The Affective Threshold; or, The Sensational Account of Place Through
Film.

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The house never forgets the sound of its original occupants.

*A house's ghosts stay inside; if they leave and go outside, they
disappear.*

A house is only afraid of gods, fire, wind and silence.

A house's blood is the moving people within when they still-stop.

*The books in the library of a house age with the inhabitants
of the house.*

When two lovers speak in a room the air listens.

*The bookshelves of a house store past and present loves and
wait for future volumes.¹*

A House Knows Who Loves It.

John Hejduk

¹ John Hejduk, *Such Places as Memory: Poems, 1953-1996* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 120.

Abstract

Architecture is persistently present in films; most human stories must take place *somewhere*.

Architectural environments serve essential roles in cinematic world-making, conversely making cinema an ideal device to unravel the affective qualities of architecture.-This dissertation proposes that film is not only a visual medium, but that in its world-making capacities it is a conveyor of haptic and kinesthetic experiences, which in consequence reveal to us the poetic, emotional, and experiential richness of place. To this end, the dissertation focuses on two key elements to support this argument. The first is, a specific approach to filmmaking: slow-cinema,² which uses delay and the cinematic long-take as a way of engaging our empathy with the spatial experiences that films can produce. The second element is the haunted house as a location: the dissertation considers this as an essential place for psychosomatic health, where the ghost figure underscores the affective dimension of space.

Each of the three chapters in this dissertation draws from phenomenology, film hermeneutics, and atmosphere theory to study portrayals of place through four haunted houses: an urban house through Luis Buñuel's *Exterminating Angel* (1962); a farmhouse and a palace through *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) and *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015) by Apichatpong

² I refer to slow-cinema not as a style or a school of filmmaking, but as a term that encompasses a philosophically consistent position that the films elicit towards time. My own position aligns with Tiago de Luca's assertion that slow-cinema is "grounded in the experience of durational cinematic time." See Tiago De Luca, "Slow Time, Visible Cinema: Duration, Experience, and Spectatorship," *Cinema Journal* 56, 1 (2018): 24. Slow films engage the experience of temporality within their worlds in a 1:1 relationship to the temporality of the *real world* and are focused on reassessing our own assumptions about the passage of time within a film. I will further elaborate on this in the "Cinematic Concepts" segment in part I of the dissertation.

Weerasethakul; and a suburban house through David Lowery's *A Ghost Story* (2016). As the text progresses, questions of memory, imagination, embodiment, and world-making become the subject matter. I paid particular attention to the processes of reciprocal co-creation between film and world, and between world and self. The dissertation concludes by shedding light on the affective entanglement we form with our houses, and the capacity of cinema to enrich critical architectural discourse on the places we dwell in our everyday lives.

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Part I

Introduction

Movies have a mysterious quality. Much more ubiquitous than architecture, less dependent for their meaning on the specificity of lived place – movie theatres everywhere tend to resemble each other – movies have a widespread presence all over the world and have arguably become one of the most relevant media for storytelling in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On the very first session of a first-year architecture studio I taught in Guadalajara (from 2007 to 2016), I would have my students watch Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), a murder mystery famously composed of six uninterrupted shots that takes place inside a bachelor's apartment in New York City. After watching the film, I asked the students to reproduce, in drawing, the entirety of the apartment. The resulting drawings demonstrated how the students had familiarized themselves with the spaces of the film. I like to consider it as a way of organizing a site visit to an imaginary version of New York, with the advantage that the story kept the students engaged, and the space of the film would become more meaningful for them. The film is in my view, a marvelous example of the collaboration between story and place in cinema. Hitchcock's decision to tell the story in *real-time*, without almost any editing, and choreographing the action in ways that utilize the apartment to the fullest for the story, permits our attention to meander through the space and get a sense of what it *feels like* to be there.

This dissertation is about this feeling. About how film can be harnessed as a medium to express spatial experiences and reveal qualities of place, taking advantage of its atmospheres and its world-making qualities. Just as drawing, painting, photography or model-making can be used as

architectural artifacts for speculative fiction that tap into different, qualitative, aspects of place, filmmaking and film-watching grant us ways of accessing the experience of place. I intend to further expand on Finish architecture scholar Juhani Pallasmaa's suggestion that cinema has the capacity of "articulating the surface between the experiencing self and the world,"³ and providing structure to our being-in-the-world, in a very similar manner to architecture. While Pallasmaa relies heavily on the image as his main point of access to cinematic space, I argue that cinema taps into our embodied experience of the world, and our making sense of it, to "enworld" its stories.⁴ Architecture's role in cinema is that of an emotional amplifier: a crucible of emotion and depth, a house for atmospheres.

In the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) places architecture and cinema in the same milieu: the lived experience of place as kinesthetic. He asserts that architecture is experienced and internalized through touch more than it is by any other form of perception,⁵ and that cinema, albeit an apparently visual medium, deals at least as much with lived spaces from the very moment characters are bodily immersed within them. Cinema relies on depth, an inherently tactile quality, for the placializing of its stories.⁶ This suggests that films draw from our embodied presence in and of the world; they tap into our way of engaging with space

³ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2000), 17.

⁴ This is a term used in the phenomenological context that refers to the *centering* of an embodied existence in and of the world. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude LeFort, translated by Alfonso Lingis, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 135-136. In film phenomenology to cinematic stories, Vivian Sobchak explains, is to locate them within the sensible world, to transpose modes of being alive and embodied in the world, to situate the embodied experience "Here, where the world is sensible; here, where I am." Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 4.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 235-237.

⁶ Edward S. Casey uses this term to refer to the act of disclosing and locating place in a work of art or fiction. See Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 9.

to build their own worlds, bound by the same perceptual horizons as do we. We not only *see* the films, but as with architecture, we participate in them.⁷

Thus, in the following dissertation I posit that as an “enworlded” architectural artifact, film allows us to re-position our relationships to our own space and time. I argue that the filmmaker, like the architect, can be a philosopher/image-maker, and through the use of delay, long-take and other temporal manipulations, allows for re-considered notions of temporality and spatiality.

To ground these positions, I study three contemporary films that expand on the use of atmosphere, bodily presence and time as filmmaking and world-making elements. These films focus on the house as an essential place in contemporary life and how houses impact our psychosomatic well-being.⁸ I examine these films through a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, channeled through the perspective of what I refer to as the ‘film-dweller’: an embodied, participative, proactive, and more empathetic spectator. I hope to ultimately amplify a better understanding of how film elicits our emotional engagement with intimate spaces, and how it creates a world with its own mythologies for us to actively participate in them: dwelling within its frames, feeling that we can belong to this world.

⁷ Rhodes, John David and Elena Gorfinkel. *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), IX-X.

⁸ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2016), 6-7.

World-making in cinema, the experience of place, and its meaning for architecture

*“[...] we must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive [...] To seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth.”*⁹

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty

There is something strangely seductive about cinema. It has a deceptive immediacy in how it deals with human emotion through image and sound. Yet, as we spend more time dwelling within its frames, its visual immediacy transforms into a complex spatial system where technology, narrative, perception, emotion, time and movement converge. Cinema presents a shifting or mercurial reality - a kind of odd realism - that does not necessarily present the world as-is. Rather, it puts forward a new world that taps into our experiential, pre-reflective relationship with the world to present something that is, simultaneously, a world in itself and a new addition to the collection of phenomenal horizons that constitute our own.

The world within a film is often presented in a collection of edited sequences that dictate the rhythm and order of the action. But sometimes, films let the camera linger in a particular moment, event or place for long stretches of time,¹⁰ demanding more from our attention, and our patience. In these

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), VIII.

¹⁰ Nowadays, according to British film scholar Barry Salt, the average shot of a Hollywood film is about 2.5 seconds. In contrast, the average length of a shot by filmmakers studied in this dissertation vary from 20.3 seconds in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee* (2010), 29.5 in Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (2000), 18.00 in Buñuel's *Exterminating Angel* (1962) to the impressive 264 second-long pie-eating scene in Lowery's *A Ghost Story* (2016). See Barry Salt, "Cinematics: Movie Measurement and Study Tool Database," *Cinematics*, 2005, accessed June 6, 2020, <http://www.cinematics.lv>.

moments our senso-perceptual, kinetic and poetic selves are more deeply attuned to the rhythm of the world on-screen: time passes there at the same speed as it does in our own world. Consider how Ting-Ting and his family – the characters in Edward Yang's *Yi Yi* (2000) – live in their Taipei apartment. The film has several scenes that emphasize this filmic lingering that brings us into an equal temporal space with the characters in their Taipei world. Extended takes include long scenes of sunlight in a living room, on aged sheet music resting atop Ting-Ting's piano; a slow pan of tiled facades while we wait beneath a concrete overpass for the arrival of a sister's boyfriend; the low ceilings and whitewashed walls in the hallway that wrap Yang-Yang's photo safari; the humidity of Taiwan in the rain coming through the open windows that frame the loneliness, longing, or joy of the ensemble of characters. Yang's film brackets the cycles of everyday life that occur between a funeral and a wedding in the spaces of Taipei and Ting-Ting's Taiwanese home. We connect with them because we are allowed to linger in their personal stories and their world, to attune our time to others'. By extending our stay in each frame Taipei's presence is rendered more tactile, familiar and inseparable from the intimate mythologies and emotions of the protagonist family. French film theorist André Bazin (1918-1958) argues that one of the essential qualities of cinema is that it captures the passage of time in a 1:1 relationship to our own, even if these temporal constructs are to later be modified and rearranged by montage.¹¹ In turn, this capture of the passage of time renders the film's images and sound spatial.

¹¹ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2005), 28.

Figure 1. Familial spaces of Taipei. Edward Yang, *Yi Yi* (Taiwan: Kuziu Enterprises; Criterion, 2000).

How does this spatialization work? For phenomenological film theories, like those of American scholar Vivian Sobchak and French film theorist Jean Mitry (1907-1988), our engagement and sense of belonging to the places screened before us depends upon our own embodied experiences of place and our access to – or ruptures from – this new, yet familiar world mediated by our sensations. We are not passively seeing and hearing the film as an audiovisual event, but we have a proactive, fully embodied, empathic connection with it. This empathic connection happens both through our sensor-perceptual channels, and our rich pre-reflective embodied self. Meaning, that we can relate to the cinematic because it engages with embodied phenomena that is familiar to our own; we empathize with it not only because it is visible and audible, but because like us, it moves. The expressivity of cinema relies on the use of a combination of audiovisual and kinesthetic expressions. This is true whether cinema is film-based, with its reel of sequential images moving through the projector to create the *illusion* of movement; or whether it is one of film's contemporary digital incarnations, sequencing a series of still-frames for the same purpose. In either case the result emerges consistently

from cinema's inherent kinesthetic quality. Movement and time are inseparable,¹² as French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) argues, both are essential qualities of our phenomenal worlds.¹³ Through movement, cinema expresses space and time as lived-in events: the depth of our embodied experience of the world. In other words, movement in cinema discloses place.

Place is inseparable from space, just as space is bound to time. It encompasses objectivity and subjectivity and is simultaneously a condition for the experiencing, perceiving consciousness while being the locus of these experiences. According to Austrian philosopher Jeff Malpas, place is a condition for being, it is "in and through place that the world presents itself."¹⁴ Place, according to Malpas, is disclosed through an *experiencing* consciousness – a creature – locating and orienting itself, moving within a spatial framework.¹⁵ The preconditions, then, for its disclosure are tightly bound to perception and embodiment in action. The expression of places through the experience of cinema will thus become a means by which I will unpack architectural notions through film in this dissertation, contributing to help fill the gap that exists about the contributions of cinema as a

¹² Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by Frank L. Pogson (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2001).

¹³ Although sound is essential and critical for the enworlding of the filmic works, this dissertation necessarily limits the analysis of the horizon of the world through an analysis of its haptic and kinesthetic elements. Sound is essential for eliciting a sense of depth and texture in films (see the discussion on sound in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Iranian film director Abbas Kiarostami (1940-2016) emphasized that sound renders present the invisible. He asserted: "It's the sound that gives depth as the third dimension of (the) image." From: Abbas Kiarostami, "A Debate with Abbas Kiarostami," *Film International* 3, 1 (Winter 1995): 47; as cited in Lutz Koepnick, *The Long Take, Art Cinema and the Wondrous* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 184. The filmic soundscape breaks the limits between the space of the film and the space of the spectator and weaves them together, making the spatial participation of the 'film-dweller' more effective. Sound can guide our attention spatially by locating the multiple bodies that emanate sound within the film-world, but it can also "destabilize the image" by juxtaposing non-diegetic sounds or "set up an entirely independent stream of signification." Koepnic, *The Long Take*, 168. Yet, the absence of sound does not render the kinetic images less spatial. Silent film can be proven to be spatial too and movement plays an important part in eliciting this feeling. For more on the perception of sound and its role in the enworlding of things. See Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: A Phenomenology of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 15.

¹⁵ Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 49.

hermeneutic tool for architectural theory. The hermeneutics with which the acts of filmmaking and film-dwelling engage – as they deal with context and the lived experience of the characters and filmmakers – bear, I wager, great significance for architectural discourse. They entail not only film’s capacity to (re)present – or express – the experience of place, but to elicit in us a feeling of rapport with such world.

Moreover, these film-worlds are never empty landscapes or actionless backdrops. These worlds are storied—meaning that their depth is not only perceptual, but also poetic. In this sharing of its world, a film enables us to reveal, understand and empathize with the historical, political and social experiences that are embedded in the places that house them. If places are, according to American philosopher Edward S. Casey, not just “a mere backdrop for actions and thoughts,” but also “concrete and at one with action and thought,”¹⁶ we can posit that the places that inspire and situate films are embedded with the poetics and politics of these places, too. As a result, these cinematic stories move beyond the simple illustration of events that happen somewhere—but emerge as rich and complex constructions of place and plot. They become dream-worlds charged with poetic imagery that frames human events, and generates philosophical inquiries, with the potential to find sense within the depth of the world.

¹⁶ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, XIII.

The dissertation's questions and reflections

This dissertation does not intend to be an analysis *on* or *about* film or film theory. Instead, it builds a hermeneutic dialogue with the film-worlds and the dwellers of these places, through thorough descriptions of their moods, atmospheres and specific emotions related to architecture as experienced and articulated *in* and *through* films. In the dissertation I examine whether film can be considered an architectural artifact, capable of eliciting experiences of place and, as does most architecture with poetic depth, if it can reveal a place's essential and elemental qualities. Conversely, can film unveil within the places it presents, like the house, the transformative qualities of architecture over our psychosomatic well-being? And ultimately, how does this impact our understanding of dwelling, not as occupation of space, but instead as a process of co-making between place and dweller?

This process is more evident when we focus our attention on the notion of belonging related to place. For this, I examine the question of how and if film's inherent world-making can give us, as film-dwellers, the possibility of having a sense of belonging to a place—one that we can empathically inhabit with our imagination, and how we participate of these experiences using the full gamut of our embodied consciousness. The haptic qualities of film, primarily movement and temporal rhythm, can help deepen an understanding of the atmospheric dimensions of architecture; conversely, they can hold a unique space for unveiling those atmospheres in our world. This opens the question of whether film as a medium can afford a fully lived-in spatial experience, and if the experience of filmmaking and film-watching can affect our embodied consciousness and ultimately influence the relationship with our own built environment. These questions are guided through the

wager that certain films—particularly those that make and present their worlds through the long take and the delay, enable an enworlding of our embodied selves and pre-reflective knowledge. I explore how these temporal manipulations are at the core of these spatial experiences. Thus, I examine these films under the premise that they become spatial, architectural artifacts with the potential to un-mask, through their poetics and politics, how architecture provides a belonging to elsewhere.

Additionally, if we are to consider films as architectural artifacts (through an examination of specific houses depicted in film), the dissertation rests on the premise of the existential relevance of the house *vis-à-vis* place. The dissertation ponders if and how can film reveal meaning and transform quotidian environments into spaces of wonder—not just as an elemental inhabitation of architecture as a machine in isotropic space. That is, how is it that our houses participate in disclosing sense—meaning—*of* and *in* place, and how do they give us orientation in our every-day lives? To unpack this, I focus on fictional narrative films where death (through funerary rituals, mourning, ghostly apparitions, specters and hauntings) is an event-phenomenon that has become part of the house and the individuals dwelling in it. I surmise that these event-phenomena are a point of atmospheric entry into each of the filmic houses. In these spaces, death has become part of the heightened, or broken, emotional attunement of the dwellers to their homes—and it creates new orientations and fractures of, and in, space. These stories reveal aspects of the relationship of the dwellers to their homes, and of the qualitative dimension of place: how we find solace and (re)orientation through rituals in spaces otherwise seen as stage-sets for the mundane, for familial and comfortable memory, for emotional reconstitution and positive psychosomatic health. The films selected to explore this in the dissertation share common traits: they either use long, extended takes without cuts as a way to

engage with atmosphere and places, or they manipulate time in unusual ways to unveil the polychronic natures of their settings.

To explore these questions, I look closely at how the films produce, and record said expressions of spatial experiences. On one side, questions of location, production design, materiality and art direction will help to understand the process of filmmaking as a process of world-making, and its close theoretical relationship with architecture. On the other side, the research will explore how this process of world-making provides the opportunity to reveal qualities of the actual places that contain—and inspire—these fictional worlds. In this regard, questions about memory, historicity, time and how we construct intimacy at home become the guiding subjects for each chapter.

As part of my methodology, while I look at each of these houses, I unpack the connection between haptic, cinematographic and spatial relationships in exercises of creative writing, drawing, collage and film editing called epistemic explorations. These exercises take an essential role in my research process to understand how each one of these fictional houses are lived and experienced by the characters and the audience. These explorations are foregrounded as hermeneutic tools through which I examine the underlying mythologies of the places where these houses are *built*, both in and out of their film worlds, and how these milieux inform not only *architectural* decisions, but the impact they have upon each other.

The objective of these questions is to ultimately locate filmmaking as part of the research toolkit for architectural thought, and to value film as a hermeneutic instrument to engage with the places we dwell in. The dissertation aims at reflecting on the co-making relationships between self, place and

architecture. It demonstrates how the richness of filmic houses unveil the multiplicity of temporalities that converge in place and how film provides ways of accessing the essential qualities and limits of said houses. It seeks to unveil the healing qualities of a house and ultimately how our houses are essential and relevant in our search for meaningful, poetic dwelling in the world.

The dissertation's methodology is developed upon theoretical understandings of film, place and perception through a hermeneutic phenomenology. I look to use specific and particular strains of phenomenological film theory to locate and demonstrate how preoccupations of place, experience and perception are part of the inherent philosophical positionings of the filmmakers from and through which they critically investigate the architectural implications, lessons and contexts that can be gleaned from cinema.

Foundational concepts: philosophical grounding of architecture in and through filmmaking

I will first unpack some of the basic notions that I use in the dissertation, and how I understand them, clarifying concepts and their philosophical grounding. Since I argue that film expresses and elicits a sense of place, I will explain why I have selected the house specifically as a narrative driver for the dissertation. I will briefly elaborate on our temporal consciousness which is essential in the act of perception and world making, how this is related with the notion of the “thick present,”¹⁷ and how

¹⁷ This notion defines an experience of the *now* as a durational experience, against an understanding of the present time as a mathematical, localized single point. The concept is further developed on the “Foundational Concepts” segment of this dissertation. See Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind* (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 318.

slow-cinema harnesses these concepts. To read these slow films, as already stated, I engage in a hermeneutic phenomenology while adopting a specific form of phenomenological film theory.¹⁸ Both are necessary for the study of spatial phenomena within films as embodied experiences; for this *reading* I explain how I understand the role of the spectator, defined by this dissertation as ‘film-dweller.’ My understanding of the *filmmaker as architect*, describes the role of the filmmakers as participants in the film’s world-making. Lastly, I discuss both empathic imagination and enactive imagination, and how our perception and imagination work in favour of experiencing the architectural spaces (re)presented by the films.

1. Location, location, location: The house

“Indeed, the well-being of reposeful residing is at home in all the places, actual or virtual, in which imagining and remembering flourish in felicitous space.”¹⁹ –Edward S. Casey

In this dissertation, the house is the main location for all the films I have selected for this study. It is the *loci* that articulates meaning and architecture, the stage where ritual and habit meet. Despite being one of the most common architectural programs of the twentieth century—where the figure of the architect found fertile ground for exercising architectural acrobatics, rendering into reality their formal fantasies and instrumental theories—little has been written in our century about the existential and emotional relevance of the house, specially what it means for its dweller and its

¹⁸ Particularly the film phenomenology developed by Vivian Sobchak in *The Address of the Eye*; Jean Mitry’s *The Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema*, translated by Christopher King (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990); and André Bazin’s film phenomenology in *What is Cinema? Vol 1*. These theories center the cinematic as an “expression of experience by experience,” a participatory act of inhabitation of subjects embodied and enworlded.

¹⁹ Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 295.

architect after the crisis of modern science.²⁰ Film, and fiction in general, often use the house as a location for stories focused on intimacy, embodiment, heightened emotions, affects, and character development. Hence, it is important to briefly stop and outline my approach to an essential component of my research: the house as location.

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) explains in *The Poetics of Space* that the house is a receptacle and emanator of poetic imagery.²¹ Houses are buildings in which the poetic imagery of our intimacy is created and reenacted in search of meaning through habit and ritual. Given that the houses studied here emerge from the imagination of a group of people (filmmakers in a broad sense, including director, screenwriter, production designer, and set decorator), they exist in the realm of imaginary places of fiction. But as Casey reminds us, they are places very well capable of being dwelled in, fictional placializations of consciousness.²² The house is an entire world in itself. It is a place where emotional well-being is sought and often achieved by reframing everyday life through a particular way of dwelling, an intense (and intimate) mode of experiencing place.

In the particular case of these films, the experience of place is bound to an intense mode of living in the house through heightened emotional states, all related to death. Whether through mourning, or haunting, the healing processes that people undergo as they deal with loss in their most intimate

²⁰ See Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and The Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1983) about the crisis of meaning in architecture that has been unfolding since the epistemological and political revolutions of late-eighteenth-century; and Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 6.

²¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 25-29.

²² Edward S. Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 135.

environment is of outmost importance for this research. It will allow us to understand the affective and embodied entanglements between film-dweller, film characters, and filmic home. Conversely, it shows possible ways of understanding how the house comes to be “our first universe,”²³ our first world.

The houses in the films I have selected offer a range of different ways of creating a home from a building; as houses they are “geographic centers with identities that embody and invite certain actions and habits of living,”²⁴ by characters and film-dweller alike. These houses portray modes of dwelling in different landscapes, cultures, and variations on manifestations of intimacy happening inside them. They are selected with intentionality during the location-scouting process, created or adjusted during set design, to participate in the process of molding the characters on the screen. The interiors are designed to convey a certain mood or atmosphere, pertaining to not only the narrative of the story but to the rich, multi-dimensional and synesthetic every-day world that these characters inhabit.

Known for relying on realistic sets, American film director Billy Wilder (1906-2002), defended the importance of attuning these sets to the emotional state of his characters.²⁵ In an interview with American screenwriter Cameron Crowe, Wilder was asked if there were any painters or artists that influenced the art direction in his movies, to which he responded that it was houses, not painters, that inspired his atmospheres.²⁶ The houses of people around him had served him as direct

²³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 26.

²⁴ Jenefer Robinson, “On Being Moved by Architecture,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, 4 (2012): 341.

²⁵ Billy Wilder, *Conversations with Wilder*, edited by Cameron Crowe and Karen Lerner (New York: Knopf, 2001), 53.

²⁶ Ibid.

inspiration for his characters and atmosphere-based production design. In Wilder's films, like the films selected in this dissertation, the houses were not designed by architects under modernist mantras of house-machine; instead, they are phenomenological manifestations of dwelling through time. They are the first sheltering universes in which these characters *are*.

2. Cinematic concepts

As I mentioned above, my work is grounded in a phenomenological framework. This framework draws on phenomenologically-inspired film theory to elaborate the experiential – and spatial – conditions of cinema concerning architecture. The film theory of Vivian Sobchak illuminates questions of cinematic perception, experience, and communication;²⁷ the groundwork laid for film phenomenology by Bazin illustrates the relevance of movement and expression of the phenomenal world within cinema.²⁸ These, overall, serve as essential works in foregrounding this dissertation's essential reading of cinema as “expression of experience by experience.”²⁹

Some debates around film theory and phenomenology are unsympathetic to the phenomenological position. Certain film theories, either asserting or criticizing cinema's visual primacy, are linked rather to psychoanalytical theories. This would include those derived from German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg's (1863-1916) “arguments about mental effects,” positing the experience of cinema as analogous to mental processes and influencing psychological and sociological

²⁷ Sobchak, *The Address of the Eye*, xiii-xix.

²⁸ Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 108-112.

²⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 155.

theories of spectatorship.³⁰ Some others put major emphasis on cinema as primarily a language-based system, for example American film theorist Todd McGowan's Lacanian theory.³¹ Such positions tend to neglect the interconnected qualities of embodiment and the locality of the spectator.

My approach to film phenomenology remains instead attuned to the interpretations that give more significance to natural phenomena, to perception and to (re)presentation of the *real* world within films. Sobchak's work on cinema, *The Address of the Eye* (1992), urges that we should look at cinema as a sensuous object, which in presence of the spectator becomes a sensing, sensual and sense-making subject.³² In this encounter between the film and spectator lies an essential premise informed by a meditation on French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) reflection that philosophy is "an expression of experience by experience."³³ Sobchak expands on this assertion: if cinema is understood to have communicative intents, if it tries to make sense while being sensed, Merleau-Ponty's lines become relevant in understanding cinema's condition as both perception and expression. These happen simultaneously, and are subject to reversibility:

"More than any other human communication, the moving picture makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience. A film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and

³⁰ Marc Furstenau, "Introduction Film Theory: A History of Debates," in *The Film Theory Reader Debates and Arguments*, edited by Marc Furstenau (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 7–19. Münsterberg's influential theory was first elaborated on: Hugo Münsterberg, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study and Other Writings*, edited by Allan Langdale (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). The German psychologist's work fell into obscurity following the end of the First World War, only to become highly influential later for a new wave of French film theorists interested in the physical and mental effects of cinema, like the aforementioned Jean Mitry.

³¹ On Lacanian film theory see Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011); see also, Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle, *Lacan and Contemporary Film*. (New York: Other Press, 2004).

³² Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 13.

³³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 155.

reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood.”³⁴

It is on these principles that my argument for architectural thought is grounded: a film is an act of inhabitation that presents itself felt and understood spatially. Influenced by these phenomenological works, I analyze the case studies within this dissertation from the perspective of the ‘film-dweller’: a proactive spectator engaging in dialogue with the films.

a. Film-dweller

Film-dweller is the term I am using to refer to myself, or to us, the spectators. It is the observer and phenomenal interpreter engaging with the films. The ‘film-dweller’ in this dissertation refers to the witnesses, the passengers of the film-world we experience every time we watch a film. Given that we are invited to participate with our enactive and empathic imaginations in the film-world, I find that ‘film-dweller’ expresses a more active voice,³⁵ against the passivity of spectator. Since the experience of cinema, particularly slow-cinema, is central to the discourse of this dissertation, the phenomenological and ontological subject that experiences and interprets these worlds is the one dwelling within it. In this case, there are two forms of dweller: the characters that construct this world every time it is perceived, and the one perceiving it.

³⁴ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 3-4.

³⁵ This is a variation on Italian scholar Alberto Baracco’s *filmgoer*, which implied a directionality and movement, but I am also interested in the time that we spend inhabiting these filmic places.

If we consider Merleau-Ponty's concept of intersubjectivity as an essential condition of the phenomenal world, it means that as film-dwellers we temporarily inhabit a world made of two realities, coexisting within its frames. The first one is the film-dweller's own experiences of place, everything she has experienced within her own phenomenal horizons, which have shaped who she is as a dweller in every building or place she has encountered. The second is the reality of the film-world in which she is allowed to dwell as the plot unfolds: to experience the world where the story is set. This dual reality allows the film-dweller to partake in the motions, actions and interactions with objects and spaces of the film-world in a mode that makes her experience also an essential place-experience in contemporary life.

Benjamin asserts that architecture is experienced and internalized through touch more than any other form of perception.³⁶ Cinema too relies on an inherently tactile and kinesthetic quality: it matters that I sit in the cinema and walk through a house or cook in the kitchen, all these spaces are experienced through depth. My own movement (or lack thereof) is part of the meaning of the train's approaching; it is essential to the placialization of filmic stories. This suggests that films draw on our embodied experience of the world, our way of engaging with space and depth, to build its own world bound by the same perceptual horizons. We not only *see* the films, but as with architecture, we participate in them - in slow-cinema more so than in other approaches to filmmaking. Through long takes, the dilation and manipulation of time, the camera lingers in the spaces of our habitual actions, inviting the film-dweller to absorb the qualities of these spaces.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, and translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 235–237.

b. Slow-Cinema is spatial cinema

Modernity's obsession with speed turns space into mere distance, a measurable entity. The twentieth century came with the modernist promise of speed. English philosopher Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) famously celebrated the exhilarating possibility of speed, and film's mechanical origins were part of the fulfilment of this promise. But film has since become also one of the artistic manifestations that enable the perceptual reversal of the culture of speed: slow-cinema is one of these cinematic fronts that attempts to bring space back into the realm of lived perceptual experience.

Considering Sobchak's phenomenological assertions about the embodied encounter of filmmaker and spectator in the communicative, linguistic space of the film, the slow-cinema approach is of particular interest to the dissertation: its filmmaking approach precisely entails considerations of space. "Slow-cinema" is the term I use within the dissertation to inscribe a philosophical position adopted by specific films or filmmakers focused, in general terms, on resistance to the speed so characteristic of contemporary commercial filmmaking. Their cinema extends the average shot length and uses this slowing down to enable a sense of engagement in the spectator with respect to their own temporal experience. In this regard film scholar Lutz Koepnic explains that "slowness allows us to experience spatial realities as being energized by various rhythms, narratives, and historical dynamics."³⁷ Film scholar Song Hwee Lim describes the emergence of slow-cinema within the philosophical context of what French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) describes as the

³⁷ Koepnic, *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, 4.

time-image, a form of cinema that emerged post World War II “with [Orson] Welles, with neo-realism, with the [French] new wave,” it is the direct time-image, a little “time in the pure state” that “rises up to the surface of the screen.”³⁸ Deleuze describes the time-image as a paradigm shift from the “movement-image” that existed before the war, in which action and montage characterized the representation of time and space in classical cinema, to the post-war period in which time becomes a constitutional element of cinema, in and on itself.³⁹

This phenomenological understanding of cinematic images as containers of spatial and temporal experiences is essential for the arguments in this dissertation. The slow-cinema approach reveals an attitude towards space and temporality that, in my view, make them ideal works for understanding cinema as a spatial practice. There are two strategies by which slow-cinema constructs its slowness and thus, provides us access to the place experienced within its pockets of space-time images. The first is through the manipulation of duration, achieved either via the long take – often accompanied by a stillness of the camera and a slow portrayal of minimal, quotidian action on-screen – or through repetition, circularity or montage revealing a universe where time manifests as a force of change and repetition in equal manner. The second strategy is, according to Hwee Lim, the narratorial subject,⁴⁰ where the interests of the film rest upon the representation of quotidian, everyday actions and moments, and through repetition, construct habits that are often *invisible* to action-oriented films.

³⁸ Gilles Deleuze, cited in Song Hwee Lim, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 17.

³⁹ Deleuze wrote two volumes on cinema, with these shifts as central arguments to each of the two volumes. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: the Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985); and also, Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: the Time-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985).

⁴⁰ Song Hwee Lim, *Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 16.

Both the manipulation of duration and the depiction of the quotidian are particularly resonant with the subject of the house.

For the manipulation of duration, the long take is often the first technical tool used in cinematography. The long take is an uninterrupted, protracted shot within a scene of a film. It is a segment of the action usually filmed in *real time* without editing cuts breaking or distorting the flow in our temporal and spatial perception of both world and narrative inside the film. A shot is a bit of recorded action in the film between cuts. By increasing the distance between cuts, and thus the delay between them, our exposure to the experience of said shot, with all its atmospheric qualities, is extended. Thus, the long take is a device to access the durational aspect of our perception. According to Italian film director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975), in his 1967 essay about the creative potential of the technique,⁴¹ the long take is the schematic, primordial element of cinema. It is presentation in pure present tense, unfolding in front of us. This specific mode of film technique, style and perceptual mode allows us to access in more detail the world of the film. It is a mode that attempts to:

“slow down processes of perception – not for the sake of slowness itself, but to rebuild what it might mean to recognize and attend to the new as new, as a wondrous event in time’, it’s used to roll back social acceleration and underline the pleasures of slower lives. Long takes deflate time, not to frustrate our attention spans, but to intensify perceptual processes and sharpen our attention for what the rush of the contemporary renders mostly invisible.”⁴²

⁴¹ Pier Paolo Pasolini, “Observations on the long take,” in *The Cinematic*, edited by David Company (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT, 2007), 87.

⁴² Koepnick, *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, 3.

With its uninterrupted flow of time, in which action is presented as it is recorded, with minimal editing – which produces a relationship of one-to-one between our perceived passage of time and that of the film – the long shot is referred to by Pasolini as a distillation of emotion and experience into the screen. It demands our embodied participation in what is being projected.

“[...] Bazin would be obliged to say that the real exists only as perceived, that situations can be said to exist only when a consciousness is engaged with something other than itself. In this view reality is not a completed sphere the mind encounters, but an “emerging-something” which the mind essentially participates in. Here the notion of ambiguity [...] is more than a result of human limitation. Here ambiguity is a central attribute of the real. For Marcel and Merleau-Ponty, there can be no complete knowledge of a situation, but instead a more and more sensitive response to the mysterious otherness which consciousness engages. Thus, ambiguity becomes a value, a measure of the depths of the real.”⁴³

While the long take is mostly deployed as a device for narrative purposes, by stretching time and raising the dramatic tension of a scene, some filmmakers make use of it for other purposes: in service of aesthetic intentions or to create a sense of place. Recently, it has become associated either with directorial bravado in action and dramatic films (demonstrating dominance over the technical difficulties and choreographic challenges that a long take might require), or with a certain type of “arthouse cinema” that intends to probe the audience’s attention, put special emphasis on the indexical and realistic possibilities of cinema, and to challenge contemporary notions regarding speed of life and reception of sensorial stimuli. The films selected for this research utilize the long take, however long—quantitatively—they might be, to enhance and extend our access to the spatio-temporal experience of the worlds presented by cinema, giving us access to certain modes of affective

⁴³ Dudley Andrew, “Critics: André Bazin,” *Film Comment* 9, 2 (March-April 25, 1973): 64.

engagement with the action (or stillness) happening in front of us. Sometimes, with a static camera fixed to a single point, these films challenge our patience, rewarding us with surreal, magical moments. While time is being distended, merging narrative with its environment, we find ourselves on the verge between boredom and delight. On other occasions, these takes are meant to construct an imaginary version of the buildings in which the story takes place. They do so by extending our stay in each room, providing details of its furnishings and materials, of characters moving inside the space; and by moving back and forth between takes to weave together the rooms of a house.

One can divide long takes into two simple kinds. The first, the establishing shot, uses an extended duration to set up the atmosphere of the upcoming scene; it presents a place in itself without necessarily containing action that drives the plot. These scenes are intimately related to the establishing frames that create a sense of place before the action.⁴⁴ Such takes help create a sense of place, mood and general atmosphere, and even when they precede action-oriented scenes, they might portray the characters (main or secondary) in movement or performing mundane actions. Some filmmakers have accomplished interesting narrative feats using this kind of take. An example is American filmmaker David Lynch in the most recent iteration of the *Twin Peaks* (2017) series, where he pushes the limits of establishing shots and blurs the line with the action-oriented scenes. He creates a single element in which the action is minimal, but the uneasy mood and apparently mundane actions of the protagonists are essential for world—and character-building.

⁴⁴ They also play a role in graphic novels and comics and have been quite predominant in Japanese manga and other Eastern forms of visual storytelling. See Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 81.

The second form of long take also contains action and plot elements. These action-oriented scenes are constructed to move the plot forward, and a long, uninterrupted take is utilized to merge the durational experience, which creates a sense of place and mood, with the framing of action (including dialogue) within the context of said character of place and mood. Here, the scenes are staged such that most of the objects within the space support character construction. Furniture, decor, materiality, and lighting are utilized to enhance an emotional state and engage our emotions fully, without necessarily drawing our attention to them.

Another strategy for slow-cinema is the manipulation of the *feeling* of duration as something distended, happening slowly, often through circularity. Time sometimes implies the use of repetition. Hwee Lim describes Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*'s (1997) reliance on circular time to propel its narrative forward, where the repetition of action creates a sense of slowing down the passage of time, as our attention is challenged through these actions. Or, as in the case of *Exterminating Angel* (1962), where Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1900-1983)—rarely regarded as a time-manipulating filmmaker—constructs a time that it is both unstable and circular. It is almost impossible to know how time is behaving inside the world of the film, yet the atmosphere and the feeling conveyed by the action, montage and rhythm of the film create a feeling that time will never be felt again in a *normal* way by the 'film-dweller,' let alone the main characters. The narratorial subject, the house, and the decay of habit and meaning inside the house, take over the physical and temporal structure of the film, marking a vital rhythm that resists a regular, consistent and reliable time.

c. The filmmaker as architect

If we think of cinema as a spatial practice, then the filmmaker can be regarded as a *speculative architect*. The makers behind each and every one of the films studied in this dissertation are to be considered as the architects of the filmic world that we experience. This is not a title exclusive to the director of the film, even though in film academia, and in general understanding, the auteur is often the director. In the process of world-making pertinent for this dissertation, filmmakers are considered to be all those engaged in imagining the spatio-temporal experience of the film. Set and production designers, storyboarders, sound designers, cinematographers, and directors are the ones responsible for the making of these worlds. In every film, the degree of participation varies, and I will focus more on different roles in each chapter.

The process of filmmaking for Benjamin entails a deep cut into the aura of objects; the filmmaking process opens up the *depth* of the subject:⁴⁵

“The surgeon constitutes one pole of an arrangement in which the other is occupied by the magician. The stance of the magician healing an invalid by laying-on of hands differs from that of the surgeon performing an operation on that invalid. The magician maintains the natural distance between himself and the patient...the surgeon does the opposite: he reduces the distance to the patient a great deal (by actually going inside him). [...] Magician and surgeon behave like painter and cameraman. The painter, while working, observes a natural distance from the subject; the cameraman, on the other hand, penetrates deep into the subject’s tissue.”⁴⁶

Benjamin argues that cinema procures the destruction of the aura of the object it captures and

⁴⁵ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 232–233.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 233.

reproduces.⁴⁷ While this is understandable if one thinks of cinema as a derivative of photography, or as something like surgery, in the case of the long shot cinema actually partakes of the aura of places and objects, that is, their uniqueness, their atmosphere and our attunement to them, which touches our emotions and produces the existential spaces so unique to each film. All of the creators behind the films that I have selected participate in this wondrous act of simultaneous world-making and sense-making. These are the *daedalic* magicians that produce films as objects of wonder, that unveil—through poetic language—their hermeneutic approach to the *lived* space within their films.

3. Lived temporality and the thick present

In order to experience stories and all their relevance as constructions of time and thus, as manifestations of our consciousness, it is important to understand how our temporal consciousness works. To be more specific: how our experience of the world is always undeniably temporal. The grasp of this time-consciousness is essential to understanding our self-awareness, the awareness of the external things and our intentionality towards the world,⁴⁸ so that we can fully comprehend how our active sensory-motor perception relates to our environment. These slow films relinquish the false concept of a single-point present devoid of thickness, or in other words, duration. Italian film scholar Alberto Baracco argues that:

“time is the form of encounter between the subject and the world, neither exclusively on the side of the subject nor totally on the side of things [...]. [The] temporality of film is an encounter between the

⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” 222-225.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, 317.

filmgoer and the film world.”⁴⁹

The most relevant meditations for this dissertation on the time-consciousness and the experience of time come from Merleau-Ponty’s enworlded consciousness,⁵⁰ Bergson’s theory of delay and temporal perception, and American philosopher Evan Thompson’s research on mind functions and phenomenology,⁵¹ which stem as an actualization of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology on time-consciousness.⁵² These philosophers offer for my dissertation an interesting intersection of concepts regarding the experience of time and how it influences (and ultimately transforms) the development of the self in a world that is lived, and experienced, in motion.

In his book on neurophenomenology *Mind in Life*, Thompson partakes of Husserl’s time-consciousness three-fold structure to explain how we experience the present. Thompson refers to a favourite example of Husserl to explain this, where in order to experience something temporal, like a musical composition—or a film—it is important to understand that it would be impossible if the present were an ever-elusive now that disappears before we can grasp it.⁵³ Every moment we perceive as present comes charged with three simultaneous elements: its own presence (primal impression), whatever it retains from the past (retention), and an anticipation of the future (protention)⁵⁴. Thus, the present is a “duration block,” a temporal expanse containing its past and future phases

⁴⁹ Alberto Baracco, *Hermeneutics of the Film World. A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 41.

⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 84, 369.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, 312-328.

⁵² Thompson offers in *Mind in Life*’s eleventh chapter, a very succinct, clear and lucid summary of Husserl’s writings on the problem of human time-consciousness. Husserl’s work on this subject can be found in Edmund Husserl, “Lectures on the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917),” translated by J.B. Borrough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991)

⁵³ Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, 319.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

simultaneously.⁵⁵ It is in other words a “thick present,”⁵⁶ with a threefold structure that contains in itself the awareness of the continuous presence of the past and the promise of what is to come. The unified operation of protention, primal impression and retention underlie our experience of the present moment as having temporal depth.⁵⁷ This state of consciousness, Mexican-Canadian architecture theorist Alberto Pérez-Gómez explains, subdivides itself according to Husserl into even more specific distinctions between retention or “primary memory” and recollection or “secondary memory;”⁵⁸ and also between protention—primary anticipation—and expectation—secondary anticipation. While the primary modes are part of the present, the secondary modes are representational. Memory—the past—and foresight of the future, are the dual elements of our temporal consciousness that enable our imaginations to act ethically towards the future, creating promising and imaginative fictions with a historical grounding. According to French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1913-2005), it is in this threefold, thick present that narration—specifically fictional narrative—makes the experience of time and space entirely accessible to human imagination.⁵⁹ Our experience of time does not happen in our unconscious but is always present in an active consciousness that works at different levels of attention. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, we are actively projecting our sight (and every other perception) outwards. Perception is not a passive task that happens to us, but a proactive engagement of our embodied temporal-consciousness with the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 318.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 334.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 318.

⁵⁸ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 152.

⁵⁹ According to Ricœur, time only becomes human when it is articulated by means of a narrative, and narrative is only meaningful when it is mimetic of temporality. To grasp a full understanding of this mimetic structure, we follow his threefold structure of analysis, composed of Prefiguration, Configuration and Refiguration. Paul Ricœur, “*Architecture and Narrative*,” *19th Triennale di Milano: Identità–differenze, exhibition catalogue* (1996), 65-66.

world. As already stated, this is the model of cinematic experience assumed by this dissertation, and it is grounded in the notion of the thick present.

For Bergson, time is an ever-flowing phenomenon that is indivisible in its perception. The experience of time is always interwoven with the phenomenon of movement and, by consequence, the traversal of space.⁶⁰ Thus, movement and our affective perception of it are for Bergson the only true measure of time. It is an experience that is always, as well as indivisible, uninterrupted. The only possible way to understand and describe time is through qualitative means —our affects, our impressions of its passing as we feel it — instead of the artificial, mechanical measurement of time in immobile slices like minutes or seconds. These artificial constructs represent slices of time but have little to do with our perceived temporal experience. Bergson proposes that duration is an ideal mode of temporal attunement that allows for a full engagement of our affects in the perception of the passage of time. This duration implies an enactive participation of our intuition and imagination in an emotional engagement with the perception of a moment in the present. This is closely related to the concepts developed earlier by Husserl and expanded by Thompson's phenomenology of consciousness. Our consciousness, actively engaged in the perception not only of the world but of the passing of time, is made aware of it as a flowing present-tense, from which the past is constantly bubbling up and disappearing.

⁶⁰ Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 102. See also, Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer (New York; Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2005), 188–191.

Mitry, in his *Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema* (1997) picks up on the Husserlian notions of time and space and on Bergsonian duration. Mitry describes time within the film as a phenomenon organized with actions (facts) that put us directly in contact with a world it organizes according to a certain story, a world organized into a narrative. For Mitry, space and time in the cinema form a continuum comparable to the one in the real world (comparable but not identical). This world is perceived as a continuous flow: a world that is ever-changing and consistently present. It is a world where there is no other temporal perception but the ever-constant unfolding of a thick present. Mitry argues that because of this, we can only perceive duration — time passing — after it has been experienced, when a memory of that action has been formed; the cinematic experience cannot convey duration, given that it always happens in the present tense, and can only convey pure movement.⁶¹ However, he claims that there is one exception: duration can be grasped when we are bored with the spectacle.⁶² I wish to argue that what he describes is not necessarily boredom, which implies that the filmic event must be entertaining. But indeed, if time flies when we are having a good time, the opposite implies a slowing down of the passage of time, thus producing total awareness of duration. Instead of boredom, I assert that this awareness can come also from an adequate attunement to the temporal and narrative rhythm of the film, which can grant us access to duration and, by consequence, to a deeper emotional connection with the space-time represented on screen.

⁶¹ Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema*, 334.

⁶² Ibid.

On the basis of the above ideas on the cinematic experience of time, we can say that each film (like every spectator) exists as simultaneously presentational and re-presentational, as viewing subject and visible object, as an embodied presence informed by the activity of retention and protention that grounds a reflection of time as past, present and future.⁶³ The filmic experience is thus a shared one, it is an act of non-verbal communication that is not exclusively visual. The filmmaker tells a story that feeds on his own experience of place. Thus, not only films are nature caught in the act,⁶⁴ but a thick present that was captured, edited, post-produced, and presented again and again in front of us. It is the present caught in the act, in its own persistent unfolding with the volition and world-making of the filmmaker present in every frame. The mythos created for the film runs through its electro-mechanical veins, and our own experiences of the world are engaged in an interpretative dialogue with it. It is in the proactivity of our consciousness that we can find the meeting point between our own experience of place, and the one that film suggests we partake in.

Lived temporality is not necessarily the same as mechanical temporality.⁶⁵ This principle is to be observed carefully, paying particular attention to the intent of montage and use of extended scenes. If the montage is trying to construct the story by manipulating time, or creating sudden displacements from one point to another, then the long-take discussed above might not be fully in operation. In some cases, for example *Exterminating Angel*, even if the “mechanical” long take is interrupted by cuts, our *sojourn* within the living-room of the house remains as a constant. Our

⁶³ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 299.

⁶⁴ Kracauer, Siegfried. *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 32.

⁶⁵ Bergson defines scientific, measurable time as mechanical, as it is subject to the precise delimitation and measurement by the use of machines. See Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 107-08.

experience of this place and the development of the plot remains uninterrupted; every tracking shot, and extended take is lived by the film-dweller in a way that enables an enactive understanding of the space within the film, and the lived world of the characters.

4. Empathic imagination

The definition of the self, as Merleau-Ponty's body schema suggests — and Sobchack's film phenomenology addresses as essential to the intersubjective experience of cinema — emerges first through the understanding of our embodied consciousness as an active, perceiving subject.⁶⁶ This recognition of the active self as such comes first through the proximate interactions with our mother as newborn babies, where we see and feel her as "other" outside ourselves. We recognize her as another active consciousness that perceives, and by mirroring association, we see ourselves in her.⁶⁷ This is a moment when we as viewers understand that we, too, are a subject of someone else's vision.⁶⁸ Thus, empathy is born into the understanding of this "other" subject in front of us, of our capacity to see ourselves in them, as them. The filmic experience is similar, in that it presents a world that is made present by another embodied consciousness, sharing with us its experience of the world. It projects its perception of that world for us through its linguistic mode, composed of movement, images and sounds. But these images and sounds are not isolated phenomena. The power of the medium and its ability to communicate the experience of the embodied and enworlded vision resides

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 37, 352; Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 130.

⁶⁷ Alva Noë, *Out of Our Heads: Why You Are Not Your Brain, and Other Lessons From the Biology of Consciousness*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 29–35.

⁶⁸ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 135.

in the experience common to both film and spectator: the act of viewing and listening as experienced from within.⁶⁹ Thus, film presents itself as another viewing subject, that expects we can relate to it, as an analogue of our own experience: a perceptive consciousness that has a specific way of telling (or re-telling) a story. We are empathically engaged because we are not only seeing a ghostly image on the screen, but an expressive language composed of images, movement and sound belonging to a subject that presents itself as a viewing, embodied consciousness. Film is presented in what Merleau-Ponty defines as “another subjectivity”: an otherness which has stopped being just another fragment of the world to become another view of the world, “another [...] center of perspectives.”⁷⁰ It would be naive to think that film is entirely analogous to our bodily experience, but nevertheless, the inclusion of movement — and in consequence time — entices our empathic imagination, allowing us to feel that what we are seeing is somehow close to our own embodied experience, because it belongs to someone who might be just like us. Film is a complex view of a world, it is the (re)presentation of a reality with two centers of perspectives bound by a narrative. Meaning in the context of film is a representation of a storied world in which we are immersed, while simultaneously the presentation of an experience of the film within our situated, phenomenal horizons.

If we consider that the film is the (re)presentation of shared observation of the world, and that the film(maker) is the storyteller who shares her experiences with us, it becomes easier to accept that the world presented onscreen is the world as it is perceived and interpreted by her: an expression of experience by experience. According to Sobchak, this happens in the linguistic space produced by

⁶⁹ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 135–136.

⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 369.

the film, with which we empathically engage.⁷¹ The communicative intent of the film, its search to produce meaning in space through experience, provokes a middle ground that emerges as the meeting place.⁷² The screen, the frame, and projection room (or living room, beach, ancient theatre) becomes the place where we bring our own embodied knowledge of the world and place it in a dialogical setup with the haptic world that the film produces. Our gaze reaches out and becomes the access point for the rest of our senses to participate in this exchange of experience and meaning.⁷³ We dwell in this world as guests, and we interpret this world as we stroll through the film-world in front of us.

It is within this understanding that I frame my own understanding of cinema for this dissertation: every one of the selected films, every story here is a phenomenological description of its world, told through a medium that is simultaneously visual, aural, kinetic and haptic.

5. Ghost stories and the memory of space

Every story selected for this dissertation is a ghost story. Stories of haunted architecture, like the ones we see in ghost films, challenge the centuries-old, Cartesian notion of temporality. Ghosts are phenomenal creatures that fold time, enabling a thickening of the present all the way into distant pasts and sometimes the future. They are, more often than not, anchored to the spaces where they

⁷¹ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 5.

⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁷³ Ibid., 8-9.

once dwelled. Ghost stories challenge modern temporal constructs and understandings that “call our calendars into question.”⁷⁴ The apparition of ghosts fold and unfold back the past into our present. The ghosts that haunt us, and our houses, thicken our temporal consciousness and are an invitation to extend it beyond the ever-elusive single-point present of the modern mindset. Ghosts and ghost stories destabilize the boundaries of embodied consciousness and expand its limits towards our own embodied history and our enactive imagination. According to American sociologist Avery Gordon “being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition.”⁷⁵ The haunting ghosts reveal essential qualities of the places upon which our histories and affections are grounded, and exteriorize them into perceptual phenomena that become present in our habitual places.

In a good portion of pre-modern and non-western mythologies, ghost stories are understood as actual phenomena, embedded in land and history, often beyond allegory or metaphor. In contemporary society hauntings and ghost stories are, according to Gordon “neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import.”⁷⁶ In stories of hauntings, the ghosts often manifest themselves in cyclical fashion. Such a ghost is an anachronism, a circular repetition that resists the “progress of vectorial or dialectical history.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time. Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 149.

⁷⁵ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁷ Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, translated by Jodi Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 105.

These anachronisms resist any sense of progress-oriented history by manifesting what we thought dead into our perceptual horizon without any rational explanation. Ghosts make death more present by transgressing its limits, while simultaneously rendering the limits of our existence clearly present. This paradoxical dimension of ghosts easily finds expression in artistic rituals and holidays, narrative languages, and in the oral stories that families tell through generations. In Mexico, the rituals of the day of the dead bring together departed relatives with their living counterparts. Both living and dead engage in an all-night long feast in the cemetery grounds, which transforms from an eerie repository of remains into a celebratory field charged with a plenitude of emotions. For modern Western thought, more often than not, ghosts exist exclusively as fictional figures: remnants of ancient superstitions, fragments of old imaginations. Their existence demands a transgression of pure rational thought into a territory where magical, spiritual and affective horizons are present in the people that participate in these stories. In Mexico's "Día de Muertos," ghosts are present not only in the imagination of the visiting relatives, but they *are* phenomena qualitatively present: they are part of the atmosphere. The place *feels* different.

French philosopher Sylviane Agacinski asserts in her book on the passing of time that modern temporal consciousness is one of permanent, fleeting passing, where the possibility of the present becomes problematic. Modern Western temporal consciousness is that of a passing of stages in a permanent progression that never stops. In place of a time-consciousness bound by natural phenomena, political or mythical horizons, since the nineteenth century the West's technological enframing has demarcated the life-rhythm of our societies. The globalization project of the modern West is what Agacinski calls a "unification of the world's rhythms, all adjusted to the Western clock,

that is, to contemporary chronotechnology.”⁷⁸ German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) questions this temporal attitude, pointing out that, in order to live authentically, one must move between different temporal attitudes towards our past (memory), our present (being), and our future (imagination). Forgetfulness is as important as memory, and “memory is only accurate if it gives meaning to present existence.”⁷⁹ Our temporal reality oscillates thus, in a permanent state of passing, while simultaneously pulsating—expanding and contracting towards and away from our memories of the past and our imagination of what is to come.

Modern framing of space and time transforms both notions into quantifiable entities, subjected to eventual, absolute understanding and control. It also implies that any place is flattened space, measured and situated in coordinates to contain—like an empty vessel—interchangeable, unambiguous meanings in a specific moment in calendric time. With the advent of the new modern horizon came a secularization of place and time. Whatever rich meaning made these places relevant for their specific dwellers has been slowly eroded and replaced. Isotropic, homogeneous space serves what German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) defined as an enframing of the world through technology and reason.⁸⁰ These epistemic frames allow for hidden, opaque, polysemic (hi)stories to be revealed and taxonomized, thus subjected to control. This Modern/Western way of understanding time and space veers towards a homogeneous, measurable, controllable space and time. Under this framework, spatio-temporality is often devoid of wonder, stabilized. Its rhythms are made consistent and thus, predictable. Modern rationality dismisses ghost stories as anachronistic or

⁷⁸ Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 19-34.

primitive, belonging to a time previous to the arrival of rational, scientific thought and that has been conquered and surpassed by a superior force.⁸¹ But these stories present the possibility of showing the fragile seams in the fabric of modern thought; they enrich and challenge understandings of the places we inhabit. For Agacinski, in the world of representation, the image in movement —film— has “become the technological model for our experience”⁸² that presents different temporalities and also separate rhythms as constitutive of our everyday, contemporary horizon of experience.

Let’s consider Tsai-Ming Liang’s *Goodbye Dragon Inn* (2003), by Taiwanese filmmaker Tsai-Ming Liang, in which two people, a man and a woman, are witnesses to the last projection night of a decaying cinema in Taipei. He, standing in for the public, walks about the theatre before and during the projection. As he meanders in the space, he witnesses several ghosts inhabiting the cinema, performing different activities. These ghosts are previous dwellers of the space he is traversing, unaware of his presence, or that he is not from the same temporality as they are. The woman, who works in the cinema as a projectionist, inhabits the space by performing her daily routines and habits. Her own actions in this space are not an act of discovery of the space, but one bound to a cyclical habit, repetition in time. Both are bound by the phantoms on the screen, for the duration of the movie. These two characters are dwellers that inhabit the theatre while four simultaneous temporalities are present: their own, that of the film-within-the-film, the ghosts’, and the lived-in time of the movie we are watching (long takes that spatialize each scene). Perhaps spectator and the projectionist are ghosts too, coming back for one last night in the theatre. The machine-bound time

⁸¹ Cua Lim, *Translating Time, Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 13-14.

⁸² Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, 15.

of the clocks and calendars is challenged and subverted by these ghosts.

Figure 2. Ghostly figures bound to a cinema theatre. Tsai Ming-Liang. *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Taiwan. Wellspring Media, 2003)

According to Bergson, the homogenization of space is a consequence of living outside of true temporal consciousness, outside pure duration—“duré.”⁸³ Homogenization of space then, brings about an understanding of time as an abstraction, a mental construct, rather than something experienced. The modern understanding of space regards it as something that pre-exists beyond and regardless of our experience, beyond inhabitation. Under this logic, inhabitation is simply an act of moving through space. Both time and space are rendered purely quantitative, and thus measurable and infinite. In her work on ghosts and temporal critique, Filipino cinema scholar Bliss Cua Lim argues that the homogenization of time, gradually arising from the West, is an instrument to control geographical territory and its dwellers’ actions through meridians, clocks and maps.⁸⁴

Homogenization of time renders place empty of time given meaning,⁸⁵ and its meaning and social relevance become instead attributes imposed from the top down. Ghosts resist this control over time

⁸³ Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 99-115.

⁸⁴ Cua Lim, *Translating Time, Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 153.

⁸⁵ To dwell is inherently temporal, to linger through time somewhere. It is the engagement of our affects and our memories with duration in *lived* space. When experience becomes secondary to time, it becomes an abstract and “absolute” mathematical construct. See David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 199-200.

and territory, by *coming back* while simultaneously *being* in their own time.⁸⁶ They present themselves like drawings inscribed on vellum, tracing the past to render themselves in the phenomena of the present.

In *Goodbye Dragon Inn*, multiple temporal experiences return, to constitute a complex and emotionally charged present. The durational is present as the perceived and experienced present of the film, both to us as film-dwellers and to the protagonists that watch and project another film respectively. The film in the title becomes diegetic,⁸⁷ organizing the lived time inside the cinema and the movie at the same time. Yet, the ghosts reveal one of their most powerful *raison d'être*: to reveal that space has memory, and each memory is comprised of complex spatio-temporal realities that compose the heterotopical present of the theatre.⁸⁸

It is no coincidence that in his own films Apichatpong Weerasethakul uses the jungle as the milieu for the ghosts to go deep into hiding, for it once was the site where communist rebels hid from military persecution in the 1960s. In his *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), Boonsong, the son of Boonmee, sees a monkey ghost while walking in the jungle. He follows the ghost-monkey to photograph it. According to Boonsong's account, he followed the ghost into the deep of the jungle, where they eventually met, had an erotic encounter and fell in love. Once thought to be lost, Boonsong returns transformed into a monkey-ghost himself. These hidden

⁸⁶ Cua Lim, *Translating Time, Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 151-152.

⁸⁷ Emanating sound from within the film-world, without being necessarily visible at all times.

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault uses the term to define those places with multiple *worlds* within them, where multiple layers of meaning coexist that are not readily visible yet present. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, 1 (Spring, 1986): 22-27.

traumas of local families “come back” as palimpsests of memories into the present. They reveal that “the present” is not as fixed and homogeneous as Western thought assumes. These ghosts that have been living in the jungle: the lost sons of an entire generation who come back as gentle spirits that meander their farmlands by night. The Thai government’s official history of the region barely acknowledges the existence of the communist rebellions, much less the violence inflicted upon them. Here, Boonmee’s past and present lives emerge as evidence of what these instruments of *official* narrative control once hid.

Ghosts are often tied to land or buildings. Their hauntings are place-makers that bring to the present past realities. They haunt all sorts of architectural objects: buildings, machines, tools, weapons, even parks or entire cities. Haunted houses are often physical manifestations of these ghosts, as we have seen above; sometimes the ghost does not take human form, but instead becomes a consciousness that transforms the spatiotemporal qualities of the spaces that it haunts.⁸⁹ Ghosts add a qualitative dimension to the material presence of these objects. They bring forth wonder, imbuing material sense (perception) with sense (meaning) and expand our imagination into both past and future. These haunted spaces tap into our pre-reflective wisdom; they stir up emotions. Often, they feed off these affects and transform the atmosphere of the places they haunt. They fill them with terror, dread, anxiety, and melancholy. The imaginary architecture within these films takes part in this summoning, and often also expands these alternate modes of understanding to reveal the richness of our lived world.

⁸⁹ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 165-166.

Methodology

Tactics of engagement: hermeneutics of the film as world

‘The movies are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other [and] it is not surprising that a critic should evoke philosophy in connection with a film.’⁹⁰

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty

‘The film is not even the text of its narrative, autonomous and transcendental with respect to the filmgoer. Rather, the film is in its relation with the filmgoer.’⁹¹

-Alberto Baracco

In order to answer the questions posited by the dissertation, I engage in a phenomenological hermeneutic analysis of the three film case studies. Each of these films, are engaged as worlds in themselves, complex and rich in meaning and purpose. In his work on cinema, Deleuze claims that “cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world.”⁹² This assertion opens the promising possibility of film as something that is extremely relevant for architecture and the understanding of the conditions that make place beyond its representational capacities. Through this understanding of “film as world to be perceived,”⁹³ cinema makes for an excellent subject to be read

⁹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology,” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, translated by Hubert Dreyfuss and Patricia Dreyfuss (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 58–59.

⁹¹ Baracco, *Hermeneutics of the Film World. A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation*, 67.

⁹² Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: Movement-Image*, 61.

⁹³ Ibid.

and engaged with through a hermeneutical phenomenology, searching in film for relevant clues to how we inhabit our world.

According to American philosopher Richard E. Palmer's (1933-2015) understanding of hermeneutics, the focus of the hermeneutic approach lies in understanding the human imprint on a work; that is, its "meaning."⁹⁴ If, as literature was for Palmer, we understand cinema as a humanly created work with its own linguistic intentionality to express experience, the interpretation of literary text can offer insight into our own attempt to engage in dialog with the "text" of a film. Based on the principle that film-works are not simply objects to be analyzed, but historical "voices we must hear, and through hearing understand,"⁹⁵ my approach to the interpretation of the films is that of "an historical encounter which calls forth personal experience of being here in the world."⁹⁶ I anticipate that if we *hear* these films as something historical and relevant, as works that come alive in our present world every time they are projected, they will offer insight into their own architectural, cultural and mythical contexts. Similarly, Ricœur's work in *Time and Narrative* underscores that reading the work of art, or for us actively watching these films, is in itself an act of translation and interpretation.⁹⁷ Both phenomenology and hermeneutics operate under the assumption that, like self and world, perceptual events and their meaning (both historical and in the present) cannot be split; they work together to navigate the world and explore the depth of its perceptual reality. In this

⁹⁴ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969), 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 1*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1984), 76-81; and also, Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 2*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1984), 6.

dissertation, I attempt to unpack and articulate these complexities of film-worlds, their underlying social dynamics, politics and mythologies, engaging in a hermeneutic circle of analysis that moves constantly between perception, description and interpretation.

For this hermeneutic circle, the work of Baracco, who reframes Ricœur's work specifically for the phenomenological interpretation of film, is of particular interest. For Baracco the process of interpretation is never concluded; rather, there is a process of constant self-awareness and self-actualization regarding our pre-conceptions and acquired understandings of the work we are engaged with. It is a process where "understanding is always [inscribed] within a hermeneutic circle in which pre-understanding is reconsidered and reverified, and changed indefinitely."⁹⁸ In the dissertation, I will enter a hermeneutic circle between the film-world and me, the 'film-dweller.' The circle begins with a pre-understanding, an anticipation that belongs to our initial state in our own world, our own location where enactive perception and imagination are not alone, and there is already an interpretation that precedes my first encounter with the film, experienced as a set of analogies and similarities between what "I experience in the film world and what I have previously experienced in my real world."⁹⁹ As I enter into hermeneutical dialog with the worlds of the films, I consider the filmmakers as architects of these worlds, working with and through the atmospheres of these places, while never losing sight that they are storytellers that draw from their own worlds for the making of new worlds within the film. I consider this dissertation an 'entering-into' the world of these films, their film-world.

⁹⁸ Baracco, *Hermeneutics of the Film World. A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation*. xxiii.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 40.

Thus, my reading of these films comes accompanied by a careful examination of each of the filmmakers' cultural context, theoretical work (in interviews, essays, commentary track, etc.) and their own assertions and influences on the role of place, architecture, time and space or the house. Phenomenological hermeneutics in film does not seek to recover an alleged and inaccessible authorial intention—even when the author has been interviewed for the dissertation—but focuses instead on the interpretation of said film-world and *my* experience of it. The film-world is never subjected to an atemporal, definite, closed, and absolute meaning; rather, the film remains open to interpretation and always requires further readings¹⁰⁰ But an engagement with the worlds from which the filmmakers themselves emerge to make other worlds is necessary; it will allow us to adequately answer some of the questions that this dissertation asks of these films about architecture, on how they reveal certain modes of orientation in place.

The dissertation addresses film itself as a hermeneutic phenomenological tool that attempts to carefully describe and make sense of places, which in turn become subjected to my own reading of them. As I analyze qualitatively the world existing within each film, I focus on groups of phenomenal elements that constitute these worlds: horizons of the works.¹⁰¹ These phenomenal horizons are considered constitutive elements of the sensible world of the film, according to

¹⁰⁰ Baracco, *Hermeneutics of the Film World. A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation*, xxiii. My emphasis.

¹⁰¹ I am using a variation of the *traditional* definition of horizon of interpretation of the world, widely used in hermeneutics (See Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* 25.); and phenomenology (See, Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 237). This variation can be understood as a series of subset phenomenal horizons that take part of the totality of the horizon of interpretation the work, what Merleau-Ponty refers to as constitutive *dimensions* of the structural framework of a “world” (a painting, a film, etc.), in Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 224.

Merleau-Ponty, “for it is the horizon of the world that secretly guides us in our constructions and harbors the truth of the procedures of reflection by which we pretend to reconstitute it.”¹⁰² For Merleau-Ponty, these horizons inscribe the constitutive parts of the sensible experience of the world, which participate of the greater “exterior horizon of the things” (of the world).¹⁰³ This analysis works in tandem with the ‘epistemic’ exploration: an oblique, experimental, non-linear method that I engaged with where I used creative writing, interpretive drawings, collage and film editing. Through these, my own experience of place is brought to the table, so to speak.¹⁰⁴ As Baracco explains, “in this experience, the film is open to or, rather, demands interpretation, and the filmgoer is the required interpreter. The filmgoer makes themselves available and is willing to listen to the film, to use an expression dear to Ricœur (...), and the film is experienced as a film-world.”¹⁰⁵ As an architect making himself available for the films, I meander in their frames with my entire set of embodied perceptual tools and memories, in order to understand some other form of architectural discourse. Merleau-Ponty argued that vision is never a passive perceptual event but a proactive one that brings together thought, action and world.¹⁰⁶ I, as a spectator, am what Baracco calls the “filmgoer,” and for this dissertation, I prefer to use my own variation of this term: the ‘film-dweller.’

¹⁰² Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 51.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 148.

¹⁰⁴ That is, the horizon of the interpreter.

¹⁰⁵ Baracco, *Hermeneutics of the Film World*, XXIII.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty “An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: A Prospectus of His Work”, translated by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, edited by James Edie, translated by William Cobb (Evanston; IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 4-5.

Finally, all my architectural questions about the house as central *loci* for each of these films are foregrounded by Bachelard's notion that the house is the perfect instrument for "topoanalysis."¹⁰⁷ That is, for my study the filmic house is equally an instrument for the methodical study of the places where intimate and private lives unfold: "an efficacious instrument, for the very reason that it is hard to use."¹⁰⁸ Topoanalysis serves to reveal, while retaining intact its obscurity, the complex set of memories and reveries that comprise the sites to which we are intimately bound. These memories are not drawn from the past as remembered, but rather, are part of the ever-unfolding-present of the house. These memories become entangled in the experience of the house, as an ever flowing, ever actualizing experience of the place where that history lies and manifests itself simultaneously. Topoanalysis is closely related to the blissful feeling of being at home, and for Bachelard, it is related to the love of places: "topophilia."¹⁰⁹ Our love for our house arises from spending time there, dwelling in place. It is my wager that the houses in every one of the films studied here are instruments for unveiling these essential qualities of place, and how the house, the film, and the filmic house establish a relationship of co-making with its dwellers. Ultimately, these filmic houses offer novel notions on how to—analogically—disclose the qualities of our own houses, or those that we dream of as architects.

¹⁰⁷ "[...] the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 19, 34.

Epistemic explorations

While the dissertation's questions were consistently foregrounded by hermeneutic phenomenology, every chapter's research was also nurtured by the thinking-through-making process behind 'epistemic explorations.' These are composed of **descriptive texts**,¹¹⁰ re-edited videos, architectural storyboards and four collages. Every chapter of this thesis opens with a prologue and two epistemic explorations: the **descriptive text** and collage, which guide the reader through the research. The storyboards and video can be found at the end of the dissertation as Appendix A and Appendix C, respectively. Together, these form a non-linear, oblique approach to open up another reading of each of the film-worlds selected.

The explorations are in themselves hermeneutic methodological tools that attempt to unveil the poetic depth within the perceptual space of the films. To better understand the film-worlds, I made an edited video that extracts fragments of the films in order to see-into their spatial environment and reveal their "eidetic" constructive process.¹¹¹ The videos were not only spatial re-constructions of fragments of the films' houses, but also slowed-down versions of their original long-takes. This deceleration technique is inspired by Scottish artist Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993),¹¹² in which the artist decelerated Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to the speed of two frames per second. While not as radical as Gordon's installation in the resulting speed of the videos, this exploration

¹¹⁰ The descriptive text in each chapter is formatted in green ink, to emphasize that they are written in first person and it belongs to the epistemic exploration component of the dissertation.

¹¹¹ Marco Frascari, *Marco Frascari's Dreamhouse: A Theory of Imagination*, edited by Federica Goffi (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 95–98.

¹¹² Douglas Gordon, *24 Hour Psycho*, Studio lost but found/VG Bild-Kunst (Wolfsburg: Kstmus, 1993), Video Installation.

challenges the spectator in the normal commitment of sustained attention and foregrounds the operation of attuning oneself to the speed of the film.

For my own research, decelerating films that I already considered to be slow opened up the opportunity to focus my attention on all the details within the spaces of the films. The exercise was born out of a practical necessity: I needed to write precise descriptions of these scenes and spaces without constantly rewinding the films. In this process, I came to the realization that indeed, emphasizing the slowness of these takes gave me more careful, attentive access to the spatiality of the scenes. Even if it meant losing the acoustic component of the film during one stage of the analysis, these re-edits were intended to cumulatively expand my spatial experience of the films. Once I went back to re-watch the films at their intended speed in preparation to write each chapter, my experience and understanding of the kinesthetic, visual, tactile and aural nuances of these spaces had become richer.

Like the recto-verso drawings that Italian architecture scholar, architecture theorist and architect Marco Frascari (1945-2013) made for his *Dream House* (1993),¹¹³ these film fragments are doubled not with a verso version of themselves, but with notes, sketches and drawings I made in a notebook meant for film storyboarding, with the intention of bridging architectural language with a filmic one. These ‘architectural storyboards’ hold my own process of understanding and peeking behind the curtain at the wizards behind the films.

¹¹³ These original drawings and sketches for Frascari’s *Dream House* were made in 1993. For the posthumous publication of the *Dream House* see Frascari, *Marco Frascari’s Dreamhouse: A Theory of Imagination* (2017).

After I worked on these edits, I used these experiences and sketches to write *first-person accounts* of each house as a film-dweller. Placed after the “Prelude” section of each chapter, and formatted in *green colour*, these pieces of writing work as text versions of a slow film, which describe these places considering my subjective experience. These accounts have the purpose of immersing the reader in the atmosphere and rhythm of the places that house each film, in the same way that I was immersed. The text works both as a method of understanding the places of the films I visited through careful description and, like the films, as a way of expressing experience by experience.

Finally, to visually summarize my epistemic explorations process, I constructed four collages: hybrid drawings superimposed over a series of stills that address the temporality of the re-edited films. The collages annotate and interpret the architectural components of the architectural objects within the films, scanning and recomposing the aforementioned architectural storyboards. In each collage, a time stamp emphasizes the passage of time in each series of stills, and added digital annotations that showed the *invisible* presence of the filmmaker’s camera within the spaces. The juxtaposition of all the components within the collage intend to not only reveal the invisible, but also reveal bridges between form and experience within these film-worlds, opening the possibility of revealing unrecognized intentions and relationships inside these film’s places.

Stories, thresholds and ghosts: Historical background

Architecture is not only built from the materials of this world; its body is also made with stories. Our inhabiting bodies, architecture’s lifeblood, are constantly seeking emotional well-being, in a never-

ending struggle for happiness. We construct houses with the intention of eventually filling them with ourselves, our language and our actions. As time goes by, we dwell in and dwell upon these houses and they become, eventually, our homes. We are story-driven beings, who use the linguistic mode to orient ourselves in the world.¹¹⁴ We invent and tell tales to make sense and find meaning in our embodied selves and our surroundings. Stories are “temporal and ethical maps of human affairs,”¹¹⁵ of possible architectural intentions for how to dwell as beings cast into the world, alone or with the other. We build to dwell, to be actively engaged with our environment, emotionally bound to space, transforming it into places that mean something to us. The act of dwelling is constructed through time, it takes over place gradually, and as time goes by more stories are born and sheltered in our homes. Throughout history, architecture has developed deep symbiotic relationships with stories, making them part of the images and language it uses to shape the places we dwell in.

Architectural narratives in European eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Mood and atmosphere played a significant role for Gothic Romanticism in the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries. Particularly in literature, architecture was used to create a setting for stories that unfold and explore the emotional dimension of human endeavors. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century architectural theory also fed on these forms of narrative, developing and exploring characters and modes of representation intending to understand the role of emotions in

¹¹⁴ Perez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 167.

¹¹⁵ Lily Chi, “The Problem With The Architect as Writer: Time and Narrative in The Work of Aldo Rossi and John Hejduk,” in *Architecture, Ethics, and Technology*, edited by Louise Pelletier and Alberto Pérez-Gómez (Buffalo, Kingston, London and Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 204, 222.

the art of building and engaging the dweller's soul. Such is the case of eighteenth-century architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières' (1721-1789) *The Genius of Architecture; or, The Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations* (1780), where, as the title implies, the author makes architecture responsible for eliciting and providing a place for our emotions. In some cases, the connection between fiction and architecture became so close that the building became a character, embodying mood and expressing an atmosphere. The house presents itself as essential to creating an emotional connection with the story, as is the case in *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) by British writer Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), where the house is a twofold concept, representing both the building and the family. The house that holds the family's memories falls into disrepair together with the family when a terrible crime is committed within its walls.

In the wake of the Enlightenment, architectural history underwent major shifts in its grounding and intentionality. French architect Claude Perrault (1613-1688) opened up a lineage of thinking aligned with Cartesianism, based on championing the rationalization of knowledge.¹¹⁶ Grounded in positive science and reason as a method for architectural work, these theories reflected the mind-body dualism characteristic of the post-Cartesian ontologies, and eventually led to the inception of the instrumental theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the loss of a mythological grounding took place in the production of an architecture mimetic of a cosmopoetic order,¹¹⁷ another paradigm was slowly emerging in France: architecture analogous to language. Pérez-Gómez explains:

“(an architecture) that recognized, instead, the importance of history

¹¹⁶ Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 66-69.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

in orienting its preferences and formal decisions, and presumed the possibility of speaking both discursively and lyrically, to affect the intellect and our sentiments [...]. This question of expression became central to a group of French writers[...] (who) labeled their work ‘character theory.’”¹¹⁸

This eventually informed a series of architects who in turn sought in architecture the same possibility of depth and capacity for self-evident meaning as poetry and prose, painting or music, a meaning that could be communicated both “discursively and/or emotionally.”¹¹⁹ In Le Camus de Mézières’ treatise, the architect proved this idea to be possible, deviating attention from architectural form and instead making the emotional dimension of our lives a central point of his text.¹²⁰ For the first time, atmospheric qualities in architectural, lived-in spaces were taken into account, by decidedly focusing on the work of the architect as a sort of stage designer for the moods in which daily life is grounded. Using as a pivotal point the analogy with language, emotions and character, the role of a writer was conferred upon the architect: a deviser of plots preoccupied with the emotional involvement of dwellers with their space.

Staging and plotting became resources essential to what Le Camus de Mézières was trying to accomplish, for which he developed a character theory that allowed an exploration of lived-in spaces. Influenced by the philosophical works by Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780) about character,¹²¹ this theory rose from the development of the picturesque garden,¹²² and theatrical

¹¹⁸ 74–77.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or, The Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations*, translated by David Britt (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1992), 61-75.

¹²¹ See Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Traité des sensations: à Madame la Comtesse de Vassé* (London and Paris: Chez Barrois l’aîné: Chez Didot fils aîné, 1788).

¹²² Specially Claude-Henri Watelet, *Essai sur les Jardins* (Paris: Wentworth Press, 2018), to whom Le Camus de Mézières dedicates *The Genius of Architecture*.

designs. Particularly relevant were those by Giovanni Niccoló Servandoni (1695-1766), a French architect educated in Rome who was famous for creating “optical plays:”¹²³ theatrical productions that represented architectural spaces, using light and the elements of nature to create atmospheric moods meant to affect the spectator and transmit emotions associated with the staged space.

According to Canadian architecture scholar Louise Pelletier, this technique fascinated Le Camus de Mézières when he attended one of the plays at the *Salle des Machines* in 1741 and eventually led him to use complex stage settings and lighting techniques as a vehicle for attuning the mood of a space and conveying “a wide array of human emotions.”¹²⁴ This, Pelletier remarks, allowed:

“Le Camus’s architecture to be no longer a codified language that could be read unambiguously, the language of (his) architecture became akin to poetry [...] it communicated its purpose by creating emotions in the spectator.”¹²⁵

As in the theatre, French picturesque gardens were meant to entice our feelings with the use of nature, using movement and time to let the staging of forms and affections unfold.¹²⁶ They represented a theatrical approach to design; in the garden’s promenade, the architect tried to weave a loose plot, considering the different emotions that the spectator (or ‘stroller-dweller’) should experience throughout the garden. The implication of time and movement to reveal plot and connect all the parts of the building became crucial.

¹²³ Robin Middleton, “Introduction,” in Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or, The Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations*, translated by David Britt (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1992), 31.

¹²⁴ Louise Pelletier, *Architecture in Words: Theatre, Language and the Sensuous Space of Architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 25.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Middleton, “Introduction,” 49.

To attain a proper atmospheric attunement partaking of time and movement, Le Camus de Mézières gives particular relevance to thresholds, which work as elements that, like a proscenium in the theatre, are spatial-temporal gaps inserted to frame certain moments of a narrative. The threshold for Le Camus de Mézières serves to weave many instances of a narrative and at the same time to create limits—for example between the inside and the outside, or to separate activities within the house as one changes chapters in a book. A threshold, like one written down in text, pauses and elicits a transformation in use and a shift in narrative. This can take place little by little, for there are many thresholds that, as though breaks in paragraphs, start to slowly and silently separate the outside from the inside and the public from the private. The threshold is one of the elements used for properly attuning the rhythm of the lived experience of space, a pacer of mood and tempo.¹²⁷

This became an important element for Le Camus de Mézières in his treatise and the source of one of his most remarkable innovations; that is, the recognition of a phenomenological continuity between dwelling, emotions, the senses and the place they are linked to. For this complex architectural program to be expressed, Le Camus de Mézières takes a page from Condillac's *Traité*¹²⁸ where he emphasizes that “language proved to be a necessary mediator between sensation and reflection.”¹²⁹ The *lived-in* of each room implies a slow, temporal unfolding of being within the walls, a physical and emotional appropriation of the home through an unfolding plot, marked by elements which weave together experience; all of this is well-described through literary language.

¹²⁷ Pelletier, *Architecture in Words: Theatre, Language and the Sensuous Space of Architecture*, 23.

¹²⁸ Étienne Bonnot de Condillac wrote his treatise *Traité des sensations* in 1754, in which he proposes that all the knowledge and understanding we construct during our lives is a product of our five senses.

¹²⁹ Pelletier, *Architecture in Words: Theatre, Language and the Sensuous Space of Architecture*, 30.

The spatial-narrative unfolding devised by Le Camus de Mézières turns the treatise into a unique piece in the genre. Created through literary descriptive narrative instead of drawing,¹³⁰ the imagery created of the hotel is one onto which we project our own memory and imagination. The text draws from our own imagination, and merges book, text, memory and architecture as an indivisible continuum. Through this temporal unfolding, we dwell as we read. The rooms (at once spaces and characters) are presented as lived-in places; they welcome us in our visit, but also imply that time has slowly passed there, memories have formed, and stories have emerged. As we project ourselves into the narrative, the building stops being a mere container of space and becomes, slowly, part of a (our) shared experience: both an atmospheric character and a place to dwell.

The home, the dwelling, is the product of a shared responsibility between the architect and the dweller, who, through time, slowly fills the space with their use of language, with the stories they carry and the memories that they pour into the space to transform it into a personal place. The act of dwelling entails the construction of a shared home, which happens,

“in the mutual coalescing that gives us a world. For Martin Heidegger, poetic dwelling occurs once we are intentional in co-creating a world and requires that we co-respond with the things that we assemble around us.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or, The Analogy of That Art With Our Sensations*, 102-142.

¹³¹ Daniel Boscaljon, *Resisting the Place of Belonging: Uncanny Homecomings in Religion, Narrative, and the Arts* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 48.

A few centuries before Heidegger, Le Camus de Mézières seems to grasp a similar understanding; the description of each room that composes the house is described as a lived-in environment. But the hotel he describes is not a definite, closed project; Le Camus de Mézières clearly states that what is proposed in the treatise is entirely dependent on each client, on each master and architect that builds their own house.¹³² What he offers is a map, a version of one of many possible homes. The home is only possible with our emotional involvement.

When we spend time in our houses, we create a phenomenological bond with the place that we call home.¹³³ Dwelling is something that happens *in time*, in the very same way we create memories: we experience life *through* and *in* time *somewhere*. The sediment of these experiences accumulating in our hearts is inherently associated with that place we dwelled in, eventually becoming our collection of memories. As Le Camus de Mézières had intuited, time is inherently linked with the emergence of an emotional bond with the places that we make. He used the narrative form to allow an unfolding through time of the building described; in the late eighteenth century, the romantic movement used the same temporal and kinesthetic means to explore our emotional relationship with the home.

The intellectual and creative product of these philosophical ventures resulted in the “roman,” the romantic novel. The novel was the medium through which the romantics availed themselves of human emotions as a source of knowledge of the world, and to search for our attunement with the places in which we dwell. In these novels, particularly cases like the *Castle of Otranto* (1764) by

¹³² Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *The Genius of Architecture; or, The Analogy Of That Art With Our Sensations*, 176.

¹³³ See Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 26, 88.

British writer and architect Horace Walpole (1717-1797),¹³⁴ as well as many of Allan Poe's stories, the buildings become the embodiment of the mood the writers were trying to explore, or unfold, in the story. At around this moment, written and drawn narrative like Le Camus' treatise were gaining ground as a critical form of representation in architecture, which allowed for architects to better explore their preoccupations about the bonds between our inner, emotional life and wisdom, with the built environment.

Architecture is present as representation and extension of the character of its own inhabitants in the first major work of romantic and gothic literature: Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. The castle with its nooks and crannies, objects and hallways, conveyed an atmosphere that materially reflected the ethics of the protagonists. The castle holds within its walls, in its *stone-flesh*, a curse. In an act of self-preservation, the castle kills a prince right at the opening of the story by mysteriously dropping a gigantic helmet on top of him. The building knows that the prince is a *faux-inheritor* of the house's title. The castle is the protector of its own homeliness, of the continuation of the bloodline; a source of anxiety and terror within the story. It performs its role as home and as such, carries within itself the role of protector of memory and tradition.

In Allan Poe's writings architecture and its furniture behave in a similar fashion; they are mirrors of the psychological states of the characters.¹³⁵ Architecture holds in its walls the images of the minds

¹³⁴ See Walpole, Horace, *The Castle of Otranto: a Gothic Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹³⁵ John H. Timmerman, "House of Mirrors: Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" in *Papers on Language and Literature* 39, 3 (2003): 236.

and, sometimes quite literally, the emotions of Poe's characters. A house can have a beating heart that pushes the protagonist into madness and destroys the house, turning it inside out. In one of his most celebrated stories, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839),¹³⁶ Poe turns to architecture to picture the possibility of a bond so close between home and body, that the house is represented as a twofold entity. "The House of Usher" is both the name of the family and the building itself; it shows physical symptoms akin to its inhabitants, who are paired to it in matters of "neglect and in physical description."¹³⁷ The house presents a physical split in two, a zig-zag fissure in the middle that again, mirrors the split between its family members.

To tell this story of mirroring between building and body, Poe employs several tropes of the Romantic canon: medieval setting, a house with a dimly lit atmosphere, rainfall and storms, an unsuspecting narrator and a secret hidden within the house. It tells the tale of a traveler that visits one of the Usher twins, who has fallen ill due to the recent death of his sister. Worried about the mental and emotional health of the estate owner, the narrator decides to visit and take care of him. As the story unfolds, the reader learns that something else has happened that was not at first apparent. The twin sister of the man was buried alive and entombed in one of the vaults in the castle. As this truth is slowly being revealed, the house begins to crumble, the owner falls into absolute madness and the corpse of the twin sister is liberated from its imprisonment. As they meet, the house falls into itself: into the mirror tarn which reflects its image, yet another representation of the mirroring between family the house.

¹³⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," in *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings: Poems, Tales, Essays, And Reviews*, edited by David Galloway (London New York: Penguin, 2003).

¹³⁷ Timmerman, "House of Mirrors: Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher,'" 236.

The walling-in of the protagonist's sister transforms the house into a makeshift cemetery that takes a toll on her brother's mental stability and brings about his eventual emotional downfall. The house cannot accept this secret, and projects the sister as a haunting memory, a ghost and a scarring in the family that demands the healing of past sins. Mortar, stone, wood and flesh then become one; in a final representation of the bond that we form with our dwelling, the building transforms itself into ruins. Retracing time, presenting us with a home formed in reverse, Usher collapses to its foundations. The house, the building, and the family become narrative synonyms that hold, within flesh and walls, the memory of family glories finally interred in a house turned into burial ground.

In both of these cases the house emerges as an atmospheric setting that explores the notion of dwelling, of being-in-the world.¹³⁸ In these stories, the buildings, as characters, are protecting a *home* rooted in spatial-temporal tradition, a family legacy. They emerge as conscious, haunted atmospheres: unhomely dwellings. They transform their atmosphere as if they realize that there is no authentic living within them. For Heidegger, this sense of "unhomeliness" is a given component of our lives, we are inherently "out of tune."¹³⁹ When exacerbated, this sense of not being at home, of un-dwelling, can be a source of anxiety which in stories often appears as a form of haunting that looms over characters and places.

¹³⁸ Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling, Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013), 144-146.

¹³⁹ See Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, translated by Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), 283-293; and Martin Heidegger, 'Poetically Man Dwells...' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 209-229.

This anxious, emotional source of knowledge conveyed by both texts is the condition thanks to which architecture holds an important key to re-attunement and to feeling at home, to “dwelling poetically.”¹⁴⁰ As for *Le Camus de Mézières*, narrative language is used to open up the role of emotions, to correctly attune ourselves to our world. Romanticism uses terror and anxiety to speak about a sense of loss, to search for meaning with respect to which architecture can take a proactive role. The building feels itself emptied of meaning and homeliness, wounded; it tries to heal itself, and doing so it reflects the emotional turmoil afflicting the soul of its inhabitants, who seem to be lost. As our imaginations take the reins, we inhabit these houses. The *body* of the texts allows us dwell there slowly, as we read along, to let the sense of dread and loss to take over. As we unravel the mysteries of both families, we can smell, touch and taste the decaying boards, the moss in the walls and the rarified air in their premises. For the wound to heal, we have to familiarize ourselves with the house, feel the loss of both the un-dwellers and the un-dwelled. The houses fall or kill, and architecture becomes a representation of a failed attempt at being-in-the-world. A critique of Romanticism directed towards the loss of meaning that the world was beginning to feel as positivism began to gain ground.¹⁴¹

Architectural filmmaking

In the early modern period, much of the Western human world embraced a technologized separation of mind from body and body from world, undermining our rich-affective embodied

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 93.

experience of the world. This ethos framed human action through a future-oriented logic prioritizing innovation that saw technology as the primary driver in the quest for truth. The resulting severance from the embodied world has meant the gradual loss of ethical orientation to time and place, and a diminishing of our emotional well-being within in our built environment. Our embodied consciousness dwells in and within a thick present,¹⁴² problematizing our relationship with the image-making technology we used to build and make sense of our world.¹⁴³ Architectural representation has relied on images as a means to build, and also to reveal underlying meanings of place, eliciting our imaginative empathy with those very images.¹⁴⁴ Drawings and models allow for the possibility of multiple readings that can reveal the politics, culture, myth and history of buildings and places; they become stories in the telling.

Storytelling has consistently been part of architectural discourse and method. It has enjoyed a particular place of prominence as means of resisting technicization and the loss of meaning — a tool to find generative roles for architecture and its image-making artifacts—within the modern age.¹⁴⁵ Drawings of imaginary places by Italian architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778), or French architect Claude Nicholas Ledoux (1736-1806) for example, encourage us to question the nature and possibilities of drawing for world-making—and to question our own embodied experiences in the process. During the Renaissance, Italian architect Antonio di Pietro Averlino, known as Filarete (1400-1469) used rhetoric and narrative as a literary means to place the architect in the role of a

¹⁴² Ibid., 152.

¹⁴³ Drawings or models.

¹⁴⁴ About the notion of imaginative empathy see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1999), 564-566.

¹⁴⁵ See Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000), 280-368.

storyteller, to produce imaginary buildings in our heads as we move through the pages.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, a few centuries later Le Camus de Mézieres and English writer, Jean-François de Bastide (1724-1798), engaged our temporal selves through words. Architecture appears before us as we follow the lines of text; time and space unfold as we dwell in these narratives. These architectural stories voice, in one way or another, the anxiety and longing within us: the struggle to reconcile body and world.

These very same longings and anxieties only became more evident as the technologically-driven products of the industrial revolution loomed large over the following two centuries. In response, new forms of image-making were adopted as tools to carry forward the work of Piranesi, Camus de Mézieres, and others. In the late-nineteenth century, filmmaking emerged as a new means of story- and image-making, combining the technical means of photography with mechanically-driven motion and reproduction. It has since been used by artists and filmmakers as a medium to open up additional possibilities of conveying and exploring, and also transforming the lived, shared experience of the world. This dissertation posits that the work of a selection of filmmakers, from surrealist master Buñuel, the works on embodiment and domesticity of Chantal Ackerman (1950-2015), the “slow-cinema” approach to filmmaking championed by Belá Tarr in Europe, Abbas Kiarostami in Iran, Taiwan’s New Wave auteur Tsai-Ming Liang, Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang, contemporary magical realists like Apichatpong Weerasethakul and David Lowery, among others, have found a means to work with affect and memory by constructing atmospheres attuned to their characters. By re-shaping time through strategies of delay, manipulating filmmaking

¹⁴⁶ Antonio di Piero Averlino ‘Filarete,’ *Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise by Antonio Di Piero Averlino, Known as Filarete*, edited and translated by John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press: 1965).

apparatuses to draw the audience into the awareness of a thick present, and using minimal editing to sequence their stories, these filmmakers assert that there is no gap between mind and body, body and world. Their works are thus architectural in their preoccupations and insights about how we dwell in the world.

These filmmakers—like some architects—work with atmospheres to frame human action. Their *oeuvre* entails an understanding of embodied selves, how to engage with an audience's pre-reflective knowledge, and how we relate to the worlds across the filmic threshold through the learned experience of our own environments. The worlds they create engage our empathic imagination: our capacity to situate and place ourselves into the lived experience (re)presented by others, to relate to these lived, embodied experiences and to integrate them into our own experiencing selves.¹⁴⁷ These directors use cinematography, editing, sound and production design to enworld their stories. In doing so, they present phenomena that unfold kinetically and temporally within a built environment which shifts the emotional state of the viewer, and turns passivity into proactive dwelling through the imaginary spaces of the film.

Given the kinesthetic and temporal qualities of these experiences, to access the enworlded stories of these filmmaker-architects, the films deploy temporal tools to attune us to their worlds: real-time, delay and/or long takes. The rekindling of our own temporality into a new place presents the possibility, in the words of Mexican writer Octavio Paz (1914-1998), to search for the present,¹⁴⁸ to

¹⁴⁷ Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, 5, 135-136; and Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 70.

¹⁴⁸ Octavio Paz, "La Búsqueda Del Presente," *Revista Canadiense De Estudios Hispánicos* 16, 3 (1992): 383. My translation.

evoke wonder and underscore the magical, spatial depth of the lived-in *now*. Bergson proposes a sensory-motor schema that:

“reveals the interaction between space, the affective body and time[...] and another mode in which consciousness can pass from space to temporal movement through the affective body by way of imitation, repetition and analogy.”¹⁴⁹

This phenomenological schema underscores the importance of embodied motion, and as such, greatly helps to unpack the position of this dissertation: that the works of these filmmakers, whether deliberately or not, are concerned with the depth of the phenomenal world and the essential qualities of place. My research and analysis focuses on the role of our body and emotion in relation to filmic space: to the worlds that constitute them both in front and behind the camera,¹⁵⁰ with time as a powerful dwelling tool. Thus, each of these films is a vehicle for talking about architectural concerns.

Italian scholar Giuliana Bruno notes:

“In these architectonics of time we are neither voyeurs nor detectives who spy on characters [...] we are simply there. Witnesses made to exist into space. We are asked to stay overtime. This 'being there' enables us to make a psychic leap and go beyond mere attendance toward a more intimate involvement. Reaching for a closer spectatorial position, we can stay there to take part in a scene, becoming participants. As an affective atmosphere unfolds in slow time-space, we can let ourselves slide in. We can take in what is in the air and partake in a mood. In this moody way, affects turn around. We become mourners, lovers, eaters, sleepers [...]”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*; and Darlene Pursley, “Moving in Time: Chantal Akerman’s *Toute Une Nuit*,” *MLN* 120, 5 (2005): 1200.

¹⁵⁰ Both the act of film-making and film-watching (reading) are equally relevant for understanding the importance of the medium. They can be understood as two moments in the life of a film.

¹⁵¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 204.

By engaging us emotionally, the worlds present in film—the film-worlds—become charged with meaning. They serve our self-orientation, and the re-signification of our language as architects. In *Yi Yi*, little Yang-Yang photographs the back of his relatives' heads; like his photographs, these moving images unveil concealed parts of our world to us. For this dissertation, selected films are explored as critical, transgressive works of architectural storytelling, not unlike the space-world imaginaries of French architect Étienne-Louis Boullée (1728-1799), Piranesi, Le Camus de Mezières, or the work by American architects John Hejduk (1929-2000) and Douglas Darden (1951-1996). Those architectural stories—those enworlded-spaces—make us question and re-orient the motility of our bodies, the mythical richness of our environment and the role of the image-maker as a philosopher of place. Thus, also do these films.

Film and architecture of everyday life

There is an important gap to be filled in the written theory of architecture—and film—that addresses film as a haptic, spatial medium, in which our embodied knowledge of place is addressed. While this dissertation concerns itself primarily with the gap in the theory of architecture, rather than film, the array of writings on the relationship between architecture and film on which one can rely, is not very ample, and the majority of these studies deal with architecture *in* film and how it is represented there.¹⁵² Some of these texts point towards architecture as merely present within the film; they either note iconic buildings, focus on questions of design and form, or address the

¹⁵² See for example Mark Lamster, *Architecture and Film* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000); Graham Cairns, *The Architecture of the Screen: Essays in Cinematographic Space* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2013).

influence of film's aesthetics on that of architecture. Most of these works read architecture in film as image, as part of a bi-dimensional representation in the space-time reality of the film. British scholar Graham Cairns writes in *The Architecture of the Screen* about the way that visual culture, led by cinema, has influenced design and a certain understanding of space and spectacle; he collects a series of essays that touch upon these influences.¹⁵³ American architecture critic Mark Lamster's own collection of essays, *Architecture and Film*, focuses on the way architects and architecture are formally depicted, or characterized, in film.¹⁵⁴ The essays mostly deal with the architect as a protagonist, or how architecture, as an aestheticized object, feeds the imagination of the public, providing hints on how to read specific types of spaces in different scales. This research avoids such readings of architecture, as there is plenty of scholarship done in that vein. Instead, the intent is to look at film and the experiences of place it can elicit, and participate in filling a gap in scholarship about film and architecture where architecture is a part of a complex world where atmosphere takes a central position.

Architecture is a central concern for many production designers, as they directly deal with the built environment where the films are set. British production designer Jane Barnwell's book, *Production Design: Architects of the Screen*, looks at the actual architecture designed and built for film, and the role of production designers in creating a sense of place in movies.¹⁵⁵ On the subject of place and location, cinema scholars John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel edited a collection of essays that

¹⁵³ Graham Cairns, *The Architecture of the Screen: Essays in Cinematographic Space*, 3-7.

¹⁵⁴ Mark Lamster, *Architecture and Film*, 1-7.

¹⁵⁵ Jane Barnwell, *Production Design : Architects of the Screen* (London: Wallflower, 2004), 1-4.

look at the way the sense of place is conveyed in film, as central in the constitution of subjectivity.¹⁵⁶

The texts question how place locates and grounds us in the experience of the film, how films can act as archives of specific places, the role of site-specific film/video-installation and how memory is engaged and constructed in the interaction between moving image, represented place and places in the “real world.” In *Film Architecture and The Transnational Imagination*, one of the few critical books on set and production design where architectural theory is addressed, film specialists Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street delve into several intersections of film production and architectural thought, in reference to the sets of classic Hollywood films.¹⁵⁷ In their introduction, they emphasize the relevance of set and production design for film, world-making, and the penetration of cinematic space into lived space through the creation of sets acknowledging our enactive imagination.¹⁵⁸

Concerning the experiencing of spaces and places through filmic architecture, the work of Bruno, Pallasmaa, British architecture scholar Renée Tobe, and Belgian art historian Steven Jacobs deal with these experiences from a more theoretical standpoint. In their writing cinematic experiences are frequently regarded as parallel dimensions with specific points of crossing into our own. Jacobs, in *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock*, avoids the trap of form-focused architectural discourse by acknowledging that in film, architecture appears in many forms, most of them experiential.¹⁵⁹ Film provides a space in which imaginary architecture can appear; it also portrays the

¹⁵⁶ Rhodes and Gorfinkel, *Taking Place : Location and the Moving Image*, edited by Elena Gorfinkel and John David Rhodes (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, *Film Architecture and The Transnational Imagination: Set Design In 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), 11-30.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Jacobs, *The Wrong House: The Architecture of Alfred Hitchcock* (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2013)

relationship that people establish with buildings, and how they have established emotional relationships with their spatial environment. Jacobs takes a novel approach and focuses on director Alfred Hitchcock not as a filmmaker, but as a chameleonic architect who has envisioned many atmospheres—most of them manifested in houses—and who understands the connection between the emotions of his characters and the buildings in which they dwell.¹⁶⁰

Bruno's work proposes an interesting meeting point between cartography, phenomenology of the body, architecture and visual media (specifically film and other moving-image media). Her work proposes too that some filmmakers, for example American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987) or Tsai-Ming Liang, recognize the presence of architecture in film as something that invites the viewer in, provoking a shift from "passive" viewing to active dwelling within the frame.¹⁶¹ Tobe's *Film, Architecture and Spatial Imagination* writes on the philosophy of architecture and film, establishing connections between the represented world and its representation in film as mutually informative.¹⁶² She references different historical moments of cinema, along with specific movies and directors, to illustrate philosophical principles concerning the feeling of place and our emotional entanglement with it.

Lastly, Pallasmaa has done extensive work and research into the existential dimension of filmmaking. Highly influential in my own thinking about cinema's architecture, Pallasmaa's insights into films are a source for understanding the links between lived space, film, imagination and architecture. His

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 10-15.

¹⁶¹ Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 189-213.

¹⁶² Renée Tobe, *Film, Architecture and Spatial Imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-19.

study focuses on how both cinema and architecture *tame* Cartesian space in order to produce richer, haptic spaces we can inhabit kinesthetically and mentally. He suggests that:

“[...] a film is viewed with the muscles and skin as much as by the eyes. Both architecture and cinema imply a kinesthetic way of experiencing space, and images stored in our memory are embodied and haptic images as much as retinal pictures.”¹⁶³

These works align with and influenced my own wager and interest in this investigation: that film portrays and conveys spatial experiences that are, in some cases, more complex, rich and informative than those found in professional texts on architecture, be their focus design theory, criticism or history.

The selected films

Each film I have selected for analysis charts a different way of living in a *house*, with the particularity that it is a house transformed in some way by death: ghosts, apparitions, reincarnations, rituals, or commemorative meals are the prevailing actions of dwelling and dealing with the phenomena present in these stories. Each of these houses is distinct. They vary in terms of scale, family dynamics, geographical location, language and cultural environment. From the technical point of view, as mentioned before, all movies share the use of the long take or some form of slow-cinema as a storytelling device. Often, these films are filmed in a mid-distance shot, a favourite amongst slow-cinema filmmakers as it allows the actors to inhabit the space with their actions for

¹⁶³ Juhani. Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of image : existential space in cinema*, 18.

longer periods, with the intent of giving more depth to their performances and a deeper connection between character and space. Despite being from different countries and historical moments, these films offer relevant insight into the role of architecture—particularly the house—in the search for psychosomatic health, and interesting meditations for architecture on memory, the every-day, as well as the wounds houses inflict upon their inhabitants and vice versa.¹⁶⁴

In the first chapter, I look at Buñuel's *Exterminating Angel* (*El Ángel Exterminador*, 1962). It is a film about a house in Mexico City that becomes a willing agent trapping its dwellers within its walls, until they reconstitute a condition of authentic dwelling. The chapter explores the notion of displacement, of a house turning un-homely. Buñuel is rarely regarded as a spatial filmmaker, yet, when we look at his filmography, very specific kinds of architectural space appear as spaces of encounter for human drama. Displacement and implacement are pervasive in Buñuel's filmography, and like Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni (1912-2007) or Russian filmmaker Andréi Tarkovsky (1932-1986), his films rely heavily in the revelation of atmospheres attuned to his characters. In the case of *Exterminating Angel*, his film is a meditation on the house as a place for

¹⁶⁴ I had also considered, but ultimately left out, Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Still Walking* (2004). The director's particular way of dealing with death allows for a poetical, yet oddly familiar and ordinary approach to the notion of dwelling one's home through mourning. A Japanese filmmaker trained in television, filming short documentaries focusing on almost mundane topics related to contemporary living in Japan. His years as a documentary filmmaker gave him a particular way of looking at the everyday life. The mundane, the details that compose our lives when we seem to be not paying attention, constitute the atmosphere that pivot and frame the stories that eventually Kore-eda would come to write and direct. Death and family are the other two structural elements upon which Kore-eda builds his stories. From the mourning process through walking in *Maboroshi* (1995), the surreal setting of *After Life* (1998) where filmmaking is akin to remembering, to *Still Walking* where the act of grieving is portrayed as a shared experience in the maternal home of a family. Grief and death are driving forces that emanate from the characters and the story. As in previous films of his, the sense of place and the creation of a particular atmosphere for dwelling play a specific role in both construing and supporting the emotional dimension of what the narrative is trying to portray. The domestic space features a series of places and objects that serve as scenarios to reconstitute or re-enact a ritual through bodily motion and repetition. These elements provided material for an interesting chapter on mourning and the domestic in film. But the realist approach of Kore-eda to the story meant for me to deviate from the consistency of the haunted house theme. I expect to further develop my analysis of this film in future projects.

proper emotional attunement. This setting allows me to explore how his filmmaking and the interpretation of his film answers some interesting questions on belonging, the intricacies of the limits between body and building, and the constitution of home through ritual and habit.

The second chapter looks at a set of films from one filmmaker treated as a thematic unity: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), and the short film *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009). All the films take place in the region of Isaan in Northern Thailand, where Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul aims to reveal literary, political, and personal stories embedded in its sites. These films concern illness; in the first the director unveils sites through the eyes of one Uncle Boonmee, who has the capacity of remembering all his previous incarnations, and who is on the verge of death from kidney disease; in the second, the nurse Jen cares for a soldier struck by a sleeping illness. All of Boonmee's previous lives happened in the same village, thus the *Boonmee* films make an exploration of the idea of memory and consciousness as inherently attached to a place, even through many generations. In *Cemetery*, Apichatpong meditates on the pervasive presence of memory in space, and how places can affect our psychosomatic health.¹⁶⁵ *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* is a meditation on embodied memory,¹⁶⁶ and how the farmhouse where he lives his final days becomes a gathering point for ghosts, relatives and memories emerging from a village with a particularly violent past. *Cemetery of Splendour* takes place in Apichatpong's

¹⁶⁵ In academic writing on this filmmaker, it is commonplace that he is referred to by his first name (Apichatpong), not his surname (Weerasethakul). To be consistent, I will follow this convention throughout the dissertation.

¹⁶⁶ For the sake of clarity, when I refer to the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, I will use the short reference *Boonmee* or *Uncle Boonmee*, written in italics; when I refer the protagonist of the film, I will write his name in normal typeset: Uncle Boonmee.

native Khon Kaen, whereas *Boonmee* was filmed in the village of Nabua, which was the site of horrific political killings in the second half of the twentieth century.

The third film and chapter focuses on American filmmaker David Lowery's *A Ghost Story* (2016). This film is a meditation on personal grief, but also on the emotional attachment that we form with our houses: how we grow into them. It takes place in a suburban house in Texas near Dallas, where two lovers are separated by the sudden death of one of them. The house, and the place where it is built, functions as the pivotal space for the plot to develop. In it, while the lover still alive mourns intensely before us, the other lover comes back as a ghost, attached to the house in which he loved so intensely.

Some scenes from other films are discussed in the dissertation, used as particular examples, all sharing the long-take or some form of ritual-making within the space of the house. Nonetheless, the works of these three filmmakers will be my main point of study and focus for their portrayal of life and death within and beyond the everyday, in search for meaningful actions in the habits that make dwelling in the house possible. Though one of the filmmakers was quite literally an architect—Apichatpong—these films are not often associated with architectural scholarship. They provide yet another insight into other forms of house dwelling.

Part II

Chapter 1. Mexico City: The Exterminating Angel

‘I am interested in the ways cinema constructs spaces in the mind, creates mind-spaces, thus reflecting the inherent ephemeral architecture of the human mind, thought and emotion. The mental task of buildings and cities is to structure our being-in-the-world and to articulate the surface between the experiencing self and the world. But doesn’t the film director do exactly the same with his projected images?’¹⁶⁷

—Juhani Pallasmaa

‘Fortunately, somewhere between chance and mystery lies imagination, the only thing that protects our freedom[...].’¹⁶⁸

—Luis Buñuel

‘To dwell is to leave traces.’¹⁶⁹

—Walter Benjamin

¹⁶⁷ Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, 17.

¹⁶⁸ Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, translated by Abigail Israel (New York: Vintage Books, 2013), 243.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 9.

Prelude

Lost at sea. Being a castaway means to temporarily be without a home, to *feel* lost. We can imagine drifting in the ocean, eventually being washed up on an unknown beach. Lost without a ship, without shelter and without a clear point of reference to where we are. There is potential horror in the idea of having no place, feeling in the middle of *nowhere*. Architecture is a response to provide a sense of place and orientation, revealing places meaningful for us. But what if architecture was not able to stabilize this condition? Can architecture lose its capacity to provide limits and a sense of home? Can buildings do the opposite and produce in us a sense of displacement, a feeling of disorientation?

While never at the center of his discourse, Buñuel's films often dealt with architectural issues like displacement, a question related to his own experience as he spent a good part of his career in exile. His subjects are often homeless, displaced or living detached from society. Architecture's failure to provide a meaningful set of limits, or to provide sense to a place, prevails in the background of his films. In this first chapter, I look into one of his most iconic films from the so-called Mexican era: *The Exterminating Angel*, where a house in Mexico City denies sense and meaning to its dwellers who, un-attuned to the world, bring dire consequences upon themselves.

The film is a surrealist fiction of speculative architecture whose narrative explores the negation of place as a source for the discovery of the self. This is the very same place at the center of Bachelard's

Poetics of Space: the home as first universe.¹⁷⁰ By examining the anxiety that emerges in the absence of what is essentially *homeliness*, the film meditates on the existential qualities of the house for orientation and psychosomatic well-being. If we consider Bachelard's idea that our inner lives shape the places we dwell and, conversely, these places influence our feelings and imagination,¹⁷¹ the journey through this exchange is articulated poetically through the perils of the castaways, as they live in isolation within the haunted house.

Luis Buñuel's early years as a surrealist, and the ideas that spanned this movement, permeate his entire body of work as a filmmaker. This body of work, in one way or another, takes part in the surrealist act of appropriative imagination, an attempt in revealing the poetic wonders residing in the quotidian, in everyday life. Many surreal works, like *The Exterminating Angel*, incite a re-taking of the quotidian through the insertion of poetical actions in search for meaning in the twentieth century. Greek architecture scholar Angeliki Sioli has pointed out that in the realm of architecture, it was Ukrainian architect Friedrich Kiesler (1890-1965) who sought to reveal meaning in everyday life "through a thorough and careful observation of life itself, including things we tend to overlook or consider trivial."¹⁷² Kiesler's project, *The Endless House*, searches for depth in the everyday life within a house, making rituals of ordinary actions. In *The Exterminating Angel*, we see an architecture that demonstrates something similar to Kiesler's, but through its inverse. The removal of limits, the loss of meaning in domestic functions, and a theatrical re-enactment which re-signifies them through ritual, offers an experience of place in which we live in anxiety. It is from this anxiety that the poetic

¹⁷⁰ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 26.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁷² Angeliki Sioli, "Is the Endless a House?," in *Chora 7*, edited by Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 267.

imagination is aroused in the promise of another form of dwelling.

For surrealism, everyday life and concrete material reality are the real terrain of revolutionary change in domestic and urban life, according to Benjamin.¹⁷³ For the German philosopher the material space of the city (or the house in this case, I argue) “figures the reification of its citizens, locked in the nineteenth-century phantasmagoria of the commodity.”¹⁷⁴ Benjamin argued that surrealism sought a path of liberation through the act of imaginative appropriation, tuning these spaces into spaces of desire to be re-taken by inhabitants.¹⁷⁵ I consider these ideas to be pivotal for Buñuel’s interest in the everyday space of the domestic. Surrealist explorations into the re-appropriation of public space can also be applied to the space of the house, where the re-appropriation of intimate places are a way of investigating dwelling in conditions of modernity. Buñuel offers a critique of capitalist and technologically-driven modes of inhabitation, by representing the castaways as performers within the house: their performance is an attempt to sustain status and bourgeois aspirations. Buñuel shows that to lead an authentic, ethical life, these nineteenth-century ghosts had to be expelled through a poetic ritual of reenactment and resignification of everyday life, while stranded in the drawing room.

In this chapter I consider the film as a surrealist architectural elucidation:

¹⁷³ Walter Benjamin, “Dream Kitsch,” in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland, and Others (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 236.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin, “Dream Kitsch,” 237.

“to reveal the hidden desires legible in the everyday environment; on the basis of authentic ethical and political aspirations, to identify what was creative or moribund in both material and immaterial culture.”¹⁷⁶

I explore the film as an architectural artifact, engaging in a dialog with the film-world to unpack what phenomenal horizons make it what it is. Ultimately, I will demonstrate how place, self and architecture are intertwined and revealed through the character of the house in the *Exterminating Angel*.

¹⁷⁶ Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, 132.

Epistemic exploration 1: The Avenging House

For this chapter's epistemic exploration, I engage with the film as I meander through three of its rooms. Each of these rooms serve as one of the stations for the castaways' "procession" through the interior of the house. In each room Buñuel made very specific decisions in editing which altered the perception of time and, thus, the spatial experience of the house. As with the other two epistemic explorations in this dissertation, I re-edited fragments of the film, drew architectural storyboards to study the composition of its spaces,¹⁷⁷ wrote the first person account of myself as a 'flim-dweller' inside the house, and composited a collage (see Figure 3). Through these, I explore the relationship between the film-dweller's body, the filmmaking body and the house of the film. To unravel the architectural discourse within *The Exterminating Angel*, I will consider material objects, the building's configuration, and the material interactions of the characters with everyday objects that enrich the atmosphere of the house. These are essential to understanding the house's character and, consequently, the character of its inhabitants.

¹⁷⁷ See Supplementary Images 1, and 2 in Part III, Appendix A.

NIGHT. INT. Night falls in Mexico City, the very first frames show me a wide street, where a few pedestrians stroll at a slow rhythm. They chat. A car drives by. In the foreground, tree leaves rattle. In the center of the frame, my destination, a manor on Providencia Street. I was born nearby, in Polanco's Euler Street, so this street looks familiar even decades later. This is a rich upscale neighborhood with quiet streets by night, wide sidewalks, and a looming sensation of being watched without anyone being around. High, heavy thick walls, well-trimmed bushes on the exterior, a neo-baroque steel gate for cars, perhaps originally for carriages. Behind the walls, a perfectly kept garden protrudes, tall cypress trees and jacarandas, illuminated from the bottom up. In the distance, the house pops up amongst the trees and bushes, its windows glowing, the details of the house lost in the penumbra. I inhale the atmosphere of the night, the calmness of the street, the silence of late hours, the smell of a garden and a hint of eeriness emanating from the house hidden in the shadows. A few seconds have passed, I am starting to get a sense of this place.

Then, a glimpse inside the house. A sumptuous mansion with crystal chandeliers, stone pillars, ebony furniture and all sorts of opulent objects. The people that work there seem unjustifiably terrified, as some of them flee the house without explanation. A group of guests and the owners of the house arrive in their cars from an evening at the opera. Dinner ensues.

The dining room is now filled with strange characters, all belonging to the Mexican upper class. Most of them are intellectuals of some sort, I listen to them talking about their projects or professions in a casual manner. It is chilly in here. The room is lit with almost clinically bright lights. There are crystal wine

glasses, forks and shimmering cutlery. The table is dressed for the occasion. The guests bicker,¹⁷⁸ and fight over trivial matters, snobbishly discussing high-brow subjects and joking with an uptight demeanor. Some introduce each other, only to forget who they just met right away. Perhaps the protagonist of this story is the woman they call the Valkyrie, but I cannot be sure right now. She seems in control; yet an uneasiness emanates from her, as she feels somehow surrounded and outnumbered by this bunch. The group leaves the table. They begin to mingle in a transitional room: narrow and flanked by two thresholds, like frames for opposite sides of the room with opposite functions. They call it the sitting-room. I feel uneasy. The rhythm of the film editing is strange, some scenes are repeated, doubled. I feel a sense of *déjà vu*. The guests move into the drawing-room, and something changes. Something in the aura here feels strange. The cinematographic style used to frame these spaces and the guests' behavior become more aggressive, uneasy. Something in the room begins to hint that a transformation is looming in the air.

The time within the film seems to pass more slowly, just like those first moments that introduced me to this world. My stay within the drawing-room feels extended, delayed. I have overstayed my welcome, and so has everyone else. As if I was witnessing a theatre play within the movie. Time stretches, I shift in my seat. Sometimes, it folds into itself, I see some actions happening twice: *déjà vu*. My gaze is allowed to drift away from the human characters, given time to meander through the rooms. I begin to notice more details about the furnishing of the house, the placement of ornaments, little details in the wooden panels in the walls. There are three doors with religious figures on them, they remind me of a hacienda I once visited as a child. It is even colder than before and I feel sleepy. The spatial arrangement of the furniture and the

¹⁷⁸ In the original title for the film's script, "Los Náufragos de la calle Providencia" Buñuel refers to the guests as the titular *náufragos*: "castaways." See the spanish version of Buñuel's autobiography, Luis Buñuel, *Mi último suspiro*, translated by Ana Maria de la Fuente (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2012), 231.

displacement of the bodies through it. I take time to take in the atmosphere of this room. Its white walls with moldings, the elaborate details around openings. The characters begin to behave differently too. They feel strange, the rhythm of everything is askew, unsettling. The house has awakened, silent, a quiet form of household rage. A building with an angry will. Architectural horror. It is out of tune.

These characters have awakened the spirit of the place. Their actions provoked a phantasmagoric reaction in the building, which inverts its own meanings and functions. They –we– can not get out of the room. The threshold is gone. Physically, it is still there, its geometry intact, and its materials still the same. But the threshold is no longer that which binds spaces. It has lost its ‘thresholdness’ and it is now impossible to cross by anyone inside the room. We are stranded inside the house, inside an island of a room. We are surrounded not by ocean but by the very same house that these intellectuals call home. An accursed space punishing their hubris. The space is now haunted, unhomely. The atmosphere is so thick, so dense that it is impossible to cross. Architecture in revolt; we are stranded inside.

The film-world

Synopsis

The Exterminating Angel was filmed in Mexico during Buñuel's famous Mexican period, made from a screenplay written by the Spanish-Mexican director and screenwriter Luis Alcoriza (1918-1992) originally titled *Los Náufragos de la Calle Providencia* (*The Castaways of Providencia Street*). The play tells the story of a group of high-class intellectuals invited to a dinner party at a mansion in Providencia street, in Mexico City, and end up stranded inside the house, kept inside by an invisible force.

Through the opening scene we learn that the film takes place in Edmundo (Enrique Rambal) and Lucía Nobile's (Lucy Gallardo) mansion, in a rich neighborhood in Mexico City. We see people at the gates, guests are arriving from a function at the opera while other people, members of the staff, are leaving from another gate. There is a clear divide between staff and the rich people coming in for dinner. The guests climb the stairs, while the host searches for anyone to receive their coats (see Figure 4).¹⁷⁹ As soon as the guests settle in the dining room their snobby, pseudo-intellectual exchanges begin. Meanwhile, the service staff begins to feel the urge to leave the premises, abandoning ship as if they knew something is about to happen. Dinner is served, we begin to get to know the eccentric tastes of the hosts and the lack of sense of humor of some of the guests. There is an accident with the first course, when the butler drops the food by falling. It turns out it was a

¹⁷⁹ The guests climb the stairs, while the host searches for anyone to receive their coats. This scene is one of several scenes doubled in the montage. Time becomes unstable from the very beginning.

performance planned by the hostess followed by the appearance of a bear and some lambs, which she cancels promptly, after complaints from one guest.

The night advances, and they move into the drawing room. We get to meet some of the guests: the mysterious and anarchic Valkyrie or Leticia (Silvia Pinal), the architect and his fiancée, a doctor, a piano player, the orchestra conductor, a preppy boy and his motherly sister, a general, Lucia the hostess, her lover, and Edmundo, the host. After a piano performance by Blanca—the pianist—none of the guests seem to be willing to abandon the room where the party was held. They go to sleep in that very room. The next morning, while everyone wakes up¹⁸⁰ and breakfast is served in the drawing room, the butler tries to go back to the kitchen but is incapable of crossing the threshold of the drawing-room: there is no door! He dances around the threshold and makes excuses for crossing it. With this, the guests start to realize there is an invisible, non-rational force that is keeping them from crossing the threshold of the room and, by consequence, from going home. No one can leave, there is a strange sense of acceptance and resignation mixed with frustration.

While they have breakfast, they realize one of the guests is terminally ill. As the day goes by, the atmosphere in the room changes. The early evening is rainy, clearly reflecting the mood in the room. They try to gather strength to leave, without success. The drawing room has a three-door closet, each door picturing images of archangels, like those on confessionals. One of the guests uses one of these doors to discreetly relieve herself. The guests blame Edmundo for their situation, claiming it was him

¹⁸⁰ Here, it is very revealing of their character that they are vain beyond measure, concerned with their looks as they wake up. Buñuel shows a particular disdain for this kind of behavior.

who started this fateful chain of events. The architect and his fiancée sneak into one of the closet doors to have sex.

Later that night, as everyone sleeps, the doctor realizes the ill guest has died. He and other guests discreetly put the dead body in the third closet door, where a cello was being stored. Now one door is for human waste, another for sex and the third one for death.

Days go by. We see commotion outside the mansion: police, firemen, reporters and onlookers have gathered to see the strange occurrence on Providencia Street. Policemen have tried, unsuccessfully, to cross the threshold of the gate that separates the mansion from the street. It seems like whatever force is keeping the castaways inside the drawing room is preventing anyone from entering the premises. Inside the house, things have taken a turn for the worse. The castaways are trying to break open a wall to reveal water pipes, fearing they might die of thirst. They break the pipes and chaos follows as everyone fights for a chance to drink. Meanwhile, one of the guests eats paper, their vanity becomes more exaggerated, and there is an air of volatile rage in the air.

The castaways' social dynamics begin to suffer; all civility is increasingly lost and madness starts to take hold of them. A woman pulls her hair out, they insult each other over their foul smells. They are still wearing their fancy clothes from the night at the opera. The air thickens with smell. The contradiction creates a strange, sinister mood. Later that night, a woman is attacked by a disembodied hand, and when she tries to stab it comes to the realization that she was dreaming, and that the hand she tried to stab was that of the piano player.

The architect and his fiancée go into their closet again. In despair, they decide to commit suicide later, considering that it might be the only way out. As night gets darker, the castaways hear noises coming from inside the house. The lambs have made their way into the hallway, chased by the bear. They are captured by the castaways and eventually slaughtered—or sacrificed, as they say—for food. They build a fire using furniture and the cello. Any remaining traces of their so-called “good upbringing,” “class,” and “etiquette” are completely gone. Outside on the street, a kid crosses the iron threshold, but as adults press him to go forward, loses interest and heads back to his mother.

Blood spills from the closet door: the couple has committed suicide. Some of the castaways try to perform magic using chicken feet, while two of the members who are freemasons speak forbidden words. Nothing works. We see everyone still, either sleeping or meditative, lying down or sitting, and as the camera lingers in the room looking at their faces, we get to listen to their thoughts, and see their dreams, as they become a surreal montage.

The castaways lose their patience. Meanwhile the staff begins to gather outside the house, compelled to be there somehow. Inside, the castaways have decided to kill Edmundo, blaming him for their situation: “when the spider dies, the web unravels.”¹⁸¹ But the Valkyrie comes to a sudden realization: after many days, permutations, movements and displacements, everyone is exactly at the very same point where they were when Blanca played the piano on the night of the dinner party. She prompts everyone to remember their motions and words, and they begin reenacting that evening,

¹⁸¹ Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel* (Mexico: Gustavo Alatriste; Criterion, 1962), [1:16:38], Blu-Ray Disc.

word by word, note by note. Eventually they feel their frustration relieved. The spell is broken. The ritual worked and they are free and greeted outside by the staff, that was already waiting for them.

In the last scene, which functions as an epilogue for the film, church bells ring as three priests try to leave the temple after the *Te Deum* mass offered by the castaways. The ritual is another failed attempt to negotiate with the forces that held them hostage, in exchange for the release from the cursed space; once again the attendants are bound and cannot leave the church. The curse is back in action, as yet another space, like the house, seems to have lost its homeliness – its existential, shared meaning.

The building:

The mansion in *Calle Providencia* is surrounded by a lush garden, which serves as a buffer between the street and the interior of the house. In turn, the garden is divided from the street by a steel gate, where eventually the officers will get stuck trying to cross and rescue the castaways. The entry to the

Figure 4. Edmundo welcomes his guests in the entry foyer. This scene is repeated twice from slightly different angles. Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel* (Mexico: Gustavo Alatriste; Criterion, 1962).

house is a grand hall with checkered floors and a majestic limestone stairwell. This is the space that is presented twice, as if by mistake. The difference lies in how both shots are filmed. The first one, shot in a low angle, reveals the vaulted ceiling of the hall while in the second iteration of the arrival, its shot in a high angle, revealing the floor and shifting the position of Edmundo on screen.

The kitchen of the house is somewhere close to the exit, it does not have a clear location within the geography of the house, but it is safe to say that it is connected to the street in some way, since we can see the staff leave quietly from there. The kitchen is also directly connected to the dining-room, where the first scene of the film unfolds.

Figure 5. Anticipation of the curse, the castaways at the Dining-Room. Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel*

(Mexico: Gustavo Alatríste; Criterion, 1962).

The dining room is an elongated space, flanked by windows on one side and a cabinet on the other. The dining table sits the twenty-one guests, and its decorated for an elegant evening. It is lit with a low hanging crystal chandelier and abundant candleholders. The room is decorated in a neo-

colonial/baroque style, and the table is set over a bright white cloth, with shimmering silver cutlery, flowers, crystal wine glasses, and ceramic plates. On one of the extremes of the room, where Edmundo sits at the head of the table, there is a doorway that leads to a pantry which in turn connects to the kitchen. On the opposite side—Lucía's side—we can see a transitional space that connects to a small studio with a fireplace, which in turns leads up to the drawing room. The dining-room is primarily shot at an eye level, giving us the point of view of the people serving food. The camera is placed at either end of the table during most of the scene, with a skewed perspectival point that reminds of Venetian painter Tintoretto's (1518-1594) table compositions, making the proportions of the room feel elongated.

Figure 6. The transitional sitting-room. Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel* (Mexico: Gustavo Alatríste; Criterion, 1962).

The following room is a small hall with a fireplace and a small table, described in the script as the sitting-room. This serves as a transitional space between the drawing-room, where they get trapped, and the dining-room. It is a transitional space for both the house and the narrative. One of the few

characters we see here are Eduardo and Beatriz—the architect and his fiancée—dancing, as well as Mr. Russell, moments before they enter the space that will be their final resting place.

The drawing-room is the centerpiece of the film, the no-place where the castaways get stranded. It has an elongated octagonal shape in floor plan, with four longer walls and chamfered corners. The infamous entry threshold is flanked by two screen doors finished in white and with glass panels. As we enter the space with the castaways, on the left wall we see three doors. These are the closets that will be prominently featured throughout the story. The closet doors are wooden and feature different religious figures: an archangel, a virgin and a hermit.¹⁸² Behind the archangel door is stashed a collection of china vases, which the Valkyrie will later use to relieve herself (followed suit by all the women in the room). The closet with the virgin door holds a cello inside, and in this room the doctor will store the dead body of Mr. Russell; the closet will be used as a men's room later on the plot. Behind the final door, the hermit, is the room Eduardo the architect and Beatriz his fiancée will use as their chamber for sex and eventual suicide.

Across the room from the closets is a small niche with a chaise lounge, or a small sofa, where Blanca will lie down in agony. This small niche has a pair of curtains on its sides, suggesting that they can be closed for privacy. At the other end of the room is a raised space, the dais, that holds a piano. This space reminds us of the space for an altar in a chapel, but also the proscenium in a theatre. In the final act of the film, it is hidden behind a curtain, which underscores the theatrical qualities of this

¹⁸² A type of character that has appeared in other Buñuel films, like *Simon del Desierto* (1965) & *Nazarín* (1959).

space and emphasizes the interpretation that theatre is the solution devised by the Valkyrie to break the spell.

Lost at home: Hermeneutics of the Film-World

“The best explanation of this film is that, from the standpoint of pure reason, there is no explanation”¹⁸³

—Luis Buñuel’s preface to *The Exterminating Angel*

The film-world of *The Exterminating Angel* belongs to the body of work by the Spanish author in which the rich language of dreams collides with the meticulous, almost clinical portrayal of human behaviour. Luis Buñuel was known for his passion for entomology.¹⁸⁴ In his films he observes his characters from a distance, as if they were strange insect-like creatures living in a dreamworld. He weaves together the cold, mechanical observing eye of the modern scientist with the irrational logic of dreams. Moreover, these observations of human behaviour are thematically framed around the relationship of these characters with their environment, their milieu of dwelling. These film-worlds are, essentially, works about how humans find a home in the world by making or un-making themselves through place, while they search for meaning. In the following pages, I unpack the film-world of *The Exterminating Angel*, demonstrating how Buñuel’s interest in implacement and displacement are present in a film about anxiety (particularly with respect to place), meaning and ritual within the everyday space of a house.

¹⁸³ Buñuel, Luis. *The Exterminating Angel*, [00:00:01].

¹⁸⁴ Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 52. Epub.

To unpack the film-world of *The Exterminating Angel*, I have divided it into four phenomenal horizons. The first, *the house*, is central to the film-world, which loses its homeliness and becomes a strange, un-homely vessel of function and ornament devoid of meaning. *Displacement* constitutes the second horizon, as it is the thematic center of the story: the characters are shipwrecked and disoriented in their own home. *Thresholds* in the house become barriers, with no physical manifestation, but barriers that nullify the will of the castaways to cross them as they should be crossed; the architecture of thresholds constitutes then, the third horizon. The characters are stranded within a house that is no longer a home but an unfamiliar space. The fourth and final horizon is the *ritual*, that eventually allows the dwellers to reconstitute spatial, temporal and social order.

House

The house is the first and central phenomenal horizon of this film-world. The film deals with spatial questions about the role of a house as our constitutive environment, offering insight into the difference between the house as a built object and a home as an affective milieu, considering the attunement of its dwellers to its domestic atmospheres. The haunted house of the film is an enveloping, and ever-present agential character, an (Arch)angel that supposes doom if temporal order and proper atmospheric attunement with place is not reinstated by the inhabitants after they have lost their sense(s) of dwelling. In the story, dwelling is not only a verb but a proactive entity that takes part of the house; the ghost of the verb, we could say. The *spirit of dwelling* transforms the house, pushed by over-intellectual jokes, vanity, jealousy, desire-less sex, and overbearing frustration.

It is the diametral opposite of what Heidegger describes as authentic dwelling in-the-world.¹⁸⁵ The atmospheric downfall within the house is immediate as anxiety bubbles up and becomes almost tangible in the behaviour of the characters. Eventually, the dwellers are stripped bare of the traits that apparently make them empathic humans and are pushed to a state that is almost of pure instinctual drive. The purpose of the house's agency in the story is to eventually, if obliquely, show the castaways how to live authentically, and to reside within it.

The physical configuration of the building is divided into stations, each devoted to the different moments/places of the curse, as if the house were a temple for domestic activities that becomes desecrated by the castaways' procession through its interior. The dining room scene maps out in spatial and visual form the hierarchy within the group and its social dynamics: the two owners of the house sit at both heads of the table (and vantage points of the room), while the guests sit to their sides; later, they move to a transitional sitting-room where the castaways flirt with each other or begin to bicker with each other. As they meander around the room the camera frames in the foreground the architect and his fiancéé, who would later *escape* the drawing room by suicide. Then the castaways traverse to the final stage of their pilgrimage, the drawing room, where every wall and every crevice is a receptacle for the detritus of their decay. Within the drawing room, the social dynamics and power positions shift constantly, as the story progresses.

¹⁸⁵ Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells...", 225.

What remains constant is a certain mutability of what is considered “normal” function in a modern, conventional house. The furniture and small spaces, the closets, are used in non-conventional ways. These permutations of function are directly connected to the shifting moods of the castaways as they lose their grasp of reality. The shifts in social dynamics in relation to the functions of furniture and architectural spaces, clearly shows Buñuel’s intent of constructing a social critique of inauthentic modern living. Buñuel famously despised those who felt righteous, morally superior or too entrenched in social comfort. He was an anti-fascist, anti-clerical and anti-bourgeois.¹⁸⁶ He built his career as a filmmaker pointing out the hypocrisies of the rich, the clergy and the intellectual spheres of the Western world, and México’s strong political and social environment were an excellent environment for his sharp critiques. Buñuel made this film at the end of his eighteen-year long exile in Mexico¹⁸⁷ He moved to the country in 1946, when he was hired by Russian-Mexican film producer Óscar Dancigers (1902-1976) to direct a film. During his stay Buñuel made around twenty full feature-length films within the studio system of the country. Working within the studio system meant to work in an environment that was influenced by Hollywood’s star system, and an economy of production that relied heavily on melodramas for its success.¹⁸⁸ It was The Golden Age of cinema in Mexico, when cherished films like *Nosotros los pobres* (1948), by Mexican director Ismael Rodríguez (1917-2004), or *Flor Silvestre* (1943), directed by Mexican filmmaker Emilio Fernández (1904-1986), were made.

¹⁸⁶ Roger Ebert, “Exterminating Angel Review,” in *Roger Ebert.com*, May 11, 1997, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-exterminating-angel-1962>.

¹⁸⁷ He moved to the country in 1946, after being fired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York under the accusation of being a communist, while waiting to acquire his American citizenship. Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 44; Luis Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, 265.

¹⁸⁸ Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38.

Although Buñuel did not necessarily envision the film as having strong roots in its surrounding environment,¹⁸⁹ it is impossible to detach the story from its milieu. The story of *The Exterminating Angel* takes place in Mexico City in the 1960s, and while the interior scenes were recorded in Estudios Churubusco—a famed film studio in Mexico City—for reasons of economy, the opening scenes, exterior and establishing shots were filmed on-site. Its location, within the film-world, is a piece of architecture that supports Buñuel’s acerbic critique of the bourgeoisie. The mansion in Providencia street was built by Mexican politician Maximino Ávila Camacho (1891-1945)—brother of Mexican ex-president Manuel Ávila Camacho (1897-1955), between 1942 and 1944. The house was designed by Mexican architect Manuel Giraud and engineer Fernando Parra, who also were in charge of the design of the new Presidential Residence Los Pinos in 1947.¹⁹⁰ This clearly illustrates that the house chosen by Buñuel was not vernacular architecture but was built by an architect that belonged to Mexico’s elite, which reinforces the critical nature of the film towards modernity. The building is still located in Polanco, an upscale neighborhood with a very affluent population that enjoyed the economic benefits of a real estate boom from the 1950s until the 70s.

The location reinforces the intentionality of the production design in this film, which reflects the psychosomatic state of the castaways. Mexican set designer Jesús Bracho (1910-1976) worked with Buñuel on his other, more authorial, films. He had already designed the production for *Simón del*

¹⁸⁹ In his autobiography he regrets filming *Exterminating Angel* in Mexico instead of Europe. He had imagined this to be set in an apartment in London or Paris, with luxurious European decor. Even the script in this film is displaced. Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, 318.

¹⁹⁰ Héctor Bialostozky, “La mansión maldita de Polanco: la locación donde Buñuel filmó ‘El ángel Exterminador’,” *Local.mx*, May 21, 2019: <https://local.mx/ciudad-de-mexico/mansion-polanco-locacion-bunuel-el-angel-exterminador/>.

Desierto (1965), another film about spatial reclusiveness and existential anxiety.¹⁹¹ Production design bears a heavy burden in the creation of the film-world; it is perhaps the field with which architects might feel a close connection,¹⁹² particularly considering the spatial constructions that Buñuel and Figueroa devised.

Figure 7. Ritual objects. Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel*. (Mexico: Gustavo Alatríste; Criterion, 1962).

The house's layout and decor help to underscore these connections between mood and character, particularly of the castaways as comfortable pseudo-intellectuals in a state of anxiety. The house is decorated with a plethora of items that objectify cultural production and commodify art. During the opening scenes of the film, characters speak about their travel adventures: they are unimpressed by the first dinner course, which reminds them of their stay in Calabria. They also find that the piano

¹⁹¹ Gathered from Jesus Bracho, "Production Design Credits", *Internet Movie Database*, IMDb.com, accessed March 21, 2019. <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0102746/>

¹⁹² Bergfelder, Harris, Street, *Film Architecture and The Transnational Imagination: Set Design In 1930s European Cinema*, 18.

performance was not enough to fulfill their expectations; they feel it would have been better with an authentic harpsichord instead of a piano. Their faux-modesty combined with an incessant need to show off and impress the other guests (who in turn remain perpetually unimpressed by everything) is reflected in the atmosphere conveyed by the objects around them.

The architectural layout of the room also articulates very deliberate elements of the story and the possible philosophical underpinnings of the film. Across the room from the dreaded haunted threshold lies another one, which frames the dais inside the drawing-room already mentioned: an enclosed and raised space for performance. It is a small proscenium with a piano and a curtain that asserts that perhaps truth lies in the realm of the poetic, of music and in the unstable and open nature of poetic language. Like French poets Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891), Buñuel presents in this space one possibility of escape from the unhomely space of the house negating its own condition: the surrendering to the irrational nature of a poetic, theatrical reenactment of their past and an embrace of the absurdity of their situation. The threshold reveals an interesting tension, as it frames a space for imagination and poetic construction; it also offers freedom as it deviates from its intended use to open up a space of possibilities, which a threshold which opens to a fully furnished house cannot.

Figure 8. Edmundo and the Valkyrie open the curtains. The dais is a stage for ritual reenactment.

Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel*. (Mexico: Gustavo Alatrisme; Criterion, 1962).

When speaking of place in cinema, it needs to be understood in relationship to the way that the camera works in conjunction with production design to bring forth atmospherics. Buñuel worked very closely with his cinematographer, Gabriel Figueroa (1907-1997), to design the place where *The Exterminating Angel* would take place. Figueroa's gorgeous cinematography draws a very rich atmosphere from the sets. The stark contrast and depth, and the use of architectural elements to frame the action in certain scenes, convey a sense of infinite spatial and temporal loops surrounding the characters, suggesting that the audience is as guilty as the castaways of the same inauthentic way of dwelling.

Figure 9. The haunted threshold doubles as a screen frame. Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel*. (Mexico: Gustavo Alatrister; Criterion, 1962).

The way Figueroa and Buñuel depict space through cinematography also makes us, the film-dwellers, aware of our own experience looking at what is happening inside the drawing room. In the scene where the lambs are captured for sacrifice, the camera is set from the other side of the threshold, which immediately locates the audience in a position outside the cursed space, as an

observer of the castaways feeding on their prey. The lights in the rest of the house are out, and as the lambs walk towards the lit interior of the drawing room, we see the castaways gathering at the edge of the frame to capture the animals. While the spatial construction through most of the film is claustrophobic, maintaining the camera at either a close or mid-distance to the bodies of the actors, in the lamb scene the camera positions the ‘film-dweller’ at the other side of the haunted threshold. Figueroa and Buñuel put us in a position of distant observers, inviting us to behave like documentarians observing an anthropological phenomenon. The position of the camera not only evidences our subjective position as “dwellers” by suddenly distancing us from the action we have been participating in, but it also produces a doubling of the film-watching space, turning the threshold of the drawing room into a framed screen and the tearoom into a cinema.

Spanish film scholars Jorge Gorostiza and José Enrique Mora-Díez have examined the architectural component of Buñuel’s production design. Neither of their texts focus on the affective elements of these architectural components, proposing interpretations of the architectural space as bearer of religious, psychological and symbolic connotations. Gorostiza does interesting work in extracting from the film architectural drawings that study the composition of the mansion spaces in *The Exterminating Angel*.¹⁹³ These drawings reveal some of the spatial intentions behind Bracho’s production design, making these spaces more transparent and easier to read, but also providing grounds for an interpretation that mistakes itself as objective. The space of the living-room rendered in architectural plan is, for example, described as sharing certain morphological similarities to a

¹⁹³ Jorge Gorostiza, “Los espacios interiores de Luis Buñuel,” *Archivos de la Filmoteca Archivos de la Filmoteca: revista de estudios históricos sobre la imagen*, 37 (February 2001), 28-31

chapel, and Gorostiza concludes that this space mirrors a clerical space: containing within its décor liturgical proxies to those of a sacred space. These top-down interpretations using an architectural plan provide insights into design intentions, with a plausible breakdown of the behind-the-scenes process of inhabiting the space, but they also reveal false modernist assumptions and broad generalizations.¹⁹⁴ Reading the spaces as abstract, taking place within the empty space of the paper and the lines drawn, as if they were the result of an architectural project not attached to a pre-existing narrative, Gorostiza's paper absurdly concludes that Buñuel was demonstrating the superiority of function over form, "Something simple but that at the end becomes an important lesson: that space should adapt to the needs of humanity, and not the other way around."¹⁹⁵ Paradoxically, this prescriptive design-oriented modernist discourse obscures the possibility of readings about the experience of these spaces, and about Buñuel as a spatial filmmaker.

Mora-Díez shows more openness towards the experience of place and the filmmaker as a crafter of a new architectural spatial language,

“[...] one more attuned to the human mind than to the structural models of three-dimensional architecture. The spaces inhabited within the film frames of *Un chien andalou* are fragmentary, inorganic, open and irrational.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Jorge Gorostiza, “Los espacios interiores de Luis Buñuel,” 30.

¹⁹⁵ “Algo tan sencillo, pero que al final se convierte en una lección: lo importante es que el espacio se adecue a los humanos y no a la inversa,” in Gorostiza, “Los espacios interiores de Luis Buñuel,” 32. My translation.

¹⁹⁶ “de la mente humana que a los modelos estructurales de la arquitectura tridimensional. Los espacios que habitan en los fotogramas *Un chien andalou* son fragmentarios, inorgánicos, abiertos e irracionales,” in Jose Enrique Mora-Díez, “La concepción del espacio arquitectónico en el cine de Luis Buñuel,” *Boletín 'Museo e Instituto Camón Aznar' de Ibercaja*, 95 (2005): 273.

His analysis avoids interpretations of religious symbolism or disclosing the meaning behind certain surrealist techniques. In his view, the spatiality in Buñuel's films stems from an understanding and subversion of the monocular and geometrical space dictated by pictorial perspective and post-renaissance spatial representation, unveiling instead the rigid fragility of these optical constructs. For Mora-Díez, Buñuel's spaces are instead those of poetic revelation and follow the illogical and irrational aesthetics of dreams and daydreams. He describes Buñuel's architecture as an anti-architecture, a spatial "greguería" that resists the orderly rigidity of institutions, driven by desire as a force of inhabitation.¹⁹⁷

Dwelling implies certain modes of living, of building a home. *The Exterminating Angel's* philosophical insight into homeliness unpacks how dwelling comes into being while we inhabit our houses. It is an action inherently temporal, where we need to let our own bodily motions settle in place. It implies return and repetition, a slow back-and-forth between permanence and movement (we also dwell on feelings or thoughts, we stay and return to them constantly). To dwell implies to extend our time in place, but also to reveal what makes these places essential. To dwell is to feel at home after time has passed and these motions have turned into habit, and our affects have attuned to the qualitative atmospheres of where the house is built. But for the castaways, spending time in the space of the drawing-room has exactly the opposite effect: a distancing between the habits that one builds through motions in the spaces familiar to us. Let us consider as an example the meals the guests share at the beginning of the film, and how they differ from habitual meals in a household.

¹⁹⁷ Mora-Díez, "La concepción del espacio arquitectónico en el cine de Luis Buñuel," 274.

The theatricality of the moment the waiter drops the main course, intentionally and as a joke, that produces a lukewarm reaction amongst the guests, begins to hint at how the castaways are becoming distanced from homeliness. They neglect home-building, and familial actions like sharing a meal around the table. Once the curse begins, the subsequent attempts at having meals as part of a shared experience result in chaos and confusion. The ghost of the house does not allow them to feel affectively comfortable, to feel enough at home within the space to share breakfast in a communal experience.

The intimate proximity between body and building, between the house and the embodied self is far from a new subject in architectural discourse and fiction. As I discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, the psychosomatic connection between the building and its inhabitants has been central to architectural discourse from Marcus Vitruvius' (1st century BC) treatise to Le Camus de Mézieres' *Le Genie de l'architecture*.¹⁹⁸ Stories of haunted houses often dealt with these ideas of continuity between body and house in the nineteenth century. In Poe's *Tell-tale Heart* the connection is quite literal, where the house houses a heartbeat, the walled-in body and representation of the guilt of its inhabitant; while in the *Fall of the House of Usher*, the curse of the house is closely linked to the walling-in of a body, ultimately producing the literal collapse of the house. It comes as no surprise that the 1928 film adaptation directed by French-Polish filmmaker Jean Epstein (1897-1953) was co-penned by Buñuel.¹⁹⁹ The influence of Poe's gothic horror stories about the connection between body, health, feeling and built environment resonate throughout *The Exterminating Angel*, in

¹⁹⁸ Marcus Vitruvius Polio, *On Architecture*, translated by Schofield Richard (London: Penguin Books, 2009), I.4.1.

¹⁹⁹ See Jean Epstein, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (France: Jean Epstein, 1928), DVD.

particular the scenes in the drawing-room.

Within the drawing-room, bodies are subjected to all sorts of modifications and revelations. The characters' bodily reactions to their confinement effects how the space of the drawing room is re-interpreted and reutilized. Everything that is meant to be private becomes public, and domestic habits of self-care, hygiene and intimacy become subjected to the gaze of everyone else. This overturns the habitual commodity that was taken for granted by the twenty-one castaways. They are subjected within this space to corporeal disintegration,²⁰⁰ as the house proactively re-signifies its functional space: loss of hair, sickness, nausea, rage. In the script, Buñuel points out the material decay of their bodies as time passes: "Why are you afraid of the truth? She smells bad, [...] like you... like me... like all of us [...]. We're living in a pigsty [...],"²⁰¹ says Francisco in a scene before several characters become agitated and almost violent. These bodily transformations transform the aura, the mood of the drawing-room, while also reflecting on the usage of the space. The three-door closet is re-purposed as a repository of all sort of human excretions: blood, urine, shit and sperm, as well as three dead bodies. Once utilized as a storage space for personal possessions, the walls of the house become a space for hiding these bodily manifestations until they start oozing from cracks and fissures in a Poe-like gesture. This is clearly illustrated as one of the closet spaces becomes the resting place for the suicidal architect and his fiancée, in the very same room they used for distancing themselves from the group and for sexual escapades; similarly, Russell's body ends up being stored in the same closet where a cello lies dormant. The body of the house and the body of the castaways

²⁰⁰ Marc Ripley, *A search for Belonging: the Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2017), 155.

²⁰¹ Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel, Nazarin, and Los Olvidados: Three films by Luis Buñuel*, translated by Nicholas Fry (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1972), 73.

become materially intermingled: the house and the human body are shown in intimate interconnection, entangled in a circle of essential co-making of each other's bodies. The severing of this connection produces a sense of place-lessness, of losing a referential horizon.

Displacement

*"Forgive me, I was not myself, not the man I am now"*²⁰²

-The Colonel, *The Exterminating Angel*

Displacement is the second horizon. Homelessness, where the self is affectively detached from place, is a usual subject in Buñuel's filmography. This is perhaps a consequence of his own situation as an expatriate in Mexico. As French director Cécile Chaspoul pointed out, "Buñuel very often films characters in displacement, who seem to never truly succeed in inhabiting the places where they find themselves."²⁰³ The staging in production design and cinematography for the drawing-room illustrates this: the furniture is slowly re-signified, losing its original function and meaning. A guitar is burned to heat up the space, a triad of religious figures conceal closets that eventually become makeshift latrines, burial grounds and chambers for sex. Function and mood are equally transformed; in this house, they seem to be codependent. Lighting is hard and high-contrast; the atmosphere of the space gets more and more rarified as the plot moves forward, clothes and rags fill

²⁰² Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel*, [1:02:30-1:02:35].

²⁰³ "Des personnages en déplacement qui semblent ne jamais vraiment réussir à habiter les lieux où ils se trouvent," Cecile Chaspoul, 'Luis Buñuel: Cinéma exilé, cinéma exilant,' *Positif*, 435 [1997]: 115; translation by Marc Ripley, in Ripley, *A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*, 22.

the space, and the room begins to fill up with debris. The castaways are at a loss and improvise, resignifying their space and transforming it qualitatively.

British film scholar Marc Ripley's work on Buñuel's Mexican period focuses on space and the sense of belonging embedded in his films.²⁰⁴ These frameworks serve to unpack Ripley's hypothesis on the perpetual sense of placelessness—and displacement—in Buñuel's films. Ripley refuses to view Buñuel's nationalities as a factor determining his poetical and philosophical underpinnings, and questions the influence of Buñuel's condition as an exile. He argues that such a condition does not necessarily translate into a "cinema of the exiled,"²⁰⁵ though it remains entangled within his work as a psychoanalytic trope to be extracted from each film based on Buñuel's biography. Instead, he interprets the films in spatial terms, considering Buñuel as much a spatial director as Antonioni or German director Wim Wenders, where every film demonstrates the characters' never-ending search for a place of belonging and thus, questions what it means to dwell in a place.²⁰⁶ This position aligns with my own interpretation of Buñuel and, much like Ripley, I avoid the commonly treaded subjects of study and philosophical frameworks used to study Buñuel—surrealist, psychoanalytic, auteurist and Marxist observations. In *The Exterminating Angel*, the mansion becomes a "mere container, de-territorialized and fragmented to its inhabitants, while the guests themselves become primitive

²⁰⁴ Ripley's insightful book on space in the films of Buñuel—*A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*—has given me an important theoretical framework to approach Buñuel as a speculative architect. It is one of the few studies about Buñuel that acknowledges the spatial qualities of his films and addresses the possibility of cinema to convey a sense of place as relevant for understanding the intentions of the auteur, rather than only as *settings* underscored by the most common readings of Buñuel as a surrealist or a social critic. He avoids the frameworks and interpretations made by many authors looking at his work in terms of surrealist and anti-clerical frameworks. Ripley works within the theoretical framework of human geography, indebted to Michel Foucault, Edward S. Casey, Juhani Pallasmaa, Edward Soja (1940-2015), Yi-Fu Tuan, Doreen Massey (1944-2016) and David Harvey.

²⁰⁵ Ripley, *A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*, 18.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 20.

figures.”²⁰⁷ De-centering the study from the subject to focus on place, the film is an exploration of the negation of belonging, and the impossibility of making the house one’s first universe.

Among the few words that Buñuel spoke about *The Exterminating Angel*, according to his son Juan Luis Buñuel, is that the origin of the story was inspired by the horror he felt at being amongst crowds of people.²⁰⁸ He found the thought of being stuck in a crowd horrifying, and wrote the script with Théodore Géricault’s (1791-1824) painting *The Raft of the Medusa* (1818-1819) in mind. According to J. L. Buñuel,

“[...] that was the idea he had. Only to make a film of that was expensive, so he [Buñuel] said, ‘Alright, what’s cheap? A room! Right, okay. Now they can’t get out of the room. Why? It’s not important; they just can’t get out.’ Now, once you get over that, then what do they do, and the rest is beautiful. And horrific. And funny.”²⁰⁹

The screenplay, as mentioned before, was originally titled *Los Náufragos De La Calle Providencia*, and it was a continuation on Buñuel’s interest in castaways isolated from society, like in his previous film *Robinson Crusoe* (1954), and the displaced hermit in *Simon del Desierto* (1965). The loss of home comes from a constant revision of themes that Buñuel gradually dealt with throughout most of his filmography, particularly in Mexico.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Ripley, *A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*, 160.

²⁰⁸ Juan Luis Buñuel, “Interview with Juan Luis Buñuel,” interview by Rob Stone, in Rob Stone and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla, *A Companion to Luis Buñuel* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 73.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ The films made in Mexico constitute the majority of Buñuel’s filmography as director.

Luis Buñuel spent most of his life in some form of exile.²¹¹ Born in 1900 in Calada, Spain, he was the son of a merchant with fruitful businesses in Cuba and educated under the Jesuit educational system and through a philosophy degree.²¹² His work has encompassed three languages and five countries. An acerbic critic of society, Buñuel wrote expecting to subvert structures of power and social tropes. He was influenced by his mentor Ramón Gómez de la Serna's "*greguerías*," a form of poetic aphorism written by free association containing absurd, often comical remarks about modern society. Before he directed films and joined the surrealists, Buñuel directed Spanish classical theatre.

After his landmark debut film *Un Chien Andalou* in 1929 and the controversial *L'Age d'Or* in 1930, Luis Buñuel had a somewhat irregular career, until he reemerged from relative obscurity in 1950 with his third Mexican feature, *Los Olvidados* (1950). The film brought him international acclaim and, as André Bazin stated in 1951, it rescued Buñuel from being "swallowed up by the commercial cinema of the New World."²¹³ Between his early surrealist phase (1929–32) and his "late" phase of European movies (1966–77), Luis Buñuel produced the largest body of his work, seventeen of his thirty-two films, in Mexico

In perhaps his most celebrated full feature length film, *Los Olvidados*, Buñuel explores displacement in urban landscapes, subjecting architecture to a critical view and using space to reflect the sociopolitical constraints of its characters. In the film, architecture's participation in the political

²¹¹ Marsha Kinder, "Exterminating Civilization," *Criterion Current*, February 9, 2009: <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1012-the-exterminating-angel-exterminating-civilization>

²¹² Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, 70, 98.

²¹³ André Bazin, *The Cinema of Cruelty: From Buñuel to Hitchcock*, edited by François Truffaut, translated by Sabine d'Estrée with Tiffany Fliss (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2013), 45.

projects of urbanization looms over every frame as a literal new horizon. Buñuel questions the ethics of modern urbanism's participation in the creation of oppressive environments, as well as economic situations for the disenfranchised. The film begins with a view of Mexico City, in the era of rapid development under president Miguel Alemán (1900-1983) when modern buildings and infrastructure were being erected throughout the city. Slowly, the movie zooms in to a poor neighborhood engulfed by construction. The film portrays the “paradox of a city that pretends to build itself under modernist principles, but building on foundations of sand,”²¹⁴ following the story of Pedro and Jaibo, who live in these slums and cannot seem to find an exit or redemption. Throughout the film, the construction of apartment buildings and highways surrounding the slums serve as a background, framing elements to create an atmosphere of hopelessness dissimulated in the promise of a better future on the horizon.

The spaces in Buñuel's films are also imaginative means of representing the affective and social constraints of his characters. André Bazin was a champion of the often-scorned Mexican period of Buñuel's cinema. In an article in *L'Observateur* in 1951, Bazin “even predicted the shift in critical attention [in Mexico] from the “classical” style of Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa to that of Luis Buñuel.”²¹⁵ Bazin includes Buñuel's work in his book about cruelty in cinema:

“Buñuel's ‘cruelty’ is entirely objective, it is no more than lucidity, and nothing less than pessimism; if pity is excluded from his aesthetic

²¹⁴ Mora-Díez, “La concepción del espacio arquitectónico en el cine de Luis Buñuel,” 277. Translation by author.

²¹⁵ But even Bazin stopped writing about Buñuel soon after *Los Olvidados* and *Subida al Cielo*, and according to Acevedo-Muñoz, Bazin gave lukewarm reviews to *Él* and to *Ensayo de un crimen*. These films would eventually emerge as among the director's best works. —Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 5.

system, it is because it envelops it everywhere.”²¹⁶

The spaces of Buñuel, for Bazin, are scenarios more akin to the paintings of Spanish artists Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), José de Ribera (1591-1652) or Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), where in the midst of war-torn, pessimistic environments there hides a hopeful eye, with a profound trust in humankind.²¹⁷

Robinson Crusoe (1954) is a film that could be thematically paired with *The Exterminating Angel* as a dyptich about space and the horrors that the loss of a home might inflict on the human spirit. While in *The Exterminating Angel* the interior, domestic space becomes alien, unhomely and detached from its own inhabitants, in *Robinson Crusoe* the horror comes from an alienation from the urban world and society. Neither film strives for an ideal setting, or to teach the right moral position one ought to assume towards inhabitation (none of Buñuel’s films are moralizing, despite some readings that interpret him as such). *Robinson Crusoe* was filmed on the coast of Mexico in the state of Colima, an adaptation of the eighteenth-century novel of the same name by British writer Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). Art historian Amparo Martínez Herranz points out that this version focuses solely on the part of the novel concerning the shipwreck on an island.²¹⁸ Although this is the case, the subject is similar to *The Exterminating Angel*, underscoring Buñuel’s preoccupation with the subject of spatial isolation and attention to the island as setting in its many incarnations. There,

²¹⁶ Bazin, *The Cinema of Cruelty: From Buñuel to Hitchcock*, 49.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Amparo Martínez H., “The Creative Process of Robinson Crusoe Exile, Loneliness, and Humanism,” in *A Companion to Luis Buñuel*, edited by Rob Stone and Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 284.

Crusoe eventually attunes himself to his environment, despite having a brooding unfulfilled desire for company. Buñuel tackles his concerns with inhabitation in solitude, in which the island is, like the drawing room in *The Exterminating Angel*, a prison. According to Ripley, the island-as-prison trope “is a symptom of the unresolved dualism of freedom and isolation.”²¹⁹ *Robinson Crusoe* allows Buñuel to tell a story about the horrors/anxieties that arise from extreme isolation, and the contradictions that this brings in space as open as the island, where some form of redemption is achieved when Friday appears in Crusoe’s life. In contrast, in *The Exterminating Angel* the filmmaker tackles the opposite situation: the dread of being stuck in a crowded room with people who not only are not each others’ saviour, but consistently make everything worse for each other.

Sometimes, Buñuel’s houses took the form of shelters rejected by their own inhabitants, subject to a destructive anarchy that attempts to regain control in a world without redemption. In *Viridiana* (1961) the house becomes a place where Viridiana, the main character, plays out a quixotic dream of making other people’s lives better. In true Buñuelian fashion this does not work; his critical pen is aimed both at the naïve goodness of Viridiana and the hypocritical behavior of the homeless who take advantage of her condescending piousness. In the context of this relationship, the most controversial—and central—scene of the film shows the homeless as they use and abuse the house in the absence of their caretaker. The house becomes an affectless shelter, its architecture an imposing symbol of their own condition of displacement. Even when the owner intends to re-signify this house, the looming oppressiveness of the neoclassical decor and monumental scale is always there as a symbol of the forces that have pushed these people into poverty and homelessness. In consequence,

²¹⁹ Ripley, *A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*, 33.

once given the chance, the homeless occupy the house and destroy it in a bacchanal that leaves it in ruins.

Later, after his return to France, Buñuel would return to the ideas behind *The Exterminating Angel* in *The Discreet Charm of The Bourgeoisie* (1972), though this time through a reverse remake of the Providencia street dramedy, in which the architectural space of action is compressed around a haunted table that suppresses and feeds on the desires of its inhabitants. Their displacement happens around food, as they are deprived of any desire for nourishment. The victims of the curse are not deprived of movement outside, but are limited in their capacity to partake of the habitual life of the table: deprived of desire to eat, but always hungry. Theirs is a displacement within the realm of habit.

The denial of this feeling of being-at-home, as the castaways are forced to remain in a single space for an extended period of time, without really inhabiting the space as a space for intimate, domestic inhabitation produces a sense of displacement and removal from one's feeling of belonging.

Belonging implies being implaced,²²⁰ establishing a relationship of co-making between house and the dweller; a belonging *to* some-where, finding one's place in the world. By removing this possibility, by surrounding the castaways with a house that does not recognize them as its dwellers, where motion is habit-less, where there is a *there* but its no-where, the remaining symptom is a feeling of anxiety. This is an essential feeling as we roam in the world in search for our place within it, the feeling that Heidegger defined as *unheimlich*, unhomely.²²¹ Ripley explains that this is one of

²²⁰ Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 13.

²²¹ This definition of the uncanny is authored by Heidegger, which differs greatly from the Freudian uncanny. Freud

the central philosophical arguments of the film: “anxiety is a symptom of displaced bodies, which in turn makes one feel ‘unhomely.’”²²² From this condition arises one of the true possibilities of finding meaning, of being-in-the-world. For Heidegger, this is a fundamental condition of the human relationship with place and the world,²²³ a fundamental structure of being specially bound to the essential qualities of place. Ripley explains that the disappearance of the familiar traits of a home, its homely qualities built through time, and the anxiety that this transformation full of emptiness brings,

“is necessary to disclose ‘the world as world’, in the sense that it individualizes a person’s being-in-the-world, preventing this from getting lost in the general, impersonal ‘they’ and from acquiring a ‘tranquillized self-assurance’. What Heidegger means by this is that, when anxiety surfaces, it functions as a reminder of our individual being-in-the-world.”²²⁴

This feeling of emptiness, of anxiety about the loss of a home is for Heidegger a way for modern

describes it primarily as a mental phenomenon, better attuned to a Cartesian separation of mind and body. For Heidegger, uncanny translates to ‘not-being-at-home’, *unhomely* or *not homelike* and it takes essential part in the human strife for authentic in the world, it is a pre-given condition of humans that can be temporarily alleviated by poetics in its many manifestations, like architecture. See Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 283-293. Within architectural discourse, Anthony Vidler’s *The Architectural Uncanny* is the most comprehensive work concerning the lack of homeliness in modernity. Built upon both Heidegger’s and Freud’s understanding of the concept, Vidler’s position on the uncanny leans too heavily on the aesthetics and on an almost disembodied, mental allocation of the sensations that emerge related to the uncanny. His position links the uncanny to the essential psychological characteristics of ‘modernism’ and in consequence, as a consequence of The Enlightenment. This mechanistic position of the uncanny as a psychological (and aesthetic) symptom resulting of the philosophical shifts of Modernity, removes the ancient, essential and existential presence of the uncanny as part of our search for well-being. In my view, Vidler’s approach works against an understanding of the uncanny, and every other form of affective entanglement and/or manifestations of atmosphere in architectural environments, as a fully embodied phenomena that is better attuned with the phenomenological underpinnings of my research. See Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 3-14.

²²² Marc Ripley, “Housed Nowhere and Everywhere Shut In: Uncanny Dwelling in Luis Buñuel’s *El Ángel Exterminador*,” *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* 93, 4 (April 20, 2016): 689.

²²³ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 283.

²²⁴ Ripley, “Housed Nowhere and Everywhere Shut In: Uncanny Dwelling in Luis Buñuel’s *El Ángel Exterminador*,” 689.

man to truly find meaning in dwelling.²²⁵ Rather than comfortably being at home, “it is homesickness, nostalgia, [born from anxiety] that can show whether modern man, aware of his exile, still knows what ‘inhabiting’ means.”²²⁶ The house’s curse lies in the *unfulfillment* of a simple desire within the experience of dwelling: the house is no longer a shelter for dwelling, despite producing an *indoor*. The castaways cannot cross a threshold, the *empty* space through which one normally moves, making the desire of moving and re-locating oneself impossible. The desire of being able to perform different functions and give place to diverse habits in our dwelling space is truncated. A desire unfulfilled leads to frustration.

As in other films by Buñuel, desire is a powerful force. Its denial reveals in his plots and characters the cracks in the relationships between humans and the environment, or with each other. In *L’Age d’Or* (1930) two lovers are kept apart; sexual desire remains unsatisfied in *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977); a desire for death and suicide prove impossible fulfill in *The Criminal Life of Archibaldo de la Cruz* (1955); and in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) people seeking to share a meal together never accomplish that. This perpetual condition of unfulfilled desire reveals in these stories the trappings of modern capitalist life, through what Buñuel calls its inherent paralyzing contradictions.²²⁷ This condition might be revealed in the intentionality of the house, and an interesting existential continuity between the architecture and its inhabitants. The manifestation of inauthentic love, of sex without desire, implies a distorted relationship with the other that forces the house to inflict a curse upon its dwellers. The cursed atmosphere becomes so thick that spaces and

²²⁵ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, 291.

²²⁶ Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, 17.

²²⁷ Buñuel, *My Last Sigh: The Autobiography of Luis Buñuel*, 319.

places lose their function; it conversely ends up affecting, in this transformation of its essential qualities, the bodies of those trapped inside. The film meditates on how our bodies are affected by our homes, and our houses by our bodies; on how our health and our psychosomatic health are both intimately related to the walls that house us.

One of the characteristic traits of the house in *The Exterminating Angel* is that it inverts its ontological condition: it creates an impossible paradox that affects the castaways and removes them from their implaced condition. The logical ontological condition of a house is to produce an *indoors*—with the accompanying sensation of being sheltered—and conversely, an outdoors beyond its walls and the limits of its thresholds. This house though, provides no sense or feeling of sheltering its dwellers beneath a roof and under protection from the elements; it is as if the feeling of being lost in the vastness of an ocean with no land in sight had become the affective condition inside the house, where, materially and visually, everything indicates clear limits and functions. This paradoxical condition short-circuits the emotional stability of the castaways, as the un-sheltering quality within makes everyone indoors feel lost, homeless. This paradoxical condition extends too to the house's spatiality. The physical limits of walls and doors are constantly transgressed by physical acts against them, in an attempt to undo their presence. The butler chops into the wall with an axe in search of piping and water, and closet doors are used to hide things away from sight. Yet, the thresholds, those “empty” spatial elements that delimit and connect spaces within the house, become unsurmountable barriers, impossible to cross.

Thresholds

These thresholds are the third element of the film-world. A healthy, *normal* house would be woven together by a series of thresholds, its rooms and hallways connected by doorways. The threshold holds an important place in Western mythology as a place of encounter: a liminal space, a hinge between the intimacy of the domestic space with the outside world. The threshold is the space of encounter of Hermes and Hestia, one the messenger god of limits and movement, the other the goddess of hearth and stability.²²⁸ A place of crossing limits without transgressing them, of passing gently from one place to the other, through a third place that is transitional, thick and shapeless. Its presence in a house should give solace to its inhabitants that the house is open to mobility while able to provide shelter and warmth.

In the house of the film-world, the threshold is there, but only in its visual (re)presentation. It ceases to perform *thresholdness*; the house is left with immaterial yet impassable limits. Both thresholds, the one that separates the property from the city, and the one that separates the castaways from the rest of the house, are untrue to their architectural sense. The threshold between the city and the house bars the participation of anyone from outside; the social and urban sphere of this world is rendered useless and alien to the personal and intimate space of indoors. It is perhaps because of the castaways' transgression, of turning meaningful public events into purely representational and performative acts of bourgeois self-satisfaction, that the house shuts down. The second threshold, the one that

²²⁸ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, "Chora: The Space of Architectural Representation," in *Chora 1: Intervals in The Philosophy of Architecture*, edited by Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell (Montréal: McGill-Queen University Press, 1994), 9.

connects the tea-room with the drawing-room, impedes the castaways from leaving the house; it stops them from truly living the house as an architectural artifact of intimacy and psychosomatic well-being. It is thus that the castaways become stranded in a liminal space, denied the possibility of accessing and participating in meaningful public life outside, while simultaneously banned from living an authentic intimate life inside.

We can see Buñuel's interest in subverting spaces and non-spaces with impossible, irrational spatial constructions in his debut film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). Perhaps his best-known work as a surrealist, the film takes place in an apartment with a non-descript decor characteristic of any domestic bourgeois house at the time. Somehow, the apartment resembles a stage ready for a theatrical performance, as it has a disproportionate empty space between the camera, the table and the bed that furnishes the space. In the scene in which a man pulls two pianos into the room, a woman escapes him through a door behind the table, only to enter an identical version of that very same room; after this, she opens the same door across the room for a visitor and disappears in the interstitial space between room and foyer. Buñuel toys with the perception of spatial continuity and the construction of time, playing with repetition and utilizing the threshold as a trigger mechanism for the use of *découpage*.²²⁹ In *Un Chien Andalou*, we begin to glimpse the spatial language that Buñuel builds through the movement of actors and through thresholds—those presented on-screen and even the screen itself—that cross realms of the absurd.

²²⁹ A form of film editing where cuts and transitions aim at producing continuity in space and narrative.

In 1932, Buñuel returned briefly to Spain to film *Las Hurdes* (*Land Without Bread*, 1933), his famous “surrealist ethnographic” documentary,²³⁰ which was a “reflection on Spain, civilization, and prejudice, a look at “the violence that is at the heart of life.”²³¹ It was also a very conscientious parody of social and ethnographic documentaries in the tradition of documentarists John Grierson (1898-1972) and Robert J. Flaherty (1884-1951). Written by Buñuel and French poet Pierre Unik (1909-1945) *Las Hurdes* juxtaposed cruel, shocking images of its subjects with a dry and detached narration, which, according to Puerto Rican scholar Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz “violates the bourgeois morality that commands pity toward the *hurdanos*, the subjects of the film,”²³² all in true accordance with surrealism’s aesthetic and ethical inclinations. This surrealist ethnographic documentary would eventually influence some of the aesthetic decisions in *The Exterminating Angel*, for example the manner in which the castaways are observed with detached objectivity as they socially and emotionally decay in front of the camera. In *The Exterminating Angel*, for example the castaways are observed with detached objectivity as they socially and emotionally decay in front of the camera.

Since Buñuel treats his thresholds like framing devices, the frame of the screen itself works like yet another threshold we have to cross to become participants in the film. This framing device is doubled, not only through the eye of the camera looking from the sitting-room across a distance at the castaways; it mirrors too towards us, the film-dwellers. A parallel is established between the screen as a threshold, framing the film-world of the house, and the threshold of the house, with all

²³⁰ Acevedo-Muñoz, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema*, 50.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

its pre-understood connotations. As in *Las Hurdes*, this attitude of observing the castaways from a distance, as if creatures studied from an objective point of view, actually points out the multiplicity of subjectivities needed to constitute this film-world. Let us consider the objective distance in the scene where the lambs are butchered by the angry castaway mob (see figure 9). This act of consumption echoes in tone the nature documentaries we see in film and on television, where for example we might watch hyenas feed in the savannah. This points out not only their precarious state, as they suffer the consequences of displacement, but also questions our own distancing and displacement as observers. Similarly, the inability of the police and military forces to cross the iron threshold of the house is mostly shot from the inner driveway of the house; the uselessness of the police and military as urban forces to recompose real, meaningful order is pointed out at the space of the threshold. If thresholds are non-isotropic spaces, which shift and transform the ontology of their surroundings as one crosses them, the question is raised whether Buñuel intended this parallelism, between screen as threshold and space as threshold, manifested in the threshold separating castaways from house. And if he did so, was it to point to our own way of dwelling in the world as simultaneously spectators and ‘film-dwellers,’ with our own authentic living put into question?

These unstable liminal conditions between screen, frame, threshold and interior space set the stage for questioning the relationship between the built elements of architecture, the frames of transition between functional spaces, and the habitual functions of each space. Thresholds, we will recall, have an essential role in the revelation of place in Le Camus de Mézières treatise: they underscore the narrativization of interior space, they create expectation and, as in Buñuel’s work, they are analogues for the line between theatrical proscenium and the place of every-day inhabitation. The destabilization of the liminal condition of these interior spaces, the sealing of boundaries, challenges

also the traditional relationship between physical boundaries and the openings that allow, properly, passage without transgression. Buñuel's film conveys the breakdown of the theatrical and ritual capacities of the threshold, and thus the failure of its capacity to articulate domestic narratives.

Thresholds allow the dweller to traverse space, as they entangle the different levels of depth of the house's interior, revealing its separate, yet interconnected spatial and platial profundity. Every doorway punctuates the progression of domestic functions, it separates the components of the house while also evidencing their accessibility. To deny mobility through a threshold is, then, to deny access to the experience of depth in the house, turning the presence of its other rooms into visual presences that remain beyond reach of fully embodied experience. If Buñuel doubles the screen with the threshold, he is making the 'flim dweller' a co-participant in the flattening of architecture and everyday life into purely visual phenomena. If the threshold denies mobility, one of the capacities it must enable as an architectural artifact, it also severs the ritual significance of the house's functions. When the castaways observe the rest of the house across the haunted threshold to the sitting-room (which is itself a threshold space in itself that articulates the line between the dining-room and the drawing-room, used only once by the castaways), their experience of the house is entirely visual, a distanced picture shows that depth is only an illusion.

The one threshold that is exempt from the haunting of unbreachable limits is the one that frames the dais: the space of theatrical performance where the piano is installed, and where, ultimately, the reconstructive ritual of order and limits will take place at the end of the story.

Ritual

Ritual, as the event that reveals the essential quality of place, is the fourth horizon of this film-world. Ritual, and its cousin, habit, make hermeneutical disclosures of place and meaning in mundane environments possible.²³³ While distrustful of organized religion, Buñuel understands the importance of ritualized space. The narrative structure of the story and the castaways' plight are tightly woven into a ritual-like narrative where religious rituals are upfront useless, but the re-insertion of poetic actions, like theatrical rituals in search for meaning, are the possible solution for authentic dwelling in the modern world: the re-attunement between self and place through events taking place in specific temporal modes.

Buñuel relies on very specific filmmaking techniques to create the disquieting atmosphere in this film. These cinematic devices enable our attention and our affective investment into the scenes, spatializing our emotions and locating them within the reclusive environment of the film-world. One of these techniques is the understanding that if authentic living inside the house is transformed, the temporal order of the world has also been affected. Time passes in a strange manner inside the house, as limits and functions change. Through editing Buñuel manipulates the perception of the passage of *time* for us, the film-dwellers. Montage weaves together the experience of place with our enactive consciousness. Editing creates a temporal structure that explores the relationship between the space, the perception of time and the temporal structure of dreams and nightmares. Although

²³³ See Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham and London; Duke University Press, 2016), 66-69; and see also: Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 116-117, 230.

the Spanish director was never known for a consistent use of the long take in his films, his use of precise, rhythm-oriented editing combined with extended takes gives the film a slow-burning pace. In some cases, the camera meanders through the space of the drawing-room like a snake, crawling sinuously over the bodies of the castaways as they sleep, providing a sense of scale and space in relation to the bodies that inhabit the drawing room.

As I discussed in the introduction, the manipulation of the temporal order within the film locates us, film-dwellers, within the platial experience of the film, as the temporal order is attuned to our own. When the temporal order is strange, unhomely to our own experience, we find ourselves drawn into the anxiety and need to recompose this temporal order as we search for re-attunement between self and place. These temporal orders affect the way habit and the experience of the everyday is understood within the film. The castaways transgress these orders and the house responds accordingly. The first evident transgression of domestic space can be found in the performative way that dinner is served in the first part of the story. The diner serves as a stage for a series of strange jokes that subvert the space of the table as a place of shared experience. The hostess of the dinner executes these jokes at the expense of the guests, making the food unavailable to them by spilling it on the floor. This changes the mood at the table and launches some of the guests into a tirade of egocentric monologues, each trying to one-up the other. The table, a familial convivial space becomes reprogrammed as a space of farce and social shaming. It is the first sign in the film of how the homely qualities of the building will be upended and eventually pit the house against its guests. This attention to transgressing the intimacy and homeliness of the dinner table is also evident in the remake in reverse of *The Exterminating Angel*, the *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoise* (1972); in that film a curse traps guests around a dinner table, making them unable to eat the food that has been served.

Once the curse kicks in and the castaways' time within the house becomes hard to calendarize, Buñuel continues to build a critical apparatus around inauthentic and institutionalized rituals and offers nothing but frustration to his characters when they engage in these behaviors. As the days go by, the castaways rely on a series of superficial fragments of discredited ritual to try to break the spell cast upon them: they try black magic, Kabbalah, masonic words and incantations and a Catholic rosary prayer in an attempt to break the spell of the threshold. Certainly, for Buñuel none of these bear any meaning in modern times, and of course will not work. These rites have been too stripped of their proper place and historical context to bear any resonance in the house's atmosphere. Through these empty rituals, their narrow rigidity is evidenced, pointing out how dogmatic thought has led to the hypocrisy and sanctimonious nature of modern institutions who rely on empty acts to find meaning.

The castaways' escape becomes possible only after the Valkyrie realizes that to reconstitute the meaningful space, the group must reenact their recently created history. Their collective memory should be reinstated, through a shared act, to acknowledge their own failed nature and their shared stories. They must retrace their steps to the point where the night went awry and, in a mythical fashion, acknowledge their impending fate. They do so by staging a theatrical reenactment in the space where the piano is installed, a raised platform flanked not by doors like the threshold to the sitting space, but by curtains that frame the space as one of performance. Theatre and narrative have the power to instill meaning, when grounded in the history of place. Thus, they create a theatrical ritual. The castaways—and the cinematography—reenact, exactly, the moment where they entered the drawing room when everyone was participating in the recital, directly or indirectly. To achieve

this, the Valkyrie directs everyone into their exact physical positions in space. The crew reenacts and reinstitutes a temporality in which memory and their own spatial history is reconsidered as the basis of their relationship with their environment. Once the ritual takes place, the thresholds of the house recover their function and meaning. Liminal space once again weaves the spaces of the house together. This ritual not only reopens the boundaries set by the thresholds, but through poetic reenactment and repetition, the temporal order within the household is also re-established.

In the end it is the underlying poetics of the stage that, once utilized for its true purpose, reinstates the functional and temporal order within the house. The ritual taking place within the mundane environment of the house re-signifies its entrails and teaches its dwellers a lesson in authentic living. It is not the religious rituals of yore that make a space significant; if these are removed from their context, they are devoid of sense and meaning today. These rituals are pregnant with meaning precisely because they pertain to a place and historicity to which the castaways belong. Architecture's role in housing and unveiling these meanings is completed, and the house's curse, broken.

Conclusions: the haunted house against modern dwelling

Considering Bachelard's principle of the house as our first universe, as our primordial place, *The Exterminating Angel* negates this condition and thus gives us a way of understanding what makes the house essential. Buñuel questions what happens *if* and *when* you lose that essential quality of residing in your house. The film is, ultimately, also an exploration of qualitative aspects of place. The space looks exactly like any other; it suffers no other physical transformation but in its atmosphere.

Dealing with the anxieties of home and displacement, the story opens questions into what, conversely, unhomeliness shows about the relationship we establish with our homes: an architecture that resists its dwellers evokes terror, we feel lost within horizons that look deceptively familiar. Modernity in Buñuel is shown to uproot the architecture of these horizons of meaning, and shows that some houses can look the part, but if removed from the qualities of its environment and inhabited by detached dwellers, they will become islands of anxiety and horror borne out of this displacement.

This is achieved through production design and the manipulation of our experience of the passage of time; within a situation of horror and displacement, time is an unstable concept. Buñuel plays with editing and cinematography by repeating scenes and lines of dialog,²³⁴ or inserting non-sequiturs into the visual and temporal narrative. Such manipulations produce the feeling of being haunted by an unstable time that disorients and destabilizes both the ‘film-dweller’ and the characters in space. Time becomes a qualitative element that feels unfamiliar. It is hard to understand whether the time the castaways spend indoors, trapped by the house, follows any calendared logic and order, or if the house itself distorts the feeling of passage of time. As Mora-Díez states, this is a “world built to unveil the rigid fragility of institutions, of modern, structured and orderly time.”²³⁵ It uses the language of dreams to build a world of anti-architecture that resists an imposed function lacking an ethical horizon.

²³⁴ Ripley, *A Search for Belonging: The Mexican Cinema of Luis Buñuel*. 88.

²³⁵ Mora-Díez, “La concepción del espacio arquitectónico en el cine de Luis Buñuel,” 270.

This horizon is reinstated once the ritual reenactment takes place. *The Exterminating Angel* ultimately reveals that to subvert the rigidity of modern, structured and inauthentic time, habit and ritual are of paramount importance for dwelling, for authentically being-in-the-world. Theater is proposed as the new ritual for reconfiguring the domestic space of authentic, ethical and poetical presentation and representation. The unhomely is banished by the reenactment of the fateful night, and the castaways are temporarily attuned to the world around them. The result is not only an attunement with the world, but the emergence of an atmosphere that offers a new potential to make this space a place. The house is turned into a home, where one might live in the present.

Thus, as a criticism of displacement, the film is ultimately a surrealist project,

“[...] to reveal the hidden desires legible in the everyday environment; on the basis of authentic ethical and political aspirations, to identify what was creative or moribund in both material and immaterial culture.”²³⁶

Walter Benjamin's perception was that for surrealist ideals the material space of the city—and also, I would assert, the house as a first unit of the city—“figures the reification of its citizens, locked in the nineteenth-century phantasmagoria of the commodity,”²³⁷ Benjamin explained that surrealism sought a path of liberation through the act of imaginative appropriation, tuning these spaces into spaces of desire to be re-appropriated by inhabitants. Like Kessler's house of poetic ritual, Buñuel shows that to lead an authentic, ethical life, these nineteenth century ghosts had to be exorcised

²³⁶ Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present*, 132.

²³⁷ Ibid.

through poetic rituals of reenactment and resignification of everyday life, while stranded in the drawing-room. Ultimately, *The Exterminating Angel* offers the possibility that the act of imaginative appropriation in the house is an act of dwelling in search of authentic living, in the realm of the everyday.

Chapter 2. Nabua: Haunted sleep and the memory of place

*“It’s okay if you fall asleep during the movie. If you do fall asleep, I hope you have pleasant dreams.”*²³⁸

-Apichatpong Weerasethakul

*“We shall see that time, conceived under the form of an unbounded and homogeneous medium, is nothing but the ghost of space haunting the reflective consciousness.”*²³⁹

-Henri Bergson

*“The memory is clear but there is no possibility that it is true.”*²⁴⁰

-Gabriel García Márquez

²³⁸ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Message to open the US Premiere of Cemetery of Splendor at the 53rd New York Film Festival*, September 30, 2015.

²³⁹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, 59.

²⁴⁰ Gabriel García Márquez, *Living to Tell the Tale*, translated by Edith Grossman (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 70.

Prelude. Ghost stories to read places

Stories of haunted architecture, like the ones we see in ghost films, challenge modern notions of space and temporality. In this chapter, I analyze the work of Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul from an architectural point of view,²⁴¹ examining how his work engages in a specific critique of modern temporality and understanding of space. Apichatpong's films propose a reading of place that recognizes it as essential, haunted with an ever-manifesting history and memory. This is achieved by the director's depiction of a form of dwelling that opens up the possibility of co-inhabiting with memories embedded in the land we call home, in which the ghosts in our homes become evident. Apichatpong tells dreamlike stories of haunted lands and buildings, where he deploys long, distended takes to push the 'film-dweller' into a state of drowsy bliss, where falling asleep is a possibility that brings them closer to the dreamworld of the film. These poetic constructs of world and story present subjective, emotional lives within an imaginary architecture that acknowledges that the connection between sense (perception) and sense (meaning) lies in our embodied experience and our enactive imagination.

Ghost stories resist the idea of a homogeneous space. Homogeneous space is one that can be easily controlled and measured, as it is framed in modern, Cartesian readings of space: a space understood as isotropic and devoid of inherent qualities. Cua Lim argues that, like homogeneous time (that which is quantitatively measurable), homogeneous space is an abstraction, suited to the demands of

²⁴¹ I will refer to Apichatpong Weerasethakul as Apichatpong from here on. According to the filmmaker in conversation with the author, this is the preferred and conventional way for Thai names to be referenced in academic texts and citations.

(modern) social life and action. The ghost film diverges from homogeneous space: “Places have long memories; space (place) is neither static nor solid but vibrates with both permanence and becoming.”²⁴² For Cua Lim, in stories told through the narrative voice of a specter the polychronic quality of place becomes visible, a place “crosshatched with several temporal rhythms.”²⁴³ The lack of a stable, homogeneous space also opens the possibility of destabilizing dominant historical-political narratives surrounding it, particularly those aspiring to homogenize and control. The inherent qualitative essence of the specter as something *other* that falls into the category of the supernatural, beyond the realm measurable and understandable by the metrics of modern science, gives the ghost story its potential of becoming a tangential alternative to dominating structures.

In this chapter, I study how Apichatpong’s filmmaking is a form of place-reading, place-inhabitation, and place-disclosure. Like the work of Buñuel, this is a narrative-driven architectural theory that challenges modern understandings of time and place. I do so by engaging in a hermeneutical phenomenology of his Isaan-based work: the films *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2009), and the short film *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2008).²⁴⁴ In order to unpack the philosophical underpinnings constituting the film-worlds, I have also separated them into four phenomenal horizons. Each one of these horizons allow me to examine how these films enable an experience of place and indeed give us the opportunity to read, inhabit and apprehend the qualitative dimension of place.

²⁴² Cua Lim, *Translating Time. Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 39

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* in italics as *Boonmee*; when referring to Uncle Boonmee in his role as protagonist, I will not use italics.

In these ghost films the experience of place is crucial. Apichatpong's background as architect and visual artist embeds his stories with a particular insight into the relevance of places for human lives. His work is also characterized as merging the poetic realism of the Taiwan New Wave of Cinema with the old-fashioned aesthetics of Thai horror cinema. Ghosts are an essential storytelling component in a good portion of his films, used to convey the multi-temporal and rich historical complexity of the film-worlds where his stories take place. These ghost stories are a way of conjuring up the past into the present, of reading land and domestic spaces as intermingled places, and revealing their homeliness while pointing out the damage done to them.

Furthermore, these films deal with time in a twofold way: one, by delaying time and demanding that our attention shifts in speed and intensity, using long takes and slow-moving tracking shots; and two, they make philosophy of the temporal experience. By combining his particular use of time with ghost stories in these historically charged places, there is at play a spatio-temporal critique of the modern/colonial understanding of history, questioning dominating definitions of place and time as progress-bound, linear, Cartesian, and isotropic. This is manifest in the role that pre-reflective knowledge plays in these film-worlds.

Affect holds in these three films a primary position as a source for knowledge. Thus, mood and architectural atmospheres become essential for their world-making. Apichatpong's stories often lack traditional storytelling structures, where he describes his films as "a gradual accumulation of

feelings.”²⁴⁵ In this approach to storytelling, these “feelings” actively constitute the atmospheres attuned to his characters. The ghosts, we will see, appear as manifestations of memory, but they are also affects made visible: the emotional component of these memories. These specters, apparitions and other ghostly figures are ways for the director to reveal the invisible, the emotional connections with the spaces and the architectural milieu that are articulated where these stories take place.

In fact, the invisible holds these film-worlds together. To render the invisible present Apichatpong proposes dreaming and filmmaking as analogous ways of knowing and understanding our environment, with our affects and imagination as guides to its opacity. His films meditate on sleep—and dreaming—as acts of authentic inhabitation, as a way of resisting normative, and productive – ways of dwelling. In consequence, these stories are used to examine and question how we dwell, how we attune to the atmosphere of the places we live in.

The three films I discuss in this chapter are understood as ways of studying the qualities and experiences of places. Narrative projects of speculative architecture used to bring forth the multi-temporal, multi-historic elements of place. At their center, architectural artifacts inhabited by ghosts—a house—or a ghostly building—a school/palace—inhabited by people, hinge every moving part of the film’s philosophical apparatus. If Buñuel’s ghosts revealed meditations on the anxieties related to modern domestic dwelling, and this was expressed through a severing of function and meaning in thresholds, in this chapter Apichatpong’s ghosts are about weaving a multiplicity of places, while operating within thick liminal spaces, within thresholds.

²⁴⁵ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, “Learning About Time: An Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” interview by Ji-Hoon Kim, *Film Quarterly*, 64, 4 (2011): 48.

Epistemic exploration 2: The House of Boonmee.

In this chapter's epistemic object exploration, I examine one of the companion pieces for the full-length *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and its corresponding house. Here, I present in detail my experience as I watched *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009). This is a short film, part of *Primitive* (2009), a multimedia project made by Apichatpong as a first approach to unveiling the memories in Uncle Boonmee's milieu: the village of Nabua. Of particular interest for this chapter, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* works as a fictional scouting exercise for the director, aimed at navigating and inhabiting the house designed and built for Uncle Boonmee as if it were a found, ready-made location. Here I make a detailed description of my experience of place as I watch the short film, engaging it by carefully describing its architecture, the buildings, and material that compose it, and how these partake in the constitution of the atmospheres and "character" of the places where the story unfolds. Moreover, I consider the characters' interactions with objects to be central to the understanding of inhabitation. And as we will later see, in understanding how the film shares its world with us, the 'flim-dwellers,' enabling us to participate in experiencing its spatial qualities. This epistemic description and drawings are promptly followed by immersion into the film-worlds of both full-length features.

Figure 10. Collage. A Letter to Uncle Boonmee: As I walk through the house of Boonmee. Collage by the author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

[Daylight. Interior. Early Evening.] Nabua, Thailand. I look out through a window, from within a room clad in darkness. It is bright outside, there is no artificial lightning inside the house. It makes my eyes struggle to adjust. I look through a louvered window with weathered glass blades that mediate between the interior and the exterior. It is partially closed. I see that we are on a higher level from the ground, perhaps a first or second floor. I can see the roof of an adjacent building or room across the courtyard outside. Even further, another farmhouse sticks out of very dense jungle, I can hear the rustling of the leaves being shaken by the wind and I am hot and sticky. The houses in the distance are roofed with red corrugated steel sheets, weathered in some parts to the point that a grey undercoat can be seen; in the foreground, the view is partially obstructed by a piece of blue garment hanging next to the window; the light shines through it, revealing its woven texture. I move with the camera to stroll through the room, thus beginning a long tracking shot that gives me a tour through the house. As it does so, a voiceover narrator (presumably, Apichatpong) reads the following letter:

“Uncle... I have been here for a while. I would like to see a movie about your life. So, I proposed a project about reincarnation. In my script there is a longan farm surrounded by mountains. But here there are endless plains and rice fields. Last week I met a man who I thought was your son. But perhaps he was your nephew because he said his father was a policeman who owned hundreds of cows. Judging from the book I have, I don’t think you owned a lot of cows, and you were a teacher, weren’t you? The man was old and couldn’t remember his father’s name very well. It might be Boonmee or Boonma. It was a long time ago, he said. Here in Nabua there are several houses that I think are suitable for this short film for which I got funding from England. I don’t know what your house looked like. I cannot use the one in my script because it is so different from the ones here. Maybe some parts of

these houses resemble yours... What was your view like? Was it like this? ... Soldiers once occupied this place.

*They killed and tortured the villagers until everyone fled into the jungle.”*²⁴⁶

After a brief moment of darkness, I can tell that the house had wooden paneling on the interior, it bounces a muted light coming from elsewhere towards the hallway of this house. Soon, a threshold appears, and through it I can see a bedroom. The floor is mostly covered by a single bed made with a pink duvet on top with rhomboidal patterns. Across the room, a window looks out to a neighbouring house, the window is framed by two solid wood shutters partially opened; birds chirp constantly, crickets and other jungle creatures fill the air with a buzzing hum. A couple of thin rays of sunlight come in through the openings, through a pink mosquito screen that hangs over the feet of the bed. The rays shine bright, bouncing off the pink duvet and painting the air with a pinkish hue. I see hints of another piece of furniture in the room, a bookcase on the edge that holds a single can and a collection of stuffed animals, it is obvious that this room belongs to a child. The wind comes whistling through the open window, I hear it whirling through the leaves outside; while the camera keeps moving, my sight begins to adjust to the contrasting darkness, revealing a closet with glass paneling, white shelves and dark clothes folded inside. Next to the closet, a couple of rain jackets and a squared pattern shirt are hanging, framing the next threshold with their rugged edges; I feel hungry. Across this new opening, I get a glimpse at yet another bedroom with a large bed occupying most of the floor surface, covered with a duvet with pink, green and grey tones in its pattern. On top is another green cover that

²⁴⁶ This letter, written by Apichatpong, is read twice through the length of the film, by two different villagers playing soldiers, cast by the director as stand-ins for him. In Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*. (Bangkok; London: Kick the Machine; Illumination Films, 2009), Blu-Ray Disc.

feels heavier at sight, thicker and denser than the other; an elongated pillow with green and red patterns, like a watermelon; and another square pillow in the back glows dimly in red light as the sunlight hits its red and white cover. Right above the cover, a grey mosquito net hangs hooked and folded on itself, waiting to be used at night. I scratch my face thinking of mosquitoes. Besides the bed, there is a pile of cushions that also have flowery patterns in red, green, yellow and white.

[Cold cut] to another space. The camera follows the same motion from left to right, moving sideways, suggesting continuity of spaces. I see a dark room, the house is made of wood by the way; from the crevices between the boards of the closed window shutter, light leaks through, like elongated stars shining in the dark. There is an old flat-screen television set with a black antenna on top, it is turned off, its polished screen reflects a muted light. A motocross helmet sits on top of a large speaker and a discarded neon bug-zapper next to them. The stroll continues, a partially open closet reveals between its doors a pink toy, followed by a wall with two photographic portraits hanging on it and a drawing of a *wat* building. A calendar in white and teal with two family photographs hung on top of the calendar; the house holds everything together. Its untreated wood boards laid up horizontally seemed aged and weary. A closed door is built of vertically-laid boards, and nailed to the shut door is a yellow paper origami crane. I move with the camera; an old-fashioned blue and black refrigerator appears in the foreground. I wonder what's for dinner. A white cable crawls up the corner of the wall to where a plug box is housed, the fridge plugged into it; a plaid blanket on top of the fridge covers part of it, on top of that plastic containers, and a fluorescent pink fruit resting over the containers; around the corner, another calendar hangs on the wall, it is September here. It depicts an illustration of some mountains; nailed over the calendar is a portrait of two male soldiers holding up their rifles. The camera keeps moving. It pulls back to give us a glimpse of the space we are visiting from a slightly wider angle.

Another mosquito net hangs from the wall, as if it were a hammock, producing a downward parabola of blue cloth from which a collection of pillows and duvets hang; this house is a house of sleepers and dreamers.²⁴⁷ The view shifts upwards, revealing for the first time the ceiling of the house, separated from the walls by structural beams. A thin strip of light washes down the meeting point between ceiling and wall; underneath, a portrait with a golden frame suggests royalty (facing the militia portrait on the previous room), and yet another calendar hangs next to the royal portrait; there is a couple pictured in it.

Suddenly, a wooden column appears blocking my view. On it, a picture of a man standing in the middle of an orchard, wearing a white cardigan and khaki pants, as the narration mentions "...so I proposed a project about your reincarnations..."²⁴⁸ maybe the image we are seeing is of a younger Uncle Boonmee, the future or past dweller of this house.

[Cold cut.] I am now looking through a window into the jungle. A deep-green thick jungle, its leaves make a loud noise, I can hear birds and insects. It reminds me of trips to the coast back in Mexico. The camera sweeps to the right, the window disappears slowly out of my sight, leaving me inside a dark room with the lingering aural presence of the jungle. Light leaks from the crevices between the boards that make the wall, but the darkness is predominant, the kind of darkness inside a house in a

²⁴⁷ The figure of the dreamer is recurrent in his films. Sleep works as a bridge between the world perceived by our senses and the pre-reflective world of ghosts and memories. Through sleep, his characters access different dimensions of a place, where past and future events collapse in the same space. In the full feature film that follows this short, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, there are several moments where the reminiscence of past lives by Uncle Boonmee is preceded by him falling asleep in a bed surrounded by a pink mosquito net, sometimes visited by his nephew, who has transformed into a monkey-ghost dwelling in the forest.

²⁴⁸ Weerasethakul, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*, [00:00:21].

cloudy day just before the sun begins to set. A wet, deep darkness surrounded by the light that comes in from the windows flanking it. Another window, and underneath it, a fan with deep red blades lies resting, motionless, refracting the light that enters, giving it a jewel-like inner light. Outside, I can hear a stream flowing; a rooster crows and a dog barks back. It is farmland. A few farmhouse roofs stick out amongst the trees and other vegetation in the jungle; the sky shines grey and the trees swivel with the wind. As I move, a third window frames the jungle at a closer distance.

[Cold cut.] Now I move forward. In darkness, I move towards a window. As I get closer, the space around me slowly disappears, giving way to the loud, buzzing jungle shaken by the wind outside. Meanwhile the sun sets in the distance in an orange, blue and pink palette of color-stained clouds.

[Ext. Day. Dawn] Cut again to a close up shot of a soldier chewing some food. The shot changes to his point of view (POV), I infer that he is sitting on the windowsill on the first level of the house, looking down into a yard with some papaya trees, dirt on the ground, an orchard surrounded by wire fence and a dog is approaching. The shot changes again, the soldier sitting with his feet hanging off the windowsill, looking downwards towards the yard. The house is raised from the ground, supported by wooden posts, with a red corrugated steel roof overhanging the sides. Underneath the house, I see nothing but penumbra and the silhouette of a staircase, there are no walls. Perhaps the place one climbs up to get to the house. The wind blows strong, shaking the leaves of palms, papayas and other giant leaves around the house, which sits still against the force of the elements.

After a close up of the dog sniffing on the floor, the film [Cuts] [Ext. Daylight] to a long take of a room with yet another bed. It is, perhaps, one of the rooms that I have previously seen. This time, I

see it in a single point perspective. A bed on the floor, engulfed in a pink mosquito net; on the back wall are two windows, with wooden shutters almost entirely opened, the jungle moving outside; on the wall on the right, another pair of windows with opened shutters let the light come pouring into the mosquito net. The light paints the air around and inside the net in pink, while the rest of the room is barely visible. The wooden floor and walls disappear, as if the wood was so rough to the touch that it absorbs all light that touches it. As I spend more time in this room, a slight movement reveals there is someone sleeping in that bed: a monkey-ghost, sleeping quietly.

[Cut] The camera regains movement, I begin in darkness and as I am taken through space, the view opens up to reveal that I am still at the first floor, on a balcony with a wooden balustrade, just few meters above ground level. I see a group of soldiers, a couple of them working with tools to dig up the ground next to a wooden shed, while the others watch around them, as they talk and contemplate their comrades' work.

[Cut] I am back inside the house. I feel sleepy. A poster on the wall depicting a collection of characters from the Dragon Ball series dominates the frame. The camera continues moving, next to the poster a pencil drawing on a sheet of A4 paper, and a poster of a pop-star next to it; the curious gaze of the camera continues its movement. In the foreground, a pile of folded clothes emerges from the bottom of the frame, as the camera movement suggests a slight downward diagonal shift in its trajectory, a rack of hanging clothes suggests that someone has been doing laundry and ironing. The hangers are plastic and multicolored, the wall in the background emanates a silent greenish hue. Did I put on the dryer?

[Cut] A collection of items hang from a piece of balustrade made of thin wooden sticks: a backpack, a yellow plastic mask, a pink plastic bag with prints of white cartoon rabbits, a white motorcycle helmet; as I keep strolling along the balustrade, there is a white sweatshirt knotted to the structure; a hello kitty balloon hanging upside down follows suit. In the background, the jungle and views of the horizon are replaced by a neighboring house, wooden exteriors painted red, window frames painted yellow and covered from the inside with pink curtains. The world keeps moving sideways. At this distance from the neighboring house, with barely any objects visible in the foreground, the impression is that it is the world that moves, that keeps being shifted in front of me and I am floating. But my muscles tell another story, they feel that distance, that lateral displacement. I reach the edge of the terrace in the upper floor. I make a pivotal turn. The red house leaves the reaches of my gaze, replaced by the dense jungle, framed by a balustrade made of bamboo poles tied and nailed together.

[Cut] I am now at ground level, underneath the house, amongst the structure and debris that makes the 'empty' space under the house; buckets, piled pipes, concrete and wood columns and beams criss-cross. I look through them to see the soldiers still at work in the courtyard, one still sitting on a shed, in the background. Another wooden shed, raised from the ground on short posts, its panels and shingles turning silver from weathering, grass and other weeds grow tall around them; roof of corrugated steel, also aging and decoloring at a different speed.

[Cut] I am back on the upper level, inside the house as I look out through a window. I can see a neighboring structure that perhaps belongs to the same house, it is made with the same materials with the same finishing: raw, reddish, weathered wood, a blue wire hangs diagonally between this room and that other one in front of us; to its right, the jungle frames that void that leads downwards, where I

can still hear the blow of shovels against the ground, engulfed in cricket and other insect songs. My gaze, the camera's? I do not know anymore; it moves slightly to the right but also downwards, it pushes a little forward to get me closer to some small objects placed in a surface next to the window. These objects are barely identifiable, they are sunk deep into the shadows that form between the light that comes in through the windows, we can tell by the little light that it reflects that there is an object, perhaps made with porcelain, that imitates the petals of a flower, and next to it, a metallic, tall object is perhaps an incense burner, made with metal, its surface emits a muted golden shimmer along some of its edges. Next, a vase, or an urn with white flowers painted over is barely visible, followed by a portrait of a man, this is most likely a shrine devoted to the man in the picture, hidden in the shadows. I move; the next window reveals another part of the exterior of this house, two farm buildings made of wood, that frame an empty space with a patch of grass, where a structure is smoking, a sort of giant wooden egg with two concave indentations on its lower half... this is a spaceship. The structure is then obscured by the edge of the window, as I move, inside the house, another portrait of another man is hanging on the wall, I move, and reach the edge of the room. The camera turns, I can see the corner of the room, and just next to it, another window brings in light and lets us see another neighbouring building, made with concrete and white-plastered walls instead of wooden frames. I can see where the rain has splashed in the dirt to paint red the area where wall and ground meet, the roof of this house has black roof tiles, most likely made of clay. as I move, I see another wooden shed, and yet again the spaceship and its white smoke appears in the distance. I can see the whole corner of the room, with the two windows on each side, revealed completely as rectangles made of light; the sound of shoveling continues, and as we fade away, the house begins to emit a long, creaking sound, as if a heavy creature was trying to shift it out of its place.

[Cut] I stare directly into a couple of portraits, black and white, framed, with glass panes covering them; next to them, diplomas, and a few drawings, suggesting design intentions for the spaceship, made with thick graphite or crayons, the house keeps creaking, I move, the jungle reflects on the portraits as if they were windows to the exterior, more portraits appear, and as sudden as the creaking sound came it disappears into the silence inside the house. I move now in silence, watching a parade of portraits until I reach another threshold to yet another room where I get a quick glimpse of a green hammock, glowing inside against the light coming in from the windows behind.

*'Soldiers once occupied this place. They killed and tortured the villagers, and forced them to flee into the jungle.'*²⁴⁹

--The narrator says.

[Cut] Two portraits, this time, of common people, a man and a woman, each one on a separate frame, next to each other, the frames hanging from a wooden lattice through which I can see the steel roof lit with daylight. [Cut] I get a close up of a portrait, a man looking directly and sternly into the camera, the jungle shines in the reflection of the glass that protects this frameless portrait. I feel so, so sleepy.

[Cut] I am now in the porch under the house, at ground level, its floor made of poured, cold, polished cement, we get a general view of the space, to our right, outside of the confines of the house are another group of farmhouses, we've seen them before, with their plastered walls painted white and specks of red mud, weeds growing tall around them, right in front of us, a column stands in the midst of this quadrangular space, and behind it, a makeshift shed that seems to house a variety of farming tools,

²⁴⁹ Weerasethakul, *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*, [00:09:16].

perhaps for the small orchard fenced with blue plastic mesh behind it, many of the details of the shed are obscured by the contrasting light coming from the sky and the darkness created by the sheltering roof of the porch, a small reminder that this is a camera and not a human eye; still, we see some fabrics and plastic being shaken by the wind, moving in unison with the leaves of palms and other jungle trees, leaves and birds fly by, hard to tell one from the other because of their speed, I hear the wind shaking everything around us, the jungle moves and I can hear it, there is a storm building up. I feel in my skin the humidity rising. I keep moving, from a pivotal point I have gazed at this space, and then start my movement walking, or floating?... backwards, entering a room in the house, crossing a threshold that leads inside. [Cut]

I face three windows that look outside, to the violent movements of thick leaves shaken by the wind, three thresholds in the dark that look outside, I know I am sheltered from the wind, but its loud music is everywhere around us, while the dark wooden panels of the shutters bounce a dim, muted light towards the place from which I am looking out. [Cut]

Looking through the window in an oblique position, I see the jungle yet again, from a closer vantage point, the enormous leaves from palm trees shake with the wind, that binds everything together, blades of grass move back and forth, a farmhouse can be seen, protruding amongst the thickness of the vegetation, it has a red-rusty outline, damaged wood walls, on the roof an old TV antenna cuts against the grey-clouded sky. In contrast, the green of the ground is almost imperceptibly altered by falling leaves. Time passes, I see the trees slow down, the wind's speed pulsates, it slows, speeds up, and slows again.

[Cut] The wind has ceased, the image turns into a blur, as the camera operator, our co-pilot, removes the lens and changes it for a wider one; once installed, he puts back the protective case and filter, I am now looking at the rooftop of the farmhouse, the horizon and a clearing sky while the sun sets. The birds are audible now, the trees stopped moving.

[Cut] I hear the sound of a ceiling fan, an old one most likely, I see one of the soldiers lying down on the floor, head on a pillow, looking up, while light comes in from an opening across the room, the wooden plank floor is illuminated, I can see how its edges have softened from traffic, its creases slightly rounded, it is smooth to the touch, a feeling reinforced by the close contact of the soldiers skin with the fresh plank floor, I can feel the soothing coolness of that room as he relaxes while watching the ceiling fan off-screen.

[Cut] The monkey - ghost is once again lying down in the bed, surrounded by the pink screen. The air in the room is dense, you can feel the humidity, a quick gust of wind shakes the screen, and the monkey man shifts a little in his resting position. The ceiling fan hums in the distance. I fall asleep.

[I take an involuntary nap as the film goes by]

I dozed off, but as I wake up I come across a small model: a combination of a shrine and an architectural model of the farmhouse,²⁵⁰ attached to the trunk of a tree, made of wood pieces and

²⁵⁰ This is an architectural artifact commonly built in Thai culture to create a healthy relationship with the spirits of the place where the house is located, as Thai artist Rikrit Tiravanija explains about ghosts and miniature architecture: “[A] common Thai custom is to erect a spirit house on every property. A spirit house is a miniature model of a house or temple and once erected offerings are given to the spirit of the place and property. When bad luck befalls on someone’s

small corrugated steel sheets, rusted and weathered by the elements, a couple of tiny tin lamps hang from its small porch made of branches and twigs; as I keep strolling through the forest.

I am forced to look upwards, the ceiling fan hums in the foreground of our aural space, as we see the sky and treetops merge in dusking light, I keep walking while looking up, listening to birds chirp and wind shake the leaves, I hear the depth of the jungle and feel the temperature drop slightly as I gradually cross the threshold between night and day; our gaze begins to go down, facing forward, and as I look into a clearing in this jungle, an animal, a mammal, an ox, appears in the distance. Its steps are barely audible, it walks with heavy ease amongst the trees, stopping to feed on the grass next to a tree, right in the center of our gaze, after a few seconds, it walks away.

I am back inside the house, the ceiling fan is still whirring somewhere near, birds chirp loudly, the space inside the house is dark, the sun has set outside and all I can see are the openings of the windows in front of us, thanks to the dusk light that makes the jungle outside glow in a blue hue, as I keep moving to the right, just before everything fades to black.

family, it is commonly explained to be caused by an unhappy spirit of the property.” In Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Apichatpong Weerasethakul: Primitive*, edited by Gary Carrion-Murayari, Massimiliano Gioni. (New York. NY: New Museum, 2011), 31.

Figure 11. Production still. House of Uncle Boonmee under construction. Apichatpong Weerasethakul. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*

(Bangkok: Kick the Machine, 2010) Photo: ©Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films.

The film-worlds

Synopsis

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (2010) tells the story of Boonmee (Thanapat Saisaymar), a widowed tamarind farmer and beekeeper living in Nabua, Thailand, who suffers from a kidney disease that is wearing away his health and his remaining days on earth. Feeling the end of his life drawing near, he gathers a few of his relatives, and is visited by ghosts from his past. With them, he reminisces about his history, telling stories of his previous incarnations. With a combination of guilt and joy, he prepares for his imminent departure.

Inspired by a book with the same title, *Uncle Boonmee who Can Recall His Past Lives*²⁵¹ is a six-reel full feature-length film, part of a larger art project called *Primitive*. The latter is a multi-platform project that spans two short films (*A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* and *Phantoms of Nabua*), video-installations and the feature-length film (*Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*). According to Apichatpong, the project addresses issues of extinction, memory and inherited trauma in the Northeast region of Thailand, where Nabua is located.²⁵² The art project explores the present-day consequences of the political violence and oppression that happened from the late 1950s to the early 1980s in the region, and how the descendants of the victims of these actions inherit and narrate them. The multi-platform narratives of *Primitive* unpack through how these events resonate through time and are still present in the political tensions currently affecting Thailand. Though his multiple incarnations, Boonmee is directly tied to these events. As a farmer who in his youth had pursued communists in Nabua, he regrets in his final days having collaborated with the military and killed farmers in their name.²⁵³

The film begins with one of Boonmee's reincarnations, an ox tied to a tree in the middle of the jungle; it eventually manages to escape its bonds and run loose in the jungle. A farmer dressed in old-fashioned attire looks for him, while monkey-spirits of the jungle traverse the landscape,

²⁵¹ The film is divided into six segments; each one is a reel of film and every reel is filmed using different narrative and cinematic techniques. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Cinematic Transformation: A Talk with Apichatpong Weerasethakul," interview by Daniel Kasman, *Notebook*, MUBI.com, 23 Sept 2010, <https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/cinematic-transformation-a-talk-with-apichatpong-weerasethakul>.

²⁵² Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "The Memory of Nabua: A Note on the Primitive Project," in *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, edited by James Quandt (New York and Vienna: SYNEMA Publikationen, 2009), 192.

²⁵³ Boonmee is inspired by a man who told many stories about his life to a monk in Sang Arun temple in northern Thailand. The monk wrote a book using these stories called *A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Apichatpong later met this monk while doing research in Isaan for his film, and was gifted this book by the author.

witnesses to this scene. The film cuts to the present. Boonmee drives with his sister-in-law, Jen (Jenjira Pongpas) and his caretaker Jaai through Nabua and arrives at his farmhouse. When they arrive, we see Jaai and Boonmee's nephew Tong setting up Boonmee's room. Meanwhile, Jen and Boonmee chat in the empty colonnade under the house about work in the field, his kidney disease, and his regrets in life.

Night falls. In the following reel, Boonmee dines with his nephew Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee), his burmese caregiver Jaai (Samud Kugasang) and Jen (Jenjira Pongpas), his sister-in-law. While dining under a single fluorescent light, the ghost of Boonmee's deceased wife Huay (Natthakarn Aphaiwonk) materializes just in time for dinner. A humorous conversation ensues; the characters are slightly taken aback by her presence, but eventually curious about whether she has received the food and gifts in the afterlife that they have been sending her through the shrine at the temple. A few minutes later a figure comes into the scene, its eyes glowing red, walking up the stairs into the veranda after having traversed the jungle. Boonmee and his family learn that it is his long-lost son, Boonsong (Geerasak Kulhong), embodied now as a monkey-ghost. He tells the story of how he transformed after an amorous encounter with the monkey-spirits hiding in the jungle.

The next scene shows Jen sleeping behind a pink mosquito net; the ghost of Boonmee's wife watches over her as she dissolves into thin air. Jen and Boonmee walk about the tamarind farm conversing about life on the farm and the immigrant workers who help Boonmee keep it up. They take shelter from the sun under a palm roof hut. Tong watches the sunset lying in a hammock when the film jump-cuts to the past, to tell one of his past lives as a Princess (Wallapa Mongkolprasert) of the region. The princess stops at a pond to refresh herself and makes love to a carp that lives in the pond,

who had offered her the gift of feeling beautiful in exchange for the sacrifice of her jewels, which she throws into the pond.

The following scene shows Boonmee saying goodbye to the ghost of his wife; he embraces her while sitting on his bed. Later, he tells his family to walk with him through the jungle and into a cavern to which he feels drawn—his last breaths are upon him. Inside the crystal lit cave, Boonmee says his farewells to his family, as he peacefully dies against the rocky walls of the cave.

The last reel of the film shows Boonmee's family attending his funeral. Tong has become a Buddhist monk and lies down in a mosquito-net-covered bed. Jen watches television with Roong (Kanokporn Thong-aram) in a hotel room. Tong accompanies them as they watch television. Tong feels reluctant to go back to the monastery and decides to join Jen going out for dinner; he showers and removes his monk attire, dressing up as a civilian. The scene cuts to Tong, looking into the hotel room, where he sees himself, still in monk attire, watching television with Jen and Roong. He leaves to have dinner with the duplicate Jen and Roong, while the second trio watches television.

Cemetery of Splendour

Cemetery of Splendour (2013) tells its story from the viewpoint of a nurse, Jen (Jenjira Pongpas) who takes care of Itt (Banlop Lomnoi), a young and handsome soldier who belongs to a group of military men fallen ill with a strange sleep syndrome, and with whom she develops a sort of platonic affective relationship. The disease has been triggered in these soldiers after they began excavating a site with construction machines. The disturbance of the site has awakened the spirits resting in it, and they

take revenge on the soldiers by bewitching them with uncontrollable sleep. A neighbouring school is transformed into a hospital for the sleeping; our protagonist is volunteering there as a nurse, and is taking care of one of these soldiers. The soldiers are tended by doctors and volunteers alike, who sit next to them and tell them stories. By night, they are treated with a light-emitting apparatus, made to cure them of their slumber and bring them back into the world of the present. As of one of the treatments, the staff hires Keng (Jarinpattru Rueangram), a medium who can contact the consciousness of the sleeping soldiers by touching them and communicating their needs to their relatives and friends when they visit. It is through Keng that we learn that they are being forced to help in another dimension, the past, with ghostly chores to make up for their transgression in hallowed ground. Jen, the protagonist, develops a very intimate relationship with her sleeping soldier, who is liberated intermittently from sleep. Their relationship grows as he becomes a bridge for her to the memories of the city and the haunted site.

Later, a series of long takes leads the film-dweller to follow Jen and Itt as they walk through the city. They go to the movies, have dinner in a food market, and eventually return to the sleeping hall where Itt is treated with the mysterious light machines. These walks and long takes provide a sense of what the city feels like, its atmosphere and the affective entanglement that these two characters have with it, and how the city transforms their connection as they walk. Keng is possessed by the sleeping spirit of Itt during a séance, and takes Jen on a walk through the city.²⁵⁴ They go to a park

²⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that Apichatpong uses gender fluidity to also challenge the limits of materiality and embodiment. Not only are human bodies fluid in their gendering, but ghosts and buildings shift and transform, transgressing the limits of what we would understand as a rigid architectural program. If we consider human bodies and architecture as analogs, Apichatpong's cinema presents a destabilization of the limits and roles of time, space and the bodies that dwell within them.

near the school where Itt reveals that in the site encompassing both park and school an ancient palace once existed; the ghosts that haunt the soldiers once lived there. Itt explains that they are walking through the gardens and golden halls of this palace. We never get to see the palace, but the two characters walk through vegetation and abandoned sculptures as Keng describes the rooms they are walking through.

After their walk, Jen sleeps right next to Itt's bed, while he watches her. The fluorescent dream machine glows as the jungle rattles in the back. Jen awakes and shares tender words about sleep, rest and healing. Jen confesses "I saw your dream,"²⁵⁵ and Itt claims he can see hers too. They are now attuned to the same dream-world. The film cuts to a long take of a dance scene in a park, followed by yet another long take of Jen watching kids play soccer in the rubble and dirt of the abandoned construction site where Itt used to work.

²⁵⁵ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour* (Bangkok: Kick the Machine. 2015), [01:43:43], Blu-Ray Disc.

The architectural artifacts within the films

Here, I include a breakdown of the two main architectural artifacts of the films. The house of *Boonmee* and the school-turned-hospital of *Cemetery of Splendour*. The description of these buildings is the background for the unpacking of certain scenes and ideas which follows.

The house

Uncle Boonmee's house was designed and built by Apichatpong, production designer Akekarat Homlaor, and their crew. According to the filmmaker, he once searched for two years before finding the right actor for one of his earlier films, *Tropical Malady* (2004).²⁵⁶ For *Boonmee*, Apichatpong traveled the country for a year scouting for the ideal house. In the end, the filmmaker decided to design and build the house in a small village near Bangkok, as a stand-in for Nabua. The house was designed and built using the traditional spatial arrangements of a house in the Isaan region, with an open first floor separating the upper floor of the house from the ground. It was planned according to specific descriptions of the house written into the script of the film. These descriptions reveal how the atmospheres of these spaces are essential for setting up the scene and mood not only from the point of view of spatial atmospherics, but to embody the intrinsic relationship between Boonmee and his environment.

²⁵⁶ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019.

Figure 12. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's drawing of Boonmee's house in shooting script margins.
 Apichatpong Weerasethakul. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives Shooting Script*, 2010
 (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2019) Photo: Jorge Rivera-Gutiérrez. Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films.

The lower floor is built with columns and concrete, while the upper volume of the house is built in wood, creating a dark and fresh space that shelters from the humid heat. In this upper floor, Boonmee hides from the heat in his bedroom; Jaai, his caretaker, changes his dialysis bags with focused, deliberate patience, the sound of plastic scratching against fabric amidst the hum of the jungle outside. In a later scene, in the very same room, as he sits in his bed, he embraces the ghost of his wife one last time, before she dissolves into thin air. The darkness of the upper floor's wood panels and wooden shutters thickens the atmosphere of these hypnotic moments composed of contrasting elements; the veil of the mosquito net glows as light passes through it, while the rest of the room remains in penumbra and the green jungle rustles in the background. In the midst of an air of longing and quietude, the dark wood walls of the house shelter the poignant, slow, scenes focused on Boonmee's intimacy with his ghost wife and his caregiver. The walls house moments of profound, tender healing and care.

Figure 13. Collage. Uncle Boonmee's House: The Ghosts in the Veranda. Collage by Author ©Jorge Rivera-Gutiérrez.

Figure 13. Uncle Boonmee's house. Upper floor. The stairs landing and the thick darkness surrounding it in broad daylight. Apichatpong Weerasethakul. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Bangkok; Kick the Machine, 2010), Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films.

The second bedroom, where Jen sleeps, is placed in a corner of the house, lit by several windows with their wooden shutters always open. Once again, thin veil-like curtains paint the light coming in blue; the bed is covered with a pink mosquito net. Outside of the room, the hallway and the veranda are also built in wood, and surrounded by rustling greenery that peers into every opening, window, door and crack in the wall. Pots hold plants, and beyond the veranda, the thick of the jungle wraps the house in green and black. The veranda is the central space of the whole building. It houses the film's most pivotal scene and behaves as a hinge/threshold between the openness/publicness of the jungle and the private/intimate darkness of the bedrooms. This interstitial veranda mediates different elements and narratives of the film, as the space of gathering and domestic exchange.

The school

The school is a wood-frame building. Once again, these spaces were designed in collaboration between production designer Akekarat Homlaor, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and art director Pichan Muangdoun.²⁵⁷ In the school, walls are filled in with wooden planks painted white, while the structure and roof are reddish in color. The main classroom, where most of the film takes place, is transformed into a hospital or patient ward; beds have been put in two lines facing each other, leaving a space in between for circulation. The arrangement resembles the makeshift hospitals from war films and actual improvised hospitals in times of war. This layout and programmatic reuse add to the political commentary of the film, bridging between architectural space and the institutions accommodated by both film and building. For Apichatpong, the transformation of the school into a

Figure 14. Light machines for healing. Atmospheric transformation for psychosomatic health. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour*.

(Bangkok; Kick the Machine, 2015), Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films.

²⁵⁷ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour*, Credits, Blu-Ray Disc.

hospital makes an oppressive space of institutional control a space for healing and human improvement; in this case the patients are representatives of the other oppressive organization that Apichatpong vocally rejects, the army. The building is rehabilitated in its architectural function to attempt to fix wounds deeply affecting contemporary Thai society.

The classroom retains certain qualities of its former use. A blackboard has been cleaned of any annotations, but the weekly calendar and the Thai alphabet are still in place. Cut-outs of birds and other animals decorate the front of the classroom and the teacher's desk presides over the space. The windows remain open throughout the soldiers' stay; the characteristic wooden shutters remain a distinguishing feature of every window shown in the film.

An important juxtaposition gives the scene an additional oneiric tone: local materiality side-by-side with strange futuristic lighting equipment, as if from a sci-fi context. The white hospital beds each have corresponding IV bags and mosquito nets hovering over them, medical equipment sitting next to them, and stools for visitors to sit on. White ceiling fans whirl over the beds, adding a droning hum to every scene filmed here. Next to each bed, there is a bent lamp emitting multicolored pastel-like light. These futuristic devices are specific to the film (sci-fi is a favourite genre of Apichatpong's);²⁵⁸ they are the artifacts meant to treat the afflicted soldiers using light waves while they sleep. The idea for these atmospheric healing machines came from Apichatpong's research on brain science. They are based on the work of a MIT professor who "used lights to manipulate brain

²⁵⁸ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul: 'Steven Spielberg Turned Me on to Making Movies'," interview by Matt Thrift, *Little White Lies*, June 14, 2016: <https://lwlies.com/interviews/apichatpong-weerasethakul-cemetery-of-splendour/>.

cells into re-enacting certain memories.”²⁵⁹ For Apichatpong, these findings contradicted “Descartes’ belief that the mind and the body are separate entities. This hypothesis aligned with my thinking that meditation is a biological process. Sleep and memory can always be ‘hacked into.’”²⁶⁰ The use of light, and thus, the atmospheric qualities of the healing room, modify environmental conditions to improve the invisible health patterns of the soldiers, while trying to also affect the audience of the film. Projecting light into a room transforms its qualities.

²⁵⁹ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour Press Kit* (Bangkok; Toronto: Kick the Machine; Films We Like, 2015), 7. Epub.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Figure 15. Collage. Cemetery of Splendour: The ghostly palace. Collage by author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

The Memory of Place: Hermeneutics of the Film-World

*Looking back on when I was growing up, I'm surprised that I could endure the system of education. You have to stand up at eight in the morning to sing the national anthem. There were so many things you had to memorize. It was like a prison. They also play the national anthem in the cinema before every movie.*²⁶¹

-Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

In the following pages, I provide my own hermeneutical phenomenology of these films. As in the previous chapter, I do so by organizing the experience of place in meditations around the interconnected phenomenal horizons of the film-world. I have divided each of Apichatpong's two films into four horizons of study: *place*, *memory*, *sleep* and *liminality*. Each of these four distinct elements encompass what I understand to be the most relevant qualities that ultimately expand the movies' film-worlds beyond the boundaries of mere film.

In the case of *Boonmee* the film-world goes beyond the boundaries of film to encompass photography, video and installation, but ultimately circles back to the feature-length film. According to Apichatpong, all of the elements of the project *Primitive* meditate on issues of extinction, memory and trauma, particularly in his native region of Isaan. *Boonmee's* film-world is constructed by a rich universe of elements that appears consistently in every one of its iterations. *Cemetery of Splendour* addresses psychosomatic healing as a possible and necessary process, subverting institutions that not

²⁶¹ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul: 'Steven Spielberg Turned Me on to Making Movies'."

only inflicted trauma in the past, but are actively perpetuating it nowadays. In both films, architecture is central to articulating their phenomenal horizons, arguments and film-worlds.

The narrative structure of *Boonmee* is divided into six distinct film reels, underscoring the multiplicity of realities coexisting within the same place. Apichatpong describes the process of writing and filming in different styles to create clear distinctions between each of the film's temporalities and/or realities, each one of these somehow tethered to Uncle Boonmee's existence in the *present* of the film.²⁶² In contrast, *Cemetery of Splendour* is perhaps Apichatpong's most linear film in terms of narrative structure. The plot is woven together using moments of encounter between the soldiers, nurses and their makeshift hospital. Its filmic language and temporal construction are composed of long, silent scenes in rooms that attempt to provide insight into the hinge between the physical world and the world of dreams.

²⁶² James Quandt, "James Quandt on Apichatpong Weerasethakul," *Artforum International*, March 1, 2011: <https://www.artforum.com/print/201103/apichatpong-weerasethakul-27580>.

Place

“Because the film was shot in Khon Kaen, we did a casting session in town. I was happily surprised to see so many talents. There are also several young, enthusiastic filmmakers. To me making this film was like making a first film. I tried to throw away some of my restrictions on filmic styles and embraced the town’s energy.

Working with the non-professionals helped me find the rhythm.”²⁶³

–Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Place is the first horizon of the film-world of *Boonmee*. *Boonmee* and *Cemetery* are, for the purpose of this dissertation, hermeneutical acts disclosing the memory of place. The films conjure up the spirits of the land, where ghosts are essential to readings of place. As mentioned above, the films explore in different ways inherited trauma, how the violence inflicted upon the ancestors of current inhabitants of northern Thailand emanate from the places they inhabit. *Boonmee* deals with the way that bodies define and are defined by Nabua. Furthermore, it frames the house and its surrounding jungle as essential to the constitution of *Boonmee*’s universe and uncle Boonmee himself. The school in *Cemetery* is the central architectural artifact through which the buried memories in sacred ground and desecrated by soldiers are channeled and made present to the protagonists and film-dwellers. These two buildings, the house and the school/palace are thus essential as the architectonics that underscore the role of place in the constitution of the conscious self.

²⁶³ Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour Press Kit*, 9.

The relationship with architecture, and why his films rely heavily on spatial phenomena, has resonance with Apichatpong's personal history and formal education. The filmmaker has built a career upon a series of dreamlike films, with elliptical narratives that explore how memory is entangled with our every-day life and spaces. His films tap into magic and wonder combined with realist aesthetics to open up the multi-layered stories hidden in the cities and wilderness of his home country. Every story deals with ideas of the multiplicity of the subject, and the entanglement between gender, memory, place and time. Born in the prefecture of Pha Nom in the northeast of Thailand, Apichatpong grew in a family of rural doctors, and after obtaining a degree in architecture in Khon Kaen, he got a master's degree from Chicago's Art Institute in the filmmaking program. In a text about Nabua and the decision-making process behind *Primitive* and *Boonmee*, Apichatpong emphasizes how each visit to the region in search of Nabua influenced the decisions that shape the stories, locations and atmospherics for these projects.²⁶⁴ Every conversation with local farmers, monks, and craftspeople unveiled a tapestry of histories that hinted at a rich history of both wonder and violent repression in the territory.

Apichatpong's repertoire of references renders evident his preoccupation for embedding these local stories into his films, engaging spatial memory, atmospheres and temporal phenomena as mechanisms to do so. He has mentioned slow-cinema master Béla Tarr, and Taiwan New Wave masters Tsai Ming-Liang and Hou Hsiao Hsien, as influences in his work, as well as French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Warhol and American filmmaker Bruce Baillie (1931-2020), and

²⁶⁴ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "The Memory of Nabua: A Note on the Primitive Project," 198.

because of the oneiric quality of his atmospheres and his use of distended time, he has been often compared to Hsien, Jia Zhang-ke and David Lynch.²⁶⁵ The work of Baillie and Warhol seem particularly relevant to the subjects tackled by this dissertation, given the evident preoccupation with the passage of time and the atmospheric qualities of space that stem directly from those influences. Both filmmakers utilize the filmic medium to engage architectonically with “the real,” utilizing long takes to portray the passage of time in their subjects, and thus, portraying how these affect the space around them and vice versa. Giuliana Bruno, quoting Bazin, asserts that the realism of Warhol’s films “abides in the space of its duration, in the sustained exploration of an architectural atmosphere.”²⁶⁶ Warhol’s film *Empire* (1964), showing an incredibly long and uninterrupted take of the Empire State building, portrays the changes in atmosphere around the building that in contrast, remains completely still and unmoved. Yet, the transformation of the mood of the building and its surrounding space is palpable in Warhol’s filmic exploration.

Another important place-bound reference in Apichatpong’s work is Baillie, whose filmography is also paramount to this dissertation’s interest. Baillie’s film *Castro Street* (1966) is a beautiful experimental film that successfully attempts to capture the prevailing atmosphere of Castro Street in San Francisco, by mixing disparate images and sounds put together as a collage to entice our memory and enactive imagination into a hermeneutic exercise generated out of these stimuli. The result is an almost musical flow of images and sounds that reenact the mood of the street, without showing actual, crystal clear footage of the place. These influences are easy to pinpoint as part of

²⁶⁵ Quandt, *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, 27-30, 252-253.

²⁶⁶ Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*, 195.

Apichatpong's discourse and temporal aesthetics. One can clearly see that the use of temporal distention, the long takes, is a way to reveal the atmospherics of the house, village, city and jungle. By thinking through experimental filmmaking, inherited from Ming-Liang, Yang, Warhol and Baillie, these long takes immerse the film-dweller in the atmosphere via a synesthetic understanding of image, movement and sound.

The filmmaking process is also as producer of thought, which weighs heavily in my understanding of this horizon. As the director himself acknowledges, the long take is used to attune the film-worlds to his biological inner rhythm, product of the places of his upbringing as the son of two physicians: "I grew up in a hospital, the waiting rooms were my playground, the life-rhythm of the hospital became mine, the speed of waiting."²⁶⁷ Apichatpong infuses his work with his own vital speed: that of waiting rooms, doctors listening calmly to their patients, the stethoscope's meandering across the skin searching for the patient's inner sounds, of patients submitting laboratory results waiting to be finished and delivered. The hospitals of Apichatpong's youth calibrate the rhythm of his future films. The long take becomes the delivery medium for this inner rhythm.

Furthermore, the long take in Apichatpong's films transform the screen into a threshold; by delaying and slowing the action, it locates in place the visuals on the screen and expands them beyond its limits. Let us look at the scene described in the epistemic object accompanying this chapter. As it presents the house in lived-time, it allows for this place to be accessed by our empathic imagination more readily, as it is attuned to our own temporal consciousness, to our own vital rhythm. The

²⁶⁷ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019.

house is lived-in by our extended presence, while we listen to the sounds of the environment, and are guided by the words of the narrator. Thus, the house is made accessible as place via the long take. As it localizes the story of Boonmee (a fictional consciousness we empathize with via the story) and shows materially how this house is inhabited by his biography, we can see and pay careful attention to all the objects that compose this house. This capacity of the house to underscore the qualities of place, its atmosphere, renders evident the importance within these film-worlds of the indivisible connection between place and consciousness.

The reciprocity of influence between the characters, their contexts (like Nabua or Khon Kaen in this case), also seeps through into how the characters simultaneously enter a perpetual circle of attunement with their houses, where they transform the atmosphere of their houses, and their houses' atmospheres end up affecting them reciprocally. As we saw in the previous chapter, this phenomenon of co-making between consciousness and place is present in several texts on place phenomenology, from Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to Jeff Malpas's *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*.²⁶⁸ It is thoroughly discussed by Edward S. Casey in his theory of "place-consciousness,"²⁶⁹ in which he maintains that place and human "implacement"²⁷⁰ are essential for the definition of the self. This co-making is constantly and directly influencing the agency and identity of the geographical subject, "for it is in place that we are besides ourselves [...] In becoming implaced, we emerge into a larger world of burgeoning experience, nor only by ourselves but with

²⁶⁸ For Malpas, place is an essential precondition for being, a constitutive element and a constructive one. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 5-6, 18.

²⁶⁹ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 43-56.

²⁷⁰ *Implacement*, for Casey, defines an indivisible unit between body, place and self "The body is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being in place. The 'here' of every-body, is the sole and sufficient condition for the condition of being (located) here. The primary situation of the embodied subjectivity." Ibid., 46-51.

others.”²⁷¹ Body is what links this self to lived-in place in its “sensible and perceptible features.”²⁷²

Bodies, as well as architecture, disclose place, so the presence of multiple forms of bodies introduces the possibility of understanding place as a rich polysemy. Bodies in the flesh, ghostly bodies, monkey-ghost bodies, sick bodies, all dwell simultaneously in Boonmee’s veranda. These phenomenal bodies are all perspectively situated and intentionally directed, addressing the intersection of these different temporalities and worldviews. My own body as the film-dweller gets to participate in this gathering of multiple bodies as yet another visiting ghost around the table.

The intertwining of Nabua with the different bodies of Boonmee helps define his multiple reincarnations. The fact that these seem to be perpetually happening in the same place reinforces Apichatpong’s questions about the idea of reincarnation as a way of looking into the relationship between consciousness and place.²⁷³ That is, the film presents a series of historical events—or a constantly unfolding history—encompassing violent acts from the late 1950s to the 80s and reverberating in the descendants of those who lived through those events. These descendants are participants in a multi-temporal consciousness that reincarnates many times in the same place: an enactive consciousness made of an accumulation of histories, always experienced in a pure phenomenological present. Let us consider the history of Nabua and how the film deals with it.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 111.

²⁷² Edward S. Casey, “Body, Self and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World,” in *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies* edited by Paul Adams, Steven Hoelscher and Karen E. Till (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 403–25.

²⁷³ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019

The village of Nabua is located in the northeast of Thailand in the Isaan region, close to the Mekong river and the border with Laos. The region housed a communist armed rebellion in the 1960s, where “a violent incident in the Northeast led thousands of farmers to take up arms against the military-ruled state that had promised a new constitution for years.”²⁷⁴ Isaan became the epicenter of the armed resistance against the government, sending “shockwaves throughout the country, fomenting a rebellion against the military regime in Bangkok that was to last for decades.”²⁷⁵ The farmers of the region found in the communist party the political and social organization necessary to resist and, perhaps, survive the government’s neglect of the northeast farmlands. Per Apichatpong’s account, the more he traveled through the region and spoke to the people in the villages, the clearer it became that Nabua was central to the narrative of the violent events, since it was the backdrop for the first armed confrontation between communist fighters and Thai security forces.²⁷⁶ Nabua had strong connections with communist base Bac Hà District in northern Vietnam and had been the focus of the Lao communist movement. It thus became the target of strong military oppression from the government, resulting in hundreds of deaths. Nabua’s forests and caves were the hiding places of those who survived the slaughter at the hands of the military government. In the official records, the communist movement has become barely an afterthought, and their memory erased from official books.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ The Isaan Record, “From Rice Fields to Rebellion: Untold Stories of Northeastern Thailand’s Armed Struggle (PART I),” *The Isaan Record*, August 16, 2016: <https://isaanrecord.com/2016/08/07/part-i-from-rice-fields-to-rebellion/>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Weerasethakul, “The Memory of Nabua: A Note on the Primitive Project,” 196.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 193-205.

In the film, Boonmee regrets that in his past he had collaborated with the military and had killed communists in Nabua—"I've killed too many Communists,"²⁷⁸ he laments, fearing that his illness is the product of karmic retribution. In the present, his farmland brings back life and work into the community, with tamarind farming and beekeeping. The jungle still houses the ghosts of the past—including Boonmee's son—the very same jungle that sheltered the fleeing communists, sympathizers and frightened villagers when the military arrived in Nabua to suppress any form of uprising. The film's disparate six filmmaking styles address the multiplicity of generations living and dwelling within this complex tapestry of place, and the memories of repression and processes of healing in this land.

In *Cemetery of Splendour* place is rendered as capable of affecting the health of its inhabitants. It takes place in a school, where soldiers are being treated for a sleeping disease inflicted on them by the spirits of the site they were excavating. Here, as in the previous chapter's *The Exterminating Angel*, place is an enactive, conscious entity that reacts against its own dwellers when they pose a threat to the order of things. Jen and Itt, the two leads of the film, dwell in the school and ancient grounds as contemporary *augurs* of place, trying to make sense of the will of the spirits that inhabit there. Apachitapong describes it as "a personal portrait of places that have latched onto you like parasites."²⁷⁹ His use of the word parasite implies, on one hand, that place has a physiological influence upon the human body; but also, that he refers to the "parasitic places" as actively latching upon the dweller opens an interesting view into his understanding of places as haunted spaces that

²⁷⁸ *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. (Bangkok. Kick the Machine. 2010.) [00:44:08] Blu-Ray Disc.

²⁷⁹ Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour Press Kit*, 4.

can proactively affect those who dwell within them. These places, though, are not the ones originally filmed, the locations, but doubles created within the film-world. These filmic doubles are properly attuned to focus our empathic gaze upon those atmospherics that might get lost on us:

“It’s because the jungle is home. We tend to forget. Now when I go to the jungle, I get scared because of the sounds, things I don’t know. But it’s our home, our ancestors’ home. And I really believe that in the past people could talk to animals and could know what particular bird sounds meant. But we’ve lost that ability. So I like to take my characters back home. Another thing that is visually or conceptually different from *Tropical Malady* is that *this jungle is artificial, it’s a cinematic jungle*.”²⁸⁰

Cemetery of Splendour takes place in Khon Kaen, where it was also filmed. A large city in the northeast of the country, hometown to Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and also in the region of Isaan. It features places of everyday Thai urban life: Buddhist temples, public parks, night markets, bus stops and a shopping center with a cinema. Apichatpong charges these spaces with underlying specters of political and institutional oppression and historical longing. Small moments like the sound of the royal anthem at the cinema or the presence of soldiers in public spaces reveal a complex social tissue subjected to military and religious surveillance in an otherwise everyday milieu. The long takes utilized in the film render these places as poetic experiences underscoring the often-invisible quotidian dimension of the city; they render their atmospheres present and resonant for the film-dweller.

²⁸⁰ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, “Uncle Boonmee: Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” interview by Virginie Sélavy, *Electric Sheep*. November 13, 2010. My emphasis.

Memory

Memory is the next horizon that composes the film-worlds of *Boonmee* and *Cemetery*, and a central theme for both films. Memory serves as a conducting force to both the visual aesthetics of the film and its non-linear dramatic structure. Every one of the six temporal iterations of Nabua and Boonmee's house feels different, yet somehow the narratives are entangled. Each of these unfold specific memories entrenched in the people and their land. Meanwhile, it is the lingering recollections of the past that inhabit and haunt the makeshift hospital, park and invisible palace in Khon Kaen.

From Apichatpong's earlier films like *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), where he tested ideas on collective imagination and *recollection*, his films have delved into the concept of memory as a driving force in and within communities. In *Boonmee*, memory becomes the essential fabric in which Apichatpong weaves his non-linear narrative, and the act of bringing back those memories into the present is at the core of its film-world. In the title of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, the act of re-entering these places in Boonmee's memory reveals the nature of the journey that takes place within his house.

The *reincarnations* of Boonmee appear as in daydreams, his *recalling* implies a *return* to certain moments, specific place-bound memories. The combination of the rhythmic stillness of the scenes of daydreaming, with the idea of memory as an ever-occurring process of remembrance and forgetfulness, evokes in the viewer a sense of languid daydream where imagination, being and remembering are happening in overlapping succession. It is a motion pulsating between recollecting

the past and being-at-home in the still present of the film. To recall, to re-live these lives is a way of returning, creating a cyclical time in which dwelling at home is constituted of different *returns* to home, to both remember and rediscover what and who has changed over time.

In Apichatpong's work notions of place are always intertwined with identity. He began his filmmaking career with an offbeat film that oscillates between documentary and fiction: *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2001) is built as a *cadavre exquis*, the French surreal technique of making through addition—where a piece of text or drawing is passed from person to person—told by several non-actors who connect each segment of the film with their own anecdotes and stories, a mixture of truth and fiction. He then began a practice that mixes filmmaking with video art and installation, jumping from one format to the other. Following *Mysterious Object at Noon* he wrote and directed *Blissfully Yours* (2002), *The Adventure of Iron Pussy* (2003) and *Tropical Malady*. Of these three films, *Blissfully Yours* and *Tropical Malady* follow a similar narrative structure in which each film is split in two parts, where each half is thematically connected to the other, but not necessarily exploring the same storyline. *The Adventure of Iron Pussy* is a riff on Thai action films and soap operas, where he deals with the multiplicity of the subject. In the film the eponymous hero is a transvestite woman with a male secret identity.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ In between these films, Apichatpong expanded on some of the subject-matter in his video installations. In his Master's thesis project, he intertwined video of his Chicago apartment with a voice recording of a phone conversation with his mother; the project worked with the connections between places and multiple meanings of what constitutes a home. In *Haunted Houses* (2001), he recorded scenes of famous Thai soap operas reenacted by non-actors in their respective home villages. See Quandt, "Apichatpong Weerasethakul", March 2011.

In this regard, identity is to some extent fluid and is shaped by place as is proven by his later film, *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), a story inspired by his own life, or to be precise, his parents'.²⁸² The film is again split in two parts and tells the love story of two doctors meeting in the halls of a hospital. The movie de-centers the narrative perspective, providing two central narrative points that flow into each other. The first half is set in a rural location, while the second mirrors the narrative of the first, but in an urban environment. While this is one of the few of his films where the fantastic, like spirits or ghosts, is not overtly present on screen, magic and wonder come from its narrative structure and its atmospheric qualities; it is a feeling that seeps through the editing and storytelling process. The film explores how places affect the outcome of these stories, or at least the feeling of them. It turns the film-dweller and the camera into ghosts that float by and observe the interactions of the characters, and often linger around these places after the action has passed. Arguably one of his most atmospheric films, he lets the quality of the different locations affect us and the characters alike.

The film opens with a static shot where we look through the window towards a calm, green field and a clear sky, a long shot that as cinema scholar James Quandt explains, announces the film's visual style.²⁸³ The dual structure of the film is present on several instances. Each of these halves are his mother and father's side of the story: "There are two trees', Joe said, 'One represents my father's story. The other represents my mother's story. They grow together, and other stories grow out of them too.'"²⁸⁴ The first half, set in a rural area of his hometown of Khon Kaen, is set in a building

²⁸² Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Memories, Mysteries: From an Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul," interview by Tony Rayns, *Kick the Machine.com*, July 2006, <http://www.kickthemachine.com/page80/page24/page12/index.html>

²⁸³ James Quandt, *Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, edited by James Quandt (New York and Vienna: SYNEMA Publikationen, 2009), 82.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

with wood paneling, multiple colors and natural light. The sun is bright, and one can feel the breeze and humidity as the characters linger in the open corridors and consultation rooms. The second half is set in an urban hospital, artificially lit and with more confined spaces. The architecture is modernist and it is easier to tell the separation between gardens, plants and the built environment. White covers most of the walls, and the sound of the breeze is substituted by the echo of the busy hospital staff walking about its shiny floors.

Syndromes and a Century is a film that once again touches upon the anachronistic structure and interests of the filmmaker. “Its title in English combines two of Apichatpong’s cardinal themes, the temporal, sickness and cycle [...].”²⁸⁵ The cyclical nature of the film’s temporality, its return to the same story with slight modifications, tap in a different way into the magic realism of his later ghost films, where the story alludes to reincarnation and the circular nature of storytelling. The architecture that houses both stories shape the behavior and physical demeanor of its inhabitants and amplify the emotional content of the story.

Primitive followed suit; the work is constituted by an entangled network of pieces about memory that orbit around the full-length feature *Boonmee*. The dinner scene in *Boonmee* is the pivot around which the whole film is constructed. It is a whole reel of nearly twenty minutes in which Apichatpong maps out Boonmee’s family history and his connection with the dark jungle around them. The scene plays beautifully with the spatiality of the table and the veranda as the central places of familial memory. The unaffected way in which the family receives the new entity at the table is

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 89.

endearing and funny. Their ghostly presence is unsettling at first, but very soon becomes a familial scene of generational re-encounter. The fantastic is never treated as uncanny, or downplayed as superstitious in Apichatpong's films, but as a departure point to access the wonderful, unstable, opaque and oneiric. The table becomes a place in the house where family gatherings include past lives, deceased family members and a looming presence of destiny, a promise of their future. It is an organizing surface of personal histories, daydreams and memories.

Cemetery of Splendour tackles the journey of dreaming as an act of inhabitation. The scene where Jen and Keng (carrying with her the spirit of Itt) explore the invisible ruins, reveals these hidden connections. The park where the invisible palace lies is slowly revealed and described as the characters journey through their halls. Once again, Casey explains how journeying is closely related to inhabitation of a place, and that reveals the dynamic qualities of place, that “between places and journeys there is a relationship of mutual implication.”²⁸⁶ Journey implies movement, even if it occurs within the bounding horizons of a specific place; its movement and revelation of hidden memories—remembering through horizontal exploration—have “little to do with speed and everything to do with exploration and inhabitation, with depth instead of distance, horizon rather than border, arc and not perimeter.”²⁸⁷ While Jen and Keng walk through these halls, there is also a lingering memory in the minds of the audience and characters of the mysterious notes and architectural drawings found in Itt's notebook.²⁸⁸ The journey takes place on two planes: through these opaque maps made from notes he takes after dreaming; and through the actual act of traversing

²⁸⁶ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, 289.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ See Weerasethakul, *Cemetery of Splendour*, [00:48:49]

the landscape using these dreams and memories as non-linear guides of interpretation. Thus, movement and dreaming become, though ostensibly at odds, modes of inhabitation that co-participate in the hermeneutical process of remembering the hidden histories of the landscape: sleepwalking as a way of revealing hidden stories.

In *Cemetery of Splendour*, it is precisely through a form of sleepwalking that its invisible house is revealed. In the film, the architectural memory is the ghost. The house's spatial intricacies are revealed by the poetic act of sleepwalking, a simultaneity of bodily action and dreaming. Through this hermeneutic act the hidden memory is made present, and we learn about the entire population of this ancient home that haunts the soldiers and puts them under a mysterious sleeping spell. The oppressors of the present—soldiers operating construction machinery that tampers with old, sacred grounds—are put to work within the dream-world for a better future, in service of the ancient dwellers of the land. Meanwhile the school, an equally oppressive institution of indoctrination,²⁸⁹ is transformed into a space for healing, both physical and psychosomatic.

Liminality

The next horizon, liminality, comprises the spaces where most of the stories take place. This transitory, vibrating and unstable condition conforms the film-world as something akin to the world of dreams and memories. The condition of Boonmee's house and Jen's school as simultaneously

²⁸⁹ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019.

central yet transitory spaces, articulating movement between the intimate and the public, underscores the role of the mysterious and wonderful in these film-worlds.²⁹⁰ Thresholds are unstable, changing, places that make the comforting stability of neighbouring spaces more visible. These transitory spaces are defined by undulatory, invisible limits of an undefined thickness.

Ghosts are liminal creatures in the worlds of Apichatpong, they only exist in the spaces in-between: twilight, dawn and in the edges between interior and exterior, between memory and imagination, and between wakefulness and sleep. Boonmee's veranda is a particularly notable liminal space that binds jungle, village and domestic spaces together. This condition allows the film to flow between the open space of the jungle, and the farmlands and the interior of the house. The exteriors of this film-world are comprised of two principal locations: the jungle and the cave. The jungle plays an essential role in the story. It is a haunted place where the past is transubstantiated into ghosts and atmosphere. These spirits entice Boonsong²⁹¹ into following them deeper into the thickness of the jungle, seducing him to have sex with them, and disappearing into the jungle. The cave, on the other hand, is filled with crystals that resemble a starry sky. Here, Boonmee feels an affective pull when he reaches the liminal stage of his life, between life and death. The innermost cavern becomes Boonmee's resting place: from the interior space of his house, in the veiled *penumbra* of his bed, into the cold, shimmering interior of the cave.

²⁹⁰ This makes a case for the possibility of all houses to be containers of a certain degree of mystery of wonder.

²⁹¹ Boonmee's son.

In *Cemetery of Splendour*, the invisible hyphenates plot, atmosphere and architecture. It is the essential liminal component. The school is transformed into a hospital for the sleeping, where half of its inhabitants are stuck in the world of dreams and memories. There, multiple temporalities and architectural spaces converge and coexist simultaneously in the film-world, articulated by a prevailing atmosphere that hums like the fluorescent lights used to heal the soldiers. Underneath the opaque veil of the present lies a thick layer of intricate pasts, where palaces of grandiose corridors and halls are intertwined with mischievous spirits; or so we are told by the medium who guides Jen through the invisible landscape. We are made aware of the invisible through soundscapes and speech.

The production design of both films reinforces this complex approach to oneiric realism. Both films tackle the representation of architecture as everyday spaces. For Boonmee, the central space is his house; while in *Cemetery*, the narrative is split between the schoolroom transformed into a hospital and the run-down park. Akekarat Homlaor's production design ensures that every element of the atmosphere is in the right place for the script's description of each space. In the script and call sheets, every scene is carefully planned, with a series of objects and atmospheric devices ensuring that the mood of the scene and the lived-in quality of the spaces successfully affects the film-dweller. In the production documentation, call sheets amalgamate a list of required elements and personnel for each shooting day. Working from these documents was possible to cross-reference all these components and unpack the filmmaker's intentions.²⁹² In Figure 17 we can see the list of shots for a specific day (A), the scene in the script (B) and the props (C) required for that day's shooting. The shots describe

²⁹² Salaya, Thai Film Archive, Apichatpong Weerasethakul file, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives: Production Call Sheets," 2009 (2552 B.E.), folios 1-15. Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films. See figure 17.

Let us consider again the scene in the veranda.²⁹³ The atmospheric—synthetic—quality of the veranda and its objects enables the possibility of reuniting Boonmee’s family in the dinner scene. The long take gives us time to dwell—linger—on the details of the veranda, so our senses can meander through the material and acoustic components of the place: the weathered table, the fluorescent light, the relentless bugs flying impatiently about it, the plastic cups and dishes full of colorful food, the whirring of the fan and the crackle and pop of insects being electrified by the bug zapper; plants in pots near the balustrade, and small images pinned to columns and walls; in the dark void beyond the wooden frame, the constant enveloping loudness of the dark jungle.

This veranda and the whole house of Boonmee was designed from scratch in the vernacular constructive system of the Nabua region, making it possible for the filmmaking crew and machinery to be allocated and function perfectly. This raises the question: how is the architectural design process different for film than for building? The architectural design of the house as a set had to acknowledge the bodies of the characters, those who compose the film-world, but also the body of the film-dweller and everyone involved beyond the frame of the screen. It is a process of attuning the visible onscreen (specified in the script) with the invisible behind it. Walls had to be movable to accommodate cameras and lights; some proportions of the house were lightly modified so they would appear regular on screen.²⁹⁴ The small discrepancies between the film-world house and the “real” version of the house shows how, between filmmaking and film watching, there is a gap of

²⁹³ There is a thorough description of the house at the beginning of this chapter. The house first appears as a setting for Project *Primitive*’s *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*, in which Apichatpong films a first walkthrough the house as he reads a letter he has written to Boonmee. See Figure 11 for a construction photo of the set.

²⁹⁴ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019. See also, Appendix B for a selection of behind-the-scenes images for the construction of Boonmee’s house.

interpretation, but also an acknowledgment of the optical/perceptual correction that the production designer and cinematographer have to take into account to make the architecture appear right and grounded within its film-world.

Considering the previously mentioned *Syndromes and a Century*, it is possible to observe how the opening scene in the rural hospital where his parents met. The female protagonist meets with a doctor and, after a short conversation, they decide to leave for lunch. The camera leaves the space with them, but instead of following them through the corridors of the hospital, it lingers, as if getting distracted by the landscape, and begins pushing out of the hospital space until all that is shown is bright green fields sheltered by a clear, sunny sky. The audio, though, stays with the doctor and her companion as they walk through the hospital. The resulting three-minute-long take invites us to daydream with the camera, to be distracted by the landscape and its blade-like leaves shimmering with the wind, while the credits begin to appear in white text superimposed over the landscape. As Koepnick describes it, Apichatpong's long take thus "blurs the line between the diegetic and the non-diegetic, between the interior and exterior spaces, between nature, and civilization, between the cognitive and the affective."²⁹⁵ These blurrings are acts of dwelling. We come across these *concordantiae oppositorum* in the very same way that we encounter co-existing contradictions in dreaming, or daydreaming.

In the process of place-making, the production designer, alongside the film director, create characters and the correlating spaces that reflect their mood and personality. These objects constitute part of

²⁹⁵ Koepnick, *The Long Take : Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, 182.

the atmosphere of each of these places, dwellings, showing the passage of time and the construction of memories. They are sundials that show us that dwelling is made through time. In time, we drag and collect objects into our homes, we create habits by locating these things around our recurrent movements and actions in place. Other objects are used habitually, yet remain static in place, being transformed gradually by our actions and our presence. Beds, for example, witness our circular time, our daily recurrences from the time we lay on them and through our slumber. Beds are witnesses of our dreams and of our circular movement through the temporality of our everyday lives. In Apichatpong's cinema, beds and hammocks are thresholds for accessing dreams, places to enter the world of imagination and memory; dreams are inherently tied to the memory of the places where his characters dream. Beds are also the place for death. Apichatpong's ghosts are both memory and dream, instances of past reincarnations manifested simultaneously in the same rectangular space.

Sleep

"I became attracted to sleep because it takes up half of our lives. We don't pay much attention to it. But it's something we can't control. Perhaps it is a better world than our waking reality. As I researched sleep, I found that we sleep in intervals. The REM intervals loop several times a night. Each loop is about 90 minutes long. It is the same running time as an average feature film. So maybe the running time of films fulfills our subconscious needs? Therefore, entering a movie theatre is not unlike entering a dream. Films hypnotise us and take us to new worlds. Sleeping and films are like twin realities." ²⁹⁶

—Apichatpong Weerasethakul

²⁹⁶ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Behind the Scenes Featurette," *Cemetery of Splendour*, Blu-Ray Disc.

Sleep—dreaming—constitutes the last horizon of this chapter. Dreaming while we sleep is an act of inhabitation in the film-worlds.²⁹⁷ The director states that his film(s) is (are) meant to be seen while in a state of sleepy drowsiness, that the warmth and slowness of the film's tone can drift the film-dweller into a stupor that can produce sleep, intermittently, while watching it. The film's atmosphere is meant to entice us into sleeping and dreaming, and the non-linearity of the plot mirrors the logic of dreams. In *Boonmee*, it is through sleeping that access to Boonmee's past lives is opened, as he dreams and daydreams about his memories. Few filmmakers work within the language of the oneiric as does Apichatpong, perhaps only preceded by Lynch and French poet Jean Cocteau (1889-1963). Sleeping in these films is an act of political resistance, of reconfiguration of space into something personal, embedded with subjective interpretations. Art critic Jonathan Crary emphasizes the capacity of sleep to resist and assert our own embodied control without control of time.²⁹⁸ Sleep is an act of inhabitation that pushes hegemonical forces, that try to render most human actions as economically productive, to the edges of our realm of action, even if momentarily.

“The huge portion of our lives that we spend asleep, freed from a morass of simulated needs, subsists as one of the great human affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism. Sleep is an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism. Most of the seemingly irreducible necessities of human life—hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and recently the need for friendship—have been remade into commodified or financialized forms. Sleep poses the idea of a human need and interval of time that cannot be colonized and harnessed to a massive engine of profitability, and thus remains an incongruous anomaly and site of crisis in the global present.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ According to Bachelard, daydreaming is an essential form of imagination as act of dwelling; Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 28. This is better discussed in chapter 3 on David Lowery's *A Ghost Story*.

²⁹⁸ Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 13.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

In the short film *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*, we get to see Boonmee's house as if it were either a recollection or a dream; its atmosphere feels suspended in time, as if the house was waiting for the characters to return. The camera glides calmly from one room to the other in a long tracking shot and guides the film-dweller through its rooms and balconies. As the long take shows the traces of dwelling left by people living in it, the tracking shot is interrupted by a couple of scenes with soldiers—local teenagers Apichatpong dressed up as soldiers—digging in the terrain and then falling asleep. The tracking shot resumes, and the letter is read once again, but this time by one of the teen soldiers, mirroring Apichatpong's words, grounding the letter in the body and voice of someone who was born in the village.

This short inherits from *Syndromes and a Century* the use of long tracking shots to elicit a sense of place from the house it meanders through. It focuses mostly in the house as an embodied manifestation of the characters. The house is pure atmosphere, accessed through our ghostly visit and by the characters in their sleep: appropriating the home through sleep and dream. The children and teenagers depicted in the film belong to different historical temporalities from those who lived through the horrors of the past; but these temporalities are collapsed, rendering them co-participants in one space, the house of *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* and *Boonmee*. These children and teenagers (the embodied future) are dressed up as soldiers (the embodied past of the land) sleeping in an unfolding narrative of the ghosts who inhabit Nabua's farmlands and houses:

“The teenagers provided me with the future of the place. When I went there, it was very much like a performance: you don't know what to do. You just go there and work with them to create dreams. In dreams you can't take control. So it's like a collaborative dream

making.”³⁰⁰

In *Boonmee*, dreaming is an active mode of access to the polychronic spirit world, the many temporalities coexisting within Boonmee and his many incarnations. The diptych sleep-dream is a mode of authentically dwelling in the house and the land, an act of collaborative making with the actual inhabitants of Nabua, which in turn offers us a point of access to the wonders that exist in Uncle Boonmee’s world. The architectural artifacts also partake in the processes of psychosomatic healing through sleep. This can be clearly seen in the scenes in Boonmee’s bedroom, a space that doubles as a room for healing and sleep. Boonmee sleeps in a room covered in ghostly veils. The architectonic space for sleeping in *Boonmee* is also a space linked to the search for one own’s health; not only do the bed and hammock serve the restorative purpose of rest, but they become the place where healing and dreaming happen in tandem. His bedroom is furnished with a combination of medical equipment for his kidneys – bags, rubber tubes, inox structures and plastic trays full of medical equipment – as well as the usual objects found in a rural home in the region, from mosquito nets to towels, tea warmers, and a thermos. Boonmee receives medical attention from his caregiver Jaai, right before sleep. Later on, he is visited there by the ghost of his wife and shares a slow, tender and amorous hug.

In *Cemetery of Splendour* sleep is how the spirits of the site punish the soldiers for breaking ground with new construction on sacred grounds. It is how the site transforms that which is oppressive and actively destructive, into the imaginative and passively productive. Sleep allows the characters to

³⁰⁰ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, “Learning About Time: An Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 50.

inhabit many places at the same time, and explore Khon Kaen's multiple temporalities. Sleep allows the soldiers to be properly healed, or at least to become agents of healing, and the school to be transformed from an oppressive structure of indoctrination into a hospital. A place that literally and symbolically strives for the psychosomatic health of its dwellers.

As I explained in the opening section of the dissertation, the long take is often considered one that exhausts the content of a frame. The long take became a preferred method of filmmaking for some of the Italian neo-realists, like Pasolini, who championed its capacity to allow cinema to present the world as-is, without cuts or edits.³⁰¹ Its reliance on lived time, instead of the constructed—manipulated—time of the montage, has become one of the reasons advocates of realism champion the approach.³⁰² In Apichatpong's work, the long take presents an opportunity to show the film-world as a deceptive place, presented as-is, but with layers of the invisible populating every frame. The utilization of the long take heightens the sense of tactility and proximity of these worlds; their qualities become more readily accessible the more time we spend on these frames. The heat, humidity, smells and general languor of the world is made accessible. Conversely, these worlds feel haunted by spirits, the narratives are non-linear, and we see on screen how ghosts materialize in these so-called realist takes. Koepnick argues that even if the frames somehow appear to "exhaust whatever could be said about the visible and sensible world [...] much of what we see resists understanding

³⁰¹ Pasolini's position on the long take is exemplified in his text with the *Abraham Zapruder Film* (1963), the 8mm color short film that documents the assassination of JFK; yet, his position on the technique could also consider the work of fellow Italian director Michelangelo Antonioni, like *The Eclipse* (1962), *The Adventure* (1960) with their frames devoid of human figures who speak off-camera; or the opening long shots of *The Night* (1961), or the looming and empty architectural spaces of *The Conformist* (1970) by Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci.

³⁰² See Hungarian director Bela Tarr's opening sequences for *The Turin Horse* (2001) or in *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2001); or the domestic long takes in French director Chantal Ackerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (1976) as exquisite examples of directors that rely on the long shot in service of realism.

and remains deeply enigmatic and riddle-like, obscure and mysterious.”³⁰³ Thus, the long take as utilized by Apichatpong subverts its usual quest for clarity and exhaustion, what Bazin defended as its greatest virtue.³⁰⁴ The dreamlike quality of his storytelling, with the slow rhythm of its atmospheres, populated by loud sounds, spirits and memories, obscures any attempt at a clear dissection, rendering the affective relationship we establish with the film, what the movie *feels-like*, the most relevant form of access to it.

Another technical aspect very characteristic of these films, used to heighten the sense of place, is sound. Sound design for Apichatpong is an essential component to bring to life the atmospherics and the proper attunement of story and film-dweller to film-world. For Apichatpong, it is the one element that calibrates and adds depth and texture to his films. Influenced by avant-garde and experimental cinema from his early days as a filmmaker, he seeks to challenge the traditional “narrative functions of sound, [instead being] more [interested] in the texture it creates.”³⁰⁵ The sounds of common objects interacting with the bodies of the actors are put into the audio mix quite loudly, bringing the invisible, the small and the distant close to the perceptual field of the film-dweller.

“I would say, it's similar to creating my own reality for the players. Not necessarily story, but something like what image does. That, you know, sometimes you leave their frame open for people to look. But for me sound, it is same, you can open it up. Not only for dialogue and so. Seeing my films in the theatre, they are quite loud with the sound. Other sounds... Because this is about this openness in the frame, not only the image but the frame of sound.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Koepnick, *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, 104.

³⁰⁴ Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 48-50.

³⁰⁵ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

In fact, the soundscape is an essential perceptual horizon within the realm of the film, not a dimension of diegetic effects or music, but a way of revealing the concealed, tactile components of the world in such a way that the film-dweller becomes immersed in a world that is at once distant and proximate. If these soundscapes are not seeking a narrative function, working instead towards elevating the perceptual dimension of the film-world, they also participate in the fantastic opacity of sound and experience. When I am falling asleep, there is a liminal moment between wakefulness and sleep when sounds are heightened and isolated in my perceptual horizon. Sounds are also a way of decentering vision as the dominant mode of knowing and imagining.

Dreaming and imagination are often placed together as the fantastic and mysterious opacity of these film-worlds reveal poetic qualities of spaces designed to be inhabited by sleepers. Canadian scholar Érik Bordeleau describes the experience entailed by these films as a mysterious opaqueness.³⁰⁷ Uncle Boonmee is, for Bordeleau, a constant revelation of deeper unknowns. Bordeleau's driving question "how to discover the obscure without uncovering it?"³⁰⁸ reveals an understanding of Apichatpong's work as an initiation, as an experience that simultaneously reveals and conceals its own messages. Dreaming is the definitive action for accessing the experience of the "imperceptible meanderings of time's passage, the unstable and indefinite nature of the present."³⁰⁹ Bordeleau makes the interesting point that the jungle and its atmospheric qualities are filmed in such a way as to "pass through us,"³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Érik Bordeleau, "Percolating the Elusive: Into Apichatpong's Dreamscape," in Érik Bordeleau, Toni Pape, Ronald Rose-Antoinette and Adam Szymanski, *Nocturnal Fabulations: Ecology, Vitality and Opacity in the Cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (London: Open Humanities Press, 2017), 80-81.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 84.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

they happen to us as we witness the film, instead of being visual backdrops for the plot. These moments of passing, as if we were dreaming, bring about the poetic revelation and concealment of the film-world's atmospheres. For Bachelard, daydreaming is the ideal state of the imagination; in his *Poetics of Space*, daydream is constantly acknowledged as a way of poetically dwelling in the world and participating in all the spaces allocated by our embodied memories, constituting our embodied, dwelling selves.³¹¹

The act of daydreaming while we participate in Apichatpong's films is a way of multiplying our attention, and a way of being-in-the-world for both us, the film-dwellers, and the characters in film. *Boonmee's* scene in the hazy night on the veranda uses the very same space where we see Boonmee dozing off in a hammock, contemplating the jungle framed by its wooden balustrade. Sleep is an action that permits access to the irrational components of story and space: a way of resisting control established by chronological time, and attuning ourselves to the rhythm of our own bodies and their surrounding environment. In the films sleep becomes an instrument of dwelling, resistance and poetic imagination.

Sleeping thus offers an escape, a taking-control of one's bodily speeds, for our sleeping selves cannot be rushed, cannot be so easily transformed into speeding humans. Sleep and dreaming are, for Apichatpong, an act of accessing the *real* in personal and collective memories:³¹² of mediating

³¹¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 21-23, 28, 119, 130.

³¹² Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," interview by Michael A. Koresky, in *Reverse Shot*, February 28, 2011: <http://www.reverseshot.org/reviews/entry/963/uncle-boonmee-who-can-recall-his-past-lives>.

between our animal selves and the modern human, of crossing a threshold between the affective world, often located in the wilderness—the jungle—and our homes.

Conclusion: Ghost stories and haunted houses, a de-homogenization of time and place

Ghosts are the making-present of a past so emotionally intense that it transcends the limits of its own present temporality and lingers in place. These intense emotions are often produced by violence, like in Nabua's past, or an intense sense of guilt, as in Edgar Allan Poe's *House of Usher*.³¹³ Apichatpong mentioned in an interview with the author of this dissertation that some of his projects crystallize eventually into a feature length film, and then branch out again into other works, following up on certain ideas sketched in the film.³¹⁴ Apichatpong strives towards the creation of an ecosystem of works which orbit around the moving image, and atmospheric sound, as delivery channels.

If we consider the films of Apichatpong as speculative architectural fiction philosophizing about place, the relevance of his critique towards dominant structures of time, place and history becomes more evident. The house of *Boonmee* and the School of *Cemetery of Splendour* are architectural artifacts that house possibilities of healing through sleep and imagination. By making the house and

³¹³ More recently, Mike Flanagan directed the series *The Haunting of Hill House* (USA: Netflix, 2018) Streaming, and Shirley Jackson's 1958 novel of the same name are great contemporary examples; Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013). In both versions, ghosts manifest themselves as a house bent on revenge on several generations of its inhabitants, by transforming one room into an architectural program attuned to each of the inhabitants' worst anxieties and fears.

³¹⁴ Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with the author. Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, November 28, 2019.

its ghostly guests explorers of memories, figures of decolonization and the decentering of histories, as well as temporal revelations of place, these films elucidate the necessity of engaging imagination and daydream to resist didactic narratives with clear-cut interpretations. Apichatpong intentionally obscures his narratives, using distended time, magical creatures, ghosts and non-linear storytelling set in quotidian architecture to let us glimpse the mysterious and fantastic. Thus, the Thai director films offer poetic revelations of the capacity of a place to heal and speak about its past.

The past lives of Boonmee are place-bound temporalities, as Cua-Lim calls them,³¹⁵ coexisting, encased together within the film. His house works as a centripetal force for these temporalities, and his consciousness is the time traveler that weaves them all together. It is not a vertical time travel ascending or descending to the past or future as single points in time, like in Hollywood sci-fi films, but a horizontal temporal journey of these past lives folded into his present self and again forward towards the promise of a future life. The house embodies this lightning rod of temporalities, each one holding a piece of the heterogeneous history of both his family and the landscape where they belong. This amassment of places constitutes the built world inhabited by Boonmee and his family, a heterogeneous space-time composed of many co-existing temporalities. Time in the film-world of *Boonmee* is bound by the cycles of the farm and the sleep cycle of its characters. Equally necessary for Boonmee's well-being, they oscillate in a continuous narrative movement between the exterior and the interior of the farmhouse. Performing as a temporal hinge, the dinner scene is where the ghosts of the landscape meet with Boonmee and the other living members of the family. The scene is, in my view, the centerpiece of the entire film. It happens in the liminal space between the jungle, the

³¹⁵ Cua Lim, *Translating Time. Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*, 75.

farmland and the farmhouse. It articulates the *polychronic* and *polyplatial* structure of the land and of the story.

The ghosts that inhabit the jungle and return to the table are also hermeneutic conjurations of the land: a reading of the meaning behind the multiple temporalities co-existing in Nabua. The fantastic, wondrous experience of both the monkey-ghost and the ghostly wife are an act of translation and interpretation of these temporal consciousnesses that have shaped the place in which the characters dwell.³¹⁶ They are a demonstration that space has memory. Interestingly, these ghosts choose to reveal themselves in the veranda, the place where the family dines regularly. Apichatpong, as the architect of this fantastic architecture of the ordinary, summons the territory's past through familial history on the ritualized veranda, using a meal as the shared experience connecting every member of this polychronic family. Their presence is a rejection of homogeneous space and time, for here polychronic realities literally sit around the table. This rejection unveils that our modes of dwelling are never linear, much less-so entirely devoted to functional concerns. The houses that we inhabit are entangled in histories, memories and dreams of the future. They participate as much in our making as we participate in making them. The other ghosts that show around the table belong to Boonmee's past, but also to that of the house, the farm, the village and the jungle. This palimpsest of temporalities assembled around the surface of the table organizes bodies and spatio-temporal meanings around it.

³¹⁶ For more about the wondrous in slow cinema, see Koepnick, *The Long Take : Art Cinema and the Wondrous*, 22-25, 52, 239, 247.

The architectural artifact of the veranda plays an essential role in the film's world-building and atmosphere-conjuring. It mirrors the frame of our own screen—the cinematic screen—and mediates between our world, the innermost domestic space of the house and the outer world of the jungle. This multiple framing places the building as a central, articulating, and regulating device of domesticity, wonder and territory. And while the table works to focus and articulate the bodies dwelling together, the veranda works as a hinge between the publicness of the table and the daydreaming space of Boonmee's bed. There is a mirroring between the balustrade looking towards the invisible, dark and ghostly jungle—present in the loud chirps of cicadas and crickets, and wind rustling the thick vegetation—and the ghost-like figure of Boonmee behind the pink mosquito net, sitting in his bed. While one membrane hinges the openness of the land and its pervasive, trauma-ridden history, the other filters the outer world and pushes the focus of our attentive gaze towards the innermost, emotional and intimate memories of Boonmee, who can recall his past lives in his dreams and reveries.

These places are significant beyond the symbolic; they are existentially relevant to psychosomatic health;³¹⁷ material and mythical places pregnant with multiple meanings. They are places of the kind Malpas addresses as fundamental to our existential well-being.³¹⁸ The ghostly images appearing in Nabua or Khon Kaen point to the acknowledgement of complex spatio-temporalities, unpacking them in film-worlds constructed through a combination of opaque storytelling and cinematic technique that makes the atmosphere of these places effervesce before us.

³¹⁷ See Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning After the Crisis of Modern Science*, 5-9, 16, 232.

³¹⁸ Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 13-16.

Apichatpong's reliance on mood, feeling, and emotion, while avoiding any restrictive intellectualization of the experiences that his film might offer, shows an important side of the filmmaker's creative process. While his work is highly political and bears the weight of strong conceptual frameworks, he deploys these through the films' affective qualities. He crafts atmospheres and moods that soak and engulf text and subtext, demanding our feelings access meaning. These affordances are clearly present in his ghosts, creatures that are both visually present and affectively lingering around us, invisible in every frame. These ghosts are the embodied manifestations of the architectural atmosphere, a condensation in visual form. Apichatpong points out that the ghosts are metaphors that one should approach carefully—they too can be rendered as instruments of ideological control—yet they serve as elements that matter and embody these qualitative aspects of place.³¹⁹ Ghosts simultaneously represent and make memories: the inherited trauma of an entire community manifested in the greenery of the landscape by night and the veiled darkness of their homes during the day. They inhabit the liminal: between day and night, between in and out, and between wakefulness and sleep. Thus, they demonstrate that dwelling and dreaming, moving and inhabitation, are not at odds but ways of revealing meaning.

The house of uncle Boonmee is a house of reverie. A heterotopic house composed of multiple, meaningful stories and histories overlapping and converging in Boonmee's bed. His house is his first universe and reveals the possibility of each house as a place where his multiple lives can bubble up and effervesce into the present. His house in the present is lived as a house for healing, where his

³¹⁹ Apichatpong Weerasethakul, "Spotlight: Ghost in the Machine: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Letter to Cinema," interview by Mark Peranson, *Cinema Scope*, accessed May 22, 2020: <https://cinema-scope.com/spotlight/spotlight-ghost-in-the-machine-apichatpong-weerasethakuls-letter-to-cinema/>.

kidney disease requires cyclical attention, as do the cyclical lives that accompany him every day. His bedroom is materially multi-layered, with a pink mosquito net turning him into the image of another ghost in his own home. The image of his last embrace with the ghost of his wife presents a permeable membrane between matter and memory. It is in our houses—and here particularly, in our beds—that these reveries give us access to the multiplicity of ghosts, our past traumas and longstanding mnemonic joys. Boonmee regrets his participation in the killing of the ancestors of Nabua, and thus projects also a lingering fear for his future lives; but he tries to cleanse his karma with generous work on his farm. Architecture becomes the material milieu for these polychronic, ghostly reveries.

Chapter 3. Dallas: Time and a ghost

*“Wandering through the house, opening the windows, whispering not to wake us, the ghostly couple seek their joy.”*³²⁰

-Virginia Woolf

*“A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from inside; it is as it were new inside.”*³²¹

-Gaston Bachelard

*“Through them, my daydreams inhabited the essential house.”*³²²

-Gaston Bachelard

³²⁰ Virginia Woolf, “A Haunted House,” in *A Haunted House, and Other Short Stories*. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 4.

³²¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 88.

³²² Ibid., 70.

Prelude

Our experience of the world is undeniably temporal. David Lowery's *A Ghost Story* (2016) presents an incarnation of what Bachelard defined as a Dream-Memory house,³²³ where the temporal qualities of place are deeply intertwined with its narrative. In the film, a suburban house becomes an architectural milieu to reflect on grief, the reconstitution of oneself in relation to others, and a source of meditation around the spatiality of time. With a threefold structure, this film delves into three separate modes of time passing inside a home. Each of these is a different modality of dwelling and an exploration of how homeliness is made within the walls of a house. The film engages with questions about the perception of time and our relationship with intimate, domestic places. In the scene examined in the epistemic exercise of this chapter—one of the most powerful and meaningful scenes in the film—the potential of filmmaking to manipulate time, perception, movement, and plot to reflect upon the way we emotionally inhabit space. Furthermore, the film unpacks ideas about the polychronic essence of place, where the linear time of a narrated story coexists with the mythical circular time of the histories of said place.

A Ghost Story is also a meditation on what binds us to our houses. A woman mourns the loss of her husband, the narrator of the story; after his death he becomes a ghost, an ontological transformation that shifts his perceptual and affective relationship to the time and place he inhabits, illustrating the close, mutually-constituting, relationship between self and place. While his widow dwells in her grief, entrenched at home in a deep, slow and thick present, his understanding of time as a ghost

³²³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 37.

shifts to a different form of present. His perception of what the present entails expands to include more immediate past recollections and future promises; these are perceived as part of the ongoing present. These temporal perceptions merge into a pulsating temporal rhythm in which the speed at which he perceives the passage of time dilates and accelerates unevenly. This shift in perception poses questions about the role of memories and dreams, and how these in turn are an essential part of the way we shape our homes and our homes shape us.

In this chapter, I explore two complementary issues. First, a close analysis of the dream-memory house and its atmosphere, as an affirmation of the temporal nature of dwelling, and the role of atmosphere and materiality in the transformation of a house into a home; and secondly, the film's narrative as philosophy of our time-consciousness. I propose that we experience Lowery's film as a Dream-Memory house, with reference to Bachelard's theories, and that this illustrates the capacity of the house to be central to human emotional well-being. In the first chapter, we looked closely at a house that upends its own limits to question authentic, meaningful everyday living; while in the second chapter, Apichatpong's work unveiled the house as lightning rod for multigenerational memories. In this chapter, the house becomes an architectural artifact that unveils the healing qualities of the house, its homeliness and the existential relevance of intimacy it provides.

Epistemic exploration 3: A Ghost Story's kitchen

In my third epistemic exploration, I study the kitchen space of the house in *A Ghost Story*. What was once a place of familial gathering becomes a space for grief; its signification is reconfigured. My experience—through the film—of this space is unpacked in this description, where I edit and re-watch the “pie scene” in the film.

The pie scene unfolds through nine minutes, uninterrupted and uncut. Lowery takes this time to have the actress inhabit not only her character's emotions, but the kitchen as her grieving place. The film presents here a delay, an expansion of time, intensely focusing our attention on a single action unfolding in front of us without interruption: a manifold temporal event that invites us to dwell with her in her grief.

Figure 17. The Pie Eating Scene. David Lowery, *A Ghost Story* (USA: A24, 2017).

The film cuts to the interior of a house. I watch as a woman opens the door. A ghost sees her enter the house and lock the door behind her. She walks by, I can tell that the ghost is invisible to her. The interior is lit by sunlight, coming in through a large window in the living room. As the action unfolds, I get a glimpse of the interior of the house, decorated with framed paintings, a worn piano, a coffee table, a sofa; underneath the windowsill, there is a wooden cabinet with a turntable and a considerable amount of records, it feels lived-in. There is an oppressive air in the way that the scene is framed, cutting the amount of negative space in the image with fragments of the house in the foreground. As the woman passes by, the camera's viewpoint shifts. I am now looking through the house from a place within one of the walls of the kitchen. Within the frame, the woman finds a pie in the table of the kitchen, a present, left by someone, perhaps to make her grief more tolerable. She looks at the pie, and hesitates whether to throw it away, but decides to eat it. She begins to sob. After a moment of contemplation, I see her as she takes the pie in her hands, and the camera follows her as she sits down on the floor and starts eating through it. The sunlight shines brightly on her legs, contrasting with the dark, hardwood floor where she sits. Her body looks contracted, tense, with a coiled expression that implies anger. As she starts eating through the pie, her expression shifts, I can see her chest start to convulse, I hear her sobbing. The kitchen has wooden cabinets, dark and worn by use. Discreet spasms start to rattle the coiled muscles of her neck and shoulders, a tear can be seen shining, dangling from the tip of her nose. A release is imminent. As she eats, repressed tears drip across her face. The sunlight has slowly crawled up; it shines on her face now. Time passes. The initial whimpers transform into audible sobs, her skin reddens, and her neck seems to loosen. She keeps eating. There is no stopping the tears now, they have taken over. In the background, the ghost stands in the distance, watching silently as she eats more pie. She gets close to finishing the pie and as she does so, her body begins to contract again. It is perhaps the last stage of her crying, maybe it's nausea, or anger, or too much pie.

Most likely, all of it at the same time. As her body twitches from the stomach upwards, she stands up and runs towards the toilet, the room in the background at the end of the shot, to empty her stomach.

Figure 18. Collage. A Ghost Story: The pie and the ghost. Collage by the author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

The Film-World: Dallas & the suburban house

Synopsis

A Ghost Story's narrative structure is composed of a series of connected reveries that happen in different modes of temporal passing. It is divided between the story of M (Rooney Mara), the widow, and C (Casey Affleck), the husband who becomes a ghost. The couple are a few years into living in their suburban-ranch Texas house. The picture begins with an image of the night sky and pans down to their house. We find them in a very mundane moment, arguing about moving out of the house. M does not want to move and pretends not to follow the conversation. The story is presented in small vignettes of everyday life: they share moments in a sofa, converse in the kitchen, and in one long take, they are lying in bed, making out until they fall asleep.

One morning, C gets into an accident outside of his house and dies in the crash. At the morgue, M identifies the body. The camera lingers with the body once everyone else has left the room. C's body lies covered by a sheet until he wakes up, a ghost covered by a sheet. The sheet has become his body, the material that allows the spectator to see the ghost. It resembles an archetypical ghost from engravings and Halloween imagery: a sheet with two holes as eyes. He walks through the hospital, until he gets to a corridor lit with fluorescent light, at the end of the corridor, there is a wall where a door-shaped portal shining bright in white light opens, but he only stares at it until it closes. He chooses, perhaps, to stay in this world. He begins his walk home, and we follow him as he traverses a bright green open field, dragging his sheet that weathers and tears as he walks, driven by a force that compels him to get back home. Once in his house, his perception of the passage of time is distorted.

He waits. M comes back from his funeral. The landlady arrives before her and leaves a pie. M mourns, eating the whole pie in a single sitting while he watches from the living room. C can only be witness, as the house is, of her mourning unfolding, burning bright and then diminishing. One day, M brings a man home who kisses her; this elicits a violent reaction from the ghost, who throws down all the books from the shelves. A book of short stories by British writer Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) – *A Haunted House* – is visible among them.

Time passes, and while M grieves, the ghost looks out the window. He spots another ghost in the neighboring house. They hold a conversation that we get to eavesdrop through subtitles. The other ghost is waiting for someone, not really knowing who or when this person will appear.

C is the narrator of the story, and the editing of the film mirrors his perception of time and sequence of events. The film plays around with this link between his own understanding of time and the editing of different temporal moments. The temporal jumps that might have been confusing at the beginning of the film, are now a narrative device that depicts the compression and expansion of time for the ghost, where past, present and future are blurred into an ongoing, non-linear series of events. To the dismay of C's ghost, M moves out of the house and a Latino family moves in. He barely notices the passage of time; this move is very sudden for him. The change is so swift that the change and presence of new people in his home enrages him, these are intruders in *his* home. Consequently, the atmosphere of the house is now different. Someone else's lives are now attached to the walls. Their things, furniture, voices, and bodily presence have suddenly—for him—changed his house into something else. They celebrate Christmas, birthdays, and dinners; they dwell in the house as he witnesses from his invisibility. His anger drives him to break kitchenware and utensils. He undoes

the lived-in-ness of their house, perhaps in an attempt to make it once again his own. The Latino family is spooked and moves out.

As time passes, a couple moves into the same house. In this scene, the script indulges us with some of the philosophical questions that underpin this film. The new couple throws a party at the house, and the scene plays around a man explaining the passage of time in the universe and the fragility of existence. He suggests that time is both linear and circular, that memory resonates in space and through stories, through family and those close to us. He claims that in the grand scale of the universe, every human life has first and foremost the intimate, domestic scale as the originary and most immediate meaningful element of their lives.

Following the monologue, the house falls into disrepair as its last inhabitants move out. The ghost has one final conversation with the neighboring ghost before both houses become derelict and are demolished. He cannot do anything but witness the demolition of the houses. Once their house is gone, his neighbor disappears under their worn blanket. In what seems to us like a split second, the ghost is standing in the place where the house was, but it is now an excavation site for a high-rise building. He wanders through the corridors of a newly-built office building. He tries to leave the building by jumping from its roof, only to find himself on the ground again in what seems the past of the same place. We realize that he has looped back around in time and has reappeared in the past of his own house. A family of settlers prepares a meal next to their carriage. The father surveys the land and traces the limits of the property. The family is slaughtered and their bodies rot in the ground.

The ghost is now back home, watching the living version of himself and his wife move into the house. He witnesses again as he, they, inhabit the house, and how as a result the house transforms. The atmosphere he is most familiar with is once again part of the house. C dies again, and two ghosts occupy the space. In the final shots, he spends time carving away the piece of paper his wife tucked in between the boards of a wall before leaving, maybe a message for him. He manages to take out the piece and, as he reads the hidden message, he dissolves into thin air and the now ragged sheet falls to the floor, empty.

The house

The built environment of *A Ghost Story's* film-world is made up mostly of interiors: the indoor setting where the couple has created a home over the years. Throughout the course of the film, different people move in and transform the house, allowing us to witness different variations of a home inside the same house, while the ghost experiences these changes. These variations show different modes of dwelling in which the building becomes, like the ghost's sheet, an enveloping garment that transforms and adapts affectively as its inhabitants move in and out. The film-world is also that of the ghost, who is constantly attuning to the atmospheric iterations of his suburban house, the sole loci of the film. It makes for a film-world of families and intimacy, of small groups of friends. The ghost of C moves about the world, interacting with it and others in his sheet — a shelter — which doubles as a material edifice for his consciousness, a body-house made of cloth.

Figure 19. The House. Front yard. Evening. David Lowery, *A Ghost Story* (USA: A24, 2017).

The house of *A Ghost Story* is a small, non-descript suburban house. Its lived-in interiors call for reflection on the nature of our own experiences of home. It is an unremarkably ordinary house, typical of those found in every fringe suburb in North American cities: a single-story house with a garage, two bedrooms, and one bathroom. As we approach the house, a large unkempt lawn makes for a buffer zone between the street and the building. The garage sits on the right side of the screen, with a blue car parked under the canopy protecting the garage door. To the left of the garage there is a small, elongated window that looks into the kitchen, followed by a larger square window which looks into the living room. Next, the porch and doorway, with a wooden balustrade and the entry door, frame the point of contact between inside and outside. A window flanks the doorway, perhaps looking into one of the two bedrooms. The exterior of the house is painted white, has a faded look to

it, where in many parts of the painted horizontal planks of the façade the paint is peeling off in grey crusts that gather dust in between the cracks.

Figure 20. Ghost in living room. David Lowery, *A Ghost Story*, (USA: A24, 2017).

Inside the house, the plan is organized around the living room. The room's walls are covered in wood planks painted in faded mint, with white moldings at the top and bottom of every wall. The floor is built with wooden planks and features a big rug, with intricate vegetable motifs; its colors are faded from exposure to the sun. There is a sofa covered with a blanket, a few cushions and a mid-century modern coffee table covered with stacks of books. Near the sofa, there is a piano, the one piece of furniture that will survive through generations of people living in this house. The large window overlooks the front yard; a green hue bouncing off the grass gives the space a muted aura of tranquility. A thin, veil-like curtain made with neutral-colored cloth filters some of the light, balancing the greenish hue to give a warm tone to the light.

Figure 21. The Kitchen. David Lowery, *A Ghost Story*, (USA: A24, 2017).

We turn right and the kitchen lies beyond a threshold, the same threshold where M will embed the piece of paper before moving out. The kitchen has wooden cabinetry, a rectangular window on top of the sink, and a central island made of wood. It is furnished with kitchen appliances, a couple of small plants in pots, and a fruit basket. The floor is red linoleum, and the ceiling is built of wooden planks, oiled and reddish in tone. The whole room has a warm tone to it and a nostalgic feeling in its dimly-lit atmosphere, as light pours through the small window and bounces off the kitchen counter and the linoleum floor.

The interior of the Dream-memory house: Hermeneutics of the Film-World

*“...if only he could engage the poets to construct for us, with their dreams, “oneiric houses” with cellar and attic. They would help us to shelter our memories, to shelter them in the unconscious of the house, in accord with the symbols of intimacy to which real life has not always the possibility of giving root.”*³²⁴

-Gaston Bachelard

We can recognize three phenomenal horizons that compose the film-world of *A Ghost Story*: *grief*, the *interior space* of the house, and *time*.

Grief.

Grief is the first horizon of this film-world. The feeling of grief and the act of mourning are central to the narrative and the main mode of inhabitation of the two main characters in the film: C and M. Death is the defining force around which both of them establish a relationship with their environment, and to each other. It is the motivating force and lingering presence in every atmosphere that emerges inside the house. M’s story is centered around mourning the loss of her husband. In analogy with the phenomena of bodily dismemberment examined thoroughly by

³²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, “The oneiric house” (1948), in *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture*, edited by Barbara Miller Lane (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 76.

Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*,³²⁵ when one of the coauthors of a home dies, there is a trauma of severance affecting the rhythm established by the bodies that co-created a home there.

Merleau-Ponty describes the phantom limb thus:

“what is in us which refuses mutilation and disablement is an *I* committed to a certain physical and inter-human world, who continues to tend toward his world despite handicaps and amputations and who, to this extent, does not recognize them *de jure*.”³²⁶

This trauma makes the absent spouse a phantom, who remains as a felt extension of embodied habit.

The scene described at the beginning of this chapter, when M eats a pie at a single sitting, exemplifies this perfectly. After a death, the film-world is inhabited through long processes of affective reconfiguration. M’s act of inhabitation of the kitchen in a state of grieving shows the clear bridge between the emotional pain of her grief and the inseparable embodied condition that comes with it. While she eats the pie, it appears as if it is hard for her to make sense of the house and the furniture, as though it is foreign to her, as if temporarily this is no longer her home but an unknown building. If the home is our first universe, one that is built from the repetition of our daily habits over and over through time, then this embodiment of grief extends to how the house is felt and affected by loss. The emotional attunement to the homeliness of the house is distorted and out of harmony. The house feels, like our own body, incomplete and somehow lost. What is supposed to provide the first horizon of orientation feels simultaneously familiar and alien. Grief becomes a series of slight physical adjustments that demand a reconfiguration of the domestic space. M sits on the

³²⁵ Merleau-Ponty examined the phenomena of the phantom limb, in which a person who has lost a limb often feels the ghostly presence of said limb as if it still were attached to the body. For more on this see Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 78–89, 101.

³²⁶ Ibid., 93.

floor to finish the pie; no other place in the house offers comfort, as if she has arrived at an unfamiliar place. The function of the floor is re-signified, the sharp-edged angle between the kitchen counter and floor becomes a nest in which M's grief can slowly burn down. The rest of the house appears from our vantage point, with C's ghost standing still there. From M's perspective the rest of the house is haunted by his absence.

Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodiment and habit, which describe the chiasmic bind between our consciousness, body and the world, allow us to think of grief as an embodied response to loss: "The phantom arm is not a representation of the arm, but rather an ambivalent presence of the arm."³²⁷ The phenomenon is a pre-reflective expression of our being in the world, of us being anchored in our belonging to a milieu. The ghost is, then, an expression of our co-making of the world and the ambivalent presence of a dweller at home. Literature scholar James Krasner explains that:

"because the neurological phenomenon known as 'body schema' suggests that we experience our loved ones' bodies as contiguous with our own, grief can be understood as bodily dismemberment, and the pain of grief as phantom pain."³²⁸

This happens if we have built our environment with someone else, spending time together, accumulating actions and material changes within that space.

If we are of the world and extend outward towards it, we surely extend also towards others. What happens then when we build a world with someone else in intimacy? Sharing a home with a loved

³²⁷ Ibid., 83.

³²⁸ James Krasner, "Doubtful Arms and Phantom Limbs: Literary Portrayals of Embodied Grief," *PMLA* 119, 2 (March, 2004): 221.

one, dwelling, becomes a shared experience of home-building, we become physically and emotionally co-extensive to that world. Naturally, grieving occurs in a “rich affective environment of lived emotion,”³²⁹ so losing a loved one means that this essential affective component of our everyday is severed from our lived-in world. When one of the co-authors of that world is gone, the one that *stays* might sense that they have been violently severed from something that has defined their affective, embodied experience of that home, that has determined the motion through our domestic geography. As if a limb were lost, the other becomes a ghostly, unhomely felt presence, producing an unhomely space, one that resembles *home* but is lacking its alchemical qualities of place. The well-rehearsed dance of dwelling in ensemble, defining space through the motion of the bodies that shared it, is interrupted:

“losing a loved one means losing not just a body but also one's bodily engagements with it. It means losing a set of postural habits formed in the rooms, halls, beds, sofas, and cars those bodies shared.”³³⁰

To mourn at home is to try and rebuild its familiarity from within. It requires a ritual reconstruction in time in space to reinstate our capacity to dwell, to re-ignite its homeliness. The ghost is, here, not a representation of grief, but an ambivalent presence of the co-maker of the home. He is an embodied phenomenon of habits anchored to the house that returns, yes, to haunt, but also to participate in the ritual process of re-attunement of new atmospheres at home.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., 222.

The house / Interior

The house in *A Ghost Story* is a filmic world composed mostly of domestic interiors—the second horizon—that serves as an organizing space for the multiple temporalities, imaginaries, and stories that converge in this film. The house’s architectural interior is the milieu that localizes the place experience of the characters. While in the previous chapters the interior of the house was always framed as a space of movement between inside an outside, entangled with its surroundings and its own historicity, the house in *A Ghost Story* is focused on the interior as a centripetal force for quotidian life and the construction of intimacy. As such, the inner space is rendered as the result of co-making between dwellers and house, constructed by the dreams, imagination, and memories of the couple who project themselves into the body of the building.

This intimate feeling dictates the organizational structure of the interior spaces and a good degree of the aesthetics behind the film. Intimacy implies a space of shared commonalities. It creates a space of silent communication that transgresses individual silence towards shared quietude. Intimacy implies the presence of pauses, of a transformation of life rhythms from time to time. Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes the emergence of intimacy at home when life pauses in search for healing, either physical or spiritual under the care of another member of the household.³³¹ Intimacy is a condition that arises from transformations in temporality and the shortening of physical distances.

“Intimacy is a condition of concentrated experience, an experience that cannot be replicated without reducing its intimate character to

³³¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2001), 6, 138.

triviality or formality. To a certain extent, it is an experience of altered temporality, the temporality of common time shared by those who are involved in a ‘secret event.’”³³²

The scene in bed, where C and M fall asleep at the beginning of the film, portrays these elongated instants in everyday life where intimacy is in its process of becoming. Their slight touch and exchange of quiet words on the threshold of sleep is filmed in a narrow frame, an overhead medium shot that emphasizes the emotional and physical proximity of the characters. Lowery allowed the scene to run longer than he expected, letting the actors inhabit their characters for an extended period of time, thus giving greater nuance and range to the embodiment of the mood and atmosphere of that moment and place. This helps to define the sense of scale and spatiality of the film, conveying how all the relationships between the characters’ bodies and with their environment are spatially composed. It also defines the atmospheric character of the house, which in turn influences how the production designers work on crafting mood through décor.

To demonstrate how the mood of the house is affected by the history of intimate interactions between C and M, the house is presented through specific uses of narrow spaces, short furniture and close-up shots consistent with the shortening of body separation. Proximity, the shortening of depth and distance, is essential for intimacy to arise as an affective condition.³³³ The spaces inside the house are originally constructed as spaces for shared proximity. This is echoed in the architectural disposition of the furniture and scale of spaces: the house’s furniture in the bedroom and living

³³² Kristupas Sabolius, “Rhythm and Reverie: On the Temporality of Imagination in Bachelard,” in *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard*, edited by Eileen Rizo-Patron, Edward S. Casey and Jason M. Wirth (Albany: Suny Press, 2017), 72.

³³³ Sara Ahmed, “Orientations Matter,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, edited by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 234.

room, designed for two people to sit and lay down; both M and C are shown sharing the space of the sofa and bed as they go about their day. The theme of intimate continuity between body and building is present too in the cinematography; there is a parallelism between the warm tones of the house's inner walls and the warm tones of the protagonists' skins. The light and material tones inside the house are in the spectrum of reds, oranges and wooden materials. It is an important shelter and workspace for C; we can tell that he is enamored with the house and refuses to even consider moving out, as M suggests at one point. His piano rests in a corner as an anchor for the film's storytelling; he is a musician and his craft shapes his inhabitation of the house. As a ghost, his music and his piano will linger on for longer than anything else in the house; once the house is demolished, the two pervasive figures indoors remain the ghost and the piano, still in the corner of the room. The instrument is an extension of his persona, a material embodiment of his music and thus, of his mode of dwelling. The ghost *lives* in close proximity with walls and domestic objects; we can see in many scenes how his sheet is being dragged around the wooden floor, the *skin* of the ghost constantly caressed by the surfaces of the house. He sees his home as his world, his first cosmos. When the ghost's house is occupied by new tenants, the Latino family for example, his lack of proximity and familiarity with these people elicits in him a sense of displacement.

Cinematography plays an important role in the creation of atmosphere within the film. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the placement of the body of the camera and the framing of space within the film-world goes a long way to eliciting specific moods within the film. Consider the interior scene in the hospital in which C comes back as a ghost—the place of his re-birth—in a space filled with bright light in cold color temperatures that bring out a soft brightness in colors. The use of this color palette and light, with their pastel-like quality, gives an aura of unsettling sadness to the

room where his body is kept. To echoing this nested connection between characters and interior, the cinematography and production design relies on high contrast between dark and light; an atmosphere of quiet and loneliness pervades every space. American cinematographer Andrew Droz Palermo has identified Apichatpong Weerasethakul's use of long takes and photographer Gregory Crewdson's moody architectural images as influences in crafting these atmospheres within the film, seeking to attune the house to the characters' emotional state:

“I looked a lot at the way he lights day interiors, because he manages to keep his corners really deep. I wanted the walls to stay deep, I wanted to feel the shafts of light, and atmosphere was really important for helping achieve that falloff.”³³⁴

While the film-world of *A Ghost Story* rarely features its surrounding territory, the lawn functions as an allegory for suburban isolation. The film's focus on enclosed spaces underscores intimacy and provides ample material for understanding the proximity of its dwellers with each other and their house, but gives little information in terms of their relationship with the environment beyond its walls. The house is a world in itself, a contained universe. Nevertheless, the exteriors are utilized to reinforce the centripetal force of the house for the characters in relation to the surrounding Texan suburbia. The intermediate space between the public and the private, the front lawn, is featured in the first moments of the film, and after C's accident. This type of lawn is characteristic of suburban north American houses; its widespread implementation since the 1950s was characterized as “a strip of grass that [...] is the welcome mat to any visitor and goes far toward giving him his first

³³⁴ Andrew Droz Palermo, “A Ghost Story: Haunted House - The American Society of Cinematographers,” interview by Jon Witmer, *American Cinematographer*, August 8, 2017: <https://ascmag.com/articles/a-ghost-story-haunted-house>.

impression of the place.”³³⁵ Its public presence can be understood a way of revealing certain intimate aspects and character traits of the house dwellers “exposing the lax gardener to his neighbors by turning brown, sprouting weeds, etc.”³³⁶ The front yard is thus a reflection on the invasive and silent voyeuristic nature of suburbia. Here, the yard buffers and keeps eavesdroppers at a distance; its unkemptness contrasts with the warm interior of the house. Yet, when the suburban context is portrayed, its vast emptiness is its most characteristic feature. When C comes back as a ghost in his walk from the hospital, all we can infer from his environment is fields of grass and houses distant from each other. The house and its front yard imply the distancing of its characters from their environment, a suburban milieu that is as indifferent to them as they are to their own neighbors. The atmosphere on the exterior is cold and ominous; it is shown chiefly during the morning of the accident or the liminal hours of the day, when the yards surrounding the house are shrouded in a thin mist and cold light.

In contrast, the great vastness of the Texan night sky is the one pervasive exterior element that permeates the rest of the film’s atmosphere. It is featured as an atmospheric, quasi-hungry element that looms over the protagonists. It is the dominating, inhuman atmospheric element that shelters the entirety of the story. The film begins with a view upwards to the starry sky, implying a stark contrast between the comforting intimacy of the protagonists and the overwhelming emptiness that predates and follows one’s existence, and suggesting the interstitial, magical existence of the ghost as

³³⁵ Frederick Frye Rockwell and Ester C. Grayson, *The Complete Book of Lawns: How to Determine What Kind of Lawn You Should Have, and Sure-Fire Methods for Constructing and Maintaining It, Lawn Grasses (and Grass Substitutes) for All Sections of the United States, and Their Particular Requirements* (Garden City, NY: American Garden Guild, 1956) 28; cited in: Georges Teyssot, *The American Lawn* (New York; Montréal: Princeton Architectural Press; Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1999), 22.

³³⁶ Ibid.

the dweller of both. An ominous storm precedes the killing of the pilgrim family during the historical sequence, and the vast unknown of the universe is paralleled visually with the night lights of the dense urban landscape of the future. As in the landscapes of British painter J. M. William Turner (1775-1851) or the optical plays of Servandoni, the sky provides atmospheric density to these scenes. In a scene that will climax in several deaths, the sky wraps the scene with grey storm-clouds, giving an oppressive weight to the air, an atmospheric sense of doom. In another scene the vast, dense lights of the stars in the nightly sky represent the cosmos as origin, end and envelope of the body. It implies that the cosmos is as much of a house, as the house is a universe for ourselves.

Throughout Lowery's career, a focus on intimate relationships between his protagonists and their environment has been a common trait. In an interview, he mentions that *Ghost Story* was about examining his memories and relationship with his childhood home, and how time is embedded in these relationships; a feeling that was inspired by encountering texts by Woolf:

“Orlando is one of my favourite novels...I love her letters too. She's my guiding light. The way she uses time fascinates me. Especially in *To the Lighthouse* and *Orlando*. They play with time in this dynamic and fun way. I love the idea of a character existing outside of time in the way that Orlando does.”³³⁷

Lowery refers in particular to Woolf's short story *A Haunted House* as a direct source for some of the themes in the film. Woolf's brief story is deceptive in its simplicity; its structure is unlike any other haunted house story from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It describes the atmosphere of the house from the perspective of two couples: one, the present inhabitants of the

³³⁷ David Lowery, “So What is The Meaning of Lowery's existential Fable ‘A Ghost Story’?” Interview by Tara Brady, *The Irish Times*, August 11, 2017. My emphasis.

house; and the other, the couple haunting the house. The story conveys, more than a sense of dread and horror, an atmosphere of longing, a revelation that the prevailing atmosphere of the house is transformed by the presence of history, and that history is always present in the experience of living in the house.

The twofold temporal dimension of this house is shaped by more than one family. In both Woolf's story and the film, we are placed in a state of daydream, a liminal state of consciousness shared by all the dwellers of the house. Both book and film document in minute detail the transformation, within the same building, from one type of atmosphere to another. Two polychronic realities thus converge in one place. The house sits as not just a site but also an articulating, revealing instrument of the coexistence of these two realities.

Similarly, in the film's built environment, there is an oneiric interpretation of the intimate memories of two worlds at play. Lowery describes how the film stemmed from his own reveries of the house of his childhood; in particular his experience, when he and his family moved out of the house, of feeling he had somehow betrayed the house by leaving. Lowery's family had made a home there; the director had felt bound to the house. In the same vein, the house within the film is a shared project for the couple who are turning their house into a home. Lowery's house in this film can be read as a Bachelardian house of dream-memory:

“there exists for each one of us an oneiric house, a house of dream-memory, that is lost in the shadow of a beyond of the real past. I called this oneiric house the crypt of the house that we were born in.”³³⁸

³³⁸ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 60.

In Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, the memory-house is the nest of our first universe, mutually constituted by dweller and house, by bird and nest. The house in *A Ghost Story* is borne of a memory-house manifestation of Lowery's childhood. The film also overtly references and builds on the haunted houses of literary tradition, that began during Gothic Romanticism.

Lowery's ghost has a specific material presence in the film; one could say that the ghost was imagined as an embodied being, contrary to popular representations of ghosts. As discussed in the previous chapter, in modern/Cartesian tradition the ghost equates to the disembodiment of the soul after death, but the ghost in this story has a material presence that ages, weathers, and moves around with tangible weight. Jade Healy, the production designer, ensured that there was a certain dragging sadness to the way the ghost moves about the screen.³³⁹ According to Lowery, the design of the costume was more complicated than it seems to be, because it had to reflect the emotive physical movement of the actor beneath it, which a normal sheet would not do.³⁴⁰ Thus, the team designed a helmet under the sheet that gave the ghost the proper shape but allowed the character's gestural language to emerge in contact with the sheet.

The house itself had to become an extension of the time-bound rags that make up the body of the ghost, but also an extension of both M and C. Lowery and his production team found the house in a state "of disrepair." Much like Apichatpong looking for the ideal house-character for *Boonmee*,

³³⁹ Jade Healey, "Haunting House: A Ghost Story's Ruminations on Home," interview by Willa Granger, *Interiors*, August 17, 2017: <https://www.intjournal.com/thinkpieces/a-ghost-story>.

³⁴⁰ David Lowery, "Haunting House: A Ghost Story's Ruminations on Home," interview by Willa Granger, *Interiors*, August 17, 2017: <https://www.intjournal.com/thinkpieces/a-ghost-story>.

Lowery searched for a house that resonated with his childhood memories and for him “felt like the house in the story.”³⁴¹ After deciding on the house, which happened to have a twin next to it in the same condition, the production team set to the task of making the house feel more lived in and attuned to the personality of the characters in the script. Carpeting was removed to reveal the original hardwood floors, and the entire kitchen was built out; the ceilings were replaced, and in one instance Tom Walker, the production designer, meticulously re-glued torn-out tiling.³⁴² As the house needed to feel like people had been there for a long period of time, walls were painted and repainted many times over.³⁴³ The director and his team decided that a couple from the team would move into the house before and during filming, so it felt lived-in. According to Healy, “basically the house needed to have character, layers that had been built up throughout time.”³⁴⁴

The material weathering of the house, and the production designer’s interventions within, converge to render visible C’s attachment as a ghost to his house. He stays inside the house for what seems an eternity and the material features of his “body” begin to become parts of the house as well. The weathering of his sheet-body and the cyclical time spent within the walls of the house begin to suggest that C is bound to and materially extended into his house, embodying the very same changes that the house experiences. The house is embedded in our flesh, according to Bachelard; as a center of our first cosmos, the house defines our sense of self and our enworlded consciousness. It makes sense that the body of those dwelling in it suffer from the same physical transformations the house

³⁴¹ David Lowery, “Commentary Track” in *A Ghost Story*, directed by David Lowery (USA: A24, 2017) Blu-ray Disc.

³⁴² Jade Healey, “Haunting House: A Ghost Story’s Ruminations on Home,” August 17, 2017: <https://www.intjournal.com/thinkpieces/a-ghost-story>.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

does. Conversely, the house is presented like a second garment, one that transforms and exhibits the accumulation of layer after layer of the affective states of its inhabitants. The production design carefully crafted a non-descript suburban house as the repository of C's dreams and nostalgia, and M's need for change. Yet, the house has been built as a shared space; in it, the processes of grief of both C and M are reflected in the way they physically transform the house.

The house is the topophilic medium through which C experiences the historicity of his home as something comprised of imaginations of the future and an ever-self-revealing-and-concealing of the past, simultaneously occurring in every "present" experience of the house. For the ghost, this process of constant actualization becomes his default mode of being and perception. Near the end of the film, there is a moment where the ghost coexists with a past version of himself. He sees himself in the past looking back at him in the future. He recalls who he was when he was living and dreamt of a future with his wife, while loving the history they had inside the home they have built. Assembling a collection of intertwined instants, the house shelters different perceptions of time and thus, different forms of inhabitation.

Time

Time is the third articulating horizon of this film-world. The film puts, at the very center of its temporal experience, its interest in the questions that arises from such experience: how time articulates the ghost's relationship with his environment. The film's tagline renders this explicit: "It's

All about Time.”³⁴⁵ The cinematic language of the film attempts to explore the perception of the passage of time as experienced by each character, manifesting that in the body of the film.

Weathering becomes one of the physical manifestations of the passage of time in the material bodies that compose the film-world. The film establishes a material connection between the corporality of the characters and their house; the sheet and the walls both function as surfaces documenting the passage of time. The (haunted) house of Lowery’s film is a form of “chronotope,”³⁴⁶

where “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.”³⁴⁷

The chronotope, for literary theorist Mikhail Bahtkin (1895-1975), is an “organizing centre”³⁴⁸ into which distinct temporal realities and narrative points are tied. Normally used in literary theory, it describes the platial qualities of time, and the temporal qualities of place, bound by a narrative device. It is possible to extrapolate this notion to cinematic storytelling, if we consider that both literature and film are capable of eliciting a sense of place in their own medium.

The house of *A Ghost Story* becomes the chronotope, the milieu in which several temporalities—transhistorical and personal narrations—converge. The house as experienced by M and the ghost demonstrates that filmmaking, like architecture, can make present the experience of time-space and place in the manner understood by phenomenology: a manner better described as a convergence of

³⁴⁵ Percival and Associates. *A Ghost Story*. Digital Print Poster, 2017.

³⁴⁶ Mikhail M. Bahtkin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist. translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 128.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

oneiric, mnemonic, imaginary, and quasi-hallucinatory experiences woven together in a personal narrative, distilled from our own first-person experience.

To make sure that the film-dweller feels these changes, the film deploys less visible elements. These included the use of different frame rates for the ghost from those used to record his physical environment. Frame rate manipulation unobtrusively produces the feeling of strangeness and the distorted fluidity of movement of the ghost onscreen; he is affected differently by time. As the director explains, recording him at 33 frames per second and playing him back at 24 frames per second “makes things slightly distended, and you feel everything a little more profoundly [...] because it’s not slow enough to feel like slow motion, but it makes the moment slightly heightened.”³⁴⁹ When shot at a different frame rate, the ghost’s body moves at a different pace and flow than its human counterparts, making the passage of time something embodied in his tactile and visual presence.

The ghost perceives time as a pulsating phenomenon, compressing and expanding in speed; he is simultaneously remembering his past experiences and dreaming of the future. This way of perceiving history and time is bound to the material body of his house, defined by his emotions, his personal history while making a home out of his house, and the experience of dwelling in it when he was alive. The delivery mechanisms of the film underscore these spatio-temporal underpinnings, seen particularly in the rhythm of the editing and the extension of long takes. The long takes within the

³⁴⁹ David Lowery, “A Ghost Story director David Lowery on how technology fixed his lonely ghost,” interview by Tasha Robinson, *The Verge*, July 14, 2017: <https://www.theverge.com/2017/7/14/15969746/a-ghost-story-director-david-lowery-interview-casey-affleck-rooney-mara>.

story elicit every feeling in the internal world of the characters, and spatialize those feelings as perceivable atmospheres. Like a cross section in Douglas Darden's *Condemned Building*,³⁵⁰ these long takes are a means for a building to evoke philosophical questions while telling its story.

Once the ghost accelerates his passage through different epochs, in a state of heightened existential anxiety, he ends up circling around in time back into the historical past of his house, where settlers are arriving at the site. This passage situates the house in a larger, historical milieu. It is one of the few moments in this film where any of the characters are outdoors. It provides certain environmental contextualizations for the house, the climate of Texas, and the site's complicated past as a territory colonized by settlers against the will of its first nations. It is a passage that speaks about the tradition of the land and unveils that even the most interior-oriented of the domestic environments is tightly woven into a larger context.

C's perception of time shifts depending on where his attentive gaze and his emotions turn. As he observes his widow mourning him, we witness the long nine-minute scene of M eating a pie, uninterrupted. We see the sunlight moving about the space and her body as it would move in our world. We can define this as perception in "real-time." But as the ghost's attention shifts, focusing on his environment, the perceived speed of the passage of time is altered. We get a glimpse into the transformations that affect the place where his home is, along the length of its historical existence.

³⁵⁰ Douglas Darden, *Condemned Building: An Architect's Pre-Text* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1993).

The ghost, as a narrator and observer, explores the complexities of temporal perception in a unique way. He is atmosphere and consciousness at once: a manifestation of the dwelling consciousness, a ghost that appears after death, the ultimate limit. Instead of “returning to nothing,” the ghost returns as “a presence [...] an atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void, or the murmur of silence.”³⁵¹ As he spends eons in the same place, we see through him how new tenants move into the house, and then move out; how the house falls into disrepair and eventually into ruin; how the ruin makes way for new construction, where we find him haunting the corridors that stand where his old house used to be. As time passes through, we see materials shift and decay around him; light changes quality and speed, everything moves at uneven speeds. But strangely, the mood and atmosphere of the place suffer almost no change. It is perhaps because his emotional entanglement with this place is such that there is almost no transformation in the way that he inhabits it.

The overarching structure of the film is to portray the perception of time through a consciousness that, similar to ours, connects the perception (and understanding) of the passage of time to the places it inhabits and to its own emotions. In counterpoint, the film’s editing exploits moments of intimacy to make pauses in the narrative rhythm. In those glimpses into the characters’ memories, the ghost’s attention is focused on specific, small-scale emotional moments. These recollections change the speed of the passage of time: it lags, allowing us a different look into what affects him the most, in a pure, focused attention which slows the flow of time.

³⁵¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Time and the Other: And Other Essays*, translated by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 46-47.

Droz Palermo's cinematography supports the production design in the concoction of these atmospheres and in building the film-world. The 1:33 screen ratio selected by the filmmakers is meant to underscore the intimate and nostalgic spatial atmosphere of the house;³⁵² it frames the characters in a format that keeps them close to the limits of the screen at all times, by proxy creating a close relationship to the walls of the house. The camera, our conduit as film-dwellers, has been designed to bear different corporeal qualities depending on the moment of the film. Droz Palermo mentions that they wanted different feelings depending on who was inhabiting the house at certain moments in the film.³⁵³ While the couple lives in the house—and after C's demise—the camera remains still and observant; the takes become longer. These decisions emphasize the relationship between the house and the couple, as the long takes permit our gaze to linger back and forth between the details of the interior and the bodies of the couple. These takes are meant to bring us closer and be more empathetic to their intimate feelings and their connection with the house. Once M moves out and the Latino family moves in, the camera is released from its fixed positions and floats more freely around the house; the filmmaking style and editing speed is more dynamic. As we move on, the film breaks again the rhythm it has established, alternately slowing down and accelerating. The editing begins to weave together past and present moments, uniting the different cinematographic languages.

The editing language is essential for a film that meditates on the question of temporal perception.

Lowery relied on two distinct approaches to editing, in order to break narrative linearity and bring

³⁵² Andrew Droz Palermo, "'A Ghost Story': The Craft of a Low-Budget Indie Shouldn't Be Forgotten During Awards Season," interview by Chris O'Falt, *Indiewire*, November 21, 2017: <https://www.indiewire.com/2017/11/ghost-story-cinematography-david-lowery-andrew-droz-palermo-low-budget-1201900131/>

³⁵³ Ibid.

together different ideas of experiencing the home, spatial attachment, memory and the passing of time. When the ghost is present during M's mourning period, his perception of time is conveyed by long, unedited takes in which when he seems to be fully present and attuned to M and the house in her affective plight. But this slow presentation of his perception oscillates with another. When C's ghost engages with some of the objects in the house, or his attention shifts from one thing to another, the editing becomes more dynamic, resulting in a more plastic passage of time that moves between past, present and future. The reveries and memories appear in sudden jump-cuts while he lingers in the space of the living room. This enables in us, the film-dwellers, to participate in the experience of the house in not just one moment of its life, but to unpack the polychronic and multisensory composition that makes this house affectively relevant to its inhabitants. As Russian director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) explored in his text on Piranesi's etchings and the architectural nature of montage, the confluence of atmospheres and the kinetic nature of montage enables us to properly access the "lyrical mood" of architectural space.³⁵⁴ As in Piranesi's etchings, qualities of place appear more readily available to us as we empathize with the ghost, and as we "go out of [our]selves"³⁵⁵ to participate in the events that are nested within their architectural milieu.

³⁵⁴ Sergei Eisenstein, "Piranesi, or The Fluidity of Form," in *Oppositions* 11, edited by Peter Eisenmann, Kenneth Frampton, Mario Gandelsonas, Anthony Vidler (New York and Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 87.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion. The house of dream-memory.

As a “chronotope,”³⁵⁶ the haunted house in *A Ghost Story* serves as meeting point for multiple, transhistorical, temporal realities; it is the depository of the author’s own experience of his first universe, while simultaneously creating a fictional world where multiple histories (and stories) meet. It is also the biography of a house and its dweller. It entices the houses and stories of dwelling in our own memories. These complex spatio-temporal configurations make up the structure that shapes the house of Dream-Memory,³⁵⁷ devoted to exploring the poetic potential of architectural interiors and the embodied entanglement of these interiors with our inner selves. Through its multiple temporalities, its portrayal of decay, and by providing a home for the story of a grieving couple, the *Ghost* house enables imagination and memory to coalesce and give birth to dreams of our own past and future houses. Marco Frascari, in his own *Dream House*, envisioned these fertile fields for imagination, where “dreams and holy icons partake of the same ontology [...] dreams are gates that cleave the imaginal and the real.”³⁵⁸ The ghostly inhabitant of the house is our guide through all the possible dreams and lingering memories in this house from a suburb in Dallas—but also within our own.

The house inside the film is the complex phenomenal horizon that serves as a threshold between Lowery’s “old house” and the “dream-house.” It is an architectural artifact, a *daidalon* shaped by the pulsating energies of grief, memory and dreams. This daedalic artifact feeds our curiosity, provoking

³⁵⁶ Bahtkin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, 128.

³⁵⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 37.

³⁵⁸ Frascari, *Marco Frascari’s Dreamhouse: A Theory of Imagination*, 32.

us into thinking about the oneiric potency of the interior, of domestic life and the painful lingering sensation that comes after the act of nesting is interrupted:

“Among the most difficult memories, well beyond any geometry that can be drawn, we must recapture the quality of the light; then come the sweet smells that linger in the empty rooms, setting an aerial seal on each room in the house of memory.”³⁵⁹

When the ghost lingers in the house, spending his existence in a constant state of affordance with his abode, his memories of that space become embodied, fleshed-in to his own body, and his own actions transform the material body of his house.

The house and the film, as pieces of poetic architectural speculation, take place in an iteration of the home often dismissed or frowned upon by architects: the suburban house. This filmic world offers an opening to find meaning in contemporary quotidian life and in the heightened emotions that surround death. Grief thus becomes a mode of dwelling, one that underscores that *to dwell* is to fully inhabit our house with those embodied feelings, to make those emotions into flesh and into felt spaces that echo our psychosomatic health. The ghost in *A Ghost Story* appears as the embodied representation of absence, of the empty space to be reconfigured by our bodies when one who dwelled there has been severed from the shared home—when it has lost one of its family members. We can think of it as a phantom limb, missing in the home built by love. The ghost appears here as the residual dweller of a mutilated space, the point of view that reveals the complexities that compose the entanglement we form with our homes. The life and space we share with our loved ones as we build these homes,

³⁵⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. 81

“the life of consciousness—cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life—is subtended by an ‘intentional arc,’ which projects around about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, rather which results in our being situated in all these respects.”³⁶⁰

These reveries and memories converge in the multi-temporal cross section of a house as artifact for self-making that is *A Ghost Story*.

Bachelard differentiates between houses of memory and of dream: the first one belonging to our childhood, composed by sensation and the lingering of sensations; the latter is lighter, brighter and looking into the future.³⁶¹ It is a promise, a project concocted in reveries. A promise composed by the matter of the memory-house, “a project is short-range oneirism, and while it gives free play to the mind, the soul does not find in it its vital expression [...]”.³⁶² The film’s potential promise is an act of inhabitation in itself, both in and out of the screen space. Its making required the re-purposing and re-use of a house—a ghostly possession—which had barely survived as an empty shell of walls and roof, destined for demolition. The potential lesson for architecture is in the power of the stories to inhabit these abandoned spaces, and that, if architecture is properly attuned to them, a new world might emerge. These haunted worlds that emerge, and the ghostly phenomena that dwells within them, participate in enticing the film-dweller’s empathic attachment to that very same world, and conversely, to turn their attention towards the way they form attachments to their own houses, mythologies and places. Ghosts unveil our own biases and affects towards the places we are entangled

³⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 157.

³⁶¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 27-29, 34-37, 81.

³⁶² Ibid., 81.

with. Lowery mentions that the screenplay required a house that in some way reminded him of the one he had grown up in, as he had imagined when he wrote the screenplay.³⁶³ After his filmmaking team found a derelict house in a Dallas suburb, they prepared it for inhabitation, both by the filmmakers and the characters in the film. Possessed by a dream-house that had existed only in the imagination of the writer/director, the house was infused with new life, repainted, and re-built.

Bachelard's idea of the house as a personal universe becomes evident when looking closely at how C's house enacts the limits of his own existence. Lowery asserts that "Ghosts have an inherent nostalgic quality, and our own sense of nostalgia often has to do with very specific places."³⁶⁴ As C's ghost dwells in this home, he engages in a retelling and re-living of the house's multiple histories, including the one story about its own making as location, address of the characters and haunted architectural artifact.

³⁶³ David Lowery, "A Ghost Story and the Inevitable Passing of Time," in *A Ghost Story* (USA: A24, 2016), Blu-Ray Disc.

³⁶⁴ Lowery, "Haunting House: A Ghost Story's Ruminations on Home."

Part III

Conclusions.

Spending time within the film-worlds of *The Exterminating Angel*, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, *Cemetery of Splendour*, *A letter to Uncle Boonmee* and *A Ghost Story* has offered insight into particular experiences of domestic living in Mexico City, Khon Kaen, Nabua and Dallas. My wager in this dissertation has been that spending time in these worlds would allow to unpack specific architectural and phenomenal insights into *the house* with an experiential richness that other forms of architectural discourse cannot access in the same way. Throughout the dissertation each of the studied filmmaker's ability to make worlds is shown to be a rich act of hermeneutics of place, in which architecture plays an essential role as it hovers on the periphery of our senses. The profound complexity of the "slow" cinematic language, which as we have witnessed presents places "in real time," demonstrates film's capacity to poetically craft its own language of atmosphere and make present the often-invisible depth of architectural environments. Conversely, the fictional quality of each story demonstrates the rich, mysterious opacity of the "real world" from which it draws its influences, showing the resonance an architectural milieu can have with one's psychosomatic health.

In the dissertation I selected a collection of films that I considered would answer the specific questions posed at the beginning of the dissertation: Whether film can be considered an architectural artifact, capable of eliciting experiences of place and if it could reveal a place's essential and elemental qualities. I also posed the question if film could unveil within the places it presents, like the house, the transformative qualities over our psychosomatic well-being and how this act of co-making

happens. These movies clearly show film's capacity for world-making, where architecture is present in its capacity to make materially manifest the act of place-divination, meaning, to unveil its essential, affective qualities and render them meaningful for us. In this regard, we have seen how indeed filmmaking is a form of *world-making* that conjures up history from its place to tell its stories, and film relies heavily on architecture and the feeling of place to do so. The epistemic explorations, included at the opening of each chapter, unveiled some of the magical opaqueness that conceals these acts of world-making, and their resulting worlds.

These worlds were shown to entail many complex entanglements: political, spiritual and personal. These imaginary places demonstrate a tender balance between the trauma inflicted upon someone (or someplace) and the complex process of healing. Architecture in these films, is not only present in the shape of buildings, but in its intrinsic capacity to house our emotional processes. It shows how the buildings are part of a complex atmosphere that becomes essential to the cyclical, narrative acts of revealing and healing trauma.

This leads to another question posed by the dissertation: the role of everyday architecture in unveiling meaning in these ritual acts that try to make sense of the violence of death. The centrality of architecture in this process is paramount, as it provides depth and limits to these events. Painting, according to Italian architect and theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), can render present those who are absent.³⁶⁵ These films demonstrate that cinema can do very much the same, conjuring

³⁶⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition*, Translated by Rocco Sinisgalli (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013) Book 2, 131.

phantoms and ghosts from the past. It does so in a two-fold way, first, by bringing back to the present people, actions and places already past; second, by telling stories of haunted people and places. On this fictional foundation, the resulting physical presence of architecture articulates and houses the cyclical rituals and habits that make sense of its own making. Architecture, when truly meaningful, is made with consideration of these rituals, cycles and stories embedded in the land, and the bodies that it houses, even stems from.

Take for example the Battamaliba house, considered to be an extension of its owner's body, and in with respect to which it plays a therapeutic role in psychosomatic health. If an inhabitant of one of these houses presents "personal difficulties (the house) necessitate some form of architectural change as part of their resolution."³⁶⁶ American art historian, Suzanne Preston Blier explains that Battamaliba men and women view their homes as human, and as such are considered to be participative in the dweller's lives. The houses have a built-in soul mound (*lisepo*), that suffers modifications from the hands of architects when one of the dwellers is passing through some form of psychological or physical distress, part of the builder's role as healer that helps the dweller transition through trauma. Or, when an elder of the family dies, the house memorializes and embraces the deceased, by naming key liminal spaces of the house after them and housing a shrine in the central space.³⁶⁷ According to Preston Blier, for the Battamaliba, architecture—specifically their houses—expresses a vision of the full physical and psychological dimensions of their identity. Architecture is bound to their inner lives and narratives and is an act of interior (emotional) and

³⁶⁶ Suzanne Preston Blier, *The Anatomy of Architecture. Ontology and Metaphor in Battamaliba Architectural Expression* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 135.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 149–53.

exterior (material) world-making, as well as bridging past and present stories of the family. Buñuel and Lowery alike were not far from these very same understandings of the richness of ritual within the everyday environment of the house. The ghost's flesh in *A Ghost Story* is one with the flesh of the house; he grieves the loss of his house as beacon of his self; ghost and house were entangled in and mirrored each other's bodily condition; meanwhile, his grieving wife condenses mood and memory in the kitchen, slowly rebuilding her world in an intimate ritual of recomposition towards a future without her partner and her house. Similarly, *The Exterminating Angel* demonstrates how a reconstruction of the mythical order of the world lies within the poetics of a theatrical re-enactment. There is poetics within the anxiety and fulfillment of the everyday and its inherent habits and rituals, and its voiced by these movies.

The architectural work of these filmmakers renders apparent, through the ghosts of their films, something deeply entrenched in our ways to inhabit space. Like manifestations of our pre-reflective, affective relationships with space, ghosts in these films appear as resisting and destabilizing forces in stories against any form of political control. They reveal that places are more than mathematical and geometrical voids to be traversed—what Cartesian thought reckons as space. Consequently, they reveal that people's ways of inhabiting and engaging with their places goes beyond the fulfilment of basic functions, and that the act of belonging requires time, memory and meaning. Ghosts in these films appear particularly bound to those complex spatial conditions that affect the other characters in their film-worlds. They haunt these places, suspending the temporal and material limits of these seemingly empty vessels; they are indeed empty and full at the same time. As we saw with Apichatpong's *Cemetery of Splendour* and *Boonmee*, they even dwell simultaneously with other beings and consciousness without having to necessarily manifest themselves as embodied:

“It’s less about self-awareness than about getting to learn about time. In Uncle Boonmee, I came to learn a lot about how time affects us, how it triggers certain emotions, and how it helps audiences have a particular relationship with cinematic time.”³⁶⁸

What does this mean for architecture? How does it present to us a possibility of understanding the poetic and emotional relevance of place, particularly the most intimate ones, in our lives and actions? By bringing together ghosts and the spiritual as inhabitants of the farms, houses and farmhouses in his films, Apichatpong reveals the intrinsic relationship between memory, place and meaning embedded in heterogeneous time. His filmic architecture acknowledges and evidences the political anxiety and struggle of the surrounding territory, which inherently affects how Boonmee and his family relate with the nucleus of his house. *A Ghost Story* demonstrates how memory, present and future are entangled as we intensely inhabit the everyday spaces of our house. The extreme grief of losing one’s lover and one’s house unpack the complex emotional entanglement that we create in a house and conversely, how the house affects our innermost selves. Andrei Tarkovsky wrote in *Sculpting in Time*,

“Memory is a spiritual concept [. . .] Bereft of memory, a person becomes the prisoner of an illusory existence; falling out of time he is unable to seize his own link with the outside world—in other words he is doomed to madness.”³⁶⁹

Or as South Korean philosopher Byung Chul-Han puts it, human memory is narrative, and narration makes *world* and meaning.³⁷⁰ These ghosts are both manifestations of the affective longing

³⁶⁸ Kim, “Learning About Time: An Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul,” 52.

³⁶⁹ Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time. Reflections on the Cinema*, translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 57–58.

³⁷⁰ Byung-Chul Han, *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Linger*, translated by Daniel Steuer (Cambridge, UK; and Medford, MA: Polity, 2017), 12–13.

anchored in each one of these locations, as kinetic memories that inhabit our houses. Participation in the world-making of these stories means for architecture a role in enabling the search for meaning, while staying peripheral to our attention.

According to Bazin film is, among other things, a defense against time.³⁷¹ It is a form of extending the meat and bones of our bodies beyond death, an attempt like many forms of image-making to fight against the anxieties of loss and disappearance. My wager was that Apichatpong, and the other filmmakers present in this dissertation, are not wielding cinema just to defend us from the erasure of death and the loss of memory, but to harness architecture in place to bring back the past once again into the present, since “cinema has the power not only to transcend time, but also space, putting the past onto an ontologically equal footing with the present on screen.”³⁷² Through the speculative architectures that operate as part of their films, these filmmaker-architects reveal the thick and complex continuity of multiple temporalities embedded and experienced in a specific place. Film and media scholar Anders Bergstrom, discussing Bazin, suggest that cinema’s representational qualities can be framed as an urge to resist death, not unlike many religious practices, but also to exceed it: “Bazin suggests that cinema goes even further in linking temporal representation, through memory, to a spiritual concern with the role of subjectivity beyond death.”³⁷³

While the subject of religious practices is well beyond the scope of this investigation, a form of non-institutionalized spirituality that embodies an act of resistance towards the modern quantitative

³⁷¹ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1, 9.

³⁷² Anders Bergstrom, “Cinematic Past Lives: Memory, Modernity, and Cinematic Reincarnation in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*,” *Mosaic* 48, 4 (2015): 2.

³⁷³ Ibid.

spatio-temporal logic of homogeneity, and the inherent search for emotional well-being in specific places that this entails, certainly is. It is hard to deny the inherent connections between spirituality (including religious practices, in the case of Apichatpong, Thai Buddhism) and the wondrous / magic present in stories about haunted houses:

“The anticipation of death, which we cannot help thinking about, has two possible effects: melancholy, which withdraws any present from us in advance and, conversely, love for finite things or beings, all the more intense since it is hopeless.”³⁷⁴

Slow-cinema, especially the long take, presents an interesting qualitative component of these films, offering a technique that seems in theoretical opposition to ghost stories (or any form of storytelling that veers towards the fantastic), since the long take, as I have discussed above, has often been associated by film theorists and historians with “pure” realism. Exploiting this contrast, Apichatpong for example utilizes the frame of the image as a threshold to a world of magical, wondrous realism, where the most quotidian spaces are capable of containing amazement under the most unassuming everyday circumstances. His films, and the other films studied here, focus on inhabiting the gaps between representation and experience.

This is the gap that, ultimately, I consider to be at the core of this dissertation. We need to understand that film-as architectural-artifact is made to dwell within these spaces of separation. The invisible gaps became more evident with the execution of the epistemic exercises for each one of the chapters. The process of watching the films, first in “real” present time, made initial impressions on me as I took notes about the worlds, attuning myself to their atmospheres and underlying

³⁷⁴ Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, 14.

mythologies that I felt were present in such places. The second and third viewings started to reveal deeper information, illuminate nuances of acting and sound design that might have eluded me. Once I began to re-edit the segments of film in which the houses were shown to be the most resonant subjects of the exercise, the material and embodied world within the film became more apparent to my imagination. The act of re-cutting and slowing down those scenes even further plunged my attention into the geometric and topological relationships between all the parts of the built environment. The more I took notes to recompose these images, the clearer it became that for these spaces to appear as quotidian spaces through the seeing body of the camera, some adjustments must have been made within the “real” location. Like Vitruvian tracings that acknowledge our anatomy, anticipating that buildings must harmonize with our perception in order to appear regular and orderly,³⁷⁵ the production design and filmmaking team must acknowledge the gaps between camera and film-dwellers’ perceptual apparatus. Once I returned to watch the original films after engaging in this process, each viewing became increasingly projective—eliciting the experiences of those places in my memory, enticing my imagination towards the production of questions, text and hybrid drawings. The production of these exercises allowed me to further inquire into some of the filmmaking decisions the authors had made. By working on the Boonmee films, I came across the realization of the importance of *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* as a device for the filmmaker to understand the character’s abode in preparation his full-length feature. It prompted questions about

³⁷⁵ In his Ten Books, Vitruvius emphasizes the importance of “optical correction” to be part of the drawing and construction of architectural elements. These corrections are a direct acknowledgment of the human eye’s curvature that compensate for perceptual experiences in order to render an architecture that appears as regular and orderly to the perceiving body. These acknowledgements of the gap between experience, perception and representation are also the subject of study in Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*. Also see Marcus Vitruvius Polio, *On Architecture* translated by Schofield Richard (London: Penguin Books, 2009) 3.1.9, 3.1.11.

this process with the filmmaker,³⁷⁶ and ultimately lead to my own understanding of the constitution of the house as I described it in the corresponding chapter.

The resulting collection of drawings, creative writing and edited videos,³⁷⁷ as well as the process of making them, provided profound hermeneutic lessons about the film-worlds, as well as a novel and insightful research methodology. The aim of these epistemic exercises became more evident: “to make visible that which otherwise might be invisible.”³⁷⁸

Drawing on the findings of my dissertation, my future aspiration is to explore the exciting possibilities of film for architecture; the potential for a poetic filmic architectonics that acknowledges the history, mythologies, physicality and mysteries of the place it anchors itself to. In the last year of this research, I had the opportunity to exercise some of the emerging curiosities within this dissertation. I taught an architecture design studio that harnessed filmmaking as a medium to explore the existing qualities of a site and imagine future, possible worlds.

The project in this studio was organized into the three basic stages of filmmaking: pre-production, production and post-production, re-imagined for an architectural project. The first stage had the students select an abandoned building in Ottawa and re-inhabit this structure with a story. These stories, which were also pre-existing, had to be in turn re-shaped by the underlying histories and

³⁷⁶ As I had previously mentioned in the footnotes, Apichatpong has provided for this research a collection of ‘behind the scenes’ photos of the construction of Boonmee’s house. See Fig 11 for a sample. See the appendix for additional photos.

³⁷⁷ See Appendix C.

³⁷⁸ Frascari, *Marco Frascari’s Dreamhouse: A Theory of Imagination*, 98.

politics of the selected ruins, underscoring the relationship of co-making between program (stories), bodies (characters) and place (ruins). For the production, the students had to devise, plan, and design the story taking place through a series of models and architectural storyboards in which every drawing and model had to be storied and be part of a larger narrative that acknowledged the temporal essence of film. Storyboards and models were used not only to plan how to shoot the story, but to imagine possible atmospheres and moods for each moment and place within the story. Afterwards, the students built a set to scale in order to film the story, meaning that they had to acknowledge not only the body of the miniature characters, but the body of the filmmakers as they filmed; these had to be invisible to the camera, but also had to be able to physically perform their work inside the model. To achieve a richer result, the students were encouraged to test different modes of seeing (through the lens) and experiment with moods (within the model); to do so they had to better understand their characters, their struggles and their desires as embodied dwellers of the model/story. Once their projects were completed (filmed and edited), their *behind the scenes* presentations were also filmed, edited and animated. These revealed their own insights about the process of filmmaking in the realm of design, the nuances that the characters and their stories brought to spatial consideration, as well as the thinking on dwelling as embodied event and the experience of place as essential for architectural thought provoked by this process.

While this approach is only one of many possible for bridging architectural design and filmmaking, it indeed gave me insight into my own questions about film's role in architectural thought and potential for education. The theoretical insights that arise from my dissertation show that film is not only a tool for architectural representation, but indeed a space in itself that enables empathy towards the world, that stirs in us a sense of belonging and an exhortation for architects to imagine and build

other, possible worlds.

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Appendix

A. Supplemental Images: Architectural Storyboards.

The following supplemental images is a selection of architectural storyboards part of the dissertation's epistemic explorations process. These storyboards were made as a form of notetaking while I watched, edited and re-watched the films in order to better understand the spatial construction of the houses within the films. Each of these storyboards portrays slices of moments within the films, inference of camera positions (orange lines) and movement (arrows in yellow), a list of the objects that enrich the character of the spaces and architectural drawings that describe the built components within the image.

Supplemental Image 1. *Exterminating Angel* Architectural Storyboard. The Sitting-Room and the Haunted Drawing-Room. Drawing by Author.

Supplemental Image 3. *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* architectural storyboard. The house of Uncle Boonmee. Drawing by Author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

Supplemental Image 4. *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* architectural storyboard #2. The house of Uncle Boonmee. Drawing by author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

Supplemental Image 5. *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* architectural storyboard #3. The house of Uncle Boonmee. Drawing by author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

Supplemental Image 6. *Letter to Uncle Boonmee* architectural storyboard #4. The house of Uncle Boonmee. Drawing by author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

Supplemental Image 7. *A Ghost Story* architectural storyboard. The house of C and M. Drawing by author. © Jorge Rivera-Gutierrez.

What's next for Buñuel

Rene Timent:

- "For imagination to a factor on human freedom, doesn't it have to move into the realm of the real?"
- "I don't see why it would have to be like that. ~~Between~~ Imagination and the real ~~there is~~ ~~always~~ are interrelated; there's no separation as in black and white. They influence each other.

In i

- Buñuel talks about his isolated characters and how they contrast: Simón del Desierto is freer than Robinson Crusoe ~~(Simon is)~~. All Simon needs is water, ^{a little bit of} ~~gravel~~ and a lettuce, whereas Robinson is never free, because he has an angst-ridden desire for company.

Ach Angel, Virgin, Monk.

Can one not contain intentions behind the floorplan?
I think so. The piano space is like a theater, a scene. It is where the final act begins but also where Blasco's performance initiates the party.

Edvard & Beatriz / The architect.

Jorge Gurovitz's essay on the architecture of Luis Buñuel is an interesting account of description of the actual physical spaces - the "architecture" - of B's films. While illuminating in its attention to spatial organization

Gurovitz falls into the trap of ascribing modern architecture's "values" to Buñuel's ~~interior~~ work.

Editing creates / time unconscious forces that.

what with this?

B. Supplemental Images: Behind the scene construction photos.

This is a selection of photographs Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films Films (Apichatpong Weerasethakul). Taken during the construction process of the house of Uncle Boonmee, the set for *A letter to Uncle Boonmee* and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*.

Supplemental photos. 1 Behind the scenes construction: the house of Uncle Boonmee.

Photos: ©Kick The Machine (Courtesy of Kick the Machine Films)

C. Supplemental Video:

Available for download from Theses and Dissertations | CURVE (carleton.ca).