

Re-tracing Erasures

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ABSTRACT

“Waves” is a short narrative film with a duration of 14 minutes, shot on 16mm film. It shows a child and her young mother struggling to take care of one another in the small bedroom they share. Years later, the daughter returns to find solace in the embrace of a childhood friend. The “Installation of film footage and recorded sound” is a response to some of the questions raised through the making of the short film. Through it, I am reinterpreting the material recorded during the production of “Waves” beyond the restrictions of montage. Using broad strokes, I am looking to see where narrative falls apart and what survives its shattered logic.

Keywords: film; narrative; repetition; difference; erasures; memory

To my great-grandmother, who made the train stop;

To my grandmother, for teaching me the importance of "Once upon a time,"

And to my mother, for her trust.

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DEFENCE STATEMENT

Story and character were my main concerns when making the film *Waves*. It is ultimately a love letter addressed to my mother, to my friends. It comes at a time when women and minorities in the film industry are starting to be heard. I made “*Waves*” wanting to add my voice to this discussion, to show what I see in the women around me every day. I see strength, and resilience despite adversity, I see moments of weakness and supportive embraces, tears, smiles, passivity, boisterous reactions. I had the luck to work with five wonderful actresses and a predominantly female crew. We’ve learned from each other. The film has its flaws, but it is in these cracks that I recognise our individual fingerprints. Together we’ve molded emotion into an unassuming form, to be enjoyed by as large and diverse an audience as we can reach.

Waves is my story. Beyond it, I am translating my more formal concepts through writing and installation. The making of *Waves* prompted a new line of questions. What are the differences born out of repetition and how do they affect narrative? What does the viewer remember? Can the story survive separately from its image? The *Installation*, which makes up the second half of this project, is where I am wrestling with these lingering ideas. Through it, I am reinterpreting the material recorded during the production of *Waves* beyond the restrictions of montage. Using broad strokes, I am looking to see where narrative falls apart and what survives its shattered logic.

Introduction

My desire when I embarked on the MFA program was to make the transition from what I called “hybrid video” (work that wasn’t clearly situated inside the boundaries of neither video art, nor cinema) into narrative filmmaking. Previously, my practice had been concerned with small, subjective narratives touching on issues of memory, family and distortion. A number of these *hybrids* can be described as video montages of dissected family archive footage mixed with quotidian shots, and layered with text/voice-overs which narrated brief childhood encounters - puzzles with missing links. My goal, as stated at the time, was to continue to push boundaries of cinema against more experimental, visual art approaches and exhibitions methods, as well as to produce character-driven films and build on screen psychologically reflective environments.

During the program, I became interested in ideas of folding and unfolding moving images. My research was prompted by Deleuze’s “The Fold: Leibniz and The Baroque” and particularly by the recurring problem of “how to continue [a fold], to have it go through the

ceiling, how to bring it to infinity”¹. I began exploring ideas of folding, unfolding and refolding by turning still photography into moving abstract imagery. On one such project, over 1,500 photographs taken over the course of 5 weeks were attributed individual durations of 0.1 seconds. The resulting animation was then compressed, stretched, multiplied and digitally folded, to later be unfolded and its duration extended. The resulting video, called *5 weeks, fold*, has a duration of 12 minutes and moves in a steady rhythm, from right to left, to unfold and then refold the images through the screen’s frame. This experiment prompted issues of duration and delay, such as stilling the image, repetition, return of certain moments and slowing down the illusion of natural movement.

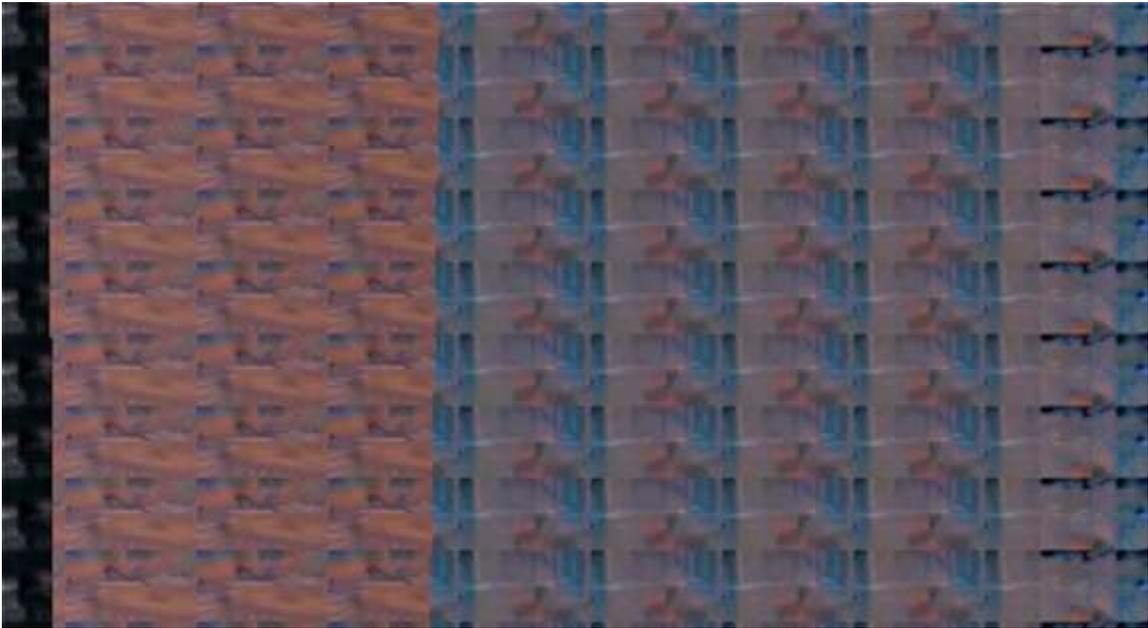


Figure 1 *5 weeks, fold* video still. 2017

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), 39.



Figure 2 **5 weeks, fold installation shot, Audain Gallery. 2017**

My graduating project, *Re-Tracing Erasures*, has two parts: a short narrative film titled *Waves*, with a duration of 14 minutes and a separate *Installation of film footage and recorded sound* presented over the span of 12 consecutive hours. As a whole, the project is concerned with ideas of narrative, repetition and duration. Carrying forward previous interests, the project is framed through notions of memory, particularly of memory as currency - the idea that each time it is reproduced, a memory is in fact reinstated in the present, occupying it fully (since it is never reproduced exactly, each memory is, in fact, a new occurrence). The film, *Waves*, explores memory through its main character's psychology. The *Installation* further pushes this theme by emphasising the notion of remembering through repetition.

Memory in *Waves*

Waves began with the writing of a short poem. "She's called the Black Sea/but she's colored dark blue/ In the summer, she fills of greens and browns/seaweed and harmless jellyfish/One winter, once, it froze/As a child, I did not know there were other seas/Just the sea/the sea with tall waves and salty lips." The final poem is the simplified version of a longer text, gradually dissolved through repeated translations between English and Romanian. The poem

became the metaphor which carries the narrative of the film and its mode of conception a reflection on the larger project. Most of the film takes place in a small bedroom, where a child and her young mother struggle to take care of one another. Years later the daughter returns to find solace in the embrace of a childhood friend.

Memories swell and spill into other days. The majority of the film's narrative takes place in the past, relayed through handheld, heavier-toned footage, rich in burnt shades of red, yellow, and blue. The poem is used as a story the mother-child pair recite before bedtime. The motif of *the waves* and *the sea* become synonymous with the mother's image. The sea freezes in the poem and the mother abandons her child. Both actions can be seen as going against nature: the sea is not meant to turn solid, but rarely, it does. The confined space of the bedroom forces the waves to take the shape of a curtain, and the sound of the sea heard by the child through a stone shell turns into a hollow voice. These echoes, always delayed, carry into the present, where a grown Anna returns to the room to remember. The previous images belong to her, imperfect memories idealised through repetition: the mother wears the same yellow dress, in the pan shot the room is perfectly laid out with treasured possessions.

The film employs pose and aesthetics of delay to create a naturalism on the border of daydreaming. An influence of note is Chantal Akerman's 1972 "La Chambre", as well as Lynne Ramsay's opening of "Ratcatcher". Although not a typical piece of slow cinema, "Waves" nonetheless uses techniques to slow down the narrative in order to consider the image separately from its story, and to create moments of contemplation. Such methods include the close-up, noted by Laura Mulvey to allow "for a moment of possession in which the image is extracted from the flow of a story"², slow-motion and long, almost still frames (*tableaux vivants* - a term introduced by Masaki Kondo to describe fixed moments "that halt the narrative development on the story and introduces stasis into the movement of the play"³). These instill in the images a life of their own, unframed by narrative, to breath with and against the sound. As with the films of Abbas Kiarostami, delay encourages a *pensive* spectator, one who is required to remember in order to reinterpret subsequent events. Repetition (of objects, as well as color schemes) becomes the key to solving the puzzle and linking narrative sequences into a coherent storyline.

Regarding Repetition and Remembering

Much of the process through which *Waves* was produced sparked the ideas for my extended essay, and the second half of this project. Before going into production, I spent one month rehearsing with the actors. Even though we were following a written script, this collaboration was vital to the final outcome. Taking the time to explore each actor's strength brought changes to the written material. Inca, the child playing the role of young Anna, turned

² Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 165.

³ Masaki Kondo, *Unfolding the In-Between Image*, (Contemporaneity, Vol 3, No 1, 2014)

out to be an accomplished tap dancer, so we included her tap performance in one of the scenes. Repeating scenes in rehearsal was meant to familiarize the actors with the material and each other, so their gestures would come off casual on screen. Shooting several takes of the same action during production is a standard in fiction filmmaking, but it made me consider the small changes brought by repeated actions. The *Installation* reflects this meditation on process.

In my extended essay, I came to call the process of repeating an action on an established object, an *Intervention*. Some examples would be: Interventions on the script by shaping the language and through rehearsals with the actors, Interventions on the performance, through framing (multiple takes, fragmentation through blocking), Interventions on the image, through sound, Interventions on the duration, through viewership. Invariably, this leads me back to the idea of folding and unfolding. As Deleuze states, “the first fly contain the seeds of all flies to come, each being called in its turn to unfold its own parts at the right time.”⁴ A repeated gesture ends up carrying the traces of its past into its future. It is my impression then, that multiple takes produce ghosts - exhausted durations which leave a trace into the present moment, a coexistence of the past with the present. From rehearsals with the actors, to blocking (and thus, fragmenting) a scene and shooting multiple takes of the same action, each stage of production is a doubling of the previous one(s) - from point A to point B. The making of a narrative film becomes an act of remembering (A) in the name of continuity (B).

Comparing different takes of the same durational unit will show overlapping images, a doubling of information, as well as misalignment (the alignment issue becomes most evident when repeating a slow-motion close-up. By mechanically slowing down the movement on a close-up image, the differences between repeated takes are magnified). Some frames will contain visual elements overlooked/unfilled in others. More importantly, repeated frames will produce performance variations triggered by projections. Justin Remes mentions Bergson to note that “consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstances might be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they will find him at a new moment in his history.”⁵ By repeating a durational unit, both the actors and the camera operator are re-tracing an already lived moment, projecting the memory forward and following a ghost trail. Through the *Installation*, I am exposing these variations. The *Installation* uses the film footage and recorded sound from the short film *Waves*. It makes use of the full recorded footage and sound captured during 3 days of production, to include *mistakes*: slates, sound checks, and accidental captures.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), 9.

⁵ Justin Remes, *Motionless Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015), 14. Justin Remes is an assistant professor of film studies at Iowa State University

Process and Installation

Film director Julio Garcia Espinosa argues that “imperfect cinema must above all show the process which generates the problems. It is thus the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results, the opposite of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema, the opposite of a cinema which “beautifully illustrates” ideas or concepts which we already possess.”⁶ It is in this spirit that the *Installation* is produced and, by acknowledging this, it works against the short film *Waves* to expose its production mechanisms and to challenge its narrative structure. The *Installation* is comprised of three elements: sound, video projection and empty space. The viewer is invited to bring their own duration into the space during the 12-hour event. The material is presented in the chronological production order, and uses the original Script as reference for the Scene order (which differs from the final edit of *Waves*). Day One includes scenes 6, 10A, 7 and 8; Day Two includes scenes 10B, 3, 5 and 11; Day 3 includes scenes 9, 1, 2 and 4.

During the production of “*Waves*”, the sound was recorded using lav mics on the actresses, as well as through a main boom. For the *Installation*, the different channels are played individually, stringed back to back, in the order in which they were recorded. This is meant to highlight the different textural value each body provides, as well as how the changes in location and movement intervene to affect the focus of the performance. By taking turns to listen to each actor’s recording, as well as the main boom recording, the viewer becomes aware of these intensity variations. Repeating the process for every take of the same recorded duration is meant to further break apart the idea of narrative and to unveil the imperfect, fragmentary nature of fiction filmmaking. The video projection mimics the above process, in that it strives to show the difference produced through repetition. Repeated takes are layered on top of each other and their durations extended, for the viewer to be able to compare the misaligned frames.

⁶ Julio Garcia Espinosa, “For An Imperfect Cinema”, *Jump Cut*, no. 20, 1979, pp. 24-26



Figure 3 *Installation of film footage and recorded sound, 2018*

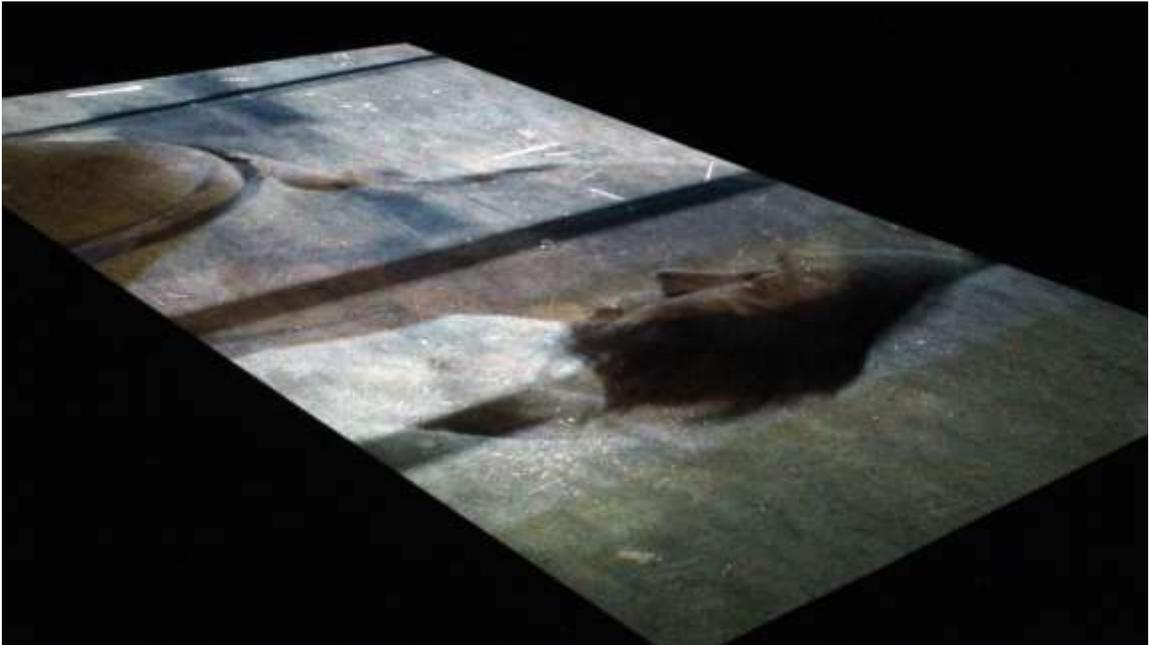


Figure 4 *Installation of film footage and recorded sound, 2018*

The *Installation* also explores what Jacques Ranciere calls the “pleasure of misunderstanding” and the “differences of knowledge between the characters, between the audience and the characters, between what the audience expects and what it sees”⁷. The third element of the *Installation*, the empty dark space is meant to facilitate this misunderstanding. Going back to the idea of remembering, the viewer participates in the experiential unfolding of sequences and acts as its Memory. Each individual viewer becomes, throughout their duration in the space, a participant in the re-tracing of erasures. It is through the viewer’s ability to remember that the disappearing layers are brought back into the present to claim their difference against a similar take. In turn, each viewer’s experience of the work will differ. Given that the duration of the video projection is 1 hour, 19 minutes and 46 seconds (played on a loop) and the sound has a duration of 2 hours, 28 minutes and 21 seconds (played on loop), throughout the 12-hour event the image and the sound repeat to continuously create different layers.

I see memory itself to work in layers of detail. One can also argue that individual engagement can span from seconds, to minutes and hours. Through the *Installation*, I am choosing to show a process which exposes a narrative film’s misaligned layers and acknowledges its fragmentary nature to provide enough space for the viewer to consider his/her role in the string of mutations.

Reflection note

Making *Waves*, for me, became a personal journey. Besides the narrative, which is partly inspired by intimate events in my life, the film was my first attempt at conventional cinema and working with both actors and a crew. In my introduction I say we learned from each other, but the truth is I learned more from them. Seeing the intricacies of how every department functions, both the technical and the practical details opened my eyes to the possibilities available to me on my next projects. Maybe *Waves* became an exercise on how a film is made, but for me it opened up the question on how it could be made. On my future projects, there are things I would do similarly – working with children is one of them. Despite conventional wisdom that children are difficult to work with, I found them to be the brightest presence on set, both professional and attentive and wonderfully full of life and whimsy. The film’s ending, where the two young girls are spinning with colorful hula hoops is perhaps my favorite scene in the whole film and the only fully improvised shot. My only intervention there was to give the children the toys, no words exchanged, and they did what came most natural to them: they played.

I would of course do some things differently. For my next project, I envision an intrusive camera which holds tight to the actors to the point of bumping into them; I would spend more time in rehearsals and shoot every take giving substantial prompts for change; and I would keep

⁷ Jacques Ranciere, *The Intervals of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2014), 43

my crew down to just the essential department heads. I would also perhaps not shoot again in Vancouver. This is a point I kept thinking about, even as we wrapped production on the film. I feel strongly that my particular sensibility doesn't fully translate to this part of the world. And at the end of the day, a film is the sum of multiple voices – I guess mine got muffled in American aesthetics. I kept thinking about Haneke's "Funny Games", how he directed a European and an American version of the same film and how, despite having the same creative voice behind both and the films being similar in a number of ways, they couldn't be more different in terms of tone and feeling. I am determined to shoot my next project back where, for me, things make more sense.

I, however, stand behind my creative decisions for the film. I chose to shoot in what was described as a "formal approach" because I like the elegance of the medium and a clear cut style. I believe that every film has an audience, some smaller than others, but an audience nevertheless who can relate to the story and receive something back. It was never my intention to pound those emotions into my viewer, but rather allow enough freedom for the spectator to become introspective. The story is ultimately how I bring my voice to the medium. It is a female story filled with minute gestures I believe every woman can recognize – the closeness of our friendships, the caresses, care and embraces, the confessions. Earlier in the year I watched Greta Gerwig's "Lady Bird", a film which some critics believe hasn't pushed the medium. As a woman, however, watching another woman's story, there are so many details I recognised in the film – it reflected my own relationship with my mother and my female friends. It may be hard for the male reader to understand, but it is so crucially important for women, young and old alike, to see our stories translated in the same medium which once portrayed us as half-wits. I believe that using those same tools and changing the message is more subversive than developing new approaches. And it is equally important, when they try to erase our history, to remind them that we were there in the beginning and throughout.

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WAVES – FILM SCRIPT

INT. APARTMENT #7, DAY - 2007

A one bedroom apartment, part of an old apartment building.

The bedroom is small. It is furnished all in white, pristine and slowly yellowing from time. On the side, there's a bathroom with a small mirror. Above it, half a mosaic wall is made out of tiny pieces of painted tile. It depicts, quite clumsily, the tiniest island with a single palm tree and a boat, surrounded by water.

Small sounds ornate the space. Water rushes through the pipes. The upstairs neighbor sneezes loudly.

In the room, there is a medium sized wardrobe perched on four carved feet. It has a sculpted frame of tiny flowers and leafs braided on invisible branches. The big, white bed in the middle of the room is covered with blood red sheets with a pattern of flowered roses. The drape is white and touches the floor.

The room is empty. The light, filtered through the crochet drape, stretches on the wall.

INT. APT. #7, NIGHT - 2007

Young-Anna runs away from her pajamas in her underwear. She laughs and hides behind the curtain. Her mother, Sarah is running out of patience. The mother is soft.

Anna does not want to go to sleep. She hides behind the curtain, playing her game and teasing her mother to find her. Sarah is undressing. She takes off her work clothes to put on a night gown.

Sarah teases Anna to come out with a bedtime story.

SARAH

(narrating)

She's called the Black Sea, but she is colored dark blue. In the summer she fills of greens and

browns, seaweed and harmless
jellyfish. One winter, she froze
to the bottom.

Anna pulls on the curtain and it falls, enveloping her with a
thud. The child screams.

Sarah jumps. She is scared. She grabs the child and lays her on
the bed. Anna looks up, expecting to be punished.

But Sarah tickles her and the little girl screams with laughter.
Sarah wraps the child in the fallen curtain. They tell the
bedtime story, wrapped in each others arms.

SARAH

The Black Sea...

ANNA

Blue almost black.

SARAH

In the summer filled with...

ANNA

Green.

SARAH

Brown. Seaweed.
Slimy...

ANNA

Jellyfish. One
winter...

SARAH

Once... It?

ANNA

Frozen.

SARAH

Froze. As a child I did not know
there were other seas. Just the

Sea. The sea, tall waves and
salty lips.

They recite the story back and forth. They use the curtain to
imagine waves, a frozen sea. They lose their hands inside some
imagined sea foam. They make "woosh"-ing noises.

ANNA
(repeating, falling asleep)
Black sea, blue, black. With
green, brown weeds. Fish. It
froze. There weren't other seas.
Just the sea.

SARAH
The waves...

Sarah moves her hands underneath the curtain to make waves.

ANNA
(growing tired)
Again!

SARAH
Black sea, blue. Green, brown
weeds. No other seas, just the
Sea with waves.

ANNA
And salt.

The child curls her mother's hair on one finger. Anna falls
asleep in her mother's arms. Sarah strokes the child's hair.

SARAH
(whispering)

I wish I could keep you like this
forever. I just want to hold you
and not let go. I wish I could...

Sarah kisses Anna and the child shifts in her sleep. Sarah covers
Anna with a blanket.

INT. APT. #7, DAY - 2007

Sarah is cowering in a corner. She is crying. Anna tries to lift
her up, but Sarah won't move. Her sobs sound like screams. The
child strokes her hair.

ANNA
You
have to eat.

Anna rushes to grab a plate of food.

ANNA
(talking while walking)
Please stop crying and eat some
food. It's good for you...

In the corner, Sarah shakes her head.

ANNA
Just stop crying and eat. Or...
You're losing too much weight.

Anna looks scared. She fills a fork and tries to reach her
mother's mouth.

SARAH
(hysterical)

Go outside, Anna! Go play! Go
away...

Sarah chokes on her sobs. The child hugs her mother's head to
block off the noise.

The muffled noise of the woman crying keeps a steady rhythm. The
drape is lying on the floor. Unfiltered, light fills the room.

INT. APT. #7, NIGHT - 2007

Mother and daughter are sleeping. The lights are turned off. The
room is dark, except for the moving car lights from the street
below. Sarah starts talking.

SARAH
(groggy)

It's wet. The bed's wet... 've you
wet the bed?

The mother pulls the child out of bed. She turns on the light. After a pause, she laughs.

Sarah covers Anna's eyes and leads her to the mirror in the bathroom. She turns the child to face her reflection. Anna's face is covered in bloody fingerprints from a nose bleed.

Anna looks unsure, her eyes open, her mouth bent. Sarah looks around and picks up the fallen curtain. She wets a corner and starts wiping the child's face. The curtain stains with blood.

ANNA

Am I sick?

Anna rinses her face and Sarah hands her a towel to pat dry.

SARAH

Yes. It's called worrying too much. I want you to go over to Lizzie's tomorrow. I know she keeps inviting you.

ANNA

Ok, but I'll come right back after dinner.

SARAH

I want you to sleep over and have fun with your friend. Promise?

They go back to bed.

SARAH

Anna? Do you promise?

ANNA

I promise...

INT. APT. #7, DAY - 2007

Anna packs an overnight bag.

The child picks up a conch shell from the night table by the door. She holds it up to her ear. The sound of the sea grows loud, then louder.

EXT. APT. #7 HALLWAY, DAY - CONTINUED

Anna waits for her mother to come home before she goes over to Lizzie's. The girls hang out outside the apartment by the railing.

Lizzie is Anna's age. Their slight build makes them look younger. They joke and laugh in high voices. Anna acts her age around her friend.

Lizzie is giggling through her story.

LIZZIE

And there's dancing like this...

Lizzie mimics club dancing and Anna follows her lead. Lizzie mimics the sound of a beat. The girls contort their bodies in silly ways, laughing at each other.

LIZZIE

And the music's super loud so you can't speak or hear people speaking.

ANNA

Like how loud?

LIZZIE

Like super loud. And my mom said that if you like somebody, you have to lick your lips to let them know.

Anna laughs, covering her mouth. Lizzie licks her lips to demonstrate. The girls laugh. They lick their lips, giggling. Sarah comes up the stairs. She looks ill, but smiles.

Anna rushes to kiss her mother, but Sarah doesn't respond.

SARAH

Go...

Anna picks up her bag. The girls run down the stairs, laughing.

EXT. APT. #7 HALLWAY, NIGHT - PRESENT

Anna (21) is accompanied by an older Lizzie (21). Lizzie's a painter and wears stained overalls. She smokes.

Anna struggles to open the door to the apartment. Lizzie takes the key and forces the door. Lizzie throws away her cigarette and steps inside. Anna lingers outside.

After a long hesitation, Anna goes inside.

INT. APT #7, CONTINUED

They carry lit flashlights to make their way inside the darkened space. Lizzie looks around the room.

LIZZIE
You could hang a curtain.
Otherwise, it's not bad...

The room is empty, with the exception of some discarded furniture: a nightstand and a bed. The space looks abandoned.

There's a scratch on the wall. Lizzie kneels to inspect it. She follows the mark with one finger.

LIZZIE
(caressing the scratch)

Isn't this scar beautiful? You
should stay, a few nights at
least. I've missed you.

Anna stretches her mouth into a half-smile.

ANNA
I've missed so much...

LIZZIE
No, not really.

Lizzie sits on the floor to roll another cigarette.

LIZZIE
You know Old Miss died?

ANNA
She wasn't so old. We just called
her Miss. Remember? Miss, can we
have water, Miss?

LIZZIE
She made us share a glass.

ANNA
Even when there were five or six
of us.

LIZZIE
No refills either.

Anna points her light in Lizzie's face. Lizzie shields her eyes
with one hand.

ANNA
You haven't changed. I'm still
talking to my friend.

LIZZIE
You haven't lost your spark. When
you wire something and the wires
get all jumbled, that spark.

ANNA
Dangerous, you mean?

LIZZIE
Sure, it can burn your house down.
But the light's pretty.

INT. APT. #7, DAY - PRESENT

Anna is lying on the floor, in the same corner where her mother
once crumbled and cried. She watches Lizzie work. Lizzie's
possessions clutter the room: cans of paint, monochrome drawings,
dried plants and discovered treasures. The bed is shoved upright
against the wall and clothes hang from its frame. They have been
there a while.

Anna is playing with a pin, scratching at the bare floor. She
follows the choreography of Lizzie's feet as she navigates the
messy floor. Step, step, dodge, small jump, turn...

Lizzie puts on music. The lyrics are sensual. They dance
together. Anna licks her lips. Lizzie licks her lips.

The music is loud. They move off-tempo, their eyes locked.

ANNA
(whispering)

I want the sea to melt.

LIZZIE
What?

Anna wipes away tears. Lizzie moves closer. Anna points at her chest.

ANNA
I want the sea to melt.

Lizzie squeezes Anna's hand. Lizzie hugs Anna and they slow dance, against the vivid rhythms of the music.

Their bodies press closer. Anna breaks away, abruptly.

ANNA
Everything smells of
paint.

LIZZIE
Open the window then, let the air
in.

ANNA
I feel like throwing up. Do you
ever hurt, in your stomach?
Sometimes I miss her. The pain
builds up. Into my lungs. It's
suffocating me... And I can't
breath.
(panicked)

I can't breath. I can't breath...

INT. APT. #7, DAY - 2007

The door to the apartment is open. Young-Anna hurries up the stairs from the floor below, talking over her shoulder to her friend, Lizzie.

ANNA
Should I ask my mom if you can
come up for breakfast?

LIZZIE
Or ask her to let you eat with us.
Then we can finish watching the
show.

ANNA
Yea, okay...

Anna goes inside the apartment. Apart from the furniture,
the space is completely empty.

Anna runs around, opening drawers. All presence of her mother
is gone.

The child is in shock.

Anna crawls to the corner of the room. She starts crying and
screaming. She covers her ears and screams louder.

ANNA
(screeching)

Mama! Maa-aa-maa-
aaa....
(heaving)
MAAA-MAAAA-AAAAAA!

EXT. TREE HOUSE ON THE BEACH, NIGHT

Anna and Lizzie are sitting on the floor on a semi-built tree
house, with an empty bottle of wine between them.

Faintly, the sound of the sea moves around them. Lizzie uses a
match to light her cigarette.

ANNA
(smiling)

I wish we could stay here like
this forever.

Lizzie lights a second match and watches the flame.

LIZZIE
Wait. You have to wish
on something.

The flame goes out. Lizzie lights a third match. Anna comes closer. She closes her eyes and blows out the flame.

The sea flows warm and dark.

FADE OUT.

APPENDIX A.

R-TRACING ERASURES

“The first fly contains the seeds of all flies to come, each being called in turn to unfold its own parts at the right time.” – Gilles Deleuze⁸

Let’s remember a childhood game, particularly the one which called a word to be repeated out loud, over and over until one forgot what the word meant, or how it functioned. Let’s use the word “story” as our example. The game is amusing in its simplicity. One must say “story” again and again, as fast as one can manage, and pay attention to how the word shifts. At first the word begins to lose its meaning. Then, one finds there is no beginning or end to the word, just the trail of letters looping in one’s mouth. Some letters fade away and the word becomes a sound made out of the harshest consonants. This new sound bears little resemblance to its original form, it has ceased to be a name or act as a signifier. Yet it has a primal urgency, given by the speed with which it is uttered. And it possesses a unique quality: it cannot be reproduced. As it is in-motion, it does not possess a definite materiality and thus it is not solid enough to allow its own reproductions, but rather it continues moving to exhaustion. Once one stops repeating it, the sound vanishes, it folds onto itself and reboots in the mind to its incipient form, the word “story”.

Narrative cinema bears some similarities with this game. It is a process of repetition; its apparatus is forward-moving and driven by sequential conventions. “What moves the story forward?” is a question which screenwriters, actors and movie-makers constantly answer in order to justify their decisions and shape the world which the viewer will ultimately inhabit. Repetition is the primary tool employed to create this illusion of truth. The conception of a narrative film implies what I would call gestures of *re-tracing*⁹. From rehearsals with the actors, to blocking (fragmenting) a scene and shooting multiple takes of the same action, to foley and so on, each stage of production is a doubling of the previous one(s) - from point A to point B. The making of a narrative film becomes an act of remembering (A) in the name of continuity (B).

⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), 9.

⁹ returning to the incipit and repeating a durational movement;

This is further carried out by the audience, but in reversal. If the story moves the image forward, the same narrative enforces a backwards motion in its spectator - from B to A. To follow the story, the viewer is encouraged to make connections, to remember. Thus the audience is constantly referencing back.

The object of this essay is to query specific ways in which the image, the narrative and the audience are differently affected by repeated Interventions into the moving image.

One, Mechanics

Interventions can be achieved by additions (+/*re-tracings*) and subtractions (-/*erasures*), yet narrative cinema by large encourages positive (+) Interventions. Narrative cinema, here, refers to works of film and video whose images can be linked and then verbally interpreted to form a summation, or a story. These are, by no extent, clear cut definitions, but rather possibilities meant to encourage a fluid discussion whilst offering a frame, or acting as guides for the ensuing debate. I shall further make no attempt to provide a list of all possible Interventions on the moving image, but rather highlight a select few to use as examples and triggers.

The Frame

Before the director calls “action”, the cinematographer must call “frame”. This means the camera is in position to capture its object. The Frame is a forceful Intervention on the actors, as well as the script. Most scenes are broken down into smaller fragments, or units. The actors are instructed where to stand, and how far to move, so the camera can contain a repeatable duration. Retracing the action in a second, third or nth take ensures the film can later be cut into a cohesive visual narrative. However, despite framing the same object, every additional take is a new occurrence. Deleuze references Leibniz when stating, “there can never be a straight line without curves intermingled”¹⁰. Much like drawing a straight line, and further attempting to draw the same exact line more than once, re-tracing an already framed duration will add “curves” at disparate intervals. Every attempt at repetition becomes an exercise in difference.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), 15.

Multiple takes produce *ghosts*¹¹. Re-tracing an already acted duration creates a host of visual anomalies. Comparing different takes of the same durational unit will show overlapping images, a doubling of information, as well as misalignment. Some frames will contain visual elements overlooked/unfilled in others. More importantly, repeated frames will produce intensity variations triggered by projections. In his book “Motionless Pictures”, Justin Remes draws from Bergson’s “Philosophical Investigations” and notes that “consciousness cannot go through the same state twice. The circumstances might be the same, but they will act no longer on the same person, since they will find him at a new moment in his history.”¹² By repeating a durational unit, both the actors and the camera operator are re-tracing an already lived moment, projecting the memory forward and following a ghost trail. A repeated frame thus contains the residue of the frame(s) shot before it, inflicting a sense of *deja-vecu*¹³, a heaviness which lingers. This instills a sense of past-ness, regardless of the narrative time in which the story is set.

The Cut

The Cut implies an aggression, as it is meant to take away, to erase in order to shape a forward moving narrative. The Cut creates the illusion; it separates the “real” from the *reality of the film*. In its least intrusive form, the Cut will remove objects which are not meant to exist, such as the slate. It will compress the duration of the frame (recorded duration) into *narrative duration*¹⁴. The Cut is a trigger, for both the story and the audience. It suggests a fragment of time has been erased. It is a recurrence of what is not there, of the minus, of the missing. Every time a cut occurs, something is forgotten, be it a frame, a second, a minute, a year or a lifetime¹⁵.

Much as it sounds like a contradiction, the Cut will extend narrative duration through this very repetition of missing time. Let’s consider the final scene of Antonioni’s “Zabriskie Point”¹⁶. A house sat atop a mountain is blown up to the sound of Pink Floyd, debris, fire, smoke, colorful garments and a raw chicken shown flying from multiple angles against a clear, blue sky. The roughly 5-minutes long explosion scene contains approximately 42 jump cuts.

¹¹ Exhausted durations which leave a trace into the present moment; a coexistence of the past with the present;

¹² Justin Remes, *Motionless Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015),

14. Justin Remes is an assistant professor of film studies at Iowa State University

¹³ my translation from French to English, “already lived”

¹⁴ the duration imposed by the story and believed by the audience to function as “real” time;

¹⁵ In a certain way, recording is a “cutting” out of lived experience; recording itself is a form of expulsion of what is not recorded.

¹⁶ *Zabriskie Point*, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni (1970, USA)

Most of the images are reproduced in slow-motion, and further repeated in close-up, prolonging the event. Justin Remes quotes Walter Benjamin to say that with the close-up, “space expands; with slow-motion, movement is extended”¹⁷. I would add that repeated Cuts further affect the perception of narrative duration for the audience.

Every cut is a new unit which occupies a full space, situating the frame in time, but also occupying time. A visual rendition would look similar to this: |---|-----|---| (where “-” stands for unfolding visuals, and “|” for a cut). Higher degrees of fragmentation imply a greater accumulation of empty durational units, which are neither fully inside nor outside narrative duration. They function much like borders do - they provide a separation, an outline of one space in relation to another. The marker itself belongs to neither party, but is an object in itself. Its physical space might appear insignificant in scale, but it is present. In the moving image, and as we have seen in the example above, borders can be used frequently, regardless of the size of the units they are separating/linking. Most viewers have been used to dismiss this *missing* time. Yet some jumps can be dramatic, moving from a blink to a lifetime in as little as a frame and others will fragment an event to the point of hypnosis. One must wonder, when faced with these repeated interruptions, how does the audience remain focused?

Two, Meaning

Jacques Ranciere believes that “the eye can only connect things if it does not linger on what it sees, if it does not try to look.”¹⁸ In turn, I would like to challenge the reader to perform two short exercises. First - one must try picturing the face of the last person with which one came in contact. One must attempt to isolate the face and to recall as many details as one can manage. When setting aside the wide brushstrokes (the context of the meeting, what the person was wearing, their hair colour), and depending on the level of familiarity with the subject, the exercise will cause different levels of uncertainty. It is not this variation which is of interest, but rather the idea that, regardless of circumstances, there will be some hesitation, for one will not be able to recall the face exactly. In our daily routines, we do not *try to look*. If we did, the amount of detail would become overwhelming. Instead, we focus on information which helps us navigate our surroundings: signals, such as traffic signs, visual cues, like the cashier raising their arm for the next in line and so on. We create a limited (if somewhat distracted) field of vision which helps us isolate and extract meaning.

¹⁷ Justin Remes, *Motion(less) Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015), 70. Justin Remes is an assistant professor of film studies at Iowa State University.

¹⁸ Jacques Ranciere, *The Intervals of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2014), 38

The second exercise requires the reader to find a volunteer partner. The reader should sit or stand facing their chosen partner. The reader is invited to look at the person in front of them and memorize the other's face; then to close their eyes and remember the face - *to keep the image present* - to open their eyes and layer the two images; to compare the *mind image* to the person's actual features; to question if they match; to memorize the newly formed image, the face and its layer; to close their eyes again and repeat. The image one produces in one's mind is different every time. The more one tries to reproduce the image exactly, the more distorted the image becomes. Much like the effect of the Frame, discussed above, these repeated re-tracings will emphasize certain details and erase or distort others, at different intervals. Yet the longer one can look uninterrupted at an isolated subject, the more one will remember.

Memory

Memories swell and spill into other days. Each time it is re-traced, a memory is reinstated into the present, occupying it fully. Since it is never reproduced exactly, each memory becomes a new occurrence when it is played back/ conceived. This has several implications. Most importantly, it can be said that the work of film changes with every viewer, both in the cinema, and outside of it, in this constant flux of shifting recollections. A series of questions ensue. Why do certain images stay in one's mind, over others? Why does one only remember certain moments from a film, but one cannot playback the whole work from the beginning? Is this connected with the duration some images rest on screen, long enough to imprint?

Every time there is a cut, the audience member is triggered to remember. This qualifies the act of remembrance on the moving image as an Intervention on the part of the viewer. But how does the speed of the edit shift the position of said viewer? As previously discussed, narrative encourages a backwards motion in its spectator. In order to follow a forward moving story, the audience is required to make connections. Point B is only possible because point A occurred. By cutting out *irrelevant* information, the "missing" begins to function as a link, joining *relevant* units into forming meaning. Laura Mulvey notes that in Abbas Kiarostami's work, "delay leads to a cinema of deferral, looking back and reintegrating the past in the light of later events."¹⁹ Fewer cuts of longer durations means the spectator can reflect, extract meaning and carry more information forward. Fast and abundant cuts might have the opposite effect. The audience could become overwhelmed and passive, no longer engaged in the linking of units, but rather hypnotized by the too-fast-to-follow flashes. As Steven Shaviro discusses in his book "Post Cinematic Affect", the latter has been a model employed by Hollywood in recent years to

¹⁹ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 144.

eliminate subjectivity “in favor of sheer push-button sensation”²⁰. By crippling the viewer’s ability to remember, these films attempt two things: to cripple the viewer’s agency whilst encouraging multiple viewings²¹.

Ranciere notes that “cinema is the residue of those presences that accumulates and settles in us as their reality fades and alters over time: that other cinema reconstituted by our memories and our words, which can be distinctly different from what had been projected on screen.”²² We can think of Derek Jarman’s 1993 feature film “Blue”, which presents a single static shot of a blue screen accompanied by a voiceover and soundtrack. If one was to reproduce the work in memory, one would single out the blue screen (the exact shade would most likely remain unclear), and try to summarize the story: Jarman’s illness and approaching death. The work of film would be truncated to a couple of validators: the visual and its meaning. While static films present a better opportunity at memorization, given the sparseness of their structure and the prolonged duration of fewer frames, it is ultimately the way the viewer stores and re-traces this information which affects the work. Through the memory of its audience, the work of film is in perpetual movement. The only way to contain its mutations, once it is released, would be to bury every copy and wait 500 years - a ridiculous gesture.

Detours

The movie theatre was curated to isolate the image, to contain it. The moving images were meant to be seen in preordained sequences and full, uninterrupted durational blocks. Whatever information the viewer carried outside the theatre had little impact on the way the collective experienced the work. However, we can no longer talk about a singular way of watching films. Contemporary modes of viewership have projected works of film inside a *collective memory*.²³ In her article titled “In Defense of the Poor Image”, Hito Steyerl notes that at present, “there are at least twenty torrents of Chris Marker’s film essays available online [...] you can keep the files, watch them again, even re-edit or improve them if you think it necessary. And the results circulate.”²⁴ Perhaps the most aggressive of Interventions, the collective memory functions not just as an extractor of meaning, but a re-shaper. Youtube and associates

²⁰ Steven Shapiro, *Post Cinematic Affect*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), 121.

²¹ *ibid* 12, “[...] reporting levels of consumer satisfaction previously known only to drug abusers. My movie going life will be all about the next hit.”

²² Jacques Ranciere, *The Intervals of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2014), preface.

²³ characterized by add-ons, a community of strangers, virtual acquaintances and Facebook friends where one can add/share/contribute or erase;

²⁴ Hito Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image”, *E-flux*, #10 November 2009; <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>

have brought forth an aggressive age of “re-”s: the collective will re-produce, re-frame, re-cut, re-caption the moving image.

Steyerl talks about the “poor image” as “a copy in motion. [...] a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, and itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed, as well as copied and pasted into other channels of distribution.”²⁵ Through this, the moving image has been attributed a fabricated flesh. What used to be called “the spectacle of light”, an elusive act of appearances and disappearances has turned material²⁶. In an age of consumer reproductions, where high-resolution is the new quality marker, this newly formed body of the moving image is deconstructed and re-assembled, truncated and otherwise reinterpreted to satisfy a collective craving. Fragments of films will be analyzed, stills will be pulled out to illustrate a particular concept, frames will be compared to point out continuity errors, images will be looped for sheer amusement and entire endings will be re-cut to satisfy fellow viewers under the caption “how it should have ended”. Despite Hollywood’s best efforts to regain the status quo, anyone attempting to categorize the contemporary spectator as passive should think again. Armed with the latest affordable technologies, the viewer will watch and dissect, flick through several tabs, and forever dissatisfied, carve out a new experience.

The collective memory does not remember, but rather, it purposefully *mis-remembers*. It moves neither forwards, nor backwards, but sideways. The moving image is no longer the framed subject on display, but a somewhat distant reference, or a starting point for the birth of hybrids and memes made out of *the harshest consonants*. These truncated durations travel at much faster speeds and survive through repetition, because in our “sharing” economy, going viral is yet another temporary marker for success. And more often than not, the distributed fragments are branded (/captioned) and misaligned. One will recognize a sequence of a film without ever having seen the work in its integrity. Most people who engage in the collective memory will feel entitled to the full scale of its knowledge. Having heard of, read about or watched a clip of a film becomes synonymous with having seen the film. It is no longer the experience of the work which the viewer craves, but the ability to participate in the *discussion*. Having actually seen the work grants one more authority, yet it does not stop others lacking this first-hand experience from engaging.

In the collective memory, the narrative and its image often get separated. The image is reproduced, repeated and otherwise altered in the digital realm. In light of these circumstances

²⁵ *ibid* 16;

²⁶ although in digital form, it can now be possessed, stored on hard-drives etc;

it becomes reasonable to ask, how does the story survive? Can the story survive separately from its image?

Three, Musings

Throughout this text I have discussed subtle Interventions²⁷, as well as aggressive ones. Predominantly, I have shown how these gestures affect the image (distortion, misalignment, erasures) and the experiential unfolding of the moving image (intensity variations, extractions, mis-remembrance). Ranciere claims that cinema is not a language, but “a compromise between divergent poetics, a complex interlacing of the functions of visual presentation, oral expression and narrative sequencing.”²⁸ Hence, it has a predisposition for both subtle and aggressive deconstruction. By contrast, if, conceptually, a painting can be separated into its parts (the canvas, the brush strokes, the oils and so on), after it becomes a *finished* object, it will solidify to limit further changes. The original will hang on display to annul, or at the very least disprove reproductions and alterations. Yet a work of film is only activated through the act of viewership and its parts are easily detached. One can watch a film without sound, but one cannot look at a painting and revert the mixture of oils.

The structural frame of a work of film is built upon the idea of the story, or at the very least, of sequential meaning. After all, the majority of narrative films are based on scripts. The story comes before the image. And whilst every image holds the ghostly traces of the story, the story lives outside of the image entirely. In fact, the moving image can be deemed to be an Intervention on the story, as its layers reinterpret and reimagine words into durational units. The story is the first fly, which “contains the seeds of all flies to come”²⁹. Cinema and its auxiliary modes of spectatorship are the loop of repeated Interventions which truncate the story into smaller and smaller units until its only quality becomes speed. Once it stops and folds back onto itself, it reboots to its original form. Not into words, but rather into the life before the words - because the story is an Intervention on life. And what Cinema negates in its durational aesthetic is the very space for life to manifest itself. In its attempt to capture a sliver of truth, to reproduce an authentic moment, to become life, the moving image is nothing more than a block of missing time, an illusion of the real. Its apparatus is too slow moving to provide an authentic present. Like the Frame, Cinema itself is retracing erasures. And like the Cut, it is a border, a link between what was and the space which encourages that something will follow.

²⁷ to remind the reader, an *Intervention* is a repeated action on the moving image;

²⁸ Jacques Ranciere, *The Intervals of Cinema* (London: Verso, 2014), 66

²⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (London: Continuum, 2006), 9.

I wish not to propose solutions, but rather to encourage an awareness of these Interventions and their various consequences. I would like to suggest a work a film be shown in a way which exposes its misaligned layers, acknowledges its fragmentary nature and provides enough space for the viewer to consider his/her role in the string of mutations. Instead of collapsing several durations into one forced experience, I would like to propose the opposite. Let us consider different durations in turn and ultimately allow the spectator the choice of his/her own duration. Instead of forcing the audience member to sit and act out a prescribed Intervention, I move that we allow him/her the freedom to move and live with and against the film. As Julio Garcia Espinosa stated in his manifesto, "For An Imperfect Cinema", "[imperfect] cinema must above all show the process which generates the problems. It is thus the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results, the opposite of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema, the opposite of a cinema which "beautifully illustrates" ideas or concepts which we already possess."³⁰ Instead of moving from A to B, or from B to A, I propose we explore letters outside the alphabet.

³⁰ Julio Garcia Espinosa, "For An Imperfect Cinema", *Jump Cut*, no. 20, 1979, pp. 24-26

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APPENDIX B.

VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

Creator: Irina Iordache

Description: Video documentation of the *Installation of film footage and recorded sound*, edited to highlight viewing angles and different image/sound layers.

Filename: Re-Tracing Erasures.mp4