ZEYNEP ARAS PRACTICAL EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF POST-DIGITAL CINEMA Bilkent University 2023

PRACTICAL EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF POST-DIGITAL CINEMA

A Master's Thesis

by

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To parallel synchronized randomness

PRACTICAL EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF POST-DIGITAL CINEMA

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
of
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
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PRACTICAL EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF POST-DIGITAL CINEMA
By Zeynep Aras

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

PRACTICAL EFFECTS IN THE AGE OF POST-DIGITAL CINEMA

Aras, Zeynep

M.A. in Media and Visual Studies

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Colleen Kennedy-Karpat

May 2023

This thesis examines the aesthetic implications of using practical effects in post-digital cinema. Digital effects have become more perceptually realistic than the practical effects of the analog era and thus turned into central tools in fulfilling Hollywood's obsession with photorealism. This study argues that digital effects' success in imitating a photorealist style has pushed the practical effects to leave aside their obsession with realism and search for their own aesthetic, which I call "anti-realist." Firstly, the study approaches this aesthetic difference between practical and digital effects from an ontological standpoint. By adopting Rodowick's (2007) arguments informed by Bazinian realism regarding the digital image's lack of indexicality, it conducts a close reading on Wes Anderson's anti-realist practical effects. Then, through the lens of Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," it explores how the foregrounded materiality of these effects can engage with an embodied experience of spectatorship. Moreover, by adopting a feminist approach to film studies, it proposes the use of

practical effects as a feminist tool in the French context to defy Hollywood's standardized effects in the films of Marjane Satrapi and Chloé Mazlo. Finally, it conducts an auteur study on the French director Michel Gondry's filmography to question the place of his analog techniques in constructing his transnational authorship. Overall, this thesis aims to uncover the meaning and significance of leaving aside the CG techniques that have revolutionized contemporary filmmaking in favor of so-called outdated cinematic techniques.

Keywords: Digital Effects, French Cinema, Haptic Visuality, Practical Effects, Realism

ÖZET

POST-DİJİTAL SİNEMA ÇAĞINDA PRATİK EFEKTLER

Aras, Zeynep

Yüksek Lisans, Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Ögr. Üyesi Colleen Kennedy-Karpat

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Bu tez, post-dijital sinemada pratik efekt kullanımının estetik sonuçlarını incelemektedir. Günümüz sinemasında dijital efektler, analog dönemin pratik efektlerinden algısal olarak daha gerçekçi hale gelmiş ve böylece Hollywood'un fotogerçekçilik takıntısını gidermekte temel araçlara dönüşmüşlerdir. Bu çalışma, dijital efektlerin fotogerçekçi bir üslubu taklit etmedeki başarısının, pratik efektlerin gerçekçilik saplantısını bir kenara bırakıp "anti-gerçekçi" olarak adlandırdığım kendi estetiklerini aramaya ittiğini ele almaktadır. Çalışma öncelikle pratik ve dijital efektler arasındaki estetik farklılığa ontolojik bir bakış açısıyla yaklaşmaktadır: Rodowick'in (2007) Bazinci gerçekçilik doğrultusunda tartıştığı, dijital görüntünün dizinsellikten yoksunluğuyla ilgili argümanları ışığında, Wes Anderson'ın pratik efekt kullanımının detaylı bir okumasını yapmaktadır. Ardından, Marks'ın (2000) "haptik görsellik" kavramını ele alarak, bu pratik efektlerin maddeselliğinin nasıl bedenleştirilmiş bir film deneyimi ortaya

çıkarabileceğine odaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca, film çalışmalarında feminist bir yaklaşım benimseyerek, Marjane Satrapi ve Chloé Mazlo'nun filmlerindeki efektlerin nasıl feminist bir araç olarak Hollywood'un standartlaşmış efekt estetiğine karşı koyabileceğini sorgulamaktadır. Son olarak, Michel Gondry'nin filmografisi üzerine bir auteur çalışması yürüterek, Fransız yönetmenin analog teknik kullanımıyla nasıl kendi ulusötesi auteur sinemasını yarattığını tartışmaktadır. Genel olarak bu tez, çağdaş film yapımında devrim yaratan dijital efektleri bir kenara bırakıp, sözde modası geçmiş teknikleri tercih etmenin anlam ve önemini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital Efektler, Fransız Sineması, Gerçekçilik, Haptik Görsellik, Pratik Efektler

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an era dominated by digital filmmaking, this thesis explores the tendency to return to practical effects, resulting in a more hands-on approach to filmmaking. The term "practical effects," also known as "physical," "analog," or "special effects," refers to effects produced on the set during live-action filming. They comprise miniatures, matte paintings, puppetry and animatronics, prosthetic make-ups, and stop-motion techniques (Keil & Whissel, 2016). On the other hand, digital effects, or "visual effects," refers to the effects that cannot be accomplished during live-action shooting and must instead be added in post-production (Keil & Whissel, 2016). However, as Keil and Whissel (2016) mention, the terms special and visual effects could also be used interchangeably by audiences, fans, and critics. In this study, I employ the terms "practical" and "digital" effects more prominently than the others since I believe these designations, in particular, underscore the ontological distinction between the two types of effects. As I will argue more in this chapter, this precise distinction is central to my argument.

The emergence of the digital era at the turn of the century has brought about significant changes in contemporary filmmaking practices. Since the enhancing computer technologies have become increasingly accessible and affordable, they have become commonplace tools in films, not only in generating heavy-effect sequences but in the creation of whole filmic universes (Keil & Whissel, 2016). Today, a film such as *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) is capable of generating an entire dazzling underwater universe, from the aquatic creatures to intricate water simulations such as waves, curves, and bubbles, by relying on CG methods. Moreover, the use of digital effects does not limit itself to blockbuster series such as *Avatar* with spectacular effects, but shows itself in more nuanced and subtle ways in films that are not necessarily considered effects-heavy. In that sense, since the last decades of the twentieth century, CG methods have become a prominent characteristic of filmmaking activities (Allison, 2016).

This ubiquitous use of CGI raises questions regarding where to situate the analog effects in analyzing post-digital cinema. CGI's widespread utilization has not erased practical effects from filmmaking practices. Especially Hollywood cinema continues to use practical effects alongside digital ones, albeit with less reliance on the former compared to the 1980s and 1990s. However, without a doubt, digital effects predominate in contemporary Hollywood mainstream cinema since it is more cost-effective and successful in generating perceptually realistic results. In fact, by being infinitely manipulable, CGI offers the creative freedom to generate a vast array of styles; however, Hollywood's fixation on photorealism pushes the effects companies to produce foremost persuasive, seamless, and immersive effects.

Interestingly, by maintaining a photorealist style, CGI has pushed the practical effects to search for their aesthetic independence and produce a style that defies Hollywood norms. In this study, I refer to this style as "anti-realism." Unlike what one might think, previous studies have not truly paid attention to the aesthetic of practical effects in post-digital cinema. Similar to the Hollywood industry's aspiration for photorealism, scholars whose work concentrates on the cinematic style and effects industry, such as Bordwell (1999), Prince (2012), or Turnock (2022), have been primarily interested in examining Hollywood cinema and its effects realism. Apart from that, the effects themselves, whether practical or digital, have not received much research attention despite being central to cinematic style and giving rise to various industrial, social, and economic questions. Turnock (2022) draws attention to this gap in research by stating that "cinema's so-called below-the-line facilities (that is, postproduction and support industries—beyond sound) have rarely received more than a passing reference in the… academic studies, and effects even less so" (p. 4). This thesis is a push to restore that much-needed attention on the effects style and, more specifically, question what it means to purposefully set aside so many digital tools that have revolutionized how films are made in the 21st century in favor of more analog methods.

I examine the effects' aesthetic primarily through the ontological split between practical and digital effects. In that regard, I benefit from Bazin's (2005) influential essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," where he explains how the photographic image differentiates itself from all previous arts by creating a spatiotemporal connection to its real-life subject through the photochemical process. Rodowick (2007) applies Bazin's

(2005) theories to the digital era and suggests that digital images erode the indexicality and analogy of the photographic image since it originates from pixels rather than photochemical capture of objects positioned in space and time. Considering their arguments, I contend that despite achieving an anti-realist look, the practical effects adhere to Bazinian realism by being indexically tied to the live-action shooting. In contrast, digital effects created in the postproduction lose this indexicality as they cannot participate in the primary shooting.

Furthermore, I stress the importance of this material distinction between analog and digital effects: I contend that analog methods, through their materiality, are capable of generating a more sensory and embodied experience of viewership. In that regard, I draw upon Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," which refers to vision's capacity to function as an organ of touch to create tactile connections with the image. The artificial materiality of practical effects can engage with the viewer's sense of touch and establish haptic connections with the image. I explore these aesthetic questionings through the lens of Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), creating an anti-realist undersea world through its purposefully "bad" or "fake" looking effects that defy Hollywood's mainstream aesthetic.

Moreover, I investigate how this anti-realist aesthetic of practical effects can serve as a tool within national contexts for resisting Hollywood standardization. Prince (2012) explains that in his study, he chooses to leave aside special effects because he believes these effects do not characterize contemporary filmmaking except in a very limited sense. It is important to note that Prince's (2012) study on effects focuses primarily on

the site of Hollywood cinema and does not take into account the filmmaking practices and cultures outside the US. Therefore, while Prince (2012) contends that the era of special effects is mainly finished, it is worth emphasizing that these effects continue to be utilized in other national contexts to generate an anti-Hollywood style and not in a limited sense.

In this study, I concentrate mainly on French cinema since it exhibits various examples favoring practical effects and embraces a more handcrafted approach over CG methods. Moreover, as I delve more into the methodology section of Chapter 2, compared to other national cinemas, French cinema represents a more robust system capable of supporting and protecting these kinds of non-mainstream or auteur films deviating from Hollywood's realistic style. French films, such as Marjane Satrapi's *Poulet aux prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011) or Chloé Mazlo's *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (Skies of Lebanon, 2020), display this anti-Hollywood aesthetic in ways that could also be considered feminist strategies used to evoke selfhood and subvert the white masculinist values associated with Hollywood's effects realism. Furthermore, the thesis also provides a look at the French director Michel Gondry's films and music videos that recurrently prioritize practical effects over CGI in creating a unique craft aesthetic. Specifically focusing on his French film *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006), I argue how his craft aesthetic transcends national and cultural boundaries and consequently becomes a strong marker of his transnational authorship.

The strongest motivation behind the creation of this study derives from my affinity with French cinema but, more importantly, from my infinite fandom for Michel Gondry. I

admire Gondry's capability of generating a unique craft aesthetic filled with childlike creativity and emotion, creating an alternative experience to Hollywood CGI. Moreover, Gondry finds ways to incorporate his visually innovative ideas into the stories of his films, making his work strong both aesthetically and narratively. Thanks to this particular interest in Gondry's work, over the years, I have discovered many French and European productions benefitting from similar techniques and thus become interested in writing about the aesthetic implications of using such techniques in post-digital cinema. Furthermore, I believe that being a researcher who is closely acquainted with French culture and can fluently speak the French language puts me in an advantageous position in examining these French films. As a Turkish woman who lived in France for many years, I think that I possess both insider and outsider perspectives which could generate an intriguing interpretative lens to look through these French productions.

Overall, this thesis aims at analyzing the aesthetic implications of retaining or returning to analog methods in an era dominated by digital effects. To provide an overview of the chapters: Chapter 2 discusses firstly the previous literature related to the question of indexicality in relation to cinematic realism and then introduces the literature about film phenomenology and embodied spectatorship. Following this literature, the methodology section clarifies my approach and establishes the studied film corpus. Chapter 3 examines the effects' aesthetic in contemporary cinema by conducting a close reading primarily on Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* through the mentioned conceptual frameworks of Bazin (2005), Rodowick (2007), and Marks (2000). Additionally, it also provides examples from Gondry's use of effects Gondry's *La Science des rêves* to strengthen its arguments. Chapter 4, through a feminist approach to

film studies, delves into French filmmakers, Mazlo and Satrapi's feminist use of effects in their films, respectively, *Poulet aux prunes* and *Sous le ciel d'Alice*, as a resistance to Hollywood hegemony in the global market. Chapter 5 conducts an auteur study in examining Gondry's transnational authorship constructed in significant part through his effects usage by focusing on his music videos and filmography and, in particular, *La Science des rêves*.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Realism and Indexicality in Cinema

As this thesis examines the practical and digital effects' realism in terms of their material difference, this section will center around the question of indexicality, which is considered "a commonly accepted basis for realism in cinema" (Prince, 2012, p. 3). Therefore, I will start by tracing back the relationship between photographic image and indexicality, which is primarily associated with the works of Bazin (2005), Sontag (2005), and Barthes (1981). Then, I will examine how indexicality reappeared in the 1990s and early 2000s with the digital age to discuss whether the digital image keeps the indexicality of photographic image or represents a total rupture from it. Here, my main focus will be on the digital and analog effects and the previous literature regarding the digital effects' loss of indexicality and analogy. Finally, I will evoke how the contemporary literature about effects leaves the ontological questionings behind and instead starts examining the effects industry and its discourses.

Before moving further, I should note that the previous literature I examine about the indexicality of film-based and digital images tends to exclude the semiotic aspect of the term "index." Indexicality derives primarily from Charles Peirce's philosophy, where "it functions not as a simple concept but as an aspect of a larger semiotic and philosophical system" (Gunning, 2008, p. 39). So, I should acknowledge that following the path of the previous literature I draw upon, I am chiefly interested in the index not as part of that larger semiotic system but as a mediating element providing the existential connection between the world and its image.

2.1.1. Indexicality

Indexicality has been the focal point for defining the realism of photography and cinema. Theorists such as Bazin (2005) and Barthes (1981), who were interested in photography's ontology, have never directly drawn upon the term indexicality; however, their arguments have been frequently associated with it. According to Rosen (2008), "theorists of the indexical image such as Bazin and Barthes fixated on light-sensitive chemicals as the key mediating materiality between an object and its depiction in the image" (p. 305). Hence, for Bazin (2005) and Barthes (1981), the chemical process provides the existential connection between the actual world and its image. Bazin (2005) defines photography as the most important event in the history of pictorial arts and considers it superior to the art of painting in representing the actual world. In this context, we can discuss Benjamin (1935/1968) as a precursor to Bazin (1967/2005) because he had already pointed out photography and cinema's distinction from other arts

in terms of their mechanical reproducibility.[1] According to Benjamin (1935/1968), photography and cinema, by being mechanically reproducible, lose their aura, which is a "unique phenomenon of distance," giving the artwork its authenticity and uniqueness against the contemporary masses' desire to have every reality "spatially and humanly" closer through their mechanical reproductions (pp. 222-223). Thus, photography and cinema, by being mechanically reproducible, lose their unique aura and depart from being authentic objects such as paintings or sculptures.

However, Bazin (2005), rather than emphasizing the photographic image's reproducibility, stresses how photography in itself is a mechanical reproduction of the world. According to him, photography's superiority to painting lies in a psychological fact: While painting includes "the inescapable subjectivity" of the painter, photography retains an "objective"[2] character since it is a mechanical reproduction of the world in which the human plays no role (Bazin, 2005, p. 13). In fact, after Bazin (2005), many theoreticians will argue that photographers reflect their subjectivity with various artistic choices inside the image and can manipulate the reality before their eyes in many ways. For instance, Barthes (1981) partially accepts the presence of human in the creation of photographs. According to him, "the drawing does not reproduce *everything* (often it reproduces very little)…whereas the photograph, although it can choose its subject, its point of view and its angle, cannot intervene *within* the object (except by trick effects)"

[1] Benjamin (1935/1968), regarding photography and cinema, writes that "the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" (p. 224).
[2] In French, the word *l'objectif*, translated to English as "objective," also means the camera lens. Bazin (2005) refers to both senses of the word.

(Barthes, 1977, p. 43). Moreover, without denying that photography is, first and foremost, an optical-chemical process depending on automatism, Sontag (2005) defends that it remains just as much as a painting or drawing an interpretation of the world. She states, “even when photographers are most concerned with mirroring reality, they are still haunted by tacit imperatives of taste and conscience” (Sontag, 2005, p. 4). Hence, thinking that a photograph is a truthful reproduction of the world would be a false assumption since it includes the photographer’s subjectivity.

However, photography has indeed achieved a higher degree of realism that the painting can no longer compete with, not because it excludes “the creative intervention of [human]” (Bazin 2005, p. 12) but because of its chemical process, which is the indexical character of photography. Bazin (2005) pays attention to photography’s indexicality by explaining that “photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption” (p. 14). Photography’s “embalming of time” reflects its indexical and analog character, which makes it superior to painting in representing reality. In that sense, Barthes’ (1981) and Sontag’s (2005) arguments about the indexical quality of photography echo those of Bazin (2005). According to Sontag (2005), even if painting can mimic photographic criteria of resemblance, photography stays superior because it has a unique quality of registering light waves reflected by objects. Hence, she defines photography as a trace, footprint, or a death mask, “something directly stenciled off the real” (Sontag, 2005, p. 120). Similarly, Barthes (1981) defines photography’s inimitable quality as “that-has-been,” meaning that the photographic referent, the object of photography, must have existed in the real world and been placed in front of a camera in order to get photographed (p. 77). He explains that

this unique quality of photography is possible thanks to its chemical process, which turns photography into a "laminated object" where the subject adheres to its image and becomes inseparable from it (Barthes, 1981, p. 6).

Therefore, the photographic image's indexical character equips it with spatial and temporal powers proving that the depicted object must have existed in space and time. No matter how much film-based image distorts reality, it has an existential connection to it, which other pictorial arts until photography could not acquire. Although Bazin (2005), Sontag (2005), and Barthes (1981) have similar claims regarding photography's realism, I choose to focus on Bazin (2005) in exploring how practical effects, despite adopting an anti-realist aesthetic, are nevertheless ontologically realist thanks to their materiality. I privilege Bazin's (2005) arguments for several reasons: Firstly, Sontag (2005) and Barthes (1981) were specifically writing about photography. Barthes (1981) explains that he is interested in discovering photography's unique quality that separates it from "the community of images," including cinema (p. 3).[3] Regarding this, Mulvey (2006) states that "Bazin was writing, implicitly, about the cinema; Barthes was writing explicitly not about the cinema" (p. 54). Bazin's (2005) ideas about photography find their reflection in cinema. To him, while photography was identified with objectivity, cinema represents "objectivity in time" (Bazin, 2005, p. 14). Assuming that films are objective would be unarguably wrong since, just like photographs, films include the subjectivity of their creator. However, cinema indeed bears the same indexical claim that photography does. Regarding this, Bazin (2005) reveals that while photography can

[3] See Barthes (1977) for a fuller understanding how he differentiates photography from cinema ontologically.

mummify time through its indexicality and analogy, cinema goes one step further by mummifying change in time. Secondly, Barthes (1981) approaches photography from a semiotics perspective; he defines the photograph as a sign and its object as the referent.[4] Therefore, as I underlined earlier in this chapter, I am not interested in approaching the question of indexicality by adopting a semiotics approach.

In Chapter 3, where I delve into the aesthetic of practical and digital effects, Bazinian realism will be the focal point in explaining how practical effects, through their materiality, become indexically tied to the profilmic space and share the same spatiotemporal existence as the other staging elements or actors.[5] Furthermore, the indexicality of the photographic image also manifests itself in Bazin's (2005) idea of "spatial unity." Even though, as Buckland (1999) suggests, Bazin (2005) prioritizes the concept of spatial unity throughout his work, I choose to focus on a very long footnote situated in "The Virtues and Limitations of Montage," where he explains spatial unity by giving an example from the film, *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951). According to him, the realism of a scene comes from its "homogeneity of space" (Bazin, 2005, p. 50). For instance, in *Where No Vultures Fly*, the scene where we see the protagonists (the child, his parents, and the lion) all together in the frame provides the film with an" immediate and retroactive authenticity," a sense of realism unlike the editing preceding it (Bazin, 2005, p. 49).[6] Therefore, Bazin (2005) values the spatiotemporal connection between

[4] As Gunning (2008) mentions, Barthes (1977) considers photography a sign but not an ordinary one; it is a "*message without a code*" (p. 17). To better grasp how he distinguishes photography from an ordinary sign, see Barthes (1977).
[5] Profilmic space designates the space in front of the camera (Rodowick, 2007).
[6] In the original text, Bazin (2005) uses the word *le montage*, which means "editing" in English. Even if Gray's translation leaves the word as it is, I believe we should replace montage with editing since, in English, the term montage can refer to a "montage sequence," which is a particular style of editing.

different objects in the frame, in his words, “the relation of [human] to things and to the surrounding world,” in defining the realism of the scene (p. 52). In Chapter 3, I will also utilize spatial unity to reveal how analog methods existentially relate to their environments and co-exist with other staging elements and actors, unlike CG methods lacking a material substance and thus cannot provide this indexical connection.

Furthermore, in addition to cinema being realist in its essence through its indexical and analog character, technological advancements can also contribute to and enhance its realism. To Bazin (2005), the precursors of cinema, such as Eadweard Muybridge, Étienne-Jules Marey, and the Lumière brothers, regardless of their background, had been driven by this common desire of reconstructing “a perfect illusion of the outside world in sound, color, and relief” (p. 20). Hence, for Bazin (2005), cinema becomes an “idealistic phenomenon,” constantly evolving towards an idea of “total realism,” which relies on providing a complete representation of the actual world (p. 17). He suggests that every new technical development brings cinema one step closer not only to accomplishing this mythical idea of total realism, but also to its origins: the initial aspiration for rebuilding the actual world in sound, color, and relief. Against Bazin’s (2005) idealist perspective, Comolli (1980) suggests a more material way of examining cinema’s technical progress. To Comolli (1980), the succession of technological advancements cannot be viewed as progress towards a “realism plus” in the Bazinian sense (p. 133). Hence, the appearance and disappearance of different cinematic techniques and their convergence do not follow a “rational-linear order” depending on scientific progress; instead, they take shape according to the ideologies and social demands governing cinema (Comolli, 1980, p. 121).

As Manovich (2001) reveals, Bazin's (2005) idea that cinema evolves towards a total realism seems to be relatively valid, considering that today computer images progress toward "a fuller and fuller illusion of reality," especially in Hollywood cinema (p. 189). However, in this thesis, rather than a mythical account of technological progress, I am closer to Comollli's (1980) ideas regarding how the ideologies dominating cinema determine the used technologies. Comolli (1980) argues that cinema itself is an ideological and social machine before it is technical, and its ideological function is foremost related to creating an illusion of realism; still, he recognizes that other ideologies beyond realism can give rise to different technological advancements. In Chapter 4 regarding French women filmmakers' anti-realist usage of practical effects, by evoking Comolli's (1980) non-linear structure for technological progress in cinema, I reveal how the use of analog methods by women in a national context is an ideological choice to go against Hollywood's obsession with effects realism. In Chapter 5, I examine how Gondry resists Hollywood's realist aesthetic inside the Hollywood system through the craft aesthetic formed mainly through his preference for analog methods.

2.1.2. The Arrival of Digital Cinema

The question of indexicality reappears in the 1990s and early 2000s to discuss whether digital representations constitute a rupture from the analog ones in regard to their material difference. In other words, to what extent does the digital image preserve the indexicality and analogy of the film-based image? In that sense, Binkley's (1989) arguments are essential since he focuses on the ontological difference between digital

and analog forms of representation. By following Barthes' (1981) definition that a photograph is a "laminated object," meaning that the subject adheres to its image, Binkley (1989) suggests that a photograph communicates with the world it depicts through its chemical process. He explains that "a photograph retains pictorial information in its smooth layer of light-sensitive film which quickly responds to any illumination by undergoing chemical changes that record an image" (Binkley, 1989, p. 10). On the other hand, digital representations cannot provide this direct connection to the world they depict. Binkley (1989) explains this situation as follows:

> A computer stores meta-pictorial information in a fragmented array of discrete numbers, which cannot communicate directly with the depicted or the observing world: some kind of translation is required before this set of abstruse digits can record or represent anything visual. In this *digital* format, defined not by a physical medium but a conceptual structure, pictorial space is approached analytically, fragmented into regular rows and columns of small dots called *pixels* (picture elements). (p. 10)

In that sense, Binkley (1989) draws attention to the material difference between analog and digital information: The photography's "concrete physical grains of chemicals" are substituted by "an intangible array of numbers" in the digital format (p. 10).[7] This change in materiality retains digital information from depicting any place in any real-time since it can only represent "the numerical contents of a frame buffer," even if the resulting image can seem like a photograph in its appearance (Binkley, 1989, p. 10). Hence, the digital format erodes the indexicality and analogy of photographic image since it cannot provide a direct connection to the world it represents due to its lack of

[7] Binkley (1989) also draws attention to the medium difference between photography and computer. According to Binkley (1989), unlike photography, which uses a physical substrate essential to gather pictorial information in an analog form, the computer doesn't acquire a medium that makes the information "disanalogous" to its source (p. 18). For a broader discussion on how computer is not a medium, See Binkley (1990).

materiality. Similarly, Legrady (1995) will argue that Barthes' "having-been-there," which is the unique quality of a photograph, turns into a "could possibly be" in the digital image since it does not have to depend ontologically on the real world and its creation could be completely fictive (p. 191).

Furthermore, the digital's loss of indexicality has also raised discussions around whether digital photographs can be considered as photographs in a traditional sense or whether we are facing the end of photography. The digital's lack of physical substance, for Willis (1990), signifies the death of photography in some senses: Even if the digital image can seem indistinguishable from a photograph in its appearance,[8] its substance has changed. Hence, this change in materiality makes the digital image lose the indexicality of the photographic image and makes it only keep its iconicity (Willis, 1990). Similarly, Legrady (1995) defines digital photographic image not as a photograph but as "simulated photographic representation" since it is composed of discrete elements called pixels, even if it can become visually indiscernible from analog photography (p. 190). On the other hand, scholars such as Rosen (2001) or Gunning (2008), whose arguments about digital cinema's embrace of the indexicality of analog images will be privileged later in this section, will argue the contrary. According to Rosen (2001), if the digital camera totally breaks the indexicality of analog, it couldn't have been sold as a replacement, or given the right context, it couldn't have taken the shape of an indexical photograph as in the case of photo-journalism. Moreover, Gunning (2008) will argue

[8] Willis (1990), as Barthes (1981), approaches photography's ontology from a semiotics perspective. She defines photography's naturalistic qualities as its iconicity and indexicality. Willis (1990) describes the latter as "the resemblance between sign and referent" (p. 201).

that no matter how much the fact that we can translate photographic images into a number-based system represents a revolutionary process, it does not go beyond being a technological process in the history of photography. Gunning (2008) suggests that "the digital revolution will change how photographs are made, who makes them, and how they are used—but they will still be photographs" (p. 38).

So far, all mentioned scholars have been interested in the ontological difference between analog and digital image: Binkley (1989) and Legrady (1995) examined it by mainly focusing on digital art. However, for the purposes of this study, it is crucial to question how the arrival of digital has also affected the very nature of cinema. According to Manovich (2001), computer media completely altered cinema's identity, which was once "the art of index"; in other words, "an attempt to make art out of footprint" (p. 295). However, with the arrival of digital, the live-action footage central to analog cinema has turned into raw material to be manipulated on a computer; digital cinema has become capable of altering individual frames or entire scenes or even creating photorealist scenes without using an actual camera (Manovich, 2001). Manovich (2001) argues that this capability of manual construction retained cinema from being an indexical art and turned it into a subgenre of painting.[9] Even though his ideas about cinema approaching the art of painting rather than photography are debatable, digital cinema indeed loses the indexicality and analogy inherent to the film-based image. In a similar vein, Rodowick (2007) questions what cinema is in the digital age since "for the first time in the history of film theory, the photographic process is challenged as the

[9] For a different perspective on the discussion about cinema's similarity to the art of painting in the digital age, see also Prince (2012).

basis of cinematic representation" (p. 9). Rodowick (2007) argues that the shift in materiality becomes crucial in questioning the transition from analog to digital. Thanks to its photo-chemical substance, the celluloid film represents a spatiotemporal molding of the originating event; on the other hand, the digital cannot acquire film's spatial and temporal powers because it comes into existence through algorithmic functions and numerical manipulations (Rodowick, 2007). Therefore, he explains that in CGI, "analogy exists as a function of spatial recognition…but it has lost its anchors from both substance and indexicality" (Rodowick, 2007, p. 10). In Chapter 3, I will benefit from Rodowick's (2007) arguments regarding the digital image's loss of indexicality in explaining how the digital effects, unlike their analog counterparts, cannot ontologically exist in the profilmic space and thus lose their indexical connection to the live-action footage.

Furthermore, because of their lack of materiality, digital images become radically more manipulable compared to analog images. Binkley (1989) explains that the grains inside an analog image are not individually manipulable; they work "as groups in consort to record a relatively continuous gradation of colors or shades of grey"; on the other hand, every pixel in a digital image becomes individually controllable (p. 17). Furthermore, while the analog image can be degraded with successive manipulations, the digital image can be unlimitedly processed without any trace or damage, thanks to its lack of materiality. Willis (1990) explains that "manipulation, once a series of awkward processes borrowed from other media, most particularly painting, becomes an intrinsic feature of the new computer based medium" (p. 201). The manipulation as an inherent quality of the digital image will also be its creative force. The digital's "lack of closure"

(Rodowick, 2007, p. 15) or its "practically infinite manipulability" (Rosen, 2001, p. 319) gives the artists the possibility to rework, reappropriate or recontextualize images readily. However, theoreticians such as Gunning (2008) would be cautious in defining digital image's manipulability as a revolutionary process: To him, the manipulation's quality, ease, and speed are much more enhanced in the digital. Nonetheless, such developed malleability does not really represent a rupture from analog photography which could also manipulate its image through various processes such as the choice of angle and exposure time or the usage of different lenses or filters, specially prepared chemicals while developing. Gunning (2008) explains that "traditional photography, therefore, also possesses processes that can attenuate, ignore, or even undo the indexical" (p. 26). As much as I agree with Gunning (2008) that photography is also malleable and thus could break the indexical, still, digital's manipulability remains a revolutionary process since it is much more flexible and practically endlessly reworkable, thereby offering unprecedented creative possibilities to artists.

However, despite its creative force, the digital image is mainly obsessed with simulating a photorealist aesthetic. Rosen (2001) names digital's capability of faking preexisting compositional forms as "digital mimicry" and highlights that digital is capable of imitating not only photography but any kind of non-digital image (p. 309). However, by taking into account Darley's (1990) view that starting from the 1970s, computer imaging follows a depictive path that values the realism, accuracy, and convincingness of image composition, Rosen (2001) suggests that the photographic image acquiring indexical ties to the real world has become a leading candidate to simulate. According to Rosen (2001), "the compositional flexibility of this imaging technology, which is supposed to

be non- or even antiphotographic,[10] includes imitating photograph form" (p. 309). Furthermore, Rosen (2001) is not the only one underlining digital's aspiration for photorealism: according to Rodowick (2007), even though digital processes have brought a lot of stylistic innovations, photorealism remains central to digital imaging. Similarly, Manovich (2001) will argue that the main goal of computer graphics is to attain a photorealist aesthetic, even though we are often under the misconception that what they fake is not the reality seen through a lens, but the reality itself, since over time we accepted photographic or cinematic images as reality because of their indexical character. In Chapter 3, I draw upon these arguments in discussing contemporary CGI's rootedness in photorealism, especially in Hollywood cinema, against practical effects' anti-realist style.

Despite losing the photographic image's indexicality because of its substance difference, what digital chiefly attempts to achieve remains on the level of photographic realism. Manovich (2001) explains that CGI visually is indistinguishable from conventional photographs, yet; in terms of their materiality, these two differ greatly since digital is made of pixels which are each coded by numbers. Furthermore, the digital era's obsession with photographic realism can also make one question whether the digital image represents a radical rupture from the photographic image. Concerning this, Rodowick (2007) raises the question of "if the digital is such a revolutionary process of image making, why is its technological and aesthetic goal to become perceptually indiscernible from an earlier mode of image production?" (p. 11).

[10] Rosen (2001) also contends that even the presence of digital mimicry emphasizes how much artists have turned to pre-existing visual codes.

Theoreticians also question whether the digital image is a revolutionary process or represents an actual rupture from analog forms of representations; they will even search for ways to bridge the digital and the indexicality. Rosen (2001) will argue that digital's strong attachment to photorealism and its ability to fake it perfectly shows that it does not entirely exclude the indexicality of the photographic image. Thus, against theorists' common tendency to evoke the digital as radically opposed to indexicality and the analog image as "the most exemplary 'other' of the digital image," he suggests that the sheer fact that we can transfer analog images into digital format shows that the digital does not completely sever ties with indexicality (Rosen, 2001, p. 314). Gunning (2008) will also search for ways of gathering the digital and indexicality under the same roof, though more importantly, he will get to the core of the matter by questioning whether the term indexicality itself is enough to describe what photography is in its essence, or our fascination with photographs in general. He suggests that the term indexicality deriving from semiotics cannot fully account for our "phenomenological fascination with photography that involves a continuing sense of relation between the photograph and a preexisting reality" (Gunning, 2008, pp. 33-34). He further explains that what strikes us in photography is not primarily its indexicality which is its chemical process, or any mode of production for that matter, whether analog or digital, but "its sense of perceptual richness and nearly infinite detail" which makes us immediately start inhabiting the image even if it concerns the discovery of an impossible world (Gunning, 2008, p. 34). Therefore, even when its indexicality is harmed, considering examples such as digitally manipulated photographs, photography still has something to offer us that other forms of visual representation cannot (Gunning, 2008). Further, he would also

argue that theoreticians are content with associating Bazin's (2005) and Barthes's (1981) arguments about photography's ontology with indexicality; however, to them, the relation between the referent and a sign is a complex one, and photographic image's "irrational power…to bear away our faith" (Bazin, 2005, p. 14) cannot be explained with simple index.

I agree with Gunning (2008) that the term indexicality can remain insufficient in defining what distinguishes photography from other pictorial arts. However, it remains an essential term in reflecting the ontological difference between analog and digital media. Thus, as the previous literature I draw upon shows, it has been frequently used by scholars interested in the emergence of digital media in the 1990s and early 2000s. In this study, I utilize this concept in indicating the ontological difference between practical and digital effects. I mainly concentrate on how, unlike practical effects, CGI cannot be ontologically realist since it comes to existence out of pixels. Though scholars such as Buckland (1999) and Prince (2012), who were writing specifically about the realist aesthetic of digital effects, will argue the exact contrary; that digital effects somehow do not erode the indexicality which has been central to cinematic realism. Prince (2012) suggests that the transition from analog to digital has had an anxious tone since the common thought was that the digital image degrades in many ways the indexicality of the photographic image and thus "undermines the reality status of cinematic images, rendering viewers doubtful about the credibility of all cinematic images" (p. 4). Regarding this, Prince (2012) explains that his views coincide with those of Rosen (2001), who had previously defended that the digital is still in contact with the indexicality of the photographic image and often embraces compositional forms

connected with indexicality. Prince (2012) will apply to digital effects Rosen's (2008) reflection on the digital image's incorporation of indexicality to the digital effects. He would defend that computer-generated imagery does not entirely erode the indexicality of photographic images because what remains under the digital manipulations can have indexical ties to reality, such as in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008) (Prince, 2012). For instance, to turn Brad Pitt's character Benjamin younger or older, they used an animated computer model deriving from a Lidar scan of Pitt's face; hence, even if the actor is not physically present in the profilmic space, we recognize the traces of his actual face embedded in this model (Prince, 2012). Similarly, Gunning (2008) will argue that the power of many digital manipulations derives from us perceiving them before anything as "manipulated photographs"; in other words, being fully aware of the layers of index located under the digital manipulation and taking pleasure out of it. As I argue in Chapter 3, the fact that we take pleasure from seeing this "indexical" trace under the manipulated effects also concerns the spectacular side of the digital effects, no matter how they attempt to become relatively transparent, photorealist, and flawless in Hollywood aesthetic: What we really want to see is not the effects themselves but how Brad Pitt's face is embedded in them and how they are capable of transforming the "indexical."

Furthermore, beyond attempting to prove the ways digital image embraces the indexicality of photographic images, scholars also argue that the digital creates new forms of indexicality and realism. Prince (2012), by mainly targeting Hollywood scenery, claims that the effects objects such as *Jurassic Park*'s (1993) digitally created dinosaurs can become so perceptually realistic that even though they cannot be indexical

as we "traditionally" perceive this category, they can still make indexical claims through their persuasiveness. Similarly, Buckland (1999), also through *Jurassic Park,* had previously argued that the fact that digital effects and actors can appear in the same shot shows that they conform to Bazin's (1991) ontological realism, which restores the decors and settings with an "existential density" (p. 88). Prince's (2012) and Buckland's (1999) arguments sound problematic because even if digital effects can seem indexical in their appearance, their lack of substance, the fact that they cannot ontologically co-exist with actors or staging elements, would keep them from making any indexical claim. As I will reveal in more depth in Chapter 3, Buckland (1999) would contradict himself by accepting that the co-existence of the digitally formed effects objects and actors within the same shot creates a new kind of realism that could only become an "illusion" of spatial unity in the Bazinian sense. In Chapter 3, I also mention Prince's (2012) and Buckland's (1999) arguments which go completely against my argument since they disregard the digital's lack of materiality and, therefore, the impossibility of any indexical claim. By revealing their contradictory views, I tend to strengthen mine, which concerns how analog methods, unlike CGI, are spatiotemporal constituents of the live-action and, therefore, can conform to indexicality and spatial unity central to Bazinian realism.

2.1.3. The Industrial Take on Digital Effects

The contemporary research on digital effects left aside the discussions around the digital image's loss of indexicality heightened in the 1990s and early 2000s and began concentrating on the effects industry itself and its discourses. Thus, scholars have started

focusing on specific industrial moments to understand the effects' aesthetics and the change of cinematic style in general. According to Bordwell and Staiger (2005), if we can acknowledge that there isn't any lawlike pattern for technological progress in the classical Hollywood style, we can search for particular historical circumstances controlling and shaping it. In that sense, teleological claims regarding cinematic styles, such as Bazin's (2005) idea of total realism, poses problems since as Bordwell and Staiger (2005) explain:

> Any such conception of progress ignores the ways in which technological change has often reduced stylistic options. The classical style has not changed in a cumulative or additive fashion, nor has technology always left room for a return to discarded practices. (p. 479)

Bordwell and Staiger's (2005) argument that technology does not always leave room for discarded practices is also valid when thinking of analog and digital effects in Hollywood cinema. Even though analog effects are still being used in conjunction with CGI, they are certainly not the norm anymore. Furthermore, as Prince (2012) explains from a historical perspective, in the analog period, visual effects such as matte paintings, miniatures, stop motion puppetry were "special" not only because they were considered as practices supplementing live-action cinematography but also because their matches with actors and elements of mise-en-scene were generally visible. On the other hand, CGI, through its relative transparency, and its success in copying photorealist style, pervades filmmaking practices, especially in contemporary Hollywood cinema, and consequently, as Manovich (2011) suggests, turns live-action footage into raw material to be manipulated rather than simply supplementing it as analog effects do. Nonetheless, even if analog effects turn into discarded practices in the center (Hollywood filmmaking practices), they find new forms of utilization in the periphery (national contexts). In

Chapter 4, by revealing French women filmmakers' usage of such analog methods in an anti-realist manner, I discuss how analog effects as discarded practices in Hollywood cinema can turn into a feminist tool in a national context to go against Hollywood's effects realism. In chapter 5, similarly, I will concentrate on Michel Gondry's usage of practical effects as a transnational auteur whose filmography includes both American and French films and discuss how he defies Hollywood's aesthetic inside the Hollywood system itself by applying a long-established voluntarily anti-realist, do-it-yourself style to his American films.

Furthermore, Bordwell and Staiger (2005) leave aside idealist and mythical accounts about change in cinematic style, such as Bazin's (2005) total realism, the idea that every new cinematic technique carries cinema one step further by representing a complete illusion of reality. Instead, the authors' views on technical progress resonate with those of Comolli (1980). For them, technological progress does not follow a precise direction; instead, as Comolli (1980) claims, it has a fundamentally non-linear structure (Bordwell & Staiger, 2005). According to them, "the direction of change in the classical Hollywood style has been not linear but dispersed, not a progress toward a goal but a series of disparate shifts (Bordwell & Staiger, 2005, p. 479). However, their claims about change in style and cinematic realism also differ greatly from those of Comolli (1980) because, as Manovich (2001) explains, Comolli (1980) perceives realism "as an effect produced between the image and the historical viewer and continuously sustained through the ideologically determined additions and substations of cinematic technologies and techniques" (p. 187). On the other hand, Bordwell and Staiger (2005) situate realism in industrial discourses as "a rational and pragmatic tool in industrial competition"

(Manovich, 2001, p. 187). Further to that, they claim that the structure for technological progress in Hollywood cinema is mainly non-linear but not random either; it follows the industrial discourses which reinforce standards to new technologies, and these technologies, in return, should become standards themselves which help to generate "better storytelling, greater realism and enhanced spectacle" (Bordwell & Staiger, 2005, p. 475). Hence, in their research, they focus on specific industrial discourses such as those of the SMPE (Society of Motion Picture Engineers), which try to enhance an already defined and standardized aesthetic system (the classical Hollywood style) with an ideology of progress in mind (Bordwell & Staiger, 2005). In the discourses of SMPE members, Bordwell and Staiger (2005) locate values such as "'showmanship', realism and invisibility" as determining the direction of change in cinematic style and adopt Goldsmith's (1934 president of SMPE) definition of realism (p. 490). This definition unlike Bazin's (2005) teleological view, perceives realism as a rational engineering goal and concerns "the production of an acceptable semblance of reality" (Bordwell & Staiger, 2005, p. 491).

I strongly agree that to have a more concrete understanding of the change in style and realism in Hollywood cinema, we should also consider the specific industrial moments that determine which technologies are used. However, as Manovich (2001) questions, I am not so sure that we can confine cinematic realism to a rational function or merely an engineering aim in the hope of eliminating Bazin's (2005) idealist view on technical innovation. More importantly, Manovich (2001) believes that Bordwell and Staiger's (2005) definition of realism in Hollywood style as the production of an acceptable semblance of reality does not necessarily specify Hollywood cinema, instead remaining

transhistorical and general, which retains it from providing any real account of the direction of technological progress. Similar to Manovich (2001), Turnock (2022) points out the impossibility of having a general and determined definition of realism towards which the cinematic styles or effects, in particular, are evolving; rather it is different industrial and cultural-historical contexts that shape the realism standards at a given time. Therefore, in her study about ILM (Industrial Light & Magic) and its long-established and internationally deployed effects aesthetic, Turnock (2022) concentrates on realism as "stylized components of an industrial aesthetic with historical contours" (p. 6) and states that she is not interested in examining effects' aesthetic through the previous discussions around Bazinian philosophies of cinema's ontology.

In that sense, Turnock's (2022) approach to examining the aesthetic of digital effects in mainstream Hollywood cinema echoes the study of Bordwell and Staiger (2005), who have also questioned how specific industrial contexts can influence and enhance classical Hollywood style. Moreover, Turnock's (2022) research holds special interest for the present study, as she provides an industrial approach to examine effects' aesthetics by focusing on an industry-leading force, ILM, and its long-established aesthetic standards for effects realism. Turnock (2022) explains that the previous studies, such as those of Manovich (2001) and Prince (2012), have neglected special and digital effects "constructed, historically based and stylized" aesthetic and instead consider the contemporary effects realism style as "natural, inevitable and ahistorical" since they deduce that effects imitate the actual world seen by the human eye or a camera lens and is compatible with human's aspiration for mimesis (p. 10). Instead, Turnock (2022) argues that it is mainly ILM, *the empire of effects*, which over its lifetime has developed

an international aesthetic and standards for effects realism that Turnock (2022) names "ISER" (the international standards for effects realism), which pushes other filmmaking companies including those outside of Hollywood to adopt it (p. 145).

However, ISER does not signify "cultural imperialism in a straightforward way," (Turnock, 2022, p. 146). In other words, not every filmmaking practice or culture must accept and absorb entirely these aesthetic standards for their effects which could also be an unreachable goal considering that they don't necessarily have access to the expensive technological advantages of ILM. Still when it is available, they can benefit from ISER to play to the global market, show their technological capacity or even resist Hollywood's aesthetic dominance in the industry. In this study, I emphasize the latter and concentrate on how directors subvert and reshape ISER and thus can go against the center's aesthetic dominance through the anti-realism of their effects. Turnock (2022) herself briefly mentions a few of these directors, such as Michel Gondry and Wes Anderson, who use their effects in an "anti-naturalist" way and thus contrast sharply with ILM's standards for effects realism (p. 155).

Especially in Chapter 5, I will benefit from Turnock's (2022) arguments in questioning how Michel Gondry, as a transnational auteur, can go against Hollywood style inside the Hollywood system itself through his analog methods. Furthermore, Turnock (2022) emphasizes that ILM's effects realism mostly derives from the aesthetic of the 1970s New Hollywood auteurist movement, which is strongly associated with "white masculinist auteurist values" (p. 14). In chapter 4, I will benefit from Turnock's (2022) arguments about male dominant Hollywood industry in arguing how French women

directors use the anti-realist style of effects as a feminist strategy inside a national context to resist ILM's obsession with effects realism stemming from white masculinist auteurist values.

ILM's effects realism centers on values such as credibility, transparency, and photorealism which gain prominence, especially when digital effects are merged with the live-action footage. Manovich (2001) argues that we often consider synthetic computer-generated imagery as inferior to photographic images, yet in fact, they are "*too perfect*" and even "*too real*" (p. 202). As he explains, these images from the human vision perspective appear hyperreal; still, this quality does make them "*an inferior representation of our reality, but a realistic representation of a different reality*" (Manovich, 2001, p. 202). Therefore, when effects artists try to marry CGI with live-action shooting, they need to degrade it in various ways to make it compatible with the imperfect photographic image. So, they diminish CGI's perfection, which was initially free of focus, clean, and sharp, by reducing its resolution, softening its edges adding depth of field, grain, or effects such as motion-blur. Thus, CGI tries to erase its own recognition and substance from the image in the hope of appearing, as Turnock (2022) suggests, "as if no post-production technology was used at all" (p. 13). Thus, ILM's effects realism contrasts with the unrealistic style of practical effects, which can attempt to bring out their unrealistic materiality as much as possible.

In Chapter 3, as well as arguing about the realism of analog and digital effects and centering this discussion around their material difference, I also show why this material difference is worth examining beyond the question of indexicality and cinema's

ontology. In that regard, by adopting Marks' (2000) approach to "haptic visuality" and "optical visuality," I discuss that unlike digital effects' intention to hide their hyperrealism, the visibly unrealistic materiality of analog effects can generate tactile connections between the viewer and the image. Therefore, the following section concerns the previous literature on film-phenomenology and how the experience of watching a film can become an embodied and tactile act that can appeal to senses other than vision and hearing.

2.2. Phenomenology and Film Studies

Since this study examines how practical effects' materiality can appeal to the sense of touch, this section delves into film-phenomenology and explores how the experience of watching a film concerns not only the vision, but the whole body of the viewer. It first briefly discusses phenomenology and sheds light on the previous literature concerning how we can approach film studies phenomenologically. Later, it draws attention to embodied spectatorship studies and questions the bodily being of spectators and their relation to other bodies (the fictional characters' and the film's body) participating in this experience. Finally, it concentrates on the cinematic experience's capability to address the sense of touch, revealing Laura Marks' (2000) approach to haptic and optical visuality.

2.2.1. Film-Phenomenology

"In a way, film *is* phenomenology: a way of seeing the world, and us" (Chamarette, 2016, p. 319).

In the experience of watching a film, we not only conceive and feel the movies through our vision and hearing but these two invite other senses into this experience, such as smelling, touching, and tasting, and sometimes our whole body. However, according to Sobchack (2004), contemporary film theory largely neglected this "bodily being at the movies" and has had difficulties understanding "how it is that "movies 'move' and 'touch' us bodily" (p. 59). Moreover, contemporary film theory has mainly posited the "full-bodied vision" of the viewer as a "distance sense" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 59) and considered the body(ies) involved the film experience (the viewer's, the characters' and the film's body) as objects among others. However, as Sobchack (2004) writes "the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*" (p. 60).

Therefore, to fully grasp the presence of the material body(ies) in the movie experience, which perceives and senses the film, theoreticians whose ideas I draw upon throughout this section advocate for a phenomenological approach to film studies. Chamarette (2016) defines phenomenology as "the study of things as they appear in the world" (p. 312). Therefore, phenomenology is concerned with the present moment: it examines

"what we see, how we perceive, and how those perceptions shape or become the world that is constitutive of both our environment and of us" (Chamarette, 2016, p. 312). Here, I should also underline Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (2005) views since his philosophical account of existential phenomenology is embedded in the writings of many theoreticians interested in film-phenomenology such as Sobchack (2004), Beugnet (2007), Barker (2009), Ince (2013) and in some senses Marks (2022).[11] As Barker (2009) argues, Merleau-Ponty's (2005) philosophy centers around our material bodily being in the world: we are inserted in this world through our body, which is the only way we relate to and make sense of it. In that sense, Barker (2009) explains:

> This is not to say that the lived body *constitutes* the world around it, or that it is acted upon by a world that is always already determined. Rather, the body is 'meaning-giving' and 'sense-bestowing'; that is, it makes possible my relations with the world. (p. 17)

Therefore, Chamarette (2016) underlines that for Merleau-Ponty (2005), we are before anything "beings-in-the-world" who can only perceive and think about the world through our material body (p. 312). Since we cannot think of our bodily being apart from the world, our perception of things cannot be excluded from it either (Chamarette, 2016). In that sense, in Merleau-Pontian thinking, the perception "rather than being an inner, subjective, mental state as for so much previous philosophy" designates "a mode of being in the world," and consequently, all perception is considered embodied (Ince, 2013, p. 608). Thus, Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology questions our embodied perception of the world and centers on the "phenomena of experience and

[11] Ince (2013) explains that Marks does not accept Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology straightforwardly; however, her work on intercultural cinema and the memories of sense remain impacted by Merleau-Ponty's thoughts about "the sensual involvement of our bodies in the world (and in particular, about how the encoding of history in our bodies influences our perception)" (p. 604).

their meaning as spatially and temporally embodied, lived and valued" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 2).

Similarly, film-phenomenology focuses on the experience of watching a movie as an embodied act and interrogates, describes and accounts for the circumstances that give rise to, or result from, this experience (Chamarette, 2016). Hence, rather than solely considering the formal and narrative qualities of the film itself or the viewers' identification with characters and the film's fictional universe, a phenomenological approach to film studies perceives the film and the viewer acting together, correlationally (Barker, 2009). Furthermore, film-phenomenology acknowledges the multiplicity of bodies concerned in the film-watching experience, which are the body of the spectators, the characters, and the film itself, and examines their intertwined, sensual and intimate relation. I underline the word "intertwined" because, from a Merleau-Pontian perspective, the fact that we cannot think of ourselves as separate from the world prevents us from talking about subjects and objects with any clear distinction (Chamarette, 2016). Therefore, according to Chamarette (2016):

> When we look at film, what film looks at, and the positions from which we look, these are part of a continuum, rather than distinct and separate concerns…phenomenology is interested in the ways that film experience manifests itself, which may indeed flow between subjects, objects, and others that slip beyond the category of either 'subject' or 'object.' (pp. 312-313)

In this study, I am interested in this continuum between onscreen and offscreen bodies and how they exist in an intimate, sensuous relation to each other. In Chapter 3, I examine how practical effects through their unrealistic materiality can heighten these sensuous connections between the different bodies involved in the movie-watching

experience and argue that they can appeal to senses beyond sight and hearing, such as touch. In this regard, the next section will examine the previous literature regarding embodied spectatorship studies and take a closer look at the body(ies) and senses concerned in the film experience.

2.2.2. Embodied Spectatorship

Film-phenomenology centers on the viewer's experience of watching a film and questions how we perceive, sense, and make sense of the movie through our bodily being. The studies around embodied spectatorship concentrate chiefly on the bodily reactions, sensations, and emotions occurring between the film's, viewer's, and characters' bodies during the cinematic experience.[12] According to Chamarette (2016), studies of spectatorship have already assumed that the screen is not the only place where the meaning is made for a film. However, embodied spectatorship studies go one step further and intend to discover how a movie can affect the viewer's entire body, such as breathing, emotions, sensations, and memory (Chamarette, 2016). By taking into account these embodied structures involved in the film-watching experience, studying embodied spectatorship "allows for a sensually formed (and informed) understanding of the ways that meaning and significance emerge in and are articulated through the fleshy, muscular and visceral engagement that occurs between film' and viewer's bodies" (Barker, 2009, p. 4).

[12] Aside from the viewers, the characters, and the film's body, theoreticians of film phenomenology also mention the presence of the filmmaker's body (Sobchack, 2004; Barker, 2009). However, this study prioritizes the other bodies involved since it chiefly concentrates on the viewer's tactile relation to the filmic image. Further to that, as I also mention in the following section, the filmmaker's body has an "indirect and only re-represented" presence in the film-watching experience (Sobchack, 1992, p. 9).

The term body itself and its usage by different theoreticians poses many questions not only in the scope of film-phenomenology or film studies but also in contemporary humanities. Sobchack (2004) reveals that the body has been a focal point for contemporary humanities and cultural studies, yet, it has been considered primarily as "an object among other objects—most often like a text or sometimes like a machine" (p. 3). In fact, many scholars have used the term "without much sense of bodiliness in their analysis" (Csordas, 1994, as cited in Sobchack, 2004, p. 3). In that regard, Sobchack (2004) argues that we need to turn our attention from body to embodiment, which she defines as "the material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an *irreducible ensemble*" (p. 4).

Therefore, paying attention to the film experience as an embodied act and concentrating on the sensuous relations between the bodies involved in the film experience is relatively new. Barker (2009) explains that in recent years, many media scholars have turned their attention to embodied spectatorship and started questioning the historical and theoretical implications of particular forms of embodiment experienced by the viewers. I would argue that the reason we have waited for so long to focus on cinema as an embodied experience is that we have neglected the presence of the body and its senses apart from vision and hearing. We get used to thinking that the only sense we use while watching a film is our vision because of its "overarching mastery and comprehension of objects and its historically hierarchical sway over our other senses" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 63). Sobchack (2004) argues that we never sense and make sense of a film solely through our vision; the other senses are always present in this experience, yet, vision's cultural hegemony obscures our awareness of their presence. Furthermore, she mentions that

vision's normative dominance is often defeated in experimental and avant-garde cinema; still, narrative cinema can also offer us rare moments where we, as spectators, become aware of our senses aside from sight and hearing (Sobchack, 2004). In Chapter 3, I contend that the films in question in this study, such as Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), Gondry's *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006) offer the viewers these rare moments where the dominance of the vision become often overthrown through their effects usage. I question how their effects' unrealistic materiality and artificiality use our dominant sense of sight and hearing to speak to our sense of touch.

The fact that the cinema can transform our dominant senses of vision and hearing into senses such as smelling, touching, and tasting shows its capacity to paradoxically generate "non-audiovisual sense experiences" as an audio-visual medium (Marks, 2000, p. 2). According to Sobchack (2004), the fact that we benefit from all our senses in the film experience turns us, the spectators, into what she defines as the "cinesthetic subject" (p. 67). She explains that "cinesthetic subject" derives from three separate terms: cinema, synaesthesia, and coenaesthesia (Sobchack, 2004). In common sense (disregarding its medical sense), synaesthesia designates a translation and exchange between different senses (Sobchack, 2004). Coenaesthesia refers to how equally available senses heighten or lessen in various ways, with the power of history and culture controlling their boundaries and regulating them hierarchically (Sobchack, 2004). In sum, the cinesthetic subject defines the film spectator "who through an embodied vision in-formed by the knowledge of the other senses, 'makes sense' of what it is to 'see' a movie" (Sobchack, 2004, pp. 70-71). Moreover, the cinesthetic subject can

translate this multiplicity of senses occurring in the film experience into each other. For instance, Sobchack (2004) claims that the spectator can communicate and translate seeing to touching and back again instantaneously. This interconnectivity of senses is also underlined in Merleau-Ponty's (2005) existential phenomenology, which suggests that "the senses translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and they are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea" (p. 273). Further, in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (2005) writes:

> The form of objects is not their geometrical shape: it stands in a certain relation to their specific nature, and appeals to all our other senses as well as sight. The form of a fold in linen or cotton shows us the resilience or dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material. (p. 267)

Sobchack (2004) acknowledges Merleau-Ponty's (2005) views about the intercommunication of senses and argues that in our daily life, we have become so used to the "constant cross-modal translations of our sensory experience" that we don't realize them except when they appear in their most striking form (p. 70). As mentioned earlier, in this study, I am interested in how practical effects through their materiality can render the intercommunication between senses so intensified that spectators can become aware of their sense of touch participating in the film-viewing experience.

Further, it is also crucial to discuss the body(ies) involved in the film experience, which concerns not only the viewer's body but also the characters' and the film's bodies. As mentioned earlier, a phenomenological approach to film studies does not draw a dividing line between these bodies; instead, it argues that they exist in a continuum. Sobchack (2004) defines her own experience of seeing Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) and centers chiefly on the film's first shot, which is a point-of-view shot in which we see the

protagonist's fingers in a blurry extreme close-up. Regarding this, Sobchack (2004) writes:

> I did not understand those fingers as 'those' fingers—that is, at a distance from my own fingers and objective in their 'thereness.' Rather, those fingers were first known sensually and sensibly as 'these' fingers and were located ambiguously both off-screen and on—subjectively 'here' as well as objectively 'there,' 'mine' as well as the image's. (p. 63)

As Sobchack's (2004) phenomenological description of this first shot shows, the bodies in the film experience do not have a distanced and objective relation but primarily exist in relation to each other without any clear distinction. Thus, as spectators, while watching a film, we are not part of "a distant experience of observation, which the notion of cinema as purely visually medium presumes" (Barker, 2009, p. 2). Our subjective experience of watching a film requires us being "here," within our physical bodies, "there" within the film and in-between these two states (Chamarettte, 2016). In a similar sense, Barker (2009) explains that in the film experience, we are situated not inside the film but not entirely outside of it either; instead, we exist in-between, in a space where the surfaces of our body and film's body enter an intimate contact with each other. According to her, the close relationship between these bodies prevents us from thinking of the viewer and film in opposition to each other; instead, it shows that these two are intersubjectively connected (Barker, 2009).

Furthermore, theoreticians, by taking into account the multiple bodies in the film experience, argue that even though while watching a movie, we can identify with characters and the fictional world, this comes secondary to our primary identification with the film's body. According to Sobchack (2004), film's body designates the material

and embodied existence of film, which is not limited to the apparatus and has a discrete existence that only becomes apparent when it is discovered and located as a "quasi-subjective and embodied 'eye'" (p. 66). Similar to Sobchack (2004), Barker (2009) defines film's body as "a concrete but distinctly cinematic lived-body, neither equated to nor encompassing the viewer's or filmmaker's body, but engaged with both of these even as it takes up its own intentional projects in the world" (pp. 7-8).[13] Not only Barker (2009) but Sobchack (2004) also accounts for the filmmaker's body in suggesting that the film reflects the filmmaker's perception and expression, but as a lived body, it also has its own perception and expression of things.[14] Sobchack (1992) explains that "in its presence and activity of perception and expression, the film transcends the filmmaker to constitute and locate its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experience of being and becoming" (p. 9). In a similar vein, Barker (2009) suggests that the film's way of seeing things is not identical to the filmmaker's; for instance, the filmmaker cannot see the world in close-up in the same way the film does and consequently, what the spectators see in a film is "*the film seeing*"; showing us its own perception and expression of things (p. 9).

Thus, theoreticians of embodied spectatorship have considered the film's body as a concrete lived body (but not a human one) and distinct from the other bodies concerned in the film experience. Barker (2009) explains that the film as a lived body perceives,

[13] Barker (2009) explains that she does not conceive the film's body as a symbolic one but as a material and concrete one, she writes "my usage of the term throughout this project will be neither symbolic nor completely 'open,' neither a Vertovian *kino-eye* nor a Deleuzian body without organs, for example" (p. 7).
[14] Sobchack (2004) does not use the term filmmaker to define a person, in particular, such as the director, but many people involved in the filmmaking activity. Similarly, Barker (2009), when she discusses the filmmaker's body, seems to talk about the director; however, she also acknowledges the body of other filmmakers, such as the boom operator or camera person.

experiences, and signifies; otherwise, there would be nothing for the viewers to see and feel. Furthermore, as spectators, even though we do not lose ourselves in the film experience, we enter an intimate and tactile contact with the film's body, living a mutual experience of both existing within our bodies and in the space formed by this contact (Barker, 2009). Even though we often become unaware of our identification with the film as a lived body, it actually precedes our identification with the fictional universe and characters. According to Beugnet (2007), being accustomed to standardized formats of mainstream cinema, we get used to enjoying films primarily in terms of their story and characters; however, a sensual understanding of film offers different but equally strong pleasure. According to Barker (2009), if a scene makes us feel uncomfortable, it is because it rejects any easy identification between viewers and characters and instead draws our attention to the film's body existing in every film experience but generally remains invisible and rarely announced. Furthermore, for Beugnet (2007), this primary identification with the film as a lived body refers to a "sensuous encounter with the film" where the viewers lose, in a way, their sense of visual control over the film to realize their tactile and intimate relationship with it.

In this study, I draw attention to this primary connection between the viewer and the film as "the sense and sensibility of materiality itself" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 65) and argue how practical effects through their artificialness and overtly unrealistic materiality can uncover the intimate, tactile and bodily connection between the viewer and the filmic material. Especially in Chapter 3, I examine the ways practical effects can attract the viewers' attention to their deliberately unrealistic texture and consequently retain them from completely getting carried away by the narrative. In that regard, effects objects can

remind the viewers of their primary connection with the film as a lived body preceding their identification with characters and the story. The following section will look closely at how analog effects can bring out the tactility of cinematic experience by centering on Laura Marks' (2000) concept of haptic and optical visuality.

2.2.3. Haptic and Optical Visuality

As I have revealed so far, watching a film constitutes a bodily experience, regardless of our awareness of its bodiliness, and takes into account not just our mind but our whole bodily being and the senses it brings along. In this section, I will concentrate on cinema's capability of addressing the sense of touch through vision by adopting Laura Marks' (2000) concept of haptic visuality. Marks (2000) defines "haptic visuality" as "the way vision itself can be tactile as though one were touching a film with one's eye" (p. xi). Marks (2000) also draws attention to the difference between "haptic visuality" and "haptic perception." The latter designates how we feel touch both outside (on the surface) and inside our bodies (Marks, 2000). In haptic visuality, the eyes themselves function as touch organs (Marks, 2000). Marks (2000) uses haptic visuality primarily in exploring intercultural cinema by focusing on the works of contemporary filmmakers and video artists living in exile or who have get integrated with a culture other than their own. She argues that these works can reveal individual and cultural memories by appealing to embodied knowledge and senses such as touch, smell, and taste (Marks, 2000). In this study, I utilize the term haptic visuality in a different context in which I delve into the aesthetic of practical and digital effects in contemporary cinema. Especially in Chapter 3, I question how practical effects' overtly unrealistic materiality

can generate haptic images which give the viewers a sensation of touch through their vision.[15]

Moreover, Marks (2000) explains that haptic visuality derives from art historian Aloïs Riegl's (1995) differentiation between haptic and optic images. Haptic visuality contrasts with optical visuality, which refers to observing objects from a distance that allows us to recognize them as distinct forms in deep space; in other words, it describes how we usually think of vision (Marks, 2000). Hence, optical visuality allows a clear separation between the viewing subject and the viewed object (Marks, 2000). On the other hand, haptic visuality subverts this clear separation by evading any distant view: haptic images push the viewer to move over the objects' surfaces, making them more inclined to pay attention to the objects' texture rather than discerning their form (Marks, 2000). Marks (2000), regarding haptic images, "it is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze" (p. 162). In that sense, haptic visuality refers to a more intimate relationship with the filmic material where the viewer's body becomes more active in the process of seeing than it does in the case of optical visuality (Marks, 2000).

In this study, I am also interested in the difference between haptic and optic images: In Chapter 3, I argue that practical effects' unrealistic materiality pushes the viewers' gaze to wander around the effects objects' surface, which could eventually retain them from

[15] The term haptic visuality is later taken up by Beugnet (2007) in discussing the films of directors such as Olivier Assayas, Gaspar Noé, Bruno Dumont, and Vincent Dieutre, which are often gathered around the collective term "The New French Extremity."

getting absorbed by the narrative. Marks (2000) herself suggests that "the haptic image forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (p. 163). In that sense, haptic images help to bring out what Sobchack (2004), Beugnet (2007), and Barker (2009) refer to as our primary identification with the film's body. On the other hand, as previously stated, Hollywood's digital effects try to diminish their hyperrealism to appear transparent, credible, and photorealist when merged with live-action footage. Hence, these digital effects, unlike the anti-realism of analog methods, try to hide their "materiality" to primarily serve the narrative progress. In Chapter 3, I would argue that Hollywood's effects realism evokes Marks' (2000) approach to optical visuality, which pushes the viewers to focus on the narrative by convincing them that all they look for is situated in the image itself. Furthermore, the usage of haptic images can also turn into a feminist tool in the hands of women filmmakers. Marks (2000) explains that although there is nothing particularly feminine about haptic images, their usage can turn into a feminist strategy. In Chapter 4, I will argue that French women filmmakers' anti-realist usage of analog effects generating haptic images turns into a feminist resistance against Hollywood's standardized effects realism aesthetic deriving primarily from white masculinist values.

Furthermore, the rapprochement between practical effects and haptic visuality has already been revealed in some senses in Pyke's (2000) work which revolves around the handmade objects in Michel Gondry's *La Science des rêves*.[16] According to Pyke (2020), "the handmade objects in Gondry's work act as discrete sites of feeling that

[16] Barker (2009) also mentions Gondry's *La Science des rêves*. According to her, the film emphasizes the integration of mind and body, as well as vision and touch in a playful manner (Barker, 2009).

seem to be touchable even in the two-dimensional medium of the film" (p. 50). In that regard, she claims that the handmade objects in *La Science*, through their sensuality, become narrative forms in their own right. Pyke (2020) writes, "the objects carry the emotional story, the abstraction of all the feelings and gaps in saying" (p. 55). I agree with Pyke (2020) that the effects objects through their almost touchable quality, carry emotions within them and contribute to the narrative progress. However, Pyke (2020) disregards the fact that these objects might also distract the viewers from the narrative as their unrealistic materiality makes them discernible in the scene.

In this chapter, I have revealed the literature I draw upon to examine the effects' aesthetic in contemporary filmmaking practices. Firstly, I explained the previous literature concentrating chiefly on the ontological difference between analog and digital images. This first part solidifies my arguments regarding the realism of practical and digital effects when taking into account their material differences. Then I revealed the former pieces in the scope of film phenomenology and provide a look at Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic" and "optical visuality." This second part has offered a background for understanding how the materiality of practical effects, as opposed to CGI, can generate an example of embodied spectatorship since it can eventually appeal to senses beyond vision and hearing and form tactile connections between the image and its viewer.

The following section concerns the methodologies I use in examining the effects aesthetic in post-digital cinema. It also discusses the related film corpus and paratextual materials I utilize in this study.

2.3. Methodology

This thesis aims to identify the aesthetic of practical effects in contrast to the standardized style of Hollywood CGI in contemporary cinema. It mainly analyzes how practical effects' anti-realism can go against Hollywood's, precisely ILM's effects realism, and finds uses in national and transnational contexts to resist the US' homogenizing impacts on the industry. As its central methodology, the study will use close reading to examine its related film corpus and special and visual effects. As a secondary methodology, it will use feminist approaches to film studies to analyze French women filmmakers' utilization of practical effects in a national context. Finally, it will conduct an auteur study on the filmography of the French director Michel Gondry to reflect his transnational authorship constructed in significant part through his craft aesthetic replete with analog methods.

The close reading methodology, otherwise known as textual analysis, analyzes "the meaning of a text or set of texts" (Stokes, 2013, p. 120). De Castilla (2009) states that close reading could remain restrictive in some senses since it only tries to perceive a text's internal traits much more than the external ones, such as its historical context. However, this method also helps to unveil the specific and frequently hidden tools that provide the text with its stylistic coherence and rhetorical impact (De Castilla, 2009). Therefore, when doing a close reading, less apparent meanings, if there are any, which have been neglected or taken for granted may come to light and offer a new perspective on the examined work (De Castilla, 2009). In this study, I am interested in applying the

close-reading methodology to films' stylistic, formal, and narrative traits to make sense of the directors' preference for analog methods in constructing their filmic universes. Furthermore, I also pay attention to the paratextual elements guiding the films in question, such as various making-of documentaries and interviews with the director or artistic and technical personnel from the film crews. These elements deepen the focus of the conducted close reading as they bring other layers of interpretations to the films themselves.

In Chapter 3, I conduct a close reading on the films' effects usage by applying the conceptual frameworks of Rodowick (2007) informed by Bazinian realism regarding the digital image's lack of indexicality and Marks' (2000) concepts of "haptic" and "optical visuality." However, as I explain more in detail in that chapter, the fact that an image could be related to haptic or optical visuality depends on the spectator's individual knowledge and cultural background (Marks, 2020). According to Rose (2016), the spatial organization of an image is never innocent; it usually contains various layers of interpretation that could have different impacts on the viewer and leads them to produce particular relationships with the image. Similarly, as Monaco (2009) argues specifically about cinema, film as a medium is equipped with culturally derived codes and shared artistic choices that can generate completely different meanings in the mind of the spectators depending on their cultural background. In that sense, I acknowledge that the close reading methodology could be supported with further reception studies elsewhere in understanding whether practical effects' texture can actually surface haptic connections between the viewer and the image.

In Chapter 3, I focus on Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004). The reason I have chosen this film as the object of the study is because of its strong preference for analog methods over CGI in constructing its anti-realist undersea world. *The Life Aquatic* is filled with voluntarily artificial decors, props, and especially sea creatures in the form of puppets animated via stop-motion. Furthermore, I also occasionally refer to Michel Gondry's *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006) to strengthen my arguments: The movie exhibits similar analog techniques appearing in *The Life Aquatic*, such as miniatures, matte paintings, and stop-motion puppetry in reflecting its protagonist's inability to discern between reality and fantasy. Even though my main focus remains limited to these two films, I also refer to various Hollywood productions throughout the chapter, such as Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003), David Fincher's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), and Colin Trevorrow's *Jurassic World* (2015) as they clearly reflect ILM's standardized effects realism. I also conduct a close reading comparing the effects of *The Life Aquatic w*ith Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) since they both offer a different representation of the sharks in their stories through effects usage and their sharply contrasting cinematography and editing styles.

In Chapter 4 regarding the French women filmmakers Marjane Satrapi and Chloé Mazlo's effects usage, aside from the close reading, I adopt a feminist approach to film studies in examining their two films, Satrapi's *Poulet aux prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011) and Mazlo's *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (Skies of Lebanon, 2020). French-Iranian director Marjane Satrapi and French-Lebanese Chloé Mazlo's films tell family stories related to their homelands. While Satrapi's film avoids realistically representing 1950s

Tehran and resembles an Iranian fairy-tale, Mazlo's film provides an idyllic interpretation of 1970s Beirut through a wide range of analog methods, from matte paintings to stop-motion animations.

I choose to analyze their works since they offer a compelling case where they reflect French cinema's long-time political project of *exception culturelle* or cultural exception through their cinematic form. This project refers to how the French state protects and promotes its indigenous culture, especially national cinema, to defend against US domination. In that regard, Mazlo and Satrapi's cinematic style echoes French cinema's cultural exception in the way that it resists Hollywood's standardized effects realism. Moreover, I choose to concentrate on these films as they turn their effects into feminist tools against the male-dominant vision of ILM's style. In addition, my analysis also highlights how these filmmakers' cinematic forms serve as a means to reveal the roots of selfhood and create forms of feminist cinematic self-writing.

In fact, the films I make the subject of close reading, except *The Life Aquatic,* are French productions forming cultural specificities through overtly artificial effects in the face of Hollywood domination. Contemporary French cinema has displayed similar examples of this type of effects utilization not only in art house cinema but also in "pop-art cinema," which mixes popular cinema and art film aesthetics and narrative techniques to appeal to both niche and mainstream audiences (Palmer, 2011, as cited in Weber-Fève, 2021). Jean-Pierre Jeunet's films, such *as La Cité des enfants perdus* (The City of Lost Children, 1995), or *Le Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Amélie, 2001), adopt an anti-realist style, not only through their effects usage helping them to create whimsical

universes but also through their bright color palette and exaggerated, stylized sets. Furthermore, as art films, Christophe Honoré's film *Chambre 212* (On a Magical Night, 2019) and Arnaud Desplechin's *Tromperie* (Deception, 2021) benefit from practical effects in some of their sequences, giving their works an anti-realist touch. We can also think of Joann Sfar's *Gainsbourg (Vie héroïque)* (Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life, 2010), where he uses a number of prosthetic make-ups in creating the alter-ego of the famous French singer Serge Gainsbourg's exaggerated facial features. Additionally, Nicolas Bedos' *La Belle Époque* (2019), as an example of pop-art cinema, also mirrors in some senses an anti-realist style, notably through the construction of sets inside the diegesis to reenact its protagonist's old memories with hired actors. Interestingly, the film's production designer Stéphane Rozenbaum also worked in the same position in *La Science des rêves*.

Even if the mentioned French films rely on analog methods and adopt a more hands-on type of filmmaking, this aesthetic has not become a common tendency in French cinema, especially in the realm of the mainstream. Most French cinema adopts a realistic aesthetic mostly in line with ILM's house style. In that sense, this anti-realist aesthetic also goes outside the norms of French cinema while also resisting Hollywood. Nonetheless, as reflected by the political project of cultural exception, the French film industry remains a robust system capable of supporting this kind of filmmaking that does not seem to be prioritized to nearly this extent in other cultural contexts.

In Chapter 5, I conduct an auteur study on Michel Gondry's filmography to analyze his transnational authorship deriving primarily from his preference for in-camera solutions

and analog methods instead of CGI. As a typological analysis method, the auteur study focuses on the various connections between a group of texts created by the same author (Stokes, 2013). According to Staiger (2003), an auteur reflects a cohesive and consistent perspective on the world through the repetitiveness of the same characteristics and stylistic choices throughout their filmography. In Michel Gondry's works, we often encounter several common themes, such as fantasy, memory, love, and identity. More importantly, with his recurrent, deliberately homemade aesthetic manifesting itself both in his French and American films, Gondry evokes how the transnational flows of cinema can overlap with trajectories of cinematic style (Block & Kirby, 2020).

I will study not only Gondry's filmography, including music videos, but in analyzing his transnational authorship I will also benefit from the paratextual elements surrounding his work, such as the making of documentaries and interviews with himself and his film crews. Even though I look through his various works, I center my arguments around his film *La Science des rêves*, which evokes his long-established homemade style. I put the movie in line with his previous music videos and other feature films such as *Be Kind Rewind* (2008) to better convey how his cinematic style can reveal itself both in his French and American productions.

Overall, the thesis argues that practical effects are still relevant tools in contemporary filmmaking despite the widespread use of CGI. In fact, CGI's capacity to achieve higher degrees of photorealism and its increasing accessibility and affordability has given the practical effects the possibility to seek their stylistic autonomy and find other forms of utilization. As I will argue throughout the thesis, the aspiration for eschewing CG

methods in favor of a more hands-on filmmaking style can be used to foreground and celebrate cultural diversity and specificity in a national realm, particularly from a feminist perspective, as exemplified with the films of with Satrapi and Mazlo. Moreover, it can generate auteurist tools transcending national and cultural borders, as is the case with the films and music videos of Michel Gondry.

CHAPTER 3

THE AESTHETIC OF PRACTICAL AND DIGITAL EFFECTS

3.1. Introduction

Cinema, from its very beginnings, has always benefited from visual effects. From its earliest years, until 1906 or 1907 when narrative films came to dominate the market,[17] films often made special or optical effects their focus, revolving around the creation of a particular effect for the spectator. Méliès' trick films, while also pioneering the field of optical effects, are often considered a contribution to the narrative mode of cinema. However, Méliès (1961, as cited in Gunning, 2006) himself explains that he sees the scenario as a pretext to display the tricks or effects of his films. In that sense, they are attached to Gunning's (2006) "cinema of attractions," an exhibitionist mode of early cinema mainly concerned with the act of showing rather than storytelling to create

[17] Gunning (1995) believes that the "cinema of attractions" that privileging the act of showing rather than storytelling lasted until 1906-1907 and preceded the dominance of the narrative in cinema.

strong reactions in the spectator, such as shock or laughter, or in Gunning's (1995) words, an "aesthetic of astonishment."[18]

Today, the cinema of attractions continues to exist in and beyond Hollywood cinema, most especially in films with heavy-effects-driven scenes created digitally. According to Gunning (2006) "clearly in some sense recent spectacle cinema has reaffirmed its roots in stimulus and carnival rides, in what might be called the Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema of effects" (p. 387). With the development of digital technologies at the turn of the century, films have started relying increasingly on digital effects not only in creating sequences with heavily spectacular scenes but also in the fabrication of entire filmic universes (Keil & Whissel, 2016). Today, digital effects are so ubiquitously used in films that even the main characters can be partially or entirely created through computer-generated techniques. Allison (2016) defines one of the prominent characteristics of filmmaking activities in the new millennium as the omnipresent usage of computer-generated effects; as she states, "they are at the very heart of contemporary visuality" (p. 185). In that sense, their ubiquitous utilization makes them more than an afterthought; as part of the cinematic language, they shape every phase of filmmaking, including how the film is written, shot, and edited.

The proliferation of effects in the industry has even reversed these filmmaking phases. Today, digital effects usually precede production, as concerns about effects help decide

[18] To have a better understanding of the shock of the early cinema spectator, see Gunning (1995). Gunning (1995) offers a different perspective about the panicked audience of Lumière brothers' film *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat Station, 1896) by suggesting that what astounds them was not the naïve belief that a train was actually approaching them but the motion of the moving image itself.

how the shots will be filmed in advance as well as or instead of manipulating them later (Allison, 2016). Interestingly, Manovich (2001) moves this discussion one step further by saying that "production becomes just the first stage of post-production" (p. 303). The live-action footage, far from being the last step, serves instead as raw material that will be altered on a computer, which for many films is where the actual creation of a scene is understood to take place (Manovich, 2001).

The heavy reliance on digital effects in contemporary filmmaking generates questions concerning the place of analog effects in post-digital cinema. Although digital effects have not entirely wiped out analog methods from filmmaking activities, in a relatively short frame of time, CGI has obtained a level of perceptual realism that its analog ancestors could never reach. By taking into account Hollywood's long-established obsession with effects realism, this chapter will examine the aesthetic implications of relying on analog effects in an era dominated by digital filmmaking. It will first discuss the anti-realist aesthetic obtainable from practical effects in relation to Bazin's (2005) ontological realism. In that sense, it will question the materiality of practical effects by benefiting from Rodowick's (2007) arguments about digital images' loss of indexicality and analogy, which are themselves integral notions to Bazinian realism. Secondly, anchoring the analysis in Laura Marks' (2000) concepts of "haptic" and "optical visuality," the chapter will discuss how the materiality of practical effects offers spectators an embodied experience that stands in opposition to effects realism's goal of concealing itself.

3.2. The Anti-Realist Aesthetic of Practical Effects

Effects have always been utilized from the early years of cinema, especially as part of the cinema of attractions (Gunning, 2006), in trick films that revolve around the elaboration of a particular effect to create strong impacts on the spectator, such as surprise or shock. With the development of narration in cinema, effects started serving the purposes of the story and hence participated in creating coherent and credible filmic universes. As Keil and Whissel (2016) explain about Hollywood cinema, analog and digital effects have always shared the primary purpose of becoming credible and transparent regardless of whether they should be spectacular or pass unnoticed by the spectator. However, thanks to advancing computer technologies since the 1990s, digital effects have attained higher transparency and credibility and thus have created a much higher level of perceptual realism for their spectators.

Importantly, digital technologies' superior position in creating effects realism did not exclude practical effects from contemporary filmmaking activities; in fact, practical and digital effects often go hand in hand in the age of digital cinema. For instance, Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) combines practical and digital effects; the dinosaurs are an amalgam of both animatronic models and digital animation (Prince, 2012). This situation was not unique to *Jurassic Park*; other films of that period also continued to apply practical effects, such as Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), which relied heavily on animatronics, puppetry, makeup effects, and miniatures, or Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), which features robotics and facial prosthetics (Keil & Whissel, 2016). According to Purse (2016) the final two decades of the 20th century could be defined as a

"transitional period" in which digital effects became more prominent than analog methods; nevertheless, some analog methods have persisted and combined with the digital ones (p. 143). In that sense, the 1980-90s suggest a "diversity of practices," where analog and practical developed and used together (Purse, 2016, p. 143).

A more recent example from one of the same film franchises could be *Jurassic World* (2015), which also used practical effects in conjunction with digital ones in fabricating some of the dinosaurs in the film. John Rosengrant, coordinator in charge of the legacy effects, explains that they build the head and neck of Apatosaurus and some other dinosaurs in the form of animatronics,[19] which would be further enhanced in the post-production process by ILM (Industrial Light & Magic) (Legacy Effects, 2015). However, unlike the first entry in the franchise (*Jurassic Park*, 1993), they didn't need to build full-size animatronic dinosaurs. Moreover, they used so few animatronics that the film depended heavily on CGI; therefore, most scenes were shot without the dinosaurs' presence. Regarding this, *Jurassic World*'s (2015) director Colin Trevorrow explains that ILM can render things so photorealist today that the dinosaurs of *Jurassic World* (2015) have nothing to do with the previous movies (Jurassic World, 2016).[20]

Thus, digital effects have exceeded practical effects in achieving higher levels of photorealism, making the latter both technically and economically less preferable

[19] ILM (Industrial Light & Magic) is an industry-leading effects company initially founded by George Lucas in 1975 as "Industrial Light and Magic."

[20] Trevorrow's arguments concerning CGI's photorealism evoke Manovich's (2001) point about how the industry values every new development in computer technologies based on its capacity to surpass the realism of analog media technologies.

especially in Hollywood industry. Effects artists are capable of creating more persuasive and credible effects than in the analog era thanks to advancing computer technologies. Tim Alexander, the visual effects supervisor of *Jurassic World* (2015), explains that the technology has tremendously moved on, which makes it possible to render the dinosaurs more photorealistic today compared to the animatronics of *Jurassic Park* by adding more skin details or showing their flexing muscles as they move (Jurassic World, 2016). Alexander's arguments show that the digital image draws all its creative force from what Rodowick (2007) calls its "lack of closure" (p. 15) or, in Rosen's (2001) term, its "practically infinite manipulability" (p. 319), referring to how CGI can be easily reworked and repurposed compared to the analog image.

The digital image's infinite manipulability gives filmmakers endless creative possibilities, yet what digital effects aesthetically strive for in Hollywood cinema remains the same as their analog counterparts: becoming perceptually realistic. Similarly, Prince (2012) defends that "digital visual effects build on stylistic traditions established by filmmakers in earlier generations even while providing new and more powerful tools to accomplish these ends" (pp. 4-5). Hence, digital effects do not break away from the aspiration of becoming perceptually realist, which was also the intention of practical effects in the analog era. Rodowick (2007) argues that even if digital technologies have brought a lot of stylistic innovations and can seem like evolutionary tools for image-making, the digital era's aesthetic and technological goal is indistinguishable from the analog one, claiming that "'photo-graphic' realism remains the Holy Grail of digital imaging" (Rodowick, 2007, p. 11).

Interestingly enough, by remaining truthful to photographic realism, digital effects have offered their practical equivalents the possibility to seek their aesthetic autonomy. Similar to Bazin's (2005) argument that "photography has freed plastic arts from their obsession with likeness" (p. 12) digital effects have allowed the practical ones to dissociate from realism and search for a new aesthetic. Bazin (2005) defines photography as the art that mummifies time and space, since it is a mechanical reproduction of the world that (arguably) excludes the human's creative intervention. Hence, photography possesses an objective character equipping it with a certain credibility that painting could not reach due to the painter's "inescapable subjectivity" (Bazin, 2005, p. 12). Yet to believe that photography has a nature that lies outside human creativity, and can thus lay claim to at least some measure of objectivity would be a false assumption, as a photographer, just like a painter, expresses their subjectivity with numerous artistic choices inherent to the resulting image. Nevertheless, Bazin (2005) is not incorrect in observing that, with the invention of photography, it became possible to relegate realism to photography so that the painting could finally leave its obsession with realism and find its aesthetic independence.

A similar divide characterizes today's digital era in filmmaking, in which digital effects' strong association with realism has led practical effects to find their aesthetic autonomy in large part by leaning on an anti-realist style. This split has a history rooted in the constant search for greater credibility among effects designers. For instance, the spectators seemed to consider rear projection an acceptably credible technique in the

1930s, 1940s, and 1950s;[21] however, today, this technique seems too easily discernable *as an effect* compared to more seamless digital methods (Keil & Whissel, 2016). The digital effects appear more sensually immersive and therefore credible for the spectator compared to analog techniques such as rear projection. Thus, digital superiority in creating effects realism motivates analog design to leave realism behind in favor of a deliberately constructed anti-realism. Turnock (2022) acknowledges the "anti-naturalism" of practical effects, defining through contrast the very standards of digital studios like ILM with the acronym ISER, "the international standard of effects realism" (p. 145).[22] Turnock (2022) associates this anti-naturalist and intentionally "bad" (that is, blatantly anti-realist) aesthetic with auteurs such as Pedro Almodovar, Michel Gondry, and Wes Anderson, and points to this as a strategy to resist ILM's universally applied effects realism standards.

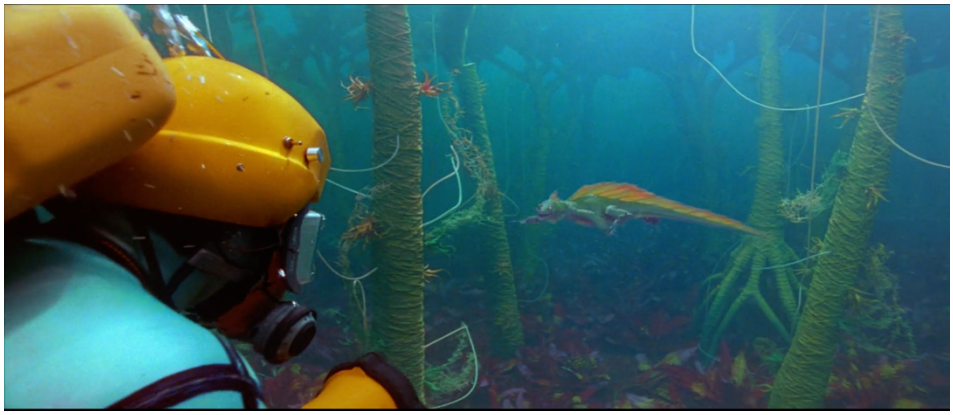


Figure 1. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), a reptile-looking sea creature stares at Steve Zissou in an over-the-head shot. The creature and the seemingly artificial sea plants reflect Anderson's anti-realist style.

[21] The rear projection involves projecting the previously filmed background onto a transparent screen on the set. When actors perform in front of that projected background, the camera can capture both of their actions at the same time (Keil & Whissel, 2016).
[22] To have a more in-depth look at ILM's aesthetic domination in the effects industry and Turnock's (2022) concept of "ISER," see Chapter 4.

Notably, we can think of Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), in which he applies the anti-realist aesthetic of practical effects precisely to move away from any suggested intention to create a realistic interpretation of the undersea world. Anderson's undersea is filled with seemingly "fake" algae, other sea plants, and creatures covered with unrealistic textures (see *Figure 1*). According to Barry Mendel, the producer of *The Life* Aquatic, digital technology has produced astonishing quality in underwater photography, and Hollywood thinking usually attempts to go visually beyond what has already been done (Anderson, 2004). Mendel's arguments echo Cameron's recently released film *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022), which relies mainly on CG techniques to create a perceptually realistic and immersive sea world with locations such as canyons and underwater forests populated with diverse exotic marine creatures. Yet, As Mendel further explains, Anderson's intentions were not to reach the photorealist style of these kinds of Hollywood blockbusters; instead, the director was interested in deviating from it as much as possible to create a unique sea world with analog methods (Anderson, 2004).

In that regard, his unfamiliar sea world proves how practical effects can search for their own aesthetic by refusing to follow Hollywood's obsession with effects realism. We can also think of Claire Denis' *High Life* (2018) as it gives an unusual interpretation of space, one of Hollywood's most familiar filmic settings. For instance, the exterior view of the ship where the prisoners live resembles a giant container. It has a modest appearance in contrast to the super polished high-tech vessels we are used to seeing in Hollywood blockbusters. Furthermore, the ship includes a garden where characters can

grow vegetables and provide nutrition for themselves. Even the presence of a garden in space remains anti-realist enough and somehow recalls the American blockbuster *The Martian* (2015), where the character of Matt Damon, out of necessity, cultivates potatoes inside his ship. *The Martian* approaches the idea of growing vegetables in space with "scientific" precision as the protagonist constantly updates us about the process in his digital diary. Nonetheless, the movie is often accused of not being scientifically accurate in the reviews.

In contrast, in *High Life*, there is no aspiration to bring a scientific explanation to this garden; instead, it is represented as an almost imaginary place filled with abundant greenery where characters can recall their origins on Earth and soil. In that sense, Seyfafjehi & Kennedy-Karpat (2021) consider *High Life* as an example of "imaginative sci-infidelity" which privileges fiction over scientific precision (p. 175). Contrary to mainstream Hollywood sci-fi movies, Denis is not interested in reflecting outer space as realistically as possible, nor does she create an impression of scientific truth; instead, the space becomes a tool to reveal themes such as isolation, crime, and punishment.

Furthermore, cinema history is full of examples of practical effects finding their aesthetic autonomy through technological developments. Comolli (1980) considers cinema as a social and ideological machine before it is technical. Film's style has always taken shape according to technological advancements yet reversely, according to Comolli (1980) the ideologies governing cinema regulated these advancements themselves. The arrival of sound to cinema represents both since it moved the films' aesthetic towards realism but could also be seen as a result of Hollywood cinema's

ideologically rooted aspiration for realism. In “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” Bazin (2005) examines the arrival of synchronized sound around the question of whether this technological advancement has aesthetically revolutionized films. According to him, the sound image would carry editing from expressionism and abstraction to realism and transparency; therefore, after the arrival of sound, the optical effects (such as superimpositions) or close-ups would disappear to avoid making the spectator aware of the cuts between images (Bazin, 2005). Though, once the cinema has established its strong relations with a realist aesthetic, these editing tools that Bazin (2005) considers abstract and expressionist reappear to become elements that reflect the directors’ style. He writes, “It is only an increased realism of the image that can support the abstraction of montage” (Bazin, 2005, p. 39).

Hence a technical development that makes films more in line with a realist aesthetic can also push the editing and transitional effects to generate styles besides realism or reflect a director’s vision. In the same way, practical effects, which were once beholden to realism and credibility, can now be used to create deliberately anti-realist scenes that can be identified with an auteur’s style. For instance, as I delve extensively in Chapter 5, besides revealing similar themes such as memory, fantasy, and love, Michel Gondry’s preference for analog methods to manage his visually compelling ideas has become an essential element of his auteur persona.

Though no matter how thoroughly auteurs such as Gondry and Anderson embrace a “fake” or “bad” aesthetic when viewed against the standards of photorealist CGI, the anti-realism of their practical effects nevertheless remains paradoxically realist in the

Bazinian sense of indexical connection to its subject. Bazin (2005) believes that "photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption" (p. 14). Photography's "embalming of time" distinguishes it from other visual arts by creating an indexical connection to the reality it represents. In that regard, Bazin (2005) consider the photographic image an imprint or trace of the captured objects that "had a spatial existence that endured in time" (Rodowick, 2007, p. 10). Thanks to their materiality, practical effects maintain the same spatial-temporal existence as they appear in front of an actual camera and participate in the live-action shooting as much as other staging elements or actors.

Digital effects, in contrast to analog ones, cannot conform to Bazinian realism. Lacking material substance, digital creations do not ontologically exist in space and time. As Rodowick (2007) argues, the transition from the analog to the digital era consists of a change in materiality: the film's photo-chemical substance provides it with spatial and temporal powers that the digital cannot claim, as it comes to existence by numerical manipulations and algorithmic functions rather than the situation of objects in space and time. Hence, even though analogy still exists in computer-generated images as a means of spatial recognition, it no longer acquires any connection to substance or indexicality (Rodowick, 2007). Hence the digital effects break the indexical connection between the principal shooting and the final product since they are later added in the post-production process. Rosen (2001) underlines that the concept of indexicality becomes invalid if the object that will be shown does not take part in the image's original production. CGI's numerical origin prevents it from being an ontological part of the profilmic space,

because the CGI subject never has to appear in front of an actual camera in order to be projected onto the screen.



Figures 2 & 3. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), the miniature toilet paper city animated via stop-motion is later used as back projection in the set, exemplifying the spatial unity central to Bazinian realism.

More interestingly, thanks to their indexicality, practical effects keep the "spatial unity" necessary for Bazinian realism (Bazin, 2005). Bazin's (2005) spatial unity can be described as characters occupying the same filmic space without the trickery of editing. In that sense, as I delve more in Chapter 2, according to him, the characters' sharing of the same spatial-temporal presence in the frame becomes a critical element in maintaining the realism of a scene (Bazin, 2005). Practical effects such as stop motion, puppetries, miniatures, matte paintings, and mechatronics, belong to the profilmic space and interact with actors and mise-en-scene elements, so they do not interrupt the spatial

unity necessary to Bazinian realism. Even if this forms only the basis for digital manipulation in post-production, CGI ontologically breaks the spatial homogeneity of the shot because it is later added to live-action footage.

Directors whose style relies on the anti-realism of analog effects nevertheless achieve the spatial unity essential to Bazinian realism by uniting their actors with the effects elements of the action on screen. For instance, Gondry used rear projection instead of its digital equivalent, the green screen, in *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006). The director and his crew replaced the backgrounds by projecting onto a transparent screen previously filmed stop-motion footage (*Figures 2 & 3*), as when a miniature city made of toilet paper rolls and animated through stop-motion, is placed behind the windows in the set. Gondry's preference of replacing the backgrounds via analog methods also allows the actors to interact with the backgrounds and have an actual idea about the final result. This would not be possible with green screens. In another example, Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud often used matte paintings to fill the background in *Poulet aux prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011),[23] such as in the scene where Nasser Ali Khan proposes to Irâne under the leaves of a big tree among the meadows (see *Figure 4*). Aside from the plants' readily observable, even foregrounded artificiality, the matte painting showing a red-colored sky has a pointedly anti-realist aesthetic that reflects the fairytale quality of the scene. These examples show that no

[23] Matte paintings are paintings composited with separately recorded footage, often to replace the backgrounds (Keil & Whissel, 2016). The compositing process can happen in front of a camera or during post-production. In the mentioned scene from *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the filmmakers preferred a physical matte painting and filmed it during the principal shooting.

matter how much directors accentuate their effects' anti-realism, these analog techniques remain realist in the Bazinian sense by being indexically tied to the profilmic space.



Figure 4. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the directors use an anti-realist matte painting to replace the background of the scene where Nasser Ali Khan and Irâne hold hands under a big tree among the meadows.

Not every scholar and critic has accepted this limitation, and the digital turn has prompted a reconsideration of the question of indexicality itself. Some scholars have searched for ways to defend how digital effects actually get along with Bazinian realism. Buckland (1999), in his article about *Jurassic Park* (1993), cites three types of cinematic realism identified by Bazin (1991). These types include the following:

> A realism that is in a certain sense ontological, restoring to the object and the decor their existential density, the weight of their presence; a dramatic realism which refuses to separate the actor from the decor, the foreground from the background; a psychological realism which brings the spectator back to the real conditions of perception, a perception which is never completely determined a priori. (Bazin, 1991, p. 88)

Buckland (1999) argues that the digital effects created by ILM in *Jurassic Park* (1993) embrace all three types of realism discussed by Bazin (1991): the ontological, the dramatic, and the psychological. The film includes ontological realism despite its use of CGI, Buckland (1999) argues, because the digitally created dinosaurs seem to have the

same weight and density as the backgrounds and actors, disregarding the fact that these effects are without material substance. No matter how credibly ILM blends these effects with live-action, they only achieve an illusion of Bazin's (1991) ontological realism. Buckland (1999) also contradicts himself when he acknowledges that the fusion of digital dinosaurs and live-action within the same shot would create an illusion of spatial unity. He writes that "the interactions created between the digital dinosaurs and live-action/real backgrounds within a single shot help to create a new realism in the digital image, for the effects create the illusion of spatial and diegetic unity" (Buckland, 1999, p. 189). Admitting that these effects are without substance, thus can only create an illusion of spatial unity, would mean they go against Bazinian realism in the first place.

Buckland (1999) has not been alone in the attempt to connect digital effects to Bazinian realism. Prince (2012) argues how image-based lighting, photogrammetry methods, and HDRi (high dynamic range images) generate new manners of indexicality inside the image. For instance, he explains that thanks to image-based lighting,[24] filmmakers can light digitally created environments and characters using the same light sources as those existing in a physical space with live actors (Prince, 2012). Still, Prince (2012) disregards that digital effects are algorithmic functions without a material basis. So even if the lighting can perfectly imitate the techniques used in the live-action shooting, *as an imitation* it would only create *an impression* of indexicality in the Bazinian sense. In fact, Manovich (2001) concedes that "visually these computer-generated or manipulated

[24] Also, Prince (2012) argues that Alfonso Cuaron's long takes in *Children of Men* (2006), achieved through digital manipulations, perfectly represent the unity of space integral to Bazinian realism. Prince (2012) defends that as long as a filmmaker can achieve ways of not disturbing the spatial continuity, the means of achieving it, digital or not, does not matter.

images are indistinguishable from traditional photo and film images, whereas on the level of 'material' they are quite different, as they are made from pixels or represented by mathematical equations and algorithms" (p. 180).

On the other hand, no matter how much they depart from a photorealist aesthetic, it is incontestable that practical effects remain ontologically real in the Bazinian sense. According to Wollen (2013), Bazin believed that realism has little to do with similarity or resemblance; instead, he valued the existential connection between the real world and its image. Unlike CG techniques, practical effects preserve this existential connection to the real world through their materiality. One might think of the construction of the ship, "Belafonte" in half to show the little cabins inside for *The Life Aquatic*. It is interesting to note that Anderson prefers to represent the interiors of Belafonte in one long take (although it includes some cuts hardly noticeable) where the camera moves around these various cabins. Bazin (2005), in his essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" also argues that a composition in depth combined with a long take contributes to the image's spatial unity and provides a more realistic interpretation of the filmic space. Thus, Anderson's preference for building an entire ship and filming it in a long take embrace strongly Bazinian realism.

Similarly, Anderson preferred to fabricate the interiors of the hotel in *Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) from scratch. He could have used CG methods to construct these filmic spaces, which likely would have been more cost-effective. However, the physicality of a detailed, fabricated ship or hotel means that the space can truly communicate with staging elements and/or actors that interact with it. According to Owen Wilson, who

interprets M. Chuck in *The Grand Budapest*, the hotel constitutes one of the characters in the movie (Behind the Screens - DVD Filmschool, 2020). This does not mean that digital universes cannot create fascinating characters out of environments—*Avatar* movies are billion-dollar examples of this kind of production. Still, the inability of the digital space to provide a material connection prevents it from interacting with the profilmic space.

Yet, in the post-digital era, practical effects also break the indexical connection inherent to photographic images—but they do so in different ways. According to Rosen (2001), the digital image does not totally exclude indexicality; on the contrary, it finds ways to incorporate it. For instance, any analog image can be digitized to exist on a computer screen. Though this incorporation of an analog original poses questions about whether an analog image, when it is transferred to a numerical environment, can keep its indexicality and analogy. Manovich (2001) claims that when live-action footage is digitized, it loses its indexical relation to the profilmic reality because the computer cannot distinguish between a digitally or photographically recorded representation; everything turns into pixels regardless of their origins. The analog image's loss of indexicality in the process of digitization echoes practical effects positioning in post-digital filmmaking. Practical effects are, in nature, indexical just like analog images, since they belong to the profilmic space; however, the way they are filmed is often through digital cameras, though exceptional cases such as Wes Anderson may still prefer

shooting on film.[25] Moreover, even though the medium is a film strip, the way spectators access it, whether on streaming platforms or in movie theaters, may be digital.



Figures 5 & 6. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane swims with the back projection of the miniature Paris in the background. They used post-production to unite the images' different layers and added extra bubbles to enhance the anti-realist style of analog methods.

Furthermore, practical effects are often combined with digital ones in the post-production process, not only to achieve photorealism, as in the case of the *Jurassic* movies, but also when seeking an anti-realist aesthetic. According to Rosen (2001), when transferred into the digital, analog images become infinitely manipulable, raising questions about the truth of photographic images and more importantly the analog images' indexical roots. For instance, Gondry's analog methods are frequently combined

[25] *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and *The French Dispatch* (2022) were shot on 35mm, *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) on 16mm. Though in *Budapest* they only used digital cameras to film the stop-motion sequences and miniatures (Savage, 2014).

with CGI to improve his universes' whimsical and dreamy quality. In *La Science des rêves*, to shoot the dream sequence where Stéphane is flying in the form of swimming (*Figures 5 & 6*), Gondry and his film crew placed Gael Garcia Bernal (interpreting Stéphane) inside an aquarium filled with water and projected the previously recorded stop-motion city view of Paris in the background. After the principal shooting, Gondry turned to Partizan Lab, his longtime associates for visual effects, to unite the images' different layers and augment the number of bubbles inside the image (since it is impossible to achieve enough of them manually), which would help enhance the images' dreamlike quality (Bielik, 2006). Similarly, Gondry's way of working shows that no matter how practical effects are integrated with live-action, they can still pose questions in terms of indexicality and analogy because of their mixture with CGI.

Considering that practical effects can also break the indexicality of photographic images, why do we have to draw a line between practical and digital effects in terms of their indexicality in the first place? Why do we question CGI's rupture from indexicality if analog techniques also depart from it in various ways in the post-digital era? The indexicality becomes a separation point only when referring to the materiality of these effects: while practical effects acquire a material substance, digital ones stay on the level of pixels. The following section will look into why the materiality of analog effects matters. By adopting Laura Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," it will examine how analog effects, through their unrealistic materiality, can create an embodied experience of spectatorship where the image no longer only appeals to the vision but evokes other senses such as touch.

3.3. The Materiality of Practical Effects in Relation to Haptic Visuality

Practical effects' materiality not only appeals to the sense of vision but also can create tactile connections between the viewer and the filmic material. Thus, their sensuous quality can be linked to Laura Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," which she defines as "the way vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one's eyes" (p. xi). The anti-realist usage of analog effects pushes the viewer to pay attention to the effects objects themselves, observe their materiality, and wonder how they are made rather than being utterly absorbed by the film's narrative. In that sense, these effects' anti-reality turns them into haptic images, revealing cinema's capacity togenerate "nonaudiovisual sense experiences" as an audiovisual medium (Marks, 2000, p. 2).

Before moving further with the rapprochement between practical effects and haptic visuality, it is important to underline that haptic visuality is strongly intertwined with the eye of the spectator and how the spectator perceives the image. Marks (2000) herself would suggest that "whether cinema is perceived as haptic may be an effect of the work itself, or it may be a function of the viewer's predisposition" (p. 170). The effects discussed here can be perceived as haptic or not depending on the individual or cultural learning of its spectators. Marks (2000) also claims that, depending on the historical period, cinema itself can be associated more readily with either haptic or optical visuality. Therefore, I should acknowledge that the rapprochement between practical effects' anti-realist usage and haptic visuality requires further reception studies that would deal with audiences directly, an approach that lies beyond the scope of this thesis.



Figure 7. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), the paisley-patterned octopus can draw spectators' attention to its unusual texture and distract the viewer from the narrative.

Directors such as Wes Anderson and Michel Gondry voluntarily brought the unrealistic materiality and texture of their effects objects to the fore. For instance, Anderson's sea creatures in *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004) acquire unrealistic textures which could appeal to senses such as touch. Henry Selick, the stop motion animator of the film regarding the undersea creatures, argues that "A lot of the creatures are slightly different than reality; people would recognize it as something they know but a different interpretation" (Anderson, 2004, 13:22). For instance, the octopus' paisley pattern in the film (*Figure 7*) gives us an unrealistic interpretation of an otherwise well-known animal which can make the viewer more inclined to observe the unfamiliar texture of it rather than get carried away by the narrative.

Similarly, Gondry's craft aesthetic is filled with whimsical toys and creative inventions such as "The Golden Ponyboy," (*Figures 8 & 9*) a little horse toy made of fabric, thread, and wool in *La Science des rêves*, which can appeal strongly to the sense of touch. Pyke (2020) has already examined the rapprochement between the effect objects in *La Science* and Marks' concept of haptic visuality: According to her, Gondry's handmade objects, in addition to fulfilling the visual aspect of the film, play a narrative role by carrying

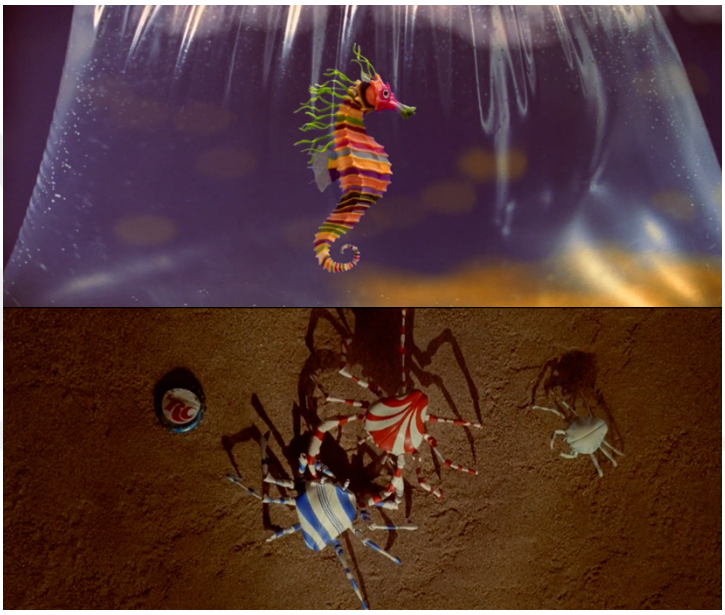
feelings within them through their almost touchable materiality. These objects carry over the narration through their sensuous quality (Pyke, 2020); yet, what is left unsaid here is that their haptic character can also draw one's attention to the surface of objects instead of immersing the spectator in the film's story. Pyke (2020) suggests that "Gondry calls attention to objects that are set apart and announced as made" (p. 50). Thus, Gondry's craft aesthetic becomes deliberately "announced" and "set apart," making his practical effects so discernable in the scene that they could become even a distraction from the narrative.



Figures 8 & 9. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), "The Golden Ponyboy," made of thread, fabric, and wool, can appeal to the sense of touch through its materiality.

Moreover, in *The Life Aquatic*, Anderson provides moments to observe the sea animals in isolation, indisputably contributing to the narrational progress but also emphasizing the effect objects themselves in the mise-en-scene. Notably, we can think of the close-up

shots where we see “the crayon ponyfish” a colorful seahorse inside of a water bag, and “the sugar crabs” with red or blue stripes walking on the sand. (see *Figures 10 & 11*). Despite being a strong reflection of the film’s universe, these effect objects animated through stop-motion reveal themselves by their unfamiliar materiality and even become autonomous objects that invite tactile connections with the spectator.



Figures 10 & 11. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), the effects objects are emphasized in the mise-en-scene by being shown individually in close-up shots, as is the case with the “crayon ponyfish” or the “sugar crabs.”

Furthermore, it is possible to focus on Anderson and Gondry’s anti-realist objects’ texture as well as the objects themselves. The water made of cellophane paper animated via stop-motion in *La Science* (*Figure 12*) can draw attention first to its materiality: one can be inclined to concentrate on the effects object’s unrealistic texture, in addition to conceiving it as a complete object. Marks (2000) states that “haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture” (p. 162). Gondry and Anderson’s effects

objects share this haptic character since they can attract attention to themselves through their unrealistic materiality and invite the eye to wander around their surface.



Figure 12. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), the cellophane paper flowing from the faucet into the kitchen sink can push the viewer to observe primarily its materiality rather than conceiving it as an entire object.

Hence, the practical effects' anti-realist usage underlines its visibility on the screen. On the other hand, Hollywood's obsession with effects realism values primarily the invisibility of its effects. Manovich (2001) explains that Hollywood cinema relies heavily on digitally manipulated scenes, yet the evidence that these effects are created on a computer should stay hidden. These effects are even called "invisible effects" because instead of displaying their numerical nature, the evidence that they are later added by post-production technologies, they conceal themselves in the hope of deceiving the audience to believe that they were shot alongside live actors in a physical environment (Manovich, 2001). Thus, Hollywood's digital effects cannot be conceived as distinct objects attracting attention to their numerical nature. In that regard, they are the opposite of a haptic image which "forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative" (Marks, 2000, p. 163). Thus, they constitute what Marks (2000) refers to as "optical visuality" in opposition to haptic visuality. Marks

(2000) states that an optical image that is closer to our sense of vision rather than touch "gives up its nature as a physical object in order to invite a distant view that allows the viewer to organize him/herself as an all-perceiving subject" (p. 162).[26] Hollywood's digital effects evoke optical visuality since they provide the viewer with a distant view of the image by erasing their technique and giving up their nature as distinct objects perceivable on their own.



Figure 13. In *Jaws* (1975), a long shot shows the shark's dorsal fin and part of its tail in the background. Spielberg chooses only to show some parts of the shark instead of the entire creature to build suspense and, at the same time, hide the mechatronics' artificiality.

To delve deeper into the visibility of effects, one can compare two films that deal with similar themes but differ in their effects' aesthetic: Anderson's *The Life Aquatic* and Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975). Both films start with a shark attack. *The Life Aquatic* tells the oceanographer Steve Zissou's, interpreted by Bill Murray, revenge attempt from a shark called "jaguar shark" who ate his longtime partner Esteban during a recent adventure in the ocean. Even though we do not witness the actual attack, Steve Zissou talks about it

[26] It is important to underline that both types of visuality, optical or haptic, are not inferior or superior to each other. They are both involved in most seeing processes. (Marks, 2000). Marks (2000) writes, "it is hard to look closely at a lover's skin with optical vision; it is hard to drive a car with haptic vision" (p. 163).

in the premiere of his latest documentary film. In the same vein, Spielberg's *Jaws* starts with a sequence where a young girl goes swimming in the ocean during a seaside party and later gets attacked by an unseen creature, a great white shark, as we will discover later in the film. So, both films begin with an attack, but neither film shows the attacker, thereby creating ambiguity about its existence.



Figures 14 & 15. In *Jaws* (1975), the shark appearing blurry under the water approaches its victim, clinging to an upturned boat to finally attack him. Spielberg intentionally chooses not to show the shark to mask its artificial materiality.

Moreover, Spielberg stresses that not displaying the shark in the first scene was a deliberate choice. According to the director, including the great white would be a spectacular opening for the film; still, he chooses to create suspense and build up the tension in the spectators' minds by making them think of what the shark would look like (Jaws, 1975). Thus, rather than creating an astonishing opening scene with the presence of its "monster," Spielberg prefers evoking ambiguity about the existence of an actual undersea creator. However, this "not showing" strategy has become a necessity as the

shark mechatronics the effects artists built did not work in the water for months of shooting (Spielberg, 1975).[27] Spielberg and his crew overcome this technical problem by showing solely parts of the mechatronics (*Figure 13*) – its tail, snout, or dorsal fin – rather than the entire animal (see *Figures 14 & 15*). As *Figure 16* displays the movie also includes the shark's perspective through point-of-view shots under the water displaying how the animal stealthily approaches its victims. When Spielberg is asked during an interview whether he would do *Jaws* (1975) with CG techniques today, he responds that the lack of the shark due to technical difficulties makes the film more effective as it pushes him to find a more suspenseful way of telling the story (FOX 5 Washington DC, 2016).

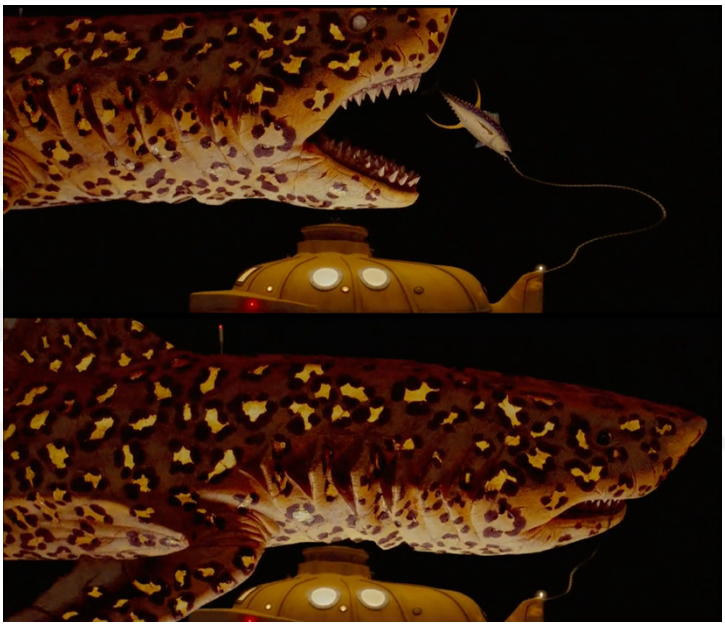


Figure 16. In *Jaws* (1975), a low-angle shot featuring the point of view of the shark approaching a pair of legs slowly instead of showing the shark itself. This cinematographic choice helps to increase the scene's tension but, at the same time, becomes a strategy to hide the shark.

However, concealing the shark is not only due to its regular breakdowns on set, nor to the suspense such withholding creates. It is also because showing the entire shark for a long time would have unveiled its obvious artificiality. Turnock (2022) explains that

[27] *Jaws*' (1975) great white is a combination of three different animatronics; for the cage scene under the water, they also used actual footages of a white shark filmed in Australia (cosmavoid, 2018).

effects artists have long been aware that if the eye gets fixated on an effects object for a long time, the viewer starts questioning its reality and realizes its artificially generated nature. Even if Spielberg's great white constitutes one of the most central characters in *Jaws*, its materiality must remain largely hidden to not distract the spectator with its artificiality.



Figures 17 & 18. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), the jaguar shark's unrealistic materiality is foregrounded in the scene.

It is only at the end of *Jaws* that we see the entire shark, at the moment when the protagonists try to kill it. Similarly, the jaguar shark of *The Life Aquatic* reveals itself only at the end of the movie, yet how we observe the two sharks differs significantly from one film to the next. In Anderson's film, the jaguar shark's texture is as discernable as the animal itself (see *Figures 17 & 18*). The unrealistic materiality of the animal is easily remarkable for the spectators and even foregrounded with its not completely smoothed out, jerky movements. Moreover, as depicted in *Figure 19* the characters themselves get in the immobile position of the spectators to contemplate the shark from

their seats inside their yellow submarine. This shows the scene is mainly concerned with the act of displaying the long-awaited shark as much as possible. At one point, as the jaguar shark passes over the submarine (*Figures 20 & 21*), it gets so close to the camera that we start observing it in extreme close-up: We wander around its surface, contemplate its skin and phosphorous jaguar pattern. This extreme close-up, in particular, puts forward how "a haptic work may create an image of such detail…that it evades a distanced view, instead pulling the viewer in close" (Marks, 2000, p. 162). As the jaguar shark covers the whole frame, it introduces such details avoiding any distant view; we observe the effects object's texture as well as the object itself.

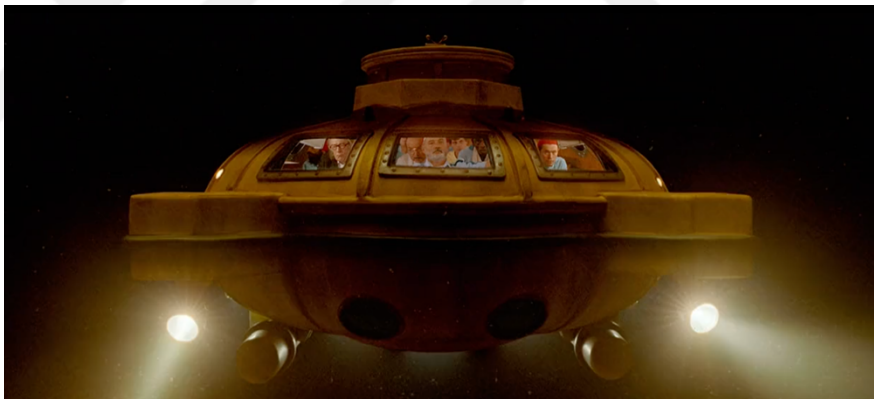


Figure 19. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), as the members of Team Zissou contemplate the shark through the front window of the submarine, they get in the immobile position of the spectators.

Conversely, when we see the entire shark at the end of *Jaws* (1975), we can only get a distant view of it thanks to the editing strategies, which also amplify the tension of the last scene where the protagonists are caught up in a "kill or die" situation. Whenever the shark fully appears on the screen, we do not see it for too long, or it returns quickly to the water, or we see it from different shot sizes or camera angles inside a fast-paced editing (see *Figures 22 & 23*). Keil & Whissel (2016) explain that in recent years, rapid

cutting has been used as a strategy to enhance the credibility of creatures created via animatronics or CGI, a technique that reduces the amount of time effects appear on the screen and, consequently, the amount of scrutiny placed upon them. The same editing strategies that prevent the eye from scrutinizing the effects objects already existed in Spielberg's 1975 movie. Even though today, *Jaws*' great white can seem plastic to the audience because of the proliferation of digital effects achieving higher levels of perceptual realism, back then, the editing aimed to create the illusion of an actual shark and keep the focus on the narrative. Marks (2000) explains that optical visuality provides a separation between the viewer and the object. *Jaws*' fast-paced editing in this last scene helps boost this separation by providing a distant view of the shark.



Figures 20 & 21. In *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), as the jaguar shark passes over the front window of the submarine, we contemplate it in an extreme close-up that emphasizes its unrealistic materiality even more.

This analysis shows that effect objects of *Life Aquatic* and *Jaws* resonate with the cinematic style of their universes: While Anderson's jaguar shark represents the overall anti-realist structure of the movie, Spielberg's great white tries to conceal its artificialness as much as possible so as not to disturb the realist atmosphere of the film. In that regard, while *Jaws*' shark initially appeals to vision, the jaguar shark can appeal to touch by drawing the viewer's attention to its materiality.

Furthermore, Hollywood's aspiration for hiding the materiality of effects that we observe in *Jaws*' mechatronics hasn't changed much in the digital era, as even digital effects try to erase their numerical nature to mimic a photorealist style. Manovich (2001) claims that the synthetic CGI seems hyperreal to the human eye; nonetheless, it does not become an inferior way of representing our reality but a way of realistically representing another type of reality. Far from being inferior to photography, CGI seems "*too real*" or "*too perfect*" compared to the photographic image (Manovich, 2001, p. 202). Therefore, digital effects have to diminish their perfection to blend into the imperfect photographic image. By degrading their hyperrealism, what digital effects try to achieve is not "our perceptual and bodily experience of reality" but rather photorealism, which is the reality capturable by a camera lens (Manovich, 2001, p. 200).[28] Furthermore, the digital image's aspiration to photorealism also evokes Rosen's (2001) term "digital mimicry," meaning the ability of digital media to simulate preexisting types of imagery, not only photography but any type of non-digital image (p. 309). Nonetheless, despite possessing

[28] Moreover, the industry and effects artists' rhetoric often implies scientific language, giving the false impression that CGI replicates the biological and physical descriptions of the body, such as the hair's texture or the eye's gleam, rather than its cinematographic representation (Turnock, 2022).

the capacity to imitate any kind of non-digital image, CGI is mainly used to capture a photorealist style.



Figures 22 & 23. In *Jaws* (1975), whenever the great white appears on the screen, we see it from various shots sizes and angles inside fast-paced editing preventing the eye from scrutinizing the shark for too long.

In that sense, similar to the techniques of analog era, contemporary CGI's strong association with photorealist norms evokes optical visuality, prioritizing the image's representational power, rather than haptic visuality, which would emphasize the image's materiality (Marks, 2020). Still, I should be clear that I find a relation between optical visuality and ILM's long-established aesthetic standards for effects realism. However, CGI could also be used in different ways to evoke haptic visuality. Marks' (2000) understanding of tactility is mainly concerned with the viewer's eye appealing to touch rather than the medium's physicalness, marking a major departure from materialist

ontologies in the Bazinian mold.[29] In that sense, for Marks (2000), digital effects' lack of material basis doesn't prevent them from creating tactile connections between the viewer and the image. For instance, nowadays, CGI aims to imitate analog methods such as stop-motion to appear indistinguishable from them. It can even simulate fingerprints on digitally created clay (*Figure 24*), as in the case of French children's movie *Non-Non Rétrécit* (2019) (Comiskey, 2022).



Figure 24. In the trailer of *Non-Non Rétrécit* (2019), a character has digitally created fingerprint marks on his glasses and red clothing to imitate the stop-motion style. This shows that the use of CGI can also create haptic connections between the viewer and the image.

By faking its stop-motion aesthetic, CGI continues to hide its numerical nature just as it does under the principles of ILM's effects realism. Yet, even if these markers are digitally rather than physically created, the simulated materiality of clay and the fingerprints on it can create haptic images. Similarly, CGI helped creating the anti-realist style of *Poulet aux Prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011), even if the visual design deliberately rejected a more conventional kind of realism. Damien Stumpf, the VFX supervisor of Satrapi and Paronnaud's film, regarding the snowflake gliding from the

[29] Marks (2000) in her own words explains that "my definition of visual tactility, however, has little to do with physical texture and mainly to do with the way the eye is compelled to 'touch' an object in the way I have described" (p. 173).

sky and falling into the garden of Naser-Ali Khan's house (*Figures 25 & 26*), explains that "[Satrapi and Paronnaud] wanted to have something that looks like a piece of cotton… It was more charming to have this unrealistic cotton flake than to have a microscopic realistic snowflake" (Frei, 2011, para. 5).



Figures 25 & 26. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the digitally created snowflake floating through the air is deliberately made to appear like a cotton piece, exemplifying that CGI can also be used to generate an anti-realist style.

Furthermore, the idea of erasing the perfection of digital effects to fake a photorealist aesthetic in Hollywood films has become a widely used strategy deriving primarily from ILM's long-established stylistic techniques. ILM's primary purpose is to avoid what effects artists name the "digital curse," a style valuing animation over photography (Turnock, 2022, p. 14). The company's effects artists aim to seamlessly composite the synthetic CGI with live-action footage and therefore degrade CGI's perfection through diverse strategies. Effects artists can also use "atmospherics" such as rain, snow, fog,

fire etc.,[30] or dim lighting such as backlighting strategies to hide the clean, sharp, free-of-focus qualities of synthetic CGI. These strategies also make the spectator fall into the illusion of seeing more than they actually do (Turnock, 2022). For instance, in *Hulk* (2003), effects artists utilized smoke as an element of atmospherics to hide Hulk's edges, giving away its numerical nature. Additionally, considering the movie's release date, 2003 refers to the early days of digital FX, where these kinds of obfuscation strategies could have been more necessary.

Aside from atmospherics, effects artists can also add to CGI motion blur, grain, or parallax effect to match the imperfect photographic image.[31] For instance, to composite the digital image of the dinosaurs with the live-action footage in *Jurassic Park* (1993), the effects artists added motion blur to dinosaurs when they moved fast (Buckland, 1999). Since a lens-based camera couldn't capture the live actors with perfect clarity when they were running, the fast-moving dinosaurs had to appear blurry as well as the actors to match the photographic image. These techniques reinforce the illusion that digital effects and live-action footage share the same spatial-temporal existence even if they ontologically cannot. Yet, considering the example of motion blur, achieving the same blurriness would not be possible solely through analog methods such as stop motion because an object animated via stop motion would stay sharp no matter how fast it is. So, the effects objects animated via stop-motion remain distinguishable in the scene, capable of attracting attention to themselves.

[30] Atmospherics are digitally created rain, smoke, and fog mimicking natural environmental qualities: These effects keep the eye moving to thus prevent the viewer from contemplating the effect objects for too long (Turnock, 2022).

[31] To achieve the parallax effect, the objects in the foreground must appear to move more quickly than those in the background as the digital camera "moves" in space (Whissel, 2014).

Not only does ILM try to hide the numerical nature of its digital effects, it also intends to give the impression that these effects are filmed by a human camera operator rather than a synthetic camera. According to Turnock (2022), ILM's style emphasizes the act of filmmaking through unstable camera motions, haphazard framing, and sudden changes in focus. These cinematographic choices not only prevent the viewer from scrutinizing an effects object by keeping the eye moving but also help to add human mistakes to CGI. Turnock (2022) even provides a formula for ILM's effects realism: "profilmic event + technology + human intervention = desired realism effect" (p. 71). The human interventions at work aim to lessen the flawlessness and hyperreal qualities of CGI.[32] Turnock (2022) explains that "perfection is the enemy of ILM's realism, and what counts is how the movie looks" (p. 71). Therefore, ILM's digital effects make room for humanly possible mistakes to hide their numerical nature which retains them from seamlessly blending with live-action footage.

In another context, ILM's effects are not designed to go completely unnoticed by the spectator: in becoming part of the spectacle of movies, they show what the medium is capable of accomplishing. Similarly, Turnock (2022) defines ILM's aesthetic as "credibly spectacular," even in films that are not effects-heavy, since the idea is to render the digital effects credible while giving room to the spectacle (p. 14). *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button's* (2008) visual effects supervisor, Eric Barba, explains that the purpose of their digital effects was "to bring this character to life so that when someone is watching the movie, all they are thinking about is the story and the

[32] I should be clear that by revealing CGI's hyperreal, automated nature, I don't intend to ignore the human labor put into making CG images. Prince (2012) suggests that "'computer-generated' implies that a computer created the image, which clearly is a false condition" (p. 9).

character" (Duncan, 2009, as cited in Allison, 2016, p. 182). Barba adds, "we didn't want anyone to be taken out of the story by some kind of obvious effects technique" (Duncan, 2009, as cited in Allison, 2016, p. 182). While this may be true for the duration of the screening, they were also interested in displaying what the technology enabled them to do, such as believably aging and de-aging a worldwide star, Brad Pitt. Olney (2010) suggests that adaptations like *Benjamin Button*, which adapts a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, can leverage an imaginative literary text as a springboard to generate spectacle via CG techniques – and this application of technology can play a major role in marketing these films to the public. Such adaptations emphasize the cutting-edge technologies used to create dazzling, fantastical landscapes or to transform actors in spectacular ways (Olney, 2010).

So, ILM's CG techniques possess an idea of exhibitionism embedded in the narrative, echoing Gunning's (2006) cinema of attractions. Gunning (2006) himself reveals that as Spielberg, Lucas, and Coppola's spectacular effects clearly show, contemporary cinema, in some senses, is inclined to revisit its origins of generating thrilling experiences reminding of amusement park rides. Still, these directors' effects find their origins in the cinema of attractions not because they disturb the narrative with non-narrative spectacle. In fact, heavy-effects sequences can be considered "as directly related to narrative thematics, subjected to allegorical reading or broader cultural discourses and anxieties" (Turnock, 2022, p. 8). The digital effects' spectacle adheres to the cinema of attractions in some senses with its eagerness to display without completely breaking off from the narrative. Tomasovic (2006), regarding *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004), explains that this kind of cinema directs the attention of the viewer to the spectacle of its

technology, though at the same time, it "transfers the attraction of the technology toward the diegetic" (Tomasovic, 2006, p. 315). In that sense, this cinema offers a double-natured attraction: the attraction of the technological device itself and diegetic action (Tomasovic, 2006). Furthermore, the spectacular aesthetic in ILM's effects can also create embodied sense experiences for its spectator, echoing the bodily responses generated through the cinema of attractions in the early days of cinema. Marks (2000) conceives the cinema of attractions as an embodied cinematic experience, since the illusion allowing for distant identification with the action is replaced with an immediate bodily reaction.

The exhibitionism of the cinema of attractions also exists in the anti-realist usage of practical effects since they can turn into displayable objects that draw attention to their surface and texture. Gunning (2006) defines the cinema of attractions as a cinema that puts forward its visibility, willing to transcend a closed-off fictitious universe to capture the spectator's attention. Comiskey (2022), concerning the TV series *The Amazing Adventures of Morph* (1980-1981), states that instead of focusing on the diegetic or portrayed space, the remarkable originality and the overt usage of recognizable materials draw attention to the profilmic space. The effect objects' unrealistic materiality, in other words, their haptic character, surpasses the limits of the narrative and pushes the viewer to think about the film's construction—that is, about how the effects are done. According to North (2016), from the very beginning of cinema, effects have aroused the curiosity of spectators and generated what Stephen Heath (1981) calls "a machine

interest,"[33] or a curiosity about the technologies used to make films and generate effects (p. 221).

This machine interest has forged new paths in post-digital cinema; in the early days of VFX, magazines such as *Cinefantastique* or *Cinefex* offered intensive information, including interviews with film crew members about the techniques and technologies utilized in Hollywood films to create special and visual effects. These magazines have respectively published their final issues in 2006 and 2021. Yet, the machine interest also surfaced elsewhere, especially with the heightened DVD culture of the 1990s and early 2000s. Films' DVD and Blu-ray releases often included supplemental materials such as making of documentaries or interviews with filmmakers and, in particular, effects artists. However, for current releases, it has become harder to reach these paratextual elements considering the proliferation of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Disney+, which do not usually pair their feature films with the same extras that might have been expected for DVD or Blu-ray releases. Nonetheless, these platforms can occasionally offer separate making-of documentaries. For instance, Netflix has released documentaries explaining the production of *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* (2019) or Guillermo del Toro's stop-motion animation film *Pinocchio* (2022), emphasizing the craftsmanship and intensive labor needed for working with analog methods.

To conclude, analog effects still exist in contemporary cinema and can reflect an anti-realist style that differs greatly from the norms of photorealism. As discussed with Wes

[33] Similar to Gunning (2006), Heath (1981) states that at the beginning of cinema history, what arouses the curiosity of the spectator was the technology. He writes "what is promoted and sold is the experience of the machine, the apparatus" (Heath, 1981, p. 221).

Anderson's *The Life Aquatic*, the unrealistic materiality of these effects provides different perspectives on the question of indexicality, which has been re-evaluated with the arrival of digital cinema. At the same time, they can embrace an embodied viewing experience where the vision can appeal to the sense of touch. Prince (2012), in his book *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema*, emphasizes that he is not writing about special effects because, to him, "except in a limited sense, the era of special effects is over" (p. 3). While Prince (2012) is strongly interested in Hollywood cinema and its abundant usage of CGI in fictional/mainstream films, the special effects actually continue to exist with a contrasting aesthetic. The fact that practical effects are no longer the backbone of Hollywood's effects industry does not totally efface them from filmmaking practices. Thus, by adopting a feminist approach to film studies, the next chapter will focus on a specific national context and question how French women filmmakers have used practical effects to go against ILM's standards of effects realism and its concomitant white masculinist values.

CHAPTER 4

FRENCH WOMEN FILMMAKERS' USE OF PRACTICAL EFFECTS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss how French women filmmakers, Marjane Satrapi and Chloé Mazlo's films can defy the ILM's standardized effects realism and reveal instead from a feminist angle the cultural exception of French cinema. To shed light on this question, I first concentrate on the intersecting qualities between the two films, Satrapi's *Poulet aux Prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011) and Mazlo's *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (Skies of Lebanon, 2020), and their transnational auteurs to better apprehend the choice for an anti-realist aesthetic in their interpretation of Iran and Lebanon. Secondly, I focus on Satrapi's effects usage evoking haptic visuality and diverging from the Hollywood style shaped by a white male dominant perspective. Finally, I will examine Mazlo's use of special effects, building a symbolic narrative and eventually creating haptic relations with the viewer to defy Hollywood's homogenized aesthetic.

It is without surprise that these films are French productions, since France has a long-established tradition of defending its national cinema, especially foregrounding such films that deviate from Hollywood norms by experimenting with film form. France held the monopoly of the worldwide film market from the emergence of cinema until the First World War.[34] Nevertheless, after this brief period, it handed over its throne to the United States. In the one hundred years following the First World War, the American film industry has expanded to become the largest in the world (Buchsbaum, 2017). Buchsbaum (2017) explains that "[the American film industry] often draws more spectators to its films in foreign markets than films produced by the national film industries in those countries" (p. 1). Hence starting very early,[35] the French state took measures to protect the French cinema from falling under Hollywood hegemony in the production, distribution, and reception areas or a certain "Hollywoodization" in the narrative and aesthetic of its films.

Even though the details of the French government's protectionary measures for defending its national cinema lie outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to note some of them here: Such as the foundation of the CNC (*Centre national de la cinématographie*) in 1946,[36] which Hayward (2006) defines as "the overseeing body for the French film industry" (p. 36). As an agency of the French Ministry of Culture, the

[34] According to Abel (1984, as cited in Hayward, 2006), 1914 marked the beginning of France's decline as the cinema industry's leader, and 1918 marked the first time the industry experienced a crisis.
[35] According to Hayward (2006), France implemented quota systems in response to the US market domination. The first quota decree was put in place as early as 1928. (Hayward, 2006).
[36] Today, it is called as *Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée*.

CNC aims to financially support the national film industry, notably through a fund called *Compte de soutien.* This fund receives money from three sources: taxes, banks, and the state, to invest them in two main categories: production and exhibition (Hayward, 2006). Moreover, we can note the foundation of SOFICAs (*Sociétés pour le financement de l'industrie cinématographique et de l'audiovisuel*) in 1985, again a government-backed entity serving to provide financial aid to French films through private investors (Buchsbaum, 2017). In addition, the state also pushes private entities such as Canal Plus*,* which is France's first private television company, a "pay-per-view and subscription media empire" (Palmer, 2011, p. 6) to invest 9% of its income in French cinema, with an additional 3% reserved for European films (Buchsbaum, 2017). Aside from *Canal Plus,* all the terrestrial or indigenous French television channels are required to spend 3.2% of their total investment on pre-purchasing and/or co-producing, with 2.5% reserved specifically for French cinema (Palmer, 2011).[37]

All protectionary measures and government-based entities help to promote the French film industry and its products. In fact, since the revolution, the French state has always valued culture and searched for means of defending and promoting it. In that regard, Hayward (2006) defines the French state as the protector of its indigenous culture since it constantly provides aid and pass laws in favor of protecting their cultural products. She writes, "protector and patron of its culture, the French state perceives the role of culture as a unifying one, as being the buttress of the nation's moral unity" (Hayward, 2006, p. 16). Hayward's (2006) arguments also reflect the recent political events

[37] For a broader perspective on the French state's protectionary measures, see Hayward (2006) and Buchsbaum (2017).

concerning French cinema's future, such as the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations in 1993 which represents in many ways a symbolic victory of Europe, led by France, against the US' push to maximize their profit from the European audiovisual market. During these trade agreements, the US insisted that the cinema and audiovisual markets "be open to the unrestricted circulation of goods," which would clearly benefit the already powerful Hollywood majors (Hayward, 2006, p. 42). In response, the minister of culture Jacques Toubon declared that cultural products should not be included in general agreements about free trade in the GATT negotiations (Hayward, 2006). Hence, France persuaded its European partners to oppose signing any agreement restricting them from establishing their own cultural policies, especially protecting their national film industry (Buchsbaum, 2017). Finally, with the help of the French government's protective measures and the resistance of the film industry, the US accepted excluding cultural products from the agreement.[38]

Hence, GATT negotiations represent a symbolic victory for France against the US, especially in terms of protecting its national cinema from Hollywood majors' already-established domination. Buchsbaum (2017) writes, "France has shown that in the increasingly globalized and digital world, national industries can survive if—and probably only if—the state intervenes judiciously to support both commercial success and artistic ambition" (pp. 2-3). In that sense, GATT was also a debate about defending French cinema's *exception culturelle*. The term *exception culturelle* or cultural exception as a political concept was introduced by France during the GATT negotiations to argue

[38] For a more detailed understanding of the GATT negotiations and its future benefits for the French cinema see Hayward (2006) and Buchsbaum (2017).

that cultural products should be treated differently from other products.[39] Even though the cultural exception is foremost related to the GATT, it reflects a long-established political strategy to support national cinema. Sojcher (2011) defines cultural exception as "the possibility of setting up a series of regulations, national and regional aids that have allowed French cinema to continue to subsist" (p. 176).[40]

While cultural exception appears primarily as a political concept, in this chapter, I will argue that the term can also manifest itself in the aesthetic of French films by leaving aside Hollywood's standardized aesthetic criteria. The films in question in this chapter, Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud's *Poulet aux prunes* (2011) and Chloé Mazlo's *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), adopt an anti-realist aesthetic chiefly through their usage of practical effects, which can go against Hollywood's obsession with effects realism and what Turnock (2022) refers in her book about ILM (Industrial Light & Magic), as ISER; "international standard of effects realism" (p. 145). As mentioned in the earlier chapters, ILM has become so powerful in the effects industry that "an aesthetic history of cinematic effects since 1975 [has become] an aesthetic history of ILM…[and] an aesthetic history of ILM [has become] the history of cinematic realism since the 1980s—and not just in effects-heavy mainstream cinema" (Turnock, 2022, p. 4). ILM's effects aesthetic has turned into a standardized style taken up by other powerful effects companies and other filmmaking practices and cultures around the world. Against ISER,

[39] Buchsbaum (2017) asserts that where the term "cultural exception" first appeared is unclear. Even though it has occasionally appeared elsewhere prior to the GATT negotiations, Buchsbaum (2017) argues that it has found its true resonance during these trade discussions in 1993.
[40] Translated by the author.

the films of Mazlo and Chloé opt for a cinematic style valuing the anti-realism of their effects.

Before delving further into this anti-realist style manifesting itself in Satrapi and Mazlo's films, I would argue that the cultural exception of French cinema also reveals itself in terms of defending women's cinema. As Rollet (2015) states, France is the most successful nation in the world in promoting women filmmakers; it has the highest number of women filmmakers actively working and the highest percentage of films made by female directors. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the CNC has a *compte de soutien*, which is preserved for helping the production and distribution sectors of the industry. The help from this fund can take two forms: the *soutien automatique* or the *avance sur recettes* (Hayward, 2006). All French productions and coproduction benefit from the *soutien automatique* which is pro-rated based on the film's performance at the box office; this aid helps to finance a subsequent movie (Hayward, 2006). On the other hand, the *avance sur recettes* is a selective aid that producers or filmmakers can receive if a government-appointed committee approves the script for their film (Hayward, 2006). This peculiar subvention system, especially the *avance sur recettes* helps French cinema produce numerous first films and "a constant renewal of filmmakers" (Rollet, 2015, p. 401). This also explains why France has the highest percentage of first films made by women in the world (Rollet, 2015).

The directors in question in this chapter, Chloé Mazlo and Marjane Satrapi, have benefitted from *avance sur recettes*: Marjane Satrapi for her debut feature *Persepolis* (2007) and Mazlo for *Sous le ciel d'Alice*. Also, la Fémis, the top-ranked French film school affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, significantly increases

the visibility of women directors by maintaining strong ties with other cinema institutions in France; for instance, most of the women directors benefiting from *avance sur recettes* are graduates from this school (Rollet, 2015). Aside from the state-affiliated organizations, the French organization Le Collectif 50/50 has been a driving force since 2018 for bringing more gender parity in the film and audiovisual sectors: At the 2018 Cannes Film festival, the organization gathered 82 women from the industry, led by Cate Blanchett and Agnès Varda, and they climbed the stairs of the red-carpet in silence to highlight the absence of female representation at the festival.

While these films, through their cinematic style, can reflect French cinema's long-time political project of cultural exception, this term itself has been confronted, if not replaced, with another term, "cultural diversity." Buchsbaum (2017) explains that while the cultural exception was the defense slogan against the US pressures in the GATT negotiations, the discussion has shifted from cultural exception to cultural diversity (Buchsbaum, 2017). One of the reasons for this shift is that the cultural exception have been accused of being too defensive or protectionist, hence the need for a more neutral term. Though more importantly, cultural diversity, as Buchsbaum explains (2017), "would argue for a world perspective on culture, one that would champion a form of labile cultural hybridity against the threats of cultural standardization represented by U.S. mass cultural production" (p. 159).

The project of "cultural diversity" displays why France often co-produces, promotes, or gives financial aid to transnational projects even though they don't necessarily prompt an idea of "France" or "Frenchness" in their narrative through parameters such as

language, casting or setting, etc. I argue that by recuperating these kinds of transnational productions, regardless of their attachment to Frenchness, the French film industry intends to resist the US domination in the global market and create diversity against its homogenizing effects. For instance, we can think of French-Turkish film director Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang* (2015), co-produced by France, Germany, Turkey, and Qatar. The film is shot in Turkey, with Turkish actors and dialogue entirely in Turkish, yet it represented France in the Best Foreign-Language Film category at the 2016 Academy Awards.

Similarly, *Poulet aux prunes* and *Sous le ciel d'Alice* are both transnational films because of their auteurs' presence; Marjane Satrapi is French-Iranian, and Chloé Mazlo French-Lebanese, their preference for a multinational cast,[41] and the setting of Iran and Lebanon in their stories. In that sense, Satrapi and Mazlo's films, as much as they are transnational productions, are also associated with some Frenchness because they are produced by French production companies (without forgetting that Satrapi's film is a co-production of France, Germany, and Belgium), benefited from governmental aid, and include heavily French language in their narrative.[42] Satrapi herself assumes this

[41] *Poulet aux prunes* include actors such as Mathieu Amalric (French), Jamel Debbouze (French-Moroccan), Isabella Rossellini (Italian-American), Chiara Mastroianni (French-Italian), Golshifteh Farahani (French-Iranian). To understand how this multinational casting nourishes the film's transnationalism, see Kennedy-Karpat (2015). Moreover, *Sous le ciel d'Alice* features actors such as Alba Rohrwacher (Italian) and Majdi Mouawad (Canadian-Lebanese), and the rest of the casting features uniquely Lebanese actors.

[42] *Poulet aux Prunes* contains only one phrase in Farsi at the beginning of the film: *Yeki bood, yeki nabood* which is the equivalent of "once upon a time" in English or *il était une fois* in French. The film also has some dialogues in English, notably in the scene remediating a sitcom episode about the future of Nasser Ali's son, Cyrus. *Sous le ciel d'Alice* also includes some scenes in Italian and Arabic throughout the film.

multiculturalist atmosphere in her film, yet defines *Poulet aux prunes* before anything as a French film (Télé 7 Jours, 2011).

Hence, the works of Satrapi and Mazlo resonate with the project of cultural diversity as well as the cultural exception. Furthermore, we can also consider these films as examples of what scholars have started to conceptualize as *cinéma-monde* in which a heightened idea of cultural diversity resides. Gott and Schilt (2018) explain that *cinéma-monde* transcends "a francophone label," which sounds problematic in many ways since it suggests a dichotomy between French and its former colonies or often tends to neglect European French-language production (p. 2). *Cinéma-monde* tries to surpass these dichotomies and describes a more flexible film corpus that does not limit itself to French-speaking countries, regions, or zones but holds other connections to the francophone world "by some combination of linguistic or cultural affinities, geographic contacts, production connections or reception networks" (Gott & Schilt, 2018, p. 2). For instance, as Weber-Fève (2021) discusses, *Poulet aux prunes* takes place in Iran, which is not considered a francophone country nor does it share any colonial history with France;[43] nonetheless, the film remains firmly attached to the francophone world, revealing a compelling example of *cinéma-monde*.

[43] Weber-Fève (2021) also highlights that while Iran has never been colonized by France, during Reza Shah's rule (from 1926 to 1942), the government collaborated with France in the establishment of French banks and French *lycées* (high schools) all over the country. This facilitated the development of cross-cultural ties between the two nations.

4.2. From Iran to Lebanon: The Construction of a Fantasy World

Poulet aux prunes tells the story of Nasser Ali Khan, a famous worldwide Iranian violinist. After his violin gets broken, Nasser Ali loses the will to live and starts waiting for death in his bed. We witness his last eight days on earth as he remembers the past and his lost love, Irâne. *Sous le ciel d'Alice* tells the story of a young Swiss nanny leaving her country to live in Lebanon, where she falls in love with a Lebanese astrophysicist. The couple lives happily until the civil war, irreparably changing their joyful lives. While *Poulet aux prunes* is set in 1950s Tehran, *Sous le ciel d'Alice* takes place in 1950-1975s Beirut. Yet, neither film provides a realistic interpretation of the country they depict: Satrapi's film takes the form of a Persian fairy tale, and *Sous le ciel d'Alice* constructs an idyllic vision of Lebanon before the civil war.

Both directors intentionally use overtly artificial practical effects to give this anti-realist interpretation of their universes. For instance, Mazlo draws upon old, grainy postcard-like images of Lebanon as matte paintings to replace the backgrounds (see *Figures 27 & 28*). While these images give an idea of 1950s to 1970s Lebanon, they certainly do not intend to provide a realistic interpretation of the country as they make the studio artifice readily apparent. Similarly, as I will reveal more in detail in the subsequent section, *Poulet aux prunes* make use of matte paintings depicting the city and mountains, which does not aim at realistically representing 1950s Tehran but rather to tell a Persian fairy-tale. It is also important to highlight that even though Mazlo is more inclined to use analog methods, Satrapi utilizes a lot of CGI, especially in replacing the backgrounds.

However, her digital effects' aesthetic does not try to pass unnoticed, transparent, or photorealist as is the case with ILM's effects realism; instead, it intends to enhance the anti-realist style of the film. For instance, regarding the set extensions, Damien Stumpf, the VFX artist of the film, explains that Satrapi and Paronnaud wanted a very graphic look avoiding any photorealism (Frei, 2011).



Figures 27 & 28. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), Mazlo avoids a realistic interpretation of Beirut: the different backgrounds of the city are depicted by matte paintings showing grainy postcard-like images of Beirut. These backgrounds remain overtly separate from the foregrounds.

Furthermore, the preference for an anti-realist aesthetic is accentuated by the decision to shoot in the studio. For Mazlo's film, they constructed Alice and Joseph's apartment in the studios of Bry-Sur-Marne, in France, the other interior scenes in Paris region, and all the exteriors in Cyprus (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). The choice of filming in a studio and not actually in Beirut, as Mazlo explains it, gives the possibility of being

"elsewhere" (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021, p. 10), thus avoiding a realistic interpretation of the city. In fact, even if the film is shot mainly in the studio, Mazlo could have still constructed a more realistic Beirut image, as is the case with mainstream Hollywood movies and blockbusters.[44] These movies usually attempt to hide the studio artifice to give a realistic image of their universes and consequently immerse the viewer in the story. On the other hand, Mazlo's matte paintings enhance the construction of an anti-realist Beirut image and thus join this sensation of being "elsewhere" rather than in Beirut.

Similarly, Satrapi and Paronnaud shot their film in Babelsberg studios located in Germany. During an interview, the duo explained that they wanted to shoot the movie entirely in a studio (except for a two-minute animation sequence) and pay homage to 1950s cinema (Allociné, 2011a). In that sense, Satrapi explains that the film is inspired by midcentury Hollywood melodrama, specifically the cinema of Micheal Powell, Emeric Pressburger, and Douglas Sirk (Mechanic, 2012).[45] However, as Kennedy-Karpat (2015) explains, "far from a pure pastiche of these films, *Poulet aux prunes* augments the studio artifice of its reconstruction of 1950s Tehran with occasional forays into remediation that lend touches of whimsy to the film's rather dark conceit" (p. 77). Since I will reveal the elements of remediation in detail later, I want to limit the discussion to the representation of Tehran. In the film's first shot, we contemplate the

[44] We should also take into account the inevitable budget difference between Mazlo's film and a Hollywood mainstream production impacting her effects' aesthetic.
[45] Satrapi also refers to specific film examples such as Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *The Red Shoes* (1948) (Mechanic, 2012). Additionally, Damien Stumpf, the film's VFX artist, explains that they were inspired by *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), the creation of the night shots (Frei, 2011).

gray city of Tehran and the mountains behind it in animation, which appear very graphic. Through a dissolve, we transition from the animated view of the city to a shot in the studio, where we are much closer to the buildings we have seen from far away in the previous shot while keeping the animated view of the mountains in the background (see *Figures 29 & 30*). This shot demonstrates that filming in the studio does not intend to provide a realistic interpretation of the city but rather to imitate the graphic style of the first animated shot.



Figures 29 & 30. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the live-action view of Tehran filmed in the studio matches the graphic style of the preceding animated shot rather than providing a realist interpretation of the city.

Hence both directors' construction of Iran and Lebanon shows that they want to adopt a whimsical, fairy-tale-like tone retaining them from creating a realistic period melodrama. Furthermore, Hayward (2006) explains that filmic narrations often refer to the "available discourses and myths of its own culture" (p. 15); however, these cultural

and nationalistic myths, instead of truthfully mirroring reality, transform and reshape it to build a specific way of understanding that nation. She also underlines that the construction of myths is neither inherent to the center (for example, Hollywood) nor the periphery (national cinemas); however, the way these two represent the myths radically differ (Hayward, 2006). She explains, "[the center] in its reconstruction will provide, in the main, hegemonic transparence. [The periphery] will challenge, even deconstruct, that transparence and hegemony" (Hayward, 2006, p. 15). According to Hayward (2006), the center, thanks to its economic hegemony, will largely dominate the periphery in its construction of myths; still, cultural specificities will emerge, as is the case with Satrapi and Mazlo's works which appeal to the anti-realism of their practical effects in reflecting the "myths" of their home country rather than imitating Hollywood's effects realism.

Furthermore, these French women directors' myth construction will differ from Hollywood because their primary source of inspiration in creating these fairy-tale-like universes comes from themselves, from the real stories their families transmitted to them. For instance, the character of Nasser Ali is inspired by Satrapi's great uncle, who died long before she was born (Paradou, 2011).[46] Satrapi explains that all she knows about her uncle is a photo of him looking handsome and romantic and what her family told her, such as the fact that he was a musician and died of sadness (Paradou, 2011). Hence, the musician uncle of Satrapi becomes no more than a reference point on which Satrapi builds her own imagination and creates a Persian fairy tale. In that regard, *Poulet*

[46] Additionally, the scene in which Nasser Ali sees Irâne for the first time is inspired by Satrapi's grandfather, who first noticed a "nice pair of legs" walking in the street and then the owner of those legs: Satrapi's grandmother. (Kennedy-Karpat, 2015, p. 83).

aux prunes also differs from Satrapi's first and internationally recognized film, *Persepolis*, where she tells her own coming-of-age story in pre and post-revolutionary Iran and her migration to Europe. Additionally, the fact that *Poulet aux prunes* is inspired by Satrapi's uncle and Satrapi's transnational authorship itself shows that even though she collaborated with Vincent Paronnaud for this film, she has a more personal attachment to the story and its cultural context. In fact, Satrapi created the story by herself first in the comic book medium and then adapted it to the cinema with the help of the film's co-director, Vincent Paronnaud. Kennedy-Karpat (2015) explains that "Satrapi's privilege as self-adapter gives her an edge in terms of perceived authority over the finished work that is strengthened by her personal connection to her story and its cultural setting" (p. 82).

Moreover, Mazlo also explains that the character of Alice was inspired by her Swiss grandmother, who left her home country for Beirut as a nanny in the 1950s and fell in love first with the country and then with Mazlo's grandfather (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). The point to underline is that Mazlo was born in France and had not been to Beirut until age eight (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Therefore, she has primarily learned and developed a fascination with this country by listening to the stories of her parents and grandparents, who describe Lebanon as an almost magical place (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021).

The common point about these French women filmmakers is that they are inspired by family stories they are not part of in creating their universes. Hence, they are distant from these stories, and this situation is accentuated in the films by their use of special

effects, which distances the filmic narration itself from reality. For instance, *Sous le ciel d'Alice* tells the shattering life of a family in the face of the Lebanese civil war. Yet, it chooses not to directly depict the brutality of the war or the suffering of other civilians. Therefore, instead of creating spectacular scenes condemning the horrors of the war as we are familiar with Hollywood films, Mazlo chooses a very symbolic narrative where Lebanon is represented by a woman disguised in cedar who gets assaulted by a soldier during a dance scene. Interestingly, Mazlo reveals that as children of Lebanese immigrants, they haven't physically suffered from the war but from the lack of family warmth (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). She adds that they feel nostalgia for a country that they don't know but have learned about through their family (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Thus the fact that Mazlo herself didn't see the war and its effects makes her use a symbolic narration nourished by her Lebanese family's stories and the anti-realism of her special effects.

Further, not only do Mazlo and Satrapi transmit family stories they are not part of, but these stories themselves take place in countries that have changed drastically in time. Both films clearly emphasize the loss of a beloved country, notably through their love stories ending in bad terms. In *Poulet aux prunes*, the character of Irâne, through her name, creates a clear allegory in which Nasser Ali's lost love also symbolizes the lost homeland. The fact that the character is interpreted by Golshifteh Farahani, the only Iranian actor in the film, accentuates this allegory even more. Without a doubt, this loss affects contemporary Iranian exiles such as Satrapi, but the setting of 1958 also highlights what has been lost to time for those who remain in Iran (Kennedy-Karpat, 2015). In the same vein, Mazlo explains that Lebanon from the 1950s to 1970s appears

as a radiant and modern country, an "Eden of the Middle East" (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021, p. 5), however with the arrival of the civil war, this paradise starts to fall apart. *Sous le ciel d'Alice* focuses on the shattering of that paradise through Alice, who is forced to leave Lebanon and her husband because of the war. In fact, during the movie, Alice struggles not to leave the country, and all characters, including Alice, have a hard time admitting the presence of an actual war.

Therefore, both Mazlo and Satrapi's films represent the denial of this loss through their aesthetic. While Satrapi chooses to show 1950s Iran as a Persian fairy-tale filled with anti-realist effects, decors, and settings and nourishing it with occasional elements of remediation, Mazlo shows pre-war Lebanon as an idealized place filled with souvenirs of Lebanon such as props, costumes and the country's old images as backgrounds. In that regard, these films resonate with Naficy's (2006) concept of "accented cinema" which is rooted in the "filmmakers' profound experiences of deterritorialization which oscillates between dysphoria and euphoria" (p. 122). Naficy (2006) explains that accented films are interested in recapturing the homeland or returning to it, and consequently, they can visually fetishize it with landscapes, monuments, photographs, and souvenirs in their mise-en-scene. Especially Mazlo's film is driven by this desire to recapture the lost homeland and convey memories from that era and Lebanon with objects and photos specific to the 1950s and 1970s.

Hence these French women filmmakers create an unrealistic interpretation of their country through their mise-en-scene and break the homogeneity of Hollywood's myth construction inclined to a realist aesthetic. Yet it is also essential to draw attention to the

fact that while they distance their story from reality through their effects usage, as discussed so far, there is also an idea of embracing the self or the roots of selfhood through their cinematic style. Both Satrapi and Mazlo use anti-realist effects as an auteurist tool to reveal stories of homeland and family. Martin (2008) argues that the concept of "auteurism" remains largely ungendered, if not masculine, stemming mainly from *Cahiers du cinéma* critics' aspiration for self-expression against the traditional mainstream French cinema. Since The French New Wave, as the visibility of women filmmakers has relatively increased in the industry, we have moved a long way from this masculinist view of authorship (Martin, 2008). However, scholars still struggle to approach and conceptualize women's filmmaking and authorship: Martin (2008) argues that female authorship is considered strongly linked to the "filmmaker as a woman," meaning the film's autobiographical attachment to her filmmaker, her actual presence in the movie, or the presence of a female voice in the story. Yet, none of these criteria makes a woman filmmaker a film's auteur; instead, in indicating a female auteur Martin (2008) proposes Agnès Varda's (1994) term *cinécriture*. The term, when translated into English, means "cine-writing," yet it does not only refer to the screenwriting process of a film but how a cinematic universe is constructed and "written" by its auteur's choices for its mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing. Varda (1994), in her own words,[47] explains *cinécriture* as the following:

> A well-written film is also well shot; the actors are well chosen, as well as the locations. The cutting, the movements, the points of view, the rhythm of the shooting, and the editing were felt and thought out like the choices of a writer, dense sentences or not, type of words, frequency of adverbs, paragraphs, parentheses, chapters progressing the story or breaking its flow, etc. In writing, it is called the style. In cinema, it is *cinécriture*. (p. 14)

[47] Translated by the author.

In the case of Satrapi and Mazlo, the usage of practical effects turns into a particular form of *cinécriture*; a feminist tool they use to write about selfhood. Though it is important to highlight that while the term *cinécriture* itself does not convey any feminist idea, it can turn into a feminist strategy when used by women filmmakers. Furthermore, this aspect of self-writing through their cinematic style also differentiates these French women filmmakers from other auteurs using similar cinematic forms, such as Wes Anderson or Joann Sfar. Their anti-realist effects usage also becomes a particular way of resisting Hollywood dominance, yet unlike Satrapi and Mazlo, they don't use their cinematic style to embrace a form of self-writing; in contrast they tend to obscure the self. For instance, as I will reveal more when explaining Satrapi's comic book background, Joann Sfar's recognized Jewish identity and anti-realist cinematic style situates himself not only outside the Hollywood norm but also the French mainstream cinema. Yet, his use of this technique is more inclined to reflect another person's life than his own, as is the case with his film *Gainsbourg (Vie héroïque)* (Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life, 2010), a biopic focusing on the life of the famous French singer Serge Gainsbourg. On the other hand, as I reveal more in Chapter 5, Michel Gondry's usage of analog methods also takes the form of self-writing in some of his films, such as *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006), reflecting clearly Gondry's own childhood memories, dreams, and nightmares; or *L'Épine dans le cœur* (The Thorn in the Heart, 2009) a documentary focusing on Gondry's family relationships and especially his aunt Suzette who is a school teacher.

Moreover, Mazlo and Satrapi's work exemplifies that cultural specificities can emerge from different cinematic styles. Hayward (2006) explains that the center determines the standardized equipment and "its homogenising effect on cinema" (p. 13). Yet, as she further discusses, "cinema does not just standardise. Cinema also particularizes," meaning that cultural and national specificity will emerge from these standardized technologies, for instance, through a particular editing style (Hayward, 2006, p. 13). *Poulet aux Prunes* and *Sous le ciel d'Alice* depict how national cinemas can use the center's homogenized technology to reshape it in various ways and create a different aesthetic that finally radically contrasts with the center.

In that sense, Satrapi and Mazlo's practical effects highlight the arguments of Comolli (1980), who perceives cinema foremost as an ideological machine and consider that the ideologies guiding cinema determine the used technologies. Satrapi and Mazlo's anti-realist practical effects turn into ideological tools refusing to follow what ILM deploys so successfully and instead choosing to wink at the beginning of film history and especially Méliès' cinema. Georges Méliès represents "the antithesis of the Lumière cinema" (Lanzoni, 2008, p. 32) since far from taking his inspiration from mundane events or concentrating on documentary as Lumière brothers do, Méliès' films are interested in creating fantasy worlds filled with *magic*. Méliès made use of "special effects, superimpositions, double or more exposure, fade in, fade out, and painted-scenery backgrounds" which consequently gave his films a brand-new style (Lanzoni, 2008, p. 34). Méliès' cinema reveals itself in the aesthetic of these French women filmmakers' works: "his humor, juvenile passion for fictional tales, elaborate

background sets, and special effects" (Lanzoni, 2008, p. 36) is also present in the works of these directors.



Figures 31 & 32. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), the constantly deployed cinematographic choice of using fixed shots filmed at eye level draws attention to the mise-en-scene and particularly the effects themselves.

In Marjane Satrapi's film, the traces of Méliès' cinema shows itself in remediation elements filled with analog effects such as miniatures, matte paintings, prosthetic make-up, etc. Yet, this tradition is heightened in Satrapi's utilization of foregrounds and backgrounds, constructed chiefly by green screen and occasionally through analog matte paintings. In either method, the foregrounds and backgrounds do not form a homogenized ensemble but remain overtly distinct from each other. In that regard, *Poulet aux prunes* recall Méliès' elaborated construction of backgrounds adding depth to the utterly flat medium of cinema. In the later section, I will concentrate more on the

formal similarities between *Poulet aux prunes* and Méliès' film *Le palais des mille et une nuits* (The Palace of the Arabian Nights, 1905) through Marks' (2000) concept of haptic visuality.[48]

Aside from both directors' usage of practical effects, the traces of Méliès cinema also displays itself in Mazlo's cinematography. Lanzoni (2008) explains that Méliès compensated for the inevitable immobility of his camera with special effects, costumes, and meticulously constructed backgrounds. Mazlo, in many senses, pays homage to this tradition, especially in the symbolically represented civil war scenes. In these various scenes, we see the dead civilians covered with white sheets lying on the ground or the soldiers with masks fighting with each other, which are always filmed with an immobile camera at eye level (see *Figures 31 & 32*). In fact, these cinematographic choices are constantly deployed in the film: The camera is often immobile, and the "attractions" come from special effects, costumes, decors, and settings reminiscent of the Méliès' films atmosphere. For example, in one scene where we contemplate the couple's apartment gradually getting decorated by itself through the stop-motion technique or in another one where Alice gets rid of a thick root attached to her foot made through practical effect, the camera always stays motionless to pay attention to the effects themselves.

Moreover, this preference for an anti-realist aesthetic standing against ILM's effects realism derives primarily from the background of the directors. Marjane Satrapi is mainly a comic book artist, and both *Persepolis* and *Poulet aux prunes* are adapted from

[48] The film is also known as *Ali Barbouyou et Ali Bouf à l'Huile* (Lant, 1995).

her own books. Yet, for this first film, Satrapi chose animation instead of live-action. As Kennedy-Karpat (2015) mentions, Satrapi clearly has the ability to animate *Poulet aux prunes* in the manner of her drawing, which means creating another *Persepolis*. Yet, the director preferred to shoot the film in a real studio with live actors. While moving away from animation and adapting from comic book to live-action represented a lot of challenges for the director, it also generated a visually rich text. Kennedy-Karpat (2015) discusses that the film evokes its original medium, but it also goes beyond it by using remediation elements varying from animation to photographic slideshow to create vignettes that diverge or deepen the narrative's focus. Similarly, Satrapi herself explains that they were obliged to detach themselves from the book because the frame of cinema and comic book differ significantly (Paradou, 2011); still, she thinks that the abundance of paintings and sets in their film recalls her origin as a graphic artist (Allociné, 2011b). In fact, Marjane Satrapi is not the only director having a comic book background and adopting a cartoonish aesthetic replete with special effects. The French comic book artist Joann Sfar has adapted his comic book *Gainsbourg: (hors champ)* (2009) to cinema with the title *Gainsbourg (Vie héroïque)* (2010). The film put forward Sfar's graphic artist background notably through an animation sequence at the beginning but also practical effects used to create Gainsbourg's alter-ego by exaggerating his "ugly features," such as his large hatchet nose or jug ears.

Similarly, Chloé Mazlo studied graphic design and discovered her interest in animation during a video course: She explains that for her first animation project, *L'amour m'anime* (2007), her primary references were not directors but painters, graphic designers, or video artists (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Also, before her first feature-

length film, all the short films she made were mostly in stop-motion animation, sometimes including live actors. For this first debut, Mazlo mentions the impossibility of making it entirely in stop-motion since this technique has a burlesque aspect that can install a distance and hinder emotion (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Instead, as I will focus more in the chapter concerning *Sous le ciel d'Alice*, Mazlo uses a variety of practical effects, including stop-motion; however, unlike her short features, the stop-motion technique appears solely in particular sequences of the film notably to create a metaphoric narration. Hence, both directors make use of a variety of techniques in the creation of their visually challenging ideas, which both reflect and transcend their backgrounds.

The following section will concentrate uniquely on Marjane Satrapi's *Poulet aux prunes* and will give a closer look at her utilization of practical effects, which stand against the center's effects aesthetic and especially ILM's effects realism.

4.2.1. Marjane Satrapi's Usage of Practical Effects in *Poulet aux prunes* (2011)

Satrapi's first two films, *Persepolis* and *Poulet aux prunes* are adapted from her own comic books carrying the same names; yet while Satrapi chooses to make an animation movie for her first film, the latter is entirely shot in a studio with live actors except for a two-minute animation sequence. As discussed earlier, the choice to move away from animation for this second film generated a visually compelling text filled with anti-realist effects contrasting sharply with the effects aesthetic of Hollywood. Yet, the desire to differentiate itself from Hollywood's dominant cinematic style is not inherent to

Poulet aux prunes but also exists in *Persepolis.* Palmer (2011) explains that *Persepolis*' aesthetic recall to Michel Ocelot's *Kirikou et la sorcière* (Kirikou and the Sorceress, 1998) "with stylized and characteristically artisanal French techniques that diverge from more technically cutting-edge Hollywood animations" (p. 53). In that sense, films such as *Kirikou* or *Persepolis,* with their lack of texture and volume, radically contrast with "the hyperrealistic three-dimensional norms for Pixar's toys, monsters, and cars" (Neupert, 2008, as cited in Palmer, 2011, p. 53).



Figures 33 & 34. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the slide show represents Cyrus' life with a cartoonish vision away from reality, such as the fans depicted as miniature dolls filling the basketball court stands or the exterior view of Cyrus' house depicted with miniature houses and a toy-looking brown SUV.

This animation aesthetic defying Hollywood's realistic standards also manifests itself in Satrapi's subsequent film, *Poulet aux prunes*, notably with remediation elements that add other layers to or deepen the narrative. One of these remediation elements appears in

the part where we watch a brief series of shots depicting the life story of Nasser Ali's son Cyrus.[49] Combining the unnatural motion of silent film with blurry framing and adding wipe transitions with the clicking sound of the carousel, this ensemble of brief shots aims to mediate a photographic slide show (Kennedy-Karpat, 2015). The slide show features key moments from Cyrus' life, such as his migration from Iran to the US because of the war, his American college life, and his meeting with his future wife. However, these moments are never given realistically and intend to represent Cyrus' life with a symbolic and "cartoonish" vision through the anti-realism of analog and digital effects. For instance, in the shot where Cyrus plays basketball while Nancy cheerleads at university, the fans filling the stands in the background are not depicted by live actors but by miniature dolls chanting in mechanical and dull movements. Moreover, in the shot where we see Cyrus come home from work, they depicted the exterior view of his house and Cyrus' car as toy-like miniatures (see *Figures 33 & 34*). Similarly, to represent Cyrus' move away to the US (*Figure 35*), the shot depicts him inside a minuscule (compared to his size) single-seater airplane with an open top, flying next to a rotating model of the earth in the lower left corner of the frame where a miniature American flag finally appears. Interestingly, in *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (*Figure 36*), Mazlo chooses a similar way to show the trajectory of Alice from Switzerland to Lebanon with an unrealistic miniature train transforming Itself into a ship and approaching the coast of Beirut in stop-motion.

[49] I will limit the discussion to the slideshow here because it illustrates the best the anti-realist style with a mix usage of both practical and digital effects. Yet, there are also other remediation elements in the film such as the scene simulating and exaggerating an American sitcom following the slides, a two-minute animation sequence or a tableau vivant imitating *La mort de Socrate* (The Death of Socrates, 1787) with live actors.



Figure 35. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), Cyrus' travel from Iran to the US is represented symbolically: Cyrus sits inside a miniature plane with an open top next to a model of the earth.



Figure 36. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), Alice's travel from Switzerland to Lebanon is depicted in a symbolic manner with a miniature boat moving around a blue and white map. This shot echoes the representation of Cyrus' journey to the US in *Poulet aux prunes.*

In that sense, Satrapi and Mazlo's effects usage departs from ILM's effects realism and its globally deployed standards which values primarily credibility, transparency, and photorealism of its effects. Moreover, *Poulet aux prunes* in some sequences also pay homage to the German expressionist movement of the 1920s, accentuating the anti-realist aesthetic of the film. Additionally, it is no surprise that the film is shot in Germany's Babelsberg studios which contributed to the German expressionist movement with iconic examples such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).

Furthermore, Palmer (2011) argues that traces of German expressionism are also present in Satrapi's previous film, *Persepolis*. According to Palmer (2011), the expressionist movement's graphically angular and claustrophobic designs influence the film's cinematic style. While these graphic motifs that we see primarily in the most disturbing moments of the film serve to highlight Iran as "a country that has sold its soul, a grotesque metropolis where no one is safe" (Palmer, 2011, p. 55) in *Poulet aux prunes* the expressionism is used to reveal Nasser Ali's bad memories, dark fantasies or his strange meeting with Azrael.



Figures 37 & 38. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the school principal scolds Nasser Ali while praising his brother Abdi inside a dark angular room with windows diffusing the light in fragments. The scene's claustrophobic atmosphere recalls the aesthetic of the German expressionist movement.

The expressionism features most clearly in one of Nasser Ali's childhood memories (*Figures 37 & 38*), in which the school principal scolds little Nasser Ali and praises his brother, Abdi, in a dark angular-shaped classroom filled with other students. The

claustrophobic atmosphere of the room is accentuated even more through the window located on the left of the frame diffusing the light in a highly fragmented way and consequently forming a game of shadow and light. This scene recalls the formal characteristics of German expressionism and its iconic examples, such as Wiene's *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) or Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922).



Figures 39 & 40. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), Nasser Ali opens his arms to the woman representing Sophia Loren. The dimensions of the space and the proportion of the objects are exaggerated, recalling the formal characteristics of German expressionism.

More importantly, the expressionist style reappears through the usage of practical effects in the film. In the scene where Nasser Ali fantasizes about Sophia Loren (*Figures 39 & 40*), a woman whose face we cannot see enters the protagonist's room in darkness and slowly approaches him lying on the bed. In an over-the-shoulder shot of the woman, we see Nasser Ali in the background, far away, appearing smaller than usual. This illusion is undoubtedly created through a light and shadow game exaggerating the dimensions of

the space. Though more importantly, in this sequence, Nasser Ali's usual bed and pillows are replaced by larger ones, eventually making him appear smaller than her. Additionally, As the woman approaches, she undresses and whispers thrillingly *Vieni piccolo* in Italian, showing very clearly that she represents Sophia Loren but also the word *piccolo* accentuates Nasser Ali's littleness against a gorgeous worldwide star like Sophia Loren.[50]As the character of Sophia Loren gets very close (*Figure 41*), we see in close-up a larger-than-life model torso with immense breasts, which again stresses Naser Ali's littleness compared to Sophia Loren. This female torso model is made by using practical effects which aim at exaggerating and contrasting the characters' proportions, again a prevalent characteristic of German expressionism.

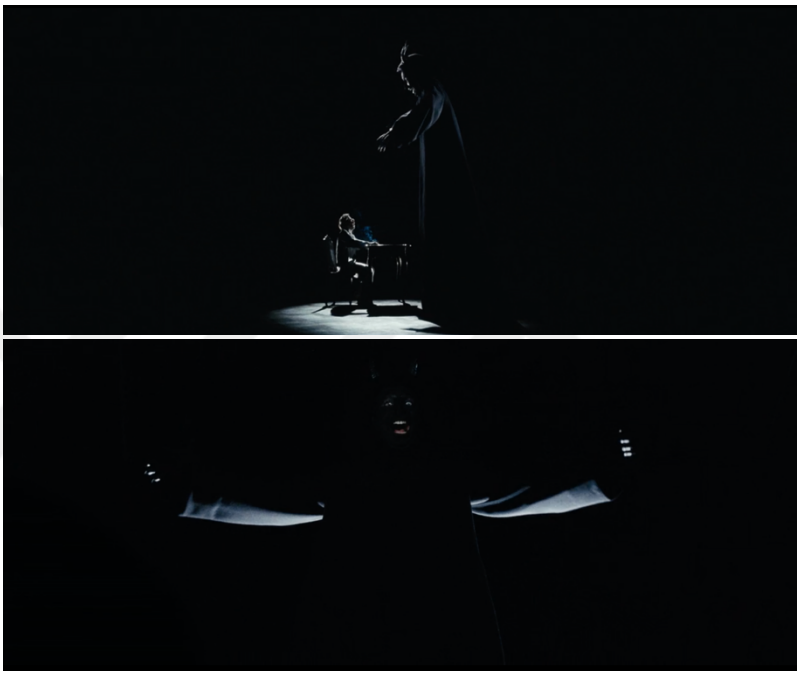


Figure 41. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), As "Sophia Loren" gets very close to Nasser Ali, her breasts appear larger than life size, emphasizing the littleness of Nasser Ali in contrast to Sophia Loren.

Furthermore, the claustrophobic design and the exaggerated dimensions and character proportions reappear in the scene where Nasser Ali meets with Azrael (see *Figures 42 & 43*). While these expressionist tendencies conform to the general anti-realist style of the film (see *Figure 44*), the fact that an actual actor interprets the Azrael character

[50] *Vieni piccolo* in Italian can be translated to English as "come here little one."

heightens it even more. Azrael could have been a realistic, monster-like character created through CG methods as we are familiar with Hollywood fantasy movies, yet Satrapi chooses to use an actual actor with a costume and heavy dark make-up serving to show the concept of death sarcastically funny.



Figures 42 & 43. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the character Azrael opens his arms wide to scare Nasser Ali inside an almost completely dark room. The exaggerated proportions of Azrael and the game of shadow and light evoke an expressionist style.

Aside from the remediation elements or the sequences discussed above heightened with an expressionist style, I want to pay attention to the usage of fore and backgrounds in *Poulet aux prunes*. Satrapi often forms the backgrounds with the green screen method and occasionally analog methods.[51] Yet, whether analog or digital, these backgrounds are not blended homogeneously with the foregrounds we are used to seeing in Hollywood films; instead, their contours are accentuated, forming a very graphic look.

[51] See also Chapter 3, where I briefly discuss the use of matte painting in *Poulet aux prunes* (2011).

Their anti-reality makes the eye focus on the image's different layers individually, which can generate an example of what Marks (2000) conceptualizes as haptic visuality. As I explain more in detail in Chapter 3, haptic visuality refers to the eye's capacity to appeal to the sense of touch or even function as an organ of touch (Marks, 2020).



Figure 44. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), a medium-close-up shot of Azrael. The character is interpreted by an actual actor rather than a digitally created creature.

The overtly discernable layers are also something we commonly come across in Méliès' films filled with matte paintings, but his film *Le Palais des mille et une nuits* holds a special interest in this regard. Especially the sequence where the Prince, Blue Dwarf, and their friends enter the magical forest on a treasure-hunting quest features the imaginative utilization of different grounds (see *Figures 45 & 46*). At the beginning of the sequence, when these characters are absent in the frame, we only contemplate an abundance of painted jungle plants. These plants gradually, layer upon layer, begin gliding to the frame's left and right side, leaving the scene to the arriving characters (see *Figures 47 & 48*). Each plant or element drifting to the sides of the frame adds another volume to the "utterly flat medium of [cinema] without texture or material" (Lant, 1995, p. 45). Regarding this sequence, Lant (1995) argues, "Méliès chose motifs that probed or

highlighted the alluring yet illusory depths of the cinema, the impossible compressions and expansions of far and near, the unclear identities of figure and ground" (p. 46).



Figures 45 & 46. In *Le Palais des mille et une nuits* (1905), the painted plants start gliding gradually on the sides of the screen, adding volume to the flat medium of cinema.

In *Poulet aux prunes* resides the same idea of adding more layers to the image to give the flatness of cinema more volume. We also come across these kinds of visual motifs sliding to the sides of the screen drawing attention to the different grounds of the composition. For instance, in the animated opening credits of the film, some visual motifs located on different layers of the image, such as clouds, trees, and mountains, move very slowly in different directions throughout the composition and leave room for others (see *Figures 49 & 50*). Moreover, in the transition scenes showing the city of Tehran with a left-to-right pan (*Figure 51*), even though no compositional element moves at all, we come across a plurality of grounds: In the foreground, we see the silhouettes of some plants almost forming a black vignette; in the middle ground, the city of Tehran, and in the background the Iranian mountains, both animated. While this multiplicity of grounds adds depth to the frame, the grounds themselves remain separate from each other, preventing the eye from focusing on the whole frame as a homogenous structure.




Figures 47 & 48. In *Le Palais des mille et une nuits* (1905), the princess appears in the background as the layers gradually peel off with the sliding plants and objects toward the edges of the screen.

A similar usage of grounds also appears very clearly in the sequence where Azrael tells Nasser Ali an anecdote. The sequence starts with Azrael opening a pop-up book showing the city of Jerusalem with its buildings, mountains, and a sun with a face in a very cartoonish and whimsical manner. With a dissolve transition, we move on to the animation part, where we see a marketplace in Jerusalem through an open door creating a black vignette. Again, we come across a plurality of layers; in the foreground, the black vignettes create a frame within a frame structure; in the middle ground, the small buildings, market booths, and characters walking around; and in the background, an abundance of adjacent structures. Both the representation of the city in the pop-up book and the animated part accentuates their drawings' contours, forming a clear separation between the different layers (see *Figures 52 & 53*).



Figures 49 & 50. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), the white clouds slide to the edges of the shot to give room to the little ruined castle on the top of a mountain. While the sliding visual motifs add depth to the 2D drawings, they remain visibly separate from each other, avoiding a homogenous structure.

These deliberately heterogeneous layers can make the eye pay attention to them individually or unequally instead of perceiving the image primarily as a whole. This situation can make the eye wander around the different layers of the image and consequently generate haptic connections with it. On the other hand, the homogeneity and transparency of layers in ILM's effects realism prevent the eye from creating haptic relations with the images and remain on the level of "optical visuality." Marks (2020) differentiates haptic and optical visuality since while in the former, the viewer's eye becomes more inclined to move around the image and feel its texture rather than focusing on it, in the latter, the eye observes the image from a distance and feels like an all-perceiving subject.

Furthermore, as explained more in-depth in Chapter 3, ILM's style derives from the 1970s cinematic style, the New Hollywood auteurist movement associated with American auteurs such as Bob Rafelson (*Five Easy Pieces,* 1970), Hal Ashby (*Harold and Maude,* 1971), Terrence Malick (*Badlands,* 1973; *Days of Heaven*, 1978), Robert Altman (*Nashville,* 1975). This style features techniques drawing attention to the filmmaking act, such as "unstabilized camera movement, haphazard framing, and abrupt changes of focus" (Turnock, 2022, p. 7). ILM's aesthetic adopts these qualities to prevent the eye from scrutinizing the effects for a long time since this would obviously harm their credibility. Furthermore, ILM's aesthetic emphasizes other characteristic features of that type of filmmaking such as the "strong reliance on lens artifacts such as flares, intense backlighting and highlighting of atmospherics such as dust and rain" (Turnock, 2022, p. 7). These characteristics enhance the effects' credibility by concealing their artificiality or rendering them homogeneous with other grounds in the frame. Therefore, ILM's cinematic style aligns more with optical visuality creating a distance between the perceiving subject and the image.

On the other hand, Satrapi's effects aesthetic has nothing to do with the 1970s Hollywood cinematic style; it intentionally puts forward effects' anti-reality, which could eventually create haptic connections between the viewer and the image, as is the case with her usage of fore and backgrounds. In that sense, Satrapi's haptic images become a feminist strategy against the New Hollywood auteurist movement's style dominated by a white male perspective. According to Marks (2020), haptic visuality has nothing feminine, yet filmmakers can convert it into a feminist strategy. Hence, Satrapi's cinematic style does not only feature the periphery's cultural specificities standing

against the center's homogenizing effects but also a feminist strategy against white masculinist Hollywood cinema.



Figure 51. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), an extreme-long shot features the city of Tehran with high mountains behind in animation. The different layers of the composition are not blended homogeneously as in Hollywood's photorealist style.

In that sense, Satrapi's film, through its form, delineates feminist tendencies defying primarily ILM's cinematic style based on the "mostly white, straight and mostly male" filmmakers of New Hollywood (Turnock, 2022, p. 217). As Turnock (2022) writes, "the New Hollywood boys' club and the histories of New Hollywood have not been welcoming to nonwhite non-male perspectives" (p. 217). In fact, according to Turnock (2022), marginalized filmmakers meaning "anyone not a white man," if we consider the disproportionate filmmaking demographics or filmmaking practices outside of the Hollywood system, seem to approach New Hollywood realism more self-consciously than just straightforwardly replicating this style (p. 218). I would argue that the French women filmmakers in this chapter also participate in this equation as they subvert ILM's standardized style to use it as a feminist strategy.

Similar to Satrapi, *Mazlo's Sous le ciel d'Alice,* replete with anti-realist analog effects, deploy as well haptic visuality as a feminist strategy that could resist Hollywood's effects realism stemming from a white masculinist vision. The following section will concentrate on Mazlo's film and the place of her effects usage in generating her cinematic style.



Figures 52 & 53. In *Poulet aux prunes* (2011), both the city represented in the pop-up book and the animation showing a marketplace in Jerusalem emphasizes the contours of their drawings and thus prevent the eye from focusing on the image as a whole.

4.2.2. Chloé Mazlo's Usage of Practical Effects in *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020)

Sous le ciel d'Alice, which takes place in the 1950s to 70s Beirut, Lebanon, firstly represents the country as a paradise. As mentioned, this representation of Lebanon is influenced by the joyful stories of Mazlo's parents and grandparents, defining the country as an almost magical place. Still, as the film advances, this paradise-like vision

of Lebanon will be gradually destroyed, notably through the arrival of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. Mazlo explains that she wanted the audience to accompany Alice in the discovery and construction of her paradise so that they could later relate to how much she suffered seeing Lebanon destroyed (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Hence, the film's first movement concentrates on a visually more striking, colorful staging filled with special effects.



Figures 54 & 55. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), while Alice and Joseph enter their apartment, in stop-motion, we see objects starting to fill the empty entrance of the house.

It is also crucial to underline that the film starts with Alice getting on a boat from Beirut to return to her homeland Switzerland and writing a letter to her husband, Joseph she left behind. The letter advances throughout the film and reveals Alice's past; how she left her home country, arrived in Beirut, met her husband, gave birth to their child, etc. Hence, we discover Beirut through Alice's vision of the past; she remembers pre-war

Lebanon as a *too good to be true* colorful dream. This character-centered vision of the city is achieved through Mazlo's preference for anti-realist analog methods. For instance, as revealed earlier, instead of using actual decors and props, Mazlo depicts the exterior scenes, such as the port, streets, shops, etc., with colorful, flat, and immobile images of Beirut reflecting an anti-realist and subjective vision of the city.



Figures 56 & 57. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), stop-motion is used to create a symbolic narration to show how the couple tries to have a baby.

Similarly, the stop-motion sequences bring a joyful ambiance to the film, reflecting Alice's happiness in constructing her dream life in Beirut. In the scene where we see the couple move to their home (*Figures 54 & 55*), we observe the house getting decorated by itself as the furniture successively fills its empty entrance and living room. Through their magical and whimsical tone, these effects heighten the couple's happiness and

make their love story more endearing. Furthermore, the stop-motion sequences also serve to create a metaphoric narration. For instance, to show the couple of Alice and Joseph struggling to have a baby (*Figures 56 & 57*), in an overhead long shot, we observe the couple lying on their bed and trying to catch the bundles in the mouths of storks passing over their heads in stop-motion. Although they miss a couple and get sad, they finally catch one. The tightly tied bundle turns instantaneously into a live-action baby, reminding the prestidigitation side of Méliès' trick films.



Figures 58 & 59. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), a shot showing on split-screen Alice talking on the phone to her parents and her father trying to pull Alice to his side of the frame. The stop-motion is used to create a metaphoric narration to show how Alice doesn't want to return home.

Furthermore, the same symbolic narration appears when Alice talks to her parents living in Switzerland on the phone (see *Figures 58 & 59*). In a scene filmed on a split screen,[52]

[52] Mazlo says that for another split-screen where we see this time only live actors speaking on the telephone to each other, they put two halves of the set side by side rather than shooting the two scenes

on the right side, Alice holds a rotary dial phone, and his parents do the same on the left. Unlike Alice, her parents are not interpreted by live actors but by pale-faced clay puppets animated through stop-motion. During this conversation, Alice tells her parents about her decision to marry Joseph in Beirut. However, her parents don't accept this decision, and her father gets furious and suddenly reaches Alice's side of the frame and tries to pull Alice to his side. Alice breaks free of his hand holding her and immediately hangs up the phone. As the conversation ends, the split screen does the same, leaving Alice alone in the frame. Further, she curiously looks down and tries to lift her right foot but struggles because a thick, long brown root sticks out from under her shoe (see *Figure 60*). She immediately starts to cut the root off with a pair of scissors and finally manages to get rid of it. This scene represents how difficult but necessary it was to sever ties with her homeland and family. Furthermore, the practical effects in the film, such as the long brown root, draw attention to their artificial texture, which can generate haptic connections resembling Satrapi's heterogeneous usage of fore and backgrounds in *Poulet aux prunes*.

separately and combining them in post-production (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). The presence of practical effects in the film, with their indexical connection to the pro-filmic space, already conforms to Bazinian realism. Yet, this scene, in particular, reveals most clearly Bazin's (2005) concept of spatial unity. As I discuss in Chapter 3, Bazin (2005) explains that the realism of a scene resides in its spatial unity, which is achieved through actors occupying the same frame instead of appearing individually in separate shots. In that regard, Mazlo preserves the spatial unity of the split-screen scene through her creative usage of decor, which makes the characters appear in the same frame even when the narrative purpose is paradoxically not to show them together during a telephone conversation.



Figure 60. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), Alice tries to cut the root attached to her shoe. The root is used to symbolize Alice's struggle to sever ties with her homeland and family.

While these practical effects distance the story from realistically interpreting Alice's vision of Lebanon and the past, a resembling distance exists between the director, Chloé Mazlo, and her film. As explained earlier in this chapter, Mazlo was born in France and learned about Lebanon with the stories of her parents and grandparents. Moreover, Mazlo's distance to her origins finds its equivalent in the story through a distant observer, the character of Alice, getting acquainted with a Middle East country for the first time. This narrative strategy has also been recuperated by an animation film, *My Sunny Maad* (2021), released one year after *Sous le ciel d'Alice*. *My Sunny Maad* is about a Czech woman, Herra, who falls in love with an Afghan man and follows him to post-Taliban Afghanistan, where she will discover a whole new life in Kabul. Herra's vision highly resembles Alice's as both occidental women choose an "unusual" life in the Middle East and observe it with a curious gaze. Additionally, *My Sunny Maad* has no French speaking characters nor does it take place in a francophone country yet France has co-produced the film and it received the CNC's financial support. Therefore, it can

also be considered an example of *cinéma-monde* even if it does not have a direct connection to the francophone world.



Figures 61 & 62. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), a tourist office employee dressed as a cedar welcomes Alice and accompanies her into the city. This woman represents Alice's vision of Lebanon.

Furthermore, Mazlo's distance from her story unveils itself most clearly in the film's second movement, where Alice's paradise starts to shatter slowly with the arrival of the civil war. Mazlo explains that although she has nourished by family stories in the writing of her film, she also wanted to go beyond these joyful memories and see the true face of the war (Unifrance, 2022). However, as mentioned earlier, Mazlo's interpretation of war remains very symbolic, and not interested in revealing its atrocities. The film refers to specific historical events but never frontally shows them; instead, it focuses on their consequences for Alice and her family. At the film's beginning, when Alice first arrives

in Beirut (*Figures 61 & 62*), a tourist office employee welcomes her. This woman is disguised very clearly in the form of cedar, the national emblem of Lebanon, and is also present in the Lebanese flag. Whenever she hears the news on the radio, the bombs explode, or civilians die, Alice, worried and sad, thinks of this zealous tourist employee who constructs her vision of Lebanon.



Figures 63 & 64. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), Mazlo prefers to reflect the war symbolically: a soldier wearing a skeleton mask and gloves dances menacingly with the cedar woman representing Lebanon.

For instance, when Alice watches the news on television (*Figures 63 & 64*), she gets sad, and we immediately move on to the next shot, where we see the cedar woman smoking a cigarette and standing in front of a wall painted with the red and white colors of the Lebanese flag. While we still hear the news anchor's voice in the following shot, a soldier wearing a skeleton mask and gloves suddenly enters the frame, followed by an

intimidating piano music. As we keep hearing the news, the soldier slowly approaches the cedar woman with threatening dance moves. At first, the cedar woman gets frightened and attempts to avoid the soldier; later, she becomes curious and approaches his face yet immediately decides to move back. The scene's tension increases as the dance movements and the piano music accelerate and finally reach their climax with the soldier putting her against the wall and clutching her throat with his hands. In this particular moment, she gets integrated more with the wall behind her, which stresses the presence of a symbolic Lebanese flag. The scene ends with the soldier leaving the cedar woman alone in the frame, looking down sadly with her messed-up costume.



Figures 65 & 66. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), the stop-motion puppets have pale faces and dull movements emphasizing Alice's stuckness and boredom in Switzerland in contrast to the colorful and vivid representation of her life in Lebanon.

Similar to Satrapi's remediation elements, these symbolic war scenes turn into parenthesis, deepening or enlarging the narrative's focus. Mazlo is repeatedly asked in various interviews why she chose to feature the war with a burlesque and metaphoric tone. She answers that the family stories she listened to revealed it in that way (letrianoncinema, 2021). In that sense, the film is not interested in showing the atrocities of the civil war on civilians but, just like Mazlo's family members, how the people are capable of almost denying the war and keep living in their fantasies. Hence, the film concentrates more on the impossibility of understanding and admitting violence and crime than the war itself. Mazlo, in an interview, mentions an expression that says, "If you think you have understood the war in Lebanon, it is because it has been badly explained to you!" (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021, p. 5).[53] The characters, Alice in particular, want to avoid the presence of an actual war in numerous ways and refuse to leave the country until they no longer have a choice.

Paradoxically, the only person who can leave the country, thanks to her Swiss nationality, remains Alice, yet she becomes the first one to refuse this idea because of her love for Lebanon. As Mazlo argues, the attachment one can have to a country can seem irrational and cannot always be explained easily (Garcia-Fons & Ricci, 2021). Yet, Mazlo achieves in conveying Alice's unconditional love for Lebanon notably through the medium of practical effects. At the movie's beginning, we see glimpses of Alice's life in her home country Switzerland, which is shot entirely in stop-motion with clay puppets, including Alice herself. In these stop-motion sequences, we feel the stuckness

[53] Translated by the author.

and boredom of Alice in Switzerland; Everything appears stagnant and lifeless through the dominant cold colors in the mise-en-scene. Furthermore, as depicted in *Figures 65 & 66*, the characters have pale faces, austere clothing, and dull movements achieved through stop motion. Additionally, the characters' lives seem very well organized, almost mechanized, such as when Alice looks after a doll baby in a classroom filled with other girl students repeating silently and in an annoyingly simultaneous way the same tasks (see *Figures 67 & 68*). Through the anti-realism of its effects, this scene reflects Alice's vision of her homeland, and her colorful, vivid vision of Lebanon contrasts sharply with her previous life in Switzerland.



Figures 67 & 68. In *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (2020), Alice repeats the same acts as the rest of the classroom in caring for a doll baby. Their annoyingly mechanized movements accentuate Alice's boredom in her homeland.

To conclude, this chapter discussed how the national context could differentiate itself from the Hollywood industry's homogenizing impact, especially through its cinematic style, by focusing on Satrapi and Mazlo's films, *Poulet aux prunes* and *Sous le ciel d'Alice*. As discussed throughout the chapter, these films intersect in many degrees, notably with the presence of their transnational auteurs and their Middle East setting, but more importantly, with their preference for an unrealistic aesthetic complete with their effects' usage. The next chapter will examine the case of Michel Gondry, a French transnational auteur who uses an abundance of voluntarily "fake" analog methods in his music videos and films. Yet, unlike the discussed French women filmmakers, Michel Gondry has also brought his particular cinematic style to Hollywood, mainly with his American movies.

CHAPTER 5

MICHEL GONDRY'S TRANSNATIONAL AUTHORSHIP AND CRAFT AESTHETIC

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will examine how French director Michel Gondry constructs an example of transnational authorship stemming from his voluntarily amateurish craft aesthetic created with his preference for practical effects rather than CGI. It will mainly concentrate on his film *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006) as it strongly reflects the traces of this craft aesthetic Gondry first started building in his music videos and later expanded to his American and French films.

In that regard, it will first discuss how *La Science des rêves* is aesthetically bound to his earlier music videos, manifesting that his oeuvre has always had a transnational character from the very beginning. However, this first discussion will extend beyond *La Science* and provide other examples demonstrating the cohesive relationship between his

films and music videos. Secondly, to shed light on the intersecting style of his French and American films, it will notably discuss his American movie *Be Kind Rewind* (2008) not only because it strongly reveals the DIY aesthetic of his previous film *La Science* but also because it inserts a layer of commentary on Hollywood's effects realism notably through its mise-en-abyme structure. Finally, by evoking Higbee and Lim's (2010) approach to critical transnationalism, the chapter will delve into how the transnational narrative elements of *La Science* also nourish the national ones, and consequently, the film speaks Frenchness back to France.

Michel Gondry started his career by making music videos replete with visually innovative ideas before directing his debut feature *Human Nature* (2001). Since then, his career has followed a zigzagging road between France and the US with various commercials, music videos, and short and feature-length films. Concerning his film career, Gondry has directed eight feature-length films, three documentaries, and eight episodes of the television series *Kidding* (2018-2020). Throughout his filmography, we come across a number of common themes such as the "inability/impossibility of distinguishing between reality and fantasy," "the terror of being erased or altered," and the "co-existence of extreme despair and hope" (Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 13). These themes' repetitiveness throughout his filmography suggests "a unified perspective on the world" (Staiger, 2003, p. 35) and sets his unique vision as an auteur. Thus, his silent presence when watching his movies becomes immediately recognizable for the spectator: Gondry is the director of fantasy, memory, and love.

Aside from reflecting similar thematic decisions, his films also manifest an expressive use of film style. Gondry has created his visually dazzling ideas by applying in-camera solutions and analog methods instead of CGI, giving his work a "funky low-tech" (Hill, 2008, p. 222) and a homemade look. Therefore, this style he has frequently applied to his music videos and advertisements has given his films a unique style and feel (Hill, 2008) and become a strong marker of his auteur persona. Gondry states that one can achieve a lot of things by using CGI, but it has to be better than using practical effects since doing something with your hands gives it a unique quality: "It is not coming from a factory or a machine, so it cannot be reproduced" (Deadline Hollywood, 2019, 1:30). Furthermore, just like the aesthetic of Marjane Satrapi and Chloé Mazlo's films that I examine in Chapter 4, we can classify Gondry's style as anti-realist since it defies ILM's internationally deployed house style prioritizing their effects realism, credibility, and immersiveness.

Furthermore, his craft aesthetic becomes emblematic of his transnational authorship since it turns into a highly apparent auteurist technique that remains consistent across his French and Hollywood films. In that sense, Gondry's cinematic form defies the type of auteur criticism which "either personalizes style and mode of production out of all locational context or reifies style in terms of national cultural specificity" (Galt & Schoonover, 2010, as cited in Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 3). On the contrary, his style foregrounds how "cinema's transnational flows might intersect with trajectories of film form" (Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, it is impossible to label Gondry's work as primarily European, French, or Hollywood cinema: it flows between these different labelings and thus surpasses the binary opposition between Hollywood versus European

cinema not solely through its aesthetic but also through creating contact points with both "American and French cinematic traditions and socio-cultural contexts" (Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, one can consider Gondry a contemporary transnational auteur "whose films and other works display both numerous continuities and an eclecticism" (Block & Kirby, p. 4).

However, Gondry's work, despite being internationally recognized, foregrounds many interactions with the French world, not only emerging from Gondry's French identity or his French-speaking films, but his American films also manifest in many senses "the artistic legacy and contemporary climate of France" (Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 6). In that sense, his work recalls the concept of *cinéma-monde*,[54] tending to surpass the dichotomies of a "francophone label" and search for a more flexible connection to the French world (Gott & Schilt, 2018). For instance, the fact that Gondry's American films are financed by French production companies, as is the case with *Human Nature* (2001), *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), and *The We and the I* (2012) shows a clear connection to the French world on the production level.

More importantly, Gondry's work, even his American films, is highly influenced by the heritage of French cinema. For instance, Gondry defines Jean Vigo and his film *L'Atalante* (1934) as a surrealist influence impacting the visual style of his films (Kohn, 2014). Further to that, Gondry reveals in his discussion with Jonathan Rosenbaum that his films with Charlie Kaufmann, such as *Human Nature* (2001) and *Eternal Sunshine of*

[54] See also Chapter 4, where I examine the concept of *cinéma-monde* in greater depth.

the Spotless Mind (2004), are influenced by the surrealist qualities of Alain Resnais' work, notably in *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (I Love You, I Love You, 1968) or *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* (My American Uncle, 1980) (Walker Art Center, 2011). Also, Gondry's interest in science, revealing itself not only in *Human Nature* and *Eternal Sunshine* but also in *La Science*, was influenced by Alain Resnais' films as well. Gondry explains regarding Alain Resnais, "I love how he finds humanity in science, which I admire because generally science is regarded as being cold and just calculation, and I don't believe so" (Walker Art Center, 2011, 46:40).

Furthermore, Gondry's visual style also resonates with Méliès' cinema. As explained in Chapter 4, Méliès creates magical and fantastical universes by drawing upon numerous visual techniques such as optical and special effects and constructing elaborate costumes, settings, and backgrounds. Hill (2008) argues that "if Gondry resembles any filmmaker before him, it's the great silent film innovator and special effects trickster, Georges Méliès" (p. 221). Gondry himself justifies his closeness to Méliès' cinema by explaining that:

> Méliès was one of the first people to witness a screening of the Frères Lumière in Paris in 1895. He immediately thought of the camera as a tool to improve his magical tricks. Interestingly, I had the same way of thinking—when I had the ability to use a camera, I always used it to explore what I could do with it, pushing the limits." (Lally, 2004, as cited in McQuiston, 2020)

The next section will analyze the transnational trajectory of Gondry's career by focusing on the formal similarities between his music videos and films.

5.2. A Transnational Career: From Music Videos to Films

"I love her because she makes things with her hands. It's as if her synapses were married directly to her fingers."

La Science des rêves (2006)

The quote above comes from *La Science des rêves*, which Stéphane says to his colleague and friend Guy to express his love for Stéphanie. Personally, I benefit from it as it describes my love and fandom for *La Science des rêves* and Gondry's work in general. In essence, I admire his films because of the value given to craftsmanship, this desire for creating things on a more tactile level rather than using CG methods, which invites its viewers to a visually striking and "alternative" experience to mainstream Hollywood cinema.

La Science is filled with homemade objects such as a horse toy named The Golden Ponyboy, a blue bird, a typewriter, a pair of glasses, shoes, etc. (see *Figures 69* & *70*). These objects remain mundane in their appearance, yet they gain new meanings in the context of how they are fabricated; through materials such as thread, fabric, wool, and buttons. According to Pyke (2020), "handmade objects in Gondry's work combine familiar objects of daily life with the sensation of soft, childlike materials" (p. 52). This

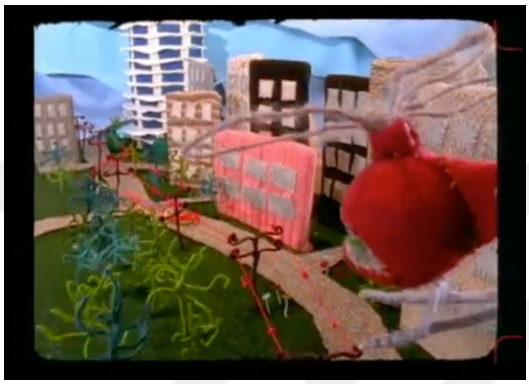
practice of creating mundane objects out of unusual materials is not inherent to *La Science* but something we also commonly come across in his music videos.



Figures 69 & 70. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), close-ups display the homemade objects Stéphanie built herself. Although they are objects of everyday life, they gain new meanings through their construction with unusual materials.

For instance, the music video Gondry directed for The White Stripes' song *Fell in Love with a Girl* (2002) is a Lego animation built entirely via analog methods rather than CGI, even though it makes the process a lot more difficult. According to Gondry, even for the minor changes such as changing a block of Lego, one has to deconstruct everything and start from scratch (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003). Similarly, in the music video of Steriogram's *Walkie Talkie Man* (2004), we observe a miniature city made of actual knitted miniature objects such as cars, streets, buildings, and helicopters (*Figures 71 & 72*). Interestingly, a girl knits a drum set via stop-motion, recalling Stéphanie in *La Science* playing an oddly small piano attached to colored

threads inside of Stéphane's dream (see *Figure 73* and *Figure 74*). The piano functions as a sewing machine, and the more Stéphanie plays it, the more the piano fabricates objects. It is possible to see many other intersecting thematic, narrative, and formal similarities between Gondry's music videos and films.




Figures 71 & 72. In *Walkie Talkie Man* (2004), shots show a miniature city built entirely with knitted handmade objects.

Before beginning his filmmaking career, Gondry played the drums in a modestly successful French band called *Oui Oui*. He started his career as a director by making videos for his band and later directed videos for internationally recognized bands such as Foo Fighters, The Chemical Brothers, Daft Punk, The White Stripes, Radiohead, and singers such as Björk, Beck, Kylie Minogue, and Kanye West.[55] In that sense, his career from the beginning had a transnational aspect since he did not limit himself to France but started making music videos in the US and working with big names. This career trajectory, starting with music videos and later shifting to filmmaking, is not specific to Michel Gondry. One can mention other directors who did music videos like Gondry in

[55] Gondry still does music videos reflecting his homemade style such as Metronomy's *Love Letters* in 2014 which is shot in plan sequence. The video features the band inside a large box. As the camera moves around it, the box transforms into different settings such as a painted recording studio, a laptop, or a stage etc.

the 1990s and early 2000s and then switched to film production, such as Spike Jonze, Hype Williams, Chris Cunningham, Mike Mills, David Fincher, Jonathan Glazer, Anton Corbijn, Mark Romanek, and many others.



Figure 73. In *Walkie Talkie Man* (2004), a girl knits a drum out of red yarn.



Figure 74. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphanie knits a blanket with the help of a mini piano attached to yarns in various colors. This shot echoes the girl knitting a drum in *Walkie Talkie Man*.

These directors can be considered the "MTV generation" since their music videos are broadcasted across the world through the widely known music channel of that time MTV which made the music video genre itself popular since it first launched in the US

in 1981 (Korsgaard, 2017). However, Gondry explains that he has never felt being part of that generation since he couldn't enter the lists ranking the "best and the most important 100 videos" announced on MTV or VH1, and his videos didn't have much visibility on these channels (Buchanan, 2014). Despite his modest thoughts, Gondry is still strongly associated with this generation since, as Kinskey (2014) contends, among many other directors of the 1990s and 2000s, he used the music video as a medium of "individual artistic statements" (p. 12).

The mentioned music video directors, including Gondry, do not share a common style in directing their videos since, as Vernallis (2013) explains, "there are no film schools for making music videos or industry internship programs, nor is there something akin to musical culture, like rehearsing in garages or spinning records at parties" (p. 26). Yet these directors overlap in how they used the medium of the music video as an experimentation site to develop their style and technique. In that regard, Fincher describes this medium as a "sandbox" where he could try anything that comes to his mind (Vernallis, 2008). Therefore, they share the common point of bringing a "distinct style…to the production from conception to execution" (Kinskey, 2014, p. 13) and consequently starting to develop their auteurist traits first in the music video medium, which would be later extended to their films.

Furthermore, these directors altered the general perception of music videos as low culture and used primarily to promote the song and enhance record sales. By generating a visually recognizable style, directors such as Gondry, Jonze, and Fincher stressed that "their individual voices were worthy of recognition, and their videos were creative

works of worth beyond their ability to move people to buy records" (Kinskey, 2014, p. 15). Moreover, to stress their directorial contribution to these music videos, Cunningham, Gondry, and Jonze released the Directors Label DVD series in 2003, in which they explain how they generated and executed the creative ideas of their clips.



Figure 75. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), an overhead close-up shot shows Stéphane's swollen and enlarged hands working with tiny pieces of paper and scissors compared to the size of his hands.



Figure 76. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane beats up his co-workers, Guy and Serge, with his huge hands.

Aside from that, these directors' work also influenced new approaches to film form. Vernallis (2008) argues that directors such as David Fincher, Spike Jonze, Hype Williams, and Michel Gondry have brought an "intensified audiovisual aesthetics" to films where "everything becomes heightened, set off, voluble" (p. 278). Vernallis' (2008) term derives from Bordwell's (2006) "intensified continuity" that accounts for

how the “post-classical cinema” intensifies classical Hollywood cinema’s already-established techniques such as “rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements” (p. 121). Vernallis’ (2008) concept extends Bordwell’s (2006) by not only referring to cinematography and editing but also including other parameters such as “acting, lighting, performance, sound effects, and musical materials” (p. 278). In other words, as Richardson (2011) explains Vernallis’ (2008) concept account for how the music video aesthetics intensify an already existing tendency in films’ aesthetics by applying characteristics such as unpredictable narrative structure, ambiguous endings, apparent repetition of visual and aural motifs, and rhythmic editing techniques serving all to create a musical sensibility.




Figures 77 & 78. In *Everlong* (1997), the character of Dave Grohl dreams that he fights with the guys bothering his girlfriend with his greatly enlarged hands. A similar dream sequence with prosthetic hands also reappears in *La Science*.

Vernallis (2008) examines this new aesthetic appearing in cinematic form through the lens of *Eternal Sunshine* and Gondry’s earlier music video works. She argues that Gondry applies a higher density of visual motifs repeating and transforming themselves during the film compared to contemporary Hollywood cinema’s use of motifs (Vernallis, 2008). Moreover, she suggests that Gondry’s use of image and sound creates distinct

relations where these two communicate in unlikely configurations (Vernallis, 2008). I would argue that Vernallis' (2008) "intensified audiovisual aesthetics" does not limit itself to *Eternal Sunshine* but also finds its way to Gondry's other films and especially *La Science,* where visual motifs also communicate with auditive ones in unlikely configurations and both of them repeat and transforms themselves between sequences evoking reality and dream.[56]



Figure 79. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), a shot of Stéphane as a child sleeping in his bed covered with vomit, with hands almost the size of his bed. This shot refers to Gondry's own childhood, where he constantly saw the nightmare of having huge hands.

Aside from bringing new approaches to films, these directors' films themselves incorporate direct references to their music videos' thematic, narrative, and stylistic elements. In the case of Michel Gondry, these references stem most clearly from his craft aesthetic and effects usage. For instance, in *La Science*, Stéphane dreams that he is at work (see *Figure 75*): he has oddly gigantic hands making him struggle when using materials such as scissors, glue, or pieces of paper. For this scene, instead of using prosthetics to enlarge the hands, they shrunk everything else, such as his desk and the

[56] Since this study does not concentrate on the relationship between visual and auditory motifs in Gondry's films, a further examination of *La Science* through Vernallis' (2008) concept of "intensified audiovisual aesthetics" remains beyond the scope of the thesis.

items on it (Bielik, 2006). As the dream advances, Stéphane also uses his giant hands, this time built via prosthetics, to beat Guy and Serge, his co-workers who force him to work (see *Figure 76*). This idea of giant hands created with analog methods appeared first in Gondry's music video for Foo Fighters' song *Everlong* (1997). The video shows a young man, interpreted by Dave Grohl, beating up the guys bothering his girlfriend with his suddenly growing and elongating hands inside of a dream (see *Figures 77* & *78*).



Figure 80. In *Everlong* (1997), the character of Dave Grohl tries to lift the large dial telephone that takes up most of the room. This shot symbolizes how Gondry feels like his hand is huge while holding a phone (since he cannot see it).

Interestingly, the visual motif of growing hands has a personal significance for Gondry. The director explains that when he was a kid, he constantly saw this nightmare of having huge hands compared to the rest of his body (Guillen, 2006). Even after waking up, he would have difficulty believing his hands were normal size (Guillen, 2006). This situation is also illustrated in *La Science* when Stéphane's mother explains to her boyfriend that Stéphane used to have nightmares about his hands as a child. As she

continues talking, we see an image from Stéphane's childhood: he lies on his bed with hands roughly around the size of the bed (see *Figure 79*). Michel Gondry also mentions this nightmare in his autobiographical documentary, *I've Been 12 Forever (Part 2 Age 12-12)* and explains that he still sometimes feels like his hands are enormous, especially when holding a telephone—since he cannot see his hands. This situation is represented by the giant black rotary dial telephone that Dave Grohl climbs up in *Everlong* (see *Figure 80*). Interestingly, as I will reveal in the last section, Gondry has benefited in various ways from his dreams and childhood memories for *La Science*, which he defines as "100% personal" (Walker Art Center, 2011, 1:02).



Figures 81 & 82. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), they used the previously filmed stop-motion footage of the miniature ski run to replace the backgrounds in the set. This usage of rear projection derives primarily from Gondry's music videos.

Moreover, as one the film's many in-camera tricks, Gondry makes use of rear projection to replace the backgrounds of the film. For instance, the miniature ski run they have created with fabric, wool, and thread and the little skiers through colorful wires is animated via stop-motion and later put behind the actors in creating one of Stéphane's dreams (see *Figures 81 & 82*). The same principle also applies to a miniature city they constructed entirely out of toilet paper rolls (see *Figures 2 & 3* in Chapter 3). They later placed this setting behind the windows again to create a dream sequence. Moreover, to show Stéphane flying over Paris inside of a dream, they put the actor Gael Garcia Bernal inside of a giant aquarium filled with actual water and projected the miniature Paris city behind him (see *Figures 5 & 6* in Chapter 3). As I discuss in Chapter 3, these anti-realist effects in *La Science* paradoxically conform to Bazinian realism since they are indexically tied to the profilmic space.





Figures 83 & 84. In *Human Behaviour* (1993), shots show Björk inside her shed and in the forest at night through the rear projection method. This video is the first time Gondry used the rear projection method.

In fact, this usage of creative rear projection is not inherent to *La Science* and derives primarily from Gondry's music video for Björk's *Human Behaviour* (1993). The director explains that this video was the first time he benefited from the back projection

in marrying the live-action images of Björk with the previously filmed footage (*Figures 83 & 84*), such as the interiors of a wooden shed, the creatures, or the forest with its starry sky (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003). One of his inspirations for this video was the Russian animated short film of Yuri Norstein, *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975), in which a hedgehog on the way to visit his friend the bear gets lost in the fog and discovers a whole new side of the forest (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003). *Human Behaviour* resembles *Hedgehog* as both use a wide range of in-camera tricks and analog effects in an anti-realist manner. Additionally, a little animated hedgehog getting across the highway appears at the beginning of the video and a few other times, recalling the one in Yorstein's film (see *Figure 85* and *Figure 86*). Gondry defines the film as an animated story "cut out of paper and layered to create a lot of texture. It is mixed with live acting, such as a back projection of water, so it's very tactile, and you can really feel how it was made" (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003, p. 8).



Figure 85. In *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975), a shot shows the hedgehog animated via stop-motion, walking sadly in the forest (left). Figure 86. In *Human Behaviour* (1993), the stop-motion animated hedgehog resembles the one in *Hedgehog in the Fog* (1975), one of Gondry's inspirations for this music video (right).

Just like Norstein's animation, Gondry's music video work and films also make the construction of their practical effects readily apparent to the spectators. In fact, most of the time, the characters themselves build things together by repurposing discarded materials in his films. For instance, As Pyke (2020) argues, the scene where Stéphane dreams of himself with Stéphanie inside a cave works as a gallery to display various objects created by Stéphanie (see *Figures 87 & 88*). During the dream, Stéphane acts like a curator and wanders around the cave to collect these objects inside of a grocery trolley and explains in a voice-over:

> I am collecting beautiful objects. A pair of shoes. Some glasses. Telephone. Typewriter. They are made from wood and felt, with apparent stitches. Their delicate and finished appearance is friendly. They are quiet. Stéphanie made them and I will expose them in an exhibition…There's this amazing blanket. It's thick red felt with big white stitches. Wild animals are running on it.

The fact that Stéphane freely talks about the materials used in fabricating these objects shows that "the making is not hidden here" (Pyke, 2020, p. 59). Pyke (2020) states that "these objects are available to you to understand and feel. These objects are not trying to trick you" (p. 59). One can also think of his other works where the fabrication of analog effects is transparent, such as Jerry and Mike shooting cheap remakes of Hollywood movies with homemade solutions in *Be Kind*, Collin explaining to Chick the working principles of his outlandish invention "Piano Cocktail" in *L'Écume des jours* (Mood Indigo, 2013) or Daniel and Théo building a car with a house on top of it with parts of old car pieces and other discarded materials in *Microbe et Gasoil* (Microbe & Gasoline, 2015).[57] Additionally, In *La Science*, Gondry makes transparent not only the fabrication

[57] "The Piano Cocktail" is a piano that produces various cocktails according to the type of chords played. *L'Écume des jours* is based on Boris Vian's novel of the same name published in 1947. The idea of *Piano Cocktail* derives from the novel, and thus it is not Gondry's own invention.

of his practical effects but also his CG methods, such as the blue screen. For instance, in the Stéphane TV describing the inside of Stéphane's head (*Figure 89*), we see a blue curtain covering the right side of the wall, connected to a digital screen next to it. Various characters during the film get in front of that blue curtain, and their images appear instantaneously on the digital screen, united with different backgrounds.



Figures 87 & 88. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane dreams that he collects the objects Stéphanie made herself inside a cave. The cave functions as a gallery to showcase these objects and make their fabrication process transparent for the spectator through Stéphane's voice-over.

This process of deliberately sharing the fabrication of his effects with the spectators also distinguishes Gondry's style from ILM's effect realism, which aims at tricking their spectators into believing that CG characters and environments truly co-exist with the live-action footage. Therefore, Gondry's style, since his early works, defied Hollywood's obsession with realistic effects. Specifically, regarding his animation style,

Gondry states that he was kind of "anti-Walt Disney" since he grew up watching mostly Eastern European and Russian animation films such as the *Hedgehog* (Walker Art Center, 2011, 14:40). Concerning the film, he says, "I liked how the story would take time to be told and how it was poetic and filled with a lot of texture" (Walker Art Center, 2011, 14:50). Furthermore, this Russian animation influence is also apparent in *La Science* through the attention given to materiality and texture of its effects objects. Interestingly, Gondry emphasizes this reference in the narrative of *La Science*: The protagonists decide to make an animation film about a forest located inside of a boat sailing in the sea. When Stéphanie suggests the cellophane paper to create the sea, Stéphane loves this idea and says, "Yes! Like a Russian animated film."



Figure 89. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Gondry shares the fabrication of his digital effects with the spectator, such as the blue screen method: Inside Stéphane TV, while Stéphane and Stéphanie stand in front of a blue wall, their image appears simultaneously on the digital screen, merged with the interior view of Stéphanie's apartment in the background.

Moreover, not only *La Science* but many of his films embrace practical effects mostly deriving from his music video background. One of the apparent examples of this is the thematic and stylistic relation between *Be Kind* and his music video for Lucas Secon's *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994). The black and white music video features a one-shot

sequence where the camera follows Lucas Secon in different settings, such as in his bedroom, inside of a train, or in the projection of his music video at a movie theater. In making this video, Gondry explains that he was inspired by 1920s and 1930s rent parties in Harlem (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003). At that time, the rent prices were very high in Harlem, and the inhabitants, to pay their rent, would carry a piano upstairs to their apartment and charge people one dollar for a night of partying and listening to live jazz music (Gondry, 2008). During the video, we come across several references to these jazz parties (*Figures 90 & 91*): two characters carrying a piano upstairs, or in a rear projection, an image of other people carrying a piano on the street, and jazz musicians playing various instruments.



Figures 90 & 91. In *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994), shots show references to 1920s and 1930s rent parties, such as two guys carrying a piano upstairs or the images of jazz musicians playing instruments used in creating the background.

References to jazz parties also reappear in *Be Kind*. During the movie, the characters remake Hollywood cult movies that they name *Sweded* with cheap solutions and a strong sense of DIY style. However, at the end of the movie, they decide to shoot something they made up from scratch: the reenactment of the American Jazz Pianist Fats Waller's

life. Waller was also part of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s. He was one of the pianists of the famous rent parties: While he was competing on the piano with other jazz musicians such as James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Duke Ellington, the inhabitants charged the partygoers for the entry and drinks (Gondry, 2008). In the reenactment of Waller's life, the local people of Passaic shoot a scene referring to these famous rent parties (see *Figure 92*).



Figure 92. In *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), the characters film the reenactment of Fats Waller's life; Mike interprets Fats Waller playing the piano in a crowded rent party. The scene refers to 1920s and 1930s jazz parties, similar to *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994).

Hence, *Be Kind* thematically recalls *Lucas with the Lid Off*. More importantly, they both make use of similar analog methods. *Lucas with the Lid Off* extensively uses back projection to fulfill the backgrounds and miniatures to construct the exterior view of Lucas' building and neighborhood (see *Figures 93 & 94*). Similarly, *Be Kind* uses miniature cities and cardboard black and white dimensionless old cars to reenact Fats Waller's life (see *Figures 95 & 96*). Moreover, Gondry's works both benefit from a mise-en-abyme strategy as they put forward the process of filmmaking evident inside their storyline. In *Lucas with the Lid Off,* we wander around a set and come across cables, cameras, and lights until the camera finds the right position, marked by small

black frame holes, to show parts of the story, such as Lucas lying in his bedroom, other characters inside their apartments or driving cars, etc. *Be Kind* displays a similar mise-en-abyme strategy since the characters themselves make movies inside the diegesis.





Figures 93 & 94. In *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994), shots displaying analog methods such as the rear projection used in creating the backgrounds inside of a car or the miniatures used in constructing Secon's building and neighborhood.

One sequence, in particular, recalls *Lucas with the Lid Off*, where Jerry, Mike, and Alma simultaneously remake films such as *When We Were Kings* (1996), *King Kong* (1933), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Men in Black* (1997) with other local people of the town. Inside a continuously moving camera shot (although it includes some hidden cuts), the camera follows the different settings from these various movies constructed with a DIY aesthetic (see *Figures 97 & 98*). Until the camera finds its adequate position to display the scenes, we see glimpses of their amateurish set, evoking the structure of *Lucas with the Lid Off*. In addition to the thematic and formal resonance between these two works, Keazor and Wübbena (2010) suggest that Gondry created the "sweded aesthetics" already in the framework of his earlier music videos, such as *Walkie Talkie Man* (p. 17). While the use of colorful threads to construct helicopters, cars, and a recording studio gives the music video a "wild and funny appearance," the director's use of a similar

style in *Be Kind* serves at showing how Mike and Jerry achieve being creative within their own constraints (Keazor & Wübbena, 2010, p. 17).



Figures 95 & 96. In *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), shots display practical effects such as a miniature city constructed with cornflake boxes or dimensionless black and white cars made of cardboard. These analog methods resonate with the aesthetic of *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994).

Additionally, the Sweded movies can resonate with the music video genre itself. As Keazor and Wübbena (2010) discuss, we can consider these short movies as a commentary made on the music video genre, which was usually considered "the cheap little sister of the big, expensive Hollywood blockbuster" (p. 17). Jerry and Mike's remakes have approximately the duration of a music video since they condense the whole content of the movies to roughly 3 minutes, by solely concentrating on their key moments. In that sense, they are condensed, short, and cheap in appearance compared to the big-budget and long Hollywood original versions; nonetheless, they are more appreciated than the originals by the customers (Keazor & Wübbena, 2010).

The following section will delve into how Gondry's craft aesthetic is observable in both his French and Hollywood films by focusing on *La Science des rêves* and *Be Kind Rewind*. It will show how Gondry uses the analog methods of *La Science* to criticize Hollywood's effects realism, and Hollywood type of standardized filmmaking in his American film *Be Kind*.



Figures 97 & 98. In *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), Jerry, Mike, and Alma remake *Men in Black* (1997): until the camera finds its right position, we contemplate the filmmaking process itself, recalling the mise-en-abyme structure of *Lucas with the Lid Off* (1994).

5.3. From France to Hollywood: Michel Gondry's Transnational Authorship in *La Science des rêves* (2006) and *Be Kind Rewind* (2008)

Gondry's films taking place in the US share overlapping themes and techniques with the ones in France. However, the French director, in his American films, also provides a look at American society, popular culture, and community (Block & Kirby, 2020), as is

the case with his films such as *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* (2005), *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), *The We and the I* (2012). *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* is a documentary about a concert that American comedian Dave Chappelle organized in honor of his musician friends who had been supporting him even before he got famous (Gondry, 2008). So the concert and Gondry's documentary accompanying it would be a way to pay homage to his community. Gondry has difficulty explaining what community means in this film since he has never felt like being part of one himself. However, he explains, "the thing with Dave is that he made it OK for me to talk about real people and the problems associated with differences in ethnicities, etc. I felt legitimate" (Gondry, 2008, p. 14).

Therefore, the documentary led Gondry to do other projects revealing different communities, such as *The We and the I*, concentrating on the relationship dynamics of an ethnically diverse group of teens from The Bronx during a bus ride, or *Be Kind Rewind*, focusing on a community's endeavor to save a local video shop from getting demolished by making amateur films. Gondry chose to shoot the film in Passaic, New Jersey, which is not a coincidence either since it has a very ethnically diverse community. "62.5 percent Hispanic and Latino and 13.8 percent African American, according to the Passaic County Planning Board," reside in Passaic, New Jersey, around the time of the movie's production (Gondry, 2008, p. 16). Furthermore Gondry (2008) adds that "there are residents from virtually every Central American and Caribbean country and a thriving Polish community" (p. 16). While these mentioned films become important as they reveal a French director's look on American society, *Be Kind* holds particular interest as it uses similar visual techniques apparent in his precedent French

film *La Science*, showing Gondry's ability to cross "aesthetic and cultural borders between national film industries" (Block & Kirby, 2020, p. 3).



Figures 99 & 100. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane and Stéphanie are constructing their animation project. The objects they make together exceed being decorative elements and turn into a form of communication between the two lovers, contributing to the narrative progress.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *La Science* makes the process of constructing handcrafted objects readily apparent to its viewers. Throughout the film, Stéphane and Stéphanie create an animation project out of rough materials such as wool, fabric, cotton, thread, and cellophane paper (see *Figures 99 & 100*). Additionally, Stéphane as an inventor, shows his strange inventions to Stéphanie (*Figures 101 & 102*), such as the "one-second time machine", moving time forward or backward by only one minute or the "3D glasses", making paintings look three-dimensional. Therefore, the effects

objects surpass just being decorative elements but directly contribute to the narrative. Gondry says that he has been criticized for the weakness of his storytelling skills in contrast to the strength of his visual style (Hirschberg, 2006). However, as Pyke (2020) argues, in *La Science*, these handmade objects turn into a type of narrative themselves through sensation. They progress the emotional story through their handmade quality, evoking childlike imagination (Pyke, 2020). In that regard, as I argue in Chapter 3, these objects can generate tactile connections with the viewer through their almost touchable materiality.



Figures 101 & 102. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), shots expose Stéphane's inventions, such as the *one-second time machine* or the *3D glasses*. These objects contribute to the narrative progress and reflect Stéphane's childlike spirit as well as his aspiration to become an inventor.

Moreover, these objects become a form of communication between Stéphane and Stéphanie in the film. Gondry argues that "in a relationship, so much goes unsaid, but

that does not mean that emotion is not felt" (Hirschberg, 2006, para. 8). The two lovers have a hard time communicating and transmitting their emotions to each other. Besides, they speak to each other in English, not in their mother tongue, which impedes their communication even more since Stéphane is Mexican/French and Stéphanie is French.[58] Throughout the film, these two find themselves arguing with each other due to various misunderstandings. The only moment they seem to get along truly is when they construct objects together. Therefore Pyke (2020) states that the objects carry the gaps in saying and turn into "catalysts for conversation" (p. 51).

In a similar vein, the effects objects of *Be Kind* are not just decorative elements serving to exhibit Gondry's craft aesthetic. These objects turn into tools to create the voice of a community in the story. The protagonists, Jerry and Mike, after accidentally erasing the content of the VHS tapes in Mr. Fletcher's video store, decide to replace the lost Hollywood movies with cheap, self-made remakes.[59] They call these movies Sweded, a term that derives from a lie that Jerry and Mike tell their customers. They say that these movies are imported from Sweden as an excuse for long waiting times and the high rental fees and to give these cheap remakes an impression of higher quality. The term Sweded can also be considered a reference to other national contexts beyond the US in which filmmaking is not as standardized or institutionalized as in Hollywood (Bourgatte,

[58] Strangely, due to Charlotte Gainsbourg's British and French identity, Stéphanie has a British accent when speaking English in the film.
[59] Aside from Hollywood productions, Mike and Jerry occasionally remake European productions such as the French director Jacques Demy's film *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (The Umbrellas of Cherbourg, 1964) or Bernardo Bertolucci's *Ultimo tango a Parigi* (Last Tango in Paris, 1972).

2012). As Bourgatte (2012) explains specifically about Sweden, the country's filmmaking practices remain weak in terms of their technical aspect.



Figures 103 & 104. In *Be Kind Rewind* (2008), When remaking *Ghostbusters* (1984) and *RoboCop* (1987), Jerry and Mike repurpose mundane materials to create their costumes, contrasting with the Hollywood originals' photorealist style.

This mise-en-abyme strategy, constructed with Sweded films, exists in Gondry's other works approaching the filmmaking process in a self-reflexive manner. We can think of the short animated film *My New New York Diary* (2010) that Gondry made with the French comic book artist Julie Doucet. The film chronicles Doucet's journey to New York to visit her boyfriend Gondry through her own drawings and foregrounds the making of their film from execution to production. Yet, in the case of *Be Kind*, the mise-en-abyme structure is used to criticize Hollywood aesthetics and standardized professional filmmaking practices. Jerry and Mike turn their constraints into creativity by repurposing old materials to remake their favorite films. To shoot their first Sweded

film, *Ghostbusters* (1984), they create their own costumes with mundane materials such as armor made of aluminum foil and colander helmets. Similarly, when remaking *RoboCop* (1987), they create Jerry's robot costume out of old car pieces found in the junkyard near the video shop (see *Figures 103 & 104*).

This idea of reshaping pre-existing materials provides their films with an unusual and cheap look which completely goes against Hollywood's obsession with perfecting as much as possible their effects' aesthetic. The ambition for creatively recycling old materials also resides in *La Science*: Stéphane and Stéphanie realize their creative project with what Stéphane's mother collects in carton boxes such as cellophane paper. This idea of sustainably creating things surpasses the narrative's boundaries but resides in the way Gondry constructed the film. The French director explains that his family members collected paper rolls for months to construct the miniature city of toilet paper rolls (Gondry, 2006). Similarly, Juan Carlos Soler, the set designer of *L'Écume,* explains that they recuperated any old object, which could be part of an old machine or a toy, and put them together to create the effects objects in the film.

Furthermore, In *Be Kind,* aside from criticizing Hollywood's realism obsession, Gondry questions Hollywood filmmaking. The Sweding process exceeds the conventional conditions of filmmaking, such as elaborate labor division and strong hierarchical relations between different departments involved in the film crew. As Mike and Jerry create movies, communal creativity gets in charge, where everyone's ideas matter for the whole production process. Additionally, Sweding films' aesthetic is influenced by the absence of an actual director figure or professional crew, the lack of professional

actors, and the possibility of only in-camera editing relaxes the hierarchy and preciseness of standardized professional filmmaking and turns film production into an almost mundane and spontaneous community activity. Hence, this type of movie production clearly praises amateurism for generating creativity and offers an alternative to Hollywood type of professionalized filmmaking.

In that regard, *Be Kind* shows Gondry's ability to apply his craft style to a mainstream Hollywood production with known actors such as Jack Black, Mia Farrow, and Danny Glover and use this style to comment on Hollywood aesthetics and filmmaking within the very Hollywood system. Moreover, Gondry says that *Be Kind* is about "the idea that you can do everything yourself without waiting for a system to come and put you on top. You construct your own system" (Garbarz & Gombeaud, 2008, p. 11).[60] While Sweded films' DIY aesthetic foregrounds the idea of constructing one's own system, the movie the characters make in the end, focusing on Fats Waller's life in Passaic, New Jersey, emphasizes this idea even more. In *Be Kind*, Mr. Fletcher lies to Mike and the customers that Fats Waller was born in the building where the video store is located. In this way, he thinks he can attract more customers and save the video store from demolition. Of course, Fats Waller was not born in New Jersey but in New York City. Though, finding out that Waller has never lived in Passaic does not retain the local characters from making a biopic documentary about him, that claims him as their own.

[60] Translated by the author.

In making the film, the inhabitants first record the voice-over they will use in the documentary. Everyone tells their fake memories about Fats Waller. In that manner, they reconstruct their collective memory from scratch by inventing a popular myth inherent to their local town. Hayward (2006) states that "myths are not pure and simple reflections of history but a transformation of history. Thus they work to construct a specific way of perceiving the nation" (p. 15). According to Hayward (2006), the center generally dominates the periphery in its myth construction. In the context of *Be Kind,* the center refers to Hollywood cinema, and the periphery to local and amateur filmmakers of Passaic. The fact that Hollywood's myths strongly influence Sweded films shows the center's influence on the periphery. However, the fact that the local people of Passaic choose to create their own myth at the end, in Gondry's words, their own system, reflects how the periphery can resist the standardization of Hollywood.

Gondry's aspiration for "creating one's own system" is not limited to the narrative of *Be Kind Rewind* but also evokes his career decisions. Gondry says they proposed he directs the fifth *Harry Potter* movie, Harry *Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007) (Garbarz & Gombeaud, 2008). However, he refused their proposal because he did not think that he could impose his style on a blockbuster film series like other French directors who made it to Hollywood, such as Jean-Pierre Jeunet, who had intended to incorporate his auteur persona into *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) (Garbarz & Gombeaud, 2008). From the beginning of his career, Gondry was interested in applying his innovative and experimental ideas to his work and writing his own screenplays, as with *La Science* and *Be Kind*. Yet, the director contradicts himself in some senses by making a Hollywood superhero movie, *The Green Hornet* (2011), that neither resonates with his craft style

nor the usual thematics of his films except perhaps in the way that characters come together to fight against corrupted journalism in their town by declaring themselves superheroes and inventing their gadgets and vehicles.

Putting the label of an auteur such as Michel Gondry on a Hollywood superhero movie like *The Green Hornet* raises some expectations and makes one believe that such a film would merge the codes of the superhero genre with Gondry's craft style, producing a unique and original result. It is also essential to consider that *The Green Hornet* is not a franchise controlled by studios identified with Hollywood blockbuster superhero movies such as DC or Marvel. Over the years, various studios have owned *The Green Hornet*; currently, Amasia Entertainment bought its rights (McNary, 2020). Therefore, the fact that *The Green Hornet* is not a mega-budget superhero franchise shows that it can be open to a more flexible system compared to Marvel and DC, which could allow Gondry's time and budget-wise risky experimentations with film style.

However, the movie received generally poor reviews from critics and fans, turning it into his least popular work. Despite the negative reviews, Block and Kirby (2020) argue that the film deconstructs the generic codes and style of the superhero genre thanks to relying on analog effects rather than CGI, giving the impression of a kid pretending to be a superhero. One can acknowledge that *The Green Hornet* makes less use of CG methods when compared to its DC and Marvel blockbusters. However, Gondry's use of practical effects in this film neither follows the anti-realist aesthetic prevalent in his previous films nor is it pushed to its edges to generate a deliberately amateurish style or childlike creativity.

The following section will focus solely on *La Science des rêves* (2006) and analyze how Gondry employs his transnational aesthetic to reflect on the film's national components and to establish a type of self-writing.

5.4. Michel Gondry's Transnationalism Nourishing Nationalism in *La Science des rêves* (2006)

One can consider *La Science des rêves* a French film since it is shot in France and involves French funding in its production. Yet it also includes many transnational elements such as the presence of its director, the transnational auteur status of Gondry despite his French identity, a multinational crew including both French and American artists and technical personnel, and the multi-language dialogue (French, English, and Spanish) in its narrative. The casting itself offers an interpretive lens for discussing the transnationalism of *La Science*. The film includes actors such as Gael Garcia Bernal (Stéphane), who is Mexican, and Charlotte Gainsbourg (Stéphanie), British and French, as she is the daughter of the British actress and singer Jane Birkin and French composer and singer Serge Gainsbourg. Furthermore, both actors had previously worked in national and transnational productions before starring in *La Science*. Thus, their career trajectory also evokes a sense of transnationalism which contrasts firmly with the presence of locally famous French actors in the film, such as Miou Miou (Stéphane's mother, Christine) and Alain Chabat (Guy), who are identified with French comedy movies. Furthermore, as part of an older generation, these actors, unlike Bernal and Gainsbourg, do not reflect the current climate of filmmaking practices turning more and

more transnational "in an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 8).

Furthermore, Gondry's craft aesthetic, replete with analog methods, constitutes another transnational element in the film as it has so far navigated between his music videos, commercials, and short and feature-length films in France and the US. However, these transnational elements, especially Gondry's homemade style, exist in a continuum with the national elements of the film. In analyzing this continuum, I take into account Higbee and Lim's (2010) approach, which they refer to as "critical transnationalism." In their article, Higbee and Lim (2010) reveal three previous approaches used in theorizing the question of transnational. Higson (2000, as cited in Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 9) proposes a binary approach between national and transnational: while the national remains limiting, the transnational enables understanding of cinema's "cultural and economic formations." Another approach considers the transnational as a "regional phenomenon" by focusing on cinemas relying on "shared cultural heritage" (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10). The final approach involves diasporic, postcolonial, and exilic cinemas questioning the power relations between center and margin, global and local such as Naficy's (2001) piece on "accented cinema." Higbee and Lim (2010) argue that these approaches' main problem originates from neglecting the existence of "national" inside the "transnational." They state the following:

> The danger [with the nation/transnational binary] is that the national simply becomes displaced or negated in such analysis as if it ceases to exist, when in fact the national continues to exert the force of its presence even within transnational film-making practices. (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10)

Thus, the writers suggest an approach they define as “critical transnationalism” to interpret how cross border filmmaking activities communicate with the paradigm of national instead of negating it (Higbee & Lim, 2010, p. 10).

La Science exemplifies critical transnationalism in how the transnational co-exists with the national and even nourishes it. The film suggests a return to the homeland and the origins of selfhood both inside its narrative and production. Stéphane, after his parents’ divorce, follows his father to Mexico and lives away from his French mother and childhood home for many years. The film concentrates on his return to France, where he journeys to his memories and rediscovers his childhood home. Stéphane has a heightened Mexican identity compared to his French one since he left France at an early age. In that sense, as a transnational element of the film, Stéphane helps to accentuate the French elements of the film by bringing an outsider perspective on the events. It is a widely popular cliché that an outsider is always better positioned in observing a place than those who live there since they don’t necessarily pay attention to the characteristics of that place that they consider not noteworthy (Block & Kirby, 2020). Stéphane, during the film, rediscovers Parisian life; he tries to get along and communicate with Parisians despite his low French speaking skills, works near *République*, which is a hectic subway stop and a well-known neighborhood in Paris, and hangs out at the *Canal Saint-Martin* with his French friend and colleague from work, Guy.

Furthermore, Stéphane’s outsider position evokes Gondry’s perspective on his American films. As mentioned earlier, after finishing *Dave Chappelle’s Block Party*, Gondry felt legitimate to make movies about subjects that did not necessarily involve his world or

life experience as a white male French director. Gondry (2008), regarding the documentary, says, "I overcame one of my main fears: taking on a subject I wasn't part of" (p. 14). Thus, through his outsider perspective, the French director provides a different look at the ethnically diverse communities of the US in his other American films following *Dave Chappelle's.* Additionally, the French director has lived in the US for many years, even before starting to make feature-length films. Therefore, as Gondry himself justifies in an interview, Gael Garcia Bernal, as a Mexican actor in France, resembles his situation in the US as a French director (Garbarz & Gombeaud, 2008).

More importantly, Stéphane's return to his origins in the story resonates with Gondry's return to France to make *La Science* after finishing *Eternal Sunshine* in the US, which won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. As Gondry reveals, his choice of returning to France despite gaining a great reputation with his second feature-length film, *Eternal Sunshine*, comes from the desire to tell a personal story with *La Science* (Garbarz & Gombeaud, 2008).[61] Gondry says that with this film, for the first time, he found the courage to talk about himself and the things that happened to him (Walker Art Center, 2011).[62] Therefore the film involves references to his own life and especially childhood, such as the fact that he uses the apartment block where he grew up for the scenes in Stéphane's apartment (Wood, 2014). Furthermore, to transmit personal references to his life, Gondry benefits from the character of Stéphane, turning almost

[61] In that regard, it is also essential to consider that while he had collaborated with Charlie Kaufmann for the writing of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, he wrote the script of *La Science des rêves* on his own.

[62] *La Science* follows the biographical documentary *I've Been 12 Forever*, focusing on Gondry's life, childhood, and music videos. Gondry defines the film as a compilation of all the autobiographical elements we come across in the documentary (Walker Art Center, 2011).

into an alter-ego of the director. As I will delve into more later in this section, Stéphane's profession as an artist, his family relations, and his dreams explicitly echo the director's life.



Figures 105 & 106. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane presents an educational TV show inside his head that he calls Stéphane TV, made with cardboard boxes. This setting includes references to Gondry's personal life.

Furthermore, one can argue that the director's practical effects usage resonates with Varda's (1994) concept of *cinécriture,* which describes an auteur's distinct use of mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing in generating their cinematic universe.[63] Gondry's use of analog methods in *La Science* turns into a form of *cinécriture* that he uses as a springboard to evoke selfhood. However, although the story evokes a return to

[63] See Chapter 4 for a more thorough explanation of Varda's (2014) concept of *cinécriture*.

the roots of selfhood, how the story is told remains connected to transnational elements: Gondry benefits from his craft aesthetic, a substantial constituent of his transnational authorship, to tell a deeply personal story taking place in his homeland. Therefore his cinematic style, as a transnational element, is used to reflect the national elements in the story. In that regard, *La Science* exemplifies how transnational constituents can co-exist with the national ones instead of entering into a binary opposition, as suggested by Higbee and Lim's (2010) critical transnationalism.



Figures 107 & 108. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane explains the fabrication of dreams inside Stéphane TV: Pink smoke coming out of the pot followed by spin art images appearing on the screen in the background indicate that his dream begins.

The dream sequences, in particular, foreground the co-existence of national and transnational elements in the film. The film starts inside Stéphane's mind (*Figures 105 & 106*), which he calls Stéphane TV, a television studio constructed almost entirely with

cardboard boxes and especially egg cartons. In this setting, Stéphane presents an educational TV show about science and dreams. First, he plays the drums and then the organ next to it to create the soundtrack of the show. Stéphane plays the drums in his mind several times during the film, which is an explicit reference to Gondry's drummer background. After arranging the soundtrack of the show, he points the two cameras, also made of cardboard boxes, towards himself while standing behind a counter. He starts explaining how dreams are constructed in the form of a food recipe. Inside a large pot, he puts acrylic paintings, tomato sauce, some spaghetti, vinyl records, etc. Each ingredient represents what we think, hear, or listen to during the day, our memories, friendships, and love. When these ingredients come together, a pink smoke starts to come out of the pot, signaling that the dream begins.

As the smoke dissipates into the air (*Figures 107 & 108*), spin art images appear on a digital screen in the background. Stéphane rushes in front of the blue wall next to the screen. His image immediately appears on the digital screen, merging with the spin art images in the background. After Stéphane's image disappears with a slow dissolve in the digital screen (*Figures 109 & 110*), we move on to the next shot, where this time, the spin art images cover the whole screen. While paints of different colors create strange lines and shapes, we hear Stéphane's voice-over talking quietly and calmly about the things he comes across in his dream at that moment. He explains that he sees his recently deceased father and says, "It is nice to see him healthy and normal again." He also dreams that they are in a Duke Ellington concert. There he switches from English to Spanish, and in amazement, he says that Duke Ellington doesn't look like himself but a

duck: It is not Duke Ellington but “Duck” Ellington. There he becomes conscious of his own dream, and he remembers that his father is no longer alive.



Figures 109 & 110. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), while shots display various spin art images, we hear Stéphane’s voice-over telling the things he sees in his dream, which clearly refers to Gondry’s relationship with his father.

In fact, the presence of Stéphane’s father in the dream is a reference to the death of Gondry’s father. The fact that they are in a Duke Ellington concert together emphasizes this reference even more because, as Gondry explains, when he was little, at home, his father, who was a pianist, was listening to a lot of Duke Ellington (Lucca, 2016). Gondry says, “At home, Duke Ellington was God” (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, in another sequence inside Stéphane TV, on the digital screen, we witness images coming from Stéphane’s childhood, where he constructs stuff with his

father. Gondry's father, aside from being a pianist in love with jazz music, was also a computer programmer. McQuiston (2020) states that:

> Gondry's father's dedication to a technical profession and love of music could have set a powerful example for his son, whose work displays a dual dedication to technique, on one hand, and to art, music, abstraction, and emotion, on the other. (p. 12)

I would argue that, in the film, his father's influence on Gondry is represented by this scene where we see the two protagonists building objects together. Additionally, when Stéphanie and Zoé ask Stéphane about his profession, he responds that he wants to be an inventor and shows his inventions to them. The fact that Stéphane wishes to be an inventor recalls Gondry's grandfather, Constant Martin, who fabricated electronic organs and also invented the ancestor of the contemporary synthesizer called "Clavioline" (*The Work of Director Michel Gondry*, 2003).

Therefore, this first dream sequence in the film highly reflects autobiographical connections to Gondry's childhood and his relationship with his father. However, the way it is told remains firmly tied to his craft aesthetic as a transnational element. Stéphane TV is a space constructed almost entirely with carton boxes. Also, the images of paints in different colors spilling on top of each other are not digitally created but made with spin art. As Gondry shows in *I've Been 12 Forever (Part 2 Age 12-12)*, to create the spin art, they pour paintings on a fast spinning round structure, and to film it, Gondry attached a camera above this structure spinning simultaneously with it. Furthermore, Stéphane's inventions are far from being sophisticated and complicated gadgets, revealing Gondry's homemade aesthetic as well as childlike spirit.

Aside from the references to his childhood and father, Gondry explains that in creating Stéphane's dreams, he mostly served from his own dreams. Gondry says, "I observed dreams that I had and put them back into the context of when they happened" (Thill, 2006). As explained earlier, the giant hands appearing both in *La Science* and *Everlong* originate from Gondry's childhood nightmare and show Gondry's ambition to exhibit his dreams. Stéphane, in one of his dreams, is physically forced by his co-workers to work, and he uses his immense hands made of prosthetics to resist his co-workers and finally gets away from their oppressions. In fact, like Gondry himself, Stéphane is an artist; he is working on a calendar collection called *Disasterology*, showing disasters around the world through his drawings, such as a plane crash in Paris or an earthquake in Mexico City.[64] Unfortunately, his boss does not appreciate his calendar design and gives him a boring job away from creativity. Therefore, Stéphane hates his new job and often refuses to come to work. As Gondry explains, Stéphane's stuckness as an artist reminds him of all the boring jobs he has done so far out of necessity, making him feel miserable for a while (Wood, 2014). Interestingly, in the making of documentary, Stéphane Rozenbaum, one of the production designers of the film, says that they designed the workplace in Stéphane's dreams, not the real-life version, based on an office the French director had worked for a while (Gondry, 2006).

[64] The idea of representing an overwhelmed artist comes up in Gondry's other films: His protagonists are usually artists, filmmakers, or inventors who are generally not appreciated or even despised by their surroundings and "outsiders with personal issues and a knack for self-sabotage" (McQuiston, 2020, p. 17) as is the case with Daniel from *Microbe et Gasoline* or Akira from Gondry's short film *Interior Design* part of *Tokyo!* (2008).

So, in these dreams where we see Stéphane being forced to work, Gondry again refers to personal preoccupations but through his effects usage, which is a sign of his transnational authorship. For creating the giant hands, he uses prosthetics that evoke transnationalism on many levels, as it is also a reference to the music video of *Everlong*. Moreover, during these dreams, we see Stéphane inside his workplace (*Figure 111*), but its dimensions have changed compared to the real-life version. Pierre Pell, another production designer of *La Science*, explains that for the dream sequences, they made the office's walls taller and thus the ceilings higher but not wider to create a claustrophobic atmosphere identified with Stéphane's stuckness (Gondry, 2006).



Figure 111. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), a long shot displays Stéphane in his workplace inside of his dream. The room's ceilings are higher but not wider (compared to real-life) to create a claustrophobic atmosphere reflecting Stéphane's stuckness as an artist working at a dead-end job away from creativity.

Aside from benefiting from his childhood dreams, the French director also uses his recent ones to construct the dream sequences. Gondry (2006) explains that he once dreamed about being the French actor Patrick Dewaere who committed suicide in 1982. He reveals that when he woke up, he felt scared since he couldn't figure out why he dreamt of being a person who killed himself (Gondry, 2006). In *La Science*, Stéphane

dreams of being a drug dealer whose girlfriend dumps him in a hotel room due to his out-law profession. Stéphane, in the throes of his breakup with his lover, hears the sound of a car approaching the hotel and turns to the window. A car covered with cardboard and with "Police" written on it in bold with black spray paint, stops in front of the hotel (see *Figure 112*). Stéphane looks back inside the hotel room and (*Figure 113*), this time, instead of his face, we see a picture of Patrick Dewaere, cut out in the shape of Stéphane's face. Further, Stéphane tries to escape through the hotel window with his rifle made of toilet paper rolls. When he gets downstairs (*Figure 114*), he quickly steals a miniature car made of cardboard, but the cops trap him on both sides.



Figure 112. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), the cops leave their car covered with cardboard to catch Stéphane in his dream. For this scene, Gondry was inspired by his own dream where he was Patrick Dewaere and by the narrative of various films starring the French actor.

Gondry (2006) explains that the dream is based on the narrative of the actor's various films. One can think of Bertrand Blier's *Les Valseuses* (Going Places, 1974) or Alain Corneau's *Série noire* (1979) as they contain thematic and narrative elements identifiable with Stéphane's dream. Therefore, this sequence not only refers to Gondry's dream but also contains many references to French cinema. In that sense, it concerns the

realm of the nation; however, its cinematic style, as is the case with other dream sequences, remains transnational, putting forward Gondry's deliberately cheap aesthetic.



Figure 113. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Stéphane's face is replaced with a cut-out picture of the French actor Patrick Dewaere's face.

To conclude, Gondry reveals a compelling example of transnational authorship that does not properly fit into any prevalent theoretical model such as Naficy's (2006) "accented cinema," which concentrates on the works of exilic and diasporic directors. Naficy (2006) explains that these directors generally come from Third World and postcolonial countries and are relocated to the West, generally northern cosmopolitan centers "where they exist in a state of tension and dissension with both their original and their current homes" (p. 111). Gondry as a white French man who initially went to the US to make music videos is already in a privileged position by means of his identity and in that sense, he does not fit these categorizations. Instead, Gondry intentionally puts himself into experiences beyond his white French man persona as is the case with *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* and he uses what he has gained from these kinds of projects through his outsider perspective to benefit the following ones such as *Be Kind Rewind* and *The We and the I*.

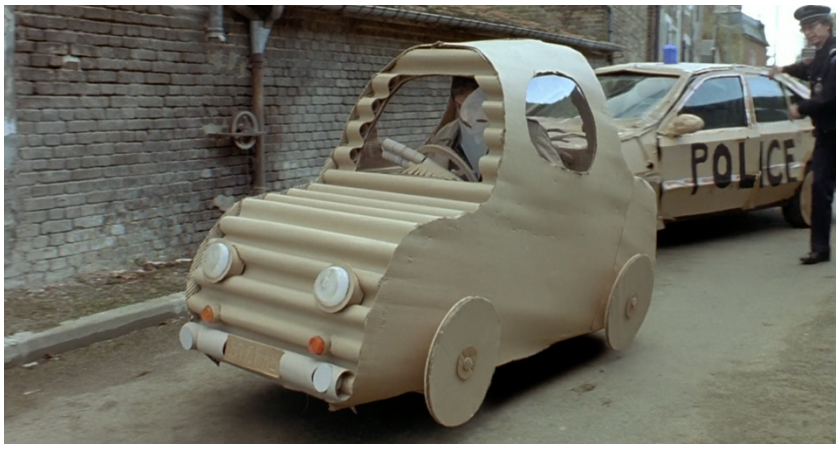


Figure 114. In *La Science des rêves* (2006), Gondry's craft aesthetic as a transnational element reflects national elements of the film, such as references to French cinema and Gondry's personal life.

Furthermore, his craft aesthetic, filled with analog methods, which has so far navigated between different mediums, cultures, and nations, helps make sense of his transnational authorship. Throughout his career, Gondry has insisted on practical effects instead of CGI, which made him stand outside the Hollywood norms; however, this situation paradoxically does not keep him from succeeding with his American productions within the Hollywood system. Yet, one should also acknowledge that Gondry has never reached the same level of success as other transnational directors who made a name for themselves in the Hollywood system, such as the Mexican director Guillermo del Toro or the South Korean director Bong Joon Ho. These directors made mainstream productions, including blockbusters privileging a realist aesthetic that echoes ILM's house style. Turnock (2022) states that Bong Joon Ho self-consciously adopts ILM's effects realism standards in his films, as is the case with his South Korean blockbuster *The Host* (2006), to play in the global market. Unlike these directors, despite entering the Hollywood system, Gondry's transnational filmmaking career has never turned mainstream. He remained generally attached to an anti-realist style that he used to

generate a form of self-writing or construct cinematic universes inherent to him. Gondry has always been interested in hearing out his own voice by applying his craft aesthetic even to his most recognized or commercialized American films such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *Be Kind Rewind.*

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the implications of using analog effects in an era dominated by digital filmmaking. It has considered the cinematic style of films such as *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* (2004), *Poulet aux prunes* (Chicken with Plums, 2011), *Sous le ciel d'Alice* (The Skies of Lebanon, 2020), and *La Science des rêves* (The Science of Sleep, 2006) through the conceptual frameworks of Bazin (2005) Rodowick (2007) and Marks (2001) in understanding their effects' aesthetic. I argued that practical effects are used in these films to generate a deliberately anti-realist that defies Hollywood norms, and especially its fixation on effects realism.

In examining the aesthetic of effects, I first focused on the ontological divide between practical and digital effects by taking into account Bazinian realism. Bazin (2005), in "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," argues that photography remains superior to all arts preceding it in representing reality thanks to its photochemical process

establishing an indexical connection to its real-life subject. Rodowick (2007), by building on Bazin's (2005) arguments, suggests that the digital image undermines the indexicality and analogy of photographic image since it comes into existence through pixels. In light of their arguments, I stated that practical effects, although they are anti-realist in their appearances, are paradoxically realist in the Bazinian sense by retaining an indexical connection to the profilmic space. Contrarily, I discussed how digital effects created in postproduction lack this indexicality by not being a part of the primary shooting.

As broadly examined in Chapter 2, the advent of the digital era in the 1990s and the early 2000s has intensified the discussions around the question of indexicality: scholars debated whether digital forms represent an actual rupture from the analog ones, in other words, whether digital image erodes the indexical connection of the analog image to reality. As the previous literature foregrounds, the scholars' arguments diverge into two opposite poles: between those who contend that the digital image departs from the indexical basis of the photographic image, such as Binkley (1989) or Rodowick (2007) and those who attempt to bridge these two such Rosen (2001) and Gunning (2007). Furthermore, Buckland (1999) and Prince (2012) have brought these discussions into post-digital cinema and contended that digital effects do not completely degrade the indexicality of the photographic image. On the contrary, they argue that these effects generate new forms of indexicality by creating perceptually realistic characters and environments that could be perfectly blended with live-action elements.

However, I contend that Buckland's (1999) and Prince's (2012) arguments are contradictory. What they define as new forms of indexicality can only become an illusion of indexicality since digital effects lack a physical substance. I believe that this desire to bridge digital effects with indexicality derives from the anxious tone that the digital era brought with it. As Prince (2012) explains, the common thought with the arrival of digital is that the digital image erodes the indexicality of the photographic image and weakens the reality status of images, thus causing viewers to doubt the reality of all filmic images. By rejecting their arguments, I argued that practical effects through their physical substance could actually become realist in the Bazinian sense no matter how thoroughly they maintain an anti-realist style. Moreover, while the previous studies were so fixated on the relation between digital effects and indexicality, incorporating practical effects into this ontological questioning has not been foregrounded in existing literature. In this study, I intended to show how approaching practical effects ontologically can contribute to these previous discussions.

Furthermore, I stressed the importance of this material difference between analog and digital effects. I discussed that analog methods, unlike digital ones, could generate a form of embodied spectatorship through their foregrounded materiality. In this discussion, I adopted Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," which refers to the ways vision can appeal to the sense of touch and thus enable haptic connections with the image. I contended that the unrealistic materiality of practical effects could stimulate the viewer's sense of touch and create an embodied experience.

Chapter 3, by concentrating on the effects objects in Wes Anderson's *The Life Aquatic*, analyzed how practical effects adhere to Bazinian realism. It also benefited from Bazin's (2005) concept of "spatial unity." According to Bazin (2005), the spatial unity of a scene derives from characters occupying the same filmic space instead of breaking them up into separate shots and then unit them in the editing. In my argument, I stressed that practical effects coexist and share the same-spatio temporal relation to the profilmic space as other actors and set elements and thus maintain the spatial unity of a scene. In contrast, CGI disrupts this unity as it is not ontologically a component of the primary shooting.

Moreover, the chapter also questioned how the practical effects of *The Life Aquatic* could resonate with Marks' (2000) haptic visuality. It showed that the foregrounded anti-realism of analog effects could direct the viewer's attention to the effects objects themselves, encouraging them to feel their texture rather than solely focusing on the narrative. In that sense, these objects deemphasize our identification with the filmic universe and characters to put forward our primary identification with the film on a more tactile level, with "the sense and sensibility of materiality itself" (Sobchack, 2004, p. 65). Moreover, the chapter also paid attention to how practical effects diverge from CGI in generating these kinds of embodied spectatorship. Marks (2000) states that "optical visuality," as opposed to haptic visuality, is closer to our sense of vision and provides the viewer with a distanced view of the image, considering themselves as an all-seeing subject. I contended that Hollywood CGI embraces more optical visuality since, unlike practical effects, it attempts to conceal its substance, in other words, the fact that it is generated out of algorithmic functions by mimicking a photorealist style.

Chapter 4 discussed how the cinematic style of French women filmmakers Marjane Satrapi and Chloé Mazlo could offer a feminist perspective and highlight the cultural exception of French cinema, defying Hollywood norms and precisely ILM's (Industrial Light & Magic) aesthetic criteria. Turnock (2022) argues that the industry-leader effects company ILM has formed a standardized effects aesthetics that other companies follow in and outside Hollywood. By examining the aesthetic of *Poulet aux prunes* and *Sous le ciel d'Alice*, I showed how these films reject ILM's effects realism standards and its white masculinist vision. Further, as I discussed in the chapter, these directors' films are based on family stories they hear from their relatives and take place in their homeland from which they have been separated. In that sense, the chapter contended that their usage of effects distances their films' stories from reality, which in turn emphasizes their own distance from these family stories as well as their countries of origin. However, in a paradoxical sense, these analog effects also turn into a tool to embrace the roots of selfhood and thus generate a form of feminist cinematic self-writing.

Chapter 5 studies Michel Gondry's use of analog effects in establishing a compelling example of transnational authorship. The chapter argued how his career from the very beginning, through his music videos shot in the US with international singers and bands, has taken on a transnational character. These music videos also reveal many thematic, narrative, and stylistic connections to his latter works that I revealed in the chapter primarily by focusing on his film *La Science des rêves*. As Block and Kirby (2020) discuss, Gondry's films and other works exhibit various continuities and eclecticism worth exploring in understanding his transnational auteur status. In that sense, the

chapter also delved into the aesthetic of his American film *Be Kind Rewind* (2008) in connection to his previous French one, *La Science,* in showing how Gondry is capable of crossing aesthetic and cultural borders through its cinematic style. Further, by taking into account Higbee and Lim's (2010) approach to "critical transnationalism," the chapter examined how the French director's craft aesthetic in *La Science* as a transnational element of his filmography can be used in reflecting a return to the origins and to the realm of the nation.

The primary focus of this thesis was to analyze the use of practical effects in a time when CGI dominates contemporary filmmaking. The study stressed a significant gap in the previous literature, which has not given enough attention to practical effects or their various usages outside Hollywood and its aesthetic norms. While the Hollywood effects industry privileges photorealism, the academic discussions on effects do the same by concentrating on Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, existing literature hasn't extensively addressed the subject of the effects themselves, whether analog or practical. It is evident that the arrival of digital and the intensive use of CGI in the Hollywood industry have given birth to studies including Bordwell (1999), Prince (2012), Keil and Whissel (2016), and Turnock (2022). Yet effects have never received the attention they deserve despite drastically impacting cinematic style or having various industrial, social, cultural, and economic factors. The main purposes of this study were to direct attention toward the significance of effects in film studies and to examine the implications of leaving aside digital methods in favor of supposedly obsolete analog practices in post-digital cinema.

Hence, the thesis contributes to the area of film studies by concentrating on the aesthetic of effects outside mainstream Hollywood cinema. It also brings new perspectives to the studies of French cinema and feminist film by investigating the cinematic style of French women filmmakers. Additionally, it contributes to auteur studies and transnational cinemas by delving into Michel Gondry's career trajectory and effects usage. This study has the strength of leaning into an overshadowed research area and providing new perspectives on the films in question. It could be expanded by using reception studies to understand whether practical effects can actually originate haptic connections between the viewer and the image. Moreover, the study can also be expanded to other national contexts. As I also argue in the methodology section of Chapter 2, French cinema is not characterized by this kind of handcrafted filmmaking nor a dominant anti-Hollywood style. In fact, French mainstream productions and auteur cinema tend to follow a realistic aesthetic in line with ILM's effects realism standards. Nonetheless, French cinema remains a solid system capable of supporting art house cinema or what Palmer (2011) defines as "pop-art cinema" and can therefore support filmmakers who aspire to lean into an anti-realist aesthetic.

In that sense, these techniques are not unique to French cinema and are also highly present in other nations which are famous for their distinctive animation styles, such as the Czech Republic, known for its puppet animation with directors such as Jiří Trnka, Karel Zeman, Břetislav Pojar and Jan Švankmajer. This aspiration for using puppet animation persists in contemporary Czech cinema with examples such as Jiří Barta's *Toys in the Attic* (2009), Jan Balej's *Little from the Fish Shop* (2015), and Daria Kashcheeva's short film *Daughter* (2019). Russian cinema is also known for its

particular animation style, with directors such as Yuri Norstein, known for his cut-out animation, Ivan Ivanov-Vano, and Roman Kachanov, among others. Contemporary Russian cinema still shows a strong interest in animation with recent examples such as Irina Evteeva's *The Melody of String Tree* (2020), combining live-action with various animation techniques or Garri Bardin's stop-motion animation with clay puppets in *The Ugly Duckling* (2010). In the scope of this study, I have concentrated on French live-action films using practical effects, however; the theoretical concepts discussed in this thesis can also be used for making sense of these kinds of stop-motion animations and the effects' aesthetic in other national and cultural contexts outside of French cinema.

Further, to broaden the scope of this research, one can also question what it means to use digital effects to mimic the anti-realist style of practical effects, which is also a technique widely used in contemporary filmmaking. Comiskey's (2022) study addresses this situation and contends that CGI, by faking stop-motion style, can challenge the material constraints and ontological principles that have long characterized stop-motion animation, including its attachment to mundane objects. Moreover, while I have concentrated on the aesthetic of analog methods by mainly looking through films, it is also possible to enlarge the scope of this study by considering the effects industry itself. Turnock's (2022) study concentrates on ILM's industrial discourses and standardized aesthetic. The same approach could be used in making sense of the anti-realist style discussed in this thesis. One can focus on the industrial entities and effects companies outside Hollywood to interpret their aesthetic standards. Lastly, it is also worth exploring the implications of using such analog methods for the production process of a film and especially for actors' performances. Bode's (2017) study concentrates on how

in digital filmmaking, acting and the use of technology are extremely intertwined. However, her study does not pay enough attention to practical effects or their use outside Hollywood norms.

Overall, I believe that we should recognize and foreground the presence of analog methods in contemporary filmmaking and how they can generate an anti-Hollywood style. When I mention that I write about effects in contemporary cinema to my relatives and friends, they immediately get the idea that I am writing about Hollywood CGI and blockbusters, which is not a surprise because they are products of the hegemon that rule in the global market. In that regard, I believe it is important to think outside the box and encourage diversity and difference. These are the qualities that remind us that cinema is not just Hollywood and realism, but as I revealed with French films, it is also a site to experiment with film form and manifest other forms of creativity. In that sense, French cinema offers a model for other national cinemas that have seemingly absorbed the Hollywood aesthetic in lockstep.

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