# MONASH University

# This Magic Moment

## The Aesthetic Devices of Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe Reimagined

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**Abstract**

In 1928, filmmaker Jean Epstein produced *La Chute de la Maison Usher:* a masterpiece of Gothic cinema. It is an adaptation of two of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Oval Portrait". The study of this intersection of Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe has led to the production of a triptych (a suite of three films): *I Work for the Devil, Tonight You Belong to Me,* and *The Night-Side of Nature*. The project explores a theory-in-action known as "photogénie", and how this method might be used and updated to invigorate experimental cinema in the twenty-first century.

The triptych does not constitute a direct remake, nor a treatment of the original source material. Instead, it is crafted from a series of vignettes and filmic experiments produced as a response to the various themes, ideas, tangents, and revelations discovered during the research process.

The notion of photogénie, as articulated Jean Epstein, refers to a quasi-mystical quality of the cinema-image which imbues meaning and moral enhancement into environments and the objects within them. Photogénie can also refer to a disassociation and breaking apart of space-time into a new and tactile screen-reality[1]. What does this theory, that evolved during the French narrative avant-garde period of the 1920s, have to offer a world submerged in ubiquitous digital technology, multitudes of screens, and varying exhibition possibilities? What can this methodology offer independent, creative filmmakers and moving-image-based visual artists in the twenty-first century?

In my work I have not sought to articulate a specific narrative, or set of characters, genre trope, or imitation of another filmmaker's stylistic approach to film form. I have instead created a series of vignettes that when combined, foreground atmosphere, mood, the 'impression' of narrative, the 'impression' of genre, and hopefully something of the effect of "sensation"[2], and instances of photogénie. In my work I have been fascinated by the

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[1]Epstein, Jean. 1923. "On Certain Characteristics of Photogenie." In *French Film Theory and Criticism: a History/Anothology, 1907 – 1939*, edited by Richard Abel. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, c1988. 314 – 318.
Jean Epstein's seminal essay in which he outlines early tenets of Photogenie as a theory for the cinema.

[2] Deleuze, Giles. 1981. *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*. (trans. Daniel W. Smith). London, New York: Continuum, 2003. First published: Editions de la Difference, 1981.

Giles Deleuze explores an aesthetic concept summarised under the term 'sensation' in relation to the art of Francis Bacon.

epiphanic moment; the magical effect of the cinema experience (translated in this case into the installation, gallery experience). My understanding of photogénie can be summarised as a method of producing and combining moving images that add up to a cinema of minutia; images that are sudden, that outburst, that shock, that are immediate, that are fleeting, and that are not concerned with narrative context but more so with the wider view of the mosaic.

My intention, through fragmentation, and explorative tangents, has been to create a dream-like image-scape. The film experiments have taken me into studies of film genre and adaptation (slasher films, midnight movies, exploitation cinema, animation, and the French narrative avant-garde, all looking to adapt and interpret Poe), studies of historical aesthetic theories such as that of sensation, as conceived by Giles Deleuze, or Attic tragedy, as conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche, through some deeper thinking about the aesthetic goals of photogénie, what it meant pragmatically to filmmakers in the early era of cinema, and into a process of making, reflecting, remixing and making again.

**Declaration**

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Signature:

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Date: 15.07.2021

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# This Magic Moment

## The Aesthetic Devices of Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe Reimagined

**Word Count: 42, 354**

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**EXEGESIS: INTRODUCTION**

> Heuretic:
> 1: (logic) The branch of logic concerned with discovery or invention[3]

This exegesis starts with a reflection on the European avant-garde film scene of the 1920s; an era in which filmmakers and artists experimented with the medium in radical ways, producing works that ranged from the grand (Abel Gance's 1927 French triptych-epic *Napoléon*; a biopic that was conceived to play at the Paris Opera House across three massive screens, tinted the respective colours of the tricolore flag), to the smaller screen (the installation and projection of Hans Richter's *Rhythmus 21*; a 1921 abstract short film from Germany, much more humble in scale, but no less radical, and no less significant in historical, critical terms).[4] In France, this era is represented broadly by a generation of filmmakers associated with the realist, narrative avant-garde, or simply, the French Impressionists: Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, and, the focus of this study, Jean Epstein.[5] This study has been structured using what Robert B. Ray describes as a 'heuretic' approach to film theory and history; that is, to follow a series associative leaps in interest, and to discover anew the historical concerns and ambitions of thinking on cinema aesthetics and craft.[6]

The avant-garde atmosphere of 1920s Paris emboldened an era of modernist fervour in a city which had only two decades prior been the site of that moment in history (arguably) when the cinematograph was born. In 1895, August and Louis Lumiere produced the first-ever exhibition of motion pictures in the basement of a Parisian café; a showcase of ten of their cinematograph experiments, one of which famously (legendarily) sent the audience fleeing from the venue in terror as they tried to evade the oncoming train as it pulled into the station.[7] The legend of the screening of *L'Arrivée d'un Train à la Ciotat* (*Arrival of a Train at*

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[3] Lexico.com. Oxford University Press, https://www.lexico.com/definition/heuretic (accessed January 2021).

[4] Richard Abel, *French Cinema: the first wave, 1915 – 1929* Princeton (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 17.

[5] Abel, *French Cinema: the first wave, 1915 – 1929*, 279.

[6] Robert B. Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 4.

[7] Martin Loiperdinger, *Lumiere's Arrival of the Train: Cinema's Founding Myth* (The Moving Image, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 2004), 89 – 118.

*La Ciotat*; 1895) is demonstrative of a curiosity that French thinkers, filmmakers and artists would pursue concerning the impact of this new technology upon the consciousness and mental facilities of an individual, an audience, and a culture. The cinema was a visceral, mind-altering experience and its character and potential were yet to be revealed.

In 1928, filmmaker and philosopher Jean Epstein produced a masterpiece of Gothic cinema, seminal to the traditions of French impressionistic cinema, and the wide-ranging genre of horror and its Expressionist underpinnings. *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (Jean Epstein; 1928 France), is an adaptation of two of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (first published in 1839) and "The Oval Portrait" (first published in 1842). The study of this intersection of Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe has led to the production of a suite of three films to be exhibited in a triptych display: *I Work For the Devil, Tonight You Belong to Me,* and *The Night-Side of Nature*. The triptych does not constitute a direct remake, nor a treatment of the original source material. Instead, it is crafted from a series of vignettes and filmic experiments produced as a response to the various themes, ideas, tangents, and revelations discovered during the research process. This process is inspired by Robert B Ray's ideas on cinema theory; his essay "How a Film Theory Got Lost" being one of the first substantive signals in this research journey to emphasis the continuing relevance of this corner of film-art history.[8]

Robert B Ray introduces the concept of *heuretics* as a method of enquiry to replace the more familiar hermeneutical methodology of interpretation. *Heuretic* in this sense is an interrogative and active research method in which 'players' (researchers) generate chains of associations from a given object (a moment or a detail from a film for instance). A *heuretic* study is one in which the researcher follows a series of intuited ideas, makes a craft of the documentation process, and reports their findings.[9] Ray is arguing that cinematic theoretical research needs to once again be about discovery rather than demystification, just as photogénie, a filmic methodology that has become a catch-all term for Epstein's wide array of ideas about the autonomy and potential for the cinematic image, hinges upon discovery and revelation rather than dialectical rationality. This project embraces this approach. Each

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[8] Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies*, 4.

[9] Ray, *How a Film Theory Got Lost and Other Mysteries in Cultural Studies*, 12.

piece of the broader mosaic of the triptych represents another link in the associative chain brought together throughout the research.

The notion of photogénie, first coined by Louis Delluc in his article "La Beaute au Cinema" (1917),[10] but most extensively articulated by Jean Epstein in his writings, and collected together in English translation as "The Intelligence of a Machine" (translated by Christophe Wall Romana; 2014), refers to the ways in which a film-viewer experiences a particular shot or sequence as a holistic intervention in the limits and potential for perceptions of realty.[11] Hence, photogénie is a quasi-mystical quality of the cinema-image which imbues meaning and moral enhancement into environments and the objects within them, as well as tends to disassociate and break apart space-time into a new and tactile screen-reality.[12] Photogénie is a theory-in-action. It assumes an active participation in the spectator, asking for an experiential, sensorial, and openness in attitude. To embody and revitalise this theory, I have embraced this openness-in-attitude in my process and creative work.

Photogénie was only one of many theories that evolved during this particular period but a theory that articulates the energy and enthusiasm of the time. If it was to be said (and quite rightly so) that this theory was nebulous, vague, and ever-shifting in its focus and value orientations, why might it be useful to re-visit and re-appraise this method of enquiry? What does photogénie have to offer a world submerged in ubiquitous digital technology, multitudes of screens, and varying exhibition possibilities; and what can this methodology offer independent, creative filmmakers and moving-image-based visual artists? This exegesis will evaluate the theory and the film, and describe their uses in my studio-project work.

The studio-project work is mapped out using a sketching method in which each successive filmic experiment is documented and labelled as a 'sketch'. Rather than working within a more finite constraint of narrative cohesion, script development, and production planning to create a singular, linear film as a response to the research journey, it made more sense, to

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[10] Abel, *French Cinema: the first wave, 1915 – 1929*, 137 – 139.

[11] Jean Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine* (trans. Christophe Wall-Romana, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014), iii.

[12] Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," in *French Film Theory and Criticism: a History/Anthology, 1907 – 1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 314 – 318.

me, from the point of view of methodology, to embrace the spirit of the theory (and the era), and experiment with smaller sequences of more tangential ideas. This method would allow the work the flexibility to follow where various research tangents might lead, but also allow my own voice and tone within the films to evolve more freely across the timespan of the project, without concern for recourse to a developed screenplay or already-underway production. The challenge of this methodology would be that eventually the sketching process would need to be exhibited. It would need to stitch together as a mosaic that had its own interior logic, continuity of thought, theme and personality.

The exegesis is structured by weaving together sub-chapters which are either reflections on the studio-sketching process, or theoretical and contextual explorations in which new connections and concepts are developed as ways to re-interpret, re-appraise and re-think the ongoing significance of both Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe's work and thought. The first task of the theoretical/contextual writing has been to offer a working rationale for what *photogénie* is, according to Jean Epstein, and where we might locate it in his films. The second task has been to creatively move the concept of *photogénie* into new territory. For instance, connections between Jean Epstein's manifesto-like imaginings and Giles Deleuze's conceptions of visual aesthetics are made, and expanded upon and used as a basis to reflect back on the studio-sketches.[13] Similarly, reflections and discussions around photogénie found in the contemporary literature point toward historical, philosophical concepts such as Gottfired Wilhelm Liebniz's notion of the 'clear-but-confused' ontological nature of the world.[14] The study into Edgar Allan Poe uncovers a set of specific themes regarding morality, malevolence, and a phenomenological view of the relations between the subjective state of the human being's interaction with the surrounding world, and the transient nature of truth, meaning and purpose. This is the third task of the writing; to understand, evaluate and articulate the relevant and most personally appealing themes and aesthetics predicated by Poe. Ultimately, in the subtext to this study, the connection between Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe is inarguable and abundantly clear. The two artists, one author and the other filmmaker, share in common this view of the world as transient, polar, malevolent yet beautiful, and as fleeting for the artist as it is transformative

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[13] Giles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation* (trans. Daniel W. Smith, London, New York: Continuum, 2003) N.B. First published: Editions de la Difference, 1981.

[14] Martine Beugnet, "Introduction," in *Indefinite Visions: Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty,* ed. Beugnet, M, Cameron, A, Fetveit, A, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 1 – 16.

and revelatory. In summary, this exegesis will aim to respond to the question of how this theory-in-action known as "photogénie", as proposed by Jean Epstein, continues to invigorate experimental cinema in the twenty-first century.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**Photogénie and the Transmutation of Classic Film Theory: The First Two Sketches and the Cinema of Jean Epstein.**

> What happens snares us like a wolf trap. The denouement, the unravelling of the plot, can be nothing more than a transition from knot to knot […] The drama is as continuous as life … There are no stories. There have never been stories. There are only situations, having neither head nor tail; without beginning, middle, or end, no right side or wrong side ... without limits in past or future, they are the present.[15]

**Locating Photogénie: *La Glace à Trois Faces* (Jean Epstein; 1927)**

Jean Epstein was prolific in his writings between 1920 and the late 1940s. His essay "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie" (1923) and later collection of essays titled "The Intelligence of a Machine" (1945) are the central defining texts for an exposition of his aesthetic theory. Photogénie has become a byword for Epstein's broader methodology in which movement, emotion, and atmosphere are favoured over linear story-telling. Photogénie can be termed a methodology since its core tenets reflect (or seek to represent) the attitude, stylistic orientation and intention of the filmmaker or artist. The filmmaker who pursues photogénie as a guide seeks images, and combinations of images, that articulate transformation, expression, the close-up, movement, temporality, rhythm, and the augmentation of the senses.[16] Through these tropes and techniques, Epstein claims to produce cinematic works that provide a conduit for the audience to interpret, create and enhance perceptions of the world around them, and their relationships to other beings and objects.

In practice, Epstein pursued these 'enhanced perceptions' most vigorously as a filmmaker in his experimental and independent works. In his 1927 short, *La Glace à Trois Faces* (*The Mirror Has Three Faces*; firmly considered as part of the narrative avant-garde movement of the time)[17] we can see that the themes of seeking out love, the subsequent emotional and

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[15] Jean Epstein, "The Senses I (b)," in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907 – 1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 242.

[16] Robert Farmer, "Jean Epstein," *Senses of Cinema*: *Great Directors Series* Issue 57. (December 2010), https://www.sensesofcinema.com/author/robert-farmer/ (accessed January 2018).

[17] Moller Olaf, "Becoming Jean Epstein," *Film Comment* Vol. 42, Iss. 1. New York. (Jan/Feb 2006): 19 – 21.

mental consequences stemming from this, as well as the associated existential crisis and eventual nihilism, are all realised through sequences in which the protagonist (unnamed throughout the duration of the film) is placed in situations of his own design, that both narratively and visually come apart at the seams (one might think of a seam quite literally as an edit, or 'cut'). The thematically desired effect of causality and finality (in this case the pursuit of unattached love interests and trysts) prove elusive for the protagonist; always out of focus; always distant. This distance and blurriness are both thematic and visually represented. The image is designed to be out of focus for precise moments, and the montage deliberately disrupts the harmony of a more standard version of cinematic spatiality and temporal logic. Epstein creates a magnified and subjective characterisation of the protagonist, reflecting his emotional and mental state, but also weaves an unsympathetic and disorientating cinematic timeline.

In a scene in which the protagonist is at dinner with Pearl (Olga Day) (the first of his love interests), formal aspects including focus, the close-up and the eyeline of the characters are combined for a curious exploration of temporality and spatiality. At this point in the film, Pearl has been introduced as a distressed woman relaying an account of the events of the evening before. The evening in question begins with the couple getting dressed as they make plans to go out. They arrive at the venue and are shown to their table for two. The protagonist (René Ferté) is directing his attention toward other patrons, specifically other women, attending the restaurant. Meanwhile, Pearl finds flirtatious interest in a young bachelor sitting across from her. Momentary interactions and isolated and reflective glances are pieced together with dizzying abandon; that is, abandonment of the conventions of eye-line continuity, perspective, and narrative flow - in favour of a flow of emotional interest. This flow-of-emotional-interest is an example of one of the traits of Epstein's cinema that I have sought to emulate in my own filmmaking, through the sketching process. There are obvious differences between my work and this, especially in terms of narrative, as I am not setting out to create direct references or remakes. However, scenes such as this are comparable from the point of view of pursuing a visual language that foregrounds this flow-of-emotional-interest. I've identified this scene as exemplary of Epstein's realisation of the 'attitude' that one can subjectively adopt in the pursuit of photogénie.

The sequence is from the perspective of Pearl. The narrative function is to relay an image of the protagonist from her point-of-view, via her memory of him, as she vents her distress as

he has subsequently broken things off. Pearl remembers the events of this evening with a blend of remorse and cynicism.



Fig. 1. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. Pearl glances to make contact with the stranger sitting across from her.

Fig. 2. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. Pearl's flirtatious interest; the young man sits on the other side of the dining room from Pearl.



Fig. 3. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. He leans backwards and into an out-of-focus position. This move changes the nature of the medium close-up. The shot is now more reminiscent of a subjective gaze rather than an objective view of the character's eyeline. It

also simultaneously disrupts the continuity of the shot-reverse-shot sequence, destabilising both the temporal and broader psychological coherence of the sequence.



Fig. 4. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. An extreme close-up of this source of amorous interest further confounds any sense of objective spatial orientation. The angle disrupts the conventional 180-degree rule.

Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. Fig. 5. An immediate reverse angle, extreme close-up on Pearl's smile works to confirm the Cubist-like aesthetic that the sequence gradually develops. Note the out-of-focus photography.

**Studio Sketches 1: Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love**



Fig. 6. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* St Kilda pier.

The first step in the creative process was to simply assemble a crew and set out to create a loose narrative framework, through which I could employ a few of the essential tropes and techniques championed by Epstein; namely, in this case, the close-up, fragmented editing structures, and an emphasis on atmosphere, mood and emotion. These initial steps in the creative process were designed with the experimental nature of the trajectory of the project in mind. The details of the cinematic sequence needed to be specific to the theory, and responsive to the films being studied, but also malleable enough that they might fit the yet-uncertain narrative evolution about to be embarked upon. The fragments captured needed to be able to be reshaped and refitted as the process unfolded across the duration of the studio practice. Traditional concerns related to issues of continuity or spatial logic were deprioritised in favour of close-ups, details, and gestures improvised by the actors. The result of this thinking aligns the work in relation to experimental cinema practices of artists such as Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, or Kenneth Anger, with their more kaleidoscopic framing and editing strategies, or Pipilotti Rist and Abigail Child, who represent contemporary examples of this same aesthetic impulse, rather than the achievement of clear and succinct plotting and story logic.[18]

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[18] NB: Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger are well recognized figures in American experimental cinema history and the final iteration of my work owes a lot to the various visual strategies innovated by artists such as these. Pipilotti Rist and Abigail Child are two prominent examples of this same train-of-aesthetic-thought in the twenty first century. However, the journey that this exegesis takes orients more toward a deeper understand of Edgar Allan Poe and genre-based cinematic interpretations of his works. Some elements of this wider view of experimental cinema history are touched upon in Chapter Five. Details of the stylistic and philosophical views of the above-mentioned artists can be found in the following literature (not an exhaustive list by any circumstance, but enough for a brief outline of historical significance):

Vincent Brook, "Puce Modern Moment: Camp, Postmodernism, and the Films of Kenneth Anger." *Journal of Film and Video* Winter 2006, Vol. 58, No. 4 pp 3 – 15

Suranjan Ganguly, "Adventures in Perception: Stan Brakhage in His Own Words." The Criterion Collection: Features (website) Sep 26, 2017 accessed July 2021

https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/4956-adventures-in-perception-stan-brakhage-in-his-own-words

Wendy Haslem, "Maya Deren: The High Priestess of Experimental Cinema," *Senses of Cinema*: Great Directors series, Issue 23, (December 2002).

Child, Abigail. https://www.abigailchild.com/films/ELSA.htm (website) accessed January 2021

Rist, Pipilotti. Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/pipilotti-rist/ (website) accessed January 2021

The sketch was scripted and labelled simply as: *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love*. The setting of St Kilda Pier was chosen for its wind-swept atmosphere, its accessibility from a production perspective, and, as a conscious reference to Epstein's sustained focus on bodies of water, coastal regions, docklands, bridges, lakes and the sea (see fig. 13 - 18). The script was simple and detailed a brief encounter between two lovers at a fairground. Simultaneously they are being stalked by a psychopath.

Script: *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love*
See appendix 1

The resulting sequence can be viewed as a documentation of my response to the technical challenges presented by the location and the resources available; as well as of my awareness, as it was at the time, of photogénie as a method. This sequence was shot during winter, and light was sparse, with little-to-no-embedded set-piece lights (overhead lamps, street light etc). I was constrained to the use of a single HMI panel and therefore had to frame tightly on the subject in order not to reveal the general lack of light. Also we could not reveal any depth of field or the backdrop as the fill light on the subject would be compromised and its artificiality made obvious. The single HMI front-lit the performers. Due to this constraint, I created a sense of distance between the performers (Ali Lai-Carlyle and William Rogers) by focussing their respective gazes into the distance. Ali gestured that she was looking past an object, or through a crowd, to reinforce this dynamic. William gestured a wave, suggesting and confirming the reverse of Ali's gaze.

This use of close-up sat well with my understanding of Epstein's emphasis on disrupting spatial coherence. When objects are in close-up, it is not immediately obvious how the surrounding geography is organised. The close-up (without the aid of a wide reveal shot) cuts the audience off from understanding the spatial logic, and 'hems in' or 'corners' the characters, and emphasises a sense of claustrophobia.

As the sequence progresses, I develop the plot-point of having the two 'fall in love'. Wanting to continue the sense of separation as a through-line, I showed William walking toward the camera from a mid-shot perspective, as the camera tracks backwards, and Ali in an equal mid-shot response, moves away from the camera as it pushes in toward her. This sequence also, unexpectedly, privileges William's point-of-view, though my intention was to focus on

Ali, and the presence of the stalker. Nevertheless, the close-ups, tracking mid-shots and general focus on eye-lines of characters build out a reflection on the theme of looking and stalking, and of voyeurism and unease.

Although I was working intuitively, and without too much of an analytical awareness of my choices, my background thinking on voyeurism, scopophilia, and point-of-view (to be further discussed in Chapter Three), helped develop a coherent response to this key theme embedded in photogénie; that theme being the disruption of the harmony of a more standard version of cinematic spatiality and temporal logic. Stylistic qualities that were embellished during this sketch included the magnified, and subjective, characterisations, reflecting varying emotional and mental states of the characters, and the weaving of a dissonant and disorientating timeline.



Fig. 7. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* Mid-shot detail to create a sense of distance, and disorientation.

Fig. 8. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* close-up detail to move the narrative forwards; the editing places the two together, and then separates them again.



Fig. 9. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* Mid-shot detail: Ali moves away from the camera as it tracks toward her.

Fig. 10. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* Mid-shot detail: William walks toward the camera as it tracks backwards.



Fig. 11. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* Mid-shot detail of Simon – the 'stalker'. Note the fairground location in the backdrop; this adding a significant visual component to the final work.

Fig. 12. *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love:* closeup detail of Simon – the 'stalker'.

Figures: Jean Epstein's visual and thematic focus on bodies of water, coastal regions, docklands, bridges, lakes and the sea:



Fig. 13. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928.A repeated shot of a moving body of water (presumably a lake).

Fig. 14. Jean Epstein, *Cœur Fidèle,* 1923. The docks as a location.



Fig. 15. Jean Epstein, *Cœur Fidèle,* 1923. The emphasis on water visualised through cross dissolves in the editing.

Fig. 16. Jean Epstein, *Cœur Fidèle,* 1923. The emphasis on water visualised through cross-dissolves in the editing. The cross-dissolve becomes metaphorically significant; the water symbolising unconscious forces, love, and the connection between the two lovers.



Fig. 17. Jean Epstein, *Finis Terræ,* 1929. The coast of Brittany.

Fig. 18. Jean Epstein, *Finis Terræ,* 1929. The town of Ushant; the Brittany coast.

**Locating Photogénie: *Cœur Fidèle* (Jean Epstein; 1923)**

Jean Epstein's highly original *Cœur Fidèle* (*The Faithful Heart*; 1923) is exemplary of early efforts in French cinema to forge pathways of artistic advance for the cinematic arts.[19] Contemporaneous art critic Waldemar George has described *Cœur Fidèle* as a melodrama reduced "to the state of an optical poem."[20] This description serves as an inspiration for an overall approach to photogénie-as-methodology that is being applied here. The reduced impact of the melodrama sufficiently describes the shift away from concerns of narrative, plot logic, a visual language based on causality, and the appearance of spatial, and temporal, coherence. The notion of an 'optical poem' suggests the possibility of understanding each frame, shot, shot-to-shot relation, overall rhythm, and ebb-and-flow of a sequence, in terms of poetic devices such as meter, stanza, caesura, couplet or refrain. Indeed, once one takes into account the fragmentary nature of Epstein's shot compositions and editing structures,

[19] Katie Kirtland, "The Cinema of the Kaleidoscope," in *Jean Epstein; Critical Essays and New Translations,* ed Sarah Keller & J. N. Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 93.

[20] Kirtland, "The Cinema of the Kaleidoscope", 94.

these terms become much more illuminating and appropriate than any inheritance from literary theories surrounding the novel (such as 'act', 'psychological realism', or even 'plot').[21]

Throughout *Cœur Fidèle,* scenes are quite often structured as a series of moments, surveyed using rhythmic and metrically timed montage editing techniques; that is, editing techniques that serve to bring non-continuous shots together to create a coherent whole.[22] In one scene in particular, the two lovers, Marie (Gina Manès) and Jean (Léon Mathot), at the centre of the narrative, meet and express their feelings for one another; though under the ominous shadow of the threat of rival, and violent gangster, 'Petit' Paul (Edmond van Daële). The drama takes place against the backdrop of the Marseille docklands (see fig. 14). The pace is slow but moves at an evenly distributed tempo (one could invoke the poetic device of metre). The purpose is not to establish the passing of time and narrative information (again, narrative is of lesser concern than mood) but, rather, to create a sense of the subjective experience of ephemerality, the sensation of the present moment, and of past; memory. Each different expression of emotion, that is articulated across multiple shots, might be thought of as a stanza (to continue the annotation of *Cœur Fidèle* as an optical poem). The array of emotions and actions conveyed in the sequence helps to build the subtext, and the story, but there is also an apparent subjective, first-person, orientation. This first-person perspective is delivered through the use of dissolves, which signal inner-thought, subjective views of the respective characters in frame, and sentiment (see figs. 15, 16). The cross-dissolves, and repetition of the image of moving water, might be thought of as a caesura, or refrain, respectively.

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[21] Francois Truffaut. "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1976), 224 – 237.
In this seminal essay Truffaut outlines, and attacks, the tradition of deferral to literary traditions in French cinematic trends. This can be extended into institutional critiques of the cinema-arts that relied upon literary terms and frameworks; Truffaut calls for cinema-specific language, theory, and art. Interestingly, he fails to acknowledge Epstein, and others, immense contribution to this project during the 1920s.
[22] Sergei Eisenstein, A Dialectic Approach to Film Form," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory,* trans. Jay Leyda (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949/1977), 47.

Fig. 19. Jean Epstein, *Cœur Fidèle,* 1923. Close-up on Jean (Léon Mathot).



Fig. 20. Jean Epstein, *Cœur Fidèle,* 1923. Close-up on Marie (Gina Manès).

Instead of using the montage to simply convey story information, Epstein has used the
montage technique to give the audience insight, respectively, into Marie and Jean's shared

mind's-eye. By utilising an intuitive, more visceral approach to pace, and repetition of images, transitions, and frames, Epstein's montage is more a montage of hypnosis, rather than one of attractions,[23] i.e. the effect of the montage is less spectacle-orientated, with less emphasis on dialectic structure, and generally more dream-like. Epstein explains this use and the repetition of the water theme:

> For Jean, the sea evokes the memory of the rendezvous, every evening, on the jetty, with Marie […] And the poetry, the sweetness of this vision of sea and sun, drowns the close-up of Marie in a melancholy […] that it would not have without that, believe me![24]

Epstein's cinema, evidently, proceeds from instinct, rather than intellect, and it is this technique that was applied to the forementioned, eventual final edit, of the *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love* sequence in my film.

*Cœur Fidèle* also features the famed fairground sequence in which Petit Paul effectively kidnaps Marie for a forced afternoon of courting (or 'wooing'). Screen scholar Katie Kirtland summarises the scene by recognising the effectiveness of Epstein's characterisations:

> By placing the camera in the cart with the characters, this vertiginous phantom ride performs a powerful transposition of stasis and motion. The viewer's access to the male character, Petit-Paul, is neutralised by his paroxysms of glee and abandon. Edmond van Daële's almost clownish physical performance in the role reflects Epstein's conception of the character as a distillation of 'the rough force of man: brutal desire; human and animal, drunk and passionate like Dionysus.' But the close-up of the heroine, Marie, remains a stable and compelling anchor in shots that internally maintain a fixed relationship between her and the viewer […] she engages the viewer by looking directly and plaintively into the camera.[25] (see fig. 20)

Whilst my own characterisations might not rise to this level of sophistication, and, on reflection, in subsequent film-shoots, these elements of character dynamic were

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[23] Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 381–388.

[24] Epstein in Kirtland, "The Cinema of the Kaleidoscope," 103.

[25] Kirtland, "The Cinema of the Kaleidoscope," 94.

incorporated into the sketching process, I did take advantage of an available, serendipitous, fairground location situated by the St Kilda pier (see figs. 6 - 11). My awareness of the fortuitous nature of the availability of this location is reflected in my approach to shoot as much of the fairground in close-up detail as possible. This series of shots has turned out to be highly expressive and abstracted in nature, and I refer to these images in shorthand as 'the carnival lights'. The 'carnival lights' became a central, visual, motif for the whole sequence.

**Studio Sketches 2: *The Carnival Lights***



Fig. 21. One of the *'carnival lights':* Detail from the fairground at St Kilda pier.

This second sketch is constituted by a series of shots of the fairground at St Kilda pier. These shots have gained significance in the editing process and have come to be a central, visual motif for the more expanded sequence. My intention in capturing this footage was simply to respond to the opportunity of having a direct thematic reference to *Cœur Fidèle.* I shot close details of the signs, side shows, rides, as well as broader, wider, frames of the fair ground. This was a separate process from sketch one – the main St Kilda pier shoot – and was scheduled for a separate date. These images were my first attempts at grabbing non-character, non-narrative-based compositions and the purpose was to use them in an *ad hoc* fashion to fill out the atmosphere and mood of the piece. This came to pass, though, in a much more significant way than was initially planned at the time. The greenscreen, employed for the next set of sketches, offered opportunities to use this footage to enhance

the colour palette, and themes attached to the carnival atmosphere, that the fairground provided. This will be further discussed in reference to sketch 3. The colour scheme and the rough light (the images use available light only; there was no artificial or controlled set-ups) lends the work an unexpected eeriness. I came to see these 'carnival lights' as a kind of glue that helps hold the whole segment together.



Fig. 22. One of the *'carnival lights':* Detail from the fairground at St Kilda pier.



Fig. 23. One of the *'carnival lights':* Detail from the fairground at St Kilda pier.

**Conclusion of Chapter One**

Photogénie is a method whereby the filmmaker searches for aesthetic innovations that appeal to the emotions and the senses in unexpected ways. For Epstein, narrative is still an important aspect of the cinematic experience, but the realisation of the subtext and the theme must be discovered through an invitation, and an appeal, to the audience's thinking and feeling selves. Narrative structure and narrative aesthetics must not seek to dictate via design the meaning of the cinema image. More importantly, the cinema image must not pretend to transform the world into a rational, intellectual structure of narrative coherence. It must, in fact, do the opposite; the cinema-image must reflect the disorientation of the world of lived experience in all its vagueness, momentary clarity, fragmentation and complexity.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**Photogénie, Figuration, Sensation: Francis Bacon and Making the Invisible Visible.**

The entire body becomes plexus.[26]

Plexus:

1**:** a network of anastomosing or interlacing blood vessels or nerves

2**:** an interwoven combination of parts or elements in a structure or system[27]

**Figuration / Sensation: Possible Experience in *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (Epstein; 1928)**

In his treatise "Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation", Gilles Deleuze suggests that Francis Bacon's paintings are a "relationship not of form and matter, but of materials and forces."[28] This framework can be co-opted to further refine Jean Epstein's sentiment. Photogénie could be described as a cinema not of form and formality, but of materials and forces; in more filmic terms, a cinema of objects (materials), and the 'liveness' of the environment in which those objects are embedded (forces). Furthermore, one could add that this cinema aesthetic is not concerned solely with objects (simply things-in-themselves) but with the correlation between things-in-the-world and the perceiving human subject. By seeking out this correlation the moving image makes some aspect of reality reveal itself to the audience. The invisible is made visible.

Sensation, according to Deleuze, "is that which is transmitted directly, and avoids the detour and boredom of conveying a story."[29] Deleuze's 'sensation' and Epstein's photogénie are kindred; this quote may be applied equally to Epstein's aesthetic ideal. Photogénie can be evoked as a particular quality of cinema that directly transmits what is real, though is equally resistant to direct representations of reality. The term 'sensation' is Deleuze's chosen way of articulating the significance, and tension, of the work of Francis Bacon.[30] Deleuze's study of Bacon's paintings discerned very distinct characteristics, which, it can be argued, have an

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[26] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation,* xi.

[27] Merriam-Webster, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plexus (accessed January 2019).

[28] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*, x – xi.

[29] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*, 34.

[30] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*, 34.

affinity with the aforementioned descriptions of Epstein's cinema and philosophy. This affinity relates to methods and relations between the artist, the reality he seeks to depict, and the audience to whom he speaks, though it will be shown that each artist, Bacon and Epstein respectively, pursue significantly different creative outcomes.

Sensation could be used as a term to describe that aspect of photogénie (an image, a movement, a moment, or a sequence of images and moments) that captures an audience's attention and reflects, via the screen, the subjective, sense-based and less tangible ways in which we experience the world. Deleuze, in reference to Bacon, cites Immanuel Kant as foundational to his thinking on this point. Kant had dissociated aesthetics into two halves: the theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience (the "Transcendental Aesthetic" discussed in the "Critique of Pure Reason"), and the theory of art as a reflection on real experience (the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" discussed in the "Critique of Judgment").[31] In terms of the cinema, my interest lies in the 'transcendental aesthetic'. Real experience is everyday lived experience. The cinema offers us a manipulated, equally real, but less human (as in less organic), version of space and time. This manipulated version of space-time relates to *possible experience*. Deleuze locates this alternative presentation of space and time within Bacon's art:

> Within the round area, the Figure is sitting on the chair, lying on the bed, and sometimes it even seems to be waiting for what is about to happen. But what is happening, or is about to happen, or has already happened, is not a spectacle or a representation.[32]

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[31] Felicity Colman, *Deleuze & Cinema: The Film Concepts*, (Oxford, New York: Berg Publishing, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. 2011), 25 – 39, 55 – 65, 131 – 147.

[32] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*, 14.

Fig. 24. Francis Bacon, Lying figure, 1969.

The round area here is considered to be the bed or platform upon which the figure lies. The round area occupies the centre of the canvas.
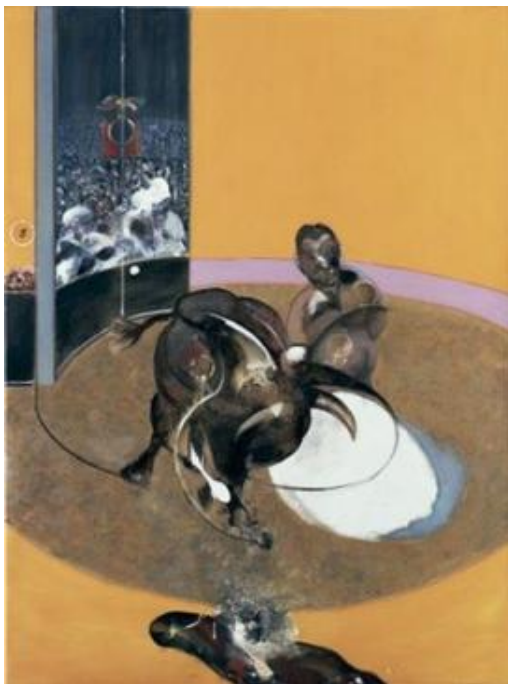


Fig. 25. Francis Bacon, Study for Bullfight no. 2, 1969.

The round area here encloses the bull and the bullfighter and the action occupies the centre of the canvas. The action, however, seems suspended and unresolved. The two figures are fused together, and both of them are individually incomplete.

Similarly, in Jean Epstein's cinema, the goal is not to promote spectacle (action), nor to achieve a representation (realism), but, rather, to find ways, through shot-structure and editing, to create an effective sense on the screen that something outside of the ordinary purview of human perception of space and time is happening, or is about to happen, or has already happened. Another way to approach this idea would be to say that, in Epstein's cinema, action and spectacle are slowed down and fragmented so as to investigate what takes place in the new, opened-up syntax of time and movement on screen. Rather than figures being contorted or fused together, as in Bacon's artworks, it is space and time that is contorted and unresolved. The final effect is the same; in that, a suspension of representations of the real, and a focus on the relationship between movement and things-in-the-world has been achieved.

It is also important to note that Epstein placed great emphasis on the study of objects as well. In *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (Jean Epstein; 1928), Madeline (Marguerite Gance) (wife to Roderick Usher {Jean Debucourt} and the central figure of causality for the mysterious ruminations of the house and its eventual 'fall') is buried in the family mausoleum after dying from a mysterious illness. The mechanical objects within the house, as a result, become slower, the mechanism of the clock works, but the pendulum moves at a slower pace. The duration of time becomes subjective and melancholic; experienced time is different from mechanical time because the weight of the past (i.e. memory) transforms it:

Fig. 26. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The clock moves at natural speed and is set against the curtain blowing in the wind. The wind creates movement and a tempested atmosphere.



Fig. 27. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The wind fills the house and the curtains blow just under natural time, in slow motion. This set-piece is akin to the field described by Deleuze in his analysis of Bacon's paintings.
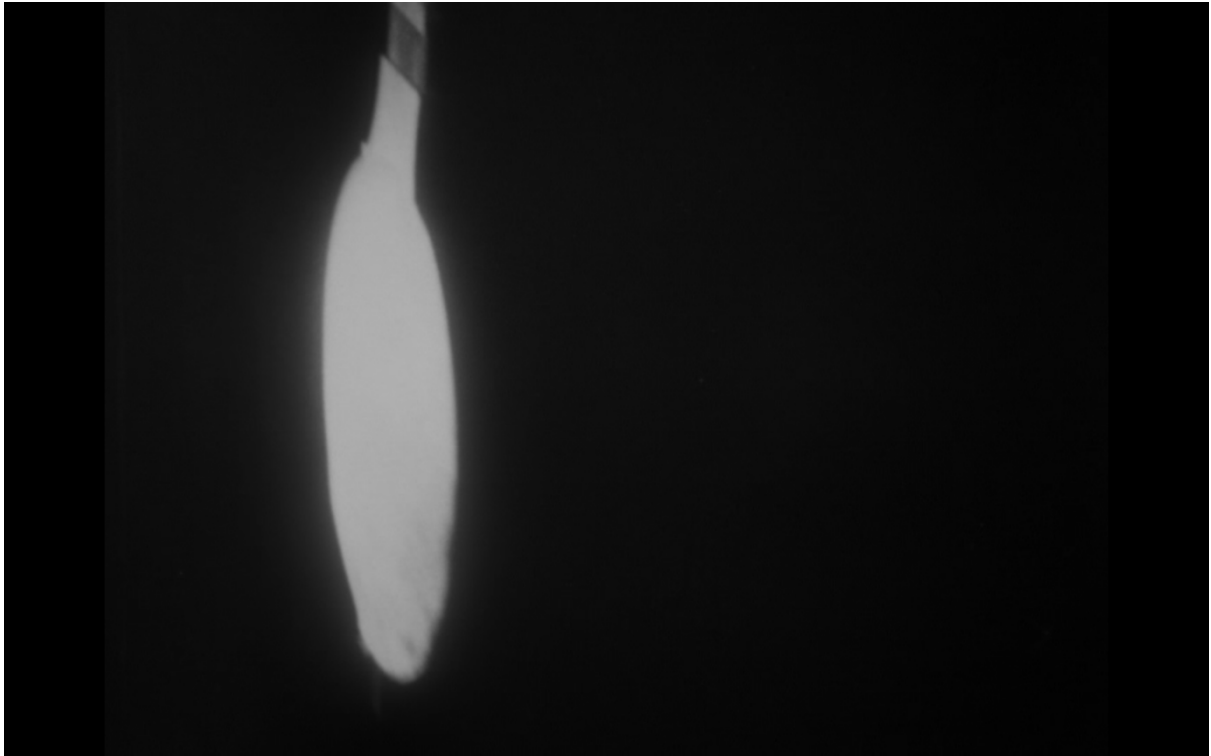
Fig. 28. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928.The pendulum swings in slow motion. Note the detailed close-up on the mechanical object.



Fig. 29. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The characters, or figures, sit in wide view and the shot is presented in natural time. There is a juxtaposition here with the more amplified, slow motion close-up of the pendulum.

Fig. 30. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928*.* The internal workings of the clock tick over in real time.



Fig. 31. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Finally, Roderick Usher's hands are presented in this montage of superimposed shots, utilising slow motion, fast motion, and jagged camera movement. As the figure, he is distorted and in contrast to the stable field (as

presented in figs 27, 29) Whilst the figure is not contorted, as in Bacon's art, a similar breakdown of temporality, and distortion of regular physicality, is taking place.

**Studio Sketches 3:** *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*



Fig. 32. *The Stalker Stalks the Streets:* Detail of edit and use of the carnival lights.

This third sketch was planned as a greenscreen shoot which would feature a classic car – an 'object' –  and a character referred to as the 'stalker' (played by Simon Stupel). The goal here was to create an atmosphere in which the object (the car), and the characterization of the stalker, was emphasised, and exaggerated. I aimed to shoot enough material to be able to conjure the effects as described above; namely, creative uses of superimposition, extreme close-ups, decomposition of movement and time, and the resultant melancholic mood. This detailing of the third character, the 'stalker', would be the equal, second half, to the first sketch. Put together, this sequence would hopefully evoke something akin to 'sensation', and something reflective of the sequence from *La Chute de la Maison Usher* characterised above.

The first sketch was a success, in that we achieved a simple narrative concept whilst creating the desired mood. But, in order to sustain the cast and crew for an hours-long session of the planned green-screen shoot, I felt it necessary to write a schedule, and concurrent script, to provide some structure to the day. This, therefore, entailed fleshing out

the story. I was hesitant to commit to a narrative, as I felt the process of detailing plot might undermine the intention of shooting purely through the intuitive, reactive process, as outlined earlier. This hesitation toward scripting would become a consistent theme throughout the studio creative work, and is, in fact, in line with Jean Epstein's own reservations toward reliance on screenplays;[33] though I did adjust the methodology, as I went, to accommodate this; and these adjustments will be the subject of later reflections.

I composed a loose screenplay in order to give the performers something more tangible to work with. The screenplay deviated from any direct correlation to the original text of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe, which was, at this point in time, the focus of my literary research. The script did, however, take inspiration from the macabre tone and themes that Poe, more broadly, is known for. This foray into narrative was my first inclination toward the very specific relationship that Poe's legacy has with film genre; specifically, the avant-garde as one mode of adaptation or interpretation, and exploitative, B-movie horror genre narrative films, as another. The sheer volume of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations in film and television has generated multitudes of scholarship and is not the principal focus of this discussion and process. However, in regard to this area of scholarship, it's important to note, as pointed out by Denis Perry and Carl Sederholm in their edited publication *Adapting Poe*:

> The traditional answer (in terms of what to do with the volume of Poe references in 20th Century popular culture) in adaptation circles has been the case-study approach of comparing a source text with its adaptation, usually leading to discussions concerning fidelity to the 'original' source. Such approaches, however, are usually simplistic and do not allow critics the proper range of judgement they need to understand the adaptation […] To suggest that adaptation is a re-imagining of a text implies a number of things, including that the adaptation is a new text that is both related to and independent from the source text. [34]

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[33] Kirtland, "The Cinema of the Kaleidoscope," 111.

This process of screenplay development, and the reservations I have toward using a screenplay in general, takes on more significance in later sketches and developments. Kirtland outlines here Epstein's own reservations toward the use of screenplays and his deployment of basic melodramatic tropes as a framework for visual experimentation.

[34] Dennis R Perry, Carl H. Sederholm, "Introduction: Poe and the Twenty-First-Century Adaptation Renaissance," in *Adapting Poe,* ed. Perry D.R., Sederholm C.H. (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10, 11.

Suitably, at this point, early in the creative process, I realised that I would not be attempting fidelity to the source literature, nor the source film; namely Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. In fact, I was, at this point, considering my first thoughts around the connections between Edgar Allan Poe's literary themes and style, and Jean Epstein's methodology and philosophy signified by photogénie, and how I might utilise these influences toward my own, original ideas. The realisation of the importance of unpacking Poe's influence in the cinema also became a research focus, and the subject of sections of chapters three and four of this exegesis.

In terms of my thinking on photogénie, I knew that I would be able to achieve my intention of contorting time and creating 'unresolved situations', as in those analysed by Gilles Deleuze, regarding Francis Bacon's figures within the round area. The situations would be more like simple moment-to-moment sequences of characterisation and atmosphere, but, in and of themselves, would still constitute an integrated whole (a coherent moving image art-work). For these sketches to appear as 'whole', or finished, the atmosphere would need to be defined; it would need to articulate a particular, Poe-esque, mood. In this case, the mood was creepy, tense, voyeuristic, and sombre. The genre-driven aspect of the visual style is intended to be reflexive and will be the subject of later reflections. This sketch cemented an early impulse that I had toward what I can, in retrospect, refer to as 'sensation'.

Script: *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*
See Appendix 2

Regarding the production, without a comprehensive plan for what was going to go into the greenscreen, I simply made a creative statement that I would be abandoning the geography of the realistic setting (I never intended to shoot and create actual matched, driving footage) and would be emphasising the mental state of the character, through an expressionistic approach to the image-making. Such an approach draws connection with uses and discussions around rear-projection in film history, and the general status of rear-projection as under-studied, and lacking in any firm scholarship. In my creative work, I conflate my use of greenscreen with rear-projection deliberately. There is a difference here between digital processes and analogue processes, but, in the interests of brevity, I must leave these as assumed and assert that the focus is on the final effect of an artificial, hermetic, environment that rejects any appearance of the 'real'. Adrian Danks asserts in his study on the subject:

For many critics – and possibly viewers – rear-projection becomes particularly problematic (or bad) within scenes and films that otherwise seem relatively objective […] It is in this regard that the technique of rear-projection can evoke some of the common conceptions of modernity and how they have transformed our relation to space and time […] But some films do make our apperception of these qualities much more likely or apparent.[35]

The utility in signalling this interest at this early stage is to point out that the use of the greenscreen was a revelation for the creative work. As the *carnival lights* and these driving shots came together for the more developed sequence, the eventual, fragmentary and vignette-like structure was firmly established; I had confirmed that I was not going to try to root this narrative, or experiment in photogénie, in any semblance of 'real experience' to refer back to Immanuel Kant. The greenscreen confirmed for me that I would be pursuing an abstracted, Expressionistic, realm of 'possible experience'. Also, as Adrian Danks points out, the discontinuity that emerges from the use of rear-projection (or a rear-projection effect in this case), evokes notions of modernity's effect on perceptions of space and time, and this is a central concern of Jean Epstein's concept of photogénie.

The driving sequences for me were akin to the use of the clock in *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. The Expressionistic approach and use of the *carnival lights* in the greenscreen were as much a statement on the subjective experience of time as Jean Epstein's clock. Both techniques express the melancholic mood, and the relation between the environments through which we move, and our mental perceptions and states of being. The *carnival lights* signify the hunting-ground that Simon the stalker moves through, and from the perspective of Ali, the 'girl', the danger, and the visualisations and sensory experiences of the fairground, and ultimately her 'last night on earth'. Note: at this stage, these interpretations are based on the narrative concept as it was at that moment. In the subsequent sketches and developments, these contexts change and evolve. The images in the greenscreen do not serve a pragmatic function; they do not serve a story or narrative function to move the

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[35] Adrian Danks, "Being in 2 Places at the Same Time: The Forgotten History of Rear-Projection," in *B is for Bad Cinema: Aesthetics, Politics, and Cultural Value*, ed. Claire Perkins, Cone Verevis (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015), 67, 70.

characters from one location to another. The images in the greenscreen are, simply, expressive.

Fig. 33. Unedited greenscreen footage from *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.



Fig. 34. Unedited greenscreen footage from *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.

Fig. 35. Unedited greenscreen footage from *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.



Fig. 36. Unedited greenscreen footage from *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*: featuring detail of Ali's horror makeup.

Fig. 37. Detail of edit and alternative fill-image for greenscreen in *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.



Fig. 38. Detail of edit: Ali in gruesome makeup for *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.

Fig. 39. Detail of edit and alternative fill-image for greenscreen in *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*.

**Figuration / Sensation: Sentiment plus Revelation**

Returning to Francis Bacon's round area and Gilles Deleuze's discussion of same, one can further discern the importance of the relation between figure or subject and the surrounding environment. Bacon creates compositions in which the figures are placed in relation to this round area. He creates a kind of amphitheatre. This amphitheatre effect is used to isolate the figure from the surrounding field. Deleuze distinguishes three fundamental elements in Bacon's painting: material structure, the round contour, and the raised image. Deleuze explains this as the field operating as a ground, and the figure functioning as a form, on a single plane that is viewed at close range.[36] This coexistence of two immediately adjacent sectors constitutes an absolutely closed and revolving space.

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[36] Deleuze, "Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation," 4 – 6.

Fig. 40. Francis Bacon, Three Studies for a Crucifixion, 1962.
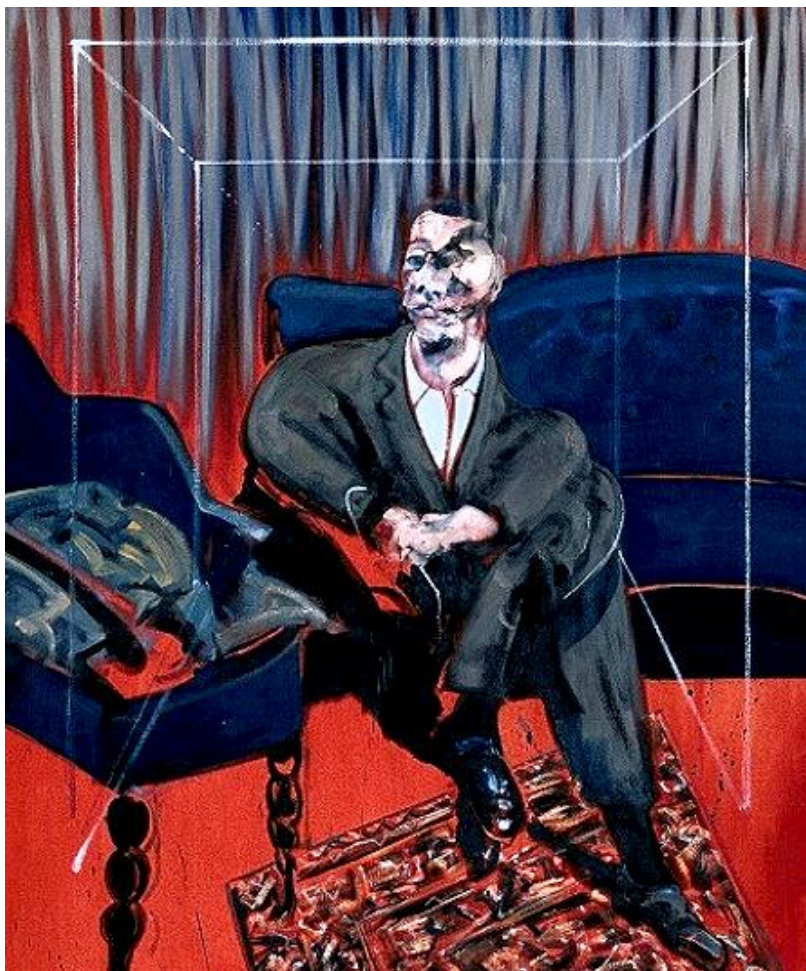


Fig. 41. Francis Bacon, Seated Figure, 1961.

Bacon also uses shapes and forms to isolate the figure such as his famous cubes.

These spaces or areas do not confine the subject to immobility. Rather, they render a sense of movement and progression: the figure relates to the space and becomes a stand-alone image. Isolating the figure is important as it avoids the illustrative and narrative implications the image would necessarily have if it were not isolated. The figure is separated from representation. Given that Epstein asserted that photogénie enhances the moral dimension of a thing-in-the-world, one could modify this to say that photogénie is the enhancement of the figurative aspect of the thing-in-the-world. This is the crucial difference between Francis Bacon and Jean Epstein; namely that Bacon seeks to isolate an object to suspend all meaning in search of something real, whereas Epstein seeks to isolate an object in order to reveal its figurative relations with the real. In other words, Bacon freezes time to see an object, whereas Epstein isolates an object and moves it through space and time.

It is clear from a close reading of Gilles Deleuze's analysis that for Francis Bacon, representation, and the narrative that representation of a thing or a being (a figure) implies, is to be avoided. Figuration for Jean Epstein is precisely where the meaning making process (a cinematic narrative) must begin. Sensation conceptually straddles both of these directions. Sensation is the isolation of the figure, and the use of temporal and spatial decomposition toward this aim, regardless of the differing outcomes for each of these artists.

Jean Epstein's style is attractive primarily because he explores moments; profound, experiential and fragmented moments. Moments, in this sense, in the cinema are much like thoughts or memories are to humans. They are not spectacles, nor are they true representations of reality. These cinematic moments are unique configurations of time and space that relate this Deleuzian concept of sensation. Cinema (photogénie and sensation) is not prosthetic. It is not a way to see better. It shapes and describes the world in its own right. The act of filming (planning, setting lights, camera, action and editing) is a quest to happen upon instances where the world reveals itself. This is the foundation of Epstein's photogénie. Deleuze's conception of sensation further enhances this point of view as sensation seeks to reveal the purely figurative and to discern the relations between things (object or living beings) and the world around them. It is clear that sensation can be taken as an augmentation of the theoretical project of photogénie.

Jean Epstein says of sentiment and the effect of photogénie:

… on the screen you see what is not there and cannot be there. You see this unreality more specifically, sentimentally, with all the precision of real life. The film shows you a man who betrays. You know perfectly well first that there is no man, then that there is no traitor. But the film addresses itself to your always aroused 'knowledge through love' [intuited, subconscious knowledge about the world]. It created, by phantom of a thing, a sentiment […] [and through this sentiment] the fallacious thing will live for you. Or rather a sentiment-thing will live, and you will believe better than in a traitor: you will believe in a betrayal. [37]

Sensation, being the purely figurative, and the revelations of the relations between things, awakens a sentiment in the viewer. The moment in which the attention of a viewer is caught is the moment in which intuited, subconscious, knowledge about the world is revealed; therefore, revelation and sensation are the same phenomena; revelation being the emergence of thought, and sensation being the catalyst for that emergence.

**Mobility, Modernity, and Sensation: Animism and Technological Objects**

In his writings on photogénie, Jean Epstein further defines that which the cinema can reveal to be only 'mobile' aspects of the world.[38] Mobility is related to space and time. An object's mobility, and therefore its photogenic quality, is a consequence of its variations in space-time. Movement makes evident the connectedness of things in the ontological world. In this way, objects take on dramatic significance as objects expressing mobility, and, by default, express a relationship with other objects and beings. Drama and the perception of things-in-the-world are correlated and entwined. In Epstein's view, the cinema is endowing life upon objects; objects are imbued with meaning as they might be in the form of charms or amulets, or totems in other cultures and in other times.[39] This focus on objects and movement are related to something felt; a reaction within our perceiving psyche, inspired by viewing a moving image. A primal, emotional, and sensational mode of seeing, perceiving and thinking is uncovered as a sequence of space and time combinations progresses upon the screen.

Robert Ray describes it in this way:

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[37] Jean Epstein, *La Lyrosophie*, (Paris. Editions de La Sirène. 1922), 34 – 35.

[38] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," 315.

[39] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," 314.

> … inadvertently, as the Impressionists and Surrealists saw, the movies glamorised everything: faces, clothes, furniture, trains. A dining car's starched white linen (in *North by Northwest*), a woman's voice (Margaret Sullivan's in *Three Comrades*), a cigarette lighter (*The Maltese Falcon*) – even the most ordinary objects could become, as Sam Spade put it in a rare literary allusion, 'the stuff that dreams are made of.'[40]

This reaction that we, as humans, have to the moving image, to glamorise and to imbue objects with meaning, is exactly what 'sensation' as an aesthetic philosophy seeks out. Sensation is something felt when the artist or filmmaker has deployed techniques to bracket things-in-the-world and draw our attention to the connectedness of these things. In Epstein's view, modernity emphasised connectedness and the objects of modernity needed to be investigated as a matter of course to reorient the modern human with their own synchronisation to a kind of modern teleology; their sense of Being in the material world.[41] The primary way in which modernity emphasises this connectedness is through mobility.

One could take the driving sequences of *La Glace A Trois Faces* as an example of this interest in mobility, and in the objects of modernity; in this case, the automobile. Epstein relishes the journey to retrieve the car from the garage as much as he relishes the motion of the car itself. The elevator that brings the protagonist to the top floor of the carpark holds as much interest as the downward trajectory and spiral motion of the car's descent to street level.

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[40] Ray, "How a Film Theory Got Lost," 6.

[41] Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, (London and New York. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), 192 – 222.
In this text Moran outlines Martin Heidegger's transformation of phenomenology in which he moved away from Husserl's focus on epoche (the bracketing of conscious experience) and toward a focus on teleology and ontology.

Fig. 42. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. The elevator arrives at the top floor of the car park. The camera is fixed inside the elevator and the sensation of movement comes from the elevator's upward journey; the camera peering out as the floors pass by.



Fig. 43. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. The attendants help start the automobile. The framing is distant, and the figures are silhouetted. Interestingly, there is no close up on the protagonist. The character is left out of view for much of this sequence.

Fig. 44. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. The car's journey downward through the multi-storey carpark is tracked by a fixed camera taking on the point of view of the driver.



Fig. 45. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. This point-of-view shot tracks the journey all the way through the carpark, creating a dizzying, spiral-like spectacle.

Similarly, in an earlier scene, the telephone takes on a special significance for Epstein. He turns his attention to communication technology by emphasising a kind of mystical wonder imbued by the protagonist toward the telephone in his office. As the protagonist contemplates using the telephone, a hypnotic sequence begins wherein a kind of collapse of space between sender and receiver is expressed. Repeated close-ups of the protagonist are cut in parallel with a track-in toward the telephone. The track-in toward the telephone is out-of-focus; an interesting juxtaposition as the purpose of the telephone is to bring a more efficient, more 'focussed' mode of communication. Intercut images of the phone lines make for a magnificent visual as a juxtaposition is established between the subjective human being (the protagonist) and the surrounding technological environment that influences and accommodates his behaviour. This sequence foregrounds some of the key concerns of sensation and photogénie: an animistic view of objects (especially technological objects), a focus on rhythm, and a disruption of coherent space and time representations. The result in this instance, is a hypnotic effect. Perhaps the subtext could be read as a commentary of the hypnotic effect of the cinema-as-technological object itself.



Fig. 46. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. The protagonist contemplates using the telephone to contact one of his lovers.

Fig. 47. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. Intercut images of the telephone lines.
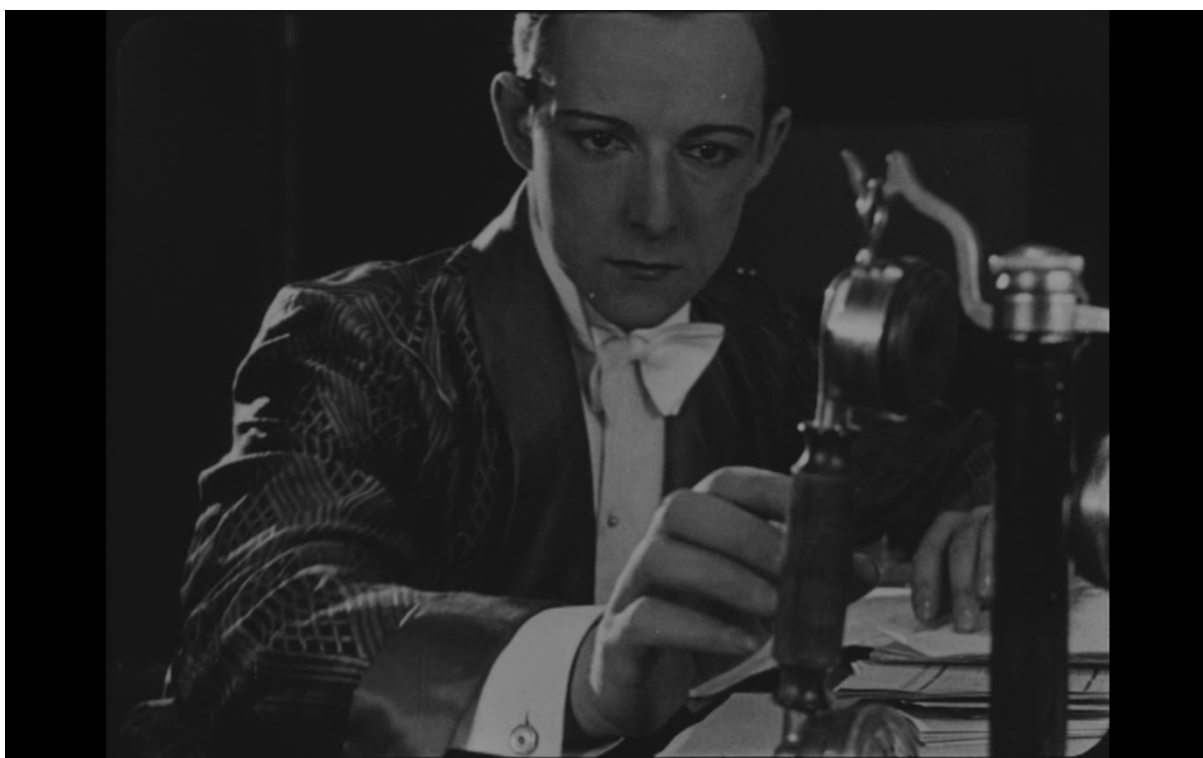


Fig. 48. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. A medium-close-up of the protagonist reaching for the receiver.
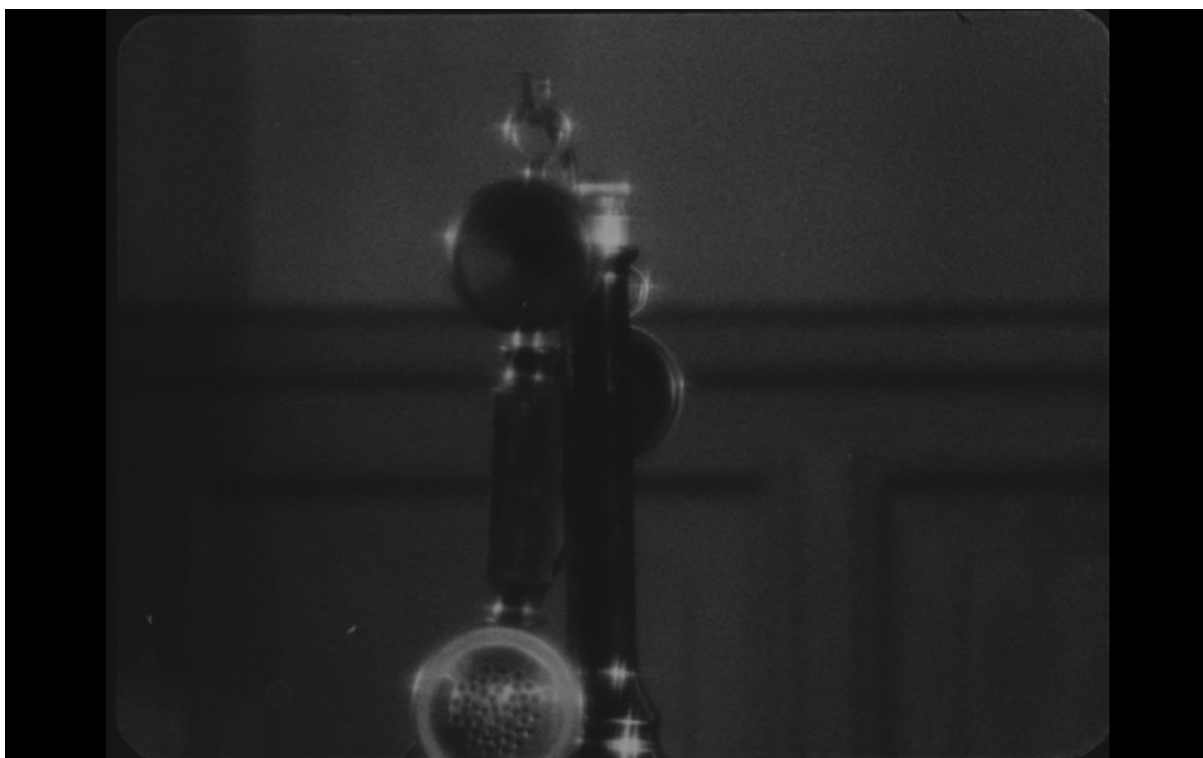
Fig. 49. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. A track-in toward the telephone.
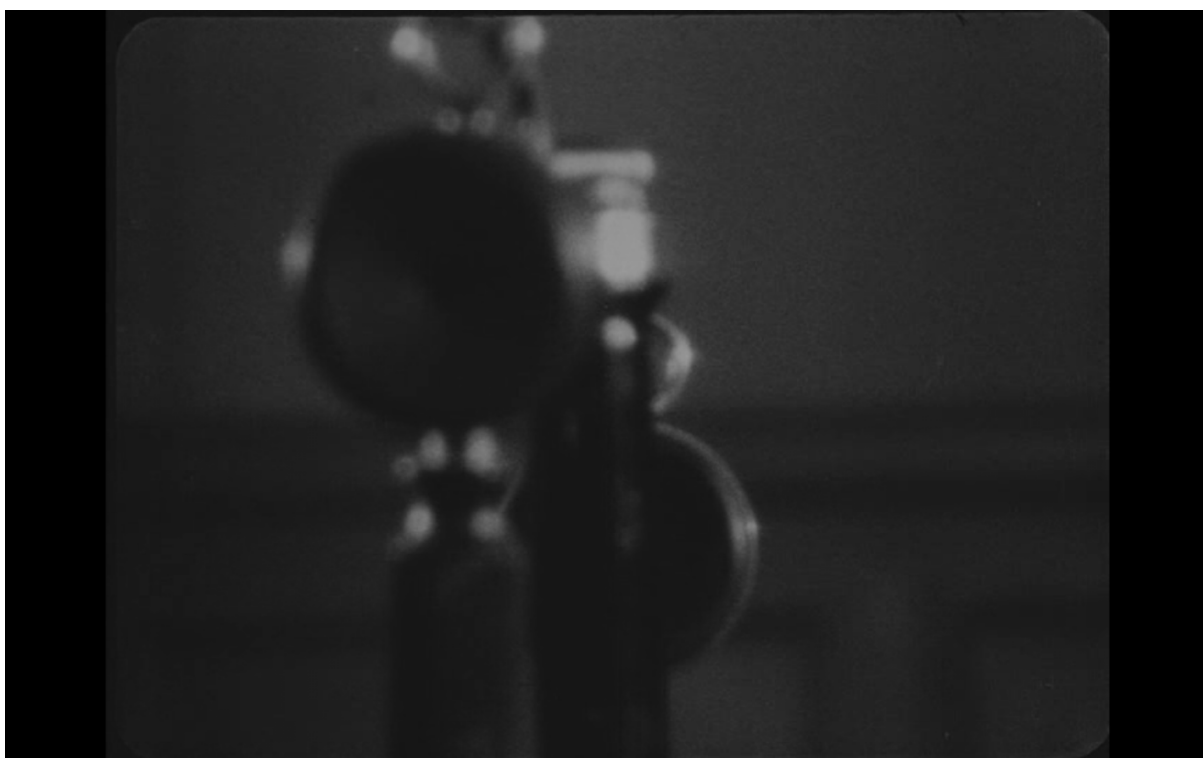


Fig. 50. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. The track-in gradually loses more focus.

Fig. 51. Jean Epstein, *La Glace à Trois Faces,* 1927. A reverse close-up of the protagonist using the telephone.

**Mobility, Modernity, and Sensation: Spirit, and the Instant and Present Moment**

Whilst Jean Epstein acknowledged narrative drama as an essential aspect of cinematic experience, his focus was on the unique qualities of the cinematic apparatus and its ability to record things-in-the-world. As previously described, Epstein was concerned with the transformative nature of recording: the 'moral' enhancement of things, beings, and souls.[42] This focus led Epstein to many innovations regarding visual language and the moving image:

> Epstein was one of the first to use dramatic high and low angled shots […] More often than nearly any other French director, he also used close-ups, especially of objects and parts of the body […] Finally, he was one of the first directors to recognize the expressive significance of using slow and rapid motion.[43]

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[42] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," 314.

[43] Stuart Liebman, *Jean Epstein's Early Film Theory: 1920 – 1922.* (Ann Arbour MI. New York University PhD Dissertation. University Microfilms International, 1980), 11.

Part of the goal of sensation, and photogénie as an aesthetic, is to disrupt, or unnerve, the everyday habitual considerations and structures of the intellect. According to Mikhail Iampolski in his essay "The Logic of an Illusion", there is an assumption in the Western empirical tradition, running from René Descartes, through Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and through developments in psychology in the nineteenth century (Hermann von Helmholtz via Sigmund Freud) that the perceiving of the world takes place through the mental realm of logic. Iampolski goes on to assert that photogénie seeks to re-orientate the viewer to perceiving the world in the instant and present moment, through the realm of the senses.[44] These developments that Iampolski outlines in nineteenth century psychology steer discourse in a direction that diminishes the sensational aspect of dreams and illusions, and transforms these phenomena into products of the intellect. Photogénie is a method whereby the artist and the viewer step back from the logic of intellect and towards an engagement with the senses. Epstein writes:

> Although everyone has their own particular understanding or misunderstanding of what could or could not be the living and the inanimate, matter and spirit, body and soul, almost all concur that the inert is thought to be only material, while beings sufficiently endowed with a vital quality are bestowed the privilege of also developing a spiritual quality, which reveals itself all the more clearly as forms become more complex, from animals to humans. Spirit is thus an aristocratic corollary of matter.[45]

Through engaging the sensational aspect of dreams and illusions, Jean Epstein seeks to express and 'rediscover' this notion of 'spirit'. Another way to frame this concept is to say that he is conducting a study of the correspondence between the ontological world-as-it-is and the subjective human being. Cinema is the tool to establish this connection. Epstein appeals to the commodities available to all human beings to establish this connection: emotion and memory. We experience Epstein's films in much the same way that we experience emotion and memory; fragmented, spatially and temporally inconsistent and focused on unexpected objects and moments in time. This technique serves to highlight what Epstein calls a vital and spiritual quality unique to human consciousness.

In his discussion on the developments of psychology in the nineteenth century, Mikhail Iampolski identifies that a focus was trained onto the importance of logic when considering

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[44] Iampolski, "The Logic of an Illusion: Notes on the Genealogy of Intellectual Cinema," 44.

[45] Epstein, "The Intelligence of a Machine," 6.

how consciousness refined its import of the world; or rather, the refinement of the impact that the world has on consciousness. This is primarily referenced via Hermann von Hemholtz and his "Treatise on Physiological Optics" (1867).[46] This focus on logic asserts that the world must be sequenced, with attention paid to grammatical relations between events (and objects). These relations give us our understanding of the world and thus the perceiving of the world takes place through the mental realm of logic. Illusions therefore are also a matter for the faculty of logic. Illusions are indicative of a breakdown of the logical connections the mind is making. They are symptomatic of the limits of the mind's ability to process information and therefore not a natural phenomenon accounted for outside of the perceiving and structured consciousness that takes in the world and interprets it: "For Hemholtz, illusions don't refute the law of causality, they only point to the weakness of our reasoning."[47]

However, a filmmaker like Jean Epstein seeks to break the causal chain and logical underpinning of sequenced images and, in some sense, prefers to entertain the possibility of illusion. Epstein's notion of photogénie effectively works to fragment this underpinning logic in order to peer through the veneer of reality strung together by images and reveal alternative ways of seeing. Iampolski describes the phenomenon this way:

> The claim that the most dramatic expressions participate in the cheapest rationality is of special importance. For Musil, that which is 'unexpressive' and 'invisible' conveys a real meaning, because it transcends the platitude of 'ratioid' repetitiveness and belongs to the unique and untranslatable experience that is called thinking. Paradoxically, from this point of view, the less expressive, the less animated 'things' are, the more eloquent they become.[48]

In addition, in reference to mobility and temporality: "Epstein claims that in dreams, as in cinema, we are dealing with a different kind of temporality, with exterior and interior times that have different speeds."[49] It's important to note that Epstein, like Francis Bacon in his art, and Gilles Deleuze in his theoretical analysis, is applying a phenomenological approach to the capability of an image (either through creation or in reflection) to reveal some aspect of reality to the viewer. Epstein is stepping away from traditions of psychology, and

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[46] Iampolski, "The Logic of an Illusion: Notes on the Genealogy of Intellectual Cinema," 38.

[47] Iampolski, "The Logic of an Illusion: Notes on the Genealogy of Intellectual Cinema," 38.

[48] Iampolski, "The Logic of an Illusion: Notes on the Genealogy of Intellectual Cinema," 44.

[49] Iampolski, "The Logic of an Illusion: Notes on the Genealogy of Intellectual Cinema," 46 .

psychoanalysis, and toward a less defined, though more intuitive, rendering of lived experience; primarily, a highlight of the connectedness and concurrent disconnectedness of things-in-the-world.

**Studio Sketches 4 & 5***: I Sit at the Piano, Differently*

This section of the creative process was my first and most comprehensive attempt at dialogue and at creating a genuine psychological profile for a character. After the success of the greenscreen edits from the previous sketches, I made it a priority to repeat the process and add in new dynamic elements, such as dialogue and characterisation, and more in-depth themes; focussed primarily on the aspect of the research into both Edgar Allan Poe and Jean Epstein that emphasised unstable mental states of being. The following script was composed and based on three key prompts: to focus on an object, to create a dynamic psychological effect, and in terms of dialogue, to avoid any mundane exposition or unnecessary plot complexity.

To start the process I focussed on the dialogue and started sketching out an interview between a psychiatrist and a catatonic schizophrenic. In order to keep the dialogue seemingly authentic I restricted the interview to relatively simple questions, such as; 'Why are you here?', 'Can you explain what led to the situation in which you find yourself here?' and so forth. Repetition became an important tool in constructing the rhythm of the dialogue. Repetition emphasises the conflict, or tension, between the two characters. Repetition suggests that the question is not sufficiently answered, and, in turn, suggests that there is more information not being conveyed to the audience. The response from the interviewee was constructed as a series of thoughts – almost a stream-of-consciousness – that serves to avoid the very straight questions. This technique, I discovered, supported the desired effect of *sensation*; in that, by not allowing the viewer access to the interior meaning, motivation, or story background, sentiment is aroused as the viewer must respond to the vagueness and intuit his or her own, personal, response and meaning-making.

In terms of the focus on an object, this was a direct response to Epstein's claim that photogénie imbues objects with meaning and 'moral enhancement'. The object in the script, the piano, was inspired by Dutch artist Poul Friis Nybo (1869 – 1929).[50] The artworks

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[50] Bonhams: International Auction House, https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/26339/lot/247/ (accessed June 2018)

chosen reflected the desired effect of low-lit interiors, and themes of isolation, alienation, solitary figures, and reflective moods inspired by the introspection of the character. The final result in the filming of the script did not even include the piano, but the emphasis placed on the mental image of the piano in the writing became the primary strength of the film; the piano became symbolic of the character's inability to express, or admit to, the psychological issues that burdened her.



Fig. 52. Poul Friis Nybo, *Femme de dos Jouant du Piano*, (year unknown).

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N.B. There is little published on this artist, and the research focus of the exegesis did not warrant a wide search for information. I discovered the images through simple web searches and found the most relevant images on the Bonhams auction website.

Fig. 53. Poul Friis Nybo, *Interior With a Woman*, (year unknown).
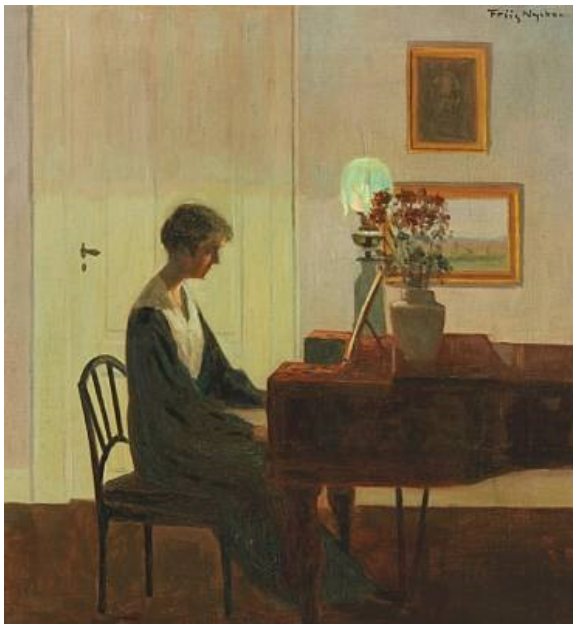


Fig. 54. Poul Friis Nybo, *Interior With a Woman Playing the Piano*, (year unknown).

The process of developing the script and final video was in two stages and is outlined as two separate sketches. The first was a filmed rehearsal and concept development. The dialogue and structure of the conversation was worked out in collaboration with performer Ali Lai-Carlyle. The second sketch was the actual filming of the script using greenscreen, as a

matter of further visual experimentation based on the success of *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*, and using performer Michael Wahr as the off-camera voice of the interviewer.

The end result is one character, the interviewer, speaking in clear, muted, terms, and the other character speaking in a more surreal, image-based, series of non-sequiturs. It occurred to me during the crafting of this script that the style I was applying to the writing had an affinity with some of the aspects of photogénie described so far; namely, lack of defining parameters to orientate the audience as to the logic of the situation; the arousal of sentiment; unstable transitions between images; and attention to mood and atmosphere ahead of coherence. The script is titled: *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*.

Script: *I Sit at the Piano, Differently.*
See Appendix 3

Screengrabs for *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*:
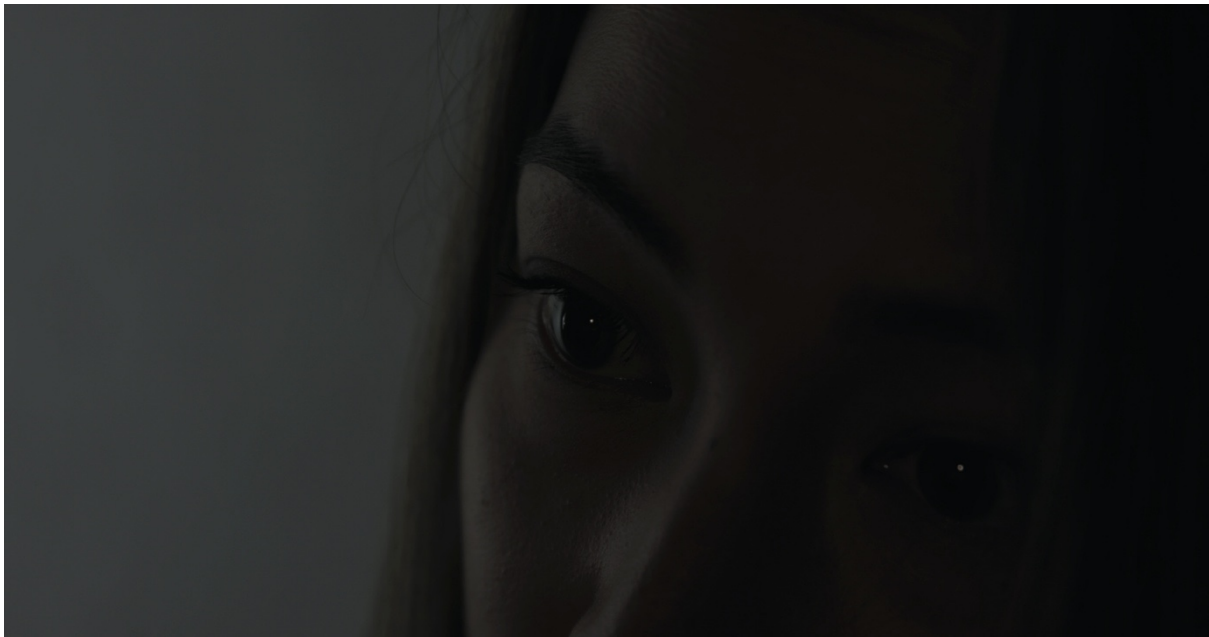


Fig. 55. Still from sketch 4: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*.

Fig. 56. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Unedited.



Fig. 57. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Unedited.

Fig. 58. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Unedited.



Fig. 59. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Edited.

Fig. 60. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Edited using neon *carnival lights* footage.



Fig. 61. Still from sketch 5: development of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*. Edited using neon *carnival lights* footage.

Altogether, sketch 1, *Girl Meets Boy, They Fall in Love*, sketch 2, *The Carnival Lights*, sketch 3, *The Stalker Stalks the Streets*, and sketches 4 and 5, *I Sit at the Piano, Differently*, add together to create a fragmentary montage which disrupts any sense of traditional plot and narrative logic in favour of a combination of images which manifests the hypnosis-effect

through montage, and subjective, emotive, and unstable mental states-of-mind through both montage techniques, Expressionistic deployment of images and the layering of images through the use of the greenscreen. The result of bringing these sketches together was identifying that a short film could be articulated from these disparate parts. The next steps in the process was to start to formulate what this potential-film might be, to fill in the gaps, so to speak, and to return to the source literature, various works by Edgar Allan Poe, to skirt back toward the research focus; an adaptation of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", and reflections on Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. The emerging film project was titled '*I Work for the Devil*'; the inspiration for which came from Poe's "The Imp of the Perverse", which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

## Mobility, Modernity, and Sensation: Disconnectedness in *Six Et Demi, Onze* (Epstein; 1928)

Whilst the focus on mobility seeks to emphasise the connectedness of things-in-the-world, it is also evident that Jean Epstein equally sought to express the disconnectedness of things-in-the-world. Modern existential alienation, and fear of technology, share a concurrent emphasis on the aforementioned examples of the automobile and the telephone, and is reflected primarily through the nihilism, or in the case of Roderick Usher 'sickness', of the protagonist characters. The protagonist of *La Glace A Trois Faces* seeks pleasure through frivolous encounters with women but rejects any further, emotional and meaningful relationship. He finds purpose and life-affirmation through the mobility and speed of his automobile and is eventually led to his death in a high-speed collision. The modern phenomena of technology, motion and speed has disassociated him from other human beings and led him to his demise. Similarly, in *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* Roderick Usher possesses unexplained qualities of sensitivity that seem to be affected by, and affecting of, the environment around him, both temporally and spatially. Through this enhanced perceptiveness, Jean Epstein details an undermining of the psychological coherence of the character and this 'sickness' is articulated as Roderick interacts with objects in the house; especially his artwork, the portrait of his sister Madeline. As discussed previously, for visual effect, the actress sits behind the portrait's adorned frame, posing as if she were the painted image (fig. 87, 89). Epstein is substituting the real for the imagined. This is a visual cue to emphasise that efforts made to articulate and define the ontology of being-in-the-world, through employing the metal realm of logic, can lead to nihilism and death. Roderick's

demise, mentally and physically, is linked to the ever-more-real incarnation of the portrait of Madeline.

This might be best illustrated by another of Epstein's films, *Six Et Demi, Onze* (*Six and One Half Times Eleven*; 1928). The following sequence demonstrates both the fascination with the modern world, through the emphasis on the technology of the camera, and the notion of isolation, alienation and death that comes with this modern, disrupted teleology:
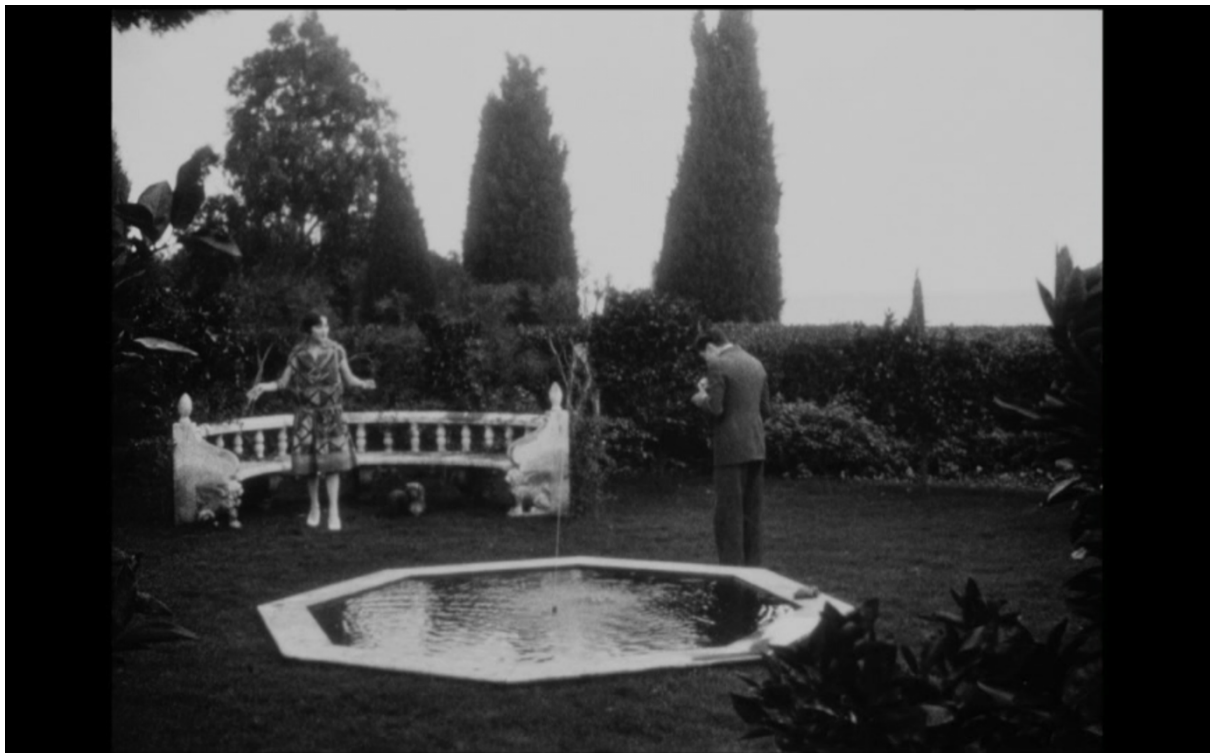


Fig. 62. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. Jean (Nino Constantini), a surrealist and artist at heart, is fascinated with the camera. He is photographing his beloved Marie (Suzy Pierson).

Fig. 63. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. A medium establishing shot of Jean.



Fig. 64. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. Jean's point-of-view through the view finder of the camera.

Fig. 65. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. A close-up of the camera as it captures a photograph.



Fig. 66. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. Jean packs up his camera, pleased with his efforts.

Fig. 67. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. Marie suddenly, inexplicably, appears distressed and runs away.



Fig. 68. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. Jean looks on; his gaze strangely inexpressive, unreactive to this turn of events. He is passive.

Fig. 69. Jean Epstein, *Six Et Demi, Onze.* 1928. The previous shot transitions into this new location and scene in which Jean awakes from sleep. The disappearance of Marie seems to be unexplained and shrouded in doubt.

In *Six Et Demi, Onze* the act of taking the photograph ruptures the connection between the two lovers. A familiar use of superimposition in the transition from one scene and location to the next, throws the established logic of the narrative into disarray. As the film progresses, the mental stability and psychological goal-orientation of Jean is frayed, resulting in his suicide. The disappearance of Marie spurs a labyrinthine series of events that leads the lover to the scene of Jean's suicide months later. There is a tension at work here, evident across most of Epstein's work; a fascination with the both the destructive power of technology, the alienation of individuals and their dissociation from their surrounds, and technology's contradictory ability to emphasise the connectedness of people, the objects with which they surround themselves, and the environments in which they live.

**Conclusion of Chapter Two**

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The term *cinematograph* was in common usage during Jean Epstein's lifetime, and he chose to take this title seriously. Cinematograph means literally to 'write in movement'. For Epstein, this means to articulate a subjective, conscious experience, into an objective, outward and communicative reality. If *cinematograph* describes the apparatus, photogénie describes the 'affect'. Photogénie has no fixed definition, but is rather a series of descriptions and arguments that frame the ways in which this affect is crafted by the artist, and is made manifest to the viewer.

There is a very real relationship between what we record, how we record it, how we watch it, and how our consciousness consumes, and is consumed by it. The moving image has very real consequences for our perceptions of the world, and of ourselves. The effects of figuration and sensation, as described, are not about allegory, metaphor, contemplation, or fantasy. Photogénie can only exist using the technology of the moving image, which confronts the human psychological world. Jean Epstein:

> Whether for good or not, in recording and reproducing a subject, the cinematograph always transforms it, recreates it as a second personality whose appearance might confound consciousness to the point of asking: Who am I? Where is my true identity? And this represents a notable attenuation of the certainty that we exist, of our 'I think therefore I am,' to which we must add: 'but I do not think myself the way I am.[51]

Epstein's films are not narrative-driven, thematic explorations of the human subjective interior, but rather expressions of forces that affect the human subjective interior. Photogénie offers a pathway for thinking and creation that activates an enquiry into such forces. In an age of ubiquitous digital technology, such an attitude and approach to the moving image seems entirely appropriate. Where Gilles Deleuze sought articulation of the tenets and formations of *sensation*, Epstein resisted precise definitions for what it is that the cinema achieves in correspondence with reality, and the human subjective experience of being-in-the-world. Francis Bacon achieved an articulation of the spectacle of the human being's movement through space and time (figuration), and the connectedness of beings, objects

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[51] Epstein, "The Intelligence of a Machine," 2.

and their environments. Rather than precise articulation, Epstein used the cinema to explore these relations, and, furthermore, to emphasise the effect of modernity, and its' technology, on the individual (the viewer). Rather than proposing a definite theory of film, the heuretic methodology that arises from studies into photogénie is one in which the researcher sets out to create a series of interpretations and descriptions that gradually illuminate the human subjective interior, and give rise to sentiment for the viewer, which can be construed as a moral enhancement, to use Epstein's wording. Above all, the aesthetics of photogénie (and sensation) promote a process of discovery and invention, not of conclusion and finality.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**Clear But Confused: Two Short Stories by Edgar Allan Poe, and Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (1928).**

> This text [Poe's original publication of *The Fall of the House of Usher*, first published in 1839, USA] provokes an unrivalled cinematic experimentalism when compared with almost any other frequently adapted pre-cinematic text, such as the novels of Jane Austen or Charles Dickens. Does something in here, in the story or its mode of narration, inspire this experimental challenge to aspirant directors?[52]

**A Natural State of Confusion**

Editor Martine Beugnet's introduction to her anthology "Indefinite Visions; Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty", re-affirms that the goal of photogénie is to not articulate the detail of the world (or in this case articulate a direct adaptation of the literature), but rather to express the world's natural state of confusion. [53] Similarly, Edgar Allan Poe's literature presents to the reader plots, character psychologies and narrative voicings that all add up to the expression of internal mental states of confusion and anxiety. One could imagine that there is an alignment between Poe's deliberate, thematic, confusion (the dilemma's faced by his characters and the hostility of the world in which they live), and the necessarily fragmentary, mosaic, and sensorial methods that have been applied by experimental filmmakers; especially in this case-study of Jean Epstein's own adaptive efforts.[54]

Beugnet, in her introduction, argues that, "art explores and cultivates the indefinite part of perception or experience […] Artistic intuition and vision thus stem from the incompleteness and constant variation of the perceived, the impossibility of a full and perfect knowledge of the world."[55] Beugnet invokes the early film theory, championed by Jean Epstein, to justify an ever-increasing and contemporary expansion of filmic stylistics that favour the vague over

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[52] Mark Byron, "The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria," *Sydney Studies in English,* Vol 38. (Jan 5, 2013): 81.

[53] Beugnet, "Introduction," 1 – 16.

[54] NB: Examples of Poe-inspired works might include, but are by no means limited to, James Watson and Melville Weber's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928; USA), and Jan Švankmajer's, *Zánik domu Usherú*, (1982; Poland). Also, as previously mentioned, the works of Maya Dereen, Stan Brakhage and Kenneth Anger would be appropriate references for this mosaic, fragmentary aesthetic, especially in reference to American avant-garde cinema.

[55] Beugnet, "Introduction," 3.

the precise. She uses Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz as a historical example of this line of thinking. In the seventeenth century, during the enlightenment era, Leibniz used the example of the sea as a phenomenon that is 'clear but confused' to assert that the world, in fact, never appears to the observer as accurate or crystalised. To pursue resolute accuracy is in fact, for Leibniz, naively idealistic and misguided. Perhaps Leibniz's theme of the sea as 'clear but confused' might be seen as reflected in Epstein's own life-long interest in bodies of water as previously discussed. Epstein's uses of water imagery tend to emphasise some form of dilemma (*Cœur Fidèle;* 1923 fig. 16) or eerie, supernatural and environmental disturbance (*La Chute de la Maison Usher;* 1928 fig. 13).

An opposition is established between a Cartesian ideal of accuracy, represented in film by synchronised sound, clear and 'effective' storytelling (exemplified by the grammar of mainstream, commercial, cinema and the over-emphasis of HD, and 4+K resolution), and Leibniz's 'clear and confused' approach, as represented here by photogénie. What I aim to create in my stitching together of the various sketches is a finished film that embraces the 'clear and confused' above the 'clear and distinct'. With ever-increasing digital capability, everything is expected to be clear, concise, and 'beautiful'.[56] These terms lose their meaning over time as clarity becomes inflated and its intrinsic value diminished. The concerns of cinema theory under the analogue system of technology have remained largely familiar under the digital system of technology. Cinema still has the means to explore, alter and intensify our experience of the world's constant transformation. Beugnet makes clear that the past can still help to frame the present, and that indeed the present can bring clarity to the problems, paradoxes, and ambitions of the past. She frames it as such:

> Artists and filmmakers that appropriate and develop these dimensions of the electronic and digital technologies in their work thus extend the tradition of avant-garde and experimental cinema that embraces the possibilities of chance – of intentional and non-intentional effects – turning errors into productive formal and critical strategies.[57]

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[56] Beugnet, "Introduction," 5 – 7.

[57] Beugnet, "Introduction," 8.

NB: Video art that emphasises the imperfections or remixing and recontextualising of older analogue technologies such as nitrate film or 8mm film stock, might be examples of this. See artists such as Rob Sheridan, Bill Morrison, or Peter Tscherkassky. References for these artists are not the concern of this exegesis, but their contemporary portfolios and context for their work in this area can be ascertained at their websites:

The focus of this chapter is to document the transformation of my sketching and theorizing process into a more articulated, formal, and critical strategy. The writing focuses back on the source-texts of inspiration; the film, and the two stories upon which the film is based. Further reflections on the sketching process detail the development of two more substantial films: *I Work for the Devil* and *Tonight You Belong to Me (*originally titled *The Cat is Black Jack!)*. Sketches one thru five are woven together into a more cohesive, singular, whole. '*Boy Meets Girl, They Fall in Love'*, '*The Stalker Stalks the Streets'*, '*The Carnival Lights'*, and '*I Sit at the Piano, Differently',* all come together into a singular film that acts as an original visualisation of the sub-text and the themes present in the work of Poe. The goal is not to create a literal adaptation of a particular story, but rather to express the more vague and elusive emotional and phenomenological underpinnings of all of Poe's literature.[58] This chapter will draw together both the filmic strategy of employing the prescriptions of photogénie*,* as outlined in Chapter One, and the analysis and interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's literature and Jean Epstein's film undertaken in the research.

**Edgar Allan Poe's The Fall of the House of Usher: Virtually-Cinematic**

> Poe's text is a literary phantasmagoria, a lantern show that invites a specifically cinematic speculation as to the nature of events, the mode of their narration, and the qualities of perception enlisted within the narrative frame that convey scene and action to the reader.[59]

"The Fall of the House of Usher" has generated countless readings, debates and interpretations. The peculiar form of the story as simultaneously a forensic report (from the point of view of the unnamed narrator) and subjective hallucination (the overall tone, timbre, and theme), and the complex web of relations between narrator, characters, architecture of the house, and its environment, confound any sense of cause and effect. As Walter Evans states, in reference to Poe's own theory of the American Gothic tale, "the bulk of the work

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http://www.tscherkassky.at/ (accessed October 2021)

https://billmorrisonfilm.com/ (accessed October 2021)

https://rob-sheridan.com/ (accessed October 2021)

[58] David Halliburton, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View*, (Princeton New Jersey. Princeton University Press, 1974), 195 – 200.

[59] Byron, "The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria," 81.

consists of images rather than incidents, of description rather than narration."[60] This foundational ambiguity both stimulates innovative readings and provokes serial cinematic reiterations of the story's spectral display.[61]

This spectral display might be read in terms of the ghostly, shadowy, and mysterious images that rise from the investigations into family bloodlines, and the deathly diseases of the mind and body that plague the weary, unknowing characters. It might be read in terms of the supernatural atmosphere that defies an era of scientific reason and rationality; be it the late nineteenth century or the early twenty-first. Or, this display might be read in terms of the binary between reason and superstition, the explained and inexplicable, or the remote and the familiar (clear and confused). Finally, one could even posit the phenomenological fields of experience through which the characters move and live, as an antithesis to the need for finality and clarity. The literature places the sensation of the lived experience of the characters above comprehension of psychological or plot logic.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" can be firmly categorised as emerging from the American Gothic literary tradition. It involves a desolate, lonely and remote landscape, supernaturalism and resurrected life. The story hints at a tendency towards obsession, the pathology of guilt and the problematic legacy of Puritanism.[62] This tradition, much like the British and European tradition of Romanticism and Gothicism, was resistant to the pervasiveness of Enlightenment-driven rationality, and anxious about the onset of modernity and rapid industrialisation.[63]

What we see in "The Fall of the House of Usher" is a struggle between the forces of irrationality (the supernatural) and reason: represented, respectively, by the mysterious principal character, Roderick Usher, and the sceptical, unnamed narrator. Key elements and themes include moral and physical degeneracy, the resurrection of life from death, melancholy, family, incest, madness and isolation. The story takes place in an environment

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[60] Walter Evans, "The Fall of the House of Usher and Poe's Theory of the Tale," *Studies in Short Fiction*, Newberry College, South Carolina Vol. 14, number 2. (Spring 1977): 139.

[61] Byron, "The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria," 82.

[62] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day. Volume 1; The Gothic Tradition*, (London and New York. Longman & The University of Michigan, 2013), 170.

[63] Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1 – 40.

of decay and harsh weather that parallels the lives of the human inhabitants. The 'house' in the title refers both to the actual house and to the bloodline of the family. The physical structure has dictated the genetic patterns of the family and there are strong suggestions of incest woven throughout the narrative. The two characters at the centre of the tale, Roderick, and his twin, Madeline, are the last survivors of this family tree. A fissure down the middle physically splits the house, causing a chasm that becomes a metaphor for the emotional distance between the siblings, and perhaps even a split in personality, and the presence of mental disorder. A kind of telepathic connection exists between the two kindred characters and Madeline's sickness and immanent death are of great concern to Roderick. The suggestion is that Roderick, himself, is close to death via his close affiliation with his sister. Roderick's bouts of depression and excitement are reflected in abrupt variations in the flow of narrative time. The characters are riddled with self-doubt and their motives are as ambiguous as the narrative's location in time and place.[64]

In his short story "The Imp of the Perverse", Poe writes: "The intellectual or logical man, rather than the understanding or observant man, set himself to imagine designs – to dictate purposes to God."[65] There is a sense here that Poe wants to elude explanation. He does not want to 'imagine designs', but rather to pursue an understanding of the human experience of Being (to borrow the Heideggerian sense of the term[66]) through direct, sensory observation. Observation, in this sense, is of one's own subjective, mental experience of the world, and in turn the effect of the external forces from the world that present themselves to the self. This is a phenomenological approach to interpreting the world of idiosyncratic experience. The impression is that Poe's 'observant' or 'understanding' man seeks to understand via the senses, rather than to abstract meaning via design, or science, as does the intellectual or logical man. This focus on the senses permeates Poe's broader body of work and signifies an important, recurring, thematic trope: the phenomenon of melancholy. One could argue that the 'observant' or 'understanding' man is interchangeable with the melancholic, mental states of mind implied across the authors output, and specifically in "The Fall of the House of Usher". Such melancholic disorder, so the thematic motif goes, leads to heightened sensory experiences and more lucid observations of reality.[67]

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64 Byron, "The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria," 81.

65 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Imp of the Perverse* http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/imp.pdf (accessed July 2019).

66 Moran, "Introduction to Phenomenology," 192 – 222.

67 David Roche, "The 'Unhealthy' in "The Fall of the House of Usher": Poe's Aesthetics of Contamination," in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*. X.1 (Spring 2009): 20 – 35.

It is important at this juncture to understand the pervasiveness of melancholy in Poe's work and the connections to depression, and, the conscious effects of depression[68]. The narrator, in "The Fall of the House of Usher", describes in his first contemplations of the house, both physical and mental attributes. From "The Fall of the House of Usher":

> I looked upon the scene before me – upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain – upon the bleak walls – upon the vacant eye-like windows – upon a few rank sedges – and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees – with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium – the bitter lapse into everyday life – the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart – an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it – I paused to think – what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?[69]

This contemplation, coming at the very beginning of the story, establishes a simultaneous split, and coming together, of the dual realms of the mental/psychological/spiritual (an utter depression of soul/dropping of the veil/a sickening of the heart) and physical/environmental/empirical (bleak walls/vacant windows/decayed tress). The dichotomy establishes a strong visual, metaphorical, provocation, and sets up a conceptual framework through which to compare and contrast these simultaneously opposed and synchronised realms of Being. David Roche argues in his essay on Poe and the aesthetics of contamination: "what links the physical to the psychological and the moral (and the many other dimensions of the mental the narrator refers to) is, in effect, discourse."[70]

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This essay details various arguments made in the scholarship around the nature of both Usher's illness, and illness in general as it is depicted in Romantic literature. In debating the presence of hypochondria and the aesthetic of contamination and contagion, Roche makes clear the Romantic link between the physical and the mental; a 'transcendental' belief in the interrelationship of mind and matter.

[68] Halliburton, "Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View," 196.

[69] Edgar Alan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Usher.pdf (accessed July 2019).

[70] Roche, "The 'Unhealthy' in "The Fall of the House of Usher": Poe's Aesthetics of Contamination," 25.

This discourse makes evident Poe's ambivalent attitude toward science. He was both fascinated by, and critical of, science's tendency to name and label everything. One interpretation of this short story might, therefore, be that the disease that permeates everything (the house, the characters, and the environment) remains out of reach, and undefinable, precisely because Poe's fundamental thesis is a scepticism of the capacity of science to map all of nature, and the human, subjective conscious experience (hence the interest in melancholy), with rationality. In fact, it seems that Poe evades clarity and embraces ambiguity precisely because he is encouraged by the possibility that reality might be more complex, or perhaps more transformable and eternally in a state of flux, than any epistemological structure can account for. The disease of the House of Usher reflects the impossibility of a full and perfect knowledge of the world.[71]

This notion draws a direct association with the previously mentioned 'theory of sensibility as the form of possible experience' (Kant's "Transcendental Aesthetic" in the "Critique of Pure Reason").[72] To reiterate, Kant's idea was that the transcendental aesthetic was achieved when an artist (or with regard to Poe, his 'understanding or observing man')  uses lived experience, and observation of one's senses (melancholy), to articulate what life, or experience, might be *like*; as opposed to the theory of art as a reflection on real experience (the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" in the "Critique of Judgment") in which the artist documents what is real and tangible in the world of social relations.[73] Richard Abel makes this connection between Poe and Epstein clear, interestingly also citing a transcendent sensibility and subjectivity:

> This anti-progressive trait (sceptical of the Enlightenment's reliance on reason and rationality) in Poe connects with a part of the French film avant-garde to which Epstein belonged, one that still honoured a certain symbolism, which led it to consider that reality had to be perceived and presented through the filter of a transcending subjectivity, of a temperament or individual imagination.[74]

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[71] Beugnet, "Introduction," 3.

[72] Deleuze, *Francis Bacon; The Logic of Sensation*, 14.

[73] Colman, *Deleuze & Cinema: The Film Concepts*, 25 – 39, 55 – 65, 131 – 147.

[74] Richard Abel cited in M. Solina Barreiro, "Epstein's The Fall of the House of Usher. Research on Altered States of Consciousness," in *Literature/Film Quaterly* Vol 41, number 3. (July 2013): 200.

In short, there is a hallucinatory and concurrent phenomenological layer to Poe's observation of life, and this layer is the focus of "The Fall of the House of Usher". The transcendental aesthetic is addressing the need to account for the transience of things-in-the-world. Poe details this transience; the close relations, and chasms, between human beings, and the mutability of the objects of the world in which they live. The exploration of this transience, and this relation between people and their environments, is well-suited to the cinema, and, in this way, Poe can be thought of as 'virtually cinematic'. Poe invites a creative visualisation of the moods and mental landscapes he maps out on the page. One would hope that this key sentiment, at least, might find its way into any adaptation of his work. As Fred Yaniga and Eloise Sureau-Hale state:

> [...] the American gothic seems ideal for visual representation as it leaves behind its lurking external ghosts and evolves toward a more psychological experience of inner demons [...] the American gothic presents both internal and external values.[75]

We can look to examples such as Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (1928; France), the James Watson / Melville Weber film of the same name *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928; USA) and the same year, or Jan Švankmajer's animation *Zánik domu Usherú* (1982; Poland) as examples of experimental and avant-garde instances of this appeal. Similarly, we could also look to examples such as Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934; USA), Roger Corman's *Poe Cycle* (8 films produced between 1960 – 1964; USA, UK), the European omnibus movie *Spirits of the Dead* (Roger Vadim, Louis Malle, Federico Fellini: 1968; France) or the Dario Argento / George A. Romero collaboration *Two Evil Eyes* (1990; Italy, USA) as more commercial, exploitative, and spectacle-orientated cinematic incarnations. These films work hard to embrace Poe's literary aesthetic and to test new ground for the possibilities of the moving image. Because these films and filmmakers are positioned firmly either in the avant-garde, or the more fringe-driven arena of the midnight movie, genre-driven or exploitative market, they wield a freedom through which they pursue Poe's aesthetic gauntlet; namely that ambiguous shifting of narrative time, space and place, emphasis on mood, and an exaggeration of the macabre and grotesque. A more thorough exploration of these elements will follow as the transmutation of the short-story-to-film becomes the focus of both the studio reflections and of theoretical and critical film analysis.

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[75] Fred Yaniga Eloïse Sureau-Hale, "Filmic Springboards: Exploring British, German, French and American Gothic Literature Through the Lens of Film," in *Films With Legs: Crossing Borders With Foreign Language Films,* ed. Rosemary A. Peters, Véronique Maisier (Cambridge. Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011), 211.

**Studio Sketch 6: Scripting *I Work for the Devil***

> Emphasis on effect undeniably forms 'The Fall of the House of Usher' and Poe's
> attitudes towards his subject and audience […] A student who closely analyses the
> story may find a paradoxical shortage of incident on the one hand, and on the other a
> radical deemphasis of incidents which do appear. In fact, the bulk of the work
> consists of images rather than incidents, of description rather than narration.[76]

After some experimentation with visual style, editing technique, dialogue, characterisation
and scripting, as detailed in chapter one, I decided to create a screenplay that would serve
as a document which would orientate each of the performers as I invited them back into the
process. The screenplay would provide a basis for me to explain the conceptual, thematic
and narrative approach that was coming together; inspired primarily by the focussed
research on Poe. Thus far, the sketches were based on tangential responses to both
Epstein and Poe: literally 'sketches' of loose narrative ideas and images. Visually, I was
achieving my intention of being able to weave together manifestations of photogénie*:* the
hypnosis-effect, subjective, emotive, and unstable mental states-of-mind, an Expressionistic
deployment of images, and an unstable, non-linear, temporal and spatial timeline. I needed
now to be sure that I could justify the film also as a manifestation of some of the essential
concerns of Poe, and so, through a screenplay, I could articulate better the themes.

I decided to start surveying and building a more diverse and comprehensive understanding
of a wider selection of Poe's literature. I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of the
underlying preoccupations present in Poe's work. I wanted to use the filmmaking process to
test my own original interpretation and critique of Poe just as Epstein had done in his film,
and not be singularly wedded to the one piece of source material. I would be looking for a
unique point-of-view, from which to hang the central premise of my film concept; a guiding
principle. The emerging film project was titled *I Work For the Devil*; a line of dialogue derived
from my reading of Poe's "The Imp of the Perverse".

"The Imp of the Perverse" is an internal dialogue that takes the literary form of an essay. At
around halfway, the tense switches from the third person to the first. An initial third person

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[76] Evans, "The Fall of the House of Usher and Poe's Theory of the Tale," 138.

perspective reads as an essay on the influence of phrenology (psychology) on the civilised human being. This influence, Poe (or the narrator) argues, causes the civilised human being to exert a rationale for all irrational behaviours; a justification for immoral acts. This is the 'Imp'.[77] The imp of the perverse is an impulse toward irrational, violent, self-destructive and immoral behaviour, and Poe's concern is that modern phrenology seeks to rationalise, moralise, and ultimately provide the tools to justify such behaviours. Essentially, Poe fears a nihilistic modern world in which people are divorced from an internal morality that is separate from rationality and reason. This essayistic tone gradually shifts to an interior monologue in the first person, in which the character confesses a murder through a sudden outburst whilst walking along the street, driven by the pressure of a morality that beckons and berates his every thought. The essayistic tone transforms into a fictional narrative about a man who has killed his father for the purposes of an expedited inheritance, and who can no longer live with the burden of guilt.

The story ends on the gallows; firmly set in a very real, non-hypothetical, though fictional, exterior world of actions and consequence. "The Imp of the Perverse" is of particular interest because in it we find this core thesis of Poe's work: namely, that human beings are driven by desire, which can lead to catastrophe. Most often in his stories this catastrophe is murder. The complexity in Poe arises when he asserts that human beings are also tempered by the desire, or impulse toward, morality. It is exactly this conundrum, that catastrophe and evil are bound to a moral impulse, that gives the work a dynamism that lifts it beyond mere genre tropes (such as the commonly recognised Gothic-inspired horror themes) or an idiosyncratic literary style (such as the poetry and short story format favoured for their mass appeal).[78]

"The Imp of the Perverse" contains an idea set forth in many of Poe's stories, in which the protagonists are driven toward violence by an uncontrollable disgust (or perverseness) that arises within themselves, and is directed toward themselves. The protagonists are driven to murder by a seemingly unreasonable reason; to murder simply because they can. Whilst there is sometimes a monetary or pleasurable reward for the violence, there is also guilt, shame and a confirmation of the initial self-disgust. The 'imp of the perverse' torments these characters. Guilt is quite often associated with memory, and disgust for oneself, therefore is

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[77] Agnieszka Sell, "Poe – Hansson – Przybyszewski. The Wandering 'Imp of the Perverse'," *MASKA* Vol. 28 Cracow (2015): 23 – 35.

[78] Levy, "*The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story,*" 11.

placed as the primary moral impetus, through which the protagonist can orientate themselves in the present, real world of lived experience. Memory gives rise to guilt, which in turn, gives rise to disgust.[79]

As Fred Yaniga and Eloise Sureau-Hale state in their exposition on the characteristics of American Gothic literature:

> Guilt and shame are traditions deeply rooted in the culture of Puritanism and the manifestations of these psychological terrors project themselves both onto literary landscapes as well as onto people's appearance.[80]

Furthermore, Poe himself asserts in his preface to his short story collection "Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque":

> […] terror is not of Germany [referring to the German romantic tradition] but of the soul, - that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results.[81]

Poe might express concerns for enlightenment values such as reason and rationality, as detailed in "The Imp of the Perverse", but here we can also detect that he has an appropriately modern penchant for logic, and justification for his foray into terror, and disruptive states and environments of/for Being. These 'legitimate' results (an execution, a murder, the collapse of the House of Usher), are the logical conclusions, drawn by a writer who seeks out the 'perverse' in human character. Poe applies reasoned thinking to the burden of guilt, memory, and the accompanying shame that he saw plaguing the society in which he lived. The Gothic aesthetic was relevant in the late nineteenth century as it was a mode, through which, by its very nature of dealing with the superstitious and other-worldly, could confront oppression, power and offer a platform to subversive ideas and insights into human behaviours. We might ask ourselves to what extent it is in this context that Poe has

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[79] Sell, "Poe – Hansson – Przybyszewski. The Wandering 'Imp of the Perverse'," 31, 32.

[80] Yaniga, Sureau-Hale, "Filmic Springboards: Exploring British, German, French and American Gothic Literature Through the Lens of Film," 213.

[81] Edgar Allan Poe, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque Volume 1,* A Project Gutenberg of Australia eBook. No: 0603401h.html http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0603401h.html#01 accessed January 2021.

had such an ongoing presence in the history of the cinematic arts. It is at this juncture in the research that I started developing longer-form screenplays.

*I Work for the Devil* was to incorporate the already-established footage and story ideas, and bind them together into something more fluid and narratively continuous. Regarding "The Fall of the House of Usher", I wanted to articulate a set of the underlying themes as discussed. I could see that I had already included the presence of mental disorder (*I Sit at the Piano, Differently*) and so, through a mosaic of various characters, I sought to establish the notion of a telepathic connection. Reflected in the script, and planned in the edit, is a sense of the abrupt variations in the flow of narrative time. To create a more dynamic overall film I would also need to try to capture themes of guilt, shame, and memory as a corrupting force.

Script: *I Work for the Devil*
See Appendix 4

**Studio Sketch 7: *The Encounter***

This sketch is the resultant footage from shooting the section of the script that involves Michael driving into a forest and stopping by the side of the road. To create an eerie atmosphere, and underscore the desired dream-like quality, we lowered the exposure of the camera so as to create a very dark image under the forest canopy. The bright blue sky can still be seen above the trees, but the overall image looks like dusk. The dark, reddish, orange colour of the car, the smoke machine, and the contrasting costumes of the performers were all intended to add up to a surreal effect. The costume and positioning of the female performer, Sophie Riozzi, is deliberately unintentional; the character has no motivation, nor context, for being there. The approach and the reciprocal movements that the performers display were improvised and intended to evoke an almost mythic atmosphere.

Following up this location was a greenscreen shoot which captured Michael's 'looking back' on the forest encounter. I had performer Michael Wahr stare into the lens of the camera to create a graphic match with the first scenes with Simon directly addressing the audience. This was also shot with the intention of giving myself options in the edit for extended, more lengthy, sequences.

Fig. 70. *I Work for the Devil.* Sophia Riozzi: the encounter in the forest, from the point of view of the windscreen of the car interior. Note the exposure and the bright sky visible above the tree canopy.



Fig. 71. *I Work for the Devil.* Michael Wahr and Sophia Riozzi: the encounter in the forest. Note the exposure, the smoke machine, the colour of the car and the framing.

Fig. 72. *I Work for the Devil.* Greenscreen Shoot. Michael: looking back toward the audience.
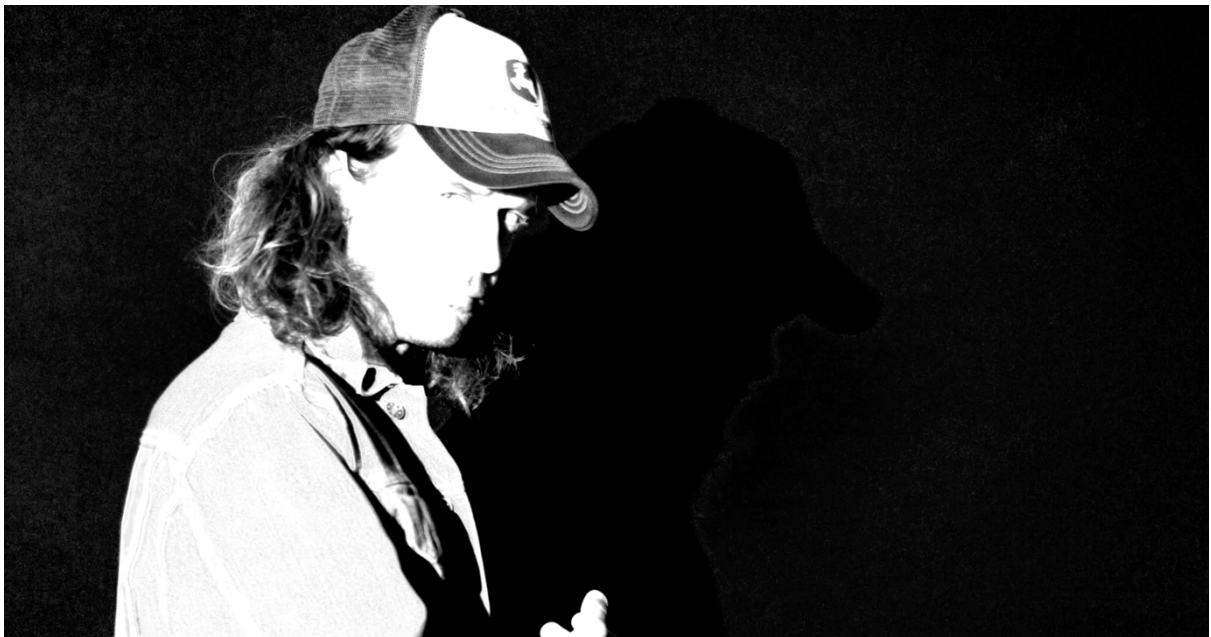


Fig. 73. *I Work for the Devil.* Black and White Monochrome edit. Michael: looking back toward the audience.

**Studio Sketch 8: *The Devil's Disciple***

This sketch focussed on the character of Simon and his direct address to the audience. It is dialogue-driven and establishes the tone and style of the overall film. The shoot was relatively straight-forward with all creative decisions essentially reflecting what was in the script. The colour and exposure choices were made with an Expressionist aesthetic in mind. A blue hue, the use of shadows and high contrast, as well as an exaggerated characterisation, reflected in the lengthy stares and facial expressions and improvisations of the performer (Simon Stupel), were all deliberate, and intended to reference the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and Dario Argento (see figs.). This use of varied genre cinema inspirations will be discussed further in the next chapter as Poe's wider influence in the cinema comes into view.

It's important to point out that not all of the script was shot, nor does the final film reflect the narrative as it is on the page. I didn't intend to be wedded to the script, but, rather, sought to continue the sketching process into the edit and to form a film based on the evolution of each sketch and the ideas that came about in turn.



Fig. 74. *I Work for the Devil.* Simon; the Devil's disciple. Ungraded, raw footage.

Fig. 75. *I Work for the Devil.* Simon; the Devil's disciple. Graded. Note the blue hue and the high contrast. The costume was originally intended to evoke Alfred Hitchcock's iconic character of Norman Bates (*Psycho*; 1960, USA). The plants and use of contrast was intended as a homage to Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946; USA).



Fig. 76. Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*, 1960. Norman Bates played by Anthony Perkins. Alfred Hitchcock's iconic character had a very ordinary look; boyish appeal, wearing very plain and conservative clothing.

Fig. 77. Howard Hawks, *The Big Sleep*, 1946. Humphrey Bogart and Charles Waldron in *The Big Sleep* (Hawks; 1946, USA). Note the mise-en-scene; the plants infer the heat of the greenhouse. The character of General Sternwood (Charles Waldron) sits covered in a blanket, whilst Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) sweats and becomes uncomfortable; suggesting the reptilian, cold-blooded nature to the general.



Fig. 78. Luke Quigg playing an extra in *I Work for the Devil*. Using Dario Argento's signature gore and bright colour palette as inspiration.

Fig. 79. Dario Argento, *Tenebrae*, 1982. Ania Pieroni in Dario Argento's *Tenebrae* (Italy; 1982). Using Dario Argento's signature gore and bright colour palette as inspiration.

**Studio Reflection: A Triptych Narrative - The Various Faces of a Single Consciousness**

> The construction of the artistic work is articulated in relation to different ways of consolidating themes and interests: the narrative climax regarding Poe, and the situation regarding Epstein. But both forms are built by exploring the same perceptive and emotional interests through different media.[82]

After reviewing the screenplay and the footage, it occurred to me that I could craft a series of three character-portrait sequences which would represent three different aspects of the psychological profile, detailed in "The Imp of the Perverse"; firstly, the impulse towards violence, secondly, memory and guilt, and thirdly, the resultant self-disgust and inability to cope in the present world of everyday lived experience (the 'Imp'). Each character, or 'figure', would be given a one-third portion of the film. As each of the three character 'portraits' came together, I decided to think of the piece as a narrative-triptych (the narrative, or linear sequence, equally portioned in terms of screen time and focus for each of the three characters).

The first figure, Simon, gives direct address to the audience. This represents the underlying impulse toward violence; i.e. the 'perverse'. The direct address is intended to create a more

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[82] Barreiro, "Epstein's The Fall of the House of Usher. Research on Altered States of Consciousness," 206.

aggressive tone in the piece. One could think of this characterisation as the self-destructive force that lingers in a personality. The second figure, Michael, represents actions taken in the world of lived experience; actions that are trapped in memory, which give rise to guilt. In the Poe stories cited in this research, characters all commit murder or some equivalent destructive act. Poe always frames these acts as almost out-of-body events; the action taking place in spite of the characters' conscious trepidation and hesitation. In the literary tone and atmosphere created by Poe, the actions appear less as premeditated, and more as eruptions of catastrophe and emotional / psychological turmoil. This second figure is representative of these actions. The character has an encounter alongside a road in a forest. This encounter, in the final cut, is left as simply a meeting between two figures, but the intention is to leave up it to the viewer's imagination as to the possibility of a violent eruption. Another series of images show him watching himself, though unable to intervene. There is no self-reflection or moral dilemma. There is only the impulse to act.

The third figure, Ali, represents the conscious fallout as a result of the acts and attitudes of the first two. The use of *I Sit at the Piano, Differently* for this section worked well as this sketch could be read as a kind of confession; albeit elusive, abstract, and in the form of a psychiatric interview. She (Ali) cannot resolve the actions, represented respectively by the two prior figures, and so she deflects to a creative act – music. If only she could play the piano in the 'right way', which would mean to sit at the piano properly, she could negate, through virtue of a creative act, the destructive actions of Simon and Michael.

As these three 'portraits' come together, another narrative effect is intended; that for the audience, the character, for whom the story is a point of view, is left unresolved and vague. The bookending of Ali and Simon in the final cut is intended to suggest that either 1) Ali is fantasising these events from the point of view of her psychiatric interview, or 2) that Simon is real and has traumatised Ali. The inclusion of the Michael character could be orientated to either situation: Michael could be another 'Devil's disciple', or another figment of Ali's imagination. Taken either way, the stylistic intention is for the film (the triptych narrative) to have a dream-like quality and logic, and to invoke the mood of the literature of Poe.

Screengrabs for *I Work for the Devil*

Fig. 80. *I Work for the Devil*. Simon addresses the audience directly.



Fig. 81. *I Work for the Devil*. Ali reflects, and struggles to articulate her thoughts during the psychiatric interview.

Fig. 82. *I Work for the Devil*. Michael: the sequence in which he observes his own experience of the encounter in the forest.

### *La Chute de la Maison Usher*: A Tale of Two Traditions

> Poe's influence also reveals something that surpasses adaptation, which is that his theoretical and sensitive universe became essential in nurturing Epstein's moving image philosophy.[83]

*La Chute de la Maison Usher* (Epstein: 1928, France) is, at the same time, an exemplar of Epstein's methodology (photogénie) and an opening through which to understand Edgar Allan Poe's prose as being 'virtually-cinematic'; an idea used and argued for in various areas of the relevant scholarship, but picked up here most directly in Mark Byron's "The House of Usher as Phantasmagoria".[84] In short, Byron argues that the text, itself, "The Fall of the House of Usher", contains embedded codes which give direction to the potential for its own conversion. It is a self-reflexive text which deploys formal, psychological, mechanical, and creative imaginings, which anticipates the conditions for conceptual exploration; keeping in mind, of course, that Poe pre-dates the cinema and could not have foreseen such a thing as a movie-adaptation. One could reframe this 'coding' as an open and conversational principle that seems to be built into Poe's literary world. Byron states:

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[83] Barreiro, "Epstein's The Fall of the House of Usher. Research on Altered States of Consciousness," 197.

[84] Mark Byron, "The house of usher as phantasmagoria." *Sydney Studies in English* Vol 38. (Jan 5, 2013): 81 – 109

In this sense it reverses and explodes the conventional binary of original and copy, and thus diverts hermeneutic attention away from the limited and unproductive zones of adaptive fidelity, quotation, and intersection.[85]

This quality of the text as inviting a hermeneutic game-play through the adaptive process, is reflected in the tradition established in the cinematic history of Poe-to-screen adaptation. Two avenues of practice and stylistic visual approach can be identified when looking at this history; that of the experimental avant-garde, and that of the genre-driven, more commercially orientated spectacle, characterised by exploitative measures, such as an over emphasis on violence or sex. As previously mentioned, instances of the experimentally driven avant-garde include the James Watson / Melville Weber film *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928; USA, note the year of production as being the same as Epstein's own), and Jan Švankmajer's animation *Zánik domu Usherů* (1982; Poland). Instances of the more commercially driven genre films include Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934; USA), Roger Corman's *Poe Cycle* (8 films produced between 1960 – 1964; USA, UK), and the Dario Argento / George A. Romero collaboration *Two Evil Eyes* (1990; Italy, USA). The omnibus production *Spirits of the Dead* (originally *Histoires Extraordinaires*, Roger Vadim, Louis Malle, Federico Fellini: 1968; France) is a curiosity from within the European art film scene of the 1960s that swings between both poles. When taking into account the varied, and very flexible, attitudes toward the literature that these films employ, my own overall sense of liberty, taken with the source texts, is justified. There is a lineage of practice revealed upon analysis of these films that resonates with my own established methodology undertaken here. The iterative and experimental approach (via the sketching process) has been foundational and a sense of the continuation and reaction to genre tropes and formulations is vital to creating an artwork that both looks back to, and updates, Edgar Allan Poe's legacy in moving-image history and culture.

The central cinematic text of concern here is, of course, Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher.* Ultimately, *La Chute de la Maison Usher*, as will be argued, can be seen through both prisms. These films are not judged by fidelity to the literature, but instead by the proximity to the unique vision and flair for both experimentation and spectacle that the literature inspires. We could ask: to what extent does the film *play* with Poe's open and

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[85] Byron, "The house of usher as phantasmagoria," p108.

conversational principle? Indeed, this exegesis hopes to show that the level of play that Epstein displays in his work cements *La Chute de la Maison Usher* as seminal, both in terms of genre and style (Gothic, horror), and in its visual innovation (the avant-garde). It is important to note that Epstein's adaptive effort (and any other significant adaptive effort as will be shown) is not limited solely to the single short story. This series of Poe-to-cinema transformations involves an array of other short stories from Poe's oeuvre, and other divergent influences and inspirations.

*La Chute de la Maison Usher* takes its central premise from two of Poe's short fictions: "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Oval Portrait" (first published in 1842 [USA]). "The Oval Portrait", a much shorter short story than "The Fall of the House of Usher", has much less detail in terms of plot. It is a succinct account of a protagonist, a painter, who is obsessed with his work. He marries one of his models and begins her portrait. The portrait becomes a signifier for a chasm that grows between the married couple. As the painter becomes more and more engrossed, she becomes weaker and weaker; again, the theme of moral and physical degeneracy, and decay. Visitors adore the artist's work and claim it to be a sign of how much he must love his beautiful wife. Obsession turns to madness and, upon finishing the portrait, he proclaims the work of art to be alive. The wife, however, has died. The story is told from the point of view of a man who finds the portrait hidden away in a chateau that he happens to be visiting. Moved by the artistry and sublime nature of the portrait, he seeks information and searches the volumes of books that recount the various artworks of the chateau's collection; thus placing the story in an anonymous past, and thereby making more remote the characters and the strange events that surround them.

In "The Fall of the House of Usher", Poe's thematic concern is the conflation and confusion of living things (the twin siblings) with inanimate objects (the house, the artefacts within the house), as well as an exposition of life forces that defy rational explanation (melancholy, perceptions of sound, and time, and resurrection from death). As argued previously, this conflation and confusion gives way to a phenomenological sense of the ways in which characters interact with one another, and simultaneously with the world, and their surrounds. It is hard, one could argue, to locate where a character's will or consciousness begins or ends, in relation to the creaks, cracks, groans and stirrings of the dilapidated mansion and its bed of tarn and swamp. The environment is as alive, and as interactive, as its human inhabitants. Similarly, in Jean Epstein's view, the cinema is endowing life upon objects, inanimate or otherwise; objects are imbued with meaning via the cinematic apparatus. The

cinematic apparatus establishes a correspondence between objects and the living human world. Both Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe, it is clear, are interested in these correspondences and this affinity provides us the measure of Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. Epstein asserts that the cinema is an affirmation of life, and that photogénie is an uncovering of truth.[86] He is not speaking about journalistic truth (factual or empirical truth). Like Poe, Epstein is speaking about a truth that takes into account transience, transformation and connectedness. In this sense, Epstein's reciprocity with Poe is clear. *La Chute de la Maison Usher* is both an expression of these conceptual underpinnings (the avant-garde nature of the film), as well as an expression of Gothic atmospherics and the sense of terror that results, and is born of, these themes (an original and unique horror-genre film, employing visual devices that would become common in the following decades)(see figs. 26 – 31, 85, 86).

**_La Chute de la Maison Usher_: Pygmalion, Sight, Knowledge and Power**

Both short stories and the film adaptation centre their narratives on the interconnection of sight and knowledge, and its relation to power.[87] In "The Fall of the House of Usher", the narrator is sceptical and frequently doubting of what he sees. From the text:

> […] what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth.[88]

Jean Epstein adds to this a dusty eyeglass and ear horn to further emphasize a deficiency regarding the ability of human beings to perceive the ontological world (fig. 83). In contrast, the character Roderick Usher possesses unexplained qualities of sensitivity that seem to be affected by, and affecting of, the environment around him, both temporally and spatially.

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[86] Epstein, *On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie,* 314.

[87] Darragh O'Donoghue, "*On Some Motifs in Poe: Jean Epstein's La Chute de la maison Usher,*" in *Senses of Cinema* Issue 30. (Feb, 2004).

[88] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher* https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Usher.pdf (accessed July 2019).

Part of Roderick's enhanced sensitivity is his ability to imbue his artwork, the portrait of his sister, Madeline, with life. It needs to be noted that it is through an obsession with looking, iterated by director Jean Epstein's constant return to Roderick's gaze, that this sensitivity and ability manifests itself (figs. 84. 85.).



Fig. 83. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The visitor (the unnamed narrator) uses an eyeglass to read the history of the Usher family.

Fig. 84. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Roderick Usher's eyeline is a constant motif. This angle, highlighting his gaze, is an establishing shot to which many sequences return.

Fig. 85. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Roderick's gaze: an exploration of looking and the relationship between sight and power. Note the luminescent globe; an example of Jean Epstein's exaggeration of elements of the mise-en-scene.



Fig. 86. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Visual style and experimentation: a subjective, unexplained point-of-view camera tracks at a racing pace along the floor of the mansion; the wind blowing and scattering leaves ahead of the frame.

Fig. 87. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The doctor looks at the portrait, but again it is Roderick's gaze which is the focus of the shot. Roderick's gaze is linked to the haunted, unstable atmosphere of the house. Madeline Usher appears as if trapped in the painting (the actress is posed behind the frame to depict the notion that the painting is somehow alive).

Fig. 88. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Roderick continues to paint as the visitor struggles with the gale that blows through the house. Roderick's relationship with the forces at play within the house is attuned so long as the painting continues. The act of painting, itself, is representative of looking; it is an articulation of sight and knowledge.

In "The Oval Portrait", the story of the painter concludes as such:

> And he would not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn
> from the cheeks of her who sat beside him. And when many weeks had passed, and
> but little remained to do, save one brush upon the mouth and one tint upon the eye,
> the spirit of the lady again flickered up as the flame within the socket of the lamp.
> And then the brush was given, and then the tint was placed; and, for one moment,
> the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next,
> while he yet gazed, he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a
> loud voice, 'This is indeed Life itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved: - She
> was dead![89]

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[89] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Oval Portrait," in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, ed. Kelley, G (San Diego. Creative Editions/Harcourt Brace. ©1996) N.B. first published in 1842.

Edgar Allan Poe's proposition here is that the very act of creating the portrait is an exercise of power over life and death; and, of the need to articulate the world-as-it-is in view of the deficiencies of the senses. This infers the Pygmalion myth in which, as related in Ovid's epic poem "Metamorphoses" (1st century CE, Common Era), Pygmalion of Cyprus condemns the loose morals of the local women and carves a statue out of ivory to become his lover. The sculptor comes to believe she is real. Through the intervention of Venus (the ancient Greek Aphrodite; Hellenic goddess of love) the statue responds to Pygmalion's caresses and indeed, art has come to life.[90] This myth gives us a template through which to understand much of the history of cinema, but also gives us the tradition to which Poe was conforming.[91] The theme of transformation and creation is present most profoundly in "The Oval Portrait", but also embedded in Madeline Usher's return from the tomb at the finale of "The Fall of the House of Usher". Madeline's resurrection from death, and the subsequent destruction of the House, provides the theme, in which the act of looking, and subsequent judgement in beauty, desire and in one's own pursuit of perfection in another human being, result only in the abstraction and destruction of lived reality. The 'clear and precise' aesthetic provides a nihilistic impulse toward destruction, whereas the 'clear but confused', championed by both Poe and Epstein, results in *sensation*, and therefore an affirmation of lived experience; the phenomenological view trumps the objective, empirical view.

To locate this theme in the visual design of Jean Epstein's film, we can look to the motif of Roderick's line of sight; a motif constantly returned to, and interrogated. The object of the gaze oscillates between objects, their interactions with the environment (both in space and time) and Madeline's portrait. Roderick's eye-line always hovers above the frame, creating a distancing of empathy in relation to the audience (fig. 84, 89). For visual effect, the actress sits behind the portrait's adorned frame, posing as if the painted image (fig. 89). Epstein is substituting the real for the imagined. This is a visual cue to emphasize in the audience's mind the theme of "The Oval Portrait"; that is, not merely that art imitates life, but that art destroys and ultimately replaces life, and that the need to look and the connection between looking, knowledge and power lie at the base of this need.[92]

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[90] Paula James, *Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion on Screen: In Pursuit of the Perfect Woman*, (London, New York: Continuum. Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception {series}, c2011), 1.

[91] Victor I. Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*, (trans. Anderson, A, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press c2008), 181.

[92] O'Donoghue, "*On Some Motifs in Poe: Jean Epstein's La Chute de la maison Usher.*"

Fig. 89. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. The portrait of Madeline Usher
(played by Marguerite Gance).

Fig. 90. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Madeline has died (apparently; the possibility catalepsy remains a significant and possible interpretation). The portrait is now depicted simply as a painting.

To further emphasize this notion that the articulation of life through art is fundamentally about the connection between looking, knowledge and power, Jean Epstein highlights the limits of knowledge and perception by framing and presenting his characters and their points-of-view in fragments. People, objects, locations, and the relations between, are all obscured by unstable editing transitions. Spatial relationships are not clarified. To fragment and disassociate the visual continuity of the film is to express the need to re-think art's relation to the real. Apprehension of what the artist desires in, and of, reality, in this case, the capturing of the likeness of Madeline via the portrait, is ultimately a retreat into fantasy. The real Madeline is replaced by the painted Madeline. Through the method articulated by photogénie*,* what is real is understood to be always in transition, always transcendent, and therefore unobtainable in the rendering of an artwork that promotes a stable, linear view of everyday experience. Clarity gives way to ambiguity, and truth (reality) is deemed to be found only in states of flux, and in the transformation of space,

and the movement of time. Epstein attributes the term 'lyrosophie' to describe a more elaborate theory of poetic language that underpins his cinema-specific photogénie. In "La Lyrosophie" Epstein writes:

> The lyrosophy of language thus leads to bestowing a double meaning or rather a double series of meanings to each verbal expression. One of these series contains reasonable, logical, and stable meanings whose individual variations are rather limited. The other series is formed by affective meanings [...] These affective meanings are infinitely more complex, more precise – and precise otherwise – and more changing. With them, the world is plainly much richer and more broadly expressive; it says more things and, by way of feeling, says them poetically. At the same time, it is exposed to being fuzzy and favoring misunderstandings […] To misunderstand certainly means first to miss understanding, but also to understand something else […][93]

This sense that truth is to be found only in states of flux and transformation within the world gives way to a multitude of possibilities of meaning. The core value here is a richness in thinking and feeling that is provoked by the 'clear but confused' aesthetic. Looking may lead to power, but it also leads to a certain demise and an artificial rendering of what it is like to be in lived reality. Misunderstanding, or alternatively understanding many things, through sensation, and the 'clear-but-confused', leads to affirmation and an enrichment of life.[94] It is evident, therefore, that the fundamental message of Epstein's film is precisely this; to look is to assert power, and to try to capture reality via conscious structures of logic, reason, and rationality, is to assert an authority over the processes of consciousness and nature, both of which result in nihilism and decay. Photogénie seeks to re-orientate its audience to the realm of sensation; and

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[93] Epstein in Kirtland, "La Lyrosophie," 285.

[94] NB: The previous mentions made of Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage are pertinent at this juncture. This essential element in the structure and purpose of Epstein's avant-garde practice is also found in Deren and Brakhage especially as regards their respective fragmentary, collage-like editing styles. These techniques do, indeed, lead to a multitude of possibilities of meaning and so the resultant aesthetic common to all artists mentioned is a 'richness in thinking and feeling'. I mention this to acknowledge the long evolution of these ideas throughout experimental cinema history, and the wider context in which my final work might be positioned.

therefore, it is clear as to why Epstein was drawn to the application of his technique on Poe's themes, and to warnings on the dangers of modernity.

### *La Chute de la Maison Usher* and Roger Corman's *The Terror* (USA 1963): An Unconscious Interior, Fidelity and Transmutation

Although it has been argued here that Edgar Allan Poe's literature offers significant potential to cinematic translation, it needs also to be noted that the literature is problematic for adaptation purposes due its lack of specific plot detail. Most adaptations of Poe's stories do indeed depart from his plot formulations and narrative structures; and understandably so. On this point, Epstein is not alone. However, whilst Poe might not detail complex plot structures, he does present complex themes, narrational voicing, and an overall mood, most often associated with terror, horror, tragedy and the supernatural[95]. Poe does not demand literal fidelity; in fact, he invites aesthetic and visual interpretation. To use Robert Stam's terminology, one could argue that Poe invites translation, transmutation, or transfiguration.[96] If Poe is so attractive for the cinema, we must interrogate the adaptive approaches a filmmaker takes, in order to illuminate both Poe's appeal as well as the appeal of the resultant films. The hope, or the aim of this exegesis, is, therefore, to place my own films in relation to these lineages.

Robert Stam asserts as a conceptual model in his seminal chapter "Beyond Fidelity; the Dialogics of Adaptation":

> "The notion of 'fidelity' is essentialist in relation to both media involved […] But in fact there is no such transferable core: a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can generate a plethora of possible readings, including even readings of the narrative itself."[97]

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[95] Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day. Volume 1; The Gothic Tradition*, 170.

[96] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 62.

[97] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," 57.

In terms of Roger Corman's extensive Poe Cycle, it would be instinctive to begin an analysis and comparison with the first of the films produced by American International Pictures (AIP); *The House of Usher* (Corman; 1960). I have opted, however, for a different path. The Poe Cycle was a series of films produced by AIP and Corman between 1960 and 1964. It is widely considered that there are eight films in this series, though there is a ninth addition, cited by Corman as an honorary member: *The Terror* (1963) is a curiosity made in the shadow of *The Raven* (1963) and developed in an *ad-hoc* fashion as an original Corman script.[98] *The Terror* (1963) is, in fact, not a Poe adaptation at all, but rather the original conception of Corman and his writing partner, Leo Gordon.[99] It may not be an adaptation, but it is, arguably, the most effective interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe created by Corman.

*The Terror* began as a narrative concept developed hurriedly after shooting for *The Raven* completed in early 1963. As Corman explains:

> I had a little bit of money, enough for two days of shooting, so I decided to try and come up with a story outline for another horror picture […] Boris [Karloff] looked at the script […] and he agreed to make it. I think it must have been in the back of his mind that I wasn't really going to do it in two days.[100]

Two days turned into three and Corman's team laid down a formula which would be added to, chopped, changed and built over time; nine months to be exact. Boris Karloff's scenes were shot in the initial two-day period. For one sequence, Corman had the cast all walk down the staircase one after the other, and again, with different expressions and different nuances to their walking with the idea that these shots might come in handy for future use. He was in fine form as the B-director making things work on a tight budget, with a mind to quantity over quality; but he was also developing an affinity with the subject material. Corman's excited use, and overuse, of the sound studio sets were in fact, thematically motivated:

> I had very specific theories about how to shoot the work of Poe. First, I felt that if I was dealing with the unconscious mind, […] (it) is not really aware of the exterior world. So, I felt I should shoot everything inside a sound stage. I should never go to

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[98]Constantine Nasr, ed., *Roger Corman: Interviews*, (Jackson, USA. University Press of Mississippi, 2011), 172.

[99]Corman in Nasr, *Roger Corman: Interviews,* 183.

[100]Corman in Nasr, *Roger Corman: Interviews,* 183.

the exterior because the unconscious mind doesn't know the exterior and on a sound stage, I could create what I wanted.[101]

What's remarkable here, though, is the extent to which Corman uses a natural location to establish the central premise of the film (fig. 91). Jack Nicholson's Andre Duvalier, a weary and disillusioned French soldier, a veteran of the Napoleonic wars, finds himself lost and wandering along a deserted coastline. An apparition of a ghostly woman (Sandra Knight) comes to him and he pursues it. The film's narrative plays a series of visual tricks that have the ghostly woman disappear and re-appear in order to establish the supernatural unease that pervades the entire work. As Duvalier chases the woman from the coastline, deeper into the forest, he catches up to her and we are introduced to her as Helene; a dialogue is spoken between the two. Helene leads Duvalier back to the coastline and into the waters and the crashing waves wherein he nearly drowns. At this point, Duvalier is rescued by an old witch who inhabits the forest, and the narrative then progresses into its second act (fig. 92). One could frame this transition, therefore, as from the natural location of the coastline of the first act, onto the studio sound-stage that is the old witch's tavern which begins the second act. Hence, going by Corman's own theory, what is taking place here is a movement from the conscious exterior world of lived experience to the inner unconscious world of irrationality and primordial desire. The dichotomy is clear, and clearly rendered through both the film's narrative and its mise-en-scéne.



Fig. 91. Roger Corman, *The Terror,* 1963. Jack Nicholson's Andre Duvalier, a weary and

[101] Roger Corman, *Talking Pictures: Roger Corman Interview.* BBC & BFI Events Video first uploaded Nov 2013 (accessed July 2019).
https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b7bc51871

disillusioned French soldier, and veteran of the Napoleonic wars, finds himself lost and wandering along a deserted coastline: the conscious exterior world of lived experience.



Fig. 92. Roger Corman, *The Terror,* 1963. The old witch who inhabits the forest: the inner unconscious world of irrationality and primordial desire.

This shifting from the conscious exterior to the unconscious interior flows all through Poe's literature, but, especially in "The Imp of the Perverse"*.* As previously discussed, "The Imp of the Perverse" has come to be a central and defining text for my own interpretive efforts and upon realising this connection between Corman's reflections on *The Terror*, and the formulations of my own thinking on adaptation and essential themes, I found a text warranting further exploration and explication.

Corman's plot for *The Terror* is, in fact, laden with so much detail, it is too complex to unpack here. However, it must be noted that this convolutedness is part of the film's charm, and the primary cause for its overall disassociation from coherence. The issues of catastrophe, human grievance, repentance and moral consequences, however, are best articulated in Boris Karloff's character, The Baron. The Baron is guilty of murdering his wife and her lover. The ghost of the deceased wife, Ilsa, is, in fact, the apparition that initially appears to Duvalier. Ilsa's ghost pursues the Baron and taunts him and drives him to his eventual suicide attempt. The plot twist soon transpires that the Baron is not, in fact, the Baron at all, but Ilsa's lover who murdered both Ilsa and the Baron. Besides the possible need for a notepad, pencil and paper to sort this mystery out, Corman seems to have inadvertently stumbled across the astounding notion that Duvalier's pursuit of truth can, in no way, be

helped by his physical gaze. For Duvalier, the position of central figure in this story does not afford him the resolution usually reserved for all-seeing hero-protagonists. The assumed intersection of sight and power has disintegrated from underneath Duvalier, and the film leaves him standing, holding a rotten corpse – the decayed body of the apparition now returned to physical reality – as he attempts to realise his role as her defender. The story remains unresolved and the central character, Duvalier, ends up as good as lost on that still-deserted coast (fig. 93).



Fig. 93. Roger Corman, *The Terror,* 1963. Helene evaporates; her body literally decayed and turned rotten. Helene might be dead, but so is the male dream of dominance and need for closure.

Like Jean Epstein, Roger Corman centres his narrative on the interconnection of sight and knowledge, and its relation to power. This magnificent, somewhat improvised, cinematic narrative has commonalities with a long line of films that have interrogated the intersection of sight and power and done so with appropriate reflexivity – a nod internally toward the cinematic experience itself. Thus, *The Terror* shares thematic motifs with Hitchcock's series of films from around the same period; *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Psycho* (1960). One could simply point to notions of tyranny and love, power and beauty, and the grasp we exert on reality-versus-artifice in order to adequately discuss *The Terror* in the same breath alongside those aforementioned Hitchcockian masterpieces. These are not small themes and through the methodology as described in this instance in *The Terror* (not dissimilar to that being practised here in this studio practice and exegesis), Corman has revealed them well. We can therefore also position Edgar Allan Poe as foundational in establishing these popular themes in cinema history, but also, most importantly, we can

recognise Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* and his broader oeuvre (*Cœur Fidèle* [1923]*, La Glace A Trois Faces* [1927], and *Six Et Demi, Onze* [1927] as discussed in chapters one and two), as essential to this legacy.

In her mapping of Ovid's myth of Pygmalion in the films of Hitchcock, commentator Paula James identifies *Vertigo* as an essential example of the cinema's encouragement of the identification of the self with the 'other', represented on the screen, in a narcissistic misrecognition of identity. James explains: "Both Ovid and Hitchcock portray men (and gods) who take control of women and manipulate them into new forms. However, there is a persuasive argument that Ovid and Hitchcock have produced texts which expose the fragility of male and female identities. The women are not always entirely disempowered."[102]

In a further explication of the film, Paula James' analysis of *Vertigo's* narrative, and the synchronicity with both *La Chute de la Maison Usher* and *The Terror,* becomes clear:

> Scottie is enticed into what later proves to be a false narrative. Playing the hunter […] he pursues Madeleine with desire but also to fulfil the fantasy that he is her protector. As an assignment Madeleine is a temporary resurrection for Scottie as he is deceived into thinking he is in control and will be able to save her.[103]

In *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* Roderick seeks to render Madeline's image in spite of her simultaneous demise. The portrait is a fantasy, a ghost, a decoy and an agent of deception. He pursues the portrait, and it is through the portrait that his desire and fantasy as protector is revealed; in that he seeks to immortalize Madeline through her image. Madeline returns from her death via a tempestuous eruption that disrupts the stability and the very existence of the House of Usher (fig. 95). In both *The Terror* and *Vertigo*, the male protagonist seeks to be the protector of the female siren. In both films the pursuit of the female reveals the fragile state of the male protagonist's identity. Just as the pursuit of Madeleine is a source of resurrection for Scottie (*Vertigo*), the pursuit of Helene is a means of resurrection for Duvalier (*The Terror*); he is quite literally rescued and 'resurrected' from the deserted beach by her apparition. Both of these pursuits result in failure for the protagonists. In reference to

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[102] Paula James, *Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion on Screen: In Pursuit of the Perfect Woman*, (London, New York: Continuum. Bloomsbury, Bloomsbury Studies in Classical Reception (series) c2011), 39.

[103] James, *Ovid's Myth of Pygmalion on Screen: In Pursuit of the Perfect Woman,* 50.

sight and power, alternatively phrased as 'gaze' and 'patriarchy', Clifford Manlove observes in both *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*:

> Pleasure and repetition work together, making the visual drive a dynamic, transgressive power. Rather than being about active male heroes using their gazes to control passive 'to-be-looked-at' women, Vertigo [and] Rear Window […] show ambivalent, less than powerful heroes, struggling to resist patriarchy, struggling to wrest control of the gaze from the world around them.[104]



Fig. 94. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Madeline's demise. Note the breakdown of temporality, and distortion of regular physicality, taking place as discussed in chapter one. The superimposition and overlay effect helps build the ghostly atmosphere.

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[104] Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey," in *Cinema Journal* Vol. 46, number 3. (Spring 2007): 84.

Fig. 95. Jean Epstein, *La Chute de la Maison Usher,* 1928. Madeline's tempestuous return from the family mausoleum. This return triggers the destruction of the house.

It is fair to argue that in *The Terror*, Duvalier turns out to be a less-than-powerful hero, who struggles to resist patriarchy, well-articulated by the Baron, the castle, and the military background of the character, and he struggles to introduce order and coherence to a world, in which his gaze is disrupted by fantasy and the supernatural. *The Terror* is clearly concurrent with these thematic tropes, located in the contemporaneous films of Hitchcock, and one might even posit the thematic proximity of Hitchcock to Edgar Allan Poe in this light. One could also point to the use of the name 'Madeline', and the essentiality of portraiture and family lineage as an intertextual connection between all texts mentioned. At the very least, this prospect firmly locates *The Terror* as a much more significant film of the early 1960s than, apparently, has been critically acknowledged previously, and in the context of this exegesis provides a framework for the adaptive, transmutative process, by which a filmmaker brings the world of Edgar Allan Poe to the moving image.

**Conclusion of Chapter Three**

*La Chute de la Maison Usher* is located firmly in the narrative avant-garde movement broadly associated with French filmmaking of the 1920s. Jean Epstein leans into the Gothic atmosphere, the unseen, subjective forces of the supernatural, and the melancholic mood that permeates the house. Through these techniques and sentiments, Epstein's film is fundamental to the development of horror-movie genre tropes and associated visual, stylistic, aesthetics in the early decades of narrative film history. When comparing this film against the evolution of the Poe-to-cinema interest that takes shape across the middle of the twentieth century, it is evident that the *'clear but confused'* approach finds itself underpinning not only the avant-garde, but also the more commercially orientated, exploitative, made-for-consumption genre fare; represented here by Roger Corman's *The Terror* (1963). It is clear that Jean Epstein's work sits clearly as an early inspiration to both camps. The effect of the experimental visualisation, mood of terror, and the supernatural, reverberates through all the alternative filmic treasures and transmutations of Edgar Allan Poe's themes and motifs mentioned thus far. Therefore, the primary goal of my studio practice must be to reflect exactly these concerns; I am to re-purpose, revise, and re-appraise this 'clear but confused' mode of narrative and visual style. Most importantly, my studio practice must actually embody this transmutative process.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

***Tonight, You Belong to Me*****: Sketching and Qualifying a New Creative Mis-Translation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat"***.*

> The cinema of 'photogenic neurasthenia' was the new epistemological method for
> Epstein, as crepuscular literary Romanticism was for Poe. They both considered
> similar questions about the mirages posed by reality and about the interactions of art,
> science, and cognition. They both specialized in altered states of human
> consciousness providing a new kind of knowledge that overcomes scientific
> rationalism and that counts on art as a revelationist tool, since this is how
> consciousness will agree to challenge its limits.[105]

**Studio Sketch 9: "The Black Cat", or: *The Cat is Black, Jack!***

At this stage in the studio sketching process, *I Work for the Devil* seemed to be reaching a natural conclusion. Enough material had been generated and the editing process has continued without the need for much more production planning. As a result, I had decided that I needed to continue the expansion of my engagement with a variety of Edgar Allan Poe's stories and themes and so selected "The Black Cat" (first published in 1843 [USA]). The primary reason for this was the story's presence in the canon of film adaptations. In particular, and selected for further analysis in this chapter, are Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934; USA), and Dario Argento's *The Black Cat*; second half in the collaborative *Two Evil Eyes* (1990; Italy, USA). I was seeking out themes that had resonance with those identified thus far, and simultaneously looking for the interest that these rather idiosyncratic filmmakers were drawn to. To what extent might I find an affinity with these filmic efforts, and to what extent might my reading of "The Black Cat" re-affirm the propositions made thus far about the qualities and impact of the Edgar Allan Poe – Jean Epstein aesthetic?

In terms of the story, itself, Poe's focus on guilt and confession are at the fore. The structure of the narrative is a confessional, told from the point-of-view of a narrator who recounts the change in his own nature throughout the evolution of his life. It is the

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[105] Barreiro, "Epstein's The Fall of the House of Usher. Research on Altered States of Consciousness," 207.

confession of a man who tortured and killed his pet, and who then escalated his violence to the murder of his wife. His attempts to conceal her in the walls of his house are thwarted by his hysterical guilt and the continual haunting presence of the cat. He tells the tale from his cell where he awaits execution for his crime. Transformation of the self is the key Poe trope being articulated here. The text reads:

> Our friendship [that of the protagonist and the black cat] lasted in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character […] had (I blush to confess it) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected but ill-used them.[106]

This transformation of character, the 'radical alteration for the worse', is punctuated by a sharp explosion of violence. The violence is fueled by an alcoholic rage. The mental or psychological disembodiment that accompanies this rage, and subsequent pseudo-remorse, and continuation of this brute metamorphosis, relays the themes of "The Imp of the Perverse"; namely that Poe does not seek a rationalization for violence and immorality. The character grapples with his own inner-machinations, and lack of reasoning, as he acknowledges his own lack of sentiment:

> One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fibre of my frame. I took from my waistcoat pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat,

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[106] Edgar Allan Poe, *The Black Cat*, http://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Poe/Black_Cat.pdf, (accessed March 2021). N.B. first published 1843.

and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.[107]

The rest of the story details the subsequent occurrences as the fallout of this act repercusses across the narrator's life. He hangs the cat out of an act of pure cruelty, an act of 'perverseness'. In a disturbing image, Poe illustrates for the reader how the protagonist slipped a noose around the cat's neck and hung it from the limb of a tree. That night the house inexplicably burnt to the ground, and the worldly wealth of this vile character was destroyed. In the ashes of the destroyed house, an image of a large cat engulfed by a noose emerges, charred into the plaster of one of the walls. Poe offers us an explanation for this ghostly apparition:

> The cat, I remembered, had been hung in a garden adjacent to the house. Upon the alarm of fire, this garden had been immediately filled by the crowd – by some one of whom the animal must have been cut from the tree and thrown, through an open window and into my chamber […] The falling of other walls had compressed the victim of my cruelty into the substance of the freshly-spread plater; the lime of which, with the flames and the ammonia from the carcass, had then accomplished the portraiture as I saw it.[108]

This explanation, however, has the tinge of the implausible. It would follow that someone might mention the strange appearance of a cat hanging from the tree. It would also follow that the person who threw the cat into the burning building might offer, through questioning or interrogation, the reasons for intervening; did they throw the cat in as an act of disgust; a kind of accusation? Or did they throw the cat in as a way to wake the protagonist from his stupor? The explanation is left wanting in terms of fullness and reasonable logic. This presents another Poe trope which is clear in "The Fall of the House of Usher"; that the realm of the supernatural, or the irrational, overlaps with the realm of the reasonable, rationalized, scientific and the modern. Both stories walk a line

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[107] Poe, *The Black Cat*.

[108] Poe, *The Black Cat*.

between offering the reader the notion that all events may be explained by phrenology, rare medical phenomena, or, in this case, the intervention of a bystander, and, offering the reader the possibility of something more extraordinary. Madeline's death, for example, and subsequent resurrection from death, and emergence from the family mausoleum, is hinted to be an instance of catalepsy; a condition in which a trance or seizure results in a loss of consciousness, accompanied by rigidity of the body and the appearance of death.[109] It is equally plausible in Poe's hermetic and fictional world that Madeline is returned from the dead. In this instance of "The Black Cat", the set-up of the plot infers that a belief in the supernatural explanation, that the cat has somehow returned to haunt the narrator, is the more tangible and plays more to the fluent continuation of events. The narrator's state of mind descends further into paranoia and melancholy as more apparitions of the cat continue to haunt him. These hauntings cast the rational explanation of the passerby, or onlooker, further into doubt as the story progresses.

The structural narrative trope of the confessional, the theme of the perverseness and essential immorality of the character (underwritten by the confession and, therefore, by some sense of a need for redemption), and the back-and-forth of the rational and superstitious explanations for events, are the central motifs from which I decided to build my cinematic interpretation, or adaptation, of "The Black Cat". Settling on these themes, I turned also to take account of the various other instances of this story in film history. Edgar Ulmer's sublime (and strange) film billed rather enthusiastically by Universal Studios as *Edgar Allan Poe's The Black Cat,* (see fig. 96 poster image), cements for my methodology the idea that adaptations of Poe to cinema can take quite broad liberties with the source-material and even go so far as to totally abandon the original narrative format, in this case the short story. Though this film (an original screenplay by Peter Ruric, better known as Paul Cain; a famous pulp fiction author)[110] might not deal with the literature in any obvious way, like *The Terror*, it still holds value in terms of the canon of films that explores these previously discussed themes, and experimental, Gothic, narrative values, and techniques.

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[109] Roche, "The 'Unhealthy' in "The Fall of the House of Usher": Poe's Aesthetics of Contamination," 20 – 35.

[110] Ronald Duke Saltinski, "Edgar G. Ulmer's Film The Black Cat: An Eighty Year Retrospective," *Journal of Arts and Humanities (JAH),* Vol. 3, No. 7, (July 2014): 1 – 7.

Fig. 96. Poster advertisement for Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat* (1934).[111]

In short, Edgar Ulmer's *The Black Cat*, follows the story of a young and innocent American newlywed couple who are honeymooning in the Carpathian Mountains. The young couple encounter a suave and mysterious European psychiatrist (played by Bela Lugosi), who leads them to the fortress home of an equally suave and mysterious European architect (played by Boris Karloff). The architect turns out to be a Satanist; a man who represents the old world of pre-war Europe. The psychiatrist and the architect confront each other over old grudges and crimes done to the other and descend into vengeful and graphically violent outbursts; the climax of which is a flaying alive of the architect in his own basement of horrors. The young American couple represent the new world; religious faith, bright demeanor, and an enthusiasm to travel abroad, reflecting their overall sense of hope. They manage to escape the nightmare of this conflict between the elderly, bitter rivals with suitably clichéd musings and reflections. Early on the young man professes with regard to Satanic worship: "Sounds like a lot of supernatural baloney to me." They are ignorant of the weight of the historical enmity, insensitive to the fervor of an abandonment of Christian faith (America symbolizing in this

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[111] N.B Image taken from IMDB website entry for The Black Cat (Ulmer; 1934 USA), https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0024894/ (accessed January 2021).

case an evangelical re-awaking of modern Christianity), and they are essentially modern people without the trappings of modern underpinnings such as secular ideologies (Marxism or psychoanalysis and Freudianism). Both older European men seek to design a new and modern society and new and modern citizen (through the analysis of the mind via psychanalysis, or the design of buildings to reflect new ways of living via the craft of the architect). Essentially, the two couplings represent the burden and weight of guilt and the legacy of the horrors of the First World War, and the hope and youth of the New World (as problematic as such historical reductions might be, they are, nevertheless presented this way in the film, and not out of step with this era in Hollywood movie making).



Fig. 97. Edgar Ulmer, *The Black Cat*, 1934. Boris Karloff's architect descends the stairs in his modern castle. Bela Lugosi's psychoanalyst stands to the right of frame.

The overall tone of the film achieves a heightened sense of the threat of a violent and alienated past (the idea of a Europe that holds onto memories, and the guilt, of the extremities of violence realized in World War One, not to mention the centuries of warfare that preceded). This is not far from the tone of Poe's "The Black Cat". An inexplicable violence inhabits the character, the weight of the past disorientates him and undermines his ability to function in the ordinary, everyday world of lived experience. He is disabled by an invisible 'imp of the perverse' (see chapter three; Studio Sketch 6: Scripting *I Work for the Devil*), much like Boris Karloff's architect and Bela Lugosi's psychoanalyst in Ulmer's rendition. It occurred to me that this could be the basis of my own take on the story, and

through this analysis, I was able to justify jettisoning the plot of the story and focusing more on these foundational themes (this process being indicative of the heuretic method as outlined by Robert B. Ray).[112] The result is a script written using stream-of-consciousness techniques, with attention given to the weight and burden of the past, the hangover from substance-abuse used to escape the present, memory, or lack of, and the split between two people who once were bonded by love and affection, and for whom the 'imp' has become a destroyer of all positive potential, let alone happiness. The visual concepts are original ideas that came to me in the writing process after reflecting on these themes. The script reflects a more absurdist approach as I wanted to try to step away from the heavier tone of *I Work For the Devil*. I wanted to try to establish a variance in the feel of the films. As established in the methodology thus far, the intention was to use the script as an anchor, but not be weighed down by it, come production.

Script: *The Cat is Black, Jack!*
See Appendix 4

## Studio Sketch 10: Shooting Commences on *The Cat is Black, Jack!* … and Jan Švankmajer's *Zánik domu Usherů* (Poland 1982)

Shooting for *The Cat is Black, Jack!* was slated to take place across three locations over two days. I chose to focus on the house (the domestic space from which the character has become alienated), the exterior shots of the walking (located in Clunes, along unsealed roads with a sparse, rural, and suitably rugged landscape), and the interior of the nightclub. As established in the methodology, we weren't bound to the script and so decided, on review, that the piece of furniture strapped to the character's back wouldn't work for the final realization of the sequence. We tried several items to achieve this effect of the character struggling with an object that was out-of-place and out-of-context but found it to be arbitrary to the overall visual effect coming together at the actual location. We aimed for the costuming to be, in part, contemporary (the leather jacket and cargo pants), but we also wanted to signal a sense of period; to hint toward what our own version of Roderick Usher might look like; in order to reference the influence of "The Fall of the House of Usher" thus far. Michael Wahr was the performer for this role and his

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[112] Ray, "How a Film Theory Got Lost," 1.

long hair, unshaven face and general presence and poise lent to this inspiration for the film's look.

The sparsely furnished house is intended to express the notion that the character has become disassociated from a former domestic, stable, and happy life. He wanders through the space as if for the first time, though simultaneously remembering, or experiencing déjà-vu. Reflections of his movements line the walls; strobing lights draw his attention to the lampshade and overhead light as he tries to climb up and out of the space (the story uses dream-like logic) (see figs. 98, 101).



Fig. 98. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* 'Philip' (Michael Wahr) wanders through the sparsely furnished house.

Fig. 99. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* Various lights trigger memories for the character as he struggles to identify where, and who, he is in this dream-like sequence.



Fig. 100. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* 'Philip' finds reflections and explores the surfaces of the environment.



Fig. 101. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* 'Philip' is drawn to the light fittings where he tries to climb out of the space.

Inspiration for the use of the light fitting, and strobe-light effects, as a kind of transition from one environment to the next, came from the influence of Jan Švankmajer's animation *Zánik domu Usherú* (*The House of Usher* 1980; Poland). In general,

Švankmajer's stop-motion animations feature cascading and kaleidoscopic representations of locations, and the teleportation of characters, or figures, from one space into another; into completely new and different, juxtaposed, environments. It was my intention to try to lean towards a sense of this effect without committing to an entire stop motion sequence. I filmed Michael Wahr's head from a wide range of angles in the greenscreen environment in order to give myself enough footage to experiment with the edit to draft out some form of a sequence that spoke to these more surrealistic images and transitions.



Fig. 102. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* Greenscreen coverage of 'Philip' (Michael Wahr); intended for experimentation in the editing process.

With regard to *Zánik domu Usherů*, Švankmajer appears to feel no special compulsion to remain strictly faithful to Poe's original. He chooses to remove the human characters altogether and instead focusses on the animate qualities of the House of Usher so vividly described by Poe. As discussed previously, Poe's sense of 'living' environments is essential, and it is this quality with which Švankmajer finds an affinity. He re-contextualises Poe's imagery of horror and mystery using his own style and technique to update and make the work relevant to his own particular cultural context (figs. 103 - 105); that being the politics of pre-1989 Communist Czechoslovakia (the film was produced in Poland, though Švankmajer was Czech and concerned with Czech political culture primarily, and broader Eastern European culture secondarily).[113] Tim White and Emmett Witt explain in their article "Jan

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[113] Tim White, Emmett Witt, "Jan Švankmajer's Adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe." *KINEMA* (Fall 2006): 1.

Švankmajer's Adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe" a point which resonates both with previously discussed, seminal elements of Poe's literature, and photogénie:

> Švankmajer also feels that science and rationality (at least as practised in today's world) are the sources of contemporary 'absurdity' […] Švankmajer believes that places, rooms and objects have their own passive lives which they have soaked up, as it were, from the situations they have been in, and from the people who made, touched, and lived with them.[114]

This is a sentiment hinted toward here in *The Cat is Black, Jack!,* but noted also for a much more thorough development in the continuing sketching process. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* embraces a greater focus on actual locations, in comparison to *I Work for the Devil*, though is still centered more on characterization rather than the focus being on objects and animation. The locations of the unsealed, dirt roads, and the nightclub interior are intended to be expressive of the mental states of being of the central character (figs 106 – 110).



Fig. 103. Jan Švankmajer, *Zánik domu Usherú*, 1980. Mud and dirt are animated to portray the House being engulfed by the surrounding swamp and tar.

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[114] White & Witt, "Jan Švankmajer's Adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe," 2, 3.

Fig. 104 Jan Švankmajer, *Zánik domu Usherú*, 1980. Švankmajer focusses on images of the cracks in the walls of the house. They are animated and grow larger and more chaotic as the sequence progresses.



Fig. 105. Jan Švankmajer, *Zánik domu Usherú*, 1980. The House spews its contents out of the widows.

Fig. 106. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* 'Philip' (Michael Wahr) wakes up by the side of the road.



Fig. 107. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* The location was sparse, brown, and dry with enough clutter and broken-down fencing and dirt tracks to create an Expressionistic atmosphere.

Fig. 108. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* 'Philip' walks and explores the landscape.



Fig. 109. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* Nightclub interior with Eva Akhurst playing the role of 'the stripper'. This part is expanded in the following series of sketches.

Fig. 110. *The Cat is Black, Jack!* Nightclub interior with Eva Akhurst and Michael Wahr. Michael Wahr's 'Philip' is transported from the exterior Clunes location to this interior; the sweat and dirt on his face being recreated to show continuity.


**Studio Sketch 11: *Tonight, You Belong to Me* and Dario Argento's *The Black Cat* (Italy/USA 1990)**


*The Cat is Black, Jack!* needed to evolve along the lines of the sketching process and so I made the decision to review the footage and craft a new visual and narrative concept in response. Adherence to the script would be reductive and not in step with the methods established so far. I felt that a significant engagement with the themes and aesthetics of Poe was being developed, whilst the heuretic filmmaking approach, signified by photogénie*,* was now well established. However, the visual style, regarding the initial sketch for *The Cat is Black, Jack!*, felt a little distant from what I initially had in mind. I chose to develop the sketching process with Eva Akhurst (who played the part of the nightclub stripper) and to develop a character and perspective that might further embed the film in a style more directly recognizable as 'Gothic'; to be more attuned to the source literature. Also, as this thought process was developing, I had been considering the influence of Dario Argento; a filmmaker noted for his deference to Edgar Allan Poe, and whose revisionism and creative flair in terms of the horror genre (specifically the Italian 'giallo' and supernatural tradition) would need to be considered, should I want to compare and tie my efforts to a wider selection of the most significant exemplars from film history. In this case, Argento's *The Black Cat* (1990; USA) was clearly the text for

reference.

Argento's cinema broadly displays a fascination with both the supernatural and the rational (the rational being represented by the detective genre, more closely aligned with 'giallo')[115] and, importantly, his perspective is framed by a lifelong love for, and fascination with, Edgar Allan Poe.[116] Clearly, as established previously, this coming together of the supernatural and the rational, or scientific, is typified by Edgar Allan Poe, who, of course, is considered an early innovator of detective fiction. Argento's films weave the detective fiction tropes associated with the Italian giallo genre together with explorations into mental telepathy, witchcraft, and the assertion of psychic powers over the natural world (respectively *Profondo Rosso*; 1975, *Suspiria*; 1977, and *Phenomena*; 1985). It is these more supernatural and occultist tropes found in Argento's stylistic and thematic devices that I was aiming to introduce into my project. Reflecting on the sketching process thus far, I had already incorporated two references to the violence and the Expressionistic tendency of Argento (figs 78, 79, 111, 112):



Fig. 111. *I Work for the Devil:* the girl (Sophia Riozzi) on the road is threatened with a

[115] Joseph Eynaud, "The Italian Detective Novel: The Literary and Cinematic Giallo," in *Italianistica Ultraiectina*, Vol. 1. ISSN: 1874-9577 Igitur (2006): 638 – 659.

[116] Niall Kitson, "Silver and Red: The Films of Dario Argento." in *Film Ireland* (Sep/Oct 2003); 94.

switchblade. The positioning, blurry effect achieved with shutter speed, and violence, was also an indication of my thinking on Francis Bacon at that stage in the sketching process.



Fig. 112. *I Work for the Devil:* Luke Quigg poses as the victim of Simon (Simon Stupel). The positioning and costuming was achieved with Argento's visual style in mind.

This exploitational element of violence is an essential marker in the history of the horror-movie genre and cult-cinema; especially as regards the Italian horror and giallo traditions. There is, however, an acknowledged tension, reflected in the relevant scholarship, between the more sophisticated elements of literary translation (the detective tropes brought forward simultaneously from the American, Gothic literary tradition, and the influence of pulp fiction authors, for instance), and the excessive and bloody depiction of violence[117]. Both expressive and thematic poles have been of interest and relevance to my work but do not, in and of themselves, warrant a prioritized focus. The main source of inspiration for my studio practice has, after all, always been Jean Epstein's aesthetic and approach to form and structure and so it is this more narrative, and experimental, interest that takes center stage. As pointed out by Niall Kitson in his

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[117] Xavier Aldana Reyes, 2017. "The cultural capital of the gothic horror adaptation: The case of Dario Argento's The Phantom of the Opera and Dracula 3D," in *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies,* Vol 5, number 2, (2017): 229.

review "Silver and Red; the Films of Dario Argento": "[…] he [Argento] has striven to develop a unique approach to filmmaking […]: aesthetically driven, preoccupied with darkness and noise, and increasingly unconcerned with the conventional logic of storytelling."[118] It is with this approach to narrative structure that I find a true affinity. This focus on visualization and thematic exploration, ahead of conforming to story and plot logic, fits the pattern that I have been tracking in this exegesis, starting with Jean Epstein.

Argento's *The Black Cat* stars Harvey Keitel as the protagonist and remains quite a lot closer to Edgar Allan Poe's original when compared with Edgar Ulmer's cinema. His character is named Rod Usher in a rather superficial nod to "The Fall of the House of Usher", and Keitel's portrayal invokes the brutish, violent, and anti-social figure described in the original story. The film proceeds to hit the key story-beats of the torture of the cat and murder of the wife. The notable departure from the story, though, is the characterization of Rod Usher's wife, Annabel (Madeleine Potter). Potter's Annabel is an ethereal and sensitive personality, who has a deep interest in witchcraft and the occult. Her chosen artform is music, which sits interestingly in contrast to Rod Usher's chosen art of photography. This dichotomy between music and image-making is reminiscent of Frederick Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music" in which an argument is made for the re-invigoration of a Dionysian artistic impulse, represented by music, to cure a nihilistic impulse driven by Apolline (the adjective descriptor used in reference to Apollo, the Greek god of sun and light), image-based, and culturally dominant, modes of art (such as, in this case, photography – literally 'writing in light').[119] Essentially, Argento is recognizing the destructive and nihilistic actuation that is born of the Pygmalion-esque obsession with image-making, as discussed previously. This line of thinking will be further developed in Chapter Five.

Both Ulmer and Argento present the theme of male paranoia, a reckoning with the past, and the irrational and confronting eruption of violence. These themes occupy the overall

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[118] Niall Kitson, "Silver and Red: The Films of Dario Argento." in *Film Ireland* (Sep/Oct 2003); 16.

[119] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music," in *Friedrich Nietzsche; The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (trans. Walter Kaufman. New York. Random House, 1967), 30 – 99.

effect of each filmic transmutation of "The Black Cat". I sought to create a response to these ideas using the same stream-of-consciousness method employed for the script of *The Cat is Black, Jack!* With all of these ideas considered, I settled on a name change; *Tonight, You Belong to Me*. This name is taken from the song of the same title used in *I Work for the Devil*. The lyrics I found to be particularly fitting to the themes of witchcraft and occultism that I now sought to incorporate. In the visual synopsis for the following sketch, this focus is signified by images of the character wandering through the woods in a hypnotic state, the power and personification of the woods, and the subsequent disappearance of the character. These ideas are all inspired by the lyrics to the song.

Visual Synopsis: *Tonight, You Belong to Me*  (incl. lyrics used as reference)
See Appendix 6

**Studio Sketch 12: *Tonight, You Belong to Me*: Normality and Witchcraft**

The visual synopsis for *Tonight, You Belong to Me* introduced perhaps the most recognisably Australian, and cinematic,  landscape or setting used thus far into the studio practice. The very recognisable Australian bush, precisely the wilderness just outside of Halls Gap, Victoria, was the chosen location for the shoot.

This discussion assumes no direct link between the 'Gothicism' of Italian horror cinema, as has been described in terms of the films of Dario Argento, and Australian horror cinema. As Jonathan Rayner states in his work, "Gothic Definitions: The New Australian Cinema of Horrors": "[…] it is not necessarily obvious how Australian or Kiwi Gothic is the same as literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, or post-war films made in Italy, America or the UK to which similar terminology has been applied."[120] This introduces the essential consideration that, at some stage, the aesthetic I am developing in response to the texts introduced so far, and the sketching process, must also be positioned in relation to some form of an established definition of the Australian Gothic sensibility; considering that the landscape could now be firmly distinguished as particularly 'Australian'. As can be seen in figs. 113 - 116, the tin shed, the water tanks, the harshness of the bush, and the gum trees all signify the cultural geography as much as the fictional or fantasy landscape I am seeking to evoke.

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[120] Jonathan Rayner, "Gothic Definitions: The New Australian 'Cinema of Horrors'," in *Antipodes*, Vol. 25, No 1. Special Issue (2011): 91.

Rayner refers to Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka's analysis of the 1970s era of Australian feature film revival for a retrospective definition of the Australian Gothic genre:

> They are in fact art films coming up into the feature category from the underground of experimental filmmaking, and from the sense of the marvellous in cartoon art, horror comics, and matinee serials […] 'Normality' – of the Australian and small town strain – is the hunting ground for Gothic/comic hyperboles and motifs […] The normal is revealed as having a stubborn bias towards the perverse, the grotesque, the malevolent.[121]

Whilst focussing on the stylistic and thematic devices of the films from this era in the nations cinema history, or of any contemporary incarnations, is not the focus of this exegesis, it can be noted that this emphasis on the 'normal', being described, might be linked with my use of the domestic space in the original sketches for *The Cat is Black, Jack!* (see figs. 98 – 100). Also, as Rayner points out, the Australian Gothic cinematic tradition emphasises the *suggestion* of the supernatural or uncanny (usually not literal), the expressive use of landscape, the peril and oppression of protagonists, and the concomitant critique of wider social structures.[122] With this consideration in mind, the following moving image sequence came into view. *Tonight, You Belong to Me* would be sketched as planned, and a further development of the domestic space (the empty house) would follow, to embed in the film both the disruption of the ordinary (the 'normality' as mentioned), and the supernatural, represented here by the use of witchcraft and more esoteric underpinnings.

The use (or invocation) of witchcraft in this sketch is not intended to open the door to a psychoanalytic analysis of the films, as is the tradition of interpretation regarding these themes in wider cinema scholarship[123]. Rather, the goal is to hint toward what Lindsay

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[121] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka in Rayner, "Gothic Definitions: The New Australian 'Cinema of Horrors'," 92.

NB: films cited in the analysis are: Peter Weir's *Homesdale* (1971), *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974), and Jim Sharman's *The Night Prowler* (1978).

[122] Rayner, "Gothic Definitions: The New Australian 'Cinema of Horrors'," 92.

NB: films used to exemplify this supernatural trend are: Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), and Colin Eggleston's *Long Weekend* (1979).

[123] Lindsay Hallam, "'Why are there always three?': The Gothic occult in Dario Argento's Three Mothers Trilogy," in *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, Volume 5, No. 2, (2017): 211.

Hallam recognises as a wider tradition of western esotericism. In her article "'Why are there always three?' The Gothic Occult in Dario Argento's Three Mothers Trilogy", Hallam argues that the surface narrative of Argento's films, which are often the focus for analysis, are a flimsy facade that mask a sub-textual engagement with symbols and rituals that belong to alternative traditions that are summarised, rather broadly, as Western (European in origin) esotericism.[124]

The esoteric symbols and structures that inhabit Argento's supernaturally themed films can be summarised by describing the set design. The three films of the three mothers trilogy are *Suspiria* (1977), *Inferno* (1980), and *La Terza Madre* (*The Mother of Tears*; 2007). Each film is centred around the setting of a house, or building; such as a ballet school in the case of *Suspiria*, or apartment complex in the case of *Inferno*, or a run-down mansion in disrepair as in *La Terza Madre.* The significance of this is that the mythology of the three mothers describes three witches whom have achieved immortality on the proviso that they will achieve a world-wide reign of evil. They each establish an architectural setting in a different city, in different corners of the globe. Without going too much farther into the complex history and genealogy of this mythic story, derived by Argento and his wife and collaborator, Daria Nicolodi, from Thomas De Quincey's essay "Levana and Our Ladies of Sorrow",[125] I will simply state that the importance of groupings of three, the juxtaposition of architecture and the elements of nature (fire, water, air and earth) and the summons of vanished faces, and destruction of the self, are the themes to which I aimed to speak through the filming process. *Tonight, You Belong to Me* is intended to embody these themes, against the backdrop of more compelling environmental settings, at the same as invoking some of the more tangential elements and themes as identified in Poe's "The Black Cat".

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NB: Hallam details a bibliography of literature that uses psychoanalysis as the mode through which interpretation of witchcraft in the cinema is practiced. It is not universal, but it is a dominate formal strategy.

[124] Hallam, "'Why are there always three?': The Gothic occult in Dario Argento's Three Mothers Trilogy," 212.

[125] Hallam, "'Why are there always three?': The Gothic occult in Dario Argento's Three Mothers Trilogy," 215.

Fig. 113. *Tonight, You Belong to Me*. A greater emphasis is placed on landscape. Eva Akhurst as the 'girl' in the forest. This was the widest reveal of landscape used in the entire shoot.



Fig. 114. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* We kept the camera in motion and created a series of portraits of Eva in this setting; fluid and disorientating camera motion and editing helps establish the unsettling *sensational* aspect of the sequence. We were creating different shot compositions that would help build out a narrative that expressed the notion of the 'disappeared self'; to reference the esoteric notion of the destruction of the self in order to summons 'vanished faces'.

Fig. 115. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* A tin shed, or bush dwelling, which in this context was our representation of the architecture / nature duality as referenced in the myth of the three mothers.



Fig. 116. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* We imagined that, just as the witches in Argento's films, our character would be bonded to the dwelling.

Fig. 117. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Eva Akhurst's 'girl in the forest' is swallowed up; she disappears into the darkness of the forest.



Fig. 118. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* The location was scattered with dead and dried out, spindly, cascading trees which formed a kind of grotto. We conceptualized that three of these dead tree formations would be representative of the three mothers. Therefore, the forces that the ritual invoked would emanate from these structures. We used strobe lights and a wide-angle lens to create a sense of uncanny; the surrounds were plunged into the darkness of night, and the strobe lights could catch only the branches and immediate foreground. The images were fantastically evocative of the spooky atmosphere we were pursuing.

Fig. 119. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* More detail of the tree formations we were exploring and filming.



Fig. 120. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Thinking through some basic visualizations of the elements; fire is symbolized by the red glow coming from the tree.

**Conclusion of Chapter Four**

> The Gothic is still here; it has changed names throughout the centuries and in different countries, but the main concepts are still prevalent. There still exists a fascination with the mysterious, the otherworldly, and the gory […] The Gothic still epitomizes one possibility of confronting oppression and power: to offer subversive ideas, and [highlight] these ideas through more tangible filmic springboards [.] [126]

At the conclusion of the first series of sketches that now fall under the banner title *I Work for the Devil,* I set out to try to open the field of view in terms of engaging a wider array of Edgar Allan Poe's literature, and in terms of thinking through the varying cinematic trends and tangents that Poe has inspired, and what they might offer me in terms of context, direction, visual style, and theme. As it turns out, rather than lifting any particular visual style, or referencing any particular theme, the sketching process revealed more unique, and hopefully more original, ideas around what a 'creative mistranslation' of Poe might look like. If the process of a direct and literal adaptation might be considered a single degree of removal from the source text, my work now seemed to be at ever increasing and multiplying degrees of remove (the heuretic, associative process).[127] The moving image work was now absorbing inputs not only from the themes offered by Poe, and the methodology and visual style offered by Jean Epstein, but also from the cinema of Edgar Ulmer, and Dario Argento, amongst others, and a keener sense of placement within the local environment; in some ways, less abstract than the masking and uses of greenscreen that dominated the previous sketches, yet still tracking the other-worldly, impressionistic sensibility.

*Tonight, You Belong to Me* is a series of narrative and visual ideas that when combined embody the primary themes of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat", as I see them; a disorientating burden of guilt, the weight of the past, the disruption of the 'normality' of the domestic sphere of being, and the gulf that these effects open between two people who once knew happiness. Edgar Allan Poe writes:

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[126] Yaniga & Sureau-Hale, "Filmic Springboards: Exploring British, German, French and American Gothic Literature Through the Lens of Film," 216.

[127] Ray, "How a Film Theory Got Lost," 1, 2.

Beneath the pressure of torments such as these the feeble remnant of the good within me succumbed. Evil thoughts became my sole intimates – the darkest and most evil of thoughts. The moodiness of my usual temper increased to hatred of all things and of all mankind; while from the sudden, frequent, and ungovernable outbursts of a fury to which I now blindly abandoned myself, my uncomplaining wife, alas, was the most usual and the most patient of sufferers.[128]

There is a self-consciousness evident in this text: Poe's character knows that he has succumbed to evil. This is reminiscent of the more internalized example of Roderick Usher whose grip on reality is destabilized by the ruminations of the house (which, in fact, may be an externalized product of his own mental disturbances) and whose closest relationship, that with Madeline, is destroyed not necessarily by evil, but by the weight and burden of the past; represented by the house and the theme of family lineage. This self-consciousness is also the structural underpinning of "The Imp of the Perverse". Self-consciousness, therefore, can be placed in equal importance to the other effects established in relation to photogénie. Also, importantly, in this set of sketches came the emphasis on the idea of sets of three. Earlier in the exegesis I explored the notion of a narrative triptych. It occurred to me that the final exhibition of the studio work could further develop this, and perhaps a fragmentation of the filmic sketches across three screens would be an appropriate conceptual design. Chapter five will explore this idea. The next stage of the studio practice will be an introduction of this new context and triptych presentation of the work.

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[128] Poe, *The Black Cat*.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

*The Night Side of Nature*: **An Argument for the Reinvigoration of Photogénie.**

From the preface to Catherine Crowe's 1850 manuscript exploring the phenomenon, and proposed science, of the paranormal, "The Night-Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-seers":

> The term "Night-Side of Nature" I borrow from the Germans, who derive it from the astronomers, the latter denominating that side of a planet which is turned from the sun, its *night-side*. We are in this condition for a certain number of hours out of every twenty-four; and as, during this interval, external objects loom upon us but strangely and imperfectly, the Germans draw a parallel between these vague and misty perceptions, and the similar obscure and uncertain glimpses we get of that veiled department of nature, of which, while comprising as it does, the solution of questions concerning us more nearly than any other, we are yet in a state of entire and wilful ignorance.[129]

**Friedrich Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music": Setting the Stage for Photogénie**

I start the chapter with this quote from Catherine Crowe's preface as I find it to be evocative of a text that has been persistent in my thinking on photogénie from the beginning of the writing of this exegesis. That text is Friedrich Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music"; first published in 1872, which has been mentioned previously, in chapter four, and which also serves as a kind of tangential response to Martine Beugnet's invocation of the 'clear but confused' aesthetic as discussed in chapter three. The ideas I will glean from Nietzsche's work of theory on ancient Greek drama and aesthetics find an affinity in Crowe's earlier work on ghosts and the paranormal. Both texts seek a way to disrupt nineteenth century Western culture, which, they assert, had become too sure of itself in terms of a broad articulation, via science, philosophy, and the arts, of the human being's relationship to reality. For Crowe, this over-confidence is represented by the scientific

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[129] Crowe, Catherine. 1850. *The Night-Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-seers,* New York. J.S. Redfield, Clinton Hall. Boston: - B.B. Mussey & Co. Website: Project Gutenberg eBook https://www.gutenberg.org/files/54532/54532-h/54532-h.htm (accessed June 2021).

community, as it was at the time, and its rejection of the legitimate study of paranormal phenomena. For Nietzsche, this overconfidence, which, he argues, is pathological, is reflected in the artistic culture and its reliance on the articulation and rendering of reality, via narrative, and movement toward an idyllic verisimilitude. It is in this diagnosis of culture that we can identify a synchronicity with Jean Epstein and his ideas on photogénie, and, indeed, more broadly with the French narrative avant-garde movement of the 1920s era. Also, we find here an affinity with Edgar Allan Poe's works and his ruminations on our troubled and unstable connections to something which might be manifestly *objective* in reality.[130]

Coming fifty years after the publication of "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*",* and twenty-five or more years after the invention of the cinematograph, an art-form Nietzsche did not, or could not, conceive of, Jean Epstein's photogénie was a system of thinking that endeavoured to find ways for the cinema to address this reduction of reality into narrative forms, and the hypothetical, coherent, rendering of time and space and the human being's relation to nature. Catherine Crowe, Friedrich Nietzsche, Edgar Allan Poe, and Jean Epstein all share in common an explorative, and aesthetic, attitude that seeks to find ways for hitherto unseen, unfelt, or forgotten, aspects of the human being's experience of reality to reveal themselves. Based on these ideas, I have decided that *The Night Side of Nature* would be a fitting title for the third and final sequence of what was now my filmic triptych installation. Perhaps photogénie could be construed as those 'vague and misty perceptions', and the strangeness and imperfection of external reality, noticed by Catherine Crowe[131].

The main thesis of "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music" is to explain Attic (Athenian) tragedy through two 'drivers' or 'powers' of art: 'Apolline' (referring to Apollo, the classical Greek god of light, dreams, poetry and prophecy), and 'Dionysian' (referring to Dionysus, the classical Greek god of winemaking and wine, insanity, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, festivity and theatre).[132] The Apolline driver of artistic creation can be described as depicting reality as differentiated by forms. Nietzsche speaks at length about dreams having determinate shapes; images. In the Apolline artistic vision, things-in-the-

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[130] Stefan. P Pajovic, "Elements of the Early Gothic in E. A. Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher'," in *Lipar / Journal for Literature, Language, Art and Culture*. 821.111(73)-32.09 (2012): 185 – 200.

[131] Crowe, *The Night-Side of Nature, or Ghosts and Ghost-seers.*

[132] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music," in *Friedrich Nietzsche; The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (trans. Walter Kaufman) New York. Random House, 1967). 30 – 99. N.B first published in 1886.

world (objects) are individuated. Objects are related to ideals. Each individuated thing-in-the-world has a form, and an ideal realization of this form is the goal of art.[133] On first glance, one might think that here we find an affinity with Jean Epstein's photogénie. However, I would contest that photogénie, and Epstein's focus on objects and animism, is precisely an antithesis to this idealisation in the Apolline mode. The object-focus and animism of Epstein's photogénie seeks out the complexity of the relations between things-in-the-world, rather than the differentiation and isolation of those things (refer back to Gilles Deleuze's 'sensation', and treatise on the art of Francis Bacon, as discussed in Chapter Two). The Dionysian driver of artistic creation is related to intoxication and sensory experience; that is, to reality undifferentiated by form, and articulated, I would argue, by Deleuze under his term 'sensation'. This embodies the idea that the experience of art is not to conceptualize or bask in the presentation of an ideal structure, but to engage in visceral, human, emotional experiences, unbridled by semblance (outward appearance).

Dionysian art is that of music, according to Nietzsche, a notion relative to his artistic context in the nineteenth century. I would expand that project to include any art form in the modern era that favours this mode of expression. Film art in particular, I believe, is suited to this Dionysian mode, or driver, of artistic impulse. Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe's reliance on environment, atmosphere, mood, and emotion equate with the Dionysian driver of artistic creation, in that the structure and determinate forms are elusive. Physiological and visceral experiences are the desired outcome for an audience; be it terror in the case of Poe, or awe and revelation in the case of Epstein.

Nietzsche argues that the Apolline driver of artistic creation had been favoured when culture was dominated by Christian religion.[134] He goes on to assert that in the twentieth century (for Nietzsche still thirty years into the future), and in the era in which religion is in retreat as the dominant cultural mode of producing meaning, the Dionysian driver of artistic creation would be a necessary force to ground human experience and allow a revaluation of all moralities and value systems. From the "Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music":

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[133] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music," section 1, 14 – 18.

[134] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music," section 8, 61 – 87.

> *Not only is the bond between human beings renewed by the magic of the Dionysiac, but nature, alienated, inimical, or subjugated, celebrates once more her festival of reconciliation with her lost son, humankind.*[135]

Let's remember, at this juncture, that Epstein's primary description of photogénie was actually articulated in moral terms:

> What is photogénie? I would describe as photogenic any aspect of things, beings, or souls whose **moral** character is enhanced by filmic reproduction. And any aspect not enhanced by filmic reproduction is not photogenic, plays no part in the art of cinema.[136]

When arguing for the relevance and re-emergence of photogénie into the lexicon of contemporary film studies and theorisations of the moving image, it needs to be recognised that, as a conceptual model for meaning-making and artistic exploration, photogénie is not entirely unique or alone in the history of aesthetic thinking and philosophy. By relating photogénie to other ideals, such as Nietzsche's treatise "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music", and tracing these trends throughout (relatively) recent history, we can place photogénie along a timeline of historical concerns, and interests in, specifically, this disruptive attitude represented by the Dionysian artistic impulse. Photogénie, in particular, is worthy of reinvigoration because it relates directly to the moving image, which is a fundamental aspect of the media-saturated age in which we live. Photogénie is uniquely contemporary, malleable, and able to be used as a tool to explore this era of ubiquitous media and digital technology; especially when framed in moral terms, as established when thinking through the linkages with Nietzsche's exposition on Attic tragedy.

**Studio Sketch 13: *Tonight, You Belong to Me*: Memory, and Chris Markers' La Jetée (France 1962)**

The final sketch for *Tonight, You Belong to Me*, was the development of Eva Akhurst's character in terms of her presence in the domestic setting; as mentioned briefly in chapter four. I have decided that I would include in this sketch the exploration of an ordinary object (to realise and articulate more thoroughly Jean Epstein's object-focus and interest in

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[135] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music," 18.

[136] Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of Photogénie," 314.

animism), further expand the notion of the teleportation of characters (the teleportation theme, being further unpacked in relation to Jan Švankmajer's animation, as mentioned in Chapter Four, and having already been established in relation to this setting in the film), and continue to build Expressionistic, disruptive, mental visual-landscapes. The object-focus would centre around the smoking of a cigarette, a broken coffee mug, and a window. In a further nod to Jan Švankmajer, and to give further weight to the Epstein-inspired focus on objects, I decided to animate, with stop-motion, the broken pieces of the coffee mug (see figs. 122, 126). Once conceptualised, the visual synopsis for this sketch was straightforward and brought each of the conceptual elements together:

Visual Synopsis: *Tonight, You Belong to Me* (Domestic setting and animation)
See Appendix 7



Fig. 121. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* This warmer, more furnished domestic setting juxtaposes the use of the same location, dressed more sparsely, and cold, for Michael Wahr's character and performance (fig. 98,99,100).

Fig. 122. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* The broken coffee mug stop motion animation.



Fig. 123. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Detail from the window that becomes the focus of the transition into *The Night-Side of Nature* sequence.

The theme that I wanted to explore in this sequence, in a sense, became the summary theme for the entire project; that is, the relation between everyday experience, and the explorative attitude embodied in both Jean Epstein's philosophy and film work, and in Edgar Allan Poe's literature (and deemed, as argued for in this chapter, as a beneficiary of Nietzsche's Dionysian mode of creation). The motif of the burden of guilt, and the impact of memory, in one's life and experience of reality, is taken from each of the Edgar Allan Poe stories explored thus far, and I trust, articulated here in this sketch. To achieve this, I use an extended time frame - the time it takes to smoke the cigarette - to emphasise the relation of the character to her setting, and provide a space within the wider narrative to reflect upon the occurrences in the accompanying scenes and sequences.

To unpack further the connection being identified between Nietzsche's nineteenth century cultural diagnosis, and Epstein's cinema-philosophy, I want to explore for a moment the prevalence and significance of this theme of 'memory' in relation to cinema history. This theme dovetails with my previous discussions on modernity, and the crisis of the individual, who emerges into the technological world of the twentieth century, as outlined in Chapters One and Two (refer, for instance, to my discussion around technology and *La Glace A Trois Faces,* or, *Six Et Demi, Onze*). To reiterate, one of the vital characteristics of photogénie is to disrupt the ordinary, habitual, considerations of the intellect to reveal hitherto unseen aspects of a person's sense of reality; his or her place in it, or relation to it. Nietzsche's conception of these habitual considerations of the intellect are signified by language-constructs and memory-operations, as evidenced in his 1873 treatise "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense":

> As a rational being, he now places his behaviour under the control of abstractions [language, and memory]. He will no longer tolerate being carried away by sudden impressions, by intuitions. First he universalizes all these impressions into less colourful, cooler concepts, so that he can entrust the guidance of his life and conduct to them […] For something is possible in the realm of these schemata [schemata referring to perceptual metaphors, by which Nietzsche means how we use language to map reality, and memory to contextualise reality] – a new world, one which now confronts that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world, and thus as the regulative and imperative world. [137]

At this stage in the studio practice, I felt that the underlying narrative, visual style and thematic focus of the project was finally crystallising around this motif of the burden of memory (guilt), and its' function as a tool for mapping the present everyday world of lived experience. The images of these two characters, played by Michael Wahr and Eva Akhurst, were designed to invoke a sense of something lost; a memory that is perhaps out-of-reach from consciousness (a 'clear but confused' sense of where one is in the present moment; as if in a dream).

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[137] Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1873. "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," https://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl201/modules/Philosophers/Nietzsche/Truth_and_Lie_in_an_Extra-Moral_Sense.htm Oregon State University PDF, (accessed June 2021).

In her writing on Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, one of cinema history's most recognised films dealing with the labyrinthine nature of memory and the subjective, solipsistic, experience of time, Janet Harbord puts forward a thesis arguing, essentially, that memory and cinema both work with the same methodology; they both create unstable sets of associations, contingent on the circumstances in which they appear. She states:

> *If the potency of a memory is the opening enigma of* La Jetée*, the rest of the film is an exploration of the ways in which recording devices, such as film and photography, perform a choreography with memory's work.*[138]

The connection between this framework and the concerns raised by Jean Epstein in his earlier works is clear; namely, that this choreography has the potential to both enhance, and threaten, existentially, an individual's sense of self and connection to the world in which he or she lives. There is the potential for both life-affirmation, and nihilism, and it is the project of photogénie to lead the audience toward the former. This is the task, also, of Nietzsche's Dionysian impulse, which uses intuition to orientate the audience away from unending abstraction, and toward the world-as-it-is, without losing our tangible, more universal, regulative sense of 'grounded-ness'. The past and the present need to peacefully co-exist. From Janet Harbord's "Chris Marker: La Jetée":

> *[…] 'I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering,' says the narrator in another of Marker's landmark films, Sans Soleil (Sunless, 1983), 'which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining'. The comment recalls Nietzsche writing that there could be no hope, 'no present, without forgetfulness', as well as Kafka's statement: 'One photographs things in order to get them out of one's mind. My stories are a kind of closing one's eyes'. We close our eyes, like the cinema's blink to blackness, and we dream of what has been and might be. Forgetting is not an abandonment of the past, but permission to elaborate, to reconstruct differently, to mix up the syntax.*[139]

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[138] Janet Harbord, *Chris Marker: La Jetée,* (College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London. Afterall Books, 2009), 4.

[139] Harbord, *Chris Marker: La Jetée*, 4.

Through Nietzsche, it is argued that memories and the everyday 'present' moment are inextricably linked. The implication of the activities of an individuals' memories, in this everyday experience, is that the past is always present, and always fighting for attention. The seduction of the past lives with us. It beckons us to grasp what has been, and remake it differently.[140] This is the central theme of *La Jetée*. It recalls the Pygmalion myth as discussed in chapter three, underpins Edgar Allan Poe's thesis of individual morality as outlined in "The Imp of the Perverse", and is implied across Poe's literature cited thus far. To no longer re-shape the present is to break a fundamental contract with the past, and with memory itself. In short, memory construes an idealised past and invades our experience of the present, tempting us to not see what is set out directly before us (intuition), but, rather, to re-shape what is before us to suit an ideal; a fantasy. This activity equates with the Apolline mode of artistic impulse in which the artist re-makes things that have been; in order to repeat them *and* to change them.[141]

With these concepts in mind, the intention of this sketch was to engage this theme of memory, and inspire, in the audience, reflections on the work that has been assembled up to this point in the image-sequence (or narrative). Together with the extended shot, I built in a series of close-ups and more abstracted images to create the sensation of a fragmented rendering of time and space, which has also helped shift the sequence to the object-focus of the cigarette, coffee mug, and window.

Images from Studio Sketch 13: *Tonight, You Belong to Me*:

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[140] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense."

[141] Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music."

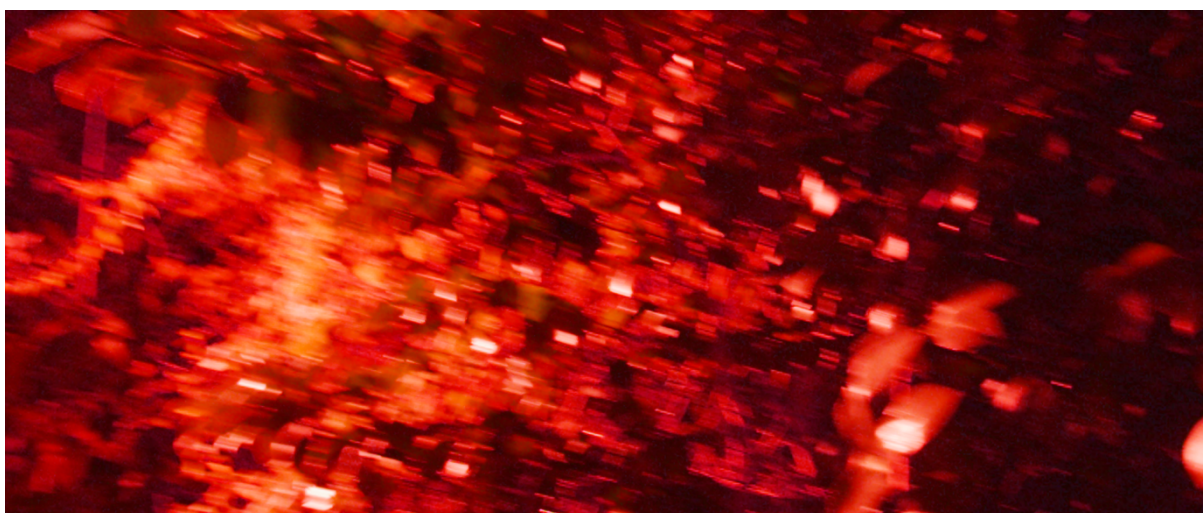Fig. 124. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Close-up detail drawing attention to the cigarette.



Fig. 125. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Detail from when the camera pushes in toward the window.

Fig. 126. *Tonight, You Belong to Me.* Close-up detail from the broken coffee mug stop motion animation.

**Jean Baudrillard: The Magic of the Concept and the Charm of the Real**

> Whence the characteristic hysteria of our times: that of the production and reproduction of the real […] What every society looks for in continuing to produce, and to over-produce, is to restore the real that escapes it. That is why today this 'material' production is that of the hyperreal itself.[142]

NB: Hyperreal - the generation of models of a 'real', without origin; a signifier lost from its referent.

At this point in the exegesis I want to invoke Jean Baudrillard's analysis of the modern media environment to provide some context, and justification, for why, and how, a reinvigoration of photogénie in the contemporary setting is relevant. Baudrillard's text "Simulacra and Simulation" describes the processes by which technological media production inevitably leads to a 'hyperreality'; one that is disassociated from the world of referents; the world-as-it-is.[143] Simulacra is the extension of this phenomenon, by which an artefact might be produced that is a signifier for another signifier; a copy with no original. Baudrillard identifies the imaginary and hallucinatory effect that the cinema has as an antithesis of a culture that

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[142] Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*, (Sheila Faria Glaser (trans.) Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 23. N.B first published in 1981.

[143] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.

seeks to render reality via collective media consumption. This cinema effect, however, according to Baudrillard, writing in the early 1980s, is under threat. What was once specific to cinema, identified best under the terms of photogénie, suffers, as culture celebrates, exponentially, improving fields of definition, fidelity, and correspondence with the 'real'.

 By adopting the attitudes and methods implied by Jean Epstein's philosophy, and finding my way across the fundamental thematic terrain of the selection of Edgar Allan Poe's writings, it seems that I have steered away from simulation, as Baudrillard would frame it, and toward the imaginary, and the hallucinatory, that is (or once was) inherent to cinema, and something that might be antithetical to the 'hyperreal'.[144]

Here, I identify a continuum extending from Nietzsche's disruptive and primal Dionysian mode of artistic creation, through Edgar Allan Poe's literary aesthetic of vagueness and guilt-ridden, ambiguous morality, through Jean Epstein's photogénie, and finally through Baudrillard's diagnosis of the contemporary, media-saturated, hyperreal, world. This diagnosis of an over-exposed, and morally drifting culture, put forward by Baudrillard, is signified by the terminology of simulation, simulacra, and the hyperreal, which is in direct commonality to Nietzsche's diagnosis of a society that has become too reliant on the Apolline (image-making, or the production of representation), to which the Dionysian impulse, or photogénie, as I argue, is a kind of therapeutic remedy. Photogénie constitutes an oppositional, healthy response.

It seems a happy coincidence that Baudrillard's antithesis to this form of media saturation and consumption is the cinematic, imaginary, hallucinatory experience. In terms of the challenges that the cinema faces, Baudrillard states:

> The cinema and the imaginary (the novelistic, the mythical, unreality, including the delirious use of its own technique) used to have a lively, dialectical, full, dramatic relation. The relation that is being formed today between the cinema and the real is an inverse, negative relation: it results from the loss of specificity of one [cinema] and of the other [reality]."[145]

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[144] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 45.

[145]  Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 47.

Images do not need to represent the real. In fact, Baudrillard, and Nietzsche before him, argue that claiming representation of the real eventually repulses a culture; the iconoclasts are cited by Baudrillard as an example of this.[146] If images, however, purport to be merely an exchange – a sign that is exchanged for meaning – the viewer is able to sidestep the resultant nihilism that is attached to the inevitable realisation of false-representation.[147] Photogénie does not make claims of representation of the real; it, in fact, does the opposite. It is a mode of creation that enhances, bends, manipulates, and transforms, what is placed in front of the camera. Baudrillard asserts that: "One can live with the idea of distorted truth."[148]

Previously, in this exegesis (in chapter three), both Jean Epstein's and Edgar Allan Poe's conception of 'truth' have been explained. Neither figure used his medium to seek out 'journalistic' truth; perhaps construed as a kind of sociological view of the world, based on fact, observation of events, or accounts of history; namely the ingredients of a contemporary hyperreality. Rather, both Epstein and Poe sought out a truth that might be described as an insight into the transience and transformational qualities of the various constituents of the ontological world. This, I would contend, is the phenomenological approach, or 'clear but confused' aesthetic, in which a richness in thinking and feeling is developed in relation to what we can now describe, at this stage in the research, as Nietzsche's 'pre-conscious' mode of being; that is, a subject's experience of the world before the formations of consciousness such as language, logic, or memory, take hold. Accessing, or enabling, this aspect of the audiences' thinking and feeling selves is to activate the imaginary, and hallucinatory, chemistry of the cinema that Baudrillard laments.

By way of photogénie, Jean Epstein argues that the moving image is interactive rather than representative, and that it, in fact, simulates human consciousness (the subjective world of lived experience), thereby creating a dialogue with the actual, conscious individuals who are watching; i.e. the audience. The screen is discursive, and therefore consciousness-enrichening, and life-affirming. It is the 'world'; as it is 'in-the-world'. Photogénie is more than merely representative of an abstract, 'out-there' or 'outside' world:

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[146] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 5.

[147] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 7.

[148] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 5.

> […] we know that the cinematograph inscribes its own character within its
> representations of the universe with such originality that it makes this representation
> not simply a record or a copy of the conceptions of its organic mastermind (*mentalité-*
> *mère*), but indeed a differently individualised system […][149]

This phenomenon of the screen being 'in-the-world' as opposed to merely representative of
an 'outside' world, can be plotted along Jean Baudrillard's notion of the evolution of
simulation and the current world situation of hyperrealness. In reference to modern media's
relation to the sociological, or political, 'real', Baudrillard invokes the metaphor of a
geographical map: "The territory [what's 'real'] no longer precedes the map [media
representation], nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory
[…]."[150] He goes on:

> Something has disappeared: the sovereign difference, between one and the other
> [map and territory], that constituted the charm of abstraction. Because it is difference
> that constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the
> concept and the charm of the real.[151]

The sum-total of photogénie (and it could be said for the whole of experimental and avant-
garde cinema), as a project, is to collect together, in a virtual mosaic form, signs, symbols,
and images, that present a distortion of what the world is like.[152] This distortion is explored in
Jean Epstein's film-philosophy, in Giles Deleuze's work regarding Francis Bacon's paintings,
in Martine Beugnet's use of the term 'clear but confused', in Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic
idealisation of the Dionysian driver of art, and finally here, in Baudrillard's "Simulacra and
Simulation". Because photogénie does not seek a direct correlation with reality, but rather an
investigation into the imperceptibility and complexities of the relations between things-in-the-
world, and the more intangible aspects of human experience, it serves as an antidote to this
issue of a kind of media-induced hypnosis or pre-programming. Photogénie orientates the
filmmaker or artist, and the audience, away from simulation; away from the 'you' that is

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[149] Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine*, 67.

[150] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1.

[151] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.

[152] As established in Chapter 1, Epstein's views, and photogénie, share in the century-or-so long evolutionary
process of experimental moving-image and screen-art practices.

constituted by information, social positioning, or modes of identification, and toward sensation.

Photogénie, as a theory, is designed to account for that which is inarticulable; that which exceeds language and representation, and points to the very essence of cinematic specificity. Therefore, photogénie reintroduces a dialectical relationship to the real, where the real is once again placed at a distance in terms of aesthetics, but in closer proximity, from a phenomenological viewpoint, to the audience; sensation orientates the viewer to their own sense of what is real, rather than replacing their sense of what is real with simulated, rendered, representational, and ideal, images.

**Studio Sketch 14: This Magic Moment: Epiphany and Shock**

Baudrillard's use of the term 'magic' sparked in me the idea that there was an affinity between this photogénie-oriented treatment for the ills of a media-saturated, contemporary society, and what is recognised in studies on cinephilia as the 'epiphanic' moment'.[153] Introducing and fixating on this term 'magic', as discovered in Baudrillard, is the focus of this reflection; and, in fact, leads to the inclusion of an important new aspect of the project's sound design, as well as overall title. That is, the use of the song *This Magic Moment* (written by Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, originally published and performed by Ben E. King and the Drifters in 1960; however, the version referenced here is the 1968 Jay and the Americans recording). This sketch is drawn more from the editing process than a new production, and is more about thinking through the various 'moments' that the overall film project might offer in this final phase of conception; the exhibition.

The overriding question, as the final film(s) start to take shape, is to what extent can the installation within the gallery promote, or even uphold, the ideal of *revelation* that photogénie offers; that is, to offer moods, atmosphere, images, and combinations of images and sounds (epiphanic, or 'magic' moments), that spark a desire in the audience to find formulations and convey something, for themselves, of the intensity of that spark.[154]

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[153] Paul Willemen, "Through the Glass Darkly; Cinephilia Reconsidered," in *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Indiana University Press; British Film Institute, 1994): 235.

[154] Willeman, "Through the Glass Darkly; Cinephilia Reconsidered," 235.

Paul Willeman, in his outlay of the history of the cultural phenomenon of cinephilia, "Through the Glass Darkly, Cinephilia Reconsidered", describes this idea of the 'epiphany', in relation to cinema, as a fetishization of any moment, movement, action, dialogue, sound or combination thereof. The emphasis in this mode of thinking is on the relationship between the viewer and the screen. The viewer (the ideal, cinephilic viewer) seeks to collect these ephemeral moments to create a kind of catalogue that becomes a signifier of their own distinctive cinephilia. Attending the cinema, or in the case of this project, the gallery, is in fact a collecting exercise. Willeman frames it this way:

> And perhaps that notion of collecting objects is not a bad analogy in the sense that you are there talking about discrete objects, moments, which are being serialised in your mind into collections, which is how Walter Benjamin talked about it… In the end, perhaps, the moment of cinephilia has to do with the serialisation of moments of revelation.[155]

Also referencing Walter Benjamin, Paul Coughlin describes this same phenomena as the 'sublime moment'.[156] Coughlin, in his article "Sublime Moments" draws together Martin Heidegger, Jean Epstein, Paul Willeman and Walter Benjamin to further articulate this encounter with the moving image. He leans on Walter Benjamin's notion of 'shock' which, in brief, refers to the idea that modern life is analogous to walking through an arcade where everything is geared toward securing the spectators attention. This concept might be further updated via Baudrillard's media theory of simulation, simulacra, and hyperreality, where this seizure of attention is akin to the 'map' preceding the 'territory' (the map being synonymous with the arcade). Coughlin concludes that the shock of the sublime, epiphanic, or magic, moment depends on the surrounding narrative environment:

> To suggest that a sublime moment exists in a contextual relationship with the narrative challenges the popular theory that the moment is by nature fragmented and found only in isolation of the narrative and its context. Yet, peak moments are often defined exclusively by the troughs that surround them.[157]

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[155] Willeman, "Through the Glass Darkly; Cinephilia Reconsidered," 223.

[156] Paul Coughlin, "Sublime Moments," in *Senses of Cinema* Issue 11. (December 2000), https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2000/philosophy-criticism-film/sublime/ (accessed January 2018).

[157] Coughlin, "Sublime Moments."

In determining an editing strategy, or wider conceptual view, of the filmic sketches coming together into a singular, lengthier, display, I can't help but need to consider such narrative peaks and troughs, even though the premise of the project is a jettisoning of certain aspects of narrative structure and approach. Willeman discusses Stan Brakhage's avant-garde works in relation to this issue of the 'moment' being embedded in a narrative-environment. He writes:

> If that in itself [revelation or excess] is the system of the film, as, say, in a Stan Brakhage film, you don't have a cinephiliac moment precisely because it's no longer demarcatable […] You can fetishize the whole of a Brakhage film .. but it is hard to fetishize a moment of a Brakhage film.[158]

To address Stan Brakhage's work, briefly, we can see in the opening sequence of *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* (Stan Brakhage, 1953 USA) a group of youths riding along in a car; their activities shot in close-up and framed in isolation (see figs. 127 - 130). The sequence is abstract and it is clear that this is a pursuit of fragmentary detail rather than story formulation. The activities of each individual in the car are banal and don't, from any plot-logic or pathos-orientated stand-point, illicit dramatic detail. In fact, the succession of close-up detail renders a sense of monotony, daydreaming (perhaps), and ordinariness. The banality of the drive is punctuated then by an oddly framed exit from the car, with shifts in point of view, and exaggerated high and low camera angles (see figs 131 - 135). This change in tone is a juxtaposition that gives rise to a sense of the uncanny. Stan Brakhage has crafted together both the focus on close-up detail, for which Jean Epstein theorised and championed, but also employed a rhythm in editing, and choice in mise-en-scene, that suggests a world of banality, and gives the totality of the film a sense that what appears ordinary may in fact be riddled with tension, mystery, conflict, threat, awe, sentiment and wonder.

After the fact of shooting, I found some similarities between my shoot at Halls Gap and this example of Stan Brakhage's early collection of psychodramas (a series of films with strong ties to the works and influence of Maya Deren, and which has influenced contemporary avant-garde, experimental filmmakers such as Abigail Child).[159] To further explicate the

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[158] Willeman, "Through the Glass Darkly; Cinephilia Reconsidered," 238.

[159] John Pruitt, "Stan Brakhage and the Long Reach of Maya Deren's Poetics of Film." *Chicago Review* 47/48 (2001): 116–32.

above quote, a film such as this is a clear example of the rejection of a fetishization of a particular detail, and the embrace of a lengthy fetishization of an aesthetic attitude; i.e. it is not the close-up details themselves, in isolation, that illicit revelation, but the process of combination and time taken to absorb the entre sequence. It takes a certain amount of patience to engage Brakhage's early, dramatically oriented films, and the focus is on a lasting effect, rather than momentary epiphany, although momentary epiphanies are welcomed and found in abundance. In my work I seek to strike a balance between both ideas; the epiphanic moment (captured through filming repetitions of actions, and improvising movements and dramatic moments), and the lengthy, more uncanny, effect and impression left by the totality of the work.

In my case, the narrative environment is something of a fetishization, in and of itself, as I have distilled themes and subtexts from both Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe, but not necessarily plot or formal narratology. Together with this articulation of a mood, or an atmosphere, I need also to provide the potential for certain moments and visual approaches to appear to the viewer as ephemeral. For visual style, and editing technique, many of Stan Brakhage's films might be good reference points to contextualise my work; for instance, the abstraction, use of colour and light, the ghostly superimpositions of close-up human faces, and overall impressionistic feel of the *Dog Star Man* series (Brakhage 1961 – 1964 USA) all play a part in forming my sentiment and aesthetic leanings when finding ways to manipulate and combine the original footage shot for the project. Most importantly though, to build in something that had more of the organic feel of a Stan Brakhage work, and to promote a moment of textural difference amongst the images, I incorporated a set of 8mm analogue-film shots into *The Night-Side of Nature*. The 8mm shots, which focus on the window in the transition between films, have a very different visual tonality to the digital images I have otherwise been capturing throughout the project. This difference suited the more abstract approach to *The Night-Side of Nature* and so I took the opportunity to diversify the recording format and method.

Fig. 127. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. A close-up of one of the passengers in the car.



Fig. 128. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. A close-up of a book being read by one of the passengers in the car.

Fig. 129. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. A close-up of knitting; another example of the banal activities of the passengers in the car.



Fig. 130. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. Passengers in the car in the opening sequence.

Fig. 131. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. Passengers in the car after arriving at a remote location. The angle is constrained; it hems in the characters creating a claustrophobic atmosphere.



Fig. 132. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. Camera angles become more exaggerated and don't favour any particular point-of-view.

Fig. 133. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. Camera angles become more exaggerated and don't favour any particular point-of-view.



Fig. 134. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. An exaggerated high angle shot.

Fig. 135. Stan Brakhage, *Unglassed Windows Cast a Terrible Reflection* 1953. An exaggerated low angle shot.



Fig. 136. Stan Brakhage, *Dog Star Man Prelude,* 1961. A close-up image of a human face, heavily superimposed and distorted against other 16mm film footage (the actual film strips being deliberately damaged and distorted as part of the process of abstraction).

Fig. 137. Close-up detail from *I Work for the Devil*. Heavily abstracted from the original footage, albeit using digital processes. This process of a heavier, collage-like, distortion of the original footage became more significant once the triptych format was decided upon. Once it was determined that the images didn't need to fit together in a linear fashion, and that the screens would present a surround, rather than a singular screen representing a singular point of focus, I had the option of using higher fidelity on one display, whilst contrasting with a lower fidelity, or more abstracted version of the image, on another.

Fig. 138. *The Night-Side of Nature*. An 8mm filmstock image detailing the setting outside the window.

With this in mind, a conceptual framework can come together for how the pieces of the mosaic film practice can be dispersed across the three screens of the triptych. Rather than seeking some kind of narrative coherence, in so much as that is possible given the nature of the work, or even seeking out clever, or narratively interconnecting relationships between the images across the screens, the editing can be driven by more of a 'collecting' attitude; in which images are selected in relation to the particular scene or scenario that is the focus, based on their tangential, intuitive, revelatory quality. Instead of rationalising my way through the work, I can seek out a 'serialisation of moments of revelation'.[160]

For the overall mosaic to produce this effect, it needs to move through very different, and demarcated, narrative and aesthetic sections in order to create contrast. Contrast – between day and night, fast and slow, colourful and dull, loud and quiet etc – will help the viewer isolate and notice detail; if all the varying pieces come together without thought to contrast, the whole mosaic might collapse into a cacophony of visual noise. With this in mind, the final edits for *I Work for the Devil* and *Tonight, You Belong to Me*, and *The Night-Side of Nature*,

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[160] Willeman, "Through the Glass Darkly; Cinephilia Reconsidered," 223.

are intended to relate to each other in terms of difference, contrast, and even to some extent, produce surprise or shock for the viewer at certain moments:



Fig. 139. *The Night-Side of Nature*. The return of Michael Wahr's character from *The Encounter* in this final section of the triptych, *The Night-Side of Nature,* is intended to add an element of horror. His apparition appears on-screen, underscored by a 'thump' in the sound design. The lightning and strobe lighting effects are intended to suggest a disturbed and unstable atmosphere; and to illicit a physiological response. The expression on Michael's face is a look of disgust; at the time conceived of in relation to *The Imp of the Perverse* - as discussed in chapter three. This 'thump' in the sound design, in and of itself, is intended as a moment of 'shock'. It underscores the opening up of a new and uncertain narrative element, or mood. It juxtaposes the more natural-setting of *Tonight, You Belong to Me*. Also, to return to Chapter Two; the isolation of the figure, and the use of temporal and spatial decomposition toward this aim, is used here to invoke 'sensation'.

Fig. 140. *The Night-Side of Nature*. The out-of-focus shot was created in-camera; not in the editing process. This use of the focus pull is reflective of the arguments made in varying parts of this exegesis that photogénie has more to do with an articulation of reality as a transformative process, rather than as a coherent, rationalised process of representation. Erika Balsom asks in her chapter, "One Hundred Years of Low Definition", why does 'definition' hold such value?[161] If definition equals quality, it can be assumed that it promises us some sort of unification with the referent. A low-definition image, or blurred image, however, does not promise transparent access to its referent. Paradoxically, the blurred, out-of-focus, quality also suggests a more normal reality; a reality closer to the one we see with our own vision; blurry, un-primed by specialty lenses and uninterested in powerful resolutions.

Part of the overall composition must necessarily be a conscious invite to the audience to enjoy the images and sequences in this way. The song *This Magic Moment* presented itself as the ideal choice to bring together the final, domestic setting sequence from *Tonight, You Belong to Me*, and dimensional, other-worldly shift into *The Night-Side of Nature*. The song will add a new sonic layer into the gallery experience. It juxtaposes the appropriately themed words of 'magic' and 'moment' against the barrage of images occurring across the three screens. This song adds theme, juxtaposition, nostalgia, and a furthering of this idea of

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[161] Erika Balsom, "One Hundred Years of Low Definition," in *Indefinite Visions: Cinema and the Attractions of Uncertainty,* ed. Beugnet, M, Cameron, A, Fetveit, A. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 73.

excess through 'shock'; as the track will be effective in competing for the attention of the audience.

**Studio Sketch 15: *The Night Side of Nature*: Triptych**

At the end of the visual synopsis, *Tonight, You Belong to Me* (Appendix 7), in which a silhouetted shape in the window takes centre stage as a kind of transformative, dimensional shift, the beginning of *The Night Side of Nature* is signalled. Regarding the differentiation between the three titles, *I Work for the Devil*, *Tonight, You Belong to Me*, and *The Night Side of Nature*, this movement between *Tonight, You Belong to Me* and *The Night Side of Nature* is the most fluid. I want to reiterate here that the differentiation between sections is important as it relates to my emphasis on three titles, and the decision to fragment the imagery across three screens. The first emphasis of sets of three came in the form of my thinking on the structure of a narrative-triptych in relation to *I Work for the Devil* (see chapter three). This was further reinforced when unpacking Dario Argento's interest in the occult, and thinking through ways in which I might invoke this corner of the history of Poe-to-screen legacy (see chapter four). Also, this decision to form a triptych had direct connection to the influence that the works of Francis Bacon had had on my explorations of the concept of *sensation* early on, but for which I had not yet formulated the notion of multiple screens (see chapter two). Now, at this stage of development, I could reflect on the sketching process and conceptualise, though the editing and structuring of the work, ways in which to exploit, make use of, and justify, the triptych gallery format.

My intention for *The Night Side of Nature* was to introduce an element of self-consciousness into the work, as mentioned at the end of chapter four. I wanted to use the editing process to open up the stylistic, visual approach enabled by the use of three screens, and to reflect upon the footage that I had collected. *The Night-Side of Nature* is on one hand a remixing and reordering of the footage collected throughout the sketching process, a reconfiguration of the methodology (the tangents, and linkages in the chain of associations, now looking inward toward footage and ideas already created and established), and an attempt to capture, once again, in a third and final sequence, the 'perverseness' that Edgar Allan Poe expresses in his short stories.

Returning to Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music", and the influence and use of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" within this project and

exegesis, I want to suggest that there is a reciprocity between these two texts that fundamentally underpins the significance of photogénie as a cultural force for the relief of Baudrillard's suggestion of modern cultural nihilism. Fred Mensch, in his article "Anticipating Nietzsche: Culture and Chaos in the 'House of Usher' and *Wuthering Heights*" outlines that what Nietzsche is articulating in his theory of tragedy is also a thesis on the philosophy of history.[162] History in the nineteenth century, Mensch asserts, was seen as a 'progressive' process; a Hegelian or Marxist process of forward movement. These theories rely heavily on reason alone, a move correlated with the Appoline driver of aesthetic impulse. Nietzsche warns against this view, seeing in it a reduction of lived experience to a politicised process of contextualisation in the present. Mensch writes:

> Nietzsche [like Poe] equates historical knowledge with a form of narcissistic introspection that chokes the instinctual life of individual and nation [in the case of Poe, this is the condition that underscores the House of Usher] and encourages "the belief in the old age of mankind" (Nietzsche 1964, 5:39), that we are the last survivors, the epigones, of an age that has lost vitality and is fast moving toward apocalypse. Ultimately this proclivity toward interiorization results in self-irony and cynicism, an intellectual sophistication removed from the vital, instinctual core of being.[163]

I want to make the case that the progressive view of history correlates with the linear sequence of a narrative, or single screen presentation. Events move, quite simply, from a beginning to an end, with no variation. The alternative view of history, that of the more phenomenologically oriented idea that events are tied to laws of polarity (Dionysian, and Apolline for instance), and evidenced in Poe's text "The Fall of the House of Usher", is captured better by a dispersal of screens. Varying relations between screens, and the dispersed attention of the audience, disable any singular view of the sequence of images. In addition, when thinking of sensation as it relates to Francis Bacon's images, as articulated by Giles Deleuze, the bracketing of time and space to emphasise the figure is reunited with a sense of temporality as a multiplicity of figures are brought together across the display of the triptych (see fig 141). In the case of Francis Bacon's use of the triptych, the sequence does not embody the progressive view of history. It suggests the possibility of an abundance

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[162] Fred Mensch, "Anticipating Nietzsche: Culture and Chaos in the House of Usher and Wuthering Heights," in *The International Journal of the Humanities: Annual Review* Vol. 13: 2, (2015), 1.

[163] Mensch, "Anticipating Nietzsche: Culture and Chaos in the House of Usher and Wuthering Heights," 2.

of meanings, experiences, and sensory possibilities tied to any given moment in time. Because of these possibilities, it therefore becomes apparent that any reduction of the process of time to a linear world-historical view is reductive at its core.

All of the arguments made for photogénie thus far, that relate to the complex interactions between cinematic, or filmic, moving images and an 'out-there' reality, might also, here, be connected to this view on history. History, when viewed through the lens of photogénie, could be construed as equally transformational, untethered to human representation, and as transient, as everyday reality. Stuart Liebman, in his book "Jean Epstein's Early Film Theory: 1920 – 1922", articulates two central questions: is the cinema a 'realistic index' of the world in front of the camera? Or, is the world an unstable fiction constructed according to the logic and capabilities of the medium?[164] Epstein's answer to this dichotomy would be that the world is an unstable fiction and the camera manifests certain configurations of that fiction. For these reasons, the dispersal of screens - three screens across three gallery walls - has become the concluding, connective, expression of the projects embodiment of these essential Epstein-esque, and Poe-esque themes.



Fig. 141. Francis Bacon, Three Studies for a Crucifixion 1944
Observe the motif of the round area and use of figuration, the grotesque nature of the images, which might be compared to Edgar Allan Poe's emphasis on the Imp of the Perverse, and the non-linear nature of the sequence.

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[164] Stuart Liebman, *Jean Epstein's Early Film Theory: 1920 – 1922*, (Ann Arbour MI. New York University PhD Dissertation. University Microfilms International, 1980), 41, 42.

Fig. 142. *Tonight, You Belong to Me* / *The Night Side of Nature.* The camera pushes in toward the window for the transition between each film / sequence.



Fig. 143. *The Night-Side of Nature*. A silhouetted shape in the window takes centre stage as a kind of transformative, dimensional shift. This image starts off a sequence in which strobe light effects and a cacophony of remixed images from across the sketching process provide a visual assault upon the audience. The intention is to embody the ritualistic nature of the cinema recognised in both Jean Epstein's and Dario Argento's films.

**Conclusion of Chapter Five**

> All, but not only, those historical films whose very perfection is disquieting:
> Chinatown, Three Days of Condor, Barry Lyndon, 1900, All the President's Men, etc.
> One has the impression of it being a question of perfect remakes, of extraordinary
> montages, that emerge more from a combinatory culture (or McLuhanesque mosaic),
> of large photo-, kino-, historicosynthesis machines, etc., rather than one of veritable
> films.[165]

When attempting a reappraisal of Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher*, and the
associated short stories from Edgar Allan Poe, as was my task at the start of this creative
research process, it would have been a misstep to attempt, or to be fixated on, fidelity to
either figure; to pursue a 'historicosynthesis', as Jean Baudrillard would frame it. Part of the
project was not simply to come to understand these texts on their own terms, but
contextualise them, via my filmmaking practice, in a twenty-first century setting. A 'veritable'
film would be a film that doesn't rely on a superficial resemblance to one's idea of what the
past might have been 'like' (historicosynthesis, or perhaps even 'fidelity'), but rather a film
that resonates as unique to its own moment in time. My films do not seek a superficial
resemblance to the original texts from which they are inspired, but instead prioritise an
authentic, reflective, voice in the present moment.

The contemporary media environment, which includes cinema, tv, video, and any analogue
or digital projection of moving images, is described by Baudrillard as a *combinatory* culture.
His term 'historicosynthesis' invokes the concept of Nietzsche's Apolline artistic impulse; a
culture wedded to idealistic, high-definition image formation, or fidelity. In reference to these
two points, I justify the fragmentary, dispersed, and distorted sketches that I have produced,
as a *contemporary* reflection on the Epstein – Poe aesthetic.[166] My work is combinatory, in
that is fragmentary and tangential, and it evades the Apolline impulse in favour of the

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[165] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 45.

[166] Nadia Kaneva, "Simulation nations: Nation brands and Baudrillard's theory of media," in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21, 5, (2018): 632, 633.
Kaneva describes Kosovo's nation branding across multiple, and ubiquitous, contemporary digital media platforms, and assigns Baudrillard's theory as a pointed foresight of this twenty-first century phenomenon. I use this source as further evidence of how Baudrillard's theory can be framed as constitutional in the twenty-first century.

Dionysian. Both Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe display fragmented and distorted mappings of environment and human psychology (or 'spirit'); which as an approach to the creative process, as is discovered via Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Baudrillard, is a remedy to the phenomenon of a simulation, or simulacra, that is above, or separate from, or seeks to replace, the terrain of the real.

**EXEGESIS: CONCLUSION**

> The value of the photogenic is measured in seconds … [it] is like a spark that
> appears in fits and starts.[167]

This exegesis documents a process of filmic discovery and experimentation. In my work I
have not sought to articulate a specific narrative, or set of characters, genre trope, or
imitation of another filmmaker's stylistic approach to film form. I have instead created a
series of vignettes that when combined, foreground atmosphere, mood, the 'impression' of
narrative, the 'impression' of genre, and hopefully something of the effect of sensation, and
instances of photogénie. I have sought to be original, to create work that invokes, provokes,
suggests and ignites, but does not pin down, verify, imitate or tell. In a sense, the creative
work avoids showing, and avoids telling. Rather, it confronts feeling, and confronts Being. So
this exegesis is not an effort in deconstruction; a process of evaluating all that has been said
about the historical theory, literature, or films that are the focus of study. Instead, it is an
effort in recreating and mapping out the hallucinatory, atmospheric, environment originally
penned by Edgar Allan Poe, and filmed by Jean Epstein; a kind of continuation of the spirit
of these two figures.

The background themes to the creative work explore the affinity between filmmaker Jean
Epstein and writer Edgar Allan Poe. Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher* was the
initial text that inspired the investigation into the aesthetic philosophy known under the term
photogénie, the Gothic sensibilities and short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, and their potential
for reinvention. Both Jean Epstein and Edgar Allan Poe challenged the semblance of reality,
or representation of the real, in their works. They did not seek to somehow validate the
linear, progressive view of history or the present moment, as discussed in chapter five in
reference to both Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Baudrillard. Narrative and aesthetic structure
did not appear for them as a rendering of the world into a coherent, logical, and comfortable
play of well-defined characters, plot devices, and orientation. For Jean Epstein, photogénie
was transformative, and not merely representational. When considering Edgar Allan Poe, it
was his evasiveness when it came to plot detail, and the burden of describing the world as it
appears in ordinary life, that shifted his aesthetic toward the less tangible, more hidden,

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[167] Epstein in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism; A History/Anthology: 1907 – 1939, Volume 1,* 236.

dimension of the human, mental interior. Each figure sought to elevate, transform, and 'morally enhance' the 'real' from which their works were conceived.

Jean Baudrillard writes: 'The cinema is fascinated by itself as a lost object as much as it (and we) are fascinated by the real as a lost referent."[168] I chose early on not to treat the cinema nostalgically, or to be fascinated by it in purely historical terms (to create a homage, or to be dedicated to imitation). I chose, also, not to be fascinated by the real, or the referent, to which we might aspire to represent (to make, for instance, something more akin to a documentary reflection on the topic). I chose instead to be fascinated by the epiphanic moment; the magical effect of the cinema experience (translated in this case into the installation, gallery experience). The decision to settle on the format of a triptych is an embrace of this original fascination and the accumulative knowledge gained from the research and studio-sketching process.

My understanding of photogénie can be summarised as a method of producing and combining moving images that add up to a cinema of minutia; images that are sudden, that outburst, that shock, that are immediate, that are fleeting, and that are not concerned with narrative context but more so with the wider view of the mosaic. My intention, through fragmentation, and explorative tangents, has been to create a dream-like image-scape. The film experiments have taken me into studies of film genre and adaptation (slasher films, midnight movies, exploitation cinema, animation, and the French narrative avant-garde, all looking to adapt and interpret Poe), studies of historical aesthetic theories such as that of sensation, as conceived by Giles Deleuze, or Attic tragedy, as conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche, through some deeper thinking about the aesthetic goals of photogénie, what it meant pragmatically to filmmakers in the early era of cinema, and into a process of making, reflecting, remixing and making again.

Jean Epstein provided his own exegesis of his cinematic practice in the form of decades of published film theory and philosophy. He published his first book on literary criticism in 1921 ("Bonjour, cinema"; a collection of essays originally published in the magazines L'Esprit Nouveau and Cinéa) and continued as writer until the 1940s; the majority of his output, at least that which concerns cinema, is published and found either in the collected works titled

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[168] Baudrillard, Jean. 1981. *Simulacra and Silmulation*. Sheila Faria Glaser (trans.) Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994. 43

"The Intelligence of a Machine"[169], or compendiums such as Richard Abel's "French Film Theory and Criticism; 1907 – 1939"[170]. Jean Epstein has been described as an image-obsessed iconoclast, and stridently modernist, which suggests a concern with technology and medium specificity; this being of significance in today's digital media landscape, as his thinking lends itself to a continuously updated mode of reflection on our own relations to the technological context in which we live (remembering that Baudrillard, for instance, might emphasise the ubiquity of media images, and the resultant culture-wide nihilism, and that photogénie might offer us a reprieve). In his 1925 essay "For a New Avant-Garde", Epstein writes: "The mechanical period of cinema is over [cinema reliant on set-design, costume, makeup, script and schedule – the mechanics of production]. The cinema must henceforth be called: the photography of delusions of the heart."[171] These 'photographs' of delusions of the heart can be taken to mean a mode of cinema-making that embraces improvisation, discovery, and fluid production methods that aren't tethered to the rigorous demands of schedules, budgets, and large-scale organisation.

Epstein was a champion of rapid montage and unusual camera movements. He was one of the first directors to recognize the expressive significance of using slow and rapid motion, and one of the first directors to theorise and exaggerate the use of the close-up and the use of superimposition.[172] These trends you'll see reflected in my work. Above all, the phrasing of moments, or the pursuit of photogénie, explodes open, even if just for an instant, the potential for an expanded, new, and reinvigorating mode of perception for the audience and their relation to the world-out-there, the world-as-it-is, the world-in-the-present-moment.

Edgar Allan Poe has been used as a reference in the culture of cinema since its inception in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adaptations are rarely true to the original story, and in many cases barely recognisable as being based on the literature. Never-the-less, Poe's writing has become almost talismanic as a launching off point for genre focussed and avant-garde filmmaking around the world. His short form writing, his thematic motifs, style, and above all romantic and realist ambiguity give us a model for methodology in filmmaking and creative practice within the academy. My PhD research has focussed on this possibility with an eye toward Jean Epstein's *La Chute de la Maison Usher*. True to form

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[169] Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine*.

[170] Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism; A History/Anthology: 1907 – 1939, Volume 1*.

[171] Epstein in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism; A History/Anthology: 1907 – 1939, Volume 1,*. 351.

[172] Farmer, "Jean Epstein."

when it comes to adaptations of Poe, I have opted not for direct translation, but a unique exploration of the themes, motifs, and moments that have caught my attention and inspired my own cinematic conceptions.

To summarize my experience in this PhD, I have essentially been trying to figure out ways to structure and present an ever increasingly complex web of associations and tangents. I have studied the film, *La Chute de la Maison Usher*, plus many others. I have studied a wide array of varying perspectives on photogénie and its associated complexities. I have studied certain specific aspects of the literature of Edgar Allan Poe. These studies, and the resultant frameworks I have compiled, have all been in aid of answering the central questions: Why might it be useful to revisit and reappraise this method of enquiry? What can this methodology offer independent, creative filmmakers and moving-image-based visual artists in the present era?

Essentially, I find Epstein's work to be enduring and daring. There is a correlation with the current, contemporary digital era, that through the context provided in relation to Martine Beugnet in Chapter Three, and Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Baudrillard in Chapter Five, can be summarised as mode of creating and viewing that offers a reprieve to an age obsessed with fidelity, definition, and as Beugnet frames it, the possibility of a full and perfect knowledge of the world (a comment that has synchronicity with Nietzsche's notion of the Apolline impulse to the ideal image, for instance). I believe that through finding and drawing these connections we are able to reinvigorate and understand afresh what the early pioneers of film theory were thinking. Like those filmmakers and theorists, the technological advancements and resultant upheaval of social and political norms, permeate our everyday lives. Jean Epstein sought to use cinema as an affirmation of the complexity, unsureness, and beauty of reality, rather than to give in to a reduction of reality and human experience into media representations and imitations of what is true.

This process and methodology, and this newly developed sympathy to photogénie  and sensation, and the seeking out of moments and situations that peer through the fabric of ordinary, everyday, experience, will underpin all my film work, commercial or otherwise, going forward. The pathway ahead, for my career, will be defined by this explorative attitude. The enthusiasm for finding and unpacking historical theories and contexts, and for relating them into the contemporary, every-day, visual-media landscape, is a trait of my practice that

will continue to augment, and to amplify. In finding an affiliation with the past, I find purpose in the present.

# GLOSSARY

**aesthetic.** Relating to the style, theme, look, or feel of the artist's work. An 'aesthetic system', for instance, would refer to the repeated techniques used to achieve that particular visual style, or thematic motif. I use the word as generic term for the overall feel and effect of the artists' work.

**alienation.** A term used widely in modern literature to describe the disconnectedness of an ordinary person living in the modern world, and surrounded by technology, from more traditional ways of living that, in theory, promote a connectedness to community and nature. This term signals a person's underlying sense of a fully lived life, and can lead to nihilism.

**esoteric.** This term comes up in the literature surrounding the films of Dario Argento. Traditionally it means of special, rare, or unusual interest; for those who are 'initiated'; and in the case of Argento's films refers specifically to the occultist aspects. I use the term in some parts of the discussion to reference this occultist thematic trope. The exegesis doesn't allow space, or warrant, further unpacking of what these occultist, esoteric, practices might be.

**figuration.** The representation of form; representing the referent by figure or resemblance, or the subject-focus of the image. Regarding Francis Bacon's art, figuration refers to conceptualising the relation between figure and field (the surrounding environment) and the implied temporal aspect of the image.

**HMI panel.** Technically: a Human-Machine Interface panel. It is a small, square light-panel that can be controlled, in terms of light temperature, by hand. It is portable, battery operated, and because of this level of control, suitable for location-based film shoots that require lighter, more accessible production gear.

**hyperreal**. A term introduced by Jean Baudrillard referring to the generation of models (media in this case; videos for instance) of a 'real', without origin; a signifier lost from its referent.

**nihilism.** Used in the way in which Friedrich Nietzsche intended; that is to refer to the dissolution of wanting any sense of fulfilment or universal happiness in one's life. To stop wanting to want; to have no desire for desire itself.

**photogénie.** Photogénie has no fixed definition, but is rather a series of descriptions, and arguments, that frame the ways in which the camera captures beauty, sublime moments, ephemeral moments, or moments the generate a genuine, revelatory, interest in the viewer. In terms of the English lexicon, the word can be equated with 'photogenic'. Photogénie, however, signifies a deeper, historical, discussion surrounding the autonomy of the moving image as an art form.

**sensation.** A word introduced in reference to Giles Deleuze, used to describe an aesthetic effect in which space, spatial relations between figures, time and temporality, are all manipulated to create disruptions in how the audience perceives the regular, every day, temporal, and spatial, environment.

**solipsistic.** I use this term in the traditional philosophical sense: to describe the phenomena in which the subject can only be sure of internal knowledge or perception. The subject is separate from, or cut off from, the object / objective outside world, and, therefore, cannot prove that any externalities actually exist.

**verisimilitude.** The appearance of being true or real.

**APPENDICES**


**Appendix 1**

*Boy Meets Girl, They Fall in Love*


*Interior CAR NIGHT*
*Greenscreen; used to give the artificial effect of rear-projection. The back of a man's head is silhouetted against the dusk in view through the windscreen.*

*Exterior FAIRGROUND NIGHT*
*Two lovers are on a date at the fairground. A boy and girl, both young and innocent. The couple are lost in each other's company; holding hands and walking together.*

*BOY*
*I love you. And everything is fine.*

*GIRL*
*And I love you. And everything is fine.*


*Exterior BEACH NIGHT*
*The girl runs across the sand dunes, scared and crying. Out of the darkness steps Simon. He has trapped her.*

*SIMON*
*(from the p.o.v of the girl, Simon speaks directly to the camera)*
*Now I want you to listen to me... very, very, carefully...*


END

**Appendix 2**


*The Stalker Stalks the Streets*


Brief synopsis: Simon is a serial killer; a deranged psychopath who stalks and hunts both

men and women to scalp them for their hair. He is a make-up artist and costume technician

for the movies, and he uses the hair from his victims to create costumes and wigs.


*Interior DAY COSTUME HIRE STORE*
*SIMON*
*I know it's wrong. Monsters exist. In the movies, it's easy to see them. In real life, not so much. (he answers a question as if from off camera) No not really... I don't feel guilt for anything. In fact, I feel sorry for people who feel guilt. (he laughs)*

*Interior CAR NIGHT*

*Simon is driving through the night. It is revealed that the two young lovers are in the back seat. Their bodies are in the boot. Their ghosts sit and haunt Simon. Note: all shot with greenscreen.*

GIRL
*Why did you kill us? What did you want from us?*

SIMON *I wanted your hair. And I work for the devil. I'm going to make a wig. And then, someone will weave a dream with it.*

BOY
*It's not a dream. It's a fucking nightmare!*

SIMON
*Shut up!*

*The girl starts crying. Simon starts crying. The boy starts to cry. Simon glares at him, seething with anger.*

*JUMP CUT. PREVIOUS EMOTIONS HAVE VANISHED. MOOD IS MUTE.*

SIMON (CONT'D)
*Do you want to know how I do it? With one hand and a firm grip and fist full of hair I take hold and jerk your head back. With the other hand I take a scalpel, or a box cutter. I make a hard and deep incision right across where your forehead meets your hairline, and I start to pull.*

*INSERT SHOTS OF CLOSEUP DETAIL OF THE SCALPING.*

*As I make progress in separating the skin from the skull I make further incisions above the ears and whoosh! Off comes the cap.*

GIRL
*Why don't you scalp yourself you fucking asshole!*

SIMON
*Not a bad idea...*

END

**Appendix 3**

*I Sit at the Piano, Differently.*

SCENE 11 Interior CLINIC / DOCTORS OFFICE
Ali is in a psych ward. She is being interviewed. She is a catatonic schizophrenic. The doctor remains unseen, out of frame.

IV
How are you feeling?

ALI
Well..

IV
How long have you been here?

ALI
Three months, since May eighteenth.

IV
And what brought you here?

ALI
That's difficult to answer.

IV
Could you give me some idea?

ALI
I can't.

IV
Whose idea was it that you come here?

ALI
My psychiatrist.

IV
What happened that ended up with your being here in the hospital?

ALI
My psychiatrist decided that this was the situation for me.

IV
Have you any idea why?

ALI
Yes.

IV
And what is that?

ALI
I am not completely like other people.

IV
What do you mean by that?

ALI
People dislike me because I am not completely like them.

IV

In what ways are you not like other people?

ALI
I play the piano.

IV
Other people play the piano.

ALI
I play the piano for other people. In ways different from how other people play the piano.

IV
I'm not quite clear on how it is that your playing the piano has resulted in your being here.

ALI
I sit differently when I'm at the piano, and occasionally when I'm away from the piano I look
differently from other people. And this has caused dislike from other people.

IV
People dislike you because of the way you sit at the piano?

ALI
Yes.

IV
How do you stand when you are away from the piano?

IV
Does it feel any different to you, to the way other people stand?

ALI
Yes, it feels different.

IV
In what way?

ALI
This is becoming too involved to describe.

IV
Can you describe how other people stand?

ALI
They stand...

(she becomes stressed and anxious as she tries to formulate answers.)

IV
Can you describe how other people sit?

ALI
When I sit at the piano I can't get my back straight.

<div align="center">IV</div>
<div align="center">Your back is straight now.</div>

<div align="center">ALI</div>
<div align="center">Yes.</div>

<div align="center">IV</div>
<div align="center">So why can't you straighten your back, when sitting at the piano?</div>

<div align="center">ALI</div>
When I sit at the piano, I can't get my back straight, it is bent. And something is stuck in my throat. It's stuck...

(Ali struggles with describing the sensation of being choked, of being contorted. She continues to think through the series of questions and her defensiveness and inner confusion escalates. She sits in silence struggling with the situation.)

<div align="center">END</div>

**Appendix 4**

<div align="center">*I Work for the Devil*</div>

Interior CAR - a stalker stalks the streets

Simon drives, searching and peering through the windshield. He travels through a neon lit carnival like landscape, through sleet and snow as he looks for potential victims. He is a psychopath, a cannibal, an ancient spirit in possession of human form.

Exterior NIGHT - girl meets boy

A girl meets a boy. A date on the pier. They are falling in love.

Exterior NIGHT - Simon hunts

Simon watches on as the two lovers walk along the pier, in front of the carnival, holding hands.

<div align="center">SIMON (VO)</div>

Doctor's, psychologists, priests and preachers. All of them want to get to know me.

Interior KITCHEN

Simon sits at the table and addresses the audience directly. It is a continuation of the vo from previous scene.

<div align="center">SIMON</div>

Who I am. What makes me tick. What is in there? What's inside? How much can they know? How much can they really know? Maybe what they are looking for doesn't reside alone in me. The devil, you see, might just be everywhere, all around us. To act on desire, to find things out, to know things about the world, to feel flesh, to breathe air, the devil might just be everywhere. And yes, I know it's unfair. Some have to die, some have to hurt. There is so much hurt in the world. But I simply ... don't.... care.

(As if to an off-screen interviewer.)

What's going through my mind? Sitting here and waiting. Looking at that.

cut to: a fat, dead body lies on the floor, face up, nearby Simon. A kitchen knife sticks out of the chest. Blood everywhere.

SIMON (cont)

I'm almost at the end of this dark, dark project. It's taken me a life time to get here. Things in my life have been a very normal succession of cause and effect.

Simon sits and listens to 'Tonight You Belong to Me' by Patience and Prudence.

SIMON (cont)

You must see it. That I work for the devil. And I owe a great debt. It's in my nature. It's what's in me. God me made me. Made me what I am.

Exterior BUSH SCRUB NIGHT

The girl falls through the bushes, panicked, bruised and bloody. Simon stands over her.

Michael leaves the house, gets into the car and starts to drive.

Interior EXT CAR DRIVES INTO THE NIGHT

Michael drives into the night. He follows a road that takes him into a forest. (extended sequence of driving)

Michael stops the car by the side of the road. It is an isolated area, he is surrounded by nothing but the forest and darkness. A young woman lies hurt on the roadside - hit by a car, battered and bruised - he goes to the car and retrieves a blade - he cuts her eye (a homage to Dali and Bunuel).

Interior NIGHT / VO

Michael is the phone/skype/FB talking to his girlfriend. She is overseas. Two lovers talk of missing each other, catching up on their days activities and feelings.

MICHAEL

I miss you.

ALI

I miss you too..

MICHAEL

What's the weather like over there?

ALI

It's fucking cold. It's the first day of winter tomorrow.

MICHAEL

You're so far away.

ALI

I think it's going to snow.

MICHAEl

I wish I was there.

ALI

I wish you were here.

MICHAEL

How are you feeling? You alright?

ALI

Yeah I'm fine.

MICHAEL

What is it?

ALI

What is what? I'm fine.

MICHAEL

What are you thinking about?

(Ali hesitates, a few beats)

What is it?

ALI

When I was a girl, we had a kitten, and we were playing and there was this heavy door, made of oak or something.

MICHAEL

What made you think of this?

ALI

I pushed the door shut. Somehow the kitten got caught there, I crushed it with the door.

MICHAEL

You killed it? You killed the animal?

ALI

(crying)

Yes. I ..

MICHAEL

Those thoughts aren't you.

ALI

But I did kill it.

MICHAEL

These thoughts aren't real.

ALI

But they are.

MICHAEL

That wasn't you.

ALI

But it was.

MICHAEL

No. Tell me how you are feeling.

ALI

I can't.

MICHAEL

How are you feeling?

ALI

I'm ok.

MICHAEL

Why can't you tell me?

ALI

I can't.. I'm feeling off.

Interior Clinic / doctor's office

Ali is in a psych ward. She is being interviewed. She is a catatonic schizophrenic. The doctor remains unseen, out of frame.

IV
How are you feeling?

ALI
Well..

IV
How long have you been here?

ALI
Three months, since May eighteenth.

IV
And what brought you here?

ALI
That's difficult to answer.

IV
Could you give me some idea?

ALI
I can't.

IV
Whose idea was it that you come here?

ALI
My psychiatrist.

IV
What happened that ended up with your being here in the hospital?

ALI
My psychiatrist decided that this was the situation for me.

IV
Have you any idea why?

ALI
Yes.

IV
And what is that?

ALI
I am not completely like other people.

IV
What do you mean by that?

ALI
People dislike me because I am not completely like them.

IV
In what ways are you not like other people?

ALI
I play the piano.

IV
Other people play the piano.

ALI
I play the piano for other people. In ways different from how other people play the piano.

IV
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ALI
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IV
People dislike you because of the way you sit at the piano?

ALI
Yes.

IV
How do you stand when you are away from the piano?

IV
Does it feel any different to you, to the way other people stand?

ALI
Yes, it feels different.

IV
In what way?

ALI
This is becoming too involved to describe.

IV
Can you describe how other people stand?

ALI
They stand...

(she becomes stressed and anxious as she tries to formulate answers.)

IV
Can you describe how other people sit?

ALI
When I sit at the piano I can't get my back straight.

IV
Your back is straight now.

ALI
Yes.

IV
So why can't you straighten your back, when sitting at the piano?

ALI
When I sit at the piano, I can't get my back straight, it is bent. And something is stuck in my throat. It's stuck...

END

**Appendix 5**

*The Cat is Black, Jack!*

Philip is a drunk. He is violent and haunted by his bad decisions and actions. The weight and burden of one's imperfect actions is the theme of this film.

SCENE 1 exterior (CLUNES)

A man sits by the side of the road. Drunk and looking. What does he see? His name is Philip. He gets up and goes for a walk.

He is trying to fix something with a Philips head screw driver. What is it? It's a wooden box. He wants to strap it to his back. It's like a piece of furniture.

Cut to:

SCENE 2 Interior DARKENED ROOM

Phillip's head. It starts spinning. 360 degrees.

SCENE 3 Interior SUBURBAN HOUSE

He walks around the house. Searching. He is alone in the house. He lies down to go to sleep.

SCENE 4 Interior STRIP CLUB

A stripper dances. She leans in close to Phillip, and whispers something into his ear.

STRIPPER

Why isn't it you?

The stripper dances some more. She leans in again and whispers in his ear.

STRIPPER

What time is it?

SCENE 5 exterior TRAIL

Phillip is hiking in the woods. The wooden box still strapped to his back. He is lugging the wooden box up a long and steep hill.

SCENE 6 Interior DARKENED ROOM

Phillip watches a giant screen. He watches himself hiking. He watches the stripper. He leans in to touch the screen. On the screen is a suburban house. He steps back from the screen. A version of himself walks out of the house.

SCENE 7 Exterior SUBURBAN HOUSE (DAY)

Phillip walks out of the house. He walks down the road and out of view.

SCENE 8 Exterior (CLUNES)

Phillip is walking along a country road. He comes to a spot where he decides to lay down and sleep.

<div align="center">END</div>

**Appendix 6**

Visual Synopsis: *Tonight, You Belong to Me*

Exterior PINE FOREST NIGHT

A girl walks through a forest. It is dark, the middle of the night. She walks toward a light in the distance. As if in a dream she is stuck. The light never gets closer no matter how hard she tries to reach it. She is slowed down, she becomes static, frozen in motion. She finds herself disorientated. Lightning strikes the forest. The moonlight peers through the tree tops. The details of the forest become exaggerated. The bark crackles, the wind is loud and stirs the trees and the leaves underfoot. A mist descends.

A ritual takes place in which an evil presence is felt in the form of the forces of nature; lightning and wind. The girl seeks a purging of her former self and the invocation of a new self in which she will be able to wield power as per the myth of the three mothers.

She sees a screen. On the screen she is dancing for a man; the man is Philip. (previously shot footage)

She watches on as she dances and whispers into the man's ear. She watches, stuck, still in the forest. The light torments her. The noise of the forest recedes. She has disappeared; swallowed up by the forces unleashed in the processes of the ritual. Her previous self, the dancer, has gone.

<div align="center">END</div>

I know (I know)

You belong to somebody new

But tonight you belong to me

Although (Although) we're apart

You're a part of my heart

And tonight you belong to me

Wait down by the stream

How sweet it will seem

Once more just to dream

In the moonlight

My honey I know (I know)

With the dawn that you will be gone

But tonight you belong to me

Wait down, wait down along the stream

How very, very sweet it will seem

Once more just to dream

In the silvery moonlight

My honey I know (I know)

With the dawn that you will be gone

But tonight you belong to me

Just to little old me

**Appendix 7**

Visual Synopsis: *Tonight, You Belong to Me* (domestic setting and animation)

Interior KITCHEN NIGHT

Music accompaniment: This Magic Moment (Jay and the Americans; 1968)

A woman sits at the kitchen table. She smokes a cigarette, and drinks coffee. Behind her is a window. She sits, observing the time passing as she looks at her watch. After finishing the cigarette, she knocks the coffee mug to the floor. It smashes.

Cut to close-up: Stop animation

The pieces of the coffee mug all start moving around independently. They move across the floor and disappear underneath a cabinet.

The woman looks into the window. A shape grabs her attention. That shape engulfs the screen; lightning, strobe light affects and a generally chaotic atmosphere takes over the scene.

This marks the end of *Tonight, You Belong to Me*, and the beginning of *The Night Side of Nature*.

END

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