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## The Ghost in the Cinema Machine

**Abstract:** The main purpose of this paper is to overview the differences between various embodied experiences we, as users, can have when interacting with contemporary visual media. By using the concept of *modes of imagination*, the author is approaching the problem of media specificity from another perspective. Using the four different “Ghost in the Shell” narratives as a coherent case study, the paper discusses the different *modalities* in which the most important categories of contemporary visual forms of representation (cinema, animated cartoons, graphic novels and video games) create immersive practice. The assumption is that “cinematic mode” or the “gaming mode” have their own ghost-like “modality”, as they bringing the user/ reader/ viewer inside their imaginative world differently. The discussion about modes and modalities is not rejecting the semiotic modes theories, it rather proposes a change of view. Starting with the philosophical intuition of Jacques Derrida, who claimed that what we imagine is never the image that we see, by the fusion of the two fundamental dimensions of any illusion, this author takes into consideration the deep separation between image and imagination. Using the insightful method of “hauntology”, the author overviews the most important theories about media specificity and proposes the use of *cinematic modalities* as experienced by the users of film as fictional world.

**Keywords:** cinema, anime, *Ghost in the Shell*, media specificity, mode and modality, immersion.

*“Just when I thought I was out...  
they pull me back in.”*

Michael Corleone from *The Godfather* (1990)

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Our media machines are mechanisms inhabited by ghosts, as we are living in a phantasmagoria of specters, wandering in a visual world dominated by the logic of haunting images, in an imaginary controlled by the technologies of spectrality. This ghost-like social and emotional mode of experiencing reality, our emotions and relationships has become a dominant modality during modernity and

continued to be developed by the new media. This was achieved through the expansion of visual devices like magic lanterns and trick photography machines and the age of mechanical production of specters, as thoroughly documented by Lynda Nead (2007), can be described as a cultural predisposition for the “animation of the inert” (Nead 53).

The main premise of this paper is based on this presumption, that there is a spectral dimension of all our modern communication devices, which sets them apart from the “old” modes of expression (like painting and literature). This has generated a different *mode of imagining things*, leading to an embodied experience within the visual world that was not part of human knowledge before modernity. This **phantomatic imagination** is a by-product of storytelling practices founded on creating convincing representations of illusory realities. As Lynda Nead argues convincingly, the nature of our image making practices remains dominated by “Pygmalionism” (60), characterized by a fascination for animating representations, which we then believe to be real and integrate into our imagination as if part of our actual experiences. In its negative form they lead to what Spinoza called *imaginatio deliria*, an irrational excess of superstitions and troublesome projections.

One possible approach, when trying to understand the process of putting life into something lifeless, is to deal with the themes and motifs of spectrality. Since ghosts are one of the most widespread tropes in contemporary works of fiction, and they are everywhere in cinema and other visual arts, this takes us to the conclusion that movies are spectral forms of artistic expression. From the very beginning the early viewers considered films an eerie art, the classical observations of Maxim Gorky, who described cinema in 1896 as a “soundless specter”, a “movement of shadows” (Gorky quoted in Leyda 408), remain extremely relevant. Cinema is an “art of phantoms”, yet, as pointed out by Murray Leeder, this is not necessarily done by simply representing phantoms or scary ghosts. In order to be “ghostly and haunted”, films are operating with “phantoms of imagination” (Leeder 3) and our interpretations must take into consideration a spectrality that goes beyond the “cinematic ghosts”. Populated by phantasms and immaterial specters, the phantasy of modern cinema goes is morphed into its own spectrality.

Another important element, pointed out by many film critics, is the “demonic” dimension of our modern media due to its ghost-like technological mechanisms. Lotte Eisner, in the study on the influences of Expressionism in early cinema (2009) has indicated the predisposition for magic and almost mystical experiences of early cinema (9), manifested later in a visible way through the fascination of the moviemaking industry and film audiences worldwide for ghosts and spectral beings. As Linda Badley also argued (40), it was the spectral photography shows and the smoke-and-mirror machines that lead to the creation of cinema, and this art form still functions today as a “phantasmagoria” of ghosts and specters.

While the thematic and technological explanations are very insightful, my own line of questionings here focuses on the nature of the cinematic experience and not the content itself or the media specificity of the camera. Although taking into consideration the connections between all the related arts of animating inanimate objects, all stimulating our imagination by means of spectral images, the experiences we have as users is different when reading cartoons or comic books, watching cinema, animations and when involved in video games.

The idea of a ghost in the cinematic machine, already used with a similar signification by Michael Atkinson when discussing the “dark heart” of cinema (1999), describes the moviegoer experience and not the presence of the auteur or the inherent values of the medium. And, while Atkinson suggests that there is a “dark” dimension of cinema, which creates a common subconscious of the viewer existing as ghost in the movie machine, my definition of the ghostly features of this visual machine are founded on neuropsychological and philosophical propositions.

### **Cinema as *hauntological* experience**

Firstly, the problematic nature of the **spectral modality** of image making processes needs to be approached from a philosophical perspective. My own assumptions are here based on the suggestions from Jacques Derrida’s seminal work *Specters of Marx* (10), where the French philosopher elaborated the term “hauntology”. This proposed methodology was devised because of the inseparable nature of two fundamental dimensions of any illusion (conceptual, ideological or simply image based). Derrida insightfully argued that what we imagine is never the image that we see (125), and we can take this penetrating understanding further, since we can describe a profound spectrality in the cinematic. In any movies there is an unbreakable division between images (as physical manifestations) and imagination (as mental activity), which opens to provocative conclusions. Thus, when watching a film, or for that matter whenever we “consume” any animated and moving images we are in fact experiencing a presence that is not present. This embodied immersion in which our bodies are attracted is a form of connectedness without corporeality, and, as Derrida commented, we are subjected to an “apparition of the inapparent” (156).

All images that are put in front of us are, as indicated by Derrida, mere specters due to the fact that, while they appear to be present, they simultaneously are refusing to disclose their real nature. And, although the philosopher was discussing mainly the ideological meaning formations, these *mechanisms of spectrality* remain intact when dealing with other expressions of human creativity. Without elaborating further on the “laws of incorporation” used by Derrida to present his framework, his *dialectics of spectralization* can be used extensively, as it proves to be extremely useful in understanding how other social and cultural representations go through a similar process.

We must underline that the spectral and ghost-like manifestations of the cinematic must be linked to the ambiguous manifestation of “on screen” projections. What we

experience while watching a movie is a fused occurrence, where the particular images and the specific imagined realities are inextricably connected. Thus, in order to be able to “speak to the specter” from the movies or to “speak about the ghosts” in the cinema machine, we need to proceed to a separation between these dimensions existing in any representation mechanism. In the following arguments, this philosophical distinction will be practiced as interpretative tool to analyze cinema, cartoons or games, treated as arts based on a dialectics of specters.

The assertion in the ensuing analysis would be that there are major differences between cinema and the other related arts which come from the “spectral mode” in which each type of media illusion is experienced. To briefly put it, the differences between the cinematic and the video games experience are emerging from their particular relationship between images and the imaginary, between the apparitions (the spectral experience with the image) and the phantasmic experience that takes place in the mind.

It must be stated that many authors consider that this “phantomatic” function is ancient and shared by all arts of representation. Mark Pizzato (2006) overviewed the long fascination of humanity for the “theaters of ghosts” and concluded that there is an almost evolutionary predisposition of humans for spectral projections. Due to a specific mechanics of our brains, which Pizzato identifies as the “theater in the brain”, it becomes a transformative power of the human mind to change reality. The mind, functioning both as stage and screen (101-102), allows us to have an experience of the world that gives us the ability to make sense of the world. This takes Pizzato to the conclusion that the experiences we have in the movie theater or in front of a TV set, and also those that are made possible by computer generated realities, are based on the same ability of the human brain to project ghost-like experiences. Using Ramachandran’s neurological conceptualizations about the zombies and the ghosts in the brain, the author equals film viewing and virtual reality, considering that all forms of participation offer the same “godlike sense” for the user, a hallucinatory pleasure that is similar no matter the medium that intermediates the experience. While the scientific proofs for such theorizing about the “phantoms in our brains” are still to be supported by data, Pizzato will go further in another book and expands his “neurotheatrical” theory, finding evidence of paleocinematic experiences in the Paleolithic caves. The author even argues that we are “theatrical animals”, driven by the ability to “stage” things in our minds (Pizzato 2016 4-5).

Such depictions of experiencing art forms are important, as the perspective put forward by Pizzato takes us close to similar philosophical speculations, such as those of Slavoj Žižek and other cultural critics, who unify all postmodern representation forms (from cinema to cyber-narratives) in a single cultural experience, founded on a disembodied separation of the “postmodern ghost of Self” (Pizzato 2006 7). However appealing these theories are, as is the case with the Žižekian speculations on the nature of the spectral dimensions of postmodernity, they remain too generic.

It must be argued why I differ from Pizzato and the conclusions of these approaches, as my point of view in the following is based on another hypothesis. The main contention is that the “modes” of the brain, the way our mind is organizing various media and representational experiences are radically different. The existence of a singular, “scene modality” or of a “screen mode”, is not acceptable. The best and simplest example in this matter is given by the disputable conclusion, which would make reading a written page and a painterly work of art similar “modalities”. They are hardly similar, and the suggestion that they are “staged” events in our mind needs to be refuted. And, while all creators of art forms might share a similar “power”, since the “cultural creatives” of all ages had the ability to project images and ideas into our brains, the way in which they do so differs. Often the effects are almost identical, but the modality in which our mind operates with every artistic tool is never the same.

Another opposing set of explanations come from neuroscience researches. One of the most controversial arguments was proposed by Warren Neidich, who suggested a reversed neural justification for the process. Neidich claimed that there is a “cinematic brain” which is in fact developing in modern times, manifested as a result of the dynamic changes in our own cultural experiences. Based on the principle of neuroplasticity, this theory went on and affirmed that our brains are changing in order to adapt to the new visual technologies we are using. By experiencing cinema and other cinematic media, our brain becomes cinematic itself (Neidich 2003).

All these observations and arguments take us back to a major and most ancient dispute, one which provided some of the oldest controversies in art theory and aesthetic philosophies. Its assumptions are flawed almost all theorizing about visual culture today. The contrasting ideas can be split in two dominant views – one which supports the idea of *a single mechanism of imagination* and one that claims a type of *media specificity* which unifies the experiences of a single medium. The first group of such theories argues that art, literature and all our contemporary media outlets are part of a single evolutionary imagination mechanism. Yet, even if there is a common emotional empathy, and while cinema, cartoons or comics share similar traits among each other and with the traditional arts of representation, they are clearly dissimilar in their *modes of immersion*. These fundamental differences would be the object of this interpretation. As it was put forward by the hypothesis announced previously, the objective here is to discuss how the major **modalities** of image representation of our visual media today are comparable, yet heterogenous in their imagination **modes**.

By using the “Ghost in the Shell” narratives as a relevant and coherent case study, as they provide various examples from the most important categories of contemporary visual forms of representation (cinema, animated cartoons, graphic novels and video games), the following discussion will focus on how each of these “modalities” generate particular “modes”, which that makes them incompatible with the other immersive practices. The premise here is that each “modality” (cinematic, cartoonish or

ludic/ gaming) has its own ghost-like “mode” of bringing the user inside its imaginative world. An ensuing discussion about the definitions of modes and modalities will be compulsory, in order to coherently deal with such complex environments, especially since representations are inevitably displaying *intermedial* traits.

This is the point where the *dialectics of spectrality* proves extremely useful, as when discussing any immersion strategy or practice we must separate between the two major dimensions already announced: the image based representations and the imagination formations. As noted before, these two manifestations do not exist separately. Neither imaginary use of images, nor any imagination can be developed without images and no image can function without imaginative efforts and results. However, this is where the distinctions are necessary, since the degree of their realization is different and the way in which our brain “ghosts” these experiences is never the same.

Traditional theories of representations separated either the specific modes of image based empathic relations – this is the case of paintings and drawings, and most of the photography based technologies – and the various imagination modalities – in which case some are active, as is literature, and other who use vicarious and pre-existing mental schemes in order to function, as is abstract painting. Resuming these theories, the main question here is if there is a *ghost in the cinema machine*, that is if the *spectral mechanism* used in the cinematic image and imagination functions differently from other art forms? While this interrogation has the same objective as those studies asking what is the “essence of cinema” or those discussing the “cinematic effect”, the foundation of my questioning is the fundamental debate about image modalities and imagination modes. Is the cinematic a different mode, does it have a separate modality, does it represent reality within a distinct imagination, since it clearly uses different images as compared with gaming or animation?

### Imaginary, imagination modes and image modalities

The conceptual distinctions between **modes of imagination** and **modalities of image formation** are relevant for this approach, as it starts by changing the terminology. My perspective takes into consideration the possibility that there are different **modes of imagination** (mental images, dreams, phantasies), which are not to be identified with the **functional modes** of each the medium (cinema, literature, painting). Thus “self” of the reader/ gamer/ spectator, the ghost which takes its place into the art object cannot be similar. In order to better understand how we experience differently cinema from all the other types of meaning making arts, the easiest example is provided by the notable unlikeliness of literary imagination and the imaginaries constructed by the new visual media today. Comparing gaming with literature, we observe that there are two basic pathways in which we operate with images and we generate imaginative world. The first is the relationship that we develop with the fictional worlds (including characters and narratives), which can be called mode of imagination (cinematic or video gaming). The second is the relationship we have with the

media itself, that is with the cinematic images or the representations in the game (the modality of each medium).

Again, here the dominant interpretative paradigm follows the transmedial perspective and considers that all forms of “life-like” experiences (either literary, painterly, cinematic or ludic) are based on a similar mode of imaginative connection. Many authors claimed that all media are providing a transgeneric type of cognitive encounter. Authors like Wolf and his colleagues described a common “illusionist immersion”, using a conceptual organization which brings together all genres that operate with fictional projections (Wolf, Bernhart and Mahler 2013), suggesting that there is an **aesthetic mode** which is similar to all media. While literature and drama could be based on an inherently similar “aesthetic illusion” (4), when these theoretical interpretations include new media into this paradigm things get extremely confusing. Dealing with all aesthetic illusions as if identical makes the gaming experience, for instance, similar with the reading immersion. Nevertheless, if the participation in a game is of course a “make-believe”, or if we are emotionally moved by the artistic experience of the graphics in a ludic environment, the idea of an universal “aesthetic predisposition” does not allow us to see how the forms of participation are immersive at a different degree.

Another useful concept is **modality**, defined by Leeuwen (1999) as the “abstract-sensory” manifestation of a medium. These theories of semiotic modality, although extremely functional, lead to a terminological unclarity. Leeuwen, for example, interprets the “modality of sound” in a similar way with the “visual modality”. As described by Leeuwen in another work (Leeuwen 2008 165), modality is a term which was borrowed from linguistics and the philosophies of language and was exported into social semiotics. These theories describe several “modes”, from Forceville’s traditional “modes of communication” (written, spoken, visual), and the semiotic modes of authors like Kress and Leeuwen (speech, writing, gestures), to innumerable modes of representation or the various stylistic modes, to modes of thinking and modes of mind (as described by Margaret Donaldson).

The most problematic nature of modes and modality comes from the polymorphous nature of the terms. When dealing with writing (as typography), speaking (as verbal utterances), or photographic representations, we can ascribe writing a specific “mode”, with “fonts” as the “modality” of the written text. Yet when we expand this formal conceptual distinction to images (by describing realistic and abstract “modalities”) these semiotic tools are no longer as useful as when analyzing the “visual design” of advertising. The interpretative solution provided by the already “classical” work of Kress and Leeuwen defines the “modes” as simply semiotic concepts, which is removing them from the specific modality of the media in which they are produced (Kress and Leeuwen 2001 22). This offers the choice of concentrating the analysis on the social and cultural discourses and makes modality a product of a dialectic tension between representation and social interaction, which allows interpreting our so-

cial agreement about what is possible in terms of representations. Later Kress and Leeuwen proposed a “multimodal” theory, one that explained the amalgamated nature of communication, since meaning is never mono-modal.

Nevertheless, if we define “modes” in this functional manner, all forms of communication are multimodal from the very beginning. There is no instance in which human communication would happen as a mono-modal way, even the most basic interactions are visual (clothes, displays of status), verbal (words and interjections) and even textual (names, identification tags).

Modes and modality, defined according with their functions, which derive from social practices, offer the possibility of practical interpretation. Nevertheless, many difficulties appear when claiming that we operate with a single **visual modality**, defined by Kress and Leeuwen as compositional. Using cues like depth, color and light, a direct consequence is that cartoons, for example, appear to have a “modality” (derived from their functional elements) which makes them more conceptual. On the other hand news photography has a different “modality”, by consequence of its objective realization of reality.

Yet modalities of the images are not media specific. As indicated by Elleström, text or image is not a mode, nor a modality (16), and the theoretician of intermediality found a way around this problematic nature of the medium of production, using the concept of “modality of media”. Elleström identifies 4 modalities (material, sensorial, semiotic and spatiotemporal) and suggests that these categorial structures make sense of the Kress and Leuwen (2001) concession about the material modes and the sensorial modalities that are somewhat mixed (28). The settlement of the dispute, for example, is given by the fact that the sensorial modality can be expressed in different “modes of modality” (either seeing, hearing or feeling).

While accepting the useful methodological dimension of the analyzing image modality (or visual modality), another concept needs to be advanced, that of **imaginary modality**. Before defining how the mode of imagination operates, another major conceptual confusion must be dealt with. In the theoretical discussions about contemporary representation modes a major misunderstanding comes from the different notions used and attributed when approaching the two “spectral” components representational illusions.

Image and imagination, which are often treated as amalgamated manifestations, are unified in another manifestation, the “Imaginary”. One of the earliest, and most enduring, definitions is found in the classical theory of Jung. The psychoanalyst elaborated a seductive theory, which suggests the existence of a “collective psyche”. This has led to the development of an entire field of research, dealing with the manifestations of this “collective imaginary”, which is just a revised concept used for this impalpable and controversial proposition. The possibility that humanity shares an “Imaginary” throughout centuries, manifested in various art forms is presented as a reality.



Some authors, such as Lucian Boia who wrote an entire “history of the imaginary” (in French “l’imaginaire”) identify in every field of human creativity the expression of a coherent “imaginary”. Supposedly there are political imaginaries, historical imaginaries, ethical imaginaries and, most importantly for this discussion, mythological imaginaries (Boia 2000). In fact “the imaginary” is everywhere and every “product of the spirit” can be described as part of this *Imaginary*, broadly defined as a particular vision of the world (Boia 14). Thus Boia, following a long line of intellectual efforts, notably of many French philosophers and representatives of various psychoanalytic schools, claims that this ineffable manifestation is presumably providing access to the “depths of human spirit” (7).

This unsubstantiated speculation has no scientific basis, it is an intellectual exploration and its conceptual problematic nature is best illustrated by one of the most important French researchers in this field, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger. Wunenburger, a distinguished specialist in the study of “imaginaries” makes a terminological separation between two levels of image formations – the image, which is used for practical purposes, and the imaginary (*l’Imaginaire*), which is beyond the pragmatic, a result of the imagination (Wunenburger 2003). The “imaginary”, which is a cultural construct, includes wholesale all the productions of the image and all those of visual artifacts that have an impact on human imagination. In his works on “the Imaginary”, Wunenburger’s basic assumption is that both the literary productions of images and the visual culture today belong to a single experience.

It is not the purpose of this paper to go deeper into this long debate about the roots of artistic imagination and cultural imaginaries, yet it must be underlined that, when using these terms many authors are following the definitions and distinctions proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre. For the existentialist philosopher, the relationship between the “external images” and the projections into our consciousness (“mental images”) can be explained by a correlation which results into the “Imaginary” (Sartre 2004 [1948]). In philosophical terms this correlation, described in *L’imaginaire* as going beyond the material images and the immaterial projections, as a phenomenological manifestation, in fact supports the argument that there is a coherent structure of the imaginary that transcends all arts and specific images.

This is undeniably, a suggestive and attractive speculation. On one hand these definitions are dysfunctional in English, since there is no terminological separation between “imaginary” and “imagination”, and are leading to a highly dysfunctional conceptualization. Some of the best examples are found in the above mentioned “history of the imaginary”, which describes a common “totalitarian imaginary”, one that includes Mao, Hitler and Stalin in a single “archetypal” interpretation, which is clearly an oversimplification.

Before moving forward with such an attempt to find the invisible dimension of the cinematic and other representation forms, we need to debunk some of these conceptual stereotypes. In fact this effort is following the myth debunking work of Gilbert Ryle,

who denounced the “ghost in the machine” dogma in his remarkable 1949 book. Ryle criticizes two of the most important “myths” proposed by Descartes, who claimed that the human body is inhabited by the reasoned mind as if by a ghost and that the mind functions in a mechanical way. The arguments, and the later influence of Descartes, based on the presumption that the human reason functions as a “god in the machine” are presuppositions that lead to some absurd consequences. The first is that humans and their brains are functioning like machines. The second is that “seeing with the mind eyes” is somehow separating the imaginary from the real images we see.

The arguments of Ryle are extremely important when discussing the “ghost in the cinematic machine”, another formula (or dogma) that needs to be criticized. As in the case of our mind, it is not about what cinema does or how cinema does it, it is about what we are doing with the cinematic experience. And, more importantly, the cinematic is not the same with the cinema, just as the mind is not the brain, and neither is the cinema apparatus identical with the emotions of the viewers. Just as Ryle pointed out the absurdity of traditional Cartesian mind-body dualism, we need to expound the separation of the “shadow-world” on the screen and what we do with the images we see.

### **If the brain is a screen, who is the ghost watching the movie?**

When asking **what is cinematic in the cinema** there are two major theories: the apparatus theory (the mechanical or the dispositif), and the medium specific aesthetic theories (the montage theory or the compositional).

The first “cinematic modality” is based on the idea that the brain and the cinema function similarly. The most popular version is that our minds work as a screen, a popular suggestion that Gilles Deleuze has put forwards in the general discussions about the essence of cinema. This French philosopher considered that, since cinema is activating images and puts them into motion (in Flaxman 366), it must be understood as different from the linguistic projections or the psychoanalytic, dream-like, manifestations. And, while Deleuze was properly reading cinematic images as different from other arts of representation, he also supported the presumption that cinema is a result of a technological monstrosity that makes the vision machine more important than our physiology.

Another important answer to the question about the **cinematic in the cinema** is identifying its inner qualities that separate it from the point of view of its production modes. As noted by Bordwell, the “seventh art” developed its own “cinematic language” (35), one which is explicit in the classical cinema, its specificity identified in cinematography (the film grammar of the shots) or editing (various montage practices). A relevant author that needs to be mentioned is Tom Gunning, who elaborated the classical theory about the “cinema of attractions”. Overviewing the early film experiments with the possibility of bringing the viewers “inside” the representational world of movies, Gunning found the specificity of cinema in this “aesthetics of astonishment”.

Since reviewing all the discussions about the nature of the cinematic throughout the history of the craft and the multitude of theories about media specificity would be too large, a final contrasting interpretation is useful. Noël Carroll provided the most coherent critical discussion about media modes and particularly about cinema specificity models, exhaustively overviews the long tradition of theorizing *film specificity* (2). For this current argument it would suffice to point out that the two major approaches to *film essentialism* – the photographic theories (or the realists) and the purist theories (based on aesthetic qualities: montage, camera works) – are both rejected. Although Carroll is wholesale dismissing the concept of “cinematic” (instead using the disputable notion of “moving image”), this author gives us many important insights. Carroll refutes the theories of the “photographic essence” of cinema, upheld by authors like Andre Bazin or Roland Barthes, as being erroneous. When dealing with the “Bazinian” theorizing of cinema we should note that this thesis always remains founded on an error of judgment (Carroll 42), which couples the photographic nature of cinema with the photographic camera. This connection disappears once we deal with how motion is put into action in cinema, since the so called “photographic objectivity” vanishes once we realize that the cinema apparatus needs a subjective intervention. The visual field in cinema entails a type of staging that is no longer photographic, as the movie director cannot capture reality like the photographer does, mostly due to the video cameras and entire cinematic “dispositif” (sound, lights, cranes and so on). As Carroll compares painted pictures, photography and cinema, and concludes that the mode of cinematic representation is based on a fundamental visual experience that allows the spectator to “see through” (59), thus belonging to a transparent mode of “direct seeing”, which makes the motion pictures different.

Carroll describes cinema as an “alienated vision”, a “disembodied experience” that does not allow us to have a direct experience of the space, leading to a “detached display” (62-63). These observations need to be taken one step forward. When discussing the “ghost” in the cinematic machine we are not only addressing the immaterial dimensions of the aesthetics of this art. To simply put it, the “cinematic mode” refers to the connection between the mind of the spectator and the representations on the screen. Authors like Robert Sinnerbrink called this process “cinempathy”, that is a specific form of empathic connections allowed by films, an immersion that allows not only emotional experiences, but also ethical results (2009)

The question is how every given art form is stimulating the mind, the emotions and finally the imagination of the viewer. This must be linked to other concepts, like **immersion, implication, illusion and identification**. Without entering into the difficult discussions about the various media modes, we can describe “time based” immersion forms – since in literature the user time is longer, while in cinema it is time limited – and “space based” art forms – theater representations need to be in the presence of viewers.

Contemporary neurosciences approaches to cinema and other media provide a useful framework for discussing the ghost-like nature of cinema. Concepts like embodied experience or embodied cognition claim that, when somebody else thinks, feels and acts for you it induces a secondary state of consciousness, which makes the user a “ghost in the machine”.

### A multimodal case study – *Ghost in the Shell*

Accused of a mediocre performance, clogged with bad reviews that criticized the whitewashing of the main character and undermined by accusations against the “racist Hollywood”, the 2017 remake of the classical *Kôkaku kidôtai* (1996) seemed to be a failure. Nevertheless, when comparing the overall revenues of the franchise the original animation which was very influential (on films like *The Matrix*, *Blade Runner*, *Johnny Mnemonic*, or *Through a Glass Darkly*) barely made 443 thousand USD, and the 2004 *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* received 1,04 million USD worldwide. Thus the so-called “failure” of the 2017 *Ghost in the Shell* is clearly an exaggeration, as the movie directed by Rupert Sanders made over 167 million USD worldwide, with 24 million USD only during the first week.

As it is not the purpose of this analysis to discuss the marketing issues of the franchise, but rather to problematize how cinema is “ghost-hacking” its viewers and what happens to the audience when connecting or disconnecting with the universe presented by movies, the first relevant element is the metaphor used by “The Ghost in the Shell” and the “Puppet Master” that confronts the main character. With three critically acclaimed movies, two television series (one of which is currently airing on Cartoon Network) and two video games, the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise provides an excellent illustration for how the **spectral mode of cinema** works and gives us the opportunity to point out to the differences and resemblances of various **modes of imagination**. All these productions clarify by comparison what makes cinema compatible or incompatible with animations, video games, manga or cartoons. What is the nature of the “ghost” that lives in the cinematic apparatus if we compare it with the manifestations in the animated films and animated series, or the multiple video games?

The story began with the manga series designed by Masamune Shirow, which was released in Japan in 1991 with the title *Mobile Armored Riot Police: The Ghost in the Shell*. This was followed by *Ghost in the Shell 2: Man-Machine Interface*, a sequel work following the story of Motoko after merging with the Puppeteer. Then another volume, *Ghost in the Shell 1.5: Human-Error Processor*, contains four separate cases and the most recent *The Ghost in the Shell 1.5 Deluxe Edition* adds to the adventures set in Japan, in 2029, where Major Motoko Kusanagi, a cybernetic organism of the intelligence department “Section 9” fights crime in the future metropolis called Newport City. The first *Ghost in the Shell* manga actually begins with a text mode, where the immersive strategy is based on the ability of the writer to tell his readers about the transforma-

tion of the Earth into a “corporate network” which is “information-intensive”, where “cyberbrain technology” allows strange connections.

This first difference in the nature of “ghosting” of the various types of media becomes even more explicit when comparing the manga series with the animation, created in 1995 by Mamoru Oshii. This “adult animation”, considered by some important directors like James Cameron (quoted by Ruh 3) as visually compelling, offers a typical *mode of immersion* specific to animation. With a highly sexualized visuality (which in the 2017 movie is downsized), Mamoru Oshii’s version takes the Japanese manga (having their own cultural specificity) and opens it for a wider, global audience. Unlike the work of Shirow, drawn in the Japanese style, the animation creates a more flexible environment for a diverse audience. And, while the nature of film is based on reality (a mode of reality), the nature of animation is cartoonish (an animatic mode). The caricature-like dimensions are exaggerated in the anime, while the movie, even when making references to cartoonish scenes, are kept veridical. This internal predisposition of the visual immersion takes the spectator into different worlds - one possible (even if implausible and utterly fantastic), and the other completely disconnecting with the real.

In fact, as many scholarly research on animation (either as animated cartoons, or 3D animations) their success remains the same childish ability to bring the adult mind into the cartoonish mode. The enjoyment of animations is exaggeration and anthropomorphized characteristics, as this particular mode is also ancient, as it was used in fables. Just as for the reader/ listener of Aesopus the characters were believable even if they were never “real”, this modality is exported into animations. We do not need “realism” in order to create connections with the cartoons, just as in the children’s games a broomstick can become a horse, the representation of in animations are often based on conventions.

Then, if we compare the anime and the manga graphic novels with the *video gaming immersion mode*, it takes us to another type of “ghosting”. The video games while opening with cinematic scenes, apparently providing and intermedial interface to the users, place the cinematic extracts as simple introduction for each new “mission”. These animated insertions themselves, designed to generate relationship between the characters and to create atmosphere in any game, show that the engagement of the gamer and the immersion of the viewer use different pathways.

Again, while if the first game of the franchise, launched in 1997, was designed and illustrated by Masamune Shirow, the creator of the manga drawings, the important difference is not visual. While in the comic book the reader immerses in the complex neurally links of the world of Newport City by following the main character, the game was based on an simplistic engagement. In Mission 01 (“The Bay Area”), in an oversimplified map which still engages the player, the action links the user with the gaming world. Inserted in the neuro-motor reality of the spider-like tank robot (which in the manga is central, and in the anime not so much) the gamer gets to con-

front several enemies, shooting and searching for keys and devices, following the indications preset in the game.

This PlayStation 1 game shows how different media have various modalities, when it comes to the immersion of the user. By playing a role within the imagined universe, assuming “missions” and completing various “tasks”, the player is given the sensation that he has the power of “puppeteering”. Unlike cinema, the player is subjected to a double manipulation. He is himself driven by a “Puppeteer”, which is the creator of the framework in the game, who is not allowing him to make choices, and also a driver of the machines he controls. In the game the graphic interface, even if most simplistic, maintains a connection with the user, thus showing that its *image* mode does not affect its *imagination* function. Even the storytelling is reduced, as the elements of narrative immersion are reduced to introductions.

“How could individuals turn into data?” is a statement in the 2004 *Ghost in the Shell Stand Alone Complex*, which is using 3D animations as intros, then becomes an action based game. This game provides another example for how the “gaming ghosting” functions, since the player is now following directly the character, from the third person perspective, in a shooter-like environment. And, even if the Fuchikoma spider tank robot is still available (to provide the fans of the original PlayStation edition the possibility to connect with their beloved object), the new game makes Batou a “playable” character.

Here we encounter an essential difference between the cinematic and anime narratives. Apparently the 2017 movie and the 1996 anime are similar, and this would make the experience of the viewers comparatively, thus their modalities identical. Yet the solution chosen by Sanders indicates the major separation. In the anime the entity known as “The Puppeteer” – a being who controls the actions of various people by means of ghost-hacking – is a female ghost. In *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) the Puppet Master is Kuze, the childhood friend of Motoko, who is a male monstrous cybernetic being, making him the perfect Antagonist. The Puppeteer (Kugutsumawashi) in the animation is a more complex manifestation, ambiguously defined as a possible manifestation of the subconscious of Motoko. Clearly the coupling and decoupling of the viewer on and off from the main character is different in the cinematic version, where we have various scenes where the character of Mira/ Motoko is abandoned and the camera follows either the male character of Batou, or other secondary characters. This is not the case with the manga series, where Major Kusanagi, is the predominant figure. Batou is also a relevant example, because in the manga, then the anime and the games, he is used in a very different mode. In the second anime, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) he becomes the main character of the story, investigating a series “murders” of doll-like sex robots.

Also suggestive are the scenes which would appear to be identical in the 1995 anime and the 2017 movie, as the overall narratives are almost identical, some of the scenes and visual structures are even mimicking previously developed graphic el-

ements. One of such “mimetic” scenes, used with one for one images, is when the Major and Batou are sharing a private moment in the middle of the gulf of Newport City, or the final confrontation with the spider-tank. Here another difference with the game is important as the process of identification in cinema is ghost-like, unlike what takes place in virtual reality games, where the player becomes the character, easily inhabiting the provided “shell”, in the movie there is no fixed identification level.

Yet the differences in the nuances point to a modal divergence, as unlike in the animations, where the plot is built on many ambiguities, with the anime ending in an opened mode, differently from the movie, where Major Kusanagi does not become part of the “infinite and vast Net”, instead she continues her missions (leaving opened the possibility of continuing the movie).

Finally the fascination of the “Ghost in the Shell” stories relies in the depiction of the mental affect and responses to perception in the process of projection of our selves. As Kuze in the movie can “install” realities in the mind of those he controls in a similar way the **cinematic imaginary mode** is also allowing a form of haunting. Inserting in us images that are not our own, fantasies, memories and dreams that are not ours, we are trapped in the shadows-like experience within the movie theater.

This idea, already present in the plot in Shirow’s early manga, deals with the scary possibility of being “ghost hacked” – when a physical entity is inhabited (temporarily or permanently) by an immaterial drive (soul, energy, spirituality) – in the world of free connectivity. Just as in the case of the Puppeteer, a master mind that can alter memories and experiences, we are “culturally ghosted”. When consuming cultural artifacts we are subjected by the mechanics of spectrality. By receiving information (visual, aesthetic, narrative) and transforming that information into reactions (emotions, concepts, ideas) we act like virtual bodies, “absorbed” into altered states of conscience.

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