CINEMAGIC REALISM

by

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ABSTRACT

Even though magic realism is a prominent trend in international cinema today, it is a seriously understudied phenomenon. Cinematic magic realism, or, more simply, cinemagic realism, deserves closer examination not only because of the extent of its presence, but also because of its exemplary power to combine aesthetic sophistication with political critique. Unjustifiably, theoreticians of literary magic realism maintain that the mode simply crossed over to film. Even though literary magic realism has influenced cinemagic realism and the same worldview of multiple perspectives governs them both, cinemagic realism can claim its own sources of the narrative mode and has medium-specific differences from magic realism in fiction. This thesis explores these differences in order to arrive at a precise, medium-specific understanding of cinemagic realism, its dynamics and techniques. In studying magic realism as a cross-cultural and cross-medial phenomenon, I propose a general aesthetics of magic realism, namely trickster aesthetics. The same playfully transgressive imagination guides and energizes both trickster tales and magic realist works – namely the trickster consciousness. To help me expose the trickster spirit in action and illustrate cinemagic realism, I turn to
Emir Kusturica’s *Time of the Gypsies* (1989), Spike Jonze’s *Being John Malkovich* (1999), and Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* (1998). Like their geographies, the artistic sensibilities of these films differ considerably, through which they exemplify different types of magic realism. Invigorated by the disruptive energy of the trickster, the ethnographic magic realist *Time of the Gypsies* makes the world larger for the Gypsies by allowing its almost entirely Gypsy cast to represent the fascinatingly inventive Gypsy lifestyle, voice their obliterated historical and political perspective, and vindicate their cultural exuberance and magical envisioning of the world. Propelled by the urban socio-cultural concerns, the grotesquely fantastic *Being John Malkovich* pushes its subject, today’s America, through a magical tunnel to face its mirror image of a narcissistically obsessed nation and a culture existing in virtual reality. Finally, *Run Lola Run* foregrounds and crowns these films’ shared tendency to lean on their cinematic lineage as the source of their magic, and above all to jubilantly explore the magic of their medium.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate’s thesis. I recommend its publication.

Signed

Susan Linville
DEDICATION

To the ones who were the first to teach me – my mother, Mira Popović, for teaching me tenacity, my father, Momo Popović, for the gift of passion, my sister, Spomenka, for making me laugh, and my brother, Saša, for challenging me.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Even though magic realism is one of the most prominent trends in international cinema today, it is a seriously understudied phenomenon. Cinematic magic realism or, more simply, cinemagic realism deserves closer examination not only because of the extent of its presence, but also because through this mode film art has already reached cinematic achievements of the highest standard. So far, scholarly writing on filmic magic realism amounts to no more than a handful of articles, and those rarely attempt to sketch any kind of theoretical framework of filmic magic realism. Unjustifiably, theoreticians of literary magic realism maintain that the mode simply crossed over to film, and, thus, they fail to see that the difference in media inevitably leads to magic realism being practiced differently in film than in literature. Even though the influence of literary magic realism on cinemagic realism is undeniable and the same worldview of multiple perspectives governs them both, magic realism in film can claim its own sources of the narrative mode and is a different phenomenon from magic realism in fiction due to the peculiarities of its medium. The main purpose of this thesis is to explore that difference in order to arrive at a precise, medium-specific understanding of filmic magic realism, its dynamics and techniques.
In the second chapter, this study takes off by tracking the origin of the term and the concept of magic realism from the theory and criticism of pictorial art of early 20th-century Germany, through extensive literary practice and theory of Latin America, to the most recent theoretical formulations of United States scholars. Given that the critical discourse on magic realism in general has displayed a proclivity to vague formulations and ill-defined criteria, any unusual and otherworldly film has been branded as magic realist. Taking into account the particular nature of the medium, I attempt to identify and clarify examples of magic realism in film by leaning on the typological model of magic realism developed by William Spindler and on Amaryll Chanady's narratological criteria for determining whether a text can be characterized as magic realist or not. Chanady's and Spindler's theoretical formulations are the guidelines for proper identification of magic realist texts that, by allowing the co-existence and intersection of different types of magic realism, ensure unrestrictiveness towards a literary phenomenon whose very ability to slip away from straight definitions could be viewed as its strength. Though literary, these concepts can still serve as valuable instruments for the exploration of the barely-treaded territory of magic realism in film.

It is notable that the majority of magic realist films are adaptations of magic realist literary works, novels and short stories (a situation not unlike that of film in general, where major cinematic works, and a great number of them for that matter, are based on works of fiction). Therefore, it is only understandable that this study
leans on literary theoretical framework for examining the same narrative mode in cinema. Even though I build my present analysis on the theory of the literary magic realism, which was, arguably, the source for the filmic mode, nevertheless, I intentionally avoid selecting films that are based on works of fiction. Instead, I choose to look at films based on original screenplays infused with magic realism. Furthermore, I use few examples from Latin American magic realist cinema, which has been considered the paragon of magic realism, but which lives in a rather parasitic relationship with its literary counterpart, in order to stress the international dimension of magic realism.

Rejecting the common, and commonly flawed, observation that magic realism entered film by simply crossing over from literature, in the third chapter, I search through the rich history of film art to find sources of inspiration and influence on the magic realism in film apart from the literary ones. Cinematic magic realism has its own magical roots to ground it. Looking back at those roots, I examine the ways magic realism is uniquely practiced in film due to the peculiarities of its medium.

In studying magic realism as a cross-cultural and cross-medial phenomenon, in chapter three, I proceed to propose a general aesthetics of magic realism, namely trickster aesthetics. I have no intention of essentializing a new general theory of magic realism; such intention would only counter the protean character of this narrative mode. Rather, I expand on and revise existing theories in the hope of
enhancing and refining the critical discourse on magic realism. I call upon the trickster figure to help me illustrate, illuminate, and investigate the scope of the magic realist worldview. The same disruptive, playfully transgressive imagination guides and energizes trickster tales and magic realist works – the trickster consciousness. Granting that the trickster consciousness is the generative power behind it, magic realism always bears the signature of the trickster. Empowered by the trickster’s mischievous art of irreverently crossing boundaries, shifting shapes and allegiances, and subverting binaries, magic realism as such betrays its proximity and ties to the concepts of the postmodern, the postcolonial, the carnivalesque, and the cyborg. True to its equivocal trickster spirit, trickster aesthetics of magic realism exist at the intersection of these concepts, resembling each in part, yet remaining resistant to mere equation.

After sketching the aesthetics of the magic realist narrative mode and charting a tentative classification and identifying criteria, in the final chapter, I turn to three films to help me illustrate cinematic magic realism. Emir Kusturica’s *Time of the Gypsies*, Spike Jonze’s *Being John Malkovich*, and Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* are films coming from different geographical destinations, and as such support my view of magic realism as an international phenomenon. Not only do their geographies differ widely but also their artistic sensibilities, through which I identify and exemplify different types of magic realism. Invigorated by the disturbing energy of the trickster, these films of exquisite artistic merit lean on their
cinematic lineage as the source of their magic, and above anything else jubilantly explore the magic of their medium.

But before I can engage these films and examine the uniqueness of the cinematic magic realism, or cinemagic realism, I would like to propose a working definition of the narrative mode. Although I appreciate the mercurial nature of magic realism and would not like to obsess about containing it within an all-too-easily-manageable (and therefore illusory) definition, I deem a definition of this easily-taken-for-granted phenomenon necessary. My definition will assist in our understanding of the terms of discussion and serve as a point of departure, but it should be seen as an evolving delineation rather than a set prescription. In this spirit, I assert that magic realism is a narrative mode characterized by the non-conflictual co-existence and oftentimes fusion of the supernatural, extraordinary, unrealistic, and fantasy with the normal, quotidian, realistic, and factual, a mode that destabilizes and confuses the very fixed positionality of these categories and opposites. It serves to challenge and subvert the representation of the supposedly unified reality of the mimetic narrative order and the received wisdom that order promulgates, and, thus, suggests multiple worldviews, opens up spaces for possibilities, and makes the world larger.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Terms and Concepts

A term cursed with confusion and blessed with unsettled definitions and multiple interpretations, "magic realism" actually originates not in the world of literature, as some might suppose, but in the world of painting. The connection should not be all that surprising since magic realist writing is strongly oriented towards visualization and actualization of visions, dreams, and metaphors. (It is this characteristic which in turn will tie it to film.) German art critic Franz Roh was the first to use the term in 1925 to characterize a group of painters including George Schrimpf, George Grosz, Otto Dix, and Max Beckmann. As expressed in the title of his book, Nach-Expressionismus. Magischer Realismus: Probleme der neuesten Europäischen Malerei, Roh gave this pictorial style two names. While he called the stylistic practice post-expressionism only to indicate its relationship to the preceding style, he coined the term magic realism specifically for what he considered a new art. In addition, the new style was alternatively called New Objectivity after the Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition G. F. Hartlaub organized in Germany in 1925 (Wechsler 296). Roh praised the departure of the magic realist artists from Expressionism; that is, their return to real objects and abandonment of the
Expressionists’ preference for fantastic and remote ones. The critic explained that “[w]ith the word ‘magic,’ as opposed to ‘mystic,’ [he] wish[ed] to indicate that the mystery does not descend to the represented world, but rather hides and palpitates behind it” (16). For Roh, magic realists painted with new objectivity, with ultra sharp focus and in a distant and cold manner, all for the sake of producing a strange effect on the viewer and presenting ordinary objects, animate and inanimate, as if seen anew through a fresh pair of eyes.

Roh’s book was partly translated into Spanish and published first by José Ortega y Gasset in Madrid in the June 1927 issue of his influential Revista de Occidente. Through this widely circulated journal, the term Magischer Realismus crossed over to South and Central America. There, it was first applied to literature by a Venezuelan author Arturo Uslar Pietri in 1948. In his book, The Literature and Men of Venezuela (Letras y hombres de Venezuela), Uslar Pietri characterized the Venezuelan short story of the thirties and forties as magic realist. Even though Uslar Pietri did not tie the term directly back to Roh, María-Elena Angulo maintains that: “one can assume that he was familiar with the term. His definition of the new prose, where man is a mystery among realistic data (‘el hombre como misterio en medio de los datos realistas’) follows the pattern of Roh’s idea” (4). That same year, El Nacional published Alejo Carpentier’s article “On the Marvelous Real in America” ("De lo real maravilloso americano"). The same essay became the prologue of Carpentier’s novel The Kingdom of this World (El reino de este mundo), published
in Mexico in 1949. In the prologue, Carpentier explains how he conceptualized “lo real maravilloso,” the marvelous real, on his trip to Haiti, where he researched the historical period of the reign of Henri Christophe, the first black king in America (1807 – 1820). Carpentier concluded that not only Haitian but also all Latin American reality is inherently marvelous. The marvelous real is, for Carpentier, a uniquely Latin American experience, the experience of a continent heavily marked by miscegenation, cultural hybridity, and vibrant folkloric heritage of myths, superstitious beliefs and rituals, and rich oral tradition. Furthermore, the marvelous real is a category of geographical and historical order; the very exotic landscape is a source of wonder, as best evidenced in the writings of Spanish conquistadores who chronicled the conquest of Latin America. Alejo Carpentier specifically cites the writings of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a Spanish soldier who participated in the discovery and conquest of Mexico, and Hernán Cortés, who wrote to Charles V, the king of Spain, that there is no human language that can possibly describe the wonders of Mexico. Carpentier explains:

Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [mestizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real? (88)

Carpentier writes his novel, accordingly, with a thematic preoccupation and in a style that engages and reflects this marvelous real. Out of it, the marvelous real

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emerges as only a "natural" and appropriate narrative mode for Latin literature; a unique source of themes and inspiration, and a unique technique for a unique experience.

Both Uslar Pietri and Carpentier, like so many Latin American intellectuals of the time, spent years in Paris and were part of the Surrealist movement. In fact, Carpentier developed his concept of the marvelous real in reaction to Surrealism. He wanted to break away from "le marveilleux" of the surrealists, which for the disillusioned Carpentier meant artificial creation of mystery and enchantment of the West jaded by rationalism and scientific positivism. Describing the surrealist marvelous as mechanically produced by minds unable to escape the rationalistic art formulae of their culture, Carpentier declares: "The result of willing the marvelous or any other trance is that the dream technicians become bureaucrats" (85). That is why he posited the American marvelous real, an effect and a technique indigenous to Latin America, magical of itself, traditional and always readily available. Not only did Carpentier want to distinguish this category from Surrealism by repossessing and, to use Amaryll Chanady's word, territorializing it with the adjective American, but he used the word marvelous to distinguish his concept from Roh's magic realism, by then a widely-known term. He directly addressed Roh's views in a 1975 essay "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real" ("Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso"). In it, Roh's uncovering of a new art was denied any validity; magic realist paintings were simply Expressionist paintings, marked neither by magic nor
realism. Carpentier explains: "what [Roh] called magical realism, was simply painting where real forms are combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality" (102). Aside from the fact that those paintings did not conform to external reality, they were, in Carpentier's views, intentionally chosen by Roh as paintings devoid of concrete political agenda: Roh turned his head away from the harsh political reality of Germany at the end of World War I. Conversely, a concrete political agenda very much interested Carpentier. Not only did he want to disassociate his own work and Latin American literature from European trends, but he also wanted to uncover a unique Latin American literary voice, and above all help define a distinct Latin American cultural identity. "Carpentier's call to Latin American writers to look to the American continent as a source of inspiration rather than to Europe coincided with the peak moment of the definition of a Latin American identity . . ." (Angulo 5).  

Another former surrealist was also breaking away from Surrealism and moving toward ideas similar to Carpentier's in the 1940s. Miguel Ángel Asturias, a Guatemalan author, was looking at the way the magical beliefs and rituals of the Guatemalan Maya were shaping their reality, a mythology for which, however, he used the term magic realism. He was also the first to use the term for his own writing. After this point, the strict distinction between the terms marvelous real and magic realism on which Carpentier so insisted, seemed to have collapsed, and magic realism started to be used to encompass different concepts and started to be applied
indiscriminately across different media, literature, painting, and film. Even modern Latin American critics and scholars who are strong proponents of the Carpentierian monopoly of Latin American literature and culture on the magical and marvelous use the term magic realism and are no longer that interested in pursuing the distinction on the lexical level.⁹ Tommaso Scarano explains: “I tend to think that among the elements that make up the real maravilloso as defined by Carpentier are also those we generally call by the name realismo magico, which is a far richer, more complex mode of narration” (19).

From Uslar Pietri’s and Carpentier’s ideas, there seemed to have developed two parallel concepts. In her essay “The Origins and Development of Magic Realism in Latin American Fiction,” Amaryll Chanady explains that one, theorized by Uslar Pietri, is more phenomenological nature and a literary mode, and the other, Carpentier’s, is more ontological. She concludes:

> Carpentier’s concept, of course, has less ontological validity than is apparent, since reality itself cannot be marvellous, but is simply considered as such by an outsider. The main difference between the two concepts, therefore, is that the marvellous real is associated with a specific geographical and cultural reality, while magic realism as formulated by Uslar Pietri alludes to the depiction of reality in general as mysterious. (53)

According to Chanady, Uslar Pietri’s designation is more European, or at least contextualized as such, and subjective, while Carpentier’s is more Latin American and anthropological. The difference between these models was further complicated
by the critical writing and thinking that followed, and, as Scarano points out, they ended up being not so different after all. In 1954 Ángel Flores delivered a lecture “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” at an MLA meeting in New York, and swayed the discussions about magic realism more towards matters of narratology. Flores popularized the term magical realism, and while considering this literary mode an “authentic expression” of Latin America, he nevertheless situated Latin American fiction and the emergence of magic realism in it within the European literary context. (It is interesting that he never discusses or even mentions Carpentier’s views!) For Flores, the novelty of magic realism “consisted in the amalgamation of realism and fantasy,” where “the unreal happens as part of reality” (112). It is notable that Flores discusses magic realism both in literature and painting; for him, giants like Kafka and Proust are its foremost originators in literature, and in painting, Giorgio de Chirico. In Latin America, Flores sees Jorge Luis Borges, who was enormously influenced by Kafka, as the trend’s doyen and the spiritus movens of a group of writers who started employing it. Borges, himself, was treading the literary middle ground and identified his writing as influenced by both Latin American writers and Euro-Iberian such as Cervantes.

As a direct critique of Flores’s views, Luis Leal published his article “Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature” (“El realismo magico en la literatura hispanoamericana”) in 1967. It is Leal who posits Roh as the originator of the term magic realism, and he goes on to establish its historical trail through Uslar
Pietri to Carpentier and Asturias. For Leal, Borges and Kafka are writers of the fantastic. Leal directly follows Roh’s ideas when he postulates that in magic realism “the principle thing is not the creation of imaginary beings or worlds but the discovery of the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances” (122). Leal seemed to narrow the gap between Roh and Uslar Pietri’s ideas on the one hand and Carpentier’s on the other, when he claimed that magic realism is not an aesthetic movement but an attitude towards reality. Carpentier’s views seemed to have fully flourished in the ideas and writing of Gabriel García Márquez. It was in 1967 that his novel One Hundred Years of Solitude (Cien años de soledad), the seminal work of magic realism and at the same time one of the most influential works of the twentieth century, was published. Even though García Márquez said that he was more influenced by Faulkner than either Borges or Carpentier, this Nobel Prize winner claimed that everyday reality of his native Caribbean, which was the setting of his novel, was in itself magical and that his style was only appropriate for its inscription.

**Magic Realisms and Their Identifying Criteria**

In spite of their occasional conflation, two different strains of magic realism need to be acknowledged. Jeanne Delbaere calls them “two very different offshoots from the same stem” and identifies them as:
An intellectual one derived from Borges and the surrealists and a popular one derived from Márquez. In the former the magic generally arises from the confusion of the tangible world with purely verbal constructs similar to it but without their counterparts in the extra-textual reality: playful, metafictional and experimental it has much in common with the spirit of fabulation. The other trend, closer to the spirit of the marvellous, accommodates the supernatural, relies heavily on superstition and primitive faith and has its source in popular myths, legends, and folklore as well as in the oral tradition; despite the challenge it offers to traditional realism it continues to adhere in its form to the realistic conventions of fiction. (76)

More recent theoretical formulations seem to be more inclusive of different types of magic realist writing and less focused on establishing the primacy of one over the other. One such formulation, which this study relies on, is William Spindler's attempt at delineating a typology of magic realism. Spindler’s aim was to put forward a framework that will incorporate the different manifestations of Magic Realism into one single model, and in this way, help to clarify the present confusion by distinguishing between different types of Magic Realism, while maintaining the links and points of contact between them (75).  

His work is motivated by the facts that the same term has been used vaguely and arbitrarily for widely different concepts and literary works and that the two concepts of magic realism described above seem to be unnecessarily mutually exclusive. Instead, Spindler views them as two sides of the same coin and even proposes a third type of magic realism. He names the three types of magic realism
metaphysical, anthropological, and ontological. Spindler’s synthesizing tripartite model is not a rigid classification but rather a flexible outline of overlapping categories. Among others, García Márquez and his writing serve as Spindler’s example of how works of the same author can belong to different types of magic realism. One Hundred Years of Solitude is an anthropological magic realist novel, and Chronicle of a Death Foretold (Crónica de una muerte anunciada, 1981) is a rather metaphysical one. The same author’s works illustrate how a writer can employ different types of magic realism within one fictional work. In One Hundred Years of Solitude, generally branded as anthropological, García Márquez uses the literary device of defamiliarization, a characteristic of the metaphysical type, as in the opening scene of the novel when José Arcadio Buendía and his sons see ice for the first time; as well as the matter-of-fact representational technique of the supernatural tied to the ontological type, as in the case of Remedios the Beauty’s ascension to heaven together with the linen sheets she was trying to fold.

Spindler conceives of the three types of the magic realist writing through the three different meanings of the word “magic”; namely, the magic of a magician, occult magic, and the inexplicable. He explains that in metaphysical magic realism, “magic” is “taken in the sense of conjuring, producing surprising effects by the arrangements of natural objects by means of tricks, devices or optical illusion” (79). The author uses various literary tricks, primarily Verfremdung, to invoke a sense of estrangement of the reader from the otherwise recognizable reality depicted.
Through this literary device, ordinary objects and situations are skillfully veiled with strangeness and mystery so as to appear fantastic and otherworldly. This is the verbally constructed magic of the world where fiction delights in its conjuring abilities; here the magic is, says Chanady, "solely an individual artistic creation" ("The Origins and Development of Magic Realism" 53). This is the magic realism theorized by Luis Leal, who drew from Roh's ideas, and exemplified by the writings of Kafka and Borges. While this type of magic realism does not deal with the supernatural explicitly, the supernatural, Chanady explains, as "the product of an alien imagination, is juxtaposed with everyday reality in order to create a more complete picture of the world" (27).  

In an effort to elucidate and expand on Spindler's ideas, I would like to rename this type of magic realism as reflexive or metafictional. The preoccupations of Spindler's metaphysical magic realism are indeed most commonly of the metaphysical and universal nature, in the sense that this kind of writing typically fixates on the generalities, universalities of the human condition, and uncovers mystery and magic behind our taken-for-granted reality. Nonetheless, the magic realist works of this type primarily explore and draw attention to their fictionality, to the unique logic and power of the process of creation of a world of fiction. The relationship between the external world and fiction, the referentiality and the fictionality, the realistic and the fantastic of this kind of magic realist work may vary. Such works may show that the only magic in this world is in fact the magic of
fiction, the magic made possible by the enchanting, mesmerizing power of storytelling. Fiction may also reveal that our world is indeed fictional, and that our reality is a consensual construct. Furthermore, fiction here could validate the multiplicity of realities and the idiosyncrasies of individual experiences. In addition, as I pointed out earlier, fiction can be the litmus-like agent that helps reveal and indicate that our reality is indeed mystical, mysterious, and magical. In any case, this type of magic realist fiction is primarily reflecting on its potentials, and that is why I find the name metafictional more appropriate than metaphysical.

Within his category of metaphysical magic realism, Spindler also includes the literary cases of what Enrique Anderson Imbert, an influential Argentinian critic, called the preternatural, rather than supernatural, kind. This is the kind of magic realism which could alternatively be called phenomenological, because it takes up the phenomena that may exceed the limits of the normal and explicable but not of the natural, and because it portrays such phenomena but does not care to explain the same. Spindler mentions as examples a character of Borges who had the ability to remember everything and a protagonist of a novel by Patrick Süskind who had a monstrously developed sense of smell. Finally, Spindler numbers under this category works like Dino Buzzati’s novel Il deserto dei Tartari (1945), and he explains:

Like Kafka, Buzzati presents a world recognizable as within the boundaries of the real. Despite its superficial similarities with the world of the reader, however, the
latter cannot help finding it alien and disconcerting... A serene and melancholy atmosphere similar to that of De Chirico's paintings contributes to produce an effect of mystery which is achieved without resorting to the irruption of the supernatural in the narrative. Buzzati's novel, like Kafka's, opens in the reader's mind the suspicion of being confronted with an allegory of a metaphor of something which remains almost within grasp and yet, unknown. \(^{(13)}\) (80)

Spindler's second type of magic realism is anthropological, which corresponds to the occult meaning of the word "magic"; that is, to the art of sorcery, of producing certain effects and controlling events by manipulating natural and supernatural forces. This kind invokes the superstition, belief system, ritualistic tradition, and folklore of a certain community or ethnic group. The magical and mythical worldview of such a group or community, which is typically branded as "primitive," popular and collective, rural or provincial, co-exists in the work of art with the urban, modern and individualistic, industrially developed, and rationalistic. It is this type of magic realism that Carpentier theorized and proclaimed as uniquely Latin American. In contrast, Spindler, along with other prominent theoreticians of magic realism, \(^{(14)}\) correctly points out that magic realism is a phenomenon found in other parts of the world and that it is the voice of the post-colonial periphery, for which "collective myths acquire greater importance in the creation of the new national identities" \(^{(82)}\).

In this respect, this kind of magic realism should then be called eccentric and ethnographic. I do recognize here that I run the risk of impudently binding the
identity of the people portrayed in this kind of magic realist works and their authors yet again to the center, and exoticizing such narratives through the foregrounding of the colorfulness of ethnicity. However, I want to tease out the underlying subtleties of the category rather cumbersomely named by Spindler as anthropological. Obvious literary cases of ethnographic magic realism from Latin America include the writings of Asturias and Carlos Fuentes, which engage the vision of the world of the Maya or Aztec; García Márquez, whose works inscribe mestizo rural communities of the Caribbean; and Isabel Allende, who takes up the typical Latin American phenomenon of dictatorship in Chile. Beyond these, this type of magic realism which permeates literatures from all over the world can be found in Leslie Marmon Silko and her take on the Native American experience, or Chinua Achebe’s portrayal of the Nigerian Ibo.15

Through its reliance on the beliefs of the group represented and an insider’s point of view, ethnographic magic realist work realistically presents the magical and asks of its audience to accept it unproblematically. Even though the ethnographic magical could give in to the symbolical, the psychological, and sometimes the scientific interpretation, positivistic demystification becomes an intruding surgical instrument intent on hurting the body of the magic realist work. Discussing Toni Morrison’s Beloved (1987) in terms of such demystification and its potential malignant impact, Robert T. Kelly mentions Elizabeth B. House’s article “Toni Morrison’s Ghost: The Beloved Who is Not Beloved” and explains how
This piece argues extensively that Beloved could not possibly be a ghost, that there is no textual evidence to support this claim. The fact that this article tries too hard to disprove the fantastic elements of Morrison's fiction (normalizing her creative talent to a form more in keeping with traditional realist texts) is proof enough of the uphill battle authors must fight to produce hybrid realities. (182)

Here, the symbolic is literally embodied, and any refusal on the part of the reader to accept the magical as literal becomes a mirror reflecting that reader's ideological motivation, even if unconscious, behind the rejection of the magical. A dismissal of the ethnographic magical is therefore a dismissal of the other's worldview, and it may align the dismissive reader with the exclusivistic perspective of which the magic realist work is critical.

In its eccentric aspect, magic realism has a powerful potential to give a clear and vibrant voice not only to the formerly colonized but also to all those whose self-expression, self-realization, and distinct histories have been suppressed by cultural, economical, and political hegemonies. These include the displaced and the ethnically or racially mixed who suffer or are made to suffer from in-betweenness and cultural illocality (Emily Dickinson's coinage). Women's experience(s) and the concerns of womankind, as well as those of the members of the gay and lesbian communities find a robust expression in magic realism. It takes chimeral, fabulously monstrous magic realism to write the painful, necessitated, but nonetheless empowering ability these creatures developed to transform and reinvent themselves. Rather than a singular category, anthropological magic realism here
becomes a set of concentric circles of a fine array of magic realisms, circles revolving around the vindication and validation of marginalized, oppressed, suppressed, neglected, or forgotten perspectives. Morrison's novels, including *Beloved*, exemplify both ethnographic and chimera magic realism, as they weave the poignantly vibrant tapestry of the history and culture of the black community, whose centrepiece is the black woman's experience(s).

Beyond the ethnographic and the chimera, there seems to be another sort of magic realism within Spindler's anthropological that needs to be sketched. This is a magic realism depicting a social group like the ethnographic, but it is not necessarily marked by ethnicity. It is certainly monstrous in that it can deal with oppression, or can tackle the monstrous ways of a certain social mindset, but it is not necessarily led by gender or postcolonial concerns. This is a more general, rather sociological magic realism, which is best exemplified by Milan Kundera's writings about the repressions of the communist regime. Kundera's is the kind that most closely resembles social realism. The function of the magical in it, however, is ambiguous. It is in the service of social realism in such a way that it just facilitates depiction of a social reality which is so grotesque and outrageous that it verges on the unbelievable. Yet, fantastically, the magical simultaneously explodes social realism, the very genre which was the perpetuating mechanism of communist ideology.

While anthropological magic realisms rely on the cultural perspective of a particular group or community and strive to redeem their collective values and
render them at least as equal, if not superior, to the values of the dominant and
domineering culture, ontological magic realism, as Spindler explains his third type,
is magic realism in its “individual” form. The supernatural, here, is presented in a
matter-of-fact way and without any explanation, and the reader is simply asked to
accept it as it is.

There is no reference to the mythical imagination of the
pre-industrial communities. Instead, the total freedom and
creative possibilities of writing are exercised by the
author, who is not worried about convincing the reader.
The word “magic” here refers to inexplicable, prodigious
or fantastic occurrences which contradict the laws of the
natural world, and have no convincing explanation. (82)

The style of this type of magic realism, where extraordinary events and
situations are described in a realistic way, is opposite to the device of
defamiliarization in the metaphysical magic realism. Spindler’s key example is
Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” (“Die Verwandlung,” 1916) and the case of its
protagonist, Gregor Samsa, whose metamorphosis into a bug is described casually,
and the reality of this dreadful incident is confirmed by other characters, including
Samsa’s parents. Certainly, the unreal and extraordinary in the text can be
interpreted on the psychological level, as a product of a disturbed mind, or as a case
of psychomachy. But, if the supernatural were a case of psychomachy, where the
internal conflictual life of a character is rendered concrete and ex-pressed into
dramatization, then we would be really looking at an example of psychological
realism rather than magic realism. The story is, however, a magic realist text, because, as Spindler clarifies:

these ‘subjective’ views are endorsed by the ‘objective’ impersonal narrator, by other characters or by the realistic description of events that take place in a normal and plausible framework. Instead of having a subjective reality, therefore, the unreal has an objective, ontological presence in the text. (82)

Correspondingly, Chanady maintains that there has to exist an internal textual consensus through which the real and unreal, the natural and supernatural are “fused in a consistent perspective” (50).

Kafka’s is, however, a rather complex case, and one that demands a separate category altogether. He seems to present in “The Metamorphosis” magic realism that is beside itself – the irreverent magic realism that defies decoding. Kafka’s is paramagic realism – it is abnormal storytelling amiss, beyond signification. Kafka provides messages or signifiers, but no code or signified by which the messages acquire meaning. It may well be that in his text the supernatural has ontological implication, but we never find out what that is. Certainly, I name Kafka’s writing as paramagic realist because I also want to allude to the parabolic value commonly attributed to it. Nevertheless, if we take parabolic to refer to parable, a text the meaning of which lies somewhere else, in an outside, contextualizing metatext, Kafka further complicates such characterization because he refuses to frame his work, and thus leaves it floating inflated by unbound possibilities. If, in addition, we
take parabolic to refer to a trajectory of an object thrown up in the air, which follows an arc path and comes down in a different place, Kafka yet again undermines such an attribute because he tosses his extraordinary text up into literary space, but it somehow has the power to resist gravitation and refuse to land on a predicted interpretive spot.

By now it should be obvious that when we talk about magic realism we are not able to address it as a solidified form. In fact, it seems we need to be talking about magic realisms. The protean nature of the mode is the source not only of the lamentable theoretical confusion but also of its fortunate resistance to being genre-sanctified. How absurd and impossible is then my promoting of a typology? How counter-magic realist is it to be devoted to classifications? It is not my intention to fit in a procrustean manner this shape-shifting art form into a definitive paradigm. Rather, I want to point to its gift of metamorphosis, describe some of its magical forms, and give some method to the theoretical madness. It is for the same reasons that Spindler set out to outline the mode’s typology while at the same time he drew attention to its unrestrictiveness and the actual overlapping of his categories. For example, metafictional writing of Borges bears witness to the mestizo culture out of which it arose as well as the socio-political atmosphere which conditioned its production. In turn, ethnographic magic realist works are no less acutely aware of their medium than the metafictional ones.
Chanady's study of the fantastic and magic realism and her attempt at their demarcation influence and inform Spindler's understanding of the variants of magic realism. Through viewing of a fictional work as a space of literary exchange that makes the relationship between author, text, and reader a communicative process, Chanady examines and outlines the narratological differences between the two commonly confused modes of the fantastic and magic realist literature. She establishes three specific criteria for testing if a literary work can be classified as magic realist or not. First of all, there has to be in the text an antinomy of the natural and the supernatural, "the simultaneous presence of the two conflicting codes" of the rational and the irrational, the real and the unreal. However, the mere presence of the two different codes is not sufficient. Chanady maintains that:

The degree of presence of these two codes is essential in determining to which mode a particular narrative belongs. If there is insufficient realistic detail, the story tends towards the fairy tale or the other types of pure fantasy. If the supernatural does not constitute a coherent code, it is perceived as out of place or absurd. . . . (57)

The realistic framework in the magic realist fiction is amplified and rendered more easily recognizable by the writer's choice to set the story generally in the contemporary world and include detailed realistic descriptions of humans and society.

Next, while the antinomy between the natural and the supernatural is present at the ontological level, it is, nevertheless, resolved on the textual level by the
presentation of the supernatural as unproblematic and in the same realistic way that
the natural is. The depiction of the supernatural follows the same rules as that of the
natural and there is no hierarchy of reality. The author, thus, creates a unified
fictional world and invites the reader to be undisturbed by the presence of the
supernatural. Finally, what Chanady calls authorial reticence plays the key role in
the validation of the supernatural and its proper infusion into the real. This
unwillingness to look closely into the supernatural and to volunteer any detailed
information about it “naturalizes the supernatural and the strange world view
presented in the text. An explanation of the supernatural, or an attempt to analyze
the perspective that differs from our normal view of reality, would only draw our
attention to the strangeness or even impossibility of certain events and beliefs”
(Chanady 149).

In addition to being factors which indicate whether certain works could
qualify as magic realist, Chanady’s criteria demonstrate that in spite of their
variability magic realisms are unified by these shared organizing principles.
Moreover, Chanady’s outline is useful not only for analyzing literary works but also
cinematic ones. It can serve as a check against the commonly uncritical branding of
any odd film as magic realist.
CHAPTER 3

THE ROOTS OF CINEMAGIC REALISM

When scholars mention cinematic magic realism (few have studied it), they always assign it a position of a mere derivative claiming that filmic magic realism derives from literature. Frederic Jameson, for example, introduces his discussion of filmic magic realism with a mere parenthetical remark which simply states that magic realism is "now transferred to the realm of film" (302). Researchers of magic realism usually give cinematic magic realism just an aside comment or assign it a footnote. In those, they typically lump together a wide spectrum of films as examples; a consequence of ill-defined criteria and a vague understanding of magic realism in general. While it is undeniable that magic realist literature exerted a major influence on magic realist film, as I pointed out earlier, literature of this kind by its very imagistic nature lends itself to being translated into film. Nonetheless, I maintain that literature and film in this case should not be fixed into a hierarchical position with literature holding the higher station. Instead, I see the two media existing in a symbiotic relationship, in which they are mutually inspired and informed. (Take for example Salman Rushdie who gives the cinema a big place in his writings, especially Midnight’s Children [1981]). Next, I want to examine
possible cinematic sources of magic realism to see how it may have been
germinating in film apart from mere adaptations of magic realist literary works.\textsuperscript{21}

In the fantastic art of Georges Méliès we see the first precursor of the magic
realist film's breaking away from "recording" reality and moving towards
incorporating the fantastic. Commendably, Frederick Luis Aldama points out that
magic realist film trespasses the cinematic territory bipolarized by Méliès versus the
Lumières doctrine. Magic realism in film, Aldama concludes, "hybridizes the two
approaches – the Lumière brother's realism and Méliès’s fantastic – to deconstruct
the traditional oppositions between mimesis-as-imitation and mimesis-as-unreality
that forms the basis of distinctions between filmic modes" (72). Yet, even if we
were to claim that magic realism could have its roots in Méliès's work only, we
would be correct, because, as Elizabeth Ezra explains:

- The dialectic envisaged by Edgar Morin between Lumière
  and Méliès, must ... be rethought ... In fact, the
dialectic between realism and 'irréalisme' does not occur
between Lumière and Méliès, but is contained in its
entirety within Méliès's work. His films revel in this
dialectic. . . . (81)

Ezra's research shows that Méliès's oeuvre consists of much more than just
fantasies and trick films. He worked in a wide range of genres, including, among
others, actualités reconstituées,\textsuperscript{22} newsreels, commercial advertisements, political
satire, historical epics, magic acts and science fiction. Ezra concludes, "The extent
of this variety belies the exclusive association of Méliès with fantasy, and the sharp-
edged wit that characterizes most of his films certainly undermines any impression of naïve innocence devoid of worldly concerns” (149). She further explains:

While it is true that most of Méliès’s films exhibit an element of the marvelous . . . many of them call into question the very distinction between fantasy and reality. As a magician, Méliès was a master of illusion; in his films, he often played with the boundaries between reality and representation, fact and fantasy. Méliès’s stage illusions had caused spectators to question their own grasp of reality: what they saw before them appeared to be real, yet it was clearly not so. Similarly, several of his films highlight the illusory nature of the realist aesthetic of mimesis. (51)

The ultimate act of Méliès the magician was to make himself disappear, as in The Living Playing Cards (Les Cartes vivantes, 1904) or The Mysterious Portrait (Le Portrait mystérieux, 1899). García Márquez’s narrator of One Hundred Years of Solitude also magically disappears at the end of the novel, when we realize that the book was not told by a third person narrator, but that it was Aureliano Babilonia reading a manuscript written by the gypsy magician Melquíades, which told the story of the Buendía family and prophesied its doom. Even though it is known that García Márquez studied filmmaking for a short time he stayed in Rome and was subsequently heavily involved in the Mexican and Cuban cinema, I cannot support the claim that Méliès’s work was a direct influence on García Márquez. Nonetheless, one can see in it at least an anticipation of what was to transpire in literature.
Méliès was exploring and revealing the boundaries between realistic representation and artifice; that is, between the illusion of realistic representation and the reality of artifice, and he repeatedly drew attention to the filmic frame. This preoccupation was to culminate in Buster Keaton’s work, and especially the great classic Sherlock Jr. (1924), a film in which we can trace seeds of magic realism. (Although the story of Sherlock Jr. is embedded as a dream sequence that is explained and revealed, and thereby violates the show-don’t-tell logic of magic realism, it is executed with a sense of documentary reality and the precision of surveyor’s tools). The magnificent scene in which Keaton’s character enters the film within the film by magically jumping into it through the projection screen wonderfully juxtaposes the laws governing the physical world with the laws governing the world of film. Through the power of editing, the film cuts fast through different scenery in which Keaton’s alter ego is at one moment standing on some porch steps wanting to step down only to find himself within a second magically transported into a different surrounding in which he is dangerously leaning forward from a cliff into an open sea. He tumbles and falls trying desperately to master the different locales at the merciless speed of the film.

In the films of Keaton’s fellow comedian, Charlie Chaplin, we also encounter unforgettable episodes of the magical in the midst of hard social realism. In one scene of The Kid (1921), we see Chaplin’s Tramp and the Kid (Jackie Coogan) in a church, dressed as altar boys and holding hands, jumping magically
high into the air. Chaplin’s Tramp turns into a giant chicken in *The Gold Rush* (1925). In the shoe-eating scene of the same film, the magic is forged by Necessity, just as in the works of the magic realist writers of the so-called Third World, wherein the political, economical, and general social destitution of their countries verges on the unbelievable and can only be told in a magic realist manner. Chaplin imbues the grotesque realism of this scene with beauty and grace, turning the despair of hunger into a sublime beauty of the surreal. Furthermore, Keaton and Chaplin masterfully collapse registers (typical for magic realism) of comedy and tragedy, popular entertainment and subversive art, laughter and social probing.

That these magic episodes cannot be discarded as mere instances of dubious significance for magic realism is best confirmed in the way these filmmakers influenced the surrealists of literature and cinema: Surrealism served as a basis and a point of departure for magic realism in both literature and cinema. Amos Vogel’s *Film as a Subversive Art* and Rudolph E. Kuenzli’s *Dada and Surrealist Film* record the surrealists’ love of the comic cinema, and how they were immensely influenced by Chaplin, Keaton, and Mack Sennet. Certainly, Surrealism, Kuenzli explains, deeply influenced cinema, especially through later surrealist aspects in commercial films, in Von Stroheim for example, but cinema, in turn, had a great impact on surrealist writing. After Keaton’s, the films of the first and foremost in surrealism, are those of Luis Buñuel. Here, Surrealism and magic realism in cinema exist together within one man’s work. Buñuel’s cinematic trajectory goes from the eye-
slashing cinematography of *The Andalusian Dog* (*Un chien andalou*, 1929) to the magic realism of *The Phantom of Liberty* (*Le Fantôme de la liberté*, 1974). The structure of the latter film is organized as a set of realistic vignettes that repeatedly play on and ridicule the viewer's expectations. In them, among other unexpected and strange things that happen, statues come alive, an ostrich visits a character's bedroom in the middle of the night, another character receives a phone call from his long-time dead sister and goes to visit her remains at the cemetery, only to find a receiver still dangling next to her coffin left ajar.

Magic realism picks up on the surrealist credo, voiced by Breton, that truth emerges only through the marvelous and magical. While popular culture, folklore and the occult, and "primitive" art were surrealists' sources of inspiration, magic realism revived them and directly weaved them into literary and cinematic works. Surrealism drew from the popular only to become elitist. Magic realism, on the other hand, manages to achieve the highest artistic merit, while remaining accessible. Magic realist works are subjects of complex academic discourse, and works read and viewed by a wide reading/viewing public.

Magic realism borrows its freedom from Surrealism. It adds to Breton's access to the unconscious a particular fecund environment, and hence produces an art both universal and yet married to the particularities of a unique set of cultural and historical circumstances. It moves the surreal forward, away from the abstract and what Carpentier discovered were forced juxtapositions, to a much more intimate relationship in literature between characters and their setting. (Mellen 58)
The poetic vision of Jean Cocteau blurs the lines between Surrealism, magic realism, and the marvelous in fiction and film. Out of his Orpheus trilogy, I find Orphée (1949) closest to magic realism. Along with the mythic and mysterious underworld experience of Orphée (Jean Marais), the film develops a strong realistic framework of the poet’s daily public and private life. Furthermore, the worlds mingle in a wonderful way: the underworld seems to be organized just like the everyday exterior world; the ones who pass over have to go through the underworld bureaucracy and show up before grey-suited judges and their meticulous scribe; the Princess of Death (María Casares) is a beautiful woman and an avid smoker who socializes with the mortals, herself of doubtful immortality. In some exquisitely envisioned scenes, Orphée, on his car radio, happens upon the frequency of a mysterious station which broadcasts a kind of esoteric poetry and starts spending all his time in the car trying to jot down the lines feverishly; the Princess leaves a pair of plastic sanitary gloves behind after doing her dirty work of taking Eurydice (Marie Dea) to the underworld.

The magic realist mode seems to be especially appropriate for the myth of a human being who trespasses boundaries between the two worlds and realities. Along with Cocteau’s Orphée, another as influential should be mentioned, Marcel Camus’s Orfeu Negro (1959). Orfeo (Breno Mello) is not a conceited Western poet suffering from ennui, but a trolley conductor living in the slums of Rio de Janeiro,
who is aided by a voodoo medium in his search for Eurydice (Marpessa Dawn), a country girl lost in the metropolis. The carnivalesque, the poverty, and the occult heritage of Brazil are beautifully presented in this film. Brazilian culture and history inspired and preoccupied Glauber Rocha's art, which along with the filmmaking of his compatriot, Carlos Diegues, hold a special place of international significance in the representation of the Latin American experience in general, and have major impact on dissemination of the cinematic magic realist mode.

In Latin America again, through the case of Gabriel García Márquez, we can trace yet another avenue for artistic exchange between literature and film, as well as track the roots of magic realism in surrealism. García Márquez’s life was inextricably tied to cinema. He used to be in charge of the film column in the Columbian El Espectador, and became an active screenwriter in the years preceding the publication of One Hundred Years of Solitude. Writing for films impacted the writing techniques behind his novels, and as the documentary Gabriel García Márquez: A Witch Writing asserts: “Working as a scriptwriter taught him how to distort time so as to recreate it better.” He wrote the script for and collaborated with the director Álvaro Cepeda Samudio on The Blue Lobster (La Langosta Azul, 1954), the Caribbean film manifesto of surrealism. García Márquez played a key role in the Mexican cinema, one of the best and most prolific cinemas of Latin America. In There Are No Thieves in This Village (En este pueblo no hay ladrones, 1964), an experimental film based on one of his short stories, “critically acclaimed
as a crossroads in the formation of a new Mexican cinema” (Noriega 70), García Márquez even acts along with an array of artists and intellectuals including Buñuel (ironically, at his own insistence playing a priest), Alberto Isaac, the director himself, Juan Rulfo, Arturo Ripstein, Alfonso Arau, Carlos Monsiváis, Leonora Carrington and so many more. Furthermore, García Márquez founded the Cinema School of Cuba in 1985.

Instances of and a tendency towards magic realism are present in such influential filmmakers as Federico Fellini and Bernardo Bertolucci. Among the directors of the Czech New Wave, Jaromil Jireš, Jiří Menzel, and Juraj Jakubisko share the same tendency. This evidence points towards the international scope of cinematic magic realism, which resembles the literary mode in this regard. To illustrate this scope further, I want to mention additional magic realist films and directors that use the mode, including the Hungarians Ildikó Enyedi in his My Twentieth Century (Az én XX. századom, 1989) and Gula Gazdag’s Hungarian Fairy Tale (Hol volt, hol nem volt, 1987), works of Krzysztof Kieslowski and more recently Jan Jakub Kolski from Poland, Julio Medem from Spain, films of Shohei Imamura from Japan, the Iranian film Gabbeh (1996) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Jacob Grønløkke’s Heart of Light (Qaamangup uummaataa or Lysets hjerte, 1997) from Denmark and Greenland, Georgian Repentance (Monanieba, 1987) by Tengiz Abuladze, Jean-Pierre Bekolo’s Quartier Mozart (1992) from Cameroon, and Sankofa (1993) by Ethiopian Haile Gerima.
Particularities of Cinematic Magic Realism

Due to the differences in media, magic realism is inevitably practiced differently in film than in literature. To accentuate those differences and point to the peculiarities of the filmic medium, I use the phrase cinemagic realism. The supernatural is easily made believable by the compelling nature of the image; the image simply is and as such is effortlessly perceived and taken in. In this respect, cinematic magic realism is simultaneously similar to and different from magic realism in fiction. The image of the magical in film is similar to the matter-of-fact sentence inscribing the supernatural, which is marked by authorial unwillingness to explain or justify the magical event or situation; the reader is simply expected to accept it as is. However, while both the filmic image and the sentence, basic expressive units of the two media, are perceived visually, they are processed differently: in fiction we read and decode symbols which invoke a mental image, whereas in film the image is readily available and it is a starting point for interpretation. This privilege of film is, nevertheless, both an advantage and a liability for magic realism in cinema. While the image is highly persuasive and impressive, it also lacks the conjuring power of a writer’s hand, which can cast a spell and make you see with a sentence. The seeming disadvantage and initial challenge of the written word becomes its source of power, which constitutes in itself the magic of fiction to which magic realist writers want to draw attention. A
magical trick and illusion, as Méliès showed, can be relatively easily constructed through editing. Nowadays, computer generating of images makes it even easier, and the viewer’s knowledge of this may actually create resistance in the acceptance of the magical image. This is not the magical of the fantastic and the fairy tale or science fiction, where the viewer knows that a whole different reality is being created; this is the magical in the midst of realistic representation, which functions to complement and amplify the real and which, in turn, gets normalized by the real.

Given that believable cinematic presentation of the unreal and supernatural is technologically easy to achieve, the question for magic realism in film is how to stage magical moments. The magical has to be tightly controlled and carefully placed. That is why in film the magical code, as oppose to the realistic one, amounts to no more than magical moments. These magical instances are strategically placed at crucial moments in the film and as such have the power to define the film as magic realist. Unlike in the novels such as Midnight’s Children or One Hundred Years of Solitude, which use the magical profusely to shape the situational and character level as well as the lexical, in film such abundance might be overwhelming, leave an impression of mere quirkiness, and possibly reverse the magical effect. One such example is Rough Magic (1995) which mixes profusely instances of conjuring magic, the occult magic of an esoteric group from Mexico, as well as the inexplicable and fantastic episodes. This film, a cinematic composite consisting of elements of melodrama, film noir, detective story, and road film,
unfortunately employs the magical arbitrarily, for the magic sake, and leaves an impression of an out-of-control narrative which is neither particularly realistic nor magical. Therefore, the magic realist film does not follow Chanady’s criterion for the magic realist novel by which the supernatural has to be fully developed, at least in equal proportion to the realistic, in order to achieve its full effectiveness. In enumerating characteristics of magic realism in fiction, Wendy B. Faris explains that an “irreducible element of magic,” magic realism’s conditio sine qua non, exits as “a disturbing element, a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism” (168). While Faris focuses on the function of the magical in fiction, her elegant metaphor can, nevertheless, convey nicely to what degree and how the magical is featured in film.

The supernatural and the unrealistic in film is typically saved for special, defining moments, employed for framing the realistic story, or contained within one character whose key presence in the narrative unavoidably marks it as magic realist. In Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust (1991) the supernatural and the magical are introduced through and embodied in the character of the unborn girl (Kai-Lynn Warren), who is visible to some characters and not others, and who, along with the voodoo practicing matriarch Nana Peazant (Cora Lee Day) is the voice-over narrator. Another mystical character whose strong presence marks the narrative as magic realist is a mysterious hermit, capable of metamorphosis, who shows up in the midst of Greenland’s snowed up hinterland and guides the spiritually and physically lost Rasmus (Rasmus Lyberth), the protagonist of Heart of Light.
Gerima’s *Sankofa* is an example of a film in which the magical contains and sustains the realistic story by framing it. The film’s main character Mona (Oyafunmike Ogunlano), a self-absorbed African American model on a photo shoot in Africa, experiences a magical transformation into a woman slave at a plantation in the West-Indies and re-lives that woman’s life. At the end, Mona is transported back into the present and into her, by now changed, self. In Percy Adlon’s *Bagdad Café* (*Out of Rosenheim*, 1988) the supernatural and the magical are economically used at the moments of the personal encounters and deep-meaning contacts between characters: at the instance when the African American Brenda (C. C. H. Pounder) first meets the German tourist Jasmin (Marianne Sägebrecht); when Jasmin enters Brenda’s café and gets served by Cahuenga, the Native American bartender (George Aquilar); or when Jasmin poses nude for the strange character of Rudi Cox (Jack Palance). In the film, characterized as “the fantasy of interracial harmony and American multiculturalism” (Mennel and Ongiri 151), the magical and the supernatural are, only expectedly, the punctuation marks for those moments of interracial contacts.

The abundance of stimuli that is inherent to the medium of film compensates for the scarcity of the magical and the supernatural, and endows those magical moments with prominence. The visual element is accompanied with movement and sound; the complex sensory stimulation is strong enough and calculatedly used to
provoke not only intellectual and emotional reaction, but also physical reactions. Such is the power of cinema.

Aside from control and careful placement of the magical elements, the effectiveness and quality of the realism is of utmost importance. To accentuate and analyze the contrapuntal effect of the realistic representation in the magic realist film, Aldama uses some of Seymour Menton’s criteria for identifying a magic realist painting. Menton, in turn, develops these criteria by summarizing and building on Franz Roh’s theory of pictorial magic realism. Because the media of painting and film are connected by their visual nature, Aldama justifies using pictorial criteria and characteristics for examining magic realism in cinema. Menton, himself, uses his criteria for characterizing works of painting along with works of fiction. I find the criteria helpful for illustrating the quality of the realistic representation.

In his analysis of Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust and Hanif Kureishi and Stephen Frears’s Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1987), Aldama picks four out of seven of Menton’s criteria. First, ultra sharp focus is the most important feature of the magic realist painting, which produces a strange effect on the viewer by presenting all the objects with equally sharp focus. Second, a basic trait of pictorial magic realism is objectivity by which intense interest in and equal importance is assigned to animate and inanimate objects. Third, the attitude or tone through which objects are presented is purposely cold, so that they would appeal more to the
intellect than to the emotions. Fourth, intellectual response is partially provoked by
the viewer’s attention being purposely divided through magic realist use of
simultaneous close and far view. In the elaboration of this magic realist
characteristic Menton mentions Franz Radziwill's landscapes as an example, for
they “move the viewer's eyes all over the canvas before they are allowed to
reassemble all the details and grasp the totality of the picture” (22).

This exceptional attention to and excessive accumulation of detail is also one
of the main characteristics of magic realism in fiction. The emphasis on detail offers
a more scrupulous and, thus, more “true” depiction of the real world, for, as Faris
explains, “a strong presence of the phenomenal world – that is the realism in
magical realism” (169). Nevertheless, the magical and the supernatural are also
recounted in detail, for the sake of normalizing them. While the detail, as Faris
astutely points out, works for and within the mimetic order, its excessiveness can,
paradoxically, work against it.

The best magical realist fiction entices us with entrancing – magic – details, the magical nature of those details is a
clear departure from realism. The detail is freed, in a
sense, from a traditionally mimetic role to a greater extent
than it has been before. This is still true even when we
consider canonical realist texts from a Barthesian
perspective. That perspective questions their mimetic
qualities, endowing details with an “effet de réel,” which
renders them principally markers that tell us not any
particular information but simply that this story is real;
but magic details can serve as markers that lead in the
opposite direction, signaling that this might be imaginary.
(169)
Because the overwhelming presence of detail is inherent to film, this ironic and paradoxical dimension of the excessive detailing typical of the magic realism in fiction is lost in cinema. Finally, for making the world in film more recognizable to the viewer, cinematic just like literary magic realism typically takes up contemporary topics and today’s world. Thus, magic realist film plays on familiarity and predictability, striving for a deeper engagement and immersion of the viewer.
I have, so far, looked at the ways the supernatural and the real are quilted together or fused, and I have touched on the way magic realism undermines the classical mimetic order. As I stated earlier, magic realism is a narrative mode suggestive of a worldview of multiple perspectives, and on the premises of that worldview I elaborate next. For the revelation of its underpinnings, I want to call upon a figure from the mythical storyworld, who can help me illustrate, illuminate, and investigate the scope of the magic realist worldview – the trickster. I draw from Lewis Hyde's exquisite study of tricksters, their mischievous artwork and artful mischief. 27

That trick and trickery are at the core of magic realism has been noted before. Spindler ties his definition of the metaphysical type of magic realism to the conjuring meaning of the word magic, in which the author is the master of illusion playing tricks on the reader. In discussing magic realism in Canadian literature, Geoff Hancock points out: “Magic realism shows the difficulty of distinguishing what is real from what is fantastic. It’s all a trick of perspective; magic realism goes beyond copying reality to inventing it” (35). Richard Todd adds: “Narrators of magic realism play confidence tricks on their readers” (305); that is they are con
artists. But magic realism is more than narrative sleights of hand. It is also what Hyde calls the disruptive and playful side of the human imagination – the manifestation of trickster consciousness. The spirit of the trickster is the driving force and the generative power behind magic realism.

Jean-Pierre Durix sensed this spirit when he called Salman Rushdie a trickster, and Hyde stumbled upon the connection between magic realism and the trickster (he never directly states it though) when, along with artists and creators as different as Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Allen Ginsberg, Frederick Douglass, and John Cage, he recognizes Maxine Hong Kingston’s life and work as trickster-like.

In outlining what he calls magicrealist “taxonomy,” Aldama declares that the hybrid trickster/pícaro narrator/character is essential to a magic realist work. In this study, however, I want to avoid branding an author a trickster, a tricky statement in itself, and I do not insist on taxonomizing magic realism, in respect of its slippery nature and defiance of definition that seem to be rooted in the trickster spirit. Tricksters are creatures of the storyworld; they are never narrators, but are the narrated. In his discussion of Hermes as a trickster and an arty demiurge, Hyde comments on the function of trickster stories, explaining that

It is not only in Hermes that we find various sorts of artus-work; trickster narratives themselves do the double task of marking and violating the boundaries of the cultures where they are told. The trickster in the narrative is the narrative itself. It creates and inhabits ambivalent space. (267)
Keeping in mind that the trickster’s calling card is the story itself, I want to point to the affinities between the trickster’s field and mode of operation and the unique envisioning of the world through magic realism. Hyde ponders the question of the presence of tricksters in the modern world and concludes that they have not left the scene, and that as cultural heroes tricksters are always present. That is why, Hyde explains, “it is mostly to the practices of art that I turn in hopes of finding where this disruptive imagination survives among us” (13). My motivation for putting the trickster next to magic realism for the sake of revealing the pervading animating principles of the mode coincides with Hyde’s rationale behind his attempt to find the trickster in the world of arts:

My own position, in any event, is not that the artists I write about are tricksters but that there are moments when the practice of art and this myth coincide. I work by juxtaposition, holding the trickster stories up against specific cases of the imagination in action, hoping that each might illuminate the other. If the method works, it is not because I have uncovered the true story behind a particular work of art but more simply that the coincidences are fruitful, making us think and see again. Such goals are in keeping with trickster’s spirit, for he is the archetype who attacks all archetypes. He is the character in myth who threatens to take the myth apart. He is an “eternal state of mind” that is suspicious of all eternals, dragging them from their heavenly preserves to see how they fare down here in this time-haunted world. (14)

Yet, unlike Hyde, who finds the trickster’s occasional appearance in art, I see magic realism as the arena of trickster’s art. I find the trickster central to magic
realism – I find that in the modern world magic realism could be the trickster’s favorite form of expression. It is not my intention here to confine the trickster to this narrative mode, for who could possibly be able to tie down the notorious wanderer? However, the trickster finds in magic realism the much-needed pluralistic playground. The trickster, in turn, defines for magic realism its ethos and lends magic realism trickster’s technē. Consequently, the magic realist world is where multiplicity and ambiguity rule, and magic realist works, much like tricksters, “trick” their readers when they repeatedly play with readers’ expectations, “lie” when they self-consciously undermine their own reliability, and “steal” when they are audaciously pastichizing.

I summon these figures to elucidate magic realism because tricksters come from the mythical past, from the collective imagination, and from the folk wisdom, all of which are essential for magic realist storytelling. The prominent presence of tricksters in a wide range of cultures from all over the world only helps me highlight the international scope of magic realism which is energized by trickster spirit. The practice of using the past to understand the present and illuminate the future is not new, but the way magic realism relies on and revives the past is truly refreshing. Moreover, magic realism even questions the pastness of the past, pointing towards the palimpsestic quality of time.

Furthermore, in many parts of the world the mythical, the collective, and the folk are not categories and experiences of the past – they are fully lived today.
These places, which are fertile ground for the emergence of magic realism, are referred to by Jameson as "problematic geographies" characterized by the "overlap or the coexistence of precapitalist with nascent capitalist or technological features . . . a mode of production still locked in conflict with traces of the older mode (if not with foreshadowings of the emergence of future one)" (311). Notwithstanding Jameson's somewhat self-corrective parenthetical disclaimer, what is really problematic here is Jameson's label "problematic," which presupposes the unproblematic nature of the technologically advanced capitalist countries; and the exclusivistic reasoning by which everything is resolved in conflict, reasoning contrary to the magic realist perspective.

If the mythical, the collective, and the folk are not be highly visible in technologically developed urban locales, it is because they are suppressed into the unconscious, which makes them latently present. Could this be the reason the West is prone to expressing its preoccupations in film through psychological realism; that is, through dramatized internal conflicts and dream sequences, rather than magic realism, which openly acknowledges and embraces possibilities of the mysterious and the magical? Could the liberating resurgence of the suppressed (histories, perspectives, experiences, and needs) through magic realism be the reason magic realist works have been so ecstatically received in the West? Furthermore, could it be that magic realism emerged in response to some ever-growing modern need?
Out of the mythical, which still exists manifestly or latently in our imaginations and psyches today, sprang trickster figures, typically animals whose smallness, or some physical handicap, is compensated by shrewdness. They are thieves driven by insatiable appetite for food, mischief, and traveling. What aids tricksters in such impossible pursuits and helps them make way out of no-way is not only the sharpness of their wit but also the gift of transformation. In Hyde’s words, “Trickster is the great shape-shifter, which I take to mean not so much that he shifts the shape of his own body but that, given the materials of this world, he demonstrates the degree to which the way we have shaped them may be altered” (91). In literature, magic realism inherited this shape-shifting quality of tricksters, who have the ingenuity “to make one’s way anew from the materials at hand” (Hyde 277) – the mode plays within and with the given norms in fictional and exterior worlds only to destabilize their normativeness. Magic realism does not pretend that it can expel hegemonic grand narratives; rather, it values its peripheral positioning against those and shrewdly subverts through imitation. In this respect, magic realism embodies Homi Bhabha’s theory of mimicry, “an ironic compromise” (86). Drawing inspiration from the works of Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie among others, Bhabha defines postcolonial mimicry as

a form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them. (89)
Nevertheless, even though magic realism has been classified as postcolonial writing (true, maybe some of the best magic realist works so far have been
generated in the countries preoccupied with the postcolonial condition), it is not
limited to the matters of postcolonialism, whether it refers to the questions of the
centre or the margins. The artistic as well as the socio-political potential of magic
realism has been and is being explored in the now-former Yugoslavia and its
offspring countries, geo-political destinations permanently blessed and cursed to
exist on the crossroads of East and West; center to some, periphery to others; neither
the First nor the Third World. Furthermore, the typological range of magic realism
has shown that the mode is employed for subjects above and beyond those of
postcoloniality. The postcolonial idiom, however, gives rise to a question central to
magic realism, a question posed by Geoff Hancock—“How do we de-colonize our
imaginations” (37).

As Hyde further explains, tricksters inhabit spaces of heightened uncertainty
and represent the intelligence needed to negotiate them. Similarly, magic realism
does not try to oust the classical mimetic order; it judiciously speaks from “the belly
of the beast,” redirecting thus appropriated power and energy against what Aldama
calls reality making realisms. Kelly recognizes in magic realism Gayatri Spivak’s
concept of negotiation, in which “one tries to change something that one is obliged
to inhabit, since one is not working from the outside. In order to keep one’s
effectiveness, one must also preserve those structures -- not cut them down completely" (qtd. in Kelly 169-170).

As boundary-crossers, tricksters make sure there is negotiation and exchange at the line dividing the opposites, such as in and out, clean and dirty, sacred and profane, right and wrong, through which we have been expressing and regulating our social life. Tricksters are arty transgressors who confuse the binaries and encourage uncertainties. As lords of the in-between, they are the apotheosis of ambivalence and ambiguity. They are rulers of the crossroad; “[they are] the spirit of the road at dusk, the one that runs from one town to another and belongs to neither” (Hyde 6). Likewise, as Faris vividly puts it, “the magical realist vision exists at the intersection of the two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions” (172). Hyde’s evaluation of the trickster stories also suits magic realist narratives: “they are invigorating experiences of transgression, salutary dunkings in ambivalence” (268). Oxymoronic in nature, magic realism is invested in blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, history and fantasy, writing and oral tradition, center and ex-centric, living and dead, private and public, real and imagined. It collapses registers of, for example, cooking and politics in hilarious acts of genre miscegenation in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and its protagonist’s “chutnification of history.” As the fine membrane dividing opposites is punctured through magic realism, the supposedly antagonistic nature of those opposites is revealed in their constructedness and these naturalized
constructs are shown as inextricably implicated in each other. By doing so, works of magic realism increase possibilities of more complete signification, through which the world emerges in all its colorful hybridity.

The pretence of completeness, however, is what magic realism shuns. As a discourse that is, in Bhabha words, uttered between the lines, magic realism recognizes that any goal of totality would be a totalitarian goal. The mode strives to preserve its marginality in the face of the all-consuming power of late capitalism, much like tricksters who always manage to slip away, because if they were ever to get in power they would cease to be tricksters. In magic realist works there is an inbuilt mechanism for self-parody; such a mechanism points towards the works' fictionality and accentuates their own unreliability. Above all, tricksters are playful deities whose stories are humorous accounts. Their playfulness in magic realism, characterized by parody, baroqueish excess, and repetition, is in critical writing always associated with mimesis-as-play, the representational technique banned by Plato from his Republic in favour of the "rational" mimesis-as-imitation, which became the normative mode of fiction and criticism alike. Yet, again, magic realism retains its in-the-doorway position and, with it, its ability to look at both sides of the door of mimesis and not commit to either. Speculating on the way mimesis-as-imitation achieved its canonic dominance, Aldama explains the magic realist stance towards it: "Magicorealism breaks with this dominance by simultaneously moving within and outside the system of hegemonic representation, always in flux between
the playful and imitative models, existing in that borderland of infinite play between significations" (60).

Within the concept of magic realist playfulness, the carnivalesque emerges as a prominent feature. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, David K. Danow explores the way the carnivalesque reversal is manifested in magic realism and the grotesque realism of the Holocaust literature. Discussing differences between carnival, a concrete cultural manifestation, and the carnivalesque, carnival's reflection in literature, Danow explains that when the spirit of Carnival permeates a work of literature, we suggest that it partakes of or promotes the Carnivalesque. That is, it supports the unsupportable, assails the unassailable, at times regards the supernatural as natural, takes fiction as truth, and makes the extraordinary or "magical" as viable a possibility as the ordinary or "real," so that no true distinction is perceived or acknowledged between the two. (3, my emphasis)

While I value the contributions of the carnivalesque to magic realism – such as the comic insurgence, the tearing down of the hierarchies, the dialogic positioning of the spectators also as participants, the irreverent mixing of genres, and the polyphonic use of narrative voices – I, nonetheless, see trickster aesthetics as highly potent for illuminating magic realism. Even though the trickster figure is sometimes placed under the umbrella of the carnivalesque, I find it to be a more pertinent medium for uncovering the properties of magic realism. Whereas carnival is about reversal and, as Danow says, "at times," tricksters, in contrast, always keep
the binaries in tension. They always already transcend binaries – they are simultaneously both creators and destroyers of the norms and boundaries, trouble-makers and the solution-givers, thieves and liars, speakers of profanities, and messengers of gods imparting sacred truths. Magic realism is inspired by such trickster consciousness when it impertinently muddies narrative modes and the preconceived notions inscribed by them while playing with and in the felicitous dirt of the world. Just like the trickster stories, magic realism “is a category of mythic narrative, a category of art, that occupies the field between polarities and by that articulates them, simultaneously marking and bridging their differences” (Hyde 268).

But this transcending of polarities is not uniquely magic realist; it is a characteristic of postmodernism in general. With a zealous need for sweeping classifications, magic realism has often been addressed as merely one of the many forms of postmodernism. Pointing to this flawed critical practice, Kelly states

[Some critics assert that the experimental nature and global application of Magical Realism indicate that it is actually just another manifestation of the postmodern. But, like classical realism (based on the order of mimesis), postmodern literature can (and perhaps already has) become a political monolith. As described in terms of the Baudrilladian hyperreal, postmodern art has no referent perhaps because it has sealed itself off from the reality of contemporary life. (165)]

In opposition to a mode of labile and shifting notions of reality, magic realism posits a narrative substratum that, even while infused with the magical, still
holds to some form of stability based on quotidian perception. Magic realism is
grounded in what John Burt Foster Jr. calls “felt history.” As he discusses this magic
realist foregrounding of the bodily experience of historical forces, Foster clarifies:

Felt history must be distinguished from official history
with its attention to leaders, its overview of events, or its
analysis of underlying trends. And it should also be
distinguished from emotions or feelings, since history’s
psychological effects are usually less dramatic and
revealing than its immediate feel, its physical impact on
the bodies and the senses. (273)

In emphasizing its realism, magic realism anchors its narratives by realistic
depictions of the messy business of living; the daily grind of personal as well as
collective histories. Following in this vain, some of the central motifs of the films I
am about to discuss are the body and the mud. In this respect, magic realist works
reflect the earthy ineluctability of the Zen saying: “Before the enlightenment, gather
wood and carry. After the enlightenment, gather wood and carry.”

Such groundedness seems to be the theme of a number of trickster tales.
These tales can help not only illustrate my point about groundedness of tricksters
but also respond to Geoff Hancock’s question about writers employing magic
realism: “Are writers like shamans, existing somewhere between a human
community and the cosmic forces” (36)? Hyde mentions some of the most common
stories which can be read as direct parodies of shamanism. Ridiculing the shamanic
practice of calling forth a magical object placed in the shaman’s body by the spirits
during the initiation, Coyote calls forth his own excrement for divination.32
Humorously replicating the stories about the shamans who can fly into the sky or the underworld when in trance, an almost universal tale depicts tricksters who try to fly with the birds, but who become the laughing stock when they inevitably fail. Hyde recalls Mac Linscott Ricketts words as he explains: “Trickster’s failure implies that shamanic pretensions are daydreams at best, fakery at worst. ‘Humans were not made to fly. . . . Trickster, like the human being, is an earth-bound creature, and his wish to fly (and to escape the human condition) is . . . a frivolous fancy’” (294). Similarly, much as they manage to validate and vindicate the mythical and the magical worldviews, the ethnographic magic realist works ground themselves in the inescapable earth-boundness and mock the idea of the transcendental author. 33

Moreover, tricksters are primarily grounded by their bodies of voracious appetite. But bodily preoccupations are not only tricksters’. Rising from the modern ironic myth, there is a creature with a different kind of body – the cyborg. As Donna J. Haraway, the mastermind of the joyfully monstrous aesthetics of the cyborg, conceptualized it, the cyborg’s is a disassembled and reassembled body, built up from human and machine or animal parts. The cyborg is a hybrid and, much like the trickster who is a being of both nature and culture, a liminal creature that always exhibits ambiguities, constantly transgresses boundaries, and subverts binaries. Such qualities of the cyborg have propelled Kelly to read magic realism through the cyborgian lens and create an analysis of the mode of impressive breadth.

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Nonetheless, even though the cyborg aesthetics seem to be more than applicable to magic realism, the relevance of the trickster for magic realism can take precedence over the cyborg because of the trickster’s mythical and folk roots, which are central to some prominent magic realist writings. Furthermore, while the cyborg aesthetics are about leaving the body behind, trickster aesthetics, with the groundedness in the body, seem to articulate better the concerns of those whose felt histories have been written into their bodies, and who are now writing those bodies. How convenient for the powerful, but disconcerting for the disempowered is it to leave the body behind now that their literal and symbolic bodies have been gaining visibility? The importance of writing that historical body made the ghost of Toni Morrison’s Beloved appear in flesh and blood. And if the powerful perspective of the cyborg’s de-centered and de-unified, assembled body makes this creature highly qualified for illuminating the subverting politics of magic realism, such cyborgian prerequisite is matched by tricksters’ shape-shifting gift. I am here, however, less discrediting the cyborgian approach than I am substantiating my aesthetical choice.

The cyborg, in fact, has a piece of the trickster built into it. Haraway acknowledges that she looked up to the trickster to give rise to her aesthetics. It seems that the spirit of the trickster animated the monstrous creation to life. Discussing the ecofeminist envisioning of the world as an active subject, rather than an object/resource to be mapped and appropriated by the masculinist projects, Haraway argues
Richly evocative figures exist for feminist visualizations of the world resisting becoming resource. The Coyote or Trickster, embodied in American Southwest Indian accounts, suggests our situation when we give up mastery but keep searching for fidelity, knowing all the while we will be hoodwinked. I think these are useful myths for scientists who might be our allies. (199)

Even with a part of trickster figures in it, the cyborg seemingly did not inherit their sense of humor, self-parody, and playfulness. In addition, while the cyborg is outside of the metanarratives, tricksters know better – they never fool themselves that they can escape those; they, consequently, speak from the belly of the beast. But Haraway knows better too, and so she understands that you cannot but ultimately speak only from within the hegemonic structures you inhabit when she says

Feminist objectivity makes room for surprises and ironies at the heart of all knowledge production; we are not in charge of the world. We just live here and try to strike up non-innocent conversations by means of our prosthetic devices, including our visualization technologies... I like to see feminist theory as a reinvented coyote discourse to its enabling sources in many kinds of heterogenous account of the world. (199, my emphasis)

Even though she maintains that the cyborg has no origin story, Haraway throws a doting look at trickster figures, who, she recognizes, just might be where the cyborg originated.

If the trickster is, then, most suitable for the illumination of magic realism, how do trickster aesthetics fare among different types of magic realism? If the
trickster’s mythical and folk pedigree may be easily traced in the ethnographic
magic realism; if trickster transgressivness and ambiguity are most fruitful for the
monstrous and sociological magic realism; and if trickster playfulness and, as Hyde
put it well, the power to drag the eternals down to this time-haunted world are the
focus of the metafictional kind, how does this elusive figure perform at the far end
of the magic realist scope – Kafka’s paramagic realism? The protean nature of
tricksters makes them multifunctional and capable of embracing different shapes
which can be relevant to different kinds of writing. Furthermore, taking into
consideration Hyde’s description of the trickster as the archetype who attacks all
archetypes and the character in the myth who threatens to take the myth apart, then
Kafka emerges as the arch-trickster. If humor is the trickster’s staple, Kafka does
not lack humor; his is the wicked kind of humor coming from the trickster’s darker
side.

And magic realism, Danow points out, is “indeed a contrapuntal art” (139),
which incorporates both light and dark, namely, the life-affirming and death-
embracing side of life. For Danow, though, “what magic realism portrays is
ultimately positive, affording a hopeful vision of life . . . ” (9). Furthermore, as Hyde
clarifies, trickster stories are not only told for passing time and entertainment, or as
a crash course in common sense, but also sometimes as concrete healing ritual or
figurative healing of human psyche, “for there is vicarious pleasure in watching
[trickster] break the rules, and a potentially fruitful fantasizing, too, for listeners are
invited, if only in imagination, to scout the territory that lies beyond the local constraints...” (12). The trickster enlivens silences and “where someone’s sense of honorable behavior has left him unable to act, trickster will appear to suggest an amoral action, something right/wrong that will get life going again” (Hyde 7).

Similarly, magic realism has a potential healing and liberating effect on the modern psyche through its sometimes fresh and uninhibited childlike perspective. Hyde’s description of the effect trickster stories have on their audience seems to be particularly relevant here.

The audience listening to any trickster tale undergoes a kind of inner artus-work, then, a loosening and breathing of the psychic boundaries. Just as Hermes and Apollo end up related to one another and the articulated pantheon thereby enlivened, so the listener’s psyche may have its functions related to one another (connected/not-connected, articulated without being divided) and thereby enlivened. It is not so much that trickster unifies the soul as that this polypotropic commerce puts its powers in touch with one another across their necessary divides. (267)

In conclusion, magic realism demands a definition that can account for its inconclusive nature, which is the trickster’s legacy to the mode. In complementing and expanding on the rather formulaic definition of the mode I outlined at the opening of this study, I want to offer an alternative definition of magic realism seen through the trickster. In that spirit, I assert that magic realism is cheeky storytelling that plays in the doorway between the fantastic and the realistic, mocking the
pretences of these modes and inviting the reader/viewer into the shameless game of imagining worlds of promiscuously mixed and mixed-up values and realities.
CHAPTER 5
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SOME EXAMPLES OF CINEMAGIC REALISM

I turn now to three films to help me illustrate the magic realism discussed and theorized earlier. These films present some widely divergent cases of magic realism in film, and as such help me sketch the possibilities and the scope of cinematic magic realism. This scope may not be as wide and rich as that of the literary magic realism, especially not in the historical domain where magic realism reaches its most powerful political form, but film has just started exploring its magic realist possibilities. While there are indications that literary magic realism in Latin America is getting exhausted, 35 magic realism in film is increasingly turning away from adaptations of magic realist works and turning towards the peculiarities of its medium as the source and inspiration for the magical; the film is re-discovering its own magical roots.

These films come from different geographies, and as such further back up my claim that magic realism is an international phenomenon. Time of the Gypsies (Dom za vešanje, 1988) was made by the Bosnian-born director Emir Kusturica; Being John Malkovich (1999) is an American independent debut of Spike Jonze; and Tom Tykwer’s Run Lola Run (Lola rennt, 1998) is a German film. If magic realism in film has not yet given consensually acknowledged world masterpieces
like those in fiction, it has offered in these films true cinematic gems. Time will tell what kind of place they will ultimately hold in the international film art. Most reviews, however, already point towards their striking stature. For example, Tom Carson titles his review of Being John Malkovich “The Last Great Movie of the Century,” and concludes that: “[l]ike Godard’s Breathless, which copped to the truth that the movie-fed flimsiness of modern life was what made it exciting, Being John Malkovich is the kind of breakthrough that leaves every other movie around looking clueless . . .” (79). Interestingly, Tom Whalen also acknowledges Godard in his review of Run Lola Run when he opens his essay on the film with: “Tom Tykwer’s [film] . . . blasts open doors for viewers in the late 90s the way Godard’s Breathless . . . did for viewers in the late 50s” (33). Time of the Gypsies, which in innumerable reviews has been called Kusturica’s masterpiece, pays tribute as well to Breathless through an embedded intercinematic reference. At one point, Kusturica’s protagonist stands in front of Orson Welles’s still advertising Citizen Kane (1941) and tries to light up Welles’s unlit cigar in the same fashion Jean-Paul Belmondo stood in front of Humphrey Bogart’s image on the Casablanca (1942) poster. Furthermore, all the exquisite awards each of these films reaped, too many to be listed here, bear witness to their astonishing quality.

Aside from their difference in locale, the films use magic realism differently, for different preoccupations, and for the creation of different worlds. They not only illustrate readily William Spindler’s typology but also strongly support the non-

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restrictiveness of the same, thus representing a fine array of possibilities and
capabilities of cinemagic realism. Moreover, all three films were conceived from
independent scripts not based on the works of fiction. Nevertheless, all three tie
themselves to the literary tradition even though Time of the Gypsies does so
indirectly. This film is in fact an homage to and a celebration of the art of cinema
and is imbued with self-reflexivity and intercinematic references from Yugoslavian,
European, and American cinemas. However, its overall atmosphere and subject
focus are evidently influenced by the storyworld of García Márquez. Kusturica
directly acknowledged that his film belongs to the world of García Márquez and
other Latin American novelists who “built their art on the irrationality and poverty
of their people” (Horton 178). Being John Malkovich incorporates the Abelard and
Heloise legend, presents passages from Chekhov and Shakespeare, refers to William
Luce’s play The Belle of Amherst (1976), and quotes one of Emily Dickinson’s
poems. Run Lola Run opens with an epigraph by T.S. Eliot. In announcing their
literary sources of inspiration, these films seem to claim artistic equality with
eminent works of fiction and ask to be counted among such ranks.

This is not the films’ only commonality. What ties them closely is that they
are all animated by the trickster spirit and its characteristic mark of playfulness.
Also, the directors of these films usher us into their narratives in a similar fashion –
each film has, what Aldama calls, a prologue-like entry. This seems to be a general
characteristic of magic realist narratives, because, as Aldama explains
The magicorealist narrative must contain the necessary “paratextual” codes that will ease the reader across the threshold into another world where hybridity and not purity of form is the norm. As Genette writes in *Paratexts*, “the relation between the text and its reader is more socialized, more openly contractual, as the result of conscious and organized practices. . . .” The magicorealist text, then, must contain a prologue-like entry into the text that will train the reader/viewer to identify the mode’s reader-codes. (26)

**How the Gypsies Drove God Away**

The opening scene of Kusturica’s film is one such prologue. The director constructed its very first image to be an announcement of his artistic intentions as well as of forthcoming events. The initial image is a veiled head of what appears to be a bride, standing with her back to the camera. That fact that the bride’s head is turned away from the camera seems to be the director’s self-humbling comment on the subject’s resistance to being fully revealed and captured. A flying bride’s veil becomes one of the film’s primary motifs. It is the magical marker of the critical moments and a heavily laden symbol; it is the symbolic presence in the absence of the protagonist’s mother and an actualized metaphor for his complex relationship with the women of the film. The veil is a premonition of what turns out to be the protagonist’s death by the hand of another disgruntled bride. It can be also interpreted as a veil of cinematic illusions that the director will present in a magic realist film. Above all, it is a naturalized metonymic signifier of joyous occasions that the director immediately inverts. Across the image of the veil the full title of the
film is inscribed, reading with outrageous ambiguity: *Dom za vešanje: Ljubavni film* (literally *A Home For Hanging: A Screen Romance*). The head turns around to reveal a boarish Gypsy bride crying over her wedding gone awry, in what becomes a sinister announcement of more bad weddings to come.

The bridegroom ruined the wedding by getting himself dead drunk. In her outrage, the bride curses at him and tries to beat him as the camera pulls away to reveal people trying to hold her back. From the initial isolated sound of her sniffing and crying, as the camera pulls away from her face the sound explodes into a cacophony of people’s voices, wind, and geese. The camera follows the raucous wedding procession only to stop to look at an on-looker—a shaven-bald Gypsy with a shabby umbrella who escaped from an asylum. He, looking uncannily like the wise fool of Grigori Kozintsev’s *King Lear* (1969), explains in a direct address to the camera that “they wanted to ruin my life, screw me up with brain injections, but I escaped.” As the madman is telling his story, the camera cuts to what appears to be a Muslim funeral procession in the background. Kusturica wants not only to introduce us to the rituals and on-goings of a community but also to point to the ominous proximity of a funeral and a wedding. The madman continues: “They wanted to clip my wings. What’s a spirit without wings? My soul is free, free as a bird. It soars high, then swoops below. Sometimes it weeps, other times it sings and laughs.” Here the narration is cut with an image of a boy getting a loaf of bread from the local bakery. The poetic madman ends with “When God came down to
earth, he could not deal with the Gypsies and he took the next flight back,” and
exclaims “Not my fault.” After this mythological reference, the camera makes a cut
and starts following different characters to reveal a primal setting of a poverty
stricken community. The setting in which incessant winds blow is steeped in mud,
washed by rain, and brimming with animals and people. Accompanied now by a
simple string tune, the camera takes us to a group of men gambling and takes off
with one of them, Merđžan (Husnija Hašimović).

The madman’s speech, delivered at what seems like a cinematic proscenium,
is a prologue to the story of Perhan (Davor Dujmović), an awkward Gypsy
adolescent who is gifted with telekinetic powers. A bastard child of a deceased
Gypsy woman and a Slovenian soldier, he lives with sister Danira (Elvira Sali) and
womanizer uncle Merđžan in his loving grandmother Hatidža’s (Ljubica Adzović)
house. They are a part of a small Gypsy community located at the edge of a
Macedonian city. He passes time in peace teaching his pet turkey to act like a
peacock, practicing moving objects by his gaze, and helping his grandmother make
and sell limestone, until he falls in love with his beautiful neighbor Azra (Sinolička
Trpkova). With Azra, he gets sexually initiated on Saint George’s Day, the greatest
of all Gypsy holidays. Unable to marry his sweetheart, because he does not have any
dowry and no skills to generate any income, he tries to hang himself, but gets saved
by Zabit (Zabit Memedov), his philosophizing neighbour and the lover of his
grandmother. Perhan seems to have inherited his magical powers from Hatidža, who
is the local healer (interestingly enough, she cannot heal her own grandchild).

Ahmed (Bora Todorović), a mobster called “Sheik,” wants to repay Hatidža for saving his son’s life by taking Danira to Slovenia for a surgery on her stunted leg and Perhan to Italy to “work” with him.³⁸ Perhan initially refuses to be a part of Ahmed’s odious dealings, which include selling babies abroad, and sending children on the streets to beg, steal and prostitute for him. He gives in, however, after being tortured and after realizing that his cooperation is Danira’s only chance for a cure and his only chance to prove himself capable of earning enough to marry Azra.

After months of proving that he is Ahmed’s best and most profitable servant, Perhan gets sent back to Yugoslavia to replenish Ahmed’s crew. Against the boss’s warnings, he goes to visit Azra, whom he finds in late pregnancy. Moreover, Perhan learns that the house Ahmed was supposed to be building for him does not exist. With insult added to his injury, he realizes that Azra’s child could have been conceived by his own uncle, Merdžan. Perhan, by now distraught with rage and disillusionment, still agrees to marry Azra and take her to Italy with him, under the condition, though, that he sell her child. His distress culminates when he finds out that, following Ahmed’s direction, Danira was taken away from the hospital and sent to Italy to be on the streets. After giving birth to a baby boy, Azra dies.

Knowing that Danira works for Ahmed, Perhan spends the next four lonely years in Rome trying to find Ahmed, who disappeared and started a new “business” somewhere else. Finally, Perhan finds Danira, and she takes him to Ahmed’s new
camp on the day of Ahmed’s wedding. Perhan has his revenge – he kills Ahmed by slashing his throat with a fork he darts with the power of his will; by putting his telekinetic powers to real use. He, in turn, gets wounded by a shot of one of Ahmed’s brothers and killed by the second, lethal shot of Ahmed’s outraged bride.

Besides presenting an unusual character, and thus adding to the richness of the communal portrayal, the madman’s speech seems to have multiple functions. It is a chorus-like entry into Perhan’s story, and Perhan will echo the madman’s “what’s a spirit without wings” when in one of the letters to his beloved grandmother from Italy he writes: “And what’s a Gypsy without dreams?” The madman’s opening “Free as a bird,” is Perhan’s ending, when the bride that kills him says: “Fly little bird!” The madman as a storyteller functions as a reflexive comment on the director’s own role as storyteller – this is a madman’s story and it forewarns us that we are about to enter a strange world. Kusturica uses it also to introduce and frame his subject – the Gypsies and their way of life. The madman’s story encapsulates the collective spirit and worldview of the Gypsies and their inability to conform to any institution and ties them to a painful personal story. Thus, it sets up a pattern for Perhan’s story, which unfolds in the interplay between communal regulations and personal desires as well.

In what appears to be a precedent in the cinematic representation of the Gypsies, Kusturica lets them speak for themselves. Almost the entire film is in the Gypsy language Romany and almost the entire acting crew consists of amateur,
mostly illiterate, Gypsies playing themselves. As an exposé on Gypsy life, the film is an example of the ethnographic magic realism. It undertakes not only the representation of contemporary Gypsy problems, but also delves deeper into the heart of their community to reveal their social coda, their rituals and beliefs, and their mythical envisioning of the world. It is through the retelling of their myths that Hatidža comforts her grandchildren when in distress. Gypsy poverty is compensated by their vibrant imagination, by their instinctive understanding that life is but a mirage, their carpe diem mentality, and by their gift of magic and hauntingly energetic music. According to the madman’s story, after God left the Gypsies, due implicitly either to his ineptness to deal with them and/or their inborn unwillingness to serve any and all authority, the Gypsies seem to have realized that they had only themselves to rely upon and, consequently, developed a pragmatic way of life.

Gypsy survival strategies may include lying, cheating, begging and stealing, casting spells, and making a way out of no way in a trickster-like fashion, but they, Kusturica points out, “have never caused people of other nations to suffer . . . Since they came to Europe over six centuries ago, they’ve survived without using the instruments of war that almost every European nation used” (interview). The Gypsies are the living embodiment of trickster consciousness whose transgressive acts, just like those of the trickster, after close scrutiny do not seem to be instigated by immorality but, in Hyde’s words, amorality in the service of the belly. Hyde lucidly states that
for a human community to make its world shapely is one thing; to preserve the shape is quite another, especially if, as is always the case, the shape is to some degree arbitrary and if the shaping requires exclusion and the excluded are hungry. So along with shapeliness comes a set of rules meant to preserve the design. (216-217)

The Gypsies have the wit, the skills, and the courage propelled by impoverishment to bend and break those rules.

In this destitute community, in which the security of home is highly questionable, human warmth and comfort are not lacking. The eloquent Zabit seems, in his own way, exceptionally kind to Perhan. He is the one who reveals the communal credo when he emphatically exclaims: "My neighbor’s my business!" Accordingly, he makes sure that Perhan and Danira are seen off to their trip with music, as is only appropriate in their shantytown. Stealing and cheating they may be, but they still want to ensure their debts are paid off before they pass away.

Their is the world of extremes and paradoxes. As Zoran Kuzmanovich states, “Among these Gypsies, selling other people’s children brings profit; selling one’s own brings a curse . . .” (268). Nonetheless, the appreciation for humans and familial ties is reinforced and best evidenced in the scene in which Perhan returns from Italy. By now a confirmed criminal, he confronts his worried grandmother for the first time in the local pub. Seeing that he is nicely dressed, spending money on musicians, whores, and drinks, Hatidža asks him where he got that kind of cash. Perhan answers that he earned it with his two hands as if to reassure her that he
worked hard and earned it honestly. But Hatidža knows better, and in response to Perhan's attempt at impressing her by revealing that he is already building a big house with that money, she asks him a rhetorical question: "Who will live in it?" She warns him that the big new house will have no worth if there is nobody to share it with him, and she will not live in the house build by his "dirty" money. Loneliness, she seems to say, will be the high price Perhan will pay for his dishonest dealings.

If some Gypsies, forced by the perversity of their poverty, take desperate measures and sell their children, then who are those that buy them? Through a structuring absence, what does this film say about that which it does not portray? Who are the people in the Western Europe who make such deals with Ahmed and his like?39 Kusturica juxtaposes the destitution of the Gypsy community and the bounty of Italian cities only to add a strange twist to such polarization. The director positions the viewer to identify with Perhan in order to feel how the grandiose architecture of Italy produced by bounty awes him; it simultaneously fills him with admiration and fear. The fearful side of it is expressed in Perhan's dream, which articulates his desire to contain the object that his cognition failed to comprehend. In his dream, he sees a miniature model of a cathedral that fascinates him in the midst of his shabby home and Hatidža winding a red thread around it from a coil representing both Perhan’s personal and Gypsy collective unconscious. In contrast
to the cold magnificence of Italian architecture, Kusturica makes Perhan’s little dog-and-children filled town appear warm and welcoming.

In another instance of the director’s reversal of the bounty / lack dichotomy, Perhan sees an enormous billboard showing an excited man suspended in the air and supporting himself only with one arm. The billboard advertises some energy-boosting food or drink with a message that reads in Italian something close to “eat well to feel like this.” Perhan unsuccessfully tries to imitate the fake magic of the athletic character on the billboard. As opposed to the bountiful consumerist society that is eternally hungry for something new which will enliven its spirit, hungry Gypsies need no energy drinks to levitate. The Gypsy community abounds in children and may be supplying some of them to the West which, in fact, created the demand. Nevertheless, the Gypsies prove themselves capable of raising even orphans as healthy and street-wise, as shown in the example of Perhan’s motherless son. Furthermore, Kusturica emphasizes in a trickster-like fashion that the bounty of the West and the poverty of the Gypsies are implicated in each other. Right before he finally finds Danira in Rome, Perhan is shown standing next to the Trevia fountain, which is being drained and cleaned. The city janitors are sweeping the coins thrown into the fountain for luck, and Kusturica shows the money in close up to foreground the disheartening absurdity of the situation in which at that very moment Gypsy children are somewhere begging and prostituting for the same amount of change.
The director views the Gypsies both as a nation and as a metaphor. They are the pariah's of the world; mistreated, marginalized, despised, distrusted, and eliminated everywhere. As the director explains:

Gypsies have a very bad position in society because every middle-class mother-fucker likes to have somebody beneath him... Any time in the history of Europe when Gypsies have been targeted, it has indicated that we are entering a new era in which totalitarian feelings are rising. (interview)

In what is more than a mere ironic reversal, Kusturica poignantly refers to their mass killing by the Nazis (half a million Gypsies were killed) when he has Merdžan, who used to be a Gastarbeiter, exclaim in German in a nightmare: “Germany is my home!” Here, Merdžan appropriates the language of the slaughterer of his people in a painfully futile, somnambulistic attempt to claim for his people a piece of wealth and a piece of history that has been denied them. Merdžan’s exclamation is a call of a figurative bastard child to a home which dispensed of him because of his racial and cultural impurity. Moreover, the scene suggests Merdžan’s impossible renunciation of the desolate Gypsy home, an eerie home for hanging as hinted at by the film’s original title.

The Gypsies are every nation’s “Other,” and, paradoxically, everybody’s fantasy. With their nomadic lifestyle, the Gypsies are the epitome of freedom and resistance to authority and institutional power. In yet another ironic scene, the director shows Ahmed’s crew operating in the midst of Vatican, under the nose of
the Pope addressing his congregation. It is hard to exhaust the significance of this scene. Kusturica irreverently sutures a documentary footage of one of the Pope’s addresses into his film, unproblematically mixing fact and fiction and, by juxtaposition, making them reflect on each other’s reliability, fictionality, and ideological purport. The scene does not only foreground the Gypsy rejection of any authority, but also shows how this spiritual authority from its elevated position fails to see and relate to the reality of the people below. And reality below is rather ambiguous and certainly far from the romanticized image of Italy. In a scene preceding this one, Perhan walks down a street full of artists and passes by a serenaded dining couple. Perhan walks right through, but the camera lingers on the image of the couple. It may well be that the Gypsies are muddying the tourist’s image of Italy, but they certainly contributed to the vibrancy of Italian culture.

The Gypsies manage to remain unassimilated while they leave an indelible mark on any culture with which they come in contact. The music and folklore of Spain, France, Yugoslavia, Romania, and Russia, to name just a few, would never have such exuberance without Gypsy influences. They inspired surrealists. Cocteau’s work, especially The Testament of Orpheus (Le Testament d’Orphée, 1960), holds a special place for the Gypsy flamenco artists. In magic realist literature, especially that of García Márquez, they have a prominent presence. In One Hundred Years of Solitude the history of Macondo begins with the arrival of a mesmerizing Gypsy caravan.
Kusturica seems to say that from their marginal position the Gypsies have
the ability to see better. For example, the director shows on several occasions the
panoramic view of the city in the background of Hatidža's home overlooking it.
Marginalized as they are, the Gypsies may even prefer to live, to use Bhabha's term,
border lives, but they certainly are not sealed off in their world. Kusturica makes
sure that his intense focus on their community does not leave the impression of a
world isolated by its immediate preoccupations. The director imbues the film with
references to the mainstream, inevitably American, culture. Ahmed claims that after
he helps Danira have a sugery she will have legs like Marilyn Monroe. The
tapestry-like cloth with a Warholian image of Elvis Presley is the background for
the scene in which Merdžan gambles everything away. A woman calls Merdžan,
who seems to be practicing Kung Fu, a "Casanova." Next to an old-fashioned name
such as Jašar, Gypsy children can be given names like Elvis and Rambo. These
Gypsies like westerns, know about Chaplin, and have a makeshift cinema in their
little town.

They, however, are not subsumed by the mainstream global culture. They
seem to appropriate it effortlessly by picking and choosing pieces they will
incorporate, and, thus, they ensure longevity of their culture through flexibility. In
spite of all the hardships and disasters, the Gypsies persist and survive through this
flexibility, the magic, cunning, and, above all, their music and their exuberant sense
of humor. In one of the briefest but unforgettable scenes, Kusturica shows Perhan
and Danira approaching Roman ruins from the left to the right of the screen. Perhan stops and the camera follows his gaze to reveal a group of Gypsy children playing in the midst of an ancient amphitheatre. This is the cinema at its best; when in an image that speaks a thousand words the film shows the Gypsies surviving and outliving empires from antiquity on.

The Gypsies and their way of life are the film’s inherent source of magic realism – they live magic realism. I do not refer here only to their folklore and their belief tradition but also to the hybrid aspects of their culture and lifestyle. They inhabit hybrid cultural reality marked by the co-existence of the mythical envisioning of the world and global consumerism, folk mysticism and scientific positivism, hunger and the technological advancement. The director stresses such coterminousness from the onset of and throughout the film. Shortly into the film, we simultaneously listen to Hatidža singing disinterestedly as the mother of a thirteen-year-old girl whom Merdžan impregnated raucously protests, and to a TV set emitting a scientific broadcast in English on human genes. For a minute, the sounds and the languages are blended together, and the viewer is frustrated by not being able to follow either one because of their equal intensity.

The hybridity of the culture, as well as the modern reality in general, is repeatedly accentuated through the use of languages ranging from Romany, Serbo-Croatian, English, German, and Italian. Romany, itself, is infused with Serbian expressions, and the way the Gypsies use it is characterized significantly by the
collapsing of styles and registers. In the sequence of Perhan’s attempted suicide, Zabit goes from cursing “Screw you, shadow!” directly to addressing Perhan’s pet turkey with the elevated Shakespeare-like “And what’s this fine fowl plotting at this hour?” The film displays different styles such as folk poetry of songs, mythical storytelling, philosophical argumentation of Zabit, and epistolary style in Perhan’s letters to Hatidža.

Furthermore, the religious orientation of the Gypsies is hybrid. Their names bespeak this hybridity through their range from Slavic Christian “Ruža,” the international and Hollywood “Elvis and Rambo,” Muslim “Ahmed” or “Hatidža,” and distinctly Gypsy “Perhan.” Their community buries their dead with Muslim rituals and celebrates the Saint George’s Day in a very pagan manner. Andrew Horton elucidates: “the [G]ypsies . . . are part pagan, part Christian, part believers, part passionate hedonists. As in their lives, so in their faith, they live with a sense of multiple possibilities” (187). In comparing and contrasting Francis Ford Coppola’s The Godfather (1972) and Kusturica’s film as its makeover, Horton asserts that similarly and differently from Coppola’s portrayal of the Catholic church and religion Kusturica portrays “the Orthodox faith of the Balkans” (186). He, thus, grossly overlooks that if the Balkans is characterized by anything it is by religious diversity. Furthermore, he fails to see that Kusturica signals from the opening of the film that the Gypsies are the ones who bridge the religions of Islam and Christianity
through their rituals and names, which is exceptionally significant for the region marked by religious animosity.  

For a film designed to portray the vibrantly hybrid culture of the Gypsies, Kusturica developed a style animated by the disruptive and playful trickster spirit. Horton calls his style a “[G]ypsy-like approach to narrative and cinema” (188). The trickster-like humor and transgressiveness are best displayed in the house-hoisting scene. When Merdžan gambles everything away, down to his clothes, he goes back home to ask of Hatidža to pay off his debt. Suspecting that she may have saved some money, he desperately searches their little home for the hidden cash, but finds none. Because Hatidža refuses to help him, Merdžan tries to scare his mother into giving in. And so, he hooks the roof of their little house by a thick rope to his pick-up truck and hoists it up in the air. Merdžan’s character, whom we got to know by now to be a naïve, compulsive gambler who wants to make deals with God, and a local irresistible charmer, makes this situation quite comic. However, the sight of Hatidža and the children being left out in the open, in the cold rain, in the middle of the night stirs up not only dread for the innocent characters but also some deep-seated atavistic fears. Kusturica makes a double transgression here. By pointing to the precarious nature of this home, he strips Home of its nostalgic aura. At the same time, he crushes Home as representation of ossified values and rigid rules. This scene, which recalls Keaton’s hoisted hospital in Steamboat Bill, Jr. (1928) and Chaplin’s hanging house (pun intended) in Gold Rush, is truly unheimlich. It
actualizes the uncanny in a moment which forces us to hold simultaneously possibilities of comedy and tragedy.

Consistent with the trickster's mischievous art of boundary crossing and reversal and confusion of the opposites, Kusturica persistently conflates comedy and tragedy. To the tragic moment when the broken-hearted Perhan tries to hang himself Zabit brings laughter. As he tries to cut the rope by which Perhan is hanging, the two get locked in an embrace and crash together through some scaffolding in a slapstick manner. Through the magical acts of editing, the film cuts to Danira and Hatidža laughing at them it seems, but then we see that they are actually watching Merdžan impersonating Chaplin. Kusturica here pays homage to Chaplin and acknowledges his influence. Through Chaplin, whom critical writing branded as a trickster figure, Kusturica celebrates the cinematic sources of his magic realist film along with its trickster spirit. He, also, effectively uses Chaplin's cinematic heritage such as mixing of melodrama and comedy and the proverbial ambiguity of Chaplin's Tramp to highlight his own style. In this film the tragic moments are relentlessly deflated by laughable instances and the comic moments are inflated to the tragic level. In a scene which encapsulates both of these processes, Danira and Perhan are leaving their home for the first time with Ahmed, melancholic music, tears, and a box full of grandma's shiny red candy apples are seeing them off to their trip. The pathos-filled moment is, nevertheless, interrupted with a comic element when we find out, with Perhan, that the box is magically missing one apple,
but the hunger-driven act also reverts the moment back to the tragic and even intensifies it. Kusturica, thus, never lets pathos degenerate into bathos.

The director infuses documentary-like representation with lyricism. Menton’s criteria of sharp focus and objectivity for pictorial magic realism are applicable to Kusturica’s realism-creating techniques. Unlike magic realist painting which tends to appeal more to the intellect, Kusturica appeals both to the intellect and emotions. However, he manages to take a directorial stance towards his subject which, in Richard Corliss’s words, neither romanticizes nor flinches from it. The director achieves such documentary-like objectivity primarily through paying attention equally to animate and inanimate objects and through the use of the simultaneous close and far view, which are characteristic of the pictorial magic realism. But in the midst of the cold-appearing realism there are poetic moments such as the sequence of the ritual celebration of St. George’s Day. It appears to begin as Perhan’s dream, in which he emerges with his turkey from the bottom of the screen and is lifted up in the air, floating over the landscape. Perhan and the camera go back down to earth within one continuous tracking shot to reveal a river full of people bathing and holding torches. To create a mystical effect, a haunting melody sung by a young woman’s voice accompanies the sublime image of the elemental fires burning on the water and the misty sight of the Gypsies taking ablution. In the continuation of the sequence, the camera shows Hatidža through a reversed shot/reverse shot looking at Perhan and Azra’s tender display of adolescent
In Gypsy mythology, geese are the animals who flew the Gypsies over the ocean and into Europe, which I think is beautiful. Geese are so elegant and somehow so intelligent that between one and many geese there is incredible harmony, plus they bring a great dynamic to a scene. It's also like a color you need to bring to a painting from time to time ... I like repeating those kinds of colors and motifs because they please me. (interview)

Consistent with the narrative pattern through which Perhan's story develops in the interplay of communal regulations and personal desires, the fantastic episodes are not only the indicators of the magical realism of the communal life but also the indicators of the critical moments in Perhan's life. They signal those turning points in his personal journey such as encounters with Azra, leaving home, transformation into a criminal and the consequent pangs of guilt-ridden conscience, Azra's death, Ahmed's murder, and his own death.

Kusturica's film, however, refuses a narrow classification of an ethnographic magic realist category. The director's fantastical instances include the matter-of-fact representation of the improbable outside of the tribal magical, such as Azra's levitation, as well as a scene whose astonishing effect is produced by Verfremdung. In that scene, Perhan travels from Italy, across the Adriatic Sea, back to his hometown. The camera positions us to look at the vastness of the sea through a tiny oval window of the ferryboat, from what turns out to be Perhan's perspective. Perhan, who obviously sees it for the first time, ingeniously ties a bun with a rope and drops it into the sea, only to pull it back quickly in order to savour the never-
before-tasted saltiness of the seawater. The film makes us "taste" anew that saltiness through the power of synesthetic representation, by which the visual stimulus provokes a secondary reaction in our sense of taste. Through what I dub here as cinesthesia, the film has the power to affect more than one of our senses and provoke not only an intellectual and emotional but also a physical reaction.

Kusturica's fantastical also include dream sequences and even blurs the line between the representation of dreams as such and reality, as in the scene of the St. George's Day celebration. In addition, Kusturica's magic realist mélange brings out surrealistic detail, such as the bathtub Hatidža keeps outside and uses for her limestone production. The sight of that bathtub extracted from its typical setting and divorced from its typical use frees the object, turns it into a detail with a mind of its own, and elevates it to a symbolic signifier. This surrealistic aspect of Kusturica's filmmaking is also exemplified in the scene of Ahmed's killing. Here, the director shows how the clout of will and intentionality can empower a banal object such as a fork, endow it with a mind of its own, and stretch to exacerbation its utilitarian potential to the frightening neck-slashing weapon.

This is how Horton characterizes the director's filmic techniques with which he implements his boundary-crossing agenda and constructs the worldview of multiple perspectives:

Kusturica's vision is one that includes both a realist and a surrealist tradition: thus does John Ford meet up with Luis Buñuel within this gypsy cinematic caravan. These
extreme borders go beyond individual filmmakers, of
course, for to mention Ford and Buñuel is also to embrace
the classical Hollywood tradition and the anarchistic
European avant-garde at the same time. (180)

In addition to Chaplin, Ford, and Buñuel, this film acknowledges other directors’
oeuvres as the sources of its cinemagic realism. For example, after being asked to
comment on the influences of Fellini’s filmmaking on his own, Kusturica replied:

Something I’m proud of is discovering the way [Fellini] made his movies and that I can make mine in the same
way. I’m using these little tricks, like a magician who sees
one circus and goes into another to work. Hopefully, in
my films you get excited by every character you meet, as
you do in Fellini’s. There’s also that incredible
architecture he created in his scenes and his kind of
Mediterranean, paganistic vision of life. (interview)

Kusturica’s circus-like approach to cinema is not only reflected in the portrayal of
his characters and their setting but also in this film’s genre carnivalization. He
creates a cinematic hybrid conceived through the use of elements of various genres,
such as Bildungsroman, love story, and mob film. Yet again, such directorial choice
seems only appropriate for the depiction of the motley world of the Gypsies.

I pointed out earlier that the multihued world and lifestyle of the Gypsies are
the film’s inherent source of magic realism. However, obvious ethnographic and
phenomenological sources of the magical, such as the representation of Hatidža’s
healing powers, Perhan’s telekinetic and hypnotic gift, and the communal rituals is
not what I want to focus on. Rather, I want to look at the medium of film and the
way the director uses its resources to produce his special blend of magic realism.
Kusturica approaches the representation of the magical from two different angles. On the one hand, he uses the camera rather statically, as a mere observer, to produce an effect of almost documentary-like “recording” of the magical, which is mostly the case with the occurrences of the occult and the paranormal. On the other hand, the camera is actively participating in the magical moments.

The director uses the creative potential of the camerawork and the editing to create the effect of the camera itself being implicated in and mesmerized by the magical. Kusturica uninges shot/reverse shot to create a supernatural effect and uncanny doubling. At Ahmed’s camp in Italy one shot shows Perhan looking at something and the shot that follows shows a couple of geese, which the spectator automatically assumes is what Perhan is watching. Within the same shot, the camera tracks the geese and stops at the sight of the bus only to reveal Perhan looking out from its window. Again in Italy, Perhan goes back to the place where he was hiding a stash of money and sees that it has been flooded. One shot shows him looking towards that secret spot and the reverse shot shows the water. A moment later, out of the water emerges Perhan, who was obviously trying to dive for his treasure. Such instances in which Perhan seems to be at two different places at the same time, as if looking at himself, appropriately occur at the time of his increased introspection; at the time when he feels torn because he rejected the honest values of his grandmother in favor of gaining easy money through hideous dealings.
There is yet another case of doubling that seems distinctly Keatonesque in nature. The dream sequence starts with the camera tracking a turkey that leads the camera eye to the bus where Perhan is sleeping. In his sleep, he is calling to the turkey which is standing outside of the window and reacting to his calls. A close-up of Perhan, obviously dreaming, is followed by a shot of Hatidža on the left side of the screen tossing a red thread coil in front of the Italian cathedral. The camera leaves Hatidža, who is humming a lullaby-like tune, to track the movement of a strange, old-fashioned gas pump in the midst of an otherwise deserted plaza, save for dogs and pigeons. The pump takes us to the right side of the screen to reveal Hatidža magically duplicated. The following shot shows Perhan through the window of the same bus lifting up his waking head and starting to watch his dream. Here, just like in the opening of the St. George's Day celebration, not only the editing but also the tracking shots and the camera movement produce a supernatural effect.

The camera movement accompanied by the extraordinary use of sound creates one of the most memorable magical scenes of the film – the limestone making scene. In front of the chimney-like furnace for making limestone, Perhan is hypnotizing his pet turkey to raise its wings, either in imitation of a peacock or in attempt to fly. He sees Azra, who came to buy some limestone, for the first time. When she kneels down at the place where the hypnotized turkey stood, across Perhan at the base of the furnace, Perhan starts to recount, with amazement in his
voice, the process of limestone production. As he relates how the smoke generated by the fire goes higher and higher up the chimney, the camera leaves the sight of the two and slowly tracks the chimney upward as if following the smoke. Along with the camera tilting, the sound of Perhan's voice gradually changes from the distinct outside sound to the muffled and almost echoing sound, as if Perhan is magically rising up the chimney too. We listen to his continuous narration, and when the camera gets to the top of the furnace we see the magically-transported Azra and Perhan up there. The sound picks up where the image leaves off to convey what is hidden from the eye of the camera. The sound gets endowed with magic of its own and manages to make us visualize the two flying up the furnace as their romance is beginning to heat up. Here, not only the turkey and Azra but also the camera gets hypnotized by Perhan to create a scene in which the magic of mythical storytelling, the magic of a paranormal phenomenon, the magic of love, and the magic of the filmic medium all coalesce into a paramount moment of cinemagic realism.

In addition to the unusual use of sound, Kusturica's use of color generates a sense of astonishment and magic. The color red stands out in this technicolor film and at times offsets other colors in such a way that the rest of the film seems as if in black-and-white. It is the red of Hatidža's headscarf and of the turkey's head, of the coil of thread in Perhan's dream, and, most strikingly, the shiny red of the apples which Hatidža sends with Perhan. Here again is a detail with a mind of its own, a motif that like Hatidža's thread is delicately woven through the film. Jameson's
discussion of the differences between magic realist historical films and what he calls mainstream nostalgia films, especially the difference between the way these films use color versus glossiness respectively, seem to be extremely pertinent to what I am pointing at here. 42

Color separates objects from one another, in some mesmerizing stasis of distinct solids whose unmixed individual hues speak to distinct zones of vibration within the eye, thereby setting each object off as the locus of some unique and incomparable visual gratification. Glossiness, on the other hand, characterizes the print as a whole, smearing its varied contents together in a unified display and transferring, as it were, the elegant gleam of clean gloss to the ensemble of jumbled objects . . . which are arranged together as a single object of consumption by the camera lens. (311-312)

Jameson proceeds to explain how different kinds of the color red do not only awaken our eye to a fully differentiated range of that color’s spectrum but that each red, rather, irritates and stimulates a different and distinct sense of perception. He asserts: “The generic category ‘red’ is thereby virtually exploded as a unity, along with ‘sight’ or the eye itself as some putative central locus for seeing” (313).

Kusturica’s unique type of magic realism, therefore, relies not only on its extraordinary subject to inspire his film’s magic but turns to the medium of film and its magical roots for motivation. He utilizes skillfully the uniqueness of that medium to create a world which is beyond the world of his immediate subject, the Gypsies; a world marked by “the invigorating experiences of transgression, salutary dunkings in ambivalence” (Hyde 268). As if echoing Danow’s views on magic realism,
Horton characterizes Kusturica’s film as a double vision and states: “Kusturica’s Gypsy epic is one of what he calls ‘joy,’ a term that embraces ‘happiness and sorrow’” (178). Thus, Kusturica’s contrapuntal art is energized by the disruptive but life-affirming spirit of the trickster, who “at the meal after the funeral . . . makes the first off-color joke” (Hyde 90). And Kusturica ends his film with such a joke when he has little Perhan steal coins off his alleged father’s dead eyes, and, thus, ensures that the spirit of the trickster and his mischievous art live on. While this magic realist film embraces both light and dark tones, it is, nonetheless, ultimately an embodiment of Gypsy joie de vivre.

**Malkovich’s Muddied Mind**

Through its matter-of-fact representation of a supernatural event, Spike Jonze’s Being John Malkovich exemplifies the ontological type of magic realism. Realistic representation as well as the consensual acknowledgement and acceptance of the supernatural phenomenon by the film’s characters give the unreal, such as the discovery of the portal that leads into the actor John Malkovich’s head, a real, ontological presence in the film. Furthermore, the compelling nature of the filmic image demands that the fantastic be accepted as is. However, when viewed as an exposé on the American urban life, the film reveals the preoccupations characteristic of the sociological magic realism. Similarly to what Kusturica explores in the ethnographic Time of the Gypsies, Jonze’s film investigates the idiosyncratic ways
of a community. Being John Malkovich, however, looks into a social group which is
not organized around ethnic belonging, a community unlike that of the Gypsies
which is animated by their magico-mythical folklore. Jonze's film probes the
corporate culture and the consumerist society of spectacle of an American
metropolis. Faris points to the "urban, 'first world,' mass cultural analogues of the
primitive belief systems that underlie earlier Latin American examples of magic
realism" (183) as the likely sources for more recent magic realism.

The film undertakes representation of a reality so outrageous that it verges
on the unbelievable and can be better represented only by the injection of the
fantastic element. As Mellen contends,

> There is no justification for enlisting magic realism unless
there is a larger truth which cannot be reached but for
distortion of ordinary social realism. Magic realism at its
best relies not upon flights of fantasy, but on the
particular fusion of fact and fantasy in the service of a
quest for meaning. (6)

The fantastic, therefore, creates what Rawdon Wilson calls "a fenestral translucency
through which reality flickers" (220). The reality that is the subject of Jonze's film,
that of the movie-crazed and celebrity-fascinated world, flickers more intensely and
more poignantly through the magic realist portal, and the viewer is invited to look
through that portal for a clearer vision of the grotesquely magical reality explored.43

After Craig Schwartz (John Cusack), the protagonist of Being John
Malkovich, experiences the trip through the head of Malkovich's (who plays
himself) for the first time, he tries excitedly to explain the incident to his co-worker Maxine (Catherine Keener) and says with frustration: “It’s supernatural for lack of a better word.” Likewise, the director of the film uses the supernatural for lack of a better way to depict the incredible reality of the modern world. The director executes his film through magic realism not only to portray the urban reality more effectively but also to self-reflexively point to the magical power of film, which pushes the limits of our ability to suspend disbelief to a point of calm acceptance of something as outrageously outlandish as a trip through somebody’s head. The film becomes, in fact, a trip through our urban collective head, by which Jonze mischievously ridicules his own viewers. Following the characteristics of the ontological magic realism, this film portrays the ordinary and the extraordinary “on exactly the same level of reality” (Spindler 83). However, its director goes beyond such portrayal to even reverse the real and the unreal wherefore the “real,” outside world is presented as disconcertedly bizarre and the fantastic portal turns quickly into just another amusement ride.

The supernatural portal channels the magic aspect of the film and, thus, makes it closer to the type of magic realist film which is framed by the magic as opposed to the dispersed magical such as in Time of the Gypsies. In addition to the portal being an extraordinary item which contains and defines the film’s magic realism, it becomes what Craig describes as “metaphysical can of worms” and the carrier of the film’s thematic preoccupations by the fact that it is a passageway to a
person's head. Chris Chang refers to the film's metaphysical aspect when he explains: "When Schwartz accidentally discovers a hidden passageway behind a large filing cabinet, things go completely Borgesian" (9). The appropriate reference to Borges's writing here implies focus on questions of memory, uncanny doubling, mistaken identity, disorderly universe, circularity of time and the notion of the eternal return, as well as the idea that all the people are one single person.

The opening sequence of the film is an announcement of such thematic preoccupations. The initial image is of a theatrical stage, through which Jonze not only points to the affiliation of the medium of film with theatre but also draws attention to the performative nature of the film. In the background of the image is what sounds like an orchestra tuning its instruments in preparation for the act. With an opening applause, the stage curtain opens to reveal a puppet of "naked" muscular body and melancholic eyes, who gets infuriated by a look at himself in a mirror. After breaking the mirror with a glass, he starts moving frenetically on the stage and at that point discovers the strings. He looks upward and reveals the man who is pulling them. The sight of the man whose uncanny double he appears to be, leads the puppet to perform what his master calls "Craig's Dance of Despair and Disillusion." We hear ovations at the conclusion of the puppet's performance only to discover that it is the canned applause emanating from a soundtrack, and that the theatre is just a part of Craig's home studio.
Through its exhibition of the doubling, the mirror image, and the puppeteer’s control, this prologue-like entry sets the stage for the film’s inquiry into the questions of self-alienation, unified subjectivity, and individual independence. The film can be characterized as metaphysical because of such thematic concerns as well as metafictional because the director points, through the opening sequence, to his own puppeteer-like control of the film’s characters and the fictional world. The sequence is an encapsulating expression of the trickster spirit of this magic realist film in the sense that it marks the boundaries between the real and the make-believe, the simulated and the lived, and simultaneously confuses those boundaries. It reveals the director’s method whereby he operates through relentless reversals and by playing tricks on the viewer’s expectations.

The director uses the selective and directing gaze of the camera self-consciously in order to reveal its manipulative power. The radically narrow perspective of the theatre supported by the sound makes us expect to be shown a real theatrical performance with an invisible but nonetheless present theatrical audience. To our surprise, when the curtain opens we see a doll looking uncannily alive. Even after the doll reveals the puppeteer, we still hold on to the notion that we are watching a live performance. Only after the camera decides to pull away from its object are we allowed to see that it is one man playing theatre on a miniature stage inside his room with the audience simulated by a soundtrack. What is significant is that this narrowing perspective parallels the later-shown perspective
from John Malkovich’s head. By this parallel the director seems to imply that trading one man’s head or life for another’s neither widens the perspective nor makes it less skewed. Consequently, the director casts a grim look at the cinema by insinuating that it is all but a game of perspectives and make-believe. Paradoxically, but also in agreement with the director’s deconstructionist method, Jonze undermines his own perspective here by the consciousness-raising quality of his film.

The prologue sequence signals that something is askew, and that is sharply emphasized in the continuation of the film. After the puppet’s performance, Craig gulps his beer and props himself exhaustedly but contently against the stage, and then the screen goes dark. We hear what sounds like a parrot repeating “Craig, honey, it’s time to get up” in the darkness, which we find out simulates the darkness behind Craig’s closed eyes because we see in the next shot a close-up of Craig’s sleeping head with a live parrot on it. And so, from the opening scene depicting strange atmosphere of the enclosure of his studio at night, the film proceeds by showing Craig waking up the next morning in the lively apartment he shares with his wife, Lotte (Cameron Diaz). This film, like many magic realist fictions, as Faris argues, “carefully delineate[s] sacred enclosures . . . and then allow[s] these sacred spaces to leak their magical narrative waters over the rest of the text and the world it describes” (174).
The exterior, real world proves to be even more bizarre than the secluded world of the artist. Not an alarm clock but a parrot that sounds like his wife wakes Craig up. The parrot's name is Orrin Hatch, after a conservative republican senator from Utah. Lotte asks Craig to baby-sit Elijah, a chimpanzee who is not feeling well and who, we are told by Lotte, is subsequently taken to a psychiatrist because he suffers from acute feelings of inadequacy. Then, we see Craig in the streets performing his rendition of the tale of Abelard and Heloise. To portray keenly how their cloistered bodies are ravished by painful longing for sexual re-union, Craig shows each engaged in a make-believe sexual intercourse. Out of the bustling crowd only a little girl turns around to watch in amazement as she and her father are waiting to cross the street. After realizing what they are being shown, the father gets seriously offended, but his sense of pedestrian propriety does not prevent him from punching Craig in the face and calling him no less then "You, mother fucker!"

Unfortunately for Craig, this is where the display of the absurdities of the real world only begins. After the misunderstood and unrecognized puppeteer and his art receive this final blow, Craig goes to interview for a "real" job. In response to a newspaper ad looking for a man with fast hands, Craig applies for a filing position in Lester Corporation. He discovers that the company is located on the seventh-and-a-half floor of a corporate building and that its employees have to walk around bent due to its "low overhead." A receptionist (Mary Kay Place), who misunderstands every word, meets Craig and the company's owner, Dr. Lester (Orson Bean), who
excuses his non-existent speech impediment, interviews him. He gets the job and that is where Craig accidentally discovers the portal to Malkovich’s head one day, and goes on to share the news with Maxine and Lotte. After realizing the commercial value of such a supernatural experience, Maxine suggests that they open up a business called JM Inc. and start charging two hundred dollars for the fifteen-minute trip to Malkovich.

The Malkovich vessel helps create an outrageous ménage-a-quatre, so to speak, in which John Malkovich starts dating Maxine without knowing that he has been invaded, Maxine and Lotte fall in love by using Malkovich as “a sort of prosthetic love attachment” (Romney 41), and Craig wins Maxine over after he inhabits Malkovich and manages to take full control over him. By using Malkovich’s celebrity status and by redirecting his career from acting to puppeteering, Craig finally receives worldwide recognition. In the meantime, Lotte finds out that Dr. Lester is just another body vehicle extending the life of Mr. Mertin, the Irish founder of the Mertin-Flemming Bulding in which Lester Corp. is located, and that he plans to secure his longevity by entering Malkovich’s body on John’s forthy fourth birthday. Craig in Malkovich lives contently his successful life alongside his now-pregnant wife Maxine until his birthday, when Maxine gets abducted by Dr. Lester and a group of his elderly friends, who intend to move into Malkovich to keep Lester company. Craig finally agrees to leave Malkovich after Dr. Lester threatens to kill Maxine. Maxine meets with Lotte again and reveals to
her that she is carrying Lotte’s child that was conceived through Malkovich. At the end of the film, Maxine and Lotte are leading a happy family life with their daughter Emily. As we watch Maxine and Lotte through Emily, who obviously inherited the portal since she is Malkovich’s daughter, we hear Craig’s loving voice in Emily’s head admiring Maxine. Given that Dr. Lester, now Malkovich, intends to move into Emily some day, the film ends on a note of suspense.

For the representation of this convoluted fictional world of reusable bodies and characters packed up in one another in Babushka, the Russian doll, fashion, Jonze uses realistic style and linear narration. Thus, the director manages not only to normalize the inexplicable and the supernatural but also bestow an air of seriousness on his absurd subject. The film’s narration is executed through the interplay between the serious and the comic, and, as Dana Dragunoiu infers, “the film’s combination of madcap comedy and serious social critique is in fact a strategy for producing meaning” (2). Jonze stretches the limits of the acceptable and of our ability to suspend disbelief to the unbearable point after which we can but laugh with realization at the malleable nature of us humans.

It is this malleability that Jonze exposes through the invention of the seventh-and-a-half-floor. The American corporations engage their marketing apparatus tracking the pulse of the America’s consumers, their psychologically-informed odd-even pricing, and the quip slogans to target the minds and lives of their consumers. They do everything to create a home away from home for their
employees under the guise of beneficence, where in fact they keep the employees cubicled off for extended exploitation all the while promoting the so-called “out of the box” thinking. The corporate culture propagates political correctness in the name of emancipation and respect, whereas it is a separationist tool (much like that crowbar with which the experienced rider forcefully separates the elevator door at the seventh-and-a-half floor) that inhibits camaraderie and honest intimacy and merely levels and suppresses differences, unresolved issues, and past transgressions.

While the laudatory goal behind P[olitical] C[orrectness] is to stimulate respect and mutual answerability in a reciprocity that takes past oppressions into account, in practice it often degenerates into the sadomasochistic self-flagellations of guilty liberals and a competition for oppressed status among the subaltern – victimhood and “one-downs-personship” as cultural capital in a fluctuating identity stock market. (Shohat and Stam 341)

And so, to represent effectively this corporate state of mind Jonze literalizes it in that infamous seventh-and-a-half floor with low ceilings that force the people working there to bend their backs in compensation. According to the founding myth of the floor presented in a training video by a politically correct cast consisting of a woman and a black man, Mr. Mertin, the Irish immigrant, built the floor for “an adult woman of miniature proportions.” She came to Mr. Mertin’s office one day to ask for a job at a safe workplace. He met her request by putting the reins of marriage on her attempt at self-sufficiency and by building a floor where she and her “cursed kind,” as he calls them, can work in peace. Through the video’s politically correct
cast, Jonze humorously represents how political correctness only superficially furthers the interests of the minorities whose backs are, in fact, bent by being conveniently squeezed in the half-floor of professional fulfillment. Jonze's playful but nonetheless pungent subversion goes even further than poking fun at political correctness and the grand narrative of the founding of America. The director appears to equate capitalism and America in general with the seventh-and-a-half floor, at which the replays of the nostalgic founding myth bend the minds of its inhabitants into uncritical gratefulness for being given a chance to live and work at the existential half-floor. Moreover, Jonze reveals that the corporate enclosures, more than Craig's studio or apartment, are those sacred spaces which leak their grotesque magic into the rest of the world. With the portal permanently located at Lester Corp., Jonze implies that the corporate mindset is the doorway through which we can enter the mind of the whole of America.

The employees working on the floor, who seem to have no problem adapting to the low ceilings, become lonely automatons with hidden mechanisms of frustrated desire. Consequently, the entire company is haunted by what Chang calls "the angst of sexual frustration" (9). Watching Craig filing away with his diligent hands, the receptionist, Floris, invites him to alphabetize her, and even though she misunderstands Craig's every word, the only thing she understood correctly is his rejection. Dr. Lester lusts for Floris, and Craig, in turn, picks what Maxine calls the unrequited love option when he gets magnetically attracted to her. She clearly
understands Craig’s desperate attempts at making conversation with her better than he understands them himself – she reads straight through their sexual motivation.

The all-consuming corporate mindset is so powerful that it changes even Craig. When the Methuselah Lester starts confiding in Craig his exuberant sexual fantasies of Floris, the former risqué artist warns Lester, in agreement with political correctness, that "workplace is not the most suitable for this type of discussion." With a typical "It’s a job thing," he quickly starts excusing himself to Lotte that he has to work late and attend after-hours bar meetings, which are supposed to bring the co-workers together and compensate for the alienating workplace. And not only Craig’s workplace but also his home and art are about nothing if not about alienation.

That "Craig’s Dance of Despair and Disillusion" is provoked by the puppet facing himself in the mirror is symptomatic of the alienation from the self and, as Dragunoiu indicates, of a psychic split. Granting that the puppet is the artist’s double, the removal from the self becomes twofold. Faris points to the doubling of characters and stories as constitutive elements of magic realism in general. "Repetition as a narrative principle, in conjunction with mirrors or their analogues used symbolically or structurally, creates a magic of shifting references" (177). Time of the Gypsies and Being John Malkovich, as well as Run Lola Run, as we shall see later, incorporate into their narrative structures the doubling and the mirror
principle. Faris’s discussion of a specific type of mirroring seems to be especially relevant for Jonze’s film.

A variation on this mirror phenomenon is the occurrence of reversals of various kind—plot-mirroring, so to speak. This is a common feature in all literature, of course, but in [magic realist] texts it occurs with particular frequency and highlights the metaphysically revisionist agenda of magical realism. . . . Such patterns of reversal implicitly figure a lack of human control over events: what you thought you controlled controls you” (178).

Craig’s art of choice, puppeteering, foregrounds the question of control, and his choice of himself as the star puppet highlights the problems of self-alienation as well as unified subjectivity. In a staged conversation with the new doll of interest, Maxine, Craig explains that he likes puppeteering because of the notion of being somebody else for a while. Ironically, he narcissistically features his own double and only seems to recycle his marionette through different garbs. In this respect, the rest of the film becomes just an elaboration on this opening scene.

Draguniou reads Being John Malkovich through the lens of Lacan’s conception of subjectivity and infers that Craig “subscribes to a Cartesian notion of selfhood, and, in consequence, believes himself to be his own master” (4). She analyzes the scene in which Craig addresses Elijah and pronounces him fortunate because the chimp supposedly does have consciousness to trouble him. Craig reasons: “Consciousness is a terrible curse. I think. I feel. I suffer. And all I ask in return is for an opportunity to do my work. And they won’t allow it, because I raise
issues.” Dragunoiu argues that this scene is a comic allusion to the opening of Lacan’s famous lecture “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I.” In it, Lacan attempts to revise Descartes’s “I think, therefore I am” into “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think” through a distinction he outlines between a very young child’s response to his mirror image and that of a young chimp. Dragunoiu applauds Jonze’s scintillating blending of the comic and the serious, the symbolic and the literal and asserts that

By means of this comic illusion, the scene between Craig and Elijah signals a paradigm shift that suggests that Craig’s subjectivity is not constructed by a Cartesian metaphysics of presence (as he tells Elijah) but rather by a series of identifications with various signifiers Craig (mis)recognizes as his doubles: his mirror-image puppet, the emasculated Peter Abelard, and John Malkovich, the Hollywood celebrity. (5)

Furthermore, Craig’s performance of the love story of Abelard and Heloise is, as Chang points out, a truly canny choice. It is, in fact, a replay of his alienated married life, which is confirmed by Craig casting the Lotte look-alike marionette to play Heloise and his puppet self to play Abelard. Their role-playing is reinforced by the soundtrack accompanying the show, which records the haunting voices of Lotte and Craig reading with agonizing conviction the passionate letters of the two legendary lovers. And so, Craig and Lotte play Abelard and Heloise who stand for Craig and Lotte. The circular pattern of this scene encapsulates and announces the theme that is elaborated in the film; the theme that any and all avenues we choose to
escape from ourselves inevitably lead back to our very selves. This pattern characterized by what Carson calls the "please-don't-throw-me-in-the-briar-patch effect" is central to this representation as well as the entire film.

That the trickster spirit is at work here is amplified by the fact that both Carson and Dragunoiu invoke the Br'er Rabbit folktale to illuminate Jonze's film. According to the tale, Br'er Rabbit, who obviously knows the psychology of the fox, escapes his grip by begging the fox not to throw him into the briar patch. The fox throws Rabbit in the patch only to discover with dismay that he has sent the trickster to his very home. Carson refers to the folktale to clarify the way “today’s cyberspectacles provide the same wish fulfillment by telling us that we live in a manufactured illusion” and to point out that Being John Malkovich both spoofs such scenarios and get to the bottom of their appeal (78).

Unlike Carson’s general review of the film, Dragunoiu’s psychoanalytically-informed analysis recalls the trickster’s story to illustrate how

[I]ike Br’er Rabbit, Being John Malkovich only seems to reject the psychoanalytic terms on which it depends . . . Anticipating the terms of its own reception, Being John Malkovich dares critics to approach it through the very terms it parodies, all the while hiding the fact that psychoanalysis is its rightful home. (2)

In any case, the trickster story is not an instrument for investigation of just one aspect of the film or the other, that is, it does not just illuminate the film’s virtual
reality subject or betray psychoanalytical premises – it is, in fact, the film's working principle.

And so, we are thrown into the briar patch of Craig’s art and his rendition of nonetheless then the twelfth-century tale only to find ourselves back at Craig’s home and in the midst of his frustrated marital life. The twentieth-century story of Craig and Lotte seem to parallel that of Abelard and Heloise on many levels. Craig relates to the figure of the renowned castrated philosopher his delusion of grandeur, which turns into disillusion. Craig sees himself as a mastermind who raises issues intolerable and incomprehensible to the ordinary public. He is, in fact, a brilliant puppeteer, but the world has no interest in puppeteering anymore, at least not until a whimsical celebrity like Malkovich provokes a fascination with the old art form. Craig’s feared professional impotence is paralleled by his obviously uneventful sexual life and his inability, economical or physical, to give Lotte a baby she wishes. Craig’s isolation in the workshop and his reasoning against them having a child recalls the way Abelard withdrew in his work and service to God and instructed the love-struck Heloise, who openly voiced her erotic needs, to compose herself and follow his example.

Social constraints and religious dogma were the partitions between Abelard and Heloise. Though modern, the marital life of the two urban-dwellers seems to subscribe to the similar old-fashioned constraints because of which Craig and Lotte are bound to play certain roles. Their situation brings to mind a 1987 song by a rock
artist, Bruce Springsteen, which insinuates the constructedness of human identity and suspects the pretenses of marital life. “Now you play the loving woman / I play the faithful man . . . So when you look at me, you better look hard and twice / Is that me baby or just a brilliant disguise?” The alienating modern lifestyle also drains the two of energy and keeps them mentally, emotionally, and physically separated. This is clearly shown in the domestic scene in which they are preparing dinner one night in their apartment filled with animals. While working on two different sides of the kitchen counter, they are talking without looking at each other, their heads bent over whatever they are doing. Craig is obviously unnerved by the animal cacophony but tries too hard not to show it, and Lotte is apologetic and tries to be tactful about the baby issue. At one point, they exchange a quick, almost mandatory kiss, which seems to be triggered, just like their I-love-yous on the phone, by a custom and a routine-born reflex and not passion.

However, under this disguise lurks frustration due to the unfulfilled needs and desires. According to García Márquez human beings do not just have public and private lives, but, in fact, three lives, including the secret one (A Witch Writing). The private life of these two betray how Craig and Lotte are haunted by their secret lives. The secret life ruptures the fine membrane of propriety of the public and the private and out of it emerge characters who are filled with rage. The portal to Malkovich opens the door for the repressed to surface and Craig displays his unflinching intention to satisfy his desires. If Lotte stands in the way of that
realization, he proves himself capable of locking his wife in the chimp cage for days. Through her experience in Malkovich, Lotte is exhilarated by the new sexual possibilities. In the way she candidly verbalizes her sexuality, Lotte resembles Heloise who used language uninhibitedly in her erotically charged letters. Lotte’s language bespeaks her transformation from a subdued, passion-deprived woman to a human being outraged by the recognition that her sexuality has been suppressed for so long. And so, from Lotte who uses mannerly and refined language over dinner at Lester’s and the soothing words of a loving wife she goes to yelling at Craig the openly uncouth: “Suck my dick!”

It must not be overlooked that Jonze draws a distinction between his female characters and the men in the film. The men appear to be haunted by feelings of inadequacy and come across as weak and insecure. Lester, who excuses his non-existent speech-impediment, extends his life in a parasitic fashion and is willing to live it miserably by doing what he obviously does not like as long as it advances his longevity. He secretly pines after Floris and eventually gets her, but only after he hides in Malkovich’s body. Malkovich, the semi-celebrity who exudes the air of ambiguous sexuality, appears to lead a lonely life over which he loses control. Finally, Craig suffers from unrealized megalomania and is controlled and overpowered in his private as well as professional life by Maxine. Women, in contrast, are firmly grounded in reality and seem to know what they want and are not afraid to voice and demand it. (They are not unlike Kusturica’s earthy Hatidža
who knows she must and knows how to carry on.) Floris openly makes her advances at Craig and curses at him in retaliation for his rejection. Maxine makes Craig speak his mind in all of its sexual honesty, and with sharp pragmatism quickly turns the portal into a business. Even before her transformation caused by the Malkovich experience, Lotte knows what she wants—a baby, and she eventually gets it. She, the bread-winner of the house, even finds a way to fulfill her motherly needs by filling her apartment with needy animals she brings from the pet shop.

Similarly to Kusturica, Jonze uses animals to reflect on the humans in the film, and ends up portraying a world quite different from that of *Time of the Gypsies*. Opposite Kusturica who shows the domestic animals such as dogs and geese running freely out in the open in the daylight, Jonze presents the animals of the wild, such as an iguana and a chimpanzee caged in Lotte and Craig's dark apartment. The animals reveal our urban alienation from the natural world. Moreover, the way these animals are treated by Lotte and Craig betrays their attempt to restrain their own urges and exhibits their uncontrollable egotism. Jonze makes us face the absurdity of our egomaniacal world in which the only things of interest are those that are anthropomorphic. Hence, Lotte's parrot is interesting because he imitates our language; the iguana's wound is dressed in bandages; and the chimp needs to be taken to a psychiatrist because of the feeling of inadequacy (perhaps as a result of being caged in a neon-lit apartment?!). Furthermore, Jonze seems to imply that life in the urban surrounding, in the cubiced-off world of the
corporate skyscrapers and apartment buildings which competes with time in a race it will never win, is, in fact, unnatural even for the humans who created it and causing alienation from ourselves and from one another.

The culmination of the human egocentrism is presented in the scene in which Malkovich goes up his own portal. Distressed after realizing that he is loosing control of himself, Malkovich secretly follows Maxine to the office building and there finds a line of JM Inc clients. He confronts Maxine and Craig and demands to go through the doorway. The experience turns out to be horrifying because he enters a world, a restaurant, in which all the characters, guests and waiters, are Malkovich himself; a world in which language is reduced to just one word “Malkovich.” According to Malkovich, this is the maddening world that no man should see – a world eternally involved in a narcissistic play. This episode recalls the opening dream sequence from Keaton’s The Playhouse (1921), in which Keaton’s character literally is every character in a vaudeville playhouse; he is everybody in the audience, in the orchestra, and on the stage. Even though (or because) Keaton alluded here to the fact that he performed multiple functions in the creation and orchestration of his films and that they were the products of his almost single-handed efforts, the narcissistic dimension of this scene is inescapable.45

But narcissism is a matter of covert alienation. Given that Narcissus fell in love with himself when he saw his reflection in the water, narcissism entails a split and a distancing from the self. In this respect, the scene replicates as well as
augments Craig's split in the reproduced puppet self. This scene is yet another actualized psychic division in which Malkovich is literally outside himself and has to enter his own head to face his multiplied self. The Malkovich vessel is central to the film not only as the doorway into the questions of gender and subjectivity, the nature of reality and the way we experience it, and the problem of freedom and manipulation, but also as the indicator of the alienation from the sensing self which mediates the ego -- the body. The portal to Malkovich leads not only to his head but also to his body. While Craig stresses the metaphysical aspect of the trip to Malkovich's head, Lotte is interested in the concrete feeling of being inside Malkovich's male body. It is significant that she is the one who defines the passageway as a vagina, and is excited by the possibility that Malkovich may actually have both a vagina and a penis. The centrality of the body is suggested from the onset of the movie with the agile "naked" body of Craig the puppet.

The notion of the estrangement from and rejection of the body is repeatedly underscored. The very first client of JM Inc. is a man who decides to go through the portal because he is fat and would like to inhabit a leaner body even if only for fifteen minutes. After her trip through Malkovich, Lotte seriously considers undergoing what she calls "the sexual reassignment surgery," but Craig discourages her by explaining correctly that changing bodies does not necessarily solve one's problems. Craig, however, contradicts himself when he decides to inhabit Malkovich permanently for the sake of recognition and Maxine's attention. When
he explains to Maxine that he is wearing his Malkovich body as an expensive suit, Craig indicates that the contemporary consumerist culture turns even our physical self into a commodity.

Jonze implies that the people living in the world that markets options for surgically altering the body are dangerously estranged from the sensing self. The sexual contacts between Lotte and Maxine and Craig and Maxine are always mediated by the Malkovich vessel, and Malkovich’s encounters with Maxine are, in turn, frightening experiences because he feels that it is not he having sex with her. Only after Maxine and Lotte reject the option of Malkovich’s mediating body do we see the two locked in a warm embrace. Jonze wants to reconnect us to the sensations of the body and to affect his audience on the physical level. He uses the visual dimension to place us in the head of Malkovich, and through the masking of the screen presents what it is like to watch the world through the eyes of Malkovich. However, through the exquisite use of the sound, more than the image, he manages to make the audience feel what it is like to be in Malkovich’s body. Jonze uses the extensive sensory potential of the cinematic medium not unlike Kusturica. When Craig first goes into Malkovich, the sound of him slurping his morning coffee seems to be “masked” so it would transfer us into Malkovich and make us experience the sound as if from inside him. The sound of a hairbrush over Malkovich’s scalp makes us almost feel the sensation of combing our hair. These sounds are modified
in such a way that they have the potential to trigger physical reactions in the audience.

Furthermore, Jonze manages to sensitize us and render his representation corporeal through a playful magic realist fusion of the trivial and concrete with the significant and abstract. The director sends characters into Malkovich through a muddy passage, which is meant to recall the birth canal, and after fifteen minutes inside they, looking exhausted and messy, are thrown out at the side of a New Jersey turnpike with a thud that sounds painful. Here, the banality of mud is mixed with a supernatural experience of pronounced metaphysical implications. The detail of mud and the bodies violently thrown around represent the weight of felt reality which, to borrow Faris’s words used for the historical anchoring of most magic realist works, “tethers the balloon of magic” (170). Jonze’s film displays a common trait of the magic realist works – the foregrounding of the body as the concrete evidence of the impact of social and cultural forces.

Through the Malkovich vessel, Jonze not only wants to portray the culturally symptomatic alienation of his characters from their body but also to invoke the sensations of the body which would reconnect us to reality. Most importantly, the director points to the absurdity of the characters’ attempt to escape, even for a little while, their individual felt histories. Furthermore, Jonze reveals with self-parody such escapist dimension of his film, and cinema in general, when he takes his
viewers for a Malkovich ride. The compensatory value of the trip for the film’s characters is equated with the compensatory value of cinema for the moviegoers. And this is where Jonze’s critique of the celebrity cult comes into play; the escapist desire of the moviegoers to be someone else and to peak into the secret world of another. Jonze exposes the ludicrous culture of the movie-crazed people who are willing to enter a virtual relationship with the star image that often extends beyond the viewing time and experience. And so, for example, the entertainment shows will keep you updated on the personal affairs of celebrities; through the internet you can communicate with your favorite celebrity; and plastic surgery can make you look like the celebrity of your choice. In the consumerist society, everything can be bought and it is all about, as Maxine pointed out to Craig, the options you choose. Since it emerges from such economical and cultural milieu, Being John Malkovich is ridiculing and at the same time capitalizing, however, on our desire to see what it is like to be John Malkovich and to get a chance to see the actor be/play himself. Moreover, Cynthia Baron argues that the director and the screenwriter, Charlie Kaufman, calculatedly used the actor’s screen persona as a “bankable media commodity because his star image plays into contemporary interest in ambiguous sexualities and gender identities” (18).

Granting that Being John Malkovich can be viewed as a trip into Malkovich, the Malkovich doorway becomes the film’s self-referential signifier. Additionally, given the film’s theme of narcissistic play, highlighted by the opening puppet
performance and Malkovich’s trip into his own head, the portal has extended self-referentiality in relation to the director and the screenwriter. That the film can be ultimately viewed as a portal to Jonze’s and Kaufman’s world is supported by the fact that its script has autobiographical background. Furthermore, the portal is a metaphor for the medium of film. Film is such a doorway through which we enter a different reality and which counts on our identification with its protagonists. Finally, the doorway represents the film’s magic realist mode through which we are effectively thrown into the reality of the modern urban world of America. Similarly to the way the Gypsies as Kusturica’s subject give rise to his magic realist approach, contemporary American culture provoked Jonze to reveal his subject by pushing it through the magic realist passageway.

Jonze, ultimately, sends America through its own portal to face an image of a nation which seems to be existing in virtual reality (the nation whose wars even simulate video games and vice versa). It is a nation that almost lost its sense of felt history because its wars are wedged and its national interests defended on foreign grounds. These are the people who seem to live in the cocoon of a grand narrative which is convincing them they are the freest nation in the world. These are the people fearing the theft of their identity which is stored in the magnetic code of their credit cards; the people who live fast lives sustained by fast food which turns their bodies into something they want to escape. And so, their escape demand is met with the supply of the entertainment industry, therapy industry, marketplace spirituality,
plastic surgery, and you name it. Thus, the nation functions within the circular pattern of the supply and demand that puts an intriguing spin on the questions of freedom and manipulation.

If, however, we follow Hyde who declares that “America is [trickster’s] apotheosis” (11), than we can argue with him “a paradox that the [trickster’s] myth asserts: that the origins, the liveliness, and durability of cultures require that there be space for figures whose function is to uncover and disrupt the very things that cultures are based on” (9). The mirror image the film holds up in front of its subject is certainly grim, but this being America, such a reflection is permissible. In addition, this being a magic realist film, it is driven by the trickster spirit which is transgressive but ultimately life-affirming. In this spirit, the film ends with an image that takes us out of the enclosures of Craig’s studio, apartment, and workplace and out of claustrophobic portals and tunnels. Like Time of the Gypsies, Being John Malkovich ends with the beginning of a child’s life. Animated by the trickster consciousness, the film offers a paradigm-shifting and an amoral solution when it proposes a happy family portrait of Lotte, Maxine, and Emily, who is, in fact, a child of three parents. The ending scene of Jonze’s film shows Emily swimming; and even though we know that she swims in the enclosed water of a pool and we hear Craig’s voice in her head, this image is ultimately relieving and liberating.
Lola Learning the Trickster's Trade

It is through another tunnel that we are thrown into the narrative of *Run Lola Run*. Even though this one does not resemble the vagina-like passageway of *Being John Malkovich*, the tunnel can still be described as the birthcanal of Tom Tykwer's narrative. Tykwer's is an animated tunnel which leads his protagonist, Lola (Franka Potente), through the jaws of a clock into a life-saving mission. In the film's set-up, Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu), Lola's boyfriend, calls her on the phone to tell her that he is about to lose his life in twenty minutes. He is a petty criminal who was about to step up to middling when Ronnie (Heino Ferch), his gangster boss, sent him to smuggle diamonds across the German border. Manni took care of the business and with a plastic bag worth one hundred thousand Deutschmarks boarded a train home. When the transit inspectors boarded, the nervous novice reacted instinctively to their uniforms and promptly exited the train. The bag, however, stayed behind and a bum (Joachim Król) picked it up. Now, Manni calls Lola from a phone booth located at the place he is supposed to meet Ronnie and deliver the money at high noon. Because Lola, who got her moped stolen, did not show up to give him a ride as planned, the angry Manni seems to blame her for his mishap. He challenges her to save him and prove her love, since she was the one who always said that love can do anything. Should she fail, he will rob the near-by supermarket at noon.

Lola has exactly twenty minutes to find the substantial amount of money and deliver it, before the merciless Ronnie kills her boyfriend, or Manni gets into more
trouble. She darts out of her apartment and runs straight to her father (Herbert Knaup), a bank president, for help. She bursts into his office only to find him in the middle of a tête-à-tête with his mistress, Jutta (Nina Petri), in which Jutta reveals to him that she is pregnant. After Lola’s desperate plea, her father says he would help her. But he, in fact, only escorts her out of the bank and along the way reveals to Lola that he is not her father and announces that he is leaving her and her mother. The broken-hearted Lola still tries to get to her meeting place with Manni but reaches him too late; Manni having already begun his robbery attempt. She joins in the hold up and helps him snatch the cash only to be shot by a policeman outside the store. Through Lola’s dying eyes we enter, what Whalen calls, a transitional world (a memory, a fantasy, or afterlife?) in which she is lying on Manni’s arm involved in what appears to be a post-coital conversation about the nature of Manni’s love for her. That is where she reenergizes her will to live and conquer the imminent death. The camera, then, takes us out of the other world to show Lola lying in the street. She commands “Stop!” to halt the narrative, and it stops, only to pick up from the moment she dropped her phone receiver after Manni’s call.

In the first subsequent version of Lola’s story, she runs to the bank and finds her father distraught because, in the meantime, he has found out that Jutta is pregnant but the child is not his. Upset after realizing that Jutta is his mistress and that she, Lola, cannot count on her father’s help, she takes him as a hostage in order to rob the bank. She gets to Manni with the money, but this time he gets killed; an
ambulance hits him when he tries to cross the street and greet Lola. Through Manni's eyes we are transferred again to the transitional world in which we see Manni lying on Lola's arm as he inquires what Lola would do if he died. She ends their argument with the conclusion that he is not dead yet. With those words Lola seems to reverse Manni's death and the narrative, which starts for the third time from the moment Lola leaves her apartment.

With the third strike Lola gets lucky. She misses the chance to ask her father for help because she reaches the bank at the moment he drives off to a meeting and, eventually, into his death, as his car will be involved in a fatal car crash. However, Lola gets the money she needs at a casino, where she determines the outcome of the game of roulette and makes the ball stop at her number twice by sheer will and a glass-shattering scream. She runs to her meeting place with Manni but he is gone. In the meantime, a blind woman outside the phone booth delays Manni only for a second but long enough to redirect his gaze and help him spot the bum passing by on a bike with Manni's bag. After a chase, Manni manages to make the man stop and retrieve his cash. Then, we see him relieved as he gets out of Ronnie's car to meet Lola who is standing in the street with her plastic bag worth a fortune. Manni takes the dumb-found Lola by the hand and inquires about the content of her bag, but the film prevents her from answering by ending with the freeze frame of Manni's face.
Thus, Lola wills the film to a happier ending, albeit an ambiguous one. Lola does not suspect (or does she?) that her father is dead and that her boyfriend played a part in his death by chasing the bum who, in turn, caused her father’s car to swerve and crash. Her look at Manni as he complacently walks towards her in the final version of their ordeal seems to be exuding more than exhaustion and disbelief. Lola’s enigmatic stare appears to be one of indignation because Manni looks smug and does not even know what she went through for him. It is also an expression of her rightful self-satisfaction because she proved to him, a skeptic, that love can do everything. Lola witnesses how Manni fawningly opens the car door for Ronnie and her look becomes a critical gaze directed at his whimpering character. Finally, her stare comes across as a mother’s look chastising him for forgetfulness and carelessness. Lola’s mothering relationship with Manni, suggested with the appeasing sound she intones in their initial phone conversation, is only reiterated in her look here.

Like the powerful women of *Time of the Gypsies* and *Being John Malkovich*, Lola is the driving force of Tykwer’s film. Tykwer’s Lola, as Maurice Yakowar observes,

is an emphatic antithesis to the horde of Lolas, Lulus, and Lilis that stud the classic German film. Where they are usually languidly ornamental blonde *femmes fatales* who destroy their adoring gulls, this Lola is a flaming redhead with a wiry, muscular build and facial features that are homey, just short of homely... Far from being the
object of her man’s love/lust, she makes herself the determining force in both their lives. (558)

Lola is a character who spites norms and determinism of fate. Her appearance accentuates her resolve and tenacity. She wears a shabby, pale blue tank top which reveals tattoos and a lacy bra, loose black belt over her light green pants, and a pair of boots. Her unkempt hair of fiery red color is an emblem of the film and one of the film’s most prominent motifs. When she starts her race against space, time, and kismet, she abandons a disorderly room with a turtle and a handful of disheveled dolls. She disregards rules and counters norms not only filmic but also social and familial when she participates in the hold up of the supermarket and when she aims a gun at her father. Moreover, she baldly contrasts the characteristics of her parents, whose conformism fills their shallow relationship with duplicity and indecisiveness.

Above all, Lola is the carrier of the magical code of the film. Like a magical wand, she drastically affects everybody she touches. With the power to resurrect life (her own, Manni’s, and the life of Schuster [Armin Rohde], the bank security guard) and re-write her story, she is the magical heroine that defines the narrative itself. Moreover, Lola, although not a trickster per se, becomes an embodiment of the film’s trickster aesthetics when she displays her trickster-like capacity to trespass with ease the boundaries not only between life and death but also between different formats and media, such as film and animation. When she drops the phone receiver and dashes out of her room, she passes by the living room in which her mother is
leisurely talking on the phone in front of a TV. We see, then, on the TV screen the animated version of Lola running down the stairs, and the camera approaches the TV set till it actually goes into the television image and from there the film version of the animation continues.

In addition to such serious playfulness, what marks her character as trickster-like is her amorality in the service of the heart. Driven by devoted determination, she unflinchingly uses any means available to accomplish her mission. She tries everything to reach Manni in time to prevent him from robbing the store but she ends up participating in the crime once she sees that he cannot back out of it. Even when she holds a gun in her hands, her intentions, however, never seem to be directly aimed at really hurting someone and we never believe that she actually would commit the immoral act of killing. Even though it is a game that initially animates her to her filmic life and it is love that nudges her into action-taking, the film is not necessarily a postmodernist fairy tale, as Whalen suggests, in which through an intriguing role reversal our heroine, aided by supernatural gifts, saves her “prince” and lives with him happily ever after (after the ambiguous ending, one wonders where their relationship is going to go).  

_Run Lola Run_ is ultimately a film about a spunky girl who is on the road of learning about personal power and individual will and how to use those to make way for an impossible feat out of a no-way situation. In this sense, the only fairy tale the film could recall would be “Little Red Riding Hood,” albeit in its less known,
oral folk tale version. Certainly, Lola is not a trickster, but she seems to be learning a lesson imparted by tricksters in their divine aspect that occasionally one needs to and can reject and transcend social and temporal boundaries. If film is life by other means, then Lola makes it vicariously possible for us too to peak into the afterlife and transcend death. Could Lola, then, be our nascent female trickster? Could it be that Lola is at least foreshadowing an emergence of a woman trickster out of magic realist narratives, who appropriates with ease different formats, knows how to recreate herself, and refuses to be merely a tricky woman (much like Lola rejects the stereotyped roles of her filmic namesakes)? But this would be a subject for a whole new project.

What seems to be most impressive and intriguing about Lola’s character is her astonishing faculty of paramnesia which allows her to “remember” parts of previous versions of her story. Thus, she does not just rely on having another chance to try to accomplish what she must but learns, rather, how to improve her journey through the next version. When, in the animated sequence, she runs into a boy with a growling dog on the stairs for the first time, Lola screams from fright. Then, in the subsequent versions, the boy trips Lola and she falls whereby she, as Whalen pointed out, loses some seconds; and then, in the final repetition, she jumps over the dog and even growls back. Also, Lola learns how to gain some time by getting a ride in the ambulance she encounters in all the three rounds, as Tykwer calls his story versions. The first time, she runs parallel with the ambulance and then passes

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it by as the car stops to avoid hitting a sheet of glass being carried across the street. Next time, Lola distracts the ambulance driver when she asks him for a lift, and, consequently, his car smashes the glass and, eventually, hits Manni. In the final round, Lola waits for the ambulance to stop so she can get into it, and that is when she revives Schuster who had a heart attack. Another example of Lola’s paramemory is the bank robbery scene in which she seems to remember how to unlock the safety pin on Schuster’s gun, something Manni showed her in the initial version when she joined him in the supermarket.

That this is a different kind of memory is underscored by the fact that the director seamlessly incorporates these uncanny moments in the unfolding narrative, whereas he uses black-and-white for Lola’s and Manni’s flashback memory sequences, representing respectively the stories of her stolen moped and his train incident. Tykwer explores and exploits these metaphysical déjà vues deeper to suggest that Lola is endowed with metaconsciousness with which she can sense her own fictitiousness. The first example of such metaphysical magic occurs in the initial episode, at the start of Lola’s run. After she runs past a graveyard, a portentous sight, she crosses a highway and enters a tunnel-like overpass. The camera tracks her running in a medium shot as the overpass brick posts rhythmically interrupt her image. The camera gradually gets closer to Lola’s face and then with a cut, which matches the cut of a post, shows Lola’s en face close-up. The film proceeds in slow motion and repeatedly alternates Lola’s profile and en face close-
ups. The fast beat of a techno soundtrack explodes when Lola breaks into her run, and, now, with the slow motion, an eerie melody sung by digitalized human voices is added to the beat. The spiritual nature of the melody that sounds as if sung in a cathedral is amplified by the visuals of the cathedral-like arches of the top of the overpass. Tykwer masterfully splits the sound, so to speak, and creates a magical effect by letting the beat relate the fastness of Lola’s running now in slow motion, while the haunting melody transports Lola and the viewer into a psychological and metaphysical dimension. Thus, the double-tracking sound represents simultaneously not only different spatial dimensions, such as the outer (overpass tunnel) and the inner (spiritual space and inner journey), but also supports the visuals to reflect different dimensions of time, whether outer and realistic or Lola’s inner, psychological time.

The cumulative effect of the powerful synergy of sound and image is transcendental – it makes us sense that Lola recognizes the tunnel. She intuits that she came into this fictitious world by running through that prenatal, animated tunnel of the narrative. With the last image of this sequence, Tykwer confirms that the sequence is meant to be read as a beginning of an outer, realistic, and action journey as well as inner, psychological, and spiritual (the psychological and spiritual aspect of Lola’s journey as well as the pace at which that journey unfolds seem to be symbolically represented by the primordial image of a turtle in Lola’s room). The en face close up of Lola moving in slow motion is superimposed with a far view,
long shot of Lola running in actual time. Thus, the director creates the impression of
Lola running between her eyes and through her head. Such image recalls yet another
tunnel – the “eye tunnel,” or the “third eye” of the ancient practice of yoga.
According to the art and science of yoga, the “third eye” is one of the seven
energetic centers, called chakras (literally wheels), of the human body. It represents
the space between our eyebrows on which practitioners of yoga turn their inward
gaze in meditation. After extensive practice and under deep meditation, an image of
an eye appears and a tunnel through which “you may see clear pictures of your
ultimate goals and insights” (Hancock 39). 51

Tykwer’s film is, in fact, replete with thematic and symbolic allusions to the
Hindu religious and philosophic tradition. Reincarnation concept is insinuated by
the repeating of Lola’s stories as well as by her descent into filmic flesh through the
spiralling tunnel. The finality of her embodiment, along with the rest of the
characters, is re/presented through the police-like photos of her en face and profile
portrait, and the prison-like view of the bodily existence is confirmed by a loud shut
of what sounds like metal jail doors closing. The spiral as a curve occurring in a
series of plains becomes an announcement of repetition with variations. Here, the
karmic concept of learning through repeated incarnations comes into play, as shown
through Lola’s learning how to improve her journey through subsequent versions of
her story. Moreover, Tykwer’s film is framed by mandalic representation of time
and space as circle and square respectively. Circle, as one of these two key motifs, is replicated in Lola’s chakra-like tattoo around her navel.

In the scene in which Lola’s search for money is resolved in the casino, Tykwer’s soundtrack explicitly refers to and honors his Hinduistic source of inspiration. After seeing her father depart, Lola keeps running to the meeting place with Manni. In the voice-over, representing the inner voice of her consciousness, she keeps asking in despair: “What can I do?” Here the sound of an Indian drumbeat replaces for the first time the techno beat of the rest of the film. She is running from the left of the screen to the right for the first time, as if to finally unwind the narrative and bring it to a promising outcome. She closes her eyes and starts a prayer, her mantra, so to speak, to an unidentified power: “Come on. Help me. Please. Just this once. I’ll just keep on running, OK? I’m waiting. I’m waiting. I’m waiting.” At this point, her slow motion run goes back to the regular speed and she nearly runs into a truck. With an expression the irony of which seems to be accessible only to the viewer who witnessed Lola’s repeated trials (and perhaps to Lola?), the truck driver shouts at her: “You wanna get killed?” As Lola turns around and spots the casino building, the drumbeat, which stopped with the sound of the truck breaks, resumes, only now it is the background sound for a man’s voice singing a melody in a distinctly Indian, trilling style. Here, the soundtrack, coupled with the significance of slow motion, amplifies the change of direction, the intensity of her feelings, and the mystery of the moment when she summons up her potent
will to determine the outcome of the game of roulette. This same drumbeat follows Manni as he chases the bagman, and matches Lola’s moment of luck with Manni’s fortuitous resolution. Moreover, just as Lola’s fate is resolved to her satisfaction once she closes her eyes in concentration and prayer, Manni gets back what almost cost him his life by following the “gaze” of a mysterious blind woman.

In the otherwise frenetically fast-paced film, Tykwer resorts to the use of slow motion either to indicate the intense moments that lead us to the transitional episodes or to augment the scenes of mystical portent, such as the ones discussed above. Again, the slow motion is accompanied by the exquisite use of sound to depict the scene in which Lola is shot, the scene that leads to the red-tinted transitional world. After Manni collects the cash from the store registers, the diegetic sound stops the minute Lola and Manni exit through the supermarket door. As if to represent that they enter an unreal world, the sound delineates almost a different spacial dimension when it bursts with the smooth and enchanting voice of Dinah Washington singing her version of “What a Diff’rence a Day Makes” (1959).

The film continues by tracking the two characters running at times in slow motion and then at a regular speed, but the song continues till the sound of shot stops it. After the shot comes the sound of Lola’s sigh; and then, gradually a slow, melancholic string music sets the tone of the scene. The only diegetic sounds that punctuate the music and the slow motion images are the muted sound of the thud of Lola’s body and the strange, amplified sound of the gun hitting the pavement.
Through Lola's eyes, the camera transfers us to the scene of the lover's intimate conversation shot through red filter.

With this transitional scene, Tykwer outlines the magical space between life and death and with it places his narrative between reality and fantasy. And so, in Tykwer's film just as in other magic realist works, as Wilson demonstrates, "a third kind of space unfolds" (220). Borrowing a term Lubomír Doležel used to characterize the world of Kafka's fiction, Wilson defines this fictional third space as hybrid and clarifies: "This hybridism occurs within the folding of worlds when one, bearing its own distinct laws, erupts into the other" (225). The representation of what Wilson calls "alternative geographies" is characterized by calmness, attention to facts, and personal lack of division. Tykwer marks the boundary between the two worlds by shooting them through different filters and by juxtaposing the calmness of the transitional world to the haste of the exterior. The director, however, presents both worlds as realistic and the shift between them as unproblematic. Through match cuts of the red bag that Manni throws up in the air in frustration, which provoked the nervous policeman to shoot, and the red phone receiver that Lola throws up in the air when she rushed out of her room, Tykwer starts Lola's story over again from the moment the receiver fell on the phone. This instance is reminiscent of Cocteau's Blood of a Poet (Le Sang d'un poète, 1930), which distorts our sense of time by showing its entire narrative happening in-between the start and the completion of the fall of a tower.
Therefore, there is the third space between life and death through which Tykwer’s narrative unfolds and the third space between reality and fantasy that his magic realist film occupies. However, there exists an additional third space, between the spectator’s viewing reality and the main character’s fictional geography, towards which Lola points. The awe-inspiring character of Lola ruptures the sacred enclosure of the filmic space and time and suggests the ethereal space between the real and the fictional worlds. She not only allows the magic of the transitional world to spill over into the action world but also lets the magic of her metaconscious gaze radiate beyond filmic enclosure and delineate the space of, to borrow Hyde’s expression, heightened uncertainty. It is through her transfixing look that Lola not only transmits her powerful will and makes other characters do as she bids but also relates that she may, in fact, be aware of the imaginary nature of her existence. Just like we are transported into the transitional world through her eyes, Lola’s look at Schuster in the third round can be viewed as an opening to the invisible, but nonetheless sensed, tunnel which reverts us back to the beginning of her character and her story.

The film begins, in fact, not with Lola’s story but with a non-diegetic prelude which explains how she got into the narrative. After the epigraphs by T.S. Eliot and S. Herberger, of which I shall say more later, the film’s credits are washed away by a wide-swinging pendulum with a gargoyle image. The camera rises upwards to reveal the clock from which the pendulum hangs and it gets devoured by
the wide-open mouth of another gargoyle, or Chronos as Whalen suggest, crowning the face of the clock. Out of darkness, to borrow Crissa-Jean Chappell’s fine expression, “a pixilated blur of people bustle against the suburban landscape, never seeming to notice one another” (4). As the camera zooms intermittently on several characters out of the magmatic crowd, we will recognize them later as the secondary characters in Lola’s story, a voice-over narrator broods on the questions of human ontology and epistemology.

The camera finally rests on the security guard, who takes over the narration and, as if in response to the voice-over narrator, states: “The ball is round. The game lasts ninety minutes. That’s a fact. Everything else is pure theory.” He picks up a soccer ball, says “Here we go!”, and throws the ball up in the air. The camera rises with the ball to reveal from a panoptic perspective people gradually forming letters of the film’s title – LOLA RENNT. The ball and the camera plummet towards the O and the dot in the middle of it, representing the guard, and through the letter enter the animated tunnel through which runs a character we later recognize as our heroine. At the end of her somewhat adventurous run through the tunnel, the character gets sucked in by a fast-spinning spiral into the opening of the story. After all the characters are presented in the police-like photos, the camera, from the satellite-like view of a city, dives towards a building and through a window gets into a room at the moment when the phone rings and Lola picks up the receiver.
And so, when she meets Schuster the third time and he says “You’ve come at last, dear,” Lola looks at him in a way which suggests that she knows how the two of them are connected. In yet another scene insinuating Lola’s paramensia, she appears to remember how she started as a ball and then as her animated double till she got into her present self. Even though this scene is not rendered through the slow motion, it is, nevertheless, characterized by a pause. When the guard utters these momentous words Lola turns around and looks at him. The heavily laden significance of her look is reflected on Schuster’s face and the camera rests on him to show that he seems to be simultaneously astonished by Lola, almost frightened by her look, as well as haunted by a rememory. Whalen contemplates the ontological consequences of this exchange and wonders:

Does he recognize that this is the third time Lola has come to the bank, that somehow his world has been split three-ways? Do he and Lola realize that it’s she who’s controlling the game? How has he become a part of Lola’s game of repetition with variations? Or is it possible that he recalls, if only faintly, his role in the film’s prologue as the kicker of the soccer ball, the one who puts the (non-diegetic) ball into play? (39)

In the ambulance scene, when the paramedic asks her what she is doing there and she replies: “I belong to him,” Whalen finds confirmation for the notion that the two characters know the nature of their connection. By holding Schuster’s hand she revives his heart, which we heard pounding after that riveting look she directed at him. Even with different improvements through the three versions, Schuster’s heart

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attack seems to be one of those inevitable incidences (similar to Mr. Meier’s [Ludger Pistor] unavoidable crash into the white BMW). In the second version, we see Schuster holding his chest behind Lola who is aiming a gun at her father and the bank teller. Interpreting in reverse, it must be Schuster in that red ambulance car in all three versions even though the camera does not show him every time. When we view the relationship of Lola and Schuster with this in mind, she was meant to save him and he seems to reveal he knows that when with “You’ve come at last, dear!” he comments on her late-to-reach-her-father but early-to-save-him arrival.

The final encounter between Lola and Schuster suggests not only how the destinies of the two inevitably had to coalesce but also how the two remember that it was he who sent her into the ruthless race. While the overpass scene suggests that Lola intuits her fictitiousness, Lola’s look at Schuster indicates that she now knows that she is a character in a fictional world, which implies that she knows she is being watched. In this moment, Lola not only looks back at the prologue conception of her story but also looks out of the filmic space and insinuates the viewer’s complicity with Schuster, a probability supported by Schuster’s direct address to the camera in the prologue sequence.

Faris’s discussion of the plot-mirroring in relation to the repetition, which is the trademark of Tykwer’s film, as the narrative principle of magic realist works is extremely relevant for elucidation of this scene. According to Faris, plot-mirroring highlights the metaphysically revisionist agenda of magic realism, through which
magic realist works frequently reverse the roles of the narrator and the listener (178). That the mirror principle governs Tykwer’s narrative structure is not only demonstrated through doubling of Lola’s character and the repetition of the story but also reinforced by reflecting surfaces which constitute one of the central motifs of the film. Those surfaces are seen in, for example, the phone booth Manni calls from, the windshield of Mr Meier’s car, the window of the train, and the window of the supermarket. We see Manni and Lola banging on different glass surfaces at different times, as if the characters want to burst out of the storyworld, but only Lola is endowed with the magical gift to break the glass with her scream (like Oscar of the German breakthrough film The Tin Drum [1979] based on Günter Grass’s novel). A parallel endowment to her astonishing glass-breaking faculty is her look. Lola’s gaze breaks the barrier of the filmic space and points toward the space of uncertainty between the viewer and the viewed and toward the possibility of their roles being reversed.

Just as Lola seems to know that she is a fictitious character, we know that she is the creature of the film world with the powers only film can bestow on her. One of the most memorable self-reflexive instances that Tykwer creates to draw our attention to the artifice of his world happens in the casino scene when we see Lola win the money and her race with time. Maurice Yakowar makes an astute observation about the end of this scene:
Of course, only in fiction can such a happy ending be assured. For salvation in a casino is not a likely prospect. To emphasize the artifice in the happy resolution, Tykwer has the casino wall feature an improbable portrait of a woman with precisely the rear-swirl hairdo in which Kim Novak found her "Carlotta" in Vertigo. (561)

The world of Tykwer's film governed by its own rules delights in the magic of the cinematic medium just as the magic realist works in general, according to Faris, highlight "the fertile magic of language itself, its capacity to create absorbing worlds out of thin event" (176). In this respect, Run Lola Run clearly exemplifies the metafictional type of magic realism of pronounced metaphysical implications. The magic in this film emanates not only from Lola's supernatural gifts and the underlying mysticism but also, and primarily, from the mesmerizing filmic medium.

More than anything else, the director playfully uses the conjuring abilities of the cinematic medium, and celebrates the uniquely filmic possibilities of, what Erwin Panofsky calls, "dynamization of space" and "spacialization of time" (281) by extending them to an exploding point.

For the source of its metaphysical preoccupations as well as its formal techniques, this German film seems to run back to its homeland and Franz Roh's conception of pictorial magic realism; and, thus, takes my study of magic realism also back to where it started. Tykwer explores what Luis Leal, who drew directly from Roh's ideas, called the mysterious relationship between man and his circumstances. Just like magic realist works in general, his film is not interested in
the profound psychological portrayal of his characters but in the circumstances into which his sketched characters find themselves. (For Lola, of course, any introspection would be fatal to her action-demanding role). Moreover, the director sees his Lola, in the words of Uslar-Pietri who also followed Roh, as a mystery among realistic data. Tykwer uses the representation of reality only as a playground for Lola and constructs his realism through techniques akin to the pictorial techniques of the German magic realists, which Roh outlined.

Unlike the realism of Being John Malkovich, which arises merely from the recognizable contemporary world, and more like the realism of Kusturica, Tykwer’s effectively constructs his real world through ultra sharp focus. The most obvious examples of such representation are scenes shot with video camera to augment the feel of reality. Tykwer’s representation is purposely cold so that it would appear more to the intellect than to the emotions. Even though the scenes of the conversations between Jutta and Lola’s father and the affectionate transitional scenes of Lola and Manni’s intimate exchange have intense emotional dimension to them, they are short and their effect is overshadowed by the events that follow. The director wants to alienate us from his subject and he manages to do just that when he uses animation or interrupts diegetic sound by, for example, the Dinah Washington song. Moreover, his entire prologue was to set up his narrative as a mere game. Tykwer strives to provoke an intellectual response also through the simultaneous close and far view and by the objectivity of his camera which invests both animate
and inanimate objects with equal importance. His attention to and repetition of
detail is so pronounced that not only his animate characters but also the inanimate
objects become like characters in the fictional world. All the elements of Tykwer’s
mise-en-scène become elevated to details pregnant with symbolism. Consequently,
every frame becomes so dense that, to borrow Menton’s words, the viewer has to
reassemble all the details in order to grasp the totality of the picture.

In addition, Tykwer’s details reiterate and expand the thematic concerns
introduced by the prologue-like entry. Besides tunnels and reflecting surfaces, the
geometrical shapes of the square and the circle are omnipresent; they are, as I said
earlier, framing motifs of the film. The square, for example is found in the shape of
the phone booth, the doors, the casino table, the grid-like courtyard Lola crosses,
and the photos that presented the characters. Some of the examples of circular
shapes are the fountain in front of Lola’s building, many clocks, the roulette, and
Lola’s tattoo. The circularity is stresses even through the camera movement, such as
in the scene in which Lola goes through her mental address book to find who could
help her, or when the police surrounds Lola and Manni and the world seems to spin
because there is no escape. Furthermore, the circularity of time and the inescapability
from the constraints of time are announced by the T.S. Eliot quotation, which reads:

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

The theme is repeated in the quotation by S. Herberger that follows: “After the game is before the game.” After posing several metaphysical questions, the voice-over narrator also stresses circularity when he states: “Innumerable questions searching for an answer, an answer that will generate a new question, and the next answer the next question, and so on, and so on.”

The spiral is yet another motif which, as Whalen reminds us, breaks up the circle. The animated spiral at the end of the tunnel, as I said earlier, pulls Lola into the narrative. Throughout the film we are visually reminded of it in the stairs of the apartment building, the sign for the bar “Spirale”, through the pattern on the lover’s bedsheets in the transitional scenes, and the close up of Lola’s ear in the first between-life-and-death scenes. In his discussion of the Hegelian dialectic as the film’s dominant formal principle, Whalen explains through the roulette scene how Lola is set free from the circularity of time.

But the movement of a roulette ball isn’t altogether circular. The ball moves clockwise to the wheel’s counterclockwise motion, and the friction this creates causes it eventually to fall into the wheel’s bowl. Thus, with a little opposition, a dialectic nudge, the circle becomes a spiral, and the spiral, as Vladimir Nabokov knew, “is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free.” (35)

In addition to these key shape motifs, Tykwer uses color red in a significant way. It is in the daring color of Lola’s hair, which becomes “the film’s visual
lifeblood threading its way through this 24-frames-per-second labyrinth” (Whalen 38). But red is also in the hue of the Lola’s phone, the emergency vehicle, and the in-between world. It is very much like the color of Hatidža’s headscarf, the apples, and the thread coil of Perhan’s dreams in Time of the Gypsies. However, unlike Kusturica’s red, which surprises the viewer and stands out in the technicolor of Kusturica’s film, Tykwer’s red is matched by the equally intense and flat yellow, green, and blue. The director uses them as if for “the creation of a toylike world” (Menton 23), much like the world in the paintings of the German magic realist, Carl Grossberg.54

The emergence of our world as toylike through Tykwer’s camera eye highlights the perspective of his magic realist film as well as reiterates Roh’s notion that the world is intrinsically magical. In addition to such a perspective, what makes this film an example of metaphysical magic realism is its Borgesian, labyrinthian structure and typically Borges’s thematic focus on chance, determinism, eternal return, and a view of life as a game. Run Lola Run also readily exemplifies the phenomenological aspect of the metaphysical type because it portrays a phenomenon of the preternatural kind – a phenomenon which exceeds the normal but not, necessarily, of the natural. Its protagonist is endowed with the glass-breaking scream and a powerful, death-conquering and luck-changing will. Additionally, Tykwer uses the characteristically metaphysical technique of Verfremdung when he shows how something as ordinary as brushing shoulders with
or bumping into somebody in the street may provoke drastic, life-changing consequences.

In each version of Lola's story, Tykwer depicts through aside, miniature narratives how Lola affects the lives of the people she encounters on her runs. Distinctly different futures of three different characters are shown through a series of still frames which are accompanied by the sound of the shutter. The example of Doris (Julia Lindig), the bad-tempered woman with a baby stroller, will suffice to show how Tykwer's narrative close-ups, so to speak, reveal drastically changed destinies of this secondary character. As Whalen points out, Tykwer wants to indicate the cause and effect relationship between Lola's story and the stories of these characters. This is explicitly stated with the “AND THEN” inscription following the encounter of Lola and the characters. Lola almost runs into Doris the first time and we are shown through the fast succession of images that social services take away her baby, and then she steals another child. In the second version, Lola brushes shoulders with her and Doris ends up winning the lottery and bying a mansion. Finally, Lola passes by Doris and she becomes an evangelist of some sort. Through these radically condensed stories, Tykwer weaves into his film the theme of the chaos theory and the so-called butterfly effect. According to this concept of sensitive dependence, the slightest variations can produce drastically different and enormous changes; and so, the beating of a butterfly's wings in Tokyo can change the weather in New York City.
Tykwer's film, however, "simply" plays with such complex ideas. His film is, first and foremost, about playfulness, and Tykwer announces the playful, trickster-like collapsing and blurring of the serious and the light-hearted as the rule of his game from its very opening. Next to the lofty verses of T.S. Eliot, Tykwer places a quote by the German soccer coach Sepp Herberger who took his country to victory in the 1954 World Cup. If, however, we remember how seriously Europeans take soccer, maybe Tykwer here stresses the seriousness of the game and intentionally refuses to mark a distinction (should we?) between a Nobel laureate and a World Cup winning coach. Ultimately, the film's Weltanschauung equates life as well as film with a game.

Yet, even when they are steeped in playfulness and preoccupied with metaphysical themes, magic realist works are grounded in felt reality. Tykwer, likewise, brings such groundedness into the forefront particularly by the image of Lola's body when she gets shot in the first round. For emphasis, Tykwer shows in slow motion how Lola's body is thrown back by the impact of the shot, and then we see her flesh wobble from the thud of her fall on the knees. Her fall is cut by the dumbfound face of the obviously inexperienced policeman that fired. And just like the policeman, we are made to blink and pause in shock of seeing the graphic representation of a murder and facing the fact that our heroine is going to die just some twenty minutes into the film. And so, magic realist film because of its very imagistic nature has an enormous advantage in this case over magic realist writing.
Metaphysical magic realist film can be more graphically grounded because it can have a stronger, more immediate, and more instantaneous effect in depiction than magic realist literature.

The power and possibilities of cinema, as stated earlier, are Tykwer's primary focus. His film is a metacinematic work which self-reflexively refers to filmmaking. Its three different versions are like different takes in the shooting of a film that can lead to the impromptu rewriting of the narrative. As Chappell contemplates: "Lola might be a movie about movies – one in which the protagonist evolves a kind of eerie sentience to alter her fate outside the godlike director's hands" (4). Run Lola Run points towards barely explored possibilities of the magic realist film which only needs to turn to its magical roots for inspiration. Tykwer's film does not only recall the beginning of magic realism in Roh's theory but also refers back to the origins of magic in Méliès's cinema. And Tykwer explains that

A film about the possibilities of life, it was clear, needed to be a film about the possibilities of cinema as well. That's why there are different formats in Run Lola Run; there is color and black and white, slow motion and speeded-up motion, all elementary blocks that have been used for ages in film history. Georges Méliès was already able to work with these effects, especially with double exposure and tricks. . . . (qtd. in Whalen 37)

Besides the tricks of Méliès, this film openly flaunts the heritage of another cinematic giant – Keaton. As Chapell notes, this film hybridizes genres and "contains elements of road movies, lovers-on-the-run, gangster robberies, and most
obviously, action, one of the oldest movie formats (and the most stylized, à la Buster Keaton)” (4).

Finally, as opposed to the cinemas of Tykwer’s German predecessors, Fassbinder, Schlondorff, and von Trotta, which are driven by the necessity to confront the country’s repressed history, Tykwer’s film “presents a narrative that exposes the mechanism of rewriting a story – whether history or fiction – and restores the primacy of the individual will and the need to discover one’s individual destiny” (Yakowar 557). If anything, Tykwer’s film is a feat of cinema and a significant step towards the discovery of the magic realist possibilities of film independent of its literary counterpart.
APPENDIX

A. Hollywood’s Realistic Magic

Magic realism in film has become so prominent that its appropriation by Hollywood was inevitable. While this development may mean a wide exposure and dissemination of the mode, it also means that magic realism, after being regurgitated by the industry, unavoidably comes out as socially unmotivated, its antihegemonic mouthpiece made toothless. This situation has a paradoxical, double-edged effect: Hollywood’s magic realist products seem new and innovative, whereas original and foremost works of magic realism start to look not so fresh, even as Hollywood calls attention to them as its originators. Aldama discusses magic realism as a means for voicing the subaltern and raises the question of whether its visibility in the late-twentieth century may actually be a controlled end-effect. He addresses this issue of capitalist control and appropriation and concludes:

The subaltern-authorized magicrealist text speaks critically to the oft-invisible, wide-swinging arm of Euro./U.S. venture capitalism, but as a text put through the machine of book and film commodification. This, perhaps, is an inherent problem of resistant knowledge in general: once it becomes visible as a discourse and attached to a social/racial demographic with buying power, it turns easily into a reified object consumable by the masses and without its originary revolutionary possibility. (41)\textsuperscript{55}
Through a quick look at Nora Ephron's *Michael* (1996) we can see to what kind of use Hollywood puts magic realism. It is a story about a flesh and blood angel, yet another in the line of angels who started dropping from heaven since *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). However, in *Michael* it is a hairy, sweaty, crotch-adjusting, bull-fighting, dirty-dancing Archangel Michael (John Travolta) who shows up in small-town Mid-West America to re-ignite hearts of two alienated urban Americans (Andie MacDowell and William Hurt). The angel’s depiction seems to be only appropriate for the nineties characterized by the crisis of belief; and while it speaks to our modern disillusioned envisioning of angels, it, at the same time, works towards a rekindling of the belief in divine intervention. Thus, the modern state of affairs characterized by isolation and despair gets to be improved and altered through an angel’s mediation and not through human agency. Even though the director attempted to create a solid realistic frame, it is still Hollywood’s Disneyfied realism with its distinctive, to use Frederic Jameson’s term, glossiness that aids film’s consumption. When magic realism hits Hollywood, its magical and supernatural elements are not new, and Hollywood recycles them freely; what Hollywood eschews the kind of realism that it does not know how, or rather, for financial reasons, does not want to incorporate into its films. To see through this veil-like quality of the film one only needs to compare it to Fernando Birri’s adaptation of García Márquez’s story of the same title *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* (Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes, 1988), a film about
an old angel brought to a small coastal town by a horrendous storm. This frail angel who is loosing feathers off his broken wings, serves as a medium of revelation of the inhabitants' ignorance, superstition, greed and arrogance – of all the follies of provincial life. Michael, on the other hand, is nostalgia driven, extending a benevolent and doting look at small town American mentality through the character of Pansy Milbank (Jean Stapelton) whose acceptance, unlike that of the urban dwellers, of the Archangel is unflinching. It seems that in the male-centered religion, acceptance of a machoistic angel should not be problematic, and Pansy simply takes care of Michael the way a woman should take care of her son or her husband, consistent with the replay of the roles of the sexes.

As Michael touches the deadened hearts of the characters in the film, the viewers themselves are supposed to be touched, positioned in such a way that they cannot but love the mischievous angel. The scene in which Michael is losing feathers and spending his last minutes on earth is especially moving in the otherwise comic film. The camera gradually pulls away from the “dying” angel in the midst of a metropolis to reveal a setting, and with it the issues at stake, from a panoptic perspective. The desensitized hearts of the modern viewers are supposed to be touched by the death of an angel at the times when deaths of human beings leave us numb – the perverse aesthetics of our times. Hollywood harps on the impermanence of everything and the salvaging importance of human love and
compassion in the midst of it all, as it simultaneously drops off of its assembly line an overwhelming number of violence-relishing war movies and action thrillers.

Magic realism is here at the service of the Hollywood genre of the time – romantic comedy,\textsuperscript{58} which endlessly recycles themes and plots, pairing up actors and actresses in all possible mathematical combinations and leaving us wondering who is going to be coupled next. The conventions of the genre are to ease, while casting is to tease the viewing experience, creating a self-perpetuating monster. Magic realism is to create difference in the sameness that markets the same as different, which after being used in this way for so many times loses its innovative potential. Occasionally, we get an intriguing film like The Groundhog Day (1993), which nonetheless repeats the nostalgic look at small town America seen in Michael.

Targeting especially the female viewing public, Hollywood uses magic realism in its deconstructive aspect for representing modern female existence and supposedly avenging female experience. Examples like The Witches of Eastwick (1987) and Practical Magic (1998), intended as celebration of female powers, only reinforce what they wanted to subvert. It is in the kitchen again, that was historically a place that stirred up male suspicion and anxiety, that the women of these films concoct ways to manipulate events through witchcraft and gather up strength to carry on with their lives. In The Witches of Eastwick the need of the women (Susan Sarandon, Cher, and Michelle Pfeiffer) need for liberation and self-expression is
triggered only after they taste the sexual powers of a mysterious man (Jack Nicholson). The film ends up confirming the mythical notion that women are prone to acquiring knowledge through tasting devilish fruits.59

Similarly, in Practical Magic a woman, Gillian Owens (Nicole Kidman) gets herself and her sister, Sally (Sandra Bullock), in trouble by messing with a fiendish Bulgarian boyfriend (Goran Visnjic). Their story, however, functions almost like a counternarrative to Dracula films (Bulgaria or Romania, it is close enough for American audiences); here man-eater Gillian controls and tames with belladonna and her knowledge of herbs the mean disposition of the handsome womanizer, turning vampire, Jimmy Angelov. He, a heavily-accented Other, gets replaced by a sensitive American police officer (Aidan Quinn). And sensitive men, concludes Hollywood, seem to be what women want, so in What Women Want (2000) we get Nick Marshall (Mel Gibson) who literally can hear women’s thoughts, as if saying that only by possessing magical powers can men understand women. At the end the girl gets the guy; because it seems that all even a career-driven and independent woman like Darcy McGuire (Helen Hunt) wants is a man; they rarely get to ride off into the sunset alone (Thelma and Louise’s only recourse was to drive off into their death).

It is clear that addressing magic realism in Hollywood films becomes discussing a whole new phenomenon. Recently, the industry has become increasingly focused on the problems it helped create: loss of memory, as in Vanilla
Sky (2001), loosing grip on reality, A Beautiful Mind (2001) for example, and the question of constructedness of reality in The Truman Show (1998) in which one man’s entire world and the only reality known to him was created by a television station and turned into a TV reality show. For this end Hollywood directors tend to use either psychological realism or a mixture of psychological realism and magical realism, as in American Beauty (1999) in which a dead man talking narrates the story (reminiscent of The Sunset Boulevard [1950]) full of literal representations of the things he imagines.
NOTES

CHAPTER 2

1 "Magic realism" is the most widely used term, and I will use it for that reason. However, I will return to the problematics of terminology.

2 The filmic nature of magic-realist writing is suggested by the fact that major magic-realist works have been turned into film (Juan Rulfo's Pedro Páramo, short stories and a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, Milan Kundera's The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Toni Morrison's Beloved, works of Mario de Andrade, Jorge Luis Borges, Jorge Amado, Isabel Allende, Julio Cortázar, Carlos Fuentes, Günter Grass, Mario Vargas Llosa, and so many more), as well as the fact that most notable writers using this narrative mode wrote or collaborated on writing scripts for films based on their works or works of other magic realist writers (García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Kundera, etc.).

3 Rob acknowledged the indebtedness of German magic realists to Italian painters Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carra and their Pittura Metafisica. Seymour Menton explains how, paradoxically, Arnold Bocklin, a German painter, and two German philosophers, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, had a profound effect on de Chirico's paintings, which in turn influenced German magic realists (45-46).

4 Chanady points to the affinities shared by the literary device of defamiliarization (Verfremdung) and Rob's theory of Post-Expressionism ("The Origins and Development of Magic Realism" 53).

5 In Europe, in the same year of 1927, Massimo Bontempelli played a key role in the dissemination of the term by using it in his bilingual (French and Italian) journal 900. Jeanne Delbaere explains that Bontempelli was also the first to apply it to literature (75).

6 William Spindler reports that after the 1927 publication of Rob's essay: "The term Magic Realism soon became widely used by Latin American critics in the context of literature. The Argentinian writer and critic Enrique Anderson Imbert, for example, writes that the term was used in the cultural circles of Buenos Aires in the 1930s to refer to European writers such as Kafka, Bontempelli, Cocteau, and Chesterton. The
first to apply the term to Latin American literature was the Venezuelan writer Arturo Uslar Pietri. At that time, the generally accepted meaning of Magic Realism was still based on Roh's definition (75-76). For a detailed overview of the evolution of the term and the concepts of magic realism, I refer the reader to a collection of essays edited by Jean Weisgerber Le Realisme magique: roman, peinture, cinema (1987).

The paradoxical nature of some of Carpentier's arguments is quite transparent in his writing. Both of his famous essays start out as extensive delineations of cultural achievements of Europe and some major world cultures against which he wants to check and measure the exquisiteness of Latin America. Carpentier flaunts his rich Western education intentionally; almost self-indulgently delves into his vast and versatile knowledge of European literary and historical heritage. He, thus, undermines his own ideas of Latin American cultural self-sufficiency. While it is understandable that he wants to prove that he knows what he is rejecting, it is obvious that he can define Latin American identity only in its relation to the European center. By looking at conquistador writing to support his argumentation, he sides with the Western men's colonizing point of view and confirms its branding of Latin America as merely exotic. He positions himself as a conquistador when with glee he talks about "the virginity of the land." He seems to appeal only to the urban male elite; and when exclaiming "our upbringing, our ontology," assumes uniformity and solidity of Latin American identity, otherwise torn by class, ethnic, and racial differences. The ones who were locally suppressed, such as Indians and Blacks (In One Hundred Years of Solitude, Gabriel García Márquez explains how the Indian natives were treated like pariahs, considered lower than Gypsies), internationally were paraded as emblems of Latin American identity by the local suppressors. Here, Eurocentric intellectual elite was capitalizing on the belief and ritual systems of the natives and Africans. It is interesting that even modern scholars of magic realism (including Chanady, Angulo, Aldama) do not challenge these aspects of Carpentier's views. I am, however, hereby not dismissing altogether Carpentier's attempts at cultural resistance.

Tommaso Scarano reports on how Asturias and Carpentier met in Paris when they were both participating in the surrealist movement. Asturias was working on translating the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Quichua Indians, into Spanish from the French version of a Sorbonne professor, Georges Raynaud. Scarano explains: "As [Asturias] recalled in later years, under the guidance of Raynaud and other French anthropologists and ethnologists, Asturias became an enthusiastic and voracious student of these cultures[of the Mayan Empire] ..." (11). This fact supports my views on Carpentier's ideas I expressed in the previous note.
that both Asturias and Carpentier developed their sense of national belonging and identity within European intellectual milieu, and even at the nudging of European intellectuals. To Carpentier’s credit or discredit comes the fact Geoff Hancock reports: “Breton’s visit to ‘the lost magic paradise’ of Haiti and Mexico in 1938 impressed him with the vitality of primitive art untainted by Christianity, an idea that subsequently influenced Alejo Carpentier’s essay on ‘the marvellous real’” (38). Chanady maintains that Carpentier was building on Pierre Mabille’s writing on the marvelous, who mentions Haitian voodoo as an example of the highly esteemed pre-reflexive mentality (“The Origins and Development of Magic Realism 57”). Furthermore, in Gabriel García Márquez: a Witch Writing, García Márquez explains: “What had been important for me in Paris, was the perspective I acquired on Latin America. Because in Latin America, I was just a Columbian, a Caribbean.. . . . But in Paris, I became a Caribbean aware of his culture, and of the more general culture the Caribbean culture fits itself into.”

Scarano lists several different terms that scholars coined as options for replacing the too-formulaic magic realism, and concludes: “Yet, as is well known, formulas die hard, and as they have been consecrated by tradition, in whatever way, they command a certain respect. It is thus understandable that the formula “realismo magico” continues to be used. It is sufficient to be aware, in using it, that it is no more than a simple formula – that is to say, a model that ‘in itself is poor in meaning’” (10).

Not to add to the terminology confusion, but it is interesting to note that there seems to be a slight difference between adjectives “magic,” and “magical:” while the former can be used only attributively, the latter can be used both attributively and predicatively. Both “magic realism,” and “magical realism” are used generally without any difference. I prefer to use magic realism because “magic” can be both an adjective, as well as a noun, in which case I like parallel viewing of the nouns “magic,” and “realism.” To me it signifies the coexistence of the supposed magic and the supposed real (supposed magic because what is one’s supernatural may be another’s reality, and supposed real because it is only mimetic reality of fiction). Throughout this study I will continue using “magic realism,” even though I value the term “magico-realism,” introduced by Aldama. He tests the term against “magical realism” and “realismo magico” (he does not consider the former as the English translation of the latter) and clarifies: “the Euro-Spanish ancestral mode, which I identify as “magical realism,” was employed by the late fifteenth-century conquistadores who wrote empire-building narratives to justify the genocide and sexual oppression of the marvelous (savage and perverse) New World other. The Latin American indigenous mode identified as realismo magico was used by writers
such as Juan Rulfo, Elena Garro, Gabriel García Márquez, and Alejo Carpentier to build a literary tradition distinct from European canons; the transdiasporic subaltern mode, "magicorealism," is currently employed by late-twentieth-century U.S. multiethnic and British postcolonial writers and directors to construct globe-spanning narratives of resistance that not only make the subaltern mode sovereign—turning the "other" into subject—but engage in dialogical play with European narrative modes (the picaresque, for example)" (11-12). Aldama fused "magic realism" into "magicorealism" for the sake of avoiding binary oppositionality even at the level of the morpheme.

11 Although referring only to literature in English, another interesting attempt at sketching a typology of magic realism is Jeanne Delbaere-Garant’s essay "Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English" (Zamora and Faris 249–263).

12 Even though Spindler acknowledges the outstanding value of Chanady’s narratological study of magic realism and partially incorporates her views, he, nevertheless, incorrectly groups Chanady together with scholars of the Latin American marvelous real critical trend because of her insistence on the presence of the supernatural in a work to be considered magic realist. Spindler does not take into consideration Chanady’s views on the supernatural expressed in Magical Realism and the Fantastic and her subsequent writing, which are more than similar to his own, and, thus, he denies Chanady her due theoretical breadth.

13 Following Flores and Leal, Spindler discusses magic realism in painting parallel to literature. Justifiably, Chanady warns against indiscriminate use of the term in different media, and she explains: "If a term is borrowed from another media of expression, it requires entirely different implications, even if there was some common ground between them" (18).


15 I agree with Aldama’s assertion that we need to be careful in reading ethnic and postcolonial texts (literary or filmic) as ethnographic artifacts, in the sense that they
are taken as mere representations of localized knowledge and local ontology. Aldama is worried that in the criticism of such texts the “anthropological has subsumed the literary” (Postethnic Narrative Criticism 2). However, Aldama’s insistence on separating ethnopoetics from aesthetics seems to lead to a creation of yet another unnecessary and false dichotomy. The aesthetics of the writers/directors of those ethnic and postcolonial texts are shaped and influenced in great part by their respective ethnopoetics. Moreover, when Aldama laments the “conflation of the literary form with ethnographic content” (Postethnic Narrative Criticism 2), he seems to speak as a proponent of a questionable polarizing between form and content.


17 I am here indebted to Kent Casper’s astute insight.

18 Chanady, in turn, was building on Tzvetan Todorov’s structuralist study of the fantastic and the marvelous (Introduction à la littérature fantastique, 1970), and on Floyd Merrell’s writing on magic realism (“The Ideal World in Search of its Reference: An Inquiry into the underlying Nature of Magical Realism,” 1975). In her immensely useful study, not only does Chanady work on outlining clear distinctions between fantastic and supernatural, but she also points to affinities and sketches differences between magic realism and the fantastic and fairy tale, uncanny, dreams and hallucinations, marvelous, and science fiction.

19 Chanady addresses the problem of the definition of the supernatural when it refers to the occult, the notions of reincarnation, metempsyhosis or telepathy, and stresses the arbitrary quality of the term. Since many people believe in these phenomena, their presence in a text may not brand it as magic realist. Chanady explains that this problem is resolved through the presence of the implied reader in the text, and adds that: “Although an author may sincerely believe in occultism, and address his story to receptive minds, the reader implied by the text believes in conventional norms of reason, and thus may differ from the intended reader. Since any definition of the supernatural is ultimately based on the beliefs of a certain culture, it will always be arbitrary from an absolute point of view, but less so than if it depended entirely on the individual. A general consensus must be reached if one is to be able to define anything. Since most educated readers in this day and age do not believe in occult phenomena, then these should be considered as supernatural, that is, something which contradicts the laws of nature as we know them. This kind of definition is of course relative, since the supernatural may be defined quite differently in the future; but for our purposes, we define ‘supernatural’ in this way, and consider occult
phenomena as such” (51). Chanady is correct to maintain reasonable reserve about what may be considered supernatural or not in the future. Elsa Linguanti records a shift in the modern understanding and experiencing of reality when she points out that: “Foundational concepts of twentieth-century science – the principles of indeterminacy and complementarity (identical phenomena are susceptible of alternative theoretical explanations and alternative theory-bound descriptions) and the theories of quanta and parallel universes – and such contemporary extrapolations as chaos mathematics, fluid dynamics and the ‘butterfly effect’ interact with general thought, encouraging alternative modes of thought and changing our attitudes about how the world is/was supposed to work” (5).

CHAPTER 3

20 Even Faris, a prominent theoretician of magic realism, simply states “the genre has been extending – often via novels - into film, including mainstream American film (The Witches of Eastwick, Ironweed, Field of Dreams, Ghost)” (163). Apart from calling magic realism a genre, a highly disputable statement, she uses Ironweed (1987) as an example of magic realist film while it is a clear example of psychological realism. Besides it seems to be injudicious to brand any film with ghosts in it as magic realist. Furthermore, Hollywood’s appropriation of the mode and the films resulting from it are a whole new issue for discussion, which I will touch on later.

21 In his essay “Magical Realism in Film and Fiction” (1995), Tomas E. Martinez reviews screen adaptations of the works of Julio Cortázar, García Márquez, and Carlos Fuentes, and concludes that the films pale next to the writings.

22 Actualités reconstituées are filmic reconstructions of actual events. Ezra mentions The Dreyfus Affair (L’Affaire Dreyfus, 1899) and The Coronation of King Edward VII (Le Sacre d’Edouard VII, 1902) as some of Méliès’s most known actualités reconstituées. Interestingly, she explains, the king was shocked by the verisimilitude of the events “recorded” in film and the uncanny resemblance of the actors to him and the queen. “Edward himself, in deeming the film to be ‘réellement fantastique’, characterized it more accurately than he may have realised. Although Méliès took great pains to recreate the ceremony held in Westminster Abbey down to the last detail, there is evidence to suggest that he had to be dissuaded from injecting the film with an overtly fantastical element,” like the idea to have the vision of Queen Victoria appear (67). In a fantastic turn of events, this film, Ezra reports, turned out to be a “pre-enactment;” it was made before the actual event took
place, because the coronation was postponed due to the king’s illness. The film ended up being shown in London on the evening of the actual coronation containing the rites that were later left out of the ceremony.

23 It is noteworthy that in painting magic realism and Surrealism may have evolved in tight chronological proximity. “Significantly, dated illustrations in Roh’s book show that examples of German magic realism predated André Breton’s Surrealist Manifesto of 1924. Thus, magic realism, as a mode of painting, has a slight chronological edge on Surrealism, while both styles are profoundly influenced by metaphysical art” (Wechsler 296).

24 Susan Linville coined this phrase for me.

25 The way Toni Morrison uses the magical is, however, more similar to the way the magical is employed in the magic realist films.

26 Beyond these characteristics, Aldama does not attempt to differentiate further between the techniques, and consequently different effects, of the filmic medium and the literary medium.

CHAPTER 4

27 See Appendix II of Hyde’s study for the question of the gendering of trickster.

28 Hyde talks about the American confidence man as a modern-day remnant of the trickster figure.

29 Hyde, himself, maintains some reservation here when he warns that: “Actual individuals are always more complicated than the archetype, and more complicated than its local version, too” (14).

30 See Hyde for the discussion on dirt: the exclusion of dirt, revivification through dirt, artwork and dirt, and ritual contacts with dirt.

31 I have to acknowledge Kent Casper’s assistance in the shaping and formulating of my ideas here.

It is this earth-boundness that Roh finds praiseworthy in pictorial magic realism when he says that, opposed to the fantastic dreamscapes of Expressionism, in magic realist paintings "[i]t feels as if that roughshod and frenetic transcendentalism, that devilish detour, that flight from the world have died and now an insatiable love for terrestrial things and a delight in their fragmented and limited nature has reawakened. One could say that once again a profound calm and thoughtfulness prevails, a calm that is perhaps a prelude to a new flight, launched with a more mature knowledge and earthly substance. Humanity seems destined to oscillate forever between devotion to the world of dreams and adherence to the world of reality" (17).

That magic realism sometimes uses the childlike point of view is by now a common critical observation.

CHAPTER 5

Klaus Blume reports that the so-called "crack generation" in Mexico and the Chilean young writers movement "McOndo" (a play on Macondo and McDonalds) have broken with the magic realist tradition. Similarly, Aldama explains that, according to Seymour Menton’s persuasive argument, the New Historical Novel has taken over magic realist central position in Latin America (15). Aldama clarifies that magic realism is not dead, but it has been handed off like in a relay race to those next in line, such as diasporic writers (15).

The English title plays on the expectations of the viewers, luring them into anticipating the traditionally exoticizing depiction of the Gypsies. This is a literal translation of the film’s original Serbo-Croatian title. Kuzmanovich suggests a more felicitous translation, "The Hanging House" (267). This portentous phrase alludes to a house in the film that literally hangs, to the protagonist’s attempted suicide by hanging, and to the general desolate state of the Gypsy Home.

Susan Linville graciously pointed out to me that the madman also resembles Buster Keaton’s protagonist of Steamboat Bill, Jr.

Villains in silent Hollywood films, as Susan Linville observed, were often called "Sheik."

It must not be overlooked that in this film, made a year before the former Yugoslavia started dissipating, Kusturica likens Yugoslavia to the Gypsy community, especially in its relation to Western Europe. Yugoslavia has always
been Western Europe’s problematic bastard child in whose disciplining, that is, its shaping and re-shaping, the Western powers such as Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and France played key roles. For the Western countries which metonymically pose as “Europe,” Yugoslavia’s European geographical destination was never enough to classify it as culturally European, in spite of the rich historical, cultural, and artistic tradition of the peoples living in that part of the world that is inextricably tied to that of the West. Yugoslavia was typically branded as Eastern European with the term which incorrectly invokes political association with the Warsaw alliance. Yugoslavia was a socialist country, which, in fact, openly cut its ties to USSR as early as 1948, and one of the founding members along with India and Egypt of the former Non-alignment Movement. Existing on the intersection of the East and the West, it was culturally blessed but politically cursed with such positionality. Kusturica’s employment of magic realism seems all the more appropriate for inscription of such Yugoslavia’s painful in-betweenness.

40 It should be repeated that Perhan is a racially-mixed bastard child of a Gypsy mother and a Slovenian soldier. Slovenian racial and cultural heritage has been shaped by Teutonic influences of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In fact, Slovenia even today keeps close cultural and political ties with Germany and Austria.

41 A disturbing amount of misinformation burdens Horton’s analysis and mars the quality of his reading of Kusturica’s film. Horton, who seems to be one of America’s foremost connoisseurs and scholars of the Eastern European and the former Yugoslav cinemas, states that the film was made with Hollywood money, specifically Columbia Pictures, and draws some conclusions about the nature of the film from that “fact.” Columbia Pictures was, in fact, just the film’s distributor in the United States. Horton reports that Merdžan says at one point “I see life as a mirage” (177), which is a paraphrase of Zabit’s words. According to Horton, Ahmed wants to repay Hatidža for saving the life of one of his relative’s son and not his own son (184). Horton makes a far-fetched implication that Merdžan’s name has something to do with “merd” (184) and an incorrect one that Perhan’s father, the Slovenian soldier was handsome (185), which we don’t know. Among a considerable number of mispelled names, Horton consistently spells the name of this people as lower case “gypsies.” By doing so, Horton invokes, even if unintentionally, a political stance toward the Gypsies which views and treats them more as a social anomaly than a people of distinct language, culture and a way of life. Finally, though noting that the film could be fruitfully studied in relation to the literary magic realism, Horton simply equates magic realism with dreams. In his analysis of the scene of Perhan and Azra’s sexual initiation, he remarks: “Desire, religion, ritual, nature, music, and magic realism (dreams) all flow together in one ‘mirage’ of sexual awakening” (186).
Even though Jameson seems to equate magic realism with the uncanny, leaves magic realism in general undefined, and seems to equate sweepingly magic realist film with "Third-worldist" films, his article on magic realism in film is an exceptionally rewarding analysis.

Given that grotto, a crypt or a subterranean passage, is the root of the term grotesque, the passageway through Malkovich's head becomes a literalized representation of the grotesqueness of that reality.

Interestingly, García Márquez claims that "the Latin American history is full of haunted man and real women" (A Witch Writing).

Susan Linville alerted me to the fact that Keaton was making fun of Thomas Ince for giving himself credit for everything. Also, and what is more pertinent to what I am hinting at here, Keaton was poking fun at the illusions of grandeur of a lowly stage-hand.

Since following Jonze's film came the outbreak and the overwhelming success of the TV reality shows, I wonder if Being John Malkovich anticipated them in the sense that it predicted such a phenomenon or it may have even provoked their emergence.

With Lester and his group of elderly friends who refuse to die, Jonze makes an explicit reference to Ron Howard's The Cocoon (1985).

In the ending scene, Lola, as I already pointed out, looks at Manni with surprise and criticism. Moreover, her facial expression seems to be filled also with repulsion when she witnesses Manni's fawning exchange with Ronnie. She does not run to him or embrace him; she merely lets him take her by the hand. When he inquires about the bag, the camera shows Lola's hand holding the bag in a close-up. Next, we see Manni smiling contentedly as if he does not even care to hear the answer.

In the bawdy folk tale, recorded by Paul Delarue in Nièvre sometime 1885, the country girl, whose character, class, and fate got modified by Perrault as well as the Grimm brothers, lies down with the wolf who pretends to be her grandmother. This self-assertive girl quickly figures out who is in her grandmother's garb and saves herself from being eaten up by saying that she has to go out to relieve herself. For the full story as well as discussion of it, see Jack Zipes's The Trials and Tribulations of Little Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Context (1983). After all, our red-haired Lola, who is eaten up by the mouth of Cronos, is on her way to
her boyfriend to take money, though, to him and save his life. But, more like the girl of the folk tale, Lola is on the road of maturation, learning self-reliance and self-assertion. Whalen does, however, say that, bearing in mind that Lola becomes more and more aware of her situation, "Run Lola Run is a coming-of-age story, albeit a fast-track one, wherein Lola moves from dependence on her parents to independence, from ignorance (powerlessness) to knowledge (power) of her player status in the game universe" (35).

50 Whalen makes a keen remark that the image of the turtle is a comic reference to Zeno's second paradox.

51 After I already made these notes on Tykwer's allusions to the Hindu religious and philosophic tradition, I was pleasantly surprised when I read Geoff Hancock's article on magic realism in general and saw that he, too, refers to the yogic "eye-tunnel." In his article written in the form of a personal essay, Hancock, however, discusses the limits of reason and logic and argues, from a personal experience, that if phenomena, such as the third eye, cannot be explained by reason, that does not make them less real. The quotation is a part of Hancock's definition of the "eye-tunnel," and I found its wording quite pertinent to Lola's goal.

52 Dare I mention here the portentous symbol of swastika? This Hindu symbol of good luck and well being has its spikes turned from left to right, as opposed to the appropriated Nazi symbol whose spikes were pointing in the opposite direction. The left to right direction of the Hindu symbol signifies getting away from the matter and getting freed from the flesh.

53 See Aldama's analysis of Rushdie's writing for an interesting discussion on the fictional fourth space as "an enlarged contact zone where firstspaces (Spain and Britain) and thirddspaces (Latin America and India) coexist" (Postethnic Narrative Criticism 91).

54 Menton points to the toylike world not only in Grossberg paintings but also in the story "Meeting" (1966) by Julio Cortázar.

APPENDIX A

55 Aldama rejects the revolutionary potential of magic realism in his recently published Postethnic Narrative Criticism: Magicorealism in Oscar "Zeta" Acosta, Ana Castillo, Julie Dash, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie, where he says that "magicorealism is not a de facto site of resistance and emancipation" (20). Yet, he
seems to contradict himself when at the end of his study he concludes that “the power of [magicorealist] narratives lies in their ability to affect our vision of the world” (109). As I stated earlier, Aldama does not differentiate enough between the literary medium and the filmic medium, and therefore does not take into consideration the fact that the filmic medium can potentially have a stronger political impetus than the literary one. The democratic nature of cinema and the fact that film, as opposed to literature which is mostly a solitary activity, is intended for collective viewing can potentially have a stronger effect on its audience than literature has on its readers.

56 *It's a Wonderful Life* is an interesting case to study because of the year of its production, 1946. Notwithstanding the fact that this is Hollywood’s brand of realism, and the source of its magic fairy tale world of Disney, the film may point toward parallel development of magic realism in film and literature. Moreover, we could trace Hollywood’s magic realism through this film, which may have developed independently of the magic realism found in Latin America and other parts of the world.

57 I refer the reader here to an exquisite article by Tomas de Zengotita, “The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic” (2002), which discusses modus operandi of our society of spectacle.

58 In Hollywood, it is still unacceptable that historical films be touched by the matter-of-fact representation of the fantastic and supernatural (a feature so prominent in the magic realist literature and film outside the United States), because such representation has the potential of being subversive to Hollywood’s self-appointed role of the guardian of historical memory and storytelling. Recently, Hollywood made a precedent with the use of magic realism in the genre of biopic, also a genre that strives typically for realistic representation. In Julie Taymore’s *Frida* (2002) paintings of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo come alive and scenes from Frida’s life are morphed into paintings. The film also includes a surrealist sequence for representing Frida and her husband, Diego Rivera’s visit to Chicago for Rivera’s exhibition. Portrayal of the eventful and unconventional life of a highly imaginative artist of fiery temperament, whose art was steeped in the colorful folklore of Mexico, may justify the use of magic realism. Also, the producer and the star of the film is Salma Hayek, a Mexican actress who worked on this project for years and must have been exposed to magic realism in her country.
59 In the ending sequence of the movie, Hollywood seems to reflect on its own ultimately patriarchal control of women-oriented narratives. In the sequence, Daryl Van Horne (Jack Nicholson), whom the women “killed” by magic, is resurrected on an enormous screen. That from the screen he talks to his offspring, the three baby boys the women had by him, remains unknown to the women.

60 In these films, symptomatically, the typical Hollywood protagonist (White, male, and heterosexual) internalizes and embodies these problems, while it is the women in the films who seem to be firmly grounded in and in control of reality. Hollywood seems to mirror the intensified reality and identity crisis in the West following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Eastern Block. The West lost its Other which was vital for the reinforcement of the West’s self-definition. Writing in 1993, Jim George articulates the situation after the fall of the Berlin Wall clearly: “Reality it seems is not what it used to be in International Relations. The Cold War is over, and patterns of thought and behaviour identified as corresponding with an enduring universal essence of global existence are coming under increasing scrutiny, as old ideology commitments and alliances are reformulated, territorial boundaries are hastily redrawn, and new symbols of identity are constructed and/or resurrected” (33). George quotes Vaclav Havel’s views on the post-Cold War era and explains: “Havel’s proposal is that instead of understanding the end of the Cold War as the victory of ‘Western’ theory/practice, the time has come for the ‘victors’ to confront those expects of their own societies that bound them together with their Soviet enemy for so long in ‘a kind of alliance between the last citadels of the modern era making a common cause against the ravages of time and change … [thus] the two self-proclaimed superpowers propped each other up against the storm blowing from the abyss of a world dissolved’” (37). Reflecting this situation and sensing the threat of its formulaic narrative structure falling apart, Hollywood started searching for the new “enemy,” and found it and created it in the form of Serbs during the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia, or, more recently, in the form of Arabs in the wake of the terrorist crisis and the attack on Iraq. Given that Hollywood plays a crucial role in representing the United States as what George defines the contemporary heroic figure most obliged to ward off the anarchical threat, the following statement of his could illuminate and relate to the way Hollywood constructs its Others: “if self-identity is construed in terms of contemporary security discourse and the anarchy problematique, then all other actors in the discursive system will be located on an ‘axis of threat’ in relation to that identity” (63)


Whalen, Tom. Rev. of Run Lola Run, dir. Tom Tykwer. Film Quarterly 53.3 (Spring 2000): 33-40.


