SEMIOTIC IMAGES

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INTRODUCTION

Julia Kisteva is famous for the theories on literature and linguistics she developed in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.[1] However, she has also shown interest in film, especially in her essay "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction" and *Intimate Revolt*. Furthermore, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* and *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* have also influenced film studies, as they provide interpretive tools for psychoanalytic readings, feminist readings, and readings of the Abject in films.[2] Along these lines, Kristeva's theories have generated inquiries focusing on the figures of the Abject (often in horror films) and feminine bodies.[3] However, these inquiries do not emphasize Kristeva's conception of the Semiotic as a part of signifying processes. Instead, these analyses focus on the Oedipal model on which Kristeva bases her paradigm or on thematic applications of the Abject. This methodology leads such readings to regard themes and characters as representations of the Semiotic or Symbolic instead of focusing on the "nonexpressive" nature of the Semiotic in films.[4]

Consequently, critics have used Kristeva for a fairly limited range of films: avant-garde and horror (or, less commonly, other films that represent the Abject). I suspect that Kristeva herself provoked these limitations. Although I appreciate that she shapes a paradigm of Semiotic analyses, I want to tackle her inconsistencies and contradictions when dealing with film. In this essay, I will undertake Kristeva's misleading statements about films and go back to the

Semiotic model she proposes in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, which I find more suitable to understand the significance of the Semiotic in cinema. In reading *Revolution in Poetic Language* in relation to film, I hope to open the narrow field of analysis that has focused on the limited film genres of horror and avant-garde associated with Kristeva's work.

Thus, I propose to examine an avant-garde and a traditional Hollywood movie to expand Kristevan filmic interpretations. Even though these films have different goals, they nonetheless have similar interests in image-making and commodification, and ask questions about aesthetic contemplation and about the consumption of images. In their questioning, they comment on the nature of the viewer's role and feature semiotic moments. Hence, these movies address the relationship between the economic and semiotic structures of films.

THE SYMBOLIC AND THE SEMIOTIC IN FILM

Kristeva's distinction between the Symbolic and the Semiotic has yet to be substantially explored by film scholars. In Kristeva's paradigm, the Symbolic relies on the rules of logical discourse whose goal is limited to communication. The Semiotic is less tangible; it is the "nonexpressive" part of the signifying process. Kristeva locates the evolution of the Semiotic in the pre-oedipal phase of the child's development. At this stage, drives articulate into a mobile and ephemeral totality, which she calls the semiotic *chora*, borrowing the term *chora* from Plato's *Timaeus*, where it denotes "an essentially mobile, extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases."[5] Kristeva defines the *chora* as "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a mobility that is as full of movement as it is regulated."[6] When the child positions her body into a

social environment, social rules organize her discourse. Hence, the semiotic *chora* becomes a pre-enunciation inseparable from the Symbolic.

However, the *chora* exists as a sub-layer in the signifying process: in any signifying practice, both the Symbolic and Semiotic poles are present. In daily communications, the *chora* might not catch our attention, as we focus on the message of the interaction. Yet, as Philip Lewis explains, Kristeva

> reserve[s] the term *écriture* for the writing of the avant-garde, for texts which make the problematic of semiotic productions more visible than others, for texts whose irreducibility to the structures of normative linguistics or concepts of representations is discernable and unsettling.[7]

The otherness and the inaccessibility of the poetic text disrupt mimetic rules and allow a more visible experience of the Semiotic. As Christophe Den Tandt explains, in a *géno-text* (as opposed to the *phéno-text* which is a plain articulation of a message relying on grammaticality), "the signifiers are subjected to the non-symbolic ordering of meter and rhythm, and its syntax is either disrupted or structured beyond the need of symbolic expression."[8] Therefore, the Semiotic can re-emerge in the realm of the very materiality of the signifier when disrupting the Symbolic. For Kristeva, this allows a pleasurable experience with the medium of the text.

My interest in this phenomenon joins with concerns that film theories focusing on excess have also addressed. Kristin Thompson's study of excess, for example, illuminates elements in films "which do not participate in the creation of narrative or symbolic meaning."[9] Thompson focuses on gaps in the narrative structure or elements that challenge the unifying construction of a film. Unjustified, problematic, and unclear elements, such as excessive close-ups, texture, colors, and shapes of the costumes are sites of excess. Kristeva's concept of the Semiotic alludes to similar

constituents in films. In "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction," Kristeva refers to the irruption of the Semiotic in film, or the "*frayages*, nameless dread, noises preceding the name, the images — pulsations, somatic waves, color frequencies, rhythms, tones."[10] Consequently, in focusing strictly on plot or characters, most readers using Kristeva's work fail to see central aspects of films that lie in the Semiotic.

Although Kristeva and Thompson target similar points, their analyses of the Semiotic and excess differ on two grounds. First, Thompson does not rely on a psycho-analytic model, and thus does not think of excess in terms of repressed elements in films. It is the critic's role to elaborate on these moments of excess since, unlike most viewers, the critic is trained to *see* these elements. Second, for Thompson, "excess implies a gap or lag in motivation."[11] This means that excess works against narrative motivation: when there is excess, motivation fails. On the contrary, Kristeva's model conceives of the Semiotic always in relation to the Symbolic, which relies on motivation. For her, one does not exclude the other. That is why her paradigm adds to film theories that address films' "*frayages*" without excluding them from motivation. V. F. Perkins, for instance, reminds us that "images and rhythm" can "release [...] meanings which are most relevant to the director's purpose," so that these meanings do not come only from "superimposed statement."[12] In this context, a closer attention to the role of the Semiotic on these "images and rhythms" would benefit film interpretations.

Semiotic approaches would also add to analysis of screen performers. The work of Andrew Klevan, for example, pays attention to the "the moment-by-moment movement of performers" and to the "character's physical and aural detail," as they enhance our understanding of film: the actor's body, while at times overlooked in film analyses, "embodies" film characters.[13] The Semiotic participates in "the physicality and texture" of interest to Klevan because it shows the limitations of

"thin interpretations based on general themes or summaries of narrative strands."[14] Consequently, the interrelation between the Semiotic and Symbolic allows a more in-depth and multifaceted vision of excessive elements in films.

This interrelation has been overlooked, as critics tend to only emphasize the political power of the Semiotic. Ann Chanter notes, for example, that the semiotic trace "is capable of disrupting and reorganizing even the overt, formal requirements of a work of art."[15] For Toril Moi, the Semiotic is revolutionary because "the revolutionary subject, whether masculine or feminine, is a subject that is able to allow the *jouissance* of semiotic motility to disrupt the strict symbolic order."[16] However, the radicalness of the Semiotic cannot be measured without meticulously describing the interface between the Semiotic and the Symbolic. As I hope to show in my analysis of *Calendar* (1993) and *Jurassic Park* (2000),[17] the Semiotic can have a revolutionary impact when it allows viewers to relate pleasurably with the filmic medium, going beyond a profit and goal-oriented process. However, it can also, in emphasizing the active participation of the viewer, take part in the commodification system on which *Jurassic Park* relies to make profit. Therefore, the claim that the Semiotic always has a revolutionary impact on art because of its non-systematic nature is reductive. The Semiotic in itself is not politically commendable, but analyzing its relationship with the Symbolic will enable critics to evaluate its challenges to film structures.

Kristeva's comments on film and literature might be partly responsible for the confusion regarding the Semiotic and the Symbolic. She provides misleading comments on images and literature that could have caused the analyses based on her theories. For example, she favors literature to images:

> I find, in a way, the verbal art, insofar as it eludes fetishization, and
> constantly raises doubts and questioning, the verbal lends itself better

perhaps to exploring these states that I call states of abjection. From the moment that you establish it in a sort of image or something representable, salable, exposable, capitalizable, you lose it.[18]

This remark might have motivated the lack of interest for the Semiotic in film studies.[19] One could interpret Kristeva's statement as a comment on filmic nature: images give a more tangible nature to the Semiotic. This reasoning leads film critics to look for compromising ways to deal with the Semiotic: they focus on the Semiotic not so much as "nonexpressive" and fluid, but more as a pragmatic notion (i.e., they look for allegories of the Semiotic and the Symbolic).

These analyses usually pair Kristeva and horror films, relying on Kristeva's statement that "everything specular is fascinating because it bears the trace, in the visible, of this agressivity, this unsymbolized drive."[20] Here, Kristeva refers to the threat of the fissure of the subject, but she adds, "no doubt this effect [the anguish of the viewer] is obtained to the maximum when the image itself signifies aggressivity."[21] As she understands the Semiotic in films in terms of agressivity and violence, it is logical that most Kristevan readings focus on horror films. Yet, Kristeva and the critics following her statement imply that the threat of the "lektonic traces" (i.e., the "elements left unaccounted for in the too-visible, too-signifying") can be traced almost strictly in films that represent aggressivity, which again limits our understanding of the Semiotic.[22]

Film critics using Kristeva's theories do not provide a detailed analysis of the Semiotic, but they usually underline the theory of the Abject, which refers literally to abject secretions that threaten the subject of keeping a clean body and thus need to be expelled. The Abject must be "radically excluded" in order to keep a safe boundary between the inside and the outside, hence securing the self.[23] This emphasis on the Abject results, at times, in misleading readings of the Semiotic. For

instance, in her analysis of *Candyman*, Andrea Kuhn builds on Kristeva's notion of Abjection.[24] She explains that "Kristeva conceptualizes the Semiotic as contract and precondition to the Symbolic, bound to overcome and outgrown in order for 'culture,' society, and subjectivity to exist. So-called abjects point towards the impossibility of such an ideal transcendence of the physical."[25] She adds that the mother, related to the semiotic *chora*, needs to be repudiated so that the child can turn to his or her father and enter the Symbolic.

Kuhn identifies various representations of the Symbolic and the Semiotic, finding referents in the film that *represent* them. However, she does not justify her method thoroughly enough for it to be helpful in terms of Semiotic analysis. Instead of thinking of Semiotic manifestations as "lektonic traces," Kuhn considers the Symbolic and Semiotic as places:

> the universe of *Candyman* is clearly divided into Semiotic and Symbolic spaces.
> The Symbolic can be found in the (predominantly white) world of the
> University of Illinois and Lincoln Village [...] Cabrini Green is the semiotic
> space (full of abjects and abjections) that the symbolic world is trying to negate
> and repress.[26]

In transposing Kristeva's notion of the Symbolic and the Semiotic to actual spaces in the movie, Kuhn simplifies the complexity of the relationship between the two aspects of signifying processes. Later on Kuhn claims, "at this point her [Helen's] self-abandonment to the power of the Semiotic seems almost complete: Rose stages this final encounter between monster and heroine as romantic seduction [...], but repulsion wins over fascination and Helen resist."[27] Here, the Semiotic appears as an exterior force in the character's life. Furthermore, at times the characters are also "representative of the Symbolic": Helen's "status as a representative of the Symbolic

remains severely compromised by her gender."[28] Besides, Kuhn claims that Helen "sacrifices herself for the boy, gives her life for his, and thus enables his transition from the Semiotic to the Symbolic."[29] There, she equates moments in the plot with Kristeva's model.

Although Kuhn provides a compelling reading of *Candyman*, her use of the notions of Semiotic and Symbolic is unstable and confusing. If the Semiotic and Symbolic are actual places in the film, as well as forces that drive the characters' actions, and eventually descriptions of advancement in the plot, it becomes difficult to pinpoint the role of the Symbolic and Semiotic. This does not mean that the Semiotic and the Symbolic cannot have different effects on texts. Yet, here Kuhn provides allegorical representations of the Semiotic and the Symbolic without explicitly referring to the characters or to the places as allegories. In doing so, she "symbolizes" the Semiotic.

It is surprising, however, to think of cinema as a medium that does not favor the emergence of the Semiotic. In fact, Kristeva herself refers to film as an art form that provides "meticulous organization of space, rigorous positioning of each object, calculated, intervention of every sound and every bit of dialogue — all were meant to add a 'rhythmic,' 'plastic' dimension to the *too* visible."[30] In this quote, cinema does incorporate the "*too* visible," but it also presents elements that build grounds for the emergence of the semiotic *chora*. Consequently, there is an obvious tension between Kristeva's comments on images and her consideration of films.

Moreover, in her writing on visual arts, Kristeva frames her discussion within the notion of great art. D. N. Rodowick suggests that Kristeva and other French thinkers approve of the experiments of avant-garde art and disapprove of the Classic Realist text (both artistically and politically), which illuminates Kristeva's comments on film and the interpretation of her work.[31] As Tina Chanter explains, Kristeva "identifies the cinema of Eisenstein — up to that of Godard — as 'great

art'."[32] Chanter points out that Kristeva invites critics to focus on avant-garde films and praises Godard for his creation of films that give the pleasure of fascination to the viewer, but at the same time create a distance from this fascination. The distance makes the viewer focus more on film as a medium, thus coming closer to the functioning of the *chora* (as the latter is concerned with an unmotivated play with sounds as a material of pleasure). Although it seems logical that avant-garde films would be the best subjects of analysis for a Kristevan reading, one must not forget that the Semiotic is also an intrinsic constituent of any communication.

Consequently, I agree with Chanter's concern about the "adequacy of this sweeping and exclusive judgment about what constitutes great art, which designates, by its silence, everything else as inferior;"[33] I would add that what is most fascinating about Kristeva's model is its possible application to all systems of signs. It thus appears restrictive to assert an opposition between great art and its opposite when Kristeva's model in *Revolution of Poetic Language* goes beyond such limitations.[34] Consequently, I would like to build on Chanter's effort to broaden the field of Kristevan studies in film, not focusing on certain kinds of films in relation to Kristeva's theory, but rather providing a different reading of Kristeva's work applicable to films. Therefore, instead of adapting Kristeva's terminology to actual characters, spaces, or moments in movies, I suggest focusing more on the characteristics of the Semiotic in cinema. Such an analysis will enable me to clarify the revolutionary possibilities of the Semiotic in the filmic realm.

To explore these matters, I would like to provide an analysis of two films: an avant-garde film, *Calendar*, and a more traditional Hollywood film, *Jurassic Park*. Here, I build on Chanter's efforts to broaden Kristevan readings of films. In her work, Chanter reads Third Cinema as an appropriate medium to study the representation of the Abject. In proposing different film categories, Chanter goes beyond Kristeva's distinction between traditional and avant-garde representations.[35]

Third Cinema, Chanter claims, combines linearity and other traditional filmic elements, as well as avant-garde tools, such as the disruption of the viewer's fascination with the image. On the other hand, Chanter's area of study is mostly thematic; she briefly analyzes films that disrupt representations of race or gender in a political way. It is worth noting that the Semiotic does not appear in her reading of Third Cinema. I wish to expand this aspect in my examination of Egoyan and Spielberg's films.

In some ways, *Calendar* and *Jurassic Park* are two radically different works. In *Calendar*, "the only real event [...] happens in between the lines, yet this sliver of a movie will remain in your head long after many more action-packed movies have faded away."[36] It relates the story of a Canadian photographer (played by Atom Egoyan) hired to take pictures of Armenian churches for a calendar. Hence, Egoyan is the writer, director, and actor of *Calendar*. Although the character has Armenian origins, he does not speak the language, and his wife serves as a translator while their guide takes them to the churches. It turns out that the photographer fails to understand the significance of these churches, but his wife is truly interested in their stories. The shooting becomes the account of her detachment from her husband, as she falls in love with their guide. Back in Canada, the photographer (re)watches the shooting of his trip and hires women who speak eastern languages to help him re-envision his relationship with his wife and write about it. The film does not provide this information linearly, however; it is layered with flashbacks and changes of filmstocks since "two distinct film media make up the body of the film: high resolution technicolour film stock is intercut with low-resolution, monochromatic video."[37]

In contrast, *Jurassic Park* is a commercial Hollywood film that enables the audience to experience continuity during the viewing of the film because it strives to conceal the technical choices necessary to this very continuity. Nevertheless,

parallels can be made between the two films' forms and messages. In *Calendar*, a photographer is hired to take pictures of Armenian churches in order to make a calendar, and in *Jurassic Park* the characters take a trip in the extraordinary world of dinosaurs. In *Calendar*, the film literally stops and we can see the shots of each church. They appear, still, as beautiful painterly scenes. As the film pauses, it becomes clear that the spectator is invited to reflect on cinema as a medium and to take pleasure in the aesthetic pictures. Similarly, in *Jurassic Park*, the characters stop at each dinosaur area and observe the scenes. As we shall see, although *Calendar* and *Jurassic Park* have opposed artistic goals, it is possible to read Semiotic moments in both movies. Here, I am not only trying to justify my use of two very different films (as I see in them some thematic and stylistic parallels), but also to show that the binary oppositions we make between them become precarious when we approach them within a semiotic framework.

ATOM EGOYAN'S *CALENDAR*

At the narrative level, *Calendar* comments on the non-expressive characteristics of film; the texture of the medium becomes the viewer's focus. The film deals with the techniques of making beautiful images. This image-making activity is filmed and presented as a video image (8mm).[38] The viewer has direct access to the video, as it fills in the gaps in the story related in the film. The embedded media offers a self-reflexive account of art and images. Therefore, the film provides meta-comments on its medium, which enables the emergence of the *chora*, as Egoyan invites his audience to take pleasure in the medium of the film in a semiotic moment. Thanks to these semiotic moments, Egoyan asks, what does it mean to make art? In turning an object into an aesthetic artifact, does an artist transform the essential "truth" of

this object? How do artists deal with the techniques and constraints of the media they use? To what extent do these constraints affect the final product?

The film asks such questions when displaying disruptive moments in the fascination of the viewer with the image. Several times in the film, we watch the video that the travelers recorded during their trip in Armenia. Because the photographer holds the camera, we do not see him, but he figures as the visually absent character (although orally present). Hence, when his wife talks to him, she faces the camera: she talks to the viewer and looks at the viewer (when she in fact faces her husband who holds the camera). Identifying with the two characters on the screen thus becomes impossible. The photographer's unusual presence/absence, as well as his wife and the guide's gaze in front of him, as they look at the viewer, insist that the object facing the viewer *is* a film. This allows the viewer to experience the Semiotic, as the latter relies on a disturbance of straightforward and logical narrative structures that allow identification between viewer and character through an immersion in the filmic medium.

The rewinding of the video that punctures the actual film accentuates this effect: a fascination with the image is unfeasible at such moments. Also, at times, the sound of the film does not match the action of the video because the sound takes place in the protagonist's present life and does not go with the recorded past. All of these disruptions of the identification with the image remind the viewer of the way film works as a medium: *Calendar* reflects on image-making processes. The photographer's comments on his art-making lead us to such conclusions. For example, the photographer says to his wife, "the light is really perfect for me right now, so if you guys could move out of the frame [...] so I can just take a picture." His statement interrupts a discussion with his wife and the guide about the church behind them. The constraints of image-making appear as an interruption of life. Conversely, as the picture becomes part of the film (the film pauses on the beautiful

image of the church), the character's remark on light is also valid for the medium
the viewer watches. This self-reflexivity disrupts traditional Symbolic modes of
storytelling and visual presentation, allowing the Semiotic to irrupt into the filmic
experience.

Conversely, this semiotic irruption is in tension with the implications of the
photographer's activity and behavior. The film shows that the photographer can
take breathtaking pictures while not relating to the landscape and its signification.
In fact, when preparing to take a picture, the photographer's wife brings up the
guide's concern for the artist's lack of attention to the reality of the buildings he
photographs:

> WIFE: Don't you feel the need to come closer? Actually touch and feel…
>
> PHOTOGRAPHER: Touch and feel the churches?
>
> WIFE: …realize how it's made, constructed?
>
> PHOTOGRAPHER: Hasn't occurred to me.
>
> WIFE: Hasn't occurred to you?
>
> PHOTOGRAPHER: He'd like me to caress them or something?
>
> WIFE: You know what he means.
>
> PHOTOGRAPHER: No, I don't, really.

Here, it is clear that the artist paradoxically creates insightful images without having
a deeper understanding of the reality that lies behind these churches. Art is
misleading, or as Ron Burnett explains "although these places are beautiful with
rich color tones, wildflowers and sun-baked fields, they are 'tourist' images for
which some anecdotal history is provided, but where the depth seems to be
missing."[39] He adds that "no photograph escapes the contradictions and potential
excitement of temporal dislocation."[40] In making the viewer realize the deceptive

nature of the photographs, Egoyan points out that "the pleasures of seeing [...] are invested with desiring to make the memory real, to generate truth, to manufacture a narrative. The truth becomes a metaphor just as quickly as the image disguises its sudden transformative power."[41] When immobilizing time and space, the photographer ends up commodifying the site he shoots, hence staining the real experience of the edifice. As Crissa-Jean Chappell shows, "some moments are too ethereal to be recorded. For example, in *Calendar*, Egoyan's photographer takes pictures of the Armenian churches but cannot capture their history."[42] Egoyan thus reveals the contradictions involved in art-making.

As a matter of fact, Egoyan has commented on this issue, explaining that "he fears falling into the trap of the photographer, an observer who records but understands very little the inner meaning of what he sees."[43] He adds in another interview:

> the image-making process is not simple, in my opinion. Although creating
> images is very attracting to me, I am aware of all of the contradictions involved
> in the making of images of human beings, in representing and defining these
> images through mechanical properties.[44]

The images that interrupt the progression of film (when the film literally stops for a few seconds) become loci of reflection on these contradicting directions.

The film pauses for each picture that figures in the calendar and thus provokes the contemplation of the image. Even though the movie might help one think about the nature of image-making, ironically, it also invites one to appreciate these very images. The repetition of the beautiful churches allows the "elements left unaccounted for in the too-visible, too-signifying" to resurface, creating a rhythm of aesthetic pleasure.[45] During the church scenes, the church is at the center of the

frame in front of the green grass. Behind, the trees' color harmonizes with the lighter green of the grass. The yellow light complements the darker browns of the edifice. Warm and cold colors balance, as well as light and shadows. When such scenes appear, we can hear the "click" of the camera taking the picture, immobilizing reality. The familiar sound makes the audience aware of the image-making process, and calls its attention to the painterly composition of the scene; it emphasizes the perfect harmony of the picture. The viewer focuses on the semiotic elements of this picture (i.e., the power of its perspective, colors, lights) and takes pleasure in the presentation of the aesthetic object.

While the emergence of the Semiotic in the film is obvious in such moments, it also appears in less stylized scenes. At the beginning of the film, when a flock of sheep stops the characters' car, the photographer records the scene using the 8mm camera, which gives a gray blue color to the scene. The flock's colors vary from black to white. Its movements and the car's movements create a rhythm of abstraction and clarity, as well as a composition in shades of colors. When the car is able to go on, the image becomes blurry and the flock becomes abstract shapes. The faster the car goes, the more abstract the shapes become. When the car slows down or stops, one has the impression that the sheep's speed goes down, although that is an optical illusion. Then, each sheep become more distinctive. Thus, the movement of the camera (in the car) adds to the texture and shapes of the scene. The sound of the sheep and bells complement the rhythms of the movements.

One pays attention to these sensory details because the film has barely developed its plot yet, and the audience is immersed in a scene with no dialogue, no voice-over, just the sounds of the sheep. Although the photographer's wife comments on this scene later on during the movie, initially, the viewer does not know its significance in the film's narrative.[46] What is important when the scene appears in the film is the texture of the animals, their colors, the sensation of their

movements and the rhythms they create. Daniele Riviere elaborates on the power of Egoyan's images to compensate for the lack of physical contact with the bodies he puts on screen, and she explains, "the camera has become subjective, and it participates in the transmission of emotion."[47] Hence, the film encourages the viewers' visual pleasure in the sensation of such scenes because these moments suspend visibility and allow the film medium to intrude in the filmic experience: the blurry colors of the sheep, for example, disrupt the deciphering of the image. These sights are semiotic because they sensually draw the viewer's attention to the surface of the image.

In sum, in *Calendar*, the Semiotic appears in the composition of images, the shift of colors and textures of the different films, the emphasis of sensory details, and it is also provoked by self-reflexiveness. *Calendar* invites viewers to enjoy the physical characteristics of the film in the sensation that this use of the medium creates. In Egoyan's work, the Semiotic works as the basis for the argument the narrative puts forth. The contradiction between the wish to look and the danger in looking at what you transform into an aesthetic object relies on our experience of the Semiotic because the film needs this experience to comment on the danger of the composition and contemplation of images.

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *JURASSIC PARK*

While *Calendar* centers thematically on the tension between aesthetic contemplation and the warning against the misunderstanding provided by the consumption of images, *Jurassic Park* is not self-reflexive about this problem. Yet, *Jurassic Park* invites viewers (with the characters) to *look* at the dinosaurs. The plot of the film revolves around wealthy entrepreneur Whilst Hammond's theme park. Situated on a hidden

island, the park features living dinosaurs drawn from the prehistoric DNA preserved by an amber stone. Before the opening of his park, Hammond invites a lawyer, a paleontologist, a paleobotanist, a mathematician, and his two grandchildren to visit the park. During their visit of the park, the security system breaks down, allowing the dinosaurs to run off and attack the visitors.

On their tour (before the system breaks down), the characters stop and look at the spectacle of the dinosaurs in nature. Many viewers have enjoyed these scenes: "the dinosaur scenes are spectacular," they said.[48] In fact, before the film came out, Stan Winston anticipated, "it'll be beautiful, seamless mix of technologies so that what you see are living dinosaurs that are almost too real to be real."[49] Dean Cundey notes, "the audience has to believe the unbelievable. You have to give them as much reality and recognizable truth as you can. They have to walk in the shoes of the characters. They have to feel the terror when the experiment goes wrong."[50] All of these comments direct us toward a closer attention to the creation of such verisimilitude.[51]

Several critics have asked about *Jurassic Park*, "how do you light mechanical puppets so it looks and feels real? [...] How does the composing of digital characters affect the overall mood and texture of lighting, the way the camera moves, and the way images are composed? What about shadows cast by digital characters?"[52] To answer such questions, Fisher stresses the continuous movements and the extreme angles of the camera that emphasize the reality effect of the movie. He also mentions the attention to details, such as the wrinkling of the dinosaurs when they move, as well as the use of shadows and light to produce a "clean look which Cundey describes as 'heightened' reality."[53] These features end up creating a believable image of the dinosaurs.

Robert Baird proposes a different approach to the verisimilitude of *Jurassic Park* based on Spielberg's comment that, he "wanted [his] dinosaurs to be animals."[54]

Braid studies how the audience relates the dinosaurs to a well-known schema, animals. The reliance on the animal-like dinosaurs fosters emotional engagement from viewers. For Warren Buckland, such emotional engagement is made possible by the digital images Spielberg uses to produce a new aesthetics. The images of the dinosaurs "go beyond spectacle by employing special effects to articulate a possible world;" "while clearly visible, the effects attempt to hide behind an iconic appearance; that is, they are visible special effects masquerading as invisible effects."[55] The composite or layered image that combines the dinosaurs and the humans gives the impression that both take place at the same time and space, even though the viewer knows that this is impossible. The illusionist qualities of the special effects do not produce perfect photographic credibility, but they stimulate the viewer to imagine a real world.

Buckland also claims that "the optical and photochemical equipment [...] has inherent limitations that cannot be disguised, such as loss of resolution, grain, and hard edge matter line."[56] While I agree with Buckland that the film works at compensating for these technical limitations to appear realistic, I would argue that when Spielberg uses high technology and calculation to give life to the dinosaurs, the "loss of resolution, grain, hard edge matte lines" creates a Semiotic disruption. The extreme use of technology calls our attention, although probably not during the entire movie, to the texture of the special effects. Hence, like in *Calendar*, the viewer focuses on the medium of the film in a Semiotic approach.

These semiotic experiences occur when the images are too green, too perfect, too spectacular. The forced realness of some scenes interrupts the immersion of the viewer in the story, calling attention to the film as a medium and to the ways in which it uses this medium. For example, at the beginning of the film, after the short ride in the park, the car stops and the characters look extremely surprised, as if they are facing the unreal. Paleontologist Alan Grant and Paleobotanist Ellie Sattler take

their glasses off, open their mouths, and stare at something the audience cannot see. The camera turns to the dinosaur as it goes by the car. The two scientists and the billionaire walk towards the diplodocus and look at the dinosaur. In this shot, Alan Grant's blue shirt matches the color of the sky. John Hammond's white clothes tone with the color of the white clouds. Ellie Sattler's pink shirt goes with the undertones in the trees and the clouds. The colors of nature, the green grass, and the blue sky are bright and distinct. These color associations and the green landscape produce a stylized representation of nature. In looking at this scene, one realizes that the composition and the minute attention paid to the harmony of the site make it un-authentic. In addition, the different elements of the picture are arranged harmoniously. The trees slightly bend the opposite direction of the diplodocus's head. The three humans appear as a little mass under the dinosaur, and the bushes on its right add symmetry to the image.

Here, like in the church sights of *Calendar*, the minute attention to every detail that composes the scene makes the viewer focus on the symmetry and harmony of the shapes and colors. The composition emphasizes the beauty of the painterly scene, which goes against the realistic nature of the film. Thus, I suggest that it might not be as simple to lose oneself in the reality of the film as most claim. Yet, *Jurassic Park* uses this attention toward the film medium: the acceptance of the aesthetization of nature and its believable traits relies on the new looking conventions related to the rules of an amusement park. The movie, a medium of mass consumption, presents the visual consumption set up in the entertainment park. Nigel Clark points out that in a theme park

the entire environment is designed for visual consumption, a place where things are more beautiful, more prefect, more enchanting than any ordinary locale. But in order to enjoy these illusions to the fullest [...] it is necessary to

follow the rules, to comply with the arrangements that regulate movement and spectatorship.[57]

Regulations of the park and of the audience's visual processes enable the illusion and the imaginary to be effective. Hence, the film invites the viewer to look at the dinosaurs that will enable an "ecstatic desire for sensory stimulation."[58] The regulated experience invites the viewer to consume images.

The viewer, in his or her gazing activity regulated by the rules the film sets up, *produces* the effect of the film. Constance Balides puts forth this argument in addressing the relationship between the economic and textual systems of the film. She shows that "*Jurassic Park* makes its economics visible" when calling attention to the objects that figure the Jurassic Park logo, for example.[59] The film also emphasizes the commodification of time through the use of the dinosaurs; "in the ride in *Jurassic Park* the work of reproduction becomes tourist spectacle, another blurring of production and reproduction."[60] She adds:

> *Jurassic Park* addresses its spectator as economic subjects in various ways — as literal (not only semiotic) consumers, as worker / consumers invested in the luster of capital through strategies of immersion, and as theme park riders for whom the labour of the assembly line is visible through its trace in the realm of consumption.[61]

This double consumption becomes the rule that structures the viewing of the film. The Semiotic tends to reaffirm this process when the narrative stops and invites the viewer to contemplate colors, line, and movement that are "nonexpressive."

This process is clarified early in the movie by the shot of a mosquito caught in an old amber stone that takes the entire frame. This recess in the film calls the

spectator's attention to the texture of the colors; the light that reflects in the golden

bubbles on the stone; and the lines of the fracture of time on it, almost as an abstract

or cubist piece of art. The brief pause in the narrative invites the viewer to think

about the film as a medium because the close-up deforms the images of the

mosquito. The close-up of the stone looks like a cave, darker on the outside, lighter

where the light comes in, in the middle. The bubbles and the imperfections of the

stone add to the texture of the image. Here, one loses bearings in regards to the

nature of the image for a few seconds: is it a mosquito, is it a stone, is it a cave?

Hence, at that moment, the "lektonic traces" are more important than the

"representable, salable, exposable, capitalizable" elements of the film.[62]

    Although it enables the emergence of a semiotic sensibility, this scene works at

confirming the symbolic aspects of the film. In fact, the narrative explains this shot

later on: the characters, when they enter the lab, watch a cartoon clarifying the use

of the amber stone. It was utilized to produce the DNA that enabled scientists to re-

create dinosaurs. But more importantly, this scene shows that the intensity of one's

look is important during the movie and in amusement parks. Hence, the audience is

invited, right during the introduction of the plot, to learn how to *look* at things.

    This contemplative activity reinforces the consumption that the movie

proposes. As Balides argues, the "excessive mise-en-scene" and the "hypervisual"

illuminate how economy and art work together.[63] When Balides refers to the

hypervisual, she points to the representation of the economic practices the film

involves, as well as its representative strategies. I would add that the Semiotic also

takes part in this category. The Semiotic participates in the modeling of the viewers

as consumers/producers; it is the key to our pleasurable filmic experience.

    However, *Jurassic Park* plays with this experience: it also condemns this

pleasurable contemplating activity because it is wrong to disrupt nature. The moral

of the film might be that it is dangerous to contemplate and make marketable

images out of what you do not understand. Here, *Jurassic Park* joins *Calendar*'s message about the commodification of reality. In the end, there will be no more gazing at the dinosaurs and the park will be destroyed. The film invites its viewer to think about the deceptiveness of the park, and it also provides aesthetic pauses that make the viewer take pleasure in the contemplation of images loosely connected to the symbolic messages. I am reminded here of the last scenes of the movie where pelicans fly by the helicopter. One can interpret the images of the birds flying as a comment on natural reproduction; Alan has come to accept his role as a future father. The birds also mark a return to nature, and its natural evolution (from dinosaurs to birds). All of these interpretations add to the conclusion of the film on natural evolution and reproduction.[64]

Conversely, the pelican scene is unusually long, and it does not add to the development of the narrative. This scene interrupts the gazes of Alan and Ellis, and focuses on the pink, gray, and blue colors of the animals as they go over the ocean that mirrors their colors. Their subtle movement is calming and soothing. The flapping of their wings harmonizes with the waves of the sea. Here, Spielberg uses parallel editing to go back to the interior of the helicopter and then to the birds. At the end of the pelican scene, the camera centers on one bird and its powerful and gracious moves over the water, now more lighted than the first scene. The Semiotic emerges in this scene and provides an aesthetic pause. Thus, although the film banishes the characters' gaze on the dinosaurs, it offers other aesthetic contemplations that do not rely on the moral of message the plot, but on the experience of film as an aesthetic medium.

Hence, in *Jurassic Park*, the Semiotic has diverse impacts on the experience of the film. The Semiotic disrupts realistic images that the minute attention to technology and filmic techniques created. In addition, it tends to reaffirm the Symbolic message of the film that relies on viewers' consuming and producing of

meaning in accord with theme park rules. Yet, the Semiotic also provides breaks in the narrative that do not relate directly to the Symbolic activity of the film: it enables a focus on the aesthetic pleasure of the viewer.

CONCLUSION

As a result, the exploration of the Semiotic's influence on the interpretations of films reveals that the Semiotic has different effects on our experiences. It can reaffirm some of the Symbolic messages or disrupt their order. The multiplicity of the Semiotic's effects thus allows us to address questions of pleasure and commodification in cinema in more complete and complex ways. Consequently, Kristeva's analytical tools and concepts to identify the non-tangible aspects of texts are useful to approach the filmic realm. Yet, an analysis of these non-tangible aspects has been overlooked in film studies. My analysis of *Calendar* and *Jurassic Park* has emphasized that the aesthetic conclusions drawn from Kristeva's paradigm clarify their ambivalent position toward the beauty of aesthetic images and their commodified uses. While studies of film in relation to categories of the subject and the Abject are important, the aesthetic impact of Kristeva's theory points toward another facet of film analysis. To acknowledge the significance of the Semiotic in films is to understand its influence on our interpretative methods. The awareness of the Semiotic's disruptiveness thus provides film analyses with a fuller understanding of their Symbolic significances (i.e., what critics give attention to almost strictly). In other words, a focus on the Semiotic takes into account the parts of movies that critics do not emphasize but that affect their readings nonetheless. In concentrating on the role of the Semiotic, viewers understand why some Symbolic aspects of films were of importance to them, to society, or to the filmmaker. For

example, when the Semiotic reinforces the Symbolic messages of a film, viewers find the Semiotic useful to support their interpretation of the film. However, as the Semiotic can also disrupt the Symbolic, they might face a more complex vision. In short, future studies of the Semiotic in film would provide other sources of interpretation that might limit, complement, or complicate our interpretations of film.

NOTES

1. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
2. Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) and *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). Numerous film analyses have used the theory of the Abject. See for example, Stephen Linstead's "Abjection and Organization: Men, Violence, and Management," Human *Relations* 50:9 (1999): 1115-31, in which he argues that "bureaucracies seek to deny the emotional dimensions of their behavior and decision-making which creates emotion as an abject phenomenon" (1115). Tina Chanter also studies the Abject at length in "Abject images. Kristeva, Art, and Third Cinema," *Philosophy Today* 45:5 (2001): 83-98 and "The Picture of Abjection: Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration*," *Parallax* 10:1 (2004): 30-9.
3. See Andrea Kuhn, "'What's the Matter, Trevor? Scared of Something?': Representing the Monstrous-feminine in *Candyman*," *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English*, http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic20/kuhn/kuhn.html (last modified in 2000), and Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
4. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 25.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Philip E. Lewis, "Revolutionary Semiotics," *Diacritics* 4:3 (1974): 29.
8. Christophe Den Tandt, "Staccato, Swivel and Glide: A Poetics of Early Rock 'n' Roll Lyrics," in *Sound as Sense: Contemporary US Poetry &/In Music*, ed. Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Michel Delville, and Christine Pagnoulle (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 83.
9. Kristin Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 488.
10. Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 236.
11. Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," 491.
12. V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 114.
13. Andrew Klevan, *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), 7.
14. Ibid., 11.
15. Tina Chanter, "Abject images. Kristeva, Art, and Third Cinema," *Philosophy Today* 45:5 (2001): 94.
16. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 170.
17. *Calendar*, directed by Atom Egoyan (Ego Film Arts); *Jurassic Park*, directed by Stephen Spielberg (Universal Pictures).
18. Kristeva, "Fetishizing the Abject," Interview with Sylvere Lontringer, in *More & Less*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Brooklyn: Semiotext(e)/Autonomedia, n.d.), 30.
19. Martin Jay provides an analysis of the relationship between French thinkers and the visual. He contends that French theorists have shown suspicions of and denigration toward the visual realm and that Kristeva's concept of the Semiotic relies on an antiocular perception of the world, "pitting the temporal rhythms of the body against the mortifying spatialization of the eye." Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California

Press, 1993), 528. Dealing with Kristeva and cinema in particular, he explains that, for her, "only if disrupted by laughter can the cinema escape its complicity with authority and order" (458).

20. "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 237.

21. Ibid., 238.

22. Ibid., 238.

23. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 82.

24. Kuhn, "'What's the matter, Trevor? Scared of Something?'," provides TriStar's official production's synopsis of the film:

For Helen Lyle, urban mythology is nothing more than an academic exercise. A doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois, she regards oral folklore and superstition with a skeptical eye, particularly one legend concerning a hook-handed killer who, it's said, can be summoned by chanting "Candyman" five times while looking in a mirror. When she learns that a signature murder in the Cabrini Green projects of Chicago is being attributed to the mythological Candyman, Helen sees a way of securing her scholarly reputation: Braving the dangers of the crime-ridden projects, she'll conduct interviews, gather data and write a doctoral thesis about this urban legend that will make her a star in academia. But as Helen begins her research, a terrible presence lurking deep within the scarred heart of the projects begins to sap her complacent belief in what is rational and what is possible, and she soon finds herself trapped by evidence that points towards her as a murderer.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Kuhn's interpretation of Kristeva's paradigm is somewhat limiting here, as it leads her reader to think of the Semiotic in terms of femininity. However, as Toril Moi points out, "the fluid mobility of the semiotic is [. . .] associated with the pre-oedipal phase, and therefore with the pre-oedipal mother, but Kristeva makes it quite clear that like Freud and Klein she sees the pre-oedipal mother as a figure that encompasses both masculinity and femininity" (Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* [London and New York: Methuen, 1985], 165). Although Kuhn builds on Barbara Creed, she fails to mention Creed's clarification of that problem. Creed explains, "Kristeva places semiotic language on the side of femininity and symbolic language on the side of masculinity although both aspects of language, the semiotic/feminine and symbolic/masculine are open to all individuals regardless of their biological sex" (*The Monstrous-Feminine*, 38). Beatriz Penas adds, "Kristeva maintains that both men and women can have access to the semiotic and the symbolic, although sexual difference as it is discursively constructed in our culture does come to bear on how and to what extent. Poetic language and maternity are functions which, though assimilated to femininity, can be performed by both man and woman" (Penas, "Kristeva's *Desire in Language*: A Feminist Semiotic Perspective on Language and Literature" in *Gender, I-deology; Essays on Theory, Fiction, and Film*, ed. Chantal Cornut-Gentille d'Arcy and José Angel García [Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi Press, 1996], 100). For Kristeva, "the paternal and maternal are functions which do not automatically attach per se to the male as father or to the female as mother" (ibid., 95).

29. Kuhn, "'What's the matter, Trevor? Scared of Something?'"

30. Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction," 238.

31. D. N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press 1998).

32. Tina Chanter also studies the Abject at length in "Abject images. Kristeva, Art, and Third Cinema," *Philosophy Today* 45:5 (2001): 89.

33. Ibid.

34. I do not mean to claim here that the Semiotic and the Symbolic function in the *same* way in any text, but Kristeva's model enables a variety of approaches that go beyond opposition such as good vs. bad art or high vs. low art.

35. First cinema refers to Hollywood. Second cinema is the European avant-garde, and third cinema is a more open category that encloses all "democratic, national, popular cinema" (Chanter, "Abject images," 88).

36. Bret Fetzer, "Review," http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail//B00005KCAS/10355281969123818?v=glance (last modified in 2004).

37. Monique Yvonne Tschofen, "Anagrams of the body: hybrid texts and the question of postmodernism in the literature and film of Canada" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1999), 226.

38. The photographer travels with a camera, and shoots the trip in Armenia. In Canada, he watches this film.

39. Ron Burnett, "Between the Borders of Cultural Identity: Atom Egoyan's *Calendar*," http://www.ecuad.ca/~rburnett/Weblog/_archives/2008/02/calendar_betwee_1.html (last modified in 2008).

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Crissa-Jean Chappell, "Alain Resnais and Atom Egoyan," *Cinetext*, http://cinetext.philo.at/magazine/chappell/resnais_egoyan.html (last modified on 18 July 2003).

43. Atom Egoyan quoted in James Wall, "Review," *The Christian Century* 110:7 (1993): 227.

44. Egoyan, "Lettres Video," interview with Paul Virilio, in *Atom Egoyan*, ed. Carole Desbarats, Jacinto Lageira, Daniele Riviere, and Virilio (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1993), 113 (my translation).

45. Kristeva, "Ellipsis on Dread and Specular Seduction," 238.

46. She says about this moment, "as you were taping, he [their guide] placed his hand on mine. I remember because I gripped his hand so hard, watching you grip your camera as if you knew all the time. Did you know?"

47. Daniele Riviere, "La place du Spectateur," in *Atom Egoyan*, ed. Carole Desbarats, Jacinto Lageira, Riviere, and Paul Virilio (Paris: Editions Dis Voir 1993), 58 (my translation).

48. Stephen Gould, "Dinomania," *New York Review of Books* (August 1993): 54.

49. Stan Winston quoted in Ron Magid, "Effects Team Brings Reptiles Back From Extinction," *American Cinematographer* 6 (1993): 52.

50. Dean Cundey quoted in Bob Fisher, "When the Dinosaurs Rule the Box Office," *American Cinematographer* 6 (1993): 39.

51 For a detailed discussion of technology and special effects in *Jurassic Park*, see Jody Duncan's "The Beauty in the Beast," *Cinefex Magazine* 55 (August 1993).

52. Bob Fisher, "When the Dinosaurs Rule the Box Office," *American Cinematographer* 6 (1993): 39.

53. Ibid., 42.

54. Steven Spielberg, quoted in Robert Braid, "Animalizing *Jurassic Park*'s Dinosaurs: Blockbuster Schemata and Cross Cultural Cognition in the Threat Scene," *Cinema Journal* 37:4 (1998): 91.

55. Warren Buckland, "Between Science Fact and Science Fiction: Spielberg's Digital Dinosaurs, Possible Worlds, and the New Aesthetic Realism," *Screen* 40:2 (1999): 178, 184-5.

56. Ibid., 185.

57. Nigel Clark, "Panic Ecology: Nature in the Age of Superconductivity," *Theory, Culture & Society* 14:1 (1997): 78.

58. Ibid., 86.

59. Constance Balides, "Jurassic Post-Fordism: Tall Tales of Economics in the Theme Park," *Screen* 41:2 (2000): 151.

60. Ibid., 154.

61. Ibid.

62. Kristeva, "Fetishizing the Abject," interview with Sylvere Lontringer, in *More & Less*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (Brooklyn: Semiotext(e)/Autonomedia, n.d.), 30.

63. Balides, "Jurassic Post-Fordism": 160.

64. Rajani Sudan offers a different reading of these scenes. She notes that the last scenes play out a parallel between the birds and the helicopter to underline that the characters "survive by the very technology that has so lately imperiled their lives: birds of prey (dinosaurs) turn into birds of rescue (helicopters) [. . .] animals become machines in the service of humans" (Sudan, "Technophallia," *Camera Obscura: A Journal of Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 40-41 [1997]: 115). As the last shot is followed by Spielberg's name, she argues that the film shows that the director can "learn from its own mistakes through the 'good' technology Hollywood provides" (ibid.).