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AN EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH TO (UN)COMMON GHOSTS OF
FINISTERRAE

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MASTER'S THESIS

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I, FATMA SELİN YAĞCI;

Hereby declare that this Master's Thesis is my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources.

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02/01/2019



ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This work entitled **AN EXISTENTIALIST APPROACH TO (UN)COMMON GHOSTS OF FINISTERRAE** prepared by **FATMA SELİN YAĞCI** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **02/01/2019** and accepted by our jury as **MASTER'S THESIS**.

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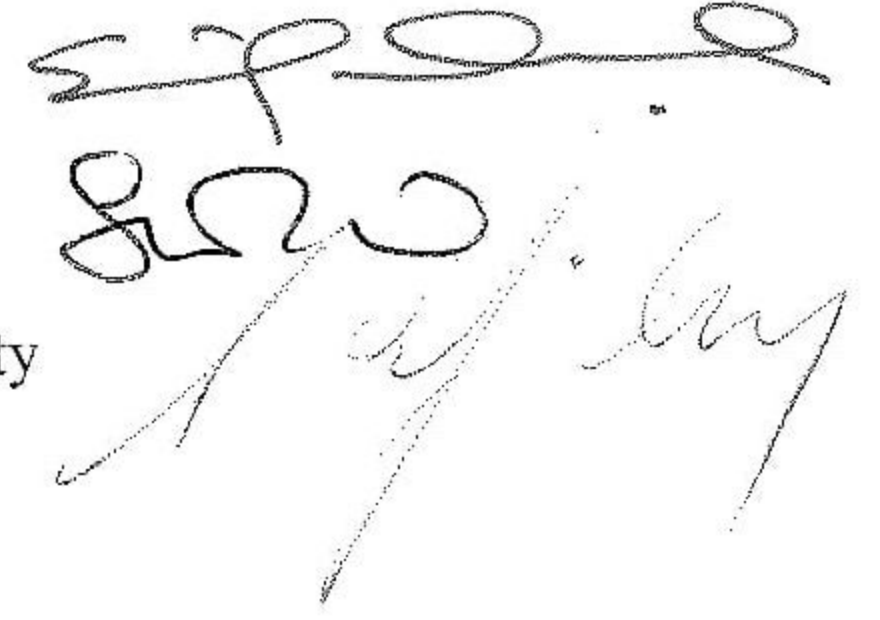
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ABSTRACT

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What comes after life has been among the existential questions in philosophy and literature. Cinema, by the virtue of its medium, has the feature of screening what is impossible to show in our world with the tools that belong to this world. Thanks to cinema, impossible appears to be possible on the screen regarding space and time as well as regarding the questionable presence of metaphysical beings. A film taking afterlife and/or ghosts as its main theme deals with invisible or non-existing objects; filming these objects is materializing what is immaterial. Being in between “life and death”, “fantasy and reality”, “past and present” or “here and there” is usually among the main issues of a ghost film. In this thesis, my main purpose is to understand the depiction of a ghost by comparing the relationship between the cinematic image and the narrative by the example of an unusual ghost film: *Finisterrae* (Sergio Caballero, 2010). I will concentrate on the topics of life-likeness of an afterlife depiction in this particular ghost film example and existentialism to reveal the communication between the image and the narrative. Additionally, mainly Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism will be interpreted by comparing the ghosts in his screenplay *The Chips Are Down* (1948) and the ghosts that are depicted in *Finisterrae*.

Keywords: ghost, afterlife, cinema, existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, Finisterrae, life-likeness, narrative

ÖZET

YAĞCI, FATMA SELİN. FINISTERRAE 'NİN ALIŞIL(MA)DIK HAYALETLERİNE VAROLUŞÇU BİR YAKLAŞIM, MASTER TEZİ, İstanbul, 2019.

Hayattan sonra ne geldiği felsefe ve literatürde varoluşçu sorular arasında yer almıştır. Sinema, medyumu sayesinde, gerçek dünyada gösterilmesi imkansız olanı seyirciye sunma kapasitesi olan bir sanattır. Sinema sayesinde, hem zamansal hem de mekansal olarak imkansız olan perdede görünür olur. Ölümden sonra yaşamı ya da hayaletleri ele alan bir film, olmayan ya da görünmeyen varlıkları konu alır, başka bir deyişle, materyal olmayanı materyalleştirir. Hayalet filmlerinde “arada” olma konusu genelde “ölümle yaşam”, “fantazi ve gerçek”, “geçmiş ve şimdi” ya da “burada ve orada” arasında mevcut olmuştur. Hayalet imajın hayatla benzerliği ve gündelik şekilde ifade edilmesini temel olarak Finisterrae (Sergio Caballero, 2010) ile ele alan bu tezde Finisterrae'de ölümün hayatla olan benzerliğini inceleyerek, bu benzerliğin filmin ontolojisiyle nasıl bir bağ kurduğuna bakmak, bu hayalet filmi üzerinden imaj ve anlatı arasındaki ilişkiyi keşfetmek amaçlanmakta. Ayrıca, özellikle Jean-Paul Sartre'ın varoluşçu felsefesi, onun *İş İştten Geçti* (1948) isimli oyunundaki hayaletlerle *Finisterrae*'nin hayaletlerin karşılaştırılmasıyla yorumlanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: hayalet, ahiret, sinema, varoluşçuluk, Jean-Paul Sartre, Finisterrae, anlatı

INTRODUCTION

On the film poster of *Casper* (Brad Silberling, 1995) a statement right downside of the film's title glitters: "Seeing is believing". It is a film version of *Casper the Friendly Ghost* that is created by Izzy Sparber in 1945 and continued as an animated cartoon series over the years. The film's interesting claim has a great place in film theory actually although it seems like a simple, catchy sentence made for a comedy ghost film. Louise Burchill's remark explains what is beyond this title, "We are placed before a scene in which we believe without believing" (Colman, 2009, p. 162). Showing what is supernatural or fantastic is not to convince the audience that the non-existent creatures actually exist, but rather, it is to provide the audience with a traceable narrative of the film that has figures which do not belong to the audience's everyday life. Mark Chorvinsky expresses cinema's ability to fantasize saying "Cinema realizes the fantastic, and in that sense, it is intrinsically a fortean medium. Something does not exist made to exist and legends may be given life" (1989, p. 34). Cinema materializes what is metaphysical, and it does this with its nature as well as its narrative. It does not only show what is impossible to show in reality but also concerning time. It reanimates moment from the past. Ontologically, cinema has a ghostly nature that comes automatically with the medium.

Ghost films use cinema's ability to materialize in two ways. The first way is the cinematic image that is in between past and present — secondly, its characters in between life and death. However, when the ghost's depiction converges to the human-like, then the boundaries between fantasy and reality starts to blur. In various cases of ghost movies, ghosts depicted in the living's world, among humans, share the human-like look or human-like habits. In this case, the fantastical narrative may come together with life-like motives in the same film.

It can be useful to look at the language, the words we use to speak, and why do we need the term "materialization" for this thesis. The terminology used in ghost stories is a good source of how storytellers approach afterlife and ghosts. In his play *Blithe Spirit* (1941), Noel Coward uses the term "materialization" to signify ghosts' coming from the dead's world. Coward also employs "to pass over" instead of "to die," as if death is not

the absolute end. These usages in cinema, particularly in this example may point out language's approach to death.

When visualizing ghosts, different properties of cinema (editing, camera, storytelling, costume, acting, etc.) is used in different films. Visualizing something does not exist (or even if it exists its appearance may not be known or may not be conceived in the same way by everyone) is a problematic issue.

A very unusual example of this case is *Finisterrae* (Sergio Caballero, 2010) in which two ghosts are wearing white sheets walking the pilgrim path of Santiago to become living beings. Ghosts of the film neither have an interest in haunting a place nor have an issue with a living. On the contrary to scary or obsessive ghosts, they are inoffensive sort of ghosts. Furthermore, their desperate effort to change and become living is a very earthly statement together with the road story. Taking into account all of these, an existentialist approach would not be irrelevant. Their freedom and decisions to change their lives can be mainly analyzed in light of existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy can also be seen in his novels and plays. Although it has not been considered as an explicit source for film theorists, in his book *What Cinema Is?* Dudley Andrew discovers Andre Bazin's copy of Sartre's *The Imaginary* (2010, p. 12) and reveals the influence of Sartre on Bazin. My purpose of consulting Sartrean existentialism in order to read a film can be explained in Dudley Andrew's words "Through cinema, the world 'appears'; it takes on the qualities and status of an 'apparition'." (2010, p. 9) Since *apparition* is an important word that Sartre takes on in *Being and Nothingness* it is essential to relate it to the word *appearance* Andrew uses to express the world on the screen. "Phenomenon of being is not being, but it indicates being and requires it" (2003, p. 19) writes, Sartre. This phenomenon is indicating and requiring being appeared on the screen through the cinematic image. In other words, the phenomenon of being can be read through the cinematic image since the being as an image is revealed on the screen. This explains my purpose of applying Sartre's philosophy to the cinema.

Sartre's screenplay *The Chips Are Down* (1948) becomes prominent here since it is also a ghost story giving its dead characters a second chance to become living again. In this thesis, I aim to search for the differences in Sartre's existentialist screenplay and *Finisterrae* that can easily be interpreted from an existentialist point of view. In doing so, my purpose is to question cinema and its ghostly nature once again with this unusual

ghost film; in order to see if the cinema can be a medium changing the fate of second chances that are given to the ghosts in ghost stories.

Sartre and *Being and Nothingness* is an essential source for bringing ghosts and existentialism together, but I also intended this thesis to offer a more general theoretical framework than only reading ghost films with Sartre and existentialism. For this reason, I made a review of other philosophically inspirational names: I included Simone de Beauvoir for her existentialist concept of ambiguity, Maurice Blanchot for his views on death, Jacques Derrida as he writes and talks about cinema and its ghosts. I realized all these names converge in how they approach death -even though their works are not explicitly on cinema, their ideas were relatable to both the nature of cinema and the ghost films.

In the first chapter, my main argument is cinema materializes what is metaphysical. I evaluate this argument in three different parts in this chapter. The ghostly nature of the cinematic image is an essential discussion to start with. Hence, I intend to consider this ghostly image first of all with references to film theory and Derrida. In the second part of this chapter, the film's capacity to lie thanks to film's two-fold – showing and narrating – ability will be examined. To find out how the image's collaboration or conflict with the narrative work in films with fantastic figures like *Finisterrae*, will also serve as a question: whether is it possible to represent an object that does not exist in our world in a film through film's lying capacity? Then, lastly, a preliminary categorization of different ways of visualizing ghosts will follow these two discussions.

In the second chapter, I will specifically start analyzing *Finisterrae*. Since the ghostly nature of the ontology of cinematic image has long been among the biggest concerns of film theorists ever since the emergence of cinema, I wanted to review *Finisterrae* not only from the point of view of film theory but from an existentialist approach to the characters. I found out that film theory can be consistently used with Sartrean existentialism in explaining the human-like states of the ghosts in *Finisterrae*.

In the third chapter, I will continue analyzing *Finisterrae* and start paying attention to existentialist sides of the film. The ambiguity of the characters and their identities, as well as the ambiguity of the space and time, lead an existentialist review of Simone de Beauvoir as well as Maurice Blanchot to do this review by going back to death and its

relation to life -although he is not among the existentialist philosophers. Then, I will make a comparison between Sartre's ghosts in *The Chips Are Down* and the ghosts in *Finisterrae*.

WHY FINISTERRAE?

As Tom Ruffles notes in his book *Ghost Images: Cinema of the Afterlife*, "films dealing with the afterlife are often limited in conceptual range and similar genres" (2004, p. 7). Also, these genres are mostly horror, war, and sci-fi. This means that they are destined to be examined within certain understandings. Although there is no general ghost description, due to the genre-issue and likeness of the narrative structures (haunted house, ghosts appearing to only one person, etc.), works examining ghost films have a pattern in treating ghosts academically such as hauntology, spectatorship, and psychoanalysis. This is because ghosts are usually considered and/or depicted as beings that only exist in the extension of the human mind, of the human perception and analyzed accordingly.

To put it another way, both in typical ghost films and the academic studies concerned about them did not treat ghosts independent of reality in which we perceive. Meaning that although the ghosts and humans were depicted within the boundaries of the same film's world, ghosts are related to the living's perception, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. This approach, at first sight, is related to the dead condemned to exist in the living's memory. Carlos Saura's films can be significant examples of survival of the dead in the living's life as a memory such as *Cria Cuervos* (1976) where eight-year-old Ana keeps seeing the ghost of her already dead mother while at the same time remembering her alive, sick and suffering and *El Amor Brujo* (1986) in which a woman dances with a ghost of her deceased husband every night. However, one should not underestimate the ghost's independent existence in an artwork. A ghost film that goes beyond the limit of stereotyped genres and stories, contextually and formally, is needed here in order to conduct a new approach in philosophizing ghosts in cinema. *Finisterrae* (Sergio Caballero, 2010) is a remarkable example of a ghost film in this regard. As a film, in which two ghosts are walking the pilgrim path Camino de Santiago until Finisterre, *Finisterrae* depicts an entire afterlife world where ghosts roam freely.

WHY (UN)COMMON GHOSTS?

Having explained why *Finisterrae* deserves scholarly attention, the title also needs to be explained further. *Finisterrae* depicts a widespread and uncommon image of a ghost at the same time. It depicts the ghost with white sheets as in the stereotypical Halloween costumes or some known example of animation images such as *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. Naturally, this creates a stereotypical ghost image and attributes white sheets a collective meaning. In the simplest terms, it is a banal costume. The invisible ghosts (to the living not to the audience) of *Beetlejuice* (Tim Burton, 1988) wear sheets in order to look like those common ghosts. While using a typical image like this, *Finisterrae* does not claim to be a horror film, nor a comedy, its ghosts are not typical ghosts but wearing typical ghost costumes. The ghosts in *Finisterrae* are neither a metaphor nor memories coming from the past. The film follows the path of Santiago on the track of its ghosts whose aim is to have an ephemeral life again. In this respect, the ghosts in this particular example have no other common point with other ghost movies that we are familiar with. Except for their claim of “being a ghost”, the film does not provide the audience with a typical ghost story, and that is what makes them uncommon.

I argue that the narrative of ghost films, in general, reflects the camera’s mechanical property of revealing what is before us. Before I move on to the analysis of *Finisterrae* in detail in the second chapter, I will discuss some qualities of the cinematic image that allow a discussion of philosophical concepts such as life, death and afterlife and the materialization of these concepts on film.

CHAPTER 1

MATERIALIZING GHOSTS

Even if it is fiction, any film can be considered a documentary. What we see on the screen is a fragment of time that has been recorded once in the past. “Mummy complex” in Bazin’s “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” essay famously connects a link between painting and sculpture and cinema: “The process [of creation in plastic arts] might reveal that at the origin of painting and sculpture there lies a mummy complex” (1945, p. 4). His “mummy complex” constitutes a simple formula: shooting an image means to freeze the time in the image, to keep the images as they are. He argues that essentially cinema constantly attempts to keep the moment untouched, as in the ancient preserving methods in Egypt that painting and sculpture also later copied to represent life.

Cinema, in this respect, immortalizes the moment but on the other side, films stand as a testimony of passing time. Jean Pierre Leaud, while watching a film in a movie theater in Godard’s film *Feminin Masculin* (1966) explains temporality in the film image in his lines: “At movies, the screen would light up, and we’d shiver. But more often we’d be disappointed. The images seemed old and flickery: Marilyn Monroe had aged terribly. We were sad. This wasn’t the film we’d imagined, the perfect film each of us carried within, the film we would like to have made or perhaps even to have lived.” Just like Leaud observes the woman on the screen – and calls her Marilyn Monroe – we, the audience observe him in different films that he starred. Seeing how he looked like in 1966 in *Masculin Feminin*, and comparing that look to Aki Kaurismaki’s *I Hired a Contract Killer* (1990) starring him, but 34 years older, we feel disappointed to witness the change: how different his face is in both films, how he is getting closer to death. What we see on the screen is nothing but mortality. Facing the passing time means being aware of one’s own death. This awareness of death might lead to different ways to cope with death. It may give people a nihilistic pessimism that nothing will matter in the end because everything is destined to be destroyed. Alternatively, it may trigger one to leave a trace behind, as Louis Vincent Thomas says “even materialists have the hope that their existences will last forever” (1991, p. 115), meaning that this need instead, comes from an instinct to be immortal or to leave a trace behind as a proof of being-in-the-world and it does not necessarily have to do with religious beliefs or spiritual

teachings. Knowing that the bitter end is going to come sooner or later, one feels overwhelmed by life's limitedness.

Cinema is both a result and a reminder of this instinct. It motivates us to save the image to be able to display it later, yet, it could also be a nostalgic moment that people look back on. It keeps reminding its audience that time is constantly passing; cinema, along with photography, is an art form that perhaps problematizes time the most. The photographic and cinematic image directly refer to the past. Daniel Morgan discusses it in the context of indexicality "just like a bullet hole refers to a past bullet, a sailor's gait to years spent at sea." He also takes a note saying "There is an ontological distance between the object and the image" (2006, p. 447). These two arguments can be evaluated as consistent together. However strong is the relation between the image of the object and the object itself and no matter how real the image looks thanks to this relation, there is an impossible experience that is being experienced when one looks at the image. For instance, a picture of a scarf, that used to belong to me but I gave it away, does not make me wear the same scarf again. I can only remember the scarf through its image. It is the ontological difference that may trigger people to think about the past, and an image increases people's awareness that they cannot fully experience the image as they experience the object in real life. Even though Maurice Blanchot does not write explicitly on cinema, it is worth noting that his *The Space of Literature* places the image as the secondary: "The image, according to the ordinary analysis, is secondary to the object. It is what follows. We see, then we imagine. After the object comes the image" (1982, p. 255). Hence, the image has the capability of keeping and changing its meaning; keeping it about the moment, it is shot, yet changing, being dependent on the object's essence as well.

While cinema inevitably points out that something *was* there once, it does not allow people to get the essence of that object. It provides a relation between the object of *then* and the moment of *now*. Laura Mulvey describes this relation as uncertain in *Death 24 Frames a Second*: "To see the star on the screen in the retrospectives that follow his/her death is also to see the cinema's uncertain relation to life and death" (2006, p. 18). While cinema brings the star back to life again even after his/her death, life's limitedness is revealed on the screen. This uncertain relation is not solely about the actor's life and death and how we see it. However, also it stands for an ontological

paradox: while the image makes the moment fully realized, producing that image kills the moment. Just like one meets death, the moment which is shot by camera meets its end too. That moment is killed – mummified in the frame – becomes passive since it is to be viewed and judged by others. It is dead, yet it is present. Hence, as Gilberto Perez refers to Bazin's claim "photography is privileged technique of surrealist creation because the image produces a hallucination that is true" (1998, p. 28), an illusion happens on the screen, the time that belongs to the past is viewed, and we keep on not entirely being in the present moment by watching the past. The title of Perez's book *The Material Ghost* is significant when the illusion of the filmic image he mentions, the surrealist creation Bazin expresses and the first chapter of this thesis are considered jointly. This illusion requires the audience to be present with what is on the screen, and it invites to share the same time interval. However, it arises from the audience's distance to the image, in another sense.

1.1. GHOSTLY NATURE

The distance between the object and the cinematic image is what forms the ghostly nature of the film. The image just like a ghost stands in between the real-life object and its appearance on the screen. However, there is an ontological conflict lying at the heart of this ghostliness, being complete and present.

Annabelle Dufourcq is interpreting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, as she claims, "Nothing can be fully itself and finished" (2015, p. 715). that is, nothing can complete its existence while it is aware of this completeness. Once something is dead, its time here in this world is completed, but it can never be capable of witnessing the last second of this completion. We can say the inherent conflict of the photographic image, to have to shoot the moment in order to capture it to display it in the future, is also a general philosophical conflict as well as ontological in its essence. In the simplest terms, it is ontological since to kill something is naturally to destroy it. Furthermore, it points out how mortal this life is, leading people to question the limited life.

Simone de Beauvoir sees this paradox as a matter of finiteness and explains this philosophical conflict with temporality: "In the past, people cried out, 'The king is dead, long live the king'; thus the present must die so that it may live" (1976, p. 127). Similarly, the audience becomes attached to the image appearing on the screen: the appearance of an object that is completely detached from the time that it existed. Being

detached and yet complete is a characteristic of the cinematic image, as Stanley Cavell writes about viewing this image: “A world complete without me which is present to me is the world of my immortality” (1979, p. 160). Cinema, from this respect, can also be considered an attempt to defeat death by constantly (as well as 24 frames per second) dealing with death. Although it is open to question how successful this attempt is, changing the sense of temporality is the biggest illusionary property of the film medium. A camera is a tool that is recording what *was* in the past to show *now*. Through cinema, the past can be transferred into the present, in other words, past becomes present on the screen. For Derrida, that moment existing in between is “a spectral moment”. As a result of this process, a moment occurs, “a moment which no longer belongs to time” (2006, p. 19).

Affirmingly, Derrida had a part in Ken McMullen’s *Ghost Dance* (1983) starring himself, in a very self-conscious scene, he is asked if he believes in ghosts. He replies saying “Here the ghost is me. Since I have been asked to play myself in a film which is more or less improvised, I feel as if I am letting a ghost speak for me.” These lines refer to the materialization of the past. He is no longer there, yet he is present. It is not a matter of believing in ghosts supernaturally. For Derrida, therefore, this scene is a reminder of cinema’s spectral essence and Louise Burchill qualifies this scene as “a phantasmatic *mise-en-abyme*” in her essay “Derrida and the (Spectral) Scene of Cinema” (Colman, 2009, p. 164). *Mise-en-abyme*, literally meaning to place something into the abyss, is a term used for artworks that reflect and give reference to themselves. Reflective enough to be considered as *mise-en-abyme*, Derrida says that he is very conscious of the medium’s ghostly nature and becomes the phantasm in the *mise-en-abyme*. As Derrida, he is his own ghost coming from his past when the audience watches the movie.

Films dealing with ghosts and describing ghosts in their own way is the main topic to be examined in this thesis along with an existential reading. Also, existentialism is a strongly connected philosophy with human’s existence and the meaning of existence. For this reason, this thesis also searches for an answer to the question: is it possible to make a connection between the ghost and human in an artwork? In order to answer this question, one needs to understand the ghostly nature of the cinematic image and be able to discuss the ghost films in an existentialist framework. For that matter, it is still worth

noting more on Derrida's spectrology in defining ghosts before moving on to the specific philosophic arguments regarding ghost films. Fifteen years after McMullen's *Ghost Dance*, in an interview made by Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse from *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1998), Derrida expresses his ideas on cinema in a clear way. In the interview titled "Cinema and Its Ghosts", Derrida asserts "cinema allows one to cultivate what could be called 'grafts' of spectrality, it inscribes traces of ghosts on a general framework, the projected film, which is itself a ghost" (2015, p. 27). Mulvey writes about cinema's animating nature. Because of this very nature, the cinematic image itself has a direct reference to death by default. In Mulvey's words "the cinema reverses the process, through an illusion that animates the inanimate frames of its own origin" (2006, p. 15). A film, by putting images together, animates the stills. Also, on the occasion of recording an image, technically, the camera materializes objects that are gone or to put it another way, objects that are dead.

The nature of the spectral moment, as Derrida coins it, provides a philosophical discussion which will be the core of this thesis in the following chapters. This nature allows 24 frames to be captured per each second and at the same time it makes these frames move; thus, it makes possible re-animating the objects in the frames. In this way, cinema becomes a space for the dead that comes back to life on the screen, or, as I will use it in this thesis, a space for the ghosts. Moreover, by watching films, the audience gets the chance of seeing ghosts as if they were part of this world. The depiction of ghosts as humans opens up new ways in which we can discuss the relationship between existentialism and cinema, a point that I will come back to this point.

What I intend to add to the argument of ghostly nature, for now, is a specific case in ghost films and this nature's harmony with the narrative. That is to say, when a film contextually employs ghosts or intentionally deals with the afterlife, it doubles the meaning of its link with ghosts. In a way, ghost films have "phantasmatic *mise-en-abyme*" in the words of Louise Burchill as explained with Derrida's self-conscious appearance in *Ghost Dance* above. This two-sided spectrality (of narrative and ontology) in cinema, is worth approaching from the point of view that is questioning film's own reality.

1.2. FILM'S CAPABILITY TO LIE

So far I explored cinema's involvement with ghosts in one aspect in the first part of this chapter: I evaluated the film like a ghost, concerning the medium's capability of materializing what is no longer there. In other words, the capacity of cinema to materialize what is metaphysical – unseen – through its medium is what makes it ghostly. However, before moving on to the second and third chapters explicitly dealing with the cases of this thesis, I would like to discover how narrative and storytelling of a film helps this materialization or vice-versa, and then I would like to make a rough categorization of different possibilities in visualizing this materialization.

Through collaboration between camera and narrative, a film can play with its fictional domain and the film's unclearness in *presenting* and *representing* the reality. Luis Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974) is not a ghost film in the sense that I am planning to discuss in this chapter since I would like to illustrate some examples in which the ghosts are explicitly said to be ghosts. However, the way it deals with the reality might be a good introduction for this thesis's main concern: visualization of the presence of the things we assume that are absent. *The Phantom of Liberty*'s humorously skeptic approach to presence reaches a peak in the scene in which the school manager informs a wealthy family that their daughter disappeared. When the family arrives in the class and see that apparently, she is still there, and they do not act as they are convinced by seeing her. She comes forward and speaks to them: "Mom, I am here". They send her back to her seat, headteacher calls the roll and reads her name: "Legendre, Aliette", just like other students, she stands up saying "present". They take her to the police station to report that she is missing. The police officer talks to her to publish a missing report. We, the audience, can see Aliette, the family, teacher as well as the headteacher, the police officer, they all see Aliette. They even go to look for her by taking her along. They talk to her; they do not even ignore her. If she disappeared "just an hour ago" how can she still be visible by everyone? How can something obviously present can be considered absent? Doubtlessly, "the phantom" in the title of the movie is a direct clue to Buñuel's trick on absence and presence. All the characters, and we, see her but the dialogues deny that she is present. Buñuel dictates his characters' (and our) reality by making absent someone who is obviously present, and he does that only by playing with

the filmic reality mainly through dramatic tools such as the script and the acting rather than editing, cinematography, framing, color, special effects, etc.

Moreover, while doing so, the camera still stands as an objective tool recording what is happening in the scene. The camera's indifference emphasizes the contradiction between what is visibly present to us and our knowledge of the story. Louise Burchill makes this distinction with the terms "optical machine" and "scriptural machine" when there is a "conflict between what we see and what we know the story to be" (Colman, 2009, p. 164). A simple manipulation (that is not technically complicated) change the meaning and context of the image. Film's capability to lie, hence, can be a tool in materializing the metaphysical through the story in addition to film's own ghostly nature that I mentioned above.

The second point I want to draw attention with the example of Luis Buñuel's film which I mentioned above, can be discussed indirectly by the difference between literature and cinema. Cinema, different than literature, has two different capacities: to narrate just like in literature and to visualize. As Sartre remarks Edmund Husserl's example of color "red is an abstraction because the color cannot exist without form," (2003, p. 27) the word red is too abstract in a text comparing to its shown version on the screen where there can only be one very specific red, the red of that exact moment. While in literature, it is up to the reader's imagination what kind of red color is that. A film can always show a purple color and claim that it is red with its narration, film can always lie. While in literature, describing a red object and saying it is purple is not possible in the same way. This simple distinction also shows cinema's visual choice of collaborating with its narration or conflicting with it. Cinema, parallel with its narration, can show what it is telling. On the other hand, it has the unlimited freedom to tell the exact opposite of what is shown. "Film lies all of the time" is Brian de Palma's antithesis of Godard's famous quote "the cinema is truth 24 frames per second" and seems like both filmmakers have a point depending on what film is saying while visualizing.

One way of collaboration between the image and the narrative can be through terminology. In *Beetlejuice*, deceased couple Barbara and Adam, they find themselves in their home reading the "Handbook of Recently Deceased," and Adam shouts saying "I found the word for our situation: Ghost!" Therefore, language's necessary help in

defining the case goes hand in hand with the narrative of the story. In order to portray a ghost, there is a need to pick some definitive terms in the text or the script. Since the potential ghost figure in a ghost movie is not always necessarily seen as a ghost, or as a human (or a dead, a living) until the narrative clarifies what it is -of course, there might be cases that the narrative never clarifies it. It is true that with its visualizing capacity film can show what is described textually in millions of different ways but it is still an essential clue to see how the artist uses the terms besides the images. Overall, cinema ensures an experience that visualizes the ghost with its illusion and with its narration sometimes in a contrary way and sometimes consistently.

A film's dramatic tools can materialize what is metaphysical, what is non-existing or invisible. For the first and the second points above, I want to remark that the notion of materialization in the cinematic image, can be best reminded by Derrida's understanding of specter. As already mentioned above, he defines the spectral moment as beyond the present, "And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being" (2006, p. 125). In this thesis, I will assume ghosts to be non-existing or intangible in real life. Either case they are not visible so that we cannot film them as a part of real life, therefore, it would not be wrong to say Derrida's definition for visibility as "beyond phenomenon" corresponds to the materialization of metaphysical. When it comes to making a movie about a ghost, for the audience to see the embodiment of this "beyond phenomenon", the narrative of the film needs to convince its audience. The audience, who do not expect to see ghosts in daily life, find themselves in the verisimilitude of the film providing a suspension of disbelief through what Derrida calls "experience of belief" as well as Baudry's "impression of reality". Derrida attributes this belief to cinematic perception in the interview with *Cahiers du Cinema*. However, what creates the experience is nothing but the screen and inevitably, the camera's presence in showing the image and hiding the off-screen. Burchill compares Derrida's "experience of belief" with Baudry's apparatus theory and claims that while Derrida's spectrality is giving the temporal difference, for Baudry the boundaries between representation and perception is space related (Colman, 2009, p. 173). As it is the camera, as an apparatus, provides this cinematic perception to the audience and this creates the "impression of reality" of Baudry for whom "the cinematographic apparatus is unique in that it offers the subject

perceptions ‘of a reality’ whose status seems similar to that of representations experienced as perceptions” (Rosen, 1986, p. 220).

In cinema, the opposite of what Buñuel does in *The Phantom of Liberty* is also possible. Thanks to the recording property of camera, technically – as I explained above by referring to Baudry – a film might show us something fantastical (or something that does not belong to our everyday life.) Indeed, it is not possible solely with the camera; editing can do the same work. However, what I mean is that the camera can record a fictional non-realistic object and seen by the naked eye. The camera is inevitably realistic, and it records what *is* there. The camera is a tool recording what is appearing in the frame. Supernatural, non-living or invisible objects can be physically created; therefore cinema is a form of art that can materialize what is metaphysical. Surely, any fantastic creature can be included in this. Something immaterial is made to be material. Hence, through materialization, the impossible to show in real life becomes possible on the screen.

In order to include Baudry into the reality discussion about ghosts properly, one needs a film that includes shots taken by the camera. As Dudley Andrew notes at the beginning of his book *What Cinema Is?* not every movie necessarily is shot by the camera (2010, p. 3). There are animations, and with the technology of special effects, the need for a camera is decreasing. There are many films which are created by using only paintings and sound. However, since I would like to discuss camera’s organic relationship with the image in order to examine realistically independently depicted ghosts, I have to note that I had to exclude films not allowing doing so technically. At this point, the problem of representing a non-existing being arises, to use the term representation in a text on ghost films might turn into a challenge. Even though it is not entirely wrong to use it here, it is a problematic expression as objective reality itself a questionable idea, so representation can be a risky and confusing term especially when discussing the life-like look of ghost films. Helen Fielding discusses in her article on the phenomenology of perception and cinema: “Film as art does not replicate or represent reality, rather, in creating, it brings new meanings into being” (Colman, 2009, p. 86). According to this approach, the image could be considered as an independent being itself, even though it is related immensely to the object that is captured. Such independence of the image is the feature attributing a new meaning to it, that is, a different level of reality than the

reality of the object in the image. As I mentioned above, the ontological distance between the image and the object itself is the reason for having a different world of reality; for the object of the real life and the viewed image. As argued above, because of the cinematic image's relation to death and the approach to cinema as a witness to passing time, this difference is temporal as well as spatial.

Similarly, a ghost can be visualized as a person who wears a white sheet, and for the audience, there is always a decision to perceive the ghost character as the person with a white sheet. However, cinema, creating a new meaning for the actors who are covered with a white sheet, uses this distance in order the film to create its own world of reality and give the possibility to its audience to view either the actor in the white sheet or make them believe in the ghost in it. What cinema does, without question, is making something appear on the screen. In Dudley Andrew's words, "the world 'appears'" (2010, p. 12). Such a world to be viewed on the screen is expressed visually, and the simplest yet a fulfilling term could be "visualization". Hence, the possibility to use the word representation can be left out of this thesis, once again, since new meaning can be visually created.

No matter how supernatural and extraordinary the being is claimed to be in the cinema, they have the ability to be visualized in various ways so that the audience can follow their story with the suspension of disbelief or, on the contrary, critique them. Our action of judging the characters is not different from our reaction to a real-life event when we approach a film with the suspension of disbelief. In our life, some of us believe that ghost do not exist some of us think even if they exist their form is not tangible. Still, as the film asks us to believe that they are ghosts during the certain amount of time - at least for the duration of the film, some stereotypes and myths arose from our visual culture and memory. Once a decision is made to perceive the ghosts as the part of the narrative, one tends to treat ghosts as if they are part of real life within the verisimilitude of the film, as they are part of the moment that we experience when we watch them. Film's capability to lie leads one last discussion in the first chapter, a question emerging from the discussion of divergence between the reality of the cinematic image and the object viewed through the image: if it is possible after all, how can one visualize a ghost?

1.3. WAYS OF VISUALISATION

A preliminary categorization of the ways of visualization can be made here, by reviewing different ghost films. The crucial choice to be made by the filmmaker is whether to make the ghost invisible or visible. On the one hand, there are those films that deal with invisible ghosts, the form of ghosts can remain unknown until the end. *Personal Shopper* (2016, Olivier Assayas) can be considered an excellent example of this. In *Personal Shopper*, the invisible ghost stays invisible, although it can interact with other objects, make noise and move things. On the other hand, films that visualize ghosts physically turn invisible into visible in Derrida's words. Under a rough categorization of *visibly* manifested ghosts, fictional and monstrous creatures can be mentioned first. We are familiar with such ghosts from *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984), a film identified with the 1980's popular culture. The second common way that ghosts physically appear merely is in human skin. Ghosts made of flesh and blood (the beloved deceased, very commonly, or the haunted soul) can appear to only one person (usually the alive ex-affair or the chosen person) like in *Life During Wartime* (Todd Solondz, 2009) or they can be a community of dead people continuing their previous lives in afterlife as if nothing happened like in *La Leggenda di Kaspar Hauser* (Davide Manuli, 2012). Ghosts in films exist in a variety of shapes and genres including experimental as well as mainstream films from around the world, but in this thesis, I will mostly deal with a particular one as it is very different from the examples I mentioned above: Sergio Caballero's *Finisterrae* (2010). The Catalan filmmakers film is the primary source of inspiration for this thesis firstly because of its very straightforward and unusual depiction of ghosts or to be more precise, (un)common ghosts as I stated in the title.

It can be argued that *Finisterrae* has multiple layers of spectrality in this case. First, its cinematic image. Second, its ghost story and characters claiming to be ghosts. Moreover, third, its road story, characters that are dead but still on the road. What is for sure is the in-betweenness of the specter exist in any film, and the idea of a road film supports the temporal and spatial in-betweenness of the ghostly image since being on the road is literally being between two points and also an experience that one expects to be completed. When it comes to deciding the range of films for a study allowing to

analyze it from such point of view, it is not that easy, as giving a universal description or finding a consistent image for ghost is a tricky thing.

There are other films wherein ghosts are on the road, but an important amount of them are horror movies where the characters still have issues with the living such as *Dead End* (Jean-Baptiste Andrea, 2003). Moreover, this thesis avoids to take on such examples in order not to view them from the point of views such as genre issues or psychoanalysis. As a non-horror afterlife road film, *Wristcutters: A Love Story* (Goran Dukic, 2004) is a remarkable example since its characters are also human-like ghosts that can create the chance to go back to life or at least it seems so at first sight. Its dead characters who all commit suicide meet in an afterlife world for people who commit suicide and have a road trip to find the main character Zia's ex-girlfriend as soon as they find out that she killed herself too. However, as they are on the road, Zia meets Mikal and falls in love with her. In the very end of the film they manage to escape from the afterlife world, and they wake up in the hospital room in beds next to each other. This very last scene confuses us, we can never be sure whether they managed to escape from the afterlife, or they were just saved after their suicide attempts and whether the whole film was just a stage in Zia's mind between life and death, for instance. This unclear situation of the film leads to different interpretations and may not let one treat the ghosts and the afterlife as if they are presented independently from the living's perception. The film leaves an open the door to the possibility of an illusion that is suggesting the afterlife depiction could only be a dream of a character after all. An example like this, emphasizes this thesis' reason to give great significance to a film that does not play with the reality perceived through its characters. Moreover, this explains, once again, why a ghost film like *Finisterrae* is an essential example for this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

GHOSTS LIKE US: *FINISTERRAE*

Not many films visualize ghosts in white sheets except for parodies that are mocking ghosts. With its white sheet covered ghosts, *Finisterrae* looks like a considerable mockery but too avant-garde to be a pure comedy at the same time. Furthermore, even with its plentiful experimental figures, *Finisterrae* manages to narrate a story of two ghosts walking Camino de Santiago with the hope to become something living. Genre-wise it is difficult to place *Finisterrae*. It is a road film, since they follow a path to achieve something, but not a usual one. It is a ghost film, but it is not conventional. Being aware of the other examples of white sheet usage in well-known ghost films such as *Beetlejuice* and *A Ghost Story* (David Lowery, 2017) however, I am not going to discuss why *Finisterrae* is different from all the other ghost films in detail. Nevertheless, before diving into details of *Finisterrae*, the importance of depicting ghosts as visible and interactable beings can be explained with another ghost film, *A Ghost Story*. In this way, Sartrean existentialism can be integrated into the discussion since the difference is the visibility of the ghosts by others.

A Ghost Story, being essentially a love story and a fantastic drama, has a different story than *Finisterrae*'s. It starts with the daily life of a couple until the man dies in a car accident. He goes back his home to be with the woman he loves, yet he is desperately invisible to the living. Although the camera and therefore the audience can see the very visible ghost who is wearing a white sheet -almost the same as in *Finisterrae*- the ghost is not visible in film's world, to film's characters. From this aspect, it is a typical haunted house story too, the ghost in *A Ghost Story* cannot leave the house even if it is built from the start, it haunts the house, shares the house with the new owners, but stays there invisible. The dead are going back to the house where they used to live before they die a typical story in ghost films. *Beetlejuice* is an example very consciously discovering the hauntedness of the house; there is a surreal desert emerging every time Barbara and Adam, the former owners of the house, attempt to go out of the house. Also, as noted in the beginning, Barbara and Adam are invisible to (the majority of) the living. *The Others* (Alejandro Amenábar, 2001) is another known case where the ghosts cannot leave the house they used to live in. When Ms. Stewart (starred by Nicole Kidman) attempts to leave the house, without being aware of the situation that she is

dead, she runs into a forest with fog and has to go back home. The invisibility of the ghosts in the haunted house films is the underlying reason why the ghosts have an issue with the living. The lack of communication follows invisibility since these ghosts do not have any other way of showing their presence except for throwing some objects around and appearing to certain people. The living has to ignore the dead or the dead ignore the living just like in *The Others* in order to share the same house. One way or another, it points out a communication problem between the dead and the living and a cliché way of depicting ghost in cinema.

The difference between *A Ghost Story* and *Finisterrae* tells so much about the philosophical significance of *Finisterrae*'s depiction of ghosts. After all, *Finisterrae* is almost a manifestation of independent ghosts for the ghosts that have been imprisoned and condemned to live in the memory of the others for all this time. At this point, it can be helpful to review Sartre's existentialism as a supporter argument for the movies where the ghosts are materialized and visible: "I see myself because somebody sees me" (2003, p. 260). Here, Sartre explains how we are subject to ourselves and every time we are aware that we are seen by others we turn into an object in their eyes and as a result, for ourselves as well. Likewise, Caballero's ghosts see themselves because the others (in the movie) see them while that is not the case in *A Ghost Story*. Caballero lets his ghosts define themselves, recognize themselves in the awareness of the others. Thereby, as stated by Sartre "there is no question of a comparison between what I am for myself and what I am for the other" (2003, p. 246). Being conscious of our visibility is being aware of our existence as well as the others' existence. Also, this statement has cinematic importance, in the context of this thesis. Visibility of a ghost in a ghost film (especially from the living characters' side) underlines their human-like existence in film's world. Unlike cinema's typical haunting ghosts that are "visible to the audience, invisible to the film characters", *Finisterrae*'s ghosts are present to both the audience and to its characters in film's world. They are not different from any human, with an odd detail of wearing sheets and their claim of being ghosts.

Through a detailed analysis of *Finisterrae* next I will read the film to see how this visibility can be interpreted philosophically and mostly from a Sartrean existentialist point of view and then I will review the existentialist philosophy from the perspective of cinema.

2.1. GHOSTS OF *FINISTERRAE*

The film starts with a still image: a grey wall and scattered paper boxes. The dominant sound is the voice-over of two male characters talking to each other in Russian. The still image does not change, but the voices comment on the background sound of a newborn baby goat. Then we hear a birthday party. People cheering. Voice-over introduces the birthday party: “They are celebrating the passing time.” What follows is the sound of a hospital room. We hear the same voice saying: “It’s a hospital,” and then the sound of intensive care unit and life support machine of a dying person. Immediately after the voice says “Look, it’s the end,” ghosts appear on the screen right after the short introduction of the *life cycle* of a living being. The ghost with the pale horse tells his wish at this very first scene of the film: “I want to become a living being.” We understand that the Russian voices belong to two ghosts, dressed up as ghosts, in white robes with black holes for the eyes. Before leaving the studio-looking site, they stand in the empty stage without doing anything. Screens behind them show random fragments from the rest of the film. With the following line of the rider ghost, they confirm that they are ghosts and they are conscious of it: “I’m overcome with nausea, I am tired of being a ghost.” They want to change this situation.

At last, they decide to consult the Oracle of Garrel to start to a new ephemeral earthly life. This is the last interior shot before they hit the road. The name of the Oracle is not incidentally chosen; it takes its name from French director Philippe Garrel’s early work, *La Cicatrice Intérieure* (1972). In this film a woman and a man, with his horse, walk in a purgatory-like desert landscape. With this strong reference, Caballero corroborates the idea of in-betweenness: in between heaven and hell, past and present or in between life and death. Ghosts are neither of this world nor another. They are dead, but they are still among the living. They say they are ghosts and they mean it. As the viewers, we take their word for that and follow the story to see if they will ever manage to become a living thing again. It is not the same with Derrida claiming “I’m a ghost now” in *Ghost Dance* as discussed in the first chapter. There, he speaks very consciously of the camera, referring to temporality in cinema. He means himself, the real Derrida, appearing on the screen. For *Finisterrae*’s ghost brothers, this ghostliness is two-sided.

First, as the actor playing the ghost, who is under that cover, whose presence will be seen by the audience in the future.

Second, the costume referring to traditional ghost costume that we get to know from the ghost depictions. Hence, we not only take their word for being a ghost but also see them in a ghost costume. They have many earthly sides we can associate with the living world. They have the ability to get tired, they see a psychiatrist, believe in a healthy lifestyle and sports, even get hungry and eat invisible food. They wear white hunter-boots to walk, and their robes get dirtier as they keep on walking. They are ghosts in the flesh. Others can see them. They can observe the others. No matter how extraordinary they are, they walk around like any other earthly being. They can be recorded, and they can be screened as in “the empty stage scene” in the film. At this point, it might be helpful to consider the film with the director’s background. Caballero is a co-director of Sónar, a New Media Art and Music Festival. The stage looking aesthetics of the first scenes become more meaningful when it is thought with Caballero’s festival career, especially a festival that is highly involved with new media and multimedia performances. The film’s relation to the outside world is also established with director’s space choices.

2.2. A PRAISE OF THE FAKE

The purposeful fakeness of objects, costumes and decors can be considered as an element of reality if the case is a ghost film. The two characters in *Finisterrae* strongly claim that they are ghosts. Even though the audience follows the story with a suspension of disbelief that they are ghosts and they hope to be living again by the help of an oracle, the explicit artificiality that is prevalent in the movie creates an awareness that they could be any people walking inside some white sheets on the other hand. The boundaries between reality and fantasy become blurred with realistic figures and the plot of a ghost story. The film starts in a very urban environment, and the grey-walled industrial building hosts the ghosts until they set off. They stand on a stage-like space while the lighting and the tools around them create a performance hall ambiance. The radical change to the landscape does not retain Caballero to use absurd objects in nature. Ghosts wander through the Galician landscape where they come across trees growing plastic ears in Bosc de la Paroles (Forest of Words) and Catalan video art from the 1980s in a tree hollow. They find their way to Finisterre with a wind gauge: after a

wheelchair and quasi-fake pale horse, another prop comes in sight. All these objects are suddenly appearing in the story, as well as the costume, supports the fake and the absurd aesthetics for the film.

In *Finisterrae*, the ghosts are not scary. They wear ordinary bed sheets. Putting the metaphysical ghost in the real white sheets that belong to everyday life, fakeness and lifelikeness converge in the same scene. They are not designed to scare us; however, they are not that funny either. During the whole film, many mythological references are used by Caballero. Most of the time, absurd versions of mythological figures go beyond being a mere parody, and they serve the narration. The most striking example of this is the scene in which they burn the fake horse. Burning their fake horse is the last thing they do before their transition into ephemeral beings. The unexpected appearance and disappearance of the familiar objects become the part of the story. These objects are overly realistic to us, as we are familiar with them; they are objects we associate with our daily life, yet they exist in a depiction of the afterlife.

The whole discussion of artificiality points out a paradox. Although they are said to be ghosts, they are just like us. This paradox can make us raise the question of the meaning of life for the afterlife and leads an existentialist interpretation of the story. In this in-between world, despair and searching are not only intrinsic to humans. The reason they consult an oracle is their desire to become something else, something living. From the very start of the film, Caballero designs an afterlife world where ghosts have existential crises too. This state of mind that ghosts are in, obscures the distinction between the living and the so-called dead in the film opening up to another conflict: can dead beings be like humans? This conflict adds up to cinema's essential paradox of turning to be alive into being dead and being dead into being present and available to be viewed.

Even though the ghosts do not look like humans in the film, the film never eliminates the possibility that they are humans hidden under the sheets; we might call them *ghosts like us*, the reason why the rest of the film explains.

In the film, the Oracle tells the ghosts to walk Camino de Santiago until Finisterre. Santiago Path is an ancient medieval pilgrimage route that is still an attractive place for pilgrims because of its unique landscape and historical meaning. Finisterre, where this path ends, is located on Costa de la Muerte (Coast of Death). Spanish word Finisterre, also known as Fisterra (in Galician) means 'land's end' which makes sense for medieval

times for the Westerns who think that there is nothing beyond that land. Ghosts decide to follow Garrel's advice, and grey studio look gives its place to a green Northern Spanish landscape. The name of the path and the coast directly connote death.

Recalling that it can technically be considered a road film, Caballero examines how ghosts walk this spiritual road with a hope to *live* despite all the names continually reminding them of *death*. To be on the way is being neither *there* nor *here* -to be in between. It is essential to remark that they are not the haunting type of ghosts. They are not after anyone, and they are not back to complete an unfinished business either. They are not stuck in a house. They are sharing the same world with the living, but other characters' consciousness or perception do not restrict them, they are independent. They are freely walking, giving a break whenever they like and keep on walking.

They not only walk for a purpose, but they get involved in different situations that are constantly changing them. The spatial in-betweenness is not independent of the characters' mood and for such state of mind, walking a path may act as a quest for meaning. Heading off to Finisterre, two ghosts turn over a new leaf, yet they are existentially incomplete, because as Sartrean existentialism asserts: being with no fixed nature or essence, continually recreates itself through its choices and actions (2003, p. 147). Hence, by adopting the Sartrean explanation for the being that exists for-itself in this case, I rely on the two ghosts' substantial presence. Ghosts, by being-in-the-world and being aware that they exist, are depicted in a way that allows a Sartrean interpretation. Such unique depiction makes me analyze *Finisterrae's* ghosts assuming them just like humans who have the capability of recreating their choices and actions.

2.3. AMBIGUITY OF EXISTENCE

The existentialist philosophy that I aim to mention by referring to Sartre and de Beauvoir is an authoritative source in recognizing one's existence by the other's existence. Furthermore, it creates a great chance to examine a character's future based on the character's acts and decisions in a film's narrative. This implies that character is always ambiguous for the audience since the audience watching the film for the first time does not know how the story will go on. However, the ambiguous I am going use in this part is in the sense of *unclear* and I intend to show characters' uncertain futures by using this term for their existence. Without a doubt, in the ghost films, the existentialist reading from the perspective of Sartre provides an alternative approach to

ghosts. With this approach I claim them to be human-like ghosts and, as discussed in the first chapter, I assess the absurd depiction and fakeness of the ghosts as a pro-argument strengthening a life-like visualization of ghosts. Through the analysis of *Finisterrae*, I argue that the ghosts' desire to be alive and their search for a purpose is an existentialist concern. However, existentialism does not only help to interpret the ghosts' state of mind that is ready to take responsibility to change, but their ambiguousness can also be explained with existentialist philosophy, which can be easily followed in the film.

In *Finisterrae*, ghost brothers are not identifiable by their look. It is hard to tell who is the rider ghost and who is the leading ghost. What is certain is, that they have male voices, speaking in Russian. For the reason that they speak a language, what we would assume, they sure have a knowledge of who they are, or perhaps who they were before, to a certain degree. Apart from their identical costumes, they have different personalities, different desires. They walk this way with one common wish. Bearing in mind that *Finisterrae* is a movie on pilgrim ghosts, to say that the characters are searching for themselves and what they want to be as much as they seek for the door that will lead them to their next lives. As, per Sartre, being is continually recreating itself, it is an experience making ghost brothers who they *are*, as they are on the move and they *will be* someone different.

At the very beginning of the journey, the ghosts stop to ask for the way to Finisterre and kill a gypsy woman singing opera because of her unsatisfying answer. Two ghosts speak Russian, and the woman speaks German, but they understand each other nevertheless. In other scenes, the ghosts communicate with animals. It is a very diverse place where they are, the culture and the language are not a compulsory part of the identity in this place, perhaps the background and identity do not even matter. This path hosts a different kind of creatures and ghosts, yet, regardless of what they are or where they come from, communication is possible. The unclear boundaries between the seasons and places create a vague atmosphere. The insignificance of identity strengthens this vagueness. This situation can be explained further by Simone de Beauvoir's distinction between absurd and ambiguous from *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Simone de Beauvoir makes a saying "To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that it's meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won" (1976, p. 129). Here, de Beauvoir thinks, like Sartre, that the

existence is always incomplete through the meaning that is won continuously and she attributes the possibility to change continually to the ambiguous nature of existence. De Beauvoir's notion of ambiguity can explain Caballero's film world, his characters' identities and their relation to this world because of the overall ambiguity of the film's atmosphere. The vagueness of the space and time in the film goes hand in hand with the existentialist ambiguity.

During the whole film, only one other ghost, other than ghost brothers, comes into sight. While ghost brothers are resting in a cave, a dancer ghost appears in the other half of the screen. This other half of the screen could be rider ghost's dream, or maybe a different layer of reality that he suddenly starts to see. In any case, an alternative screen introduced that is never introduced before. The rider ghost startles as soon as he sees the dancer dancing erotically. He leaves the cave -jumps from the other side of the split screen to the dancer's screen- to have a closer look at her. The transition between the screens happens in a very smooth way. Rider ghost can change worlds easily; moreover, he can return with the stone that he takes from the dancer. Through this scene, the access from one screen to the other is proven to be possible. The capability of transition given the ghosts is very much in line with the accessibility to everything that the film's world promises us.

Revealing the body of a ghost, the dancer dances around the rider ghost and gives him a stone while dancing. This becomes the first and the last scene that the whole body of a ghost -except for the face- is shown explicitly. For the ghost brothers, their body is strictly covered, as if Caballero wants to hide what is inside. They never give a clue about what they look like. Do they have human skin? How old are they? Are they even men as we assumed from the voice-overs? However, during stripper ghost's dance, the human-like body of the dancer unfolds, we begin to wonder what the face looks like as it remains the only covered part. Again, a very particular part of the body remains a mystery, and once again the ambiguity of existence is emphasized through dancer ghost's presence.

Next day, he makes friends with a deer and hides the stone that he took from the stripper. They have to move on, but they realize a creature from underworld follows them. However, this creature is as fake as the pale horse, still moving and scary for them. This would be the first thing that scares them, in panic, they try to vanish without

a trace. Where is this *underworld*? How and why they are familiar with the creatures from the underworld, the film does not answer these questions. The creature from the underworld does not look like a ghost, but the ghost and the creature still speak to each other. The audience can understand the creature only with the subtitles. Subtitles become part of the film's diegetic world. Non-sense speech of the creature from underworld can be comprehended only with the help of the subtitles. Another impossible act is made possible through the film's technical capacity.

Finally, when the two ghosts arrive in Finisterre, they burn the pale horse -the fake one- and they become ready to go through the door. The name of the rider of the pale horse in the New Testament is death. So when there is no more *death*, there is no need for the pale horse. Rider ghost turns into a reindeer which he decided to be during the trip. The leading ghost turns into a frog until a prince comes with a black horse and kisses it (we do not see either the real nor the fake pale horse anymore). Then the frog turns into a princess and goes with the prince. Having acknowledged that Russian male voices of the ghosts and their brotherhood, we are surprised to see the leading ghost becoming a woman after all. The film continues to challenge the audience's expectation until the very last scene.

For *Finisterrae*, the characters and space remain ambiguous. In "The Two Versions of Imaginary", Maurice Blanchot not only refers to the relation between death and the image but also draws attention to ambiguity as a return of finiteness (1982). Death -the end of life is ambiguous because one cannot know when death will come or what comes after death. A ghost film inevitably deals with this ambiguity by speculating on the afterlife. However, *Finisterrae*, more than any other ghost film, can be seen as a visualized, manifested version of Blanchot's ambiguity with the meaning -or meaninglessness- of its cinematic image. By this means, when considered with Blanchot's point on ambiguity "Because of ambiguity nothing has meaning, but everything *seems* infinitely meaningful" (1982, p. 262). Although Blanchot is not among the existentialist philosophers, it would not be wrong to use the notion of ambiguity in the sense that he uses it.

On the contrary, this term Blanchot uses very often is very compatible with Simone de Beauvoir's ambiguity of existence. Blanchot understanding of ambiguity, adds up to de Beauvoir's ambiguity about life. In other words, while de Beauvoir says life is

ambiguous, Blanchot says the end of this life and afterlife is ambiguous too. For Blanchot, if we go further, “in order for being to accomplish its work, it has to be hidden: it proceeds by hiding itself, it is always reserved and preserved by dissimulation, but also removed from it” (1982, p. 263). The most significant factor that is creating the ambiguity in *Finisterrae* is the white sheet costumes. Apart from their remark to lifelikeness, the white sheets have another critical function in the film, they are hiding what is inside. Despite our assumption about what is inside, we are never allowed to imagine it completely. The element of ambiguity is what haunts us. To the contrary of ghosts that are not haunting in *Finisterrae*, the image through the costume - emphasizing what is there, by hiding it- haunts us more than any time.



CHAPTER 3

CINEMA AS A SECOND CHANCE FOR THE DEAD

Finisterrae's ghost characters establish a close tie between Derrida's understanding of metaphysics of presence and Sartre's phenomenology that sees being and nothingness as compliments. Derrida's spectrology claiming that past of the object haunts the present in the image, means that the object that is recorded is no longer the same object from the moment on it is recorded, but it will look the same as the moment it is recorded. For Sartre, "Non-being is a perpetual presence in us, and outside of us, nothingness haunts being" (2003, p. 35) similarly. One may ask here, how can we feel non-being's presence? We feel it through its absence. It might seem impossible to do so, but the ontology of image can be a significant reminder here once again. We see the trace of being-there in the image. Alternatively, as in Sartre's example (2003, p. 565), when I leave my jacket to someone, my presence, and hence my absence, will be available through the jacket that I just left in the hands of someone else's. In Derrida's hauntology, what haunts us is a non-being too, through its *no-longer-thereness*, non-being becomes our *beingness* and Sartre's phenomenology remarks a similar point. For Colin Davis, Sartre's phenomenology prefigures Derrida's ghosts, and he articulates it in the following sentences "everything is only what it seems, and nothing is quite what it seems" (2005, p. 223). This conflict stems from the "world of appearances and apparitions" that I discussed in the first chapter. Davis reviews Sartre's *The Chips Are Down* and ghosts in the story and Jean Delannoy's adaptation of the screenplay with the same name (1947). Davis reminds Sartre's apparitions (what, in French, both means *apparitions* and *appearances*) being fully present and largely absent at the same time (2005, p. 223) and he compares it with being ghost-like. Even though Davis' overview of *Being and Nothingness* seems like a compatible source for *Finisterrae* and *The Chips Are Down* in this regard, he continues with the impossibility of second chances wherein he claims that "one can have the chance to live her life, but one can never have the chance truly" (2005, p. 228). He reads Sartre's approach to death as for the dead, going back to life is not possible, even if it *is* possible. No doubt that for Sartre himself, when one dies, she is defenseless, she cannot even convince the others to change their judgments about her (2003, p. 138).

Moreover, he has a straightforward suggestion for the living, one can always change the course of events, and even if she cannot, then, one can always have the decision to kill herself not to live this life she cannot change (2003, p. 575). However, what Sartre says necessarily means that the dead in the films cannot change their fate? Perhaps, one can read Sartre's existentialism on the impossibility of dead/ghost life differently in cinema. The unusual ghost story of *Finisterrae* and the free walking ghosts are the main ideas to adopt an existentialist approach in this thesis. Moreover, Sartre's existentialism dealing specifically with death, the issue of the "other", as well as freedom was in line with both the film's narrative and the form so far. It is needed here, to take a closer look at the ghost story in Sartre's *The Chips Are Down* to see how the ghosts in *Finisterrae* diverges from the ones in *The Chips Are Down*. Therefore whether the idea of a second chance for the dead contradicts with the Sartrean existentialist approach in analyzing *Finisterrae* becomes the question of this chapter.

Sartre's *The Chips Are Down* is an existentialist story about two ghosts that fall in love with each other in the afterlife: Pierre and Eve. As the article 140 states so, they are sent back to the world of the living to be together since they did not have the chance to meet each other when they were alive. In order to go back to life as themselves with the awareness that they are going back and with the knowledge of their past lives, they are expected to end up being together at the end of 24 hours that they are allowed for. Things do not go as planned, both of them find themselves trying to solve past problems instead of endeavoring to come together; Pierre, who was planning a revolution before he was betrayed and killed by an organization member, wants to go back to warn his comrades for revolution while Eve, who was killed by her husband for her wealth, wants to warn her sister as her husband and sister are having an affair. Pierre tries to convince the group members while Eve tries to tell the truth to her sister. Neither of them can succeed to fix what happened before, and on top of it, they cannot complete the 24 hours given to them for being together. They die again and cannot come together in the afterlife even if they can still see each other, and they go to other directions.

Materializing ghosts in *The Chips Are Down*, just like in *Finisterrae*, may point out the life-likeness of afterlife depictions. The similarity between afterlife and life is expressed with daily routines in both of these artworks. In *Finisterrae*, the ghosts have dinner around the bonfire; they go fishing, one of them even meets a ghost stripper dancer.

However, what is more, striking of all is the detail of how the audience witnesses their robes getting dirtier. In *The Chips Are Down* same detailed examples exist, even when people die they still struggle with bureaucracy (there is an Article 140). They still find each other attractive. They are still among the living people. They can still see what is happening in the world of the living.

Moreover, the state of mind of the characters is similar in both stories. Both stories have desperate characters: ghosts straining to be alive again. As Colin Davis puts it “ghosts striving to make themselves and their desires real” (2005, p. 227) applies in both stories and lead to an inevitable existentialist reading. In one case, walking a pilgrim path is the picture of this struggle, in the other, unfinished missions and incomplete affairs. In contrast to their nature as non-existing, the ghosts have existential problems, and they want to change their current state.

Both stories emphasize the ambiguity of existence that is discussed in detail in the second chapter. *Finisterrae*, by its vague atmosphere and characters under the cover of white sheets, frames a world where identity (language, culture, space and time) is not a significant issue. *The Chips Are Down* does the same with removing the class difference between people in love affairs. Only death can make two different people’s love possible since there are no borders there. In Sartre’s afterlife dead from different backgrounds, social class and age are all together. Indeed, when a dead person commits to going back to life again, she will rediscover the impossibility of being together.

To think of afterlife as separate from life is not possible in both works. Ghosts wandering around the streets -or around the landscape- evokes Blanchot’s following lines: “Dear departed is conveyed into another place. No doubt this site is only symbolically set apart, doubtless, it is by no means really unsituatable.” (1982, p. 259) In Blanchot’s fictional works such as *Thomas the Obscure*, the separation between life and death is not done clearly. However, I argue that it is because of the impossibility of *representing* the afterlife since we do not (and cannot) know what it is. It is still possible for an artist to depict this afterlife as Sartre does in literature and Caballero by visualization.

Thus, the (im)possibility of depicting afterlife inevitably tells us something about the real life itself. Yes, it is something impossible to depict something that we cannot experience. Because the moment when we experience, we are no longer accessible in

the living's world to share this experience. However, what makes it possible is our speculations about it. Mythology, religions have known and similar depictions, and no doubt those depictions are reduced to ephemeral perception in order people to conceive it. The artist, who works on an afterlife depiction, no matter how abstract she can be, has to make use of objects that are directly or indirectly related to real life when depicting a non-existing or an invisible thing. Everything perceived can be expressed abstractly, but even this abstraction is expressed with the tools of our world. Tools creating a fantastical thing have to belong to our world, in other words, they are limited with our world. This is the reason why we cannot imagine an afterlife independent from life itself, no matter how we force the limit of our imagination or no matter how deep we discover the depths of our unconscious.

Moreover, that is how I interpret Blanchot's possibility to situate the "departed one" not set apart from our world. Sartre and Caballero both admit that the world of ghost and world of the living are the same in their stories. However, with a significant difference: ghosts sharing the same world with living can be seen in *Finisterrae*, while in *The Chips Are Down* ghosts can see the living but cannot be seen by them. Hence, life-likeness of the afterlife or human-like ghosts as a common point in both stories, provide a connection as well as a distinction between the ghosts depicted in two stories.

"Life decides its own meaning because it's always in suspense, it possesses essentially a power of self-criticism and self-metamorphosis which causes it to define itself as a 'not yet'" (Sartre, 2003, p. 563). We are what we are but also what we are going to be, and life always provides us with a possibility to criticize and change what we are doing according to Sartre. However, this is only possible in the boundaries of life for him: "At the moment of death, we are, that is we are defenseless before the judgments of others. They decide *in truth* what we are; ultimately we have no longer any chance of escape from what an all-knowing intelligence could do" (2003, p. 138). The distinction between the living and the dead is an essential element in *The Chips Are Down*, Sartre's ghosts fail to take the chance to turn back to life. A second chance is given to them, but they fail to take the chance. They are *condemned* to fail. Sartre's ghosts are, therefore, invisible for the living. What Sartre asserts with the existentialist phenomenology, does not prevail in his design of afterlife. Even if a being like a ghost exists, for Sartre, they can solely exist invisibly among the living. In his afterlife depiction, the dead are bound

to be a memory in some other people's mind as they *were*. The lack of interaction of ghosts with the living's world in *The Chips Are Down* proves that Sartre's depiction of the afterlife does not attribute the ghosts living-like capabilities -such as having the right to decide what to do- despite their human-like depictions.

On the other hand, for *Finisterrae's* ghosts chips are not down. Transformation and possibility of a change bring new insight to the existentialist philosophy when one considers the ghosts are acting like humans in Caballero's work after all. What Sartre says for life is still currently doable for them. The ghost brothers on the road, who can interact with the living beings, who act like living beings, they can decide on their future by their actions. It is almost an extension of Sartre's philosophy for the afterlife. Moreover, this happens with the cinema's ability to give ghosts a second chance.

Arguing this in the context of *Finisterrae*, it is clear that this ability comes from cinema's natural capacity to depict ghost in a visible, a human-like way in ghost films. However, one should not ignore the general meaning of giving a second chance to dead in cinema, might not be possible in a broader sense. It is true that film as a medium has the capacity to materialize the metaphysical, bring the dead back to life in a ghostly cinematic image. Moreover, I reviewed the film theory accordingly in the first chapter. The argument that cinema gives a second chance for the dead can be, again, a valid argument in itself as cinema makes it possible to view the image over and over again. However, through the property of viewing the same image multiple times from the start, ghost material in the film is made available, a second chance is given to the image in a sense. A second chance that makes the image present to the audience, the dead is mummified in that image survives in film's copy's safe margins.

On the other hand, the cinematic image is to be viewed without a change in the text or the form in every view since there is only one unique moment that a particular scene is recorded. Although the film freely keeps on being viewed by others, the finished, completed piece is not available for a change. It is available, but it is not really available since after a change the film turns into another film, it is no longer the same film. A case of Woody Allen imagines in his film *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985), or his short story "Kugelmass" (1980) is not yet possible. There are interactive examples that are giving its audience different choices and a few alternate endings. However, the dialogue between the film and the audience is still not at the point as in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*

in which the “fictional” character falls in love with a girl among the audience in the movie theater, escapes from the screen and the rest of the actors continue without him while they try to act but do not know what to do without the escaped character.

Similarly, in Allen’s short story a professor seeking for a romance starts to have an affair with Emma Bovary in Gustav Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, managing to enter the novel’s world and take Emma Bovary out freely. Yes, there is always a chance to interpret and reinterpret an artwork when reviewing it. A Stanford professor says rereading *Madame Bovary* in “The Kugelmass Episode”, “Well, I guess the mark of a classic is that you can reread it a thousand times and always find something new.” (Allen, 1980, p. 29) However, reinterpreting a work does not mean that the work has the capacity to change itself. The film or the text cannot change its meaning on its own, without the others’ interpretations. Alternatively, it needs an intervention from outside, which will change the piece itself. Changes such as remaking, reshooting or re-editing create new content in the end, which leads the film to be something different from what it used to be. Still, this does not justify the argument “there is no second chance for an alternative story in cinema”, there might be a chance, but when this chance is truly realized (by re-editing it, remaking it or reshooting it) the result is a newly made film that is, in essence, different from the previous one.

There is a second chance given to *Finisterrae*’s ghost in the film. Surely, a second chance in a different sense that I discussed above with the essence, ontology of filmic image. Successful attempt of the ghosts in turning into something living is seen here as a realized second chance. Therefore, not only cinema’s inevitable life-like expression for the ghosts as argued above but also human-like acts of the ghosts specifically in *Finisterrae* is the reason to see a second chance that is given to them and is realized by them successfully. This human-likeness in the film is created through the costume and the details like dirty, white sheets that the ghosts are wearing. Reading a ghost story and watching it are two different experiences in the sense of believing. What I tried to explain with Husserl’s example of the color red in the first chapter, the difference between showing the color and describing that color in the text, is that showing is always more specific than describing it with words. It is because showing an object that is recorded with the camera has the object’s temporal details as well as its material

description. In cinema, that object exactly belongs to that moment, among the other moments that the object exists in.

Cinema's two-fold textual and audiovisual capacity, help the ghosts in *Finisterrae* to act extraordinarily. They say they want to become living, and this is what is given to the audience as information in the dialogue. While they say so, there is no apparent conflict against their wish; nothing is keeping them away from the world and act of the living. The way they act and interact with the other characters of the film does not provide any further supporting arguments that they are ghosts. Only the stereotypical ghost costume might be considered as a ghostly look, but even that is so absurdly artificial that it seems like film tries to show that they are just actors wearing a white sheet rather than saying they are ghosts. Overall, the conflict in the film is created by the ghosts themselves and the possibility to change, hence the second chance, when thought from an existential point of view, is still possible with imagining them as so-called ghosts.

CONCLUSION

I started this thesis reviewing the film theory on the ontology of cinematic image. Film as a medium, which has the power to create a new meaning with what it reveals on the screen, is always related to death and absence while being life-like and present at the same time — this life-likeness that exists in all genres from the most abstract to most realistic examples. Moreover, even in a ghost film, where the audience acknowledges the supernatural of ghosts, it is possible to have a life-like depiction. Ghosts who have a human look, or the human abilities, or merely human-like concerns are all pointing out that ways of thinking ghosts as the living or human-like beings are possible in cinema in different levels of life-likeness depending on how the ghosts are visualized. After all, even the living in the film is the ghost in one sense, because they are a part of the cinematic image that is by nature ghostly. Ghostliness surrounds the filmic image, and it is unattached from what is shown or from what is said in a scene, but utilizing cinema's two-fold (audiovisual and textual) capacity to deal with an object, there can always be further information that can be either convincing or conflicting for the audience.

Ghost films and how they approach ghosts vary from one to another. A divergence in depicting ghosts ensures that different source of theories can be consulted academically. Doubtless, that ghost as a metaphor can be treated as a social or even political issue. What Derrida does in *The Specters of Marx* is perhaps the most inspiring example of this. Learning to live and, perhaps, learning to live with the specters, the ghosts beyond the death of the ideas, people, eras. The ghost can be a metaphor of a state of mind, of being in the past accurately, distorting the present with memories from the past as in the films of Carlos Saura. In this case, ghosts are limited to the living's memory, imagination, reality.

On the other hand, ghosts that are independently depicted from the living in a film. Moreover, such films give the audience a chance to contemplate the differently framed reality in the film, not only by creating a film world that places the ghost among the living but also by letting the ghosts interact with each other without a barrier. The independent ghost becomes free from the living's perspective, but at the same time, acts like the living. The cinematic image depicts this living-like ghost with its tools that are

inevitably from our real world. In this way, a life-like image of a fantastical being can be created, once again, in an ephemeral, earthly way.

At this point, it might be helpful to refer to the subtitle of *Casper* (1995): “Seeing is believing”. Is seeing really believing? As a matter of course, this is not a valid argument to reduce believing to what one sees. Rather, this statement refers to the illusion of cinema that can only be uniquely created through the image. Seeing an object can come together with a suspension of disbelief. Alternatively, an odd object can create a distance between the film and the audience and may lead the audience to question the reality film presents. Then, how can we include the (un)common ghosts of *Finisterrae* in this discussion of believing? Is it their absurd costumes or their own claim that they are *ghosts* we believe while following them until “the end of the world”? Perhaps it is none of them. Even so, there is always a possibility to approach them as if they are humans walking a path for a chance to change. This possibility can be examined in an existentialist framework.

Moreover, perhaps, what an existentialist text cannot express, can be expressed in a film, in an audiovisual medium. This goes beyond the distinction between literature and cinema. A distinction between a text and a visual in analyzing them existentially, become apparent in ghost stories because of the cinematic image’s ghostly nature. In the end, it would not be wrong to say *Finisterrae*, suggests a second chance for its (un)common ghosts through an existentialist reading. For further film analyses, perhaps thanks to the conflict between the image and the narrative, existentialism can be reinterpreted in cinema especially in films dealing with afterlife and ghosts.

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