Haunted Screens: Horacio Quiroga in Dialogue with Japanese Horror Cinema

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Abstract

In this article, I will argue that ghosts are used, in two very different contexts and cases, as ways to represent and discuss anxieties about the advances of science and the uses of technology, at the same time that they express a cautious fascination with these unstoppable advances. This concern with the ability of ghosts to move and adapt to technological change is not only about what happens in the films but is also related to what happens outside the films, that is, the viral expansion of ghosts stories and filmic narratives as ways to talk about social and political issues. I will work primarily with two short stories by Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga, "The Specter" and "The Puritan", that I will place in dialog with two Japanese movies, *The Ring* by Hideo Nakata and *Pulse* by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, tracing their possible connections and interpolations.

Keywords: Horacio Quiroga, Japanese horror, Ghosts in cinema, *Logic of sense*

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, writers and filmmakers of multiple nationalities have dramatized similarities between ghosts and cinema. Such comparisons are not difficult to imagine: both the ghostly and the cinematic appear and disappear, both are intangible projections, and both gesture towards immortality. Early twentieth-century Uruguayan writer Horacio Quiroga deals with the related idea of cinema as a haunted art in four short stories "Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa" ("Miss Dorothy Phillips, my wife", 1919), "El espectro" ("The Specter", 1921), "El puritano" ("The Puritan", 1926) and "El vampiro" ("The Vampire", 1927). In these stories, the screen becomes a portal for ghosts not only to move on it, but also through it. In imagining these supernatural potentials of the screen, Quiroga showed admiration, as well as the terror and apprehension, toward the development of cinematic technology.

Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Japanese horror movies (known as J-Horror in the United States) indirectly continue Quiroga's exploration of the relationship between ghosts and technology, deviating from traditional depictions by altering phantasmal abilities. Ghosts are no longer necessarily tied to cursed spaces (houses, hospitals, cemeteries); instead, they can employ and move freely through electronic media such as televisions, cell phones, and digital

cameras. They move through these mediums (in both senses of the word) and also engage with the surfaces of these technologies through their apparitions.

Ghostly manifestations through technology–specifically in the use of screens as portals to access different dimensions–became the common point between two different traditions and cultural products: Uruguayan short stories and Japanese horror movies. I argue that ghosts are used, in these two very different contexts, as ways to represent anxieties about the advances of science and the uses of technology, while expressing a cautious fascination with these unstoppable advances. This concern with the ability of ghosts to move and adapt to technological change is not only about what happens in the films–the ghosts can travel and expand the range of their curses using technological artifacts–but is also related to what happens outside the film, that is, the viral expansion of ghost stories and filmic narratives as ways to talk about social and political issues.

I will work primarily with two short stories by Quiroga, "El espectro" ("The Specter") and El puritan ("The Puritan"), which I will place in dialog with Japanese movies, mostly *Ringu* (*The Ring*, 1998) by Hideo Nakata and *Kairo* (*Pulse*, 2001) by Kiyoshi Kurosawa, tracing their possible connections and influences. Giles Deleuze's approximation of the phantasm and his ideas concerning the surfaces on which they manifest will serve as a theoretical point of contrast, mainly through the cogent themes raised in his book *Logique du sens* (*Logic of Sense)*.

Although the differences between Quiroga's short stories and the Japanese films, in both the media (literary in one case and cinematographic in the other) and the context (Quiroga's stories written in the first half of the twentieth century and the Japanese films filmed in the late twentieth and twenty-first century) there is an ominous proximity in the usages of ghosts, an unfamiliar familiarity in Freudian terms. This closeness can also be seen in the presentation of the screen as an interface between the world of the living and the world of the dead. In both cases the ghosts are able to move at will through the screens, using technological instruments to reveal themselves and take revenge on those who harmed them.[1]

Through the Looking-Screen

> And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away
> just like a bright silvery mist.
> In another moment Alice was through the glass,
> and had jumped lightly down into the Looking-Glass room.
> *Through the Looking-Glass*. Lewis Carroll

Horacio Quiroga's (1878–1937) interest in the terrifying capacity of technology (specifically film) and its advances is evident in stories whose otherworldly protagonists clearly belong to the Gothic genre. Ghosts and vampires appear in "El espectro", "El puritano", and "El vampiro" ("The Vampire"), mobilizing and merging with new terrors generated by the arrival to the Southern Cone of technological elements such as the cinematographic camera, as well as the development of film as entertainment. In these stories Quiroga makes clear that cinema, with its immaterial projection and translucent film, is haunted by ghosts, for whom the mixture of still images, motion, and light appears as an ideal space within which to live, move and maintain their immortality.

As Quiroga asserted in his article "Espectros que hablan" ("Specters who speak"), specters are the ones who "slide from side to side across the surface of the screen" (338, my translation), haunting movie screens and moving freely on and through them. The fact that actors remain young and vital in the movies, without any change even after their death, fascinated Quiroga and inspired him to relate this capacity of cinema with the one exhibited by vampires and other immortals. In fact, the claim of immortality becomes clear in a short note written for the Argentinian magazine *Caras y caretas* (*Faces and Masks*) in 1920, contrasting the fate of ordinary people with the stars of cinema: "The film saves its interpreters from this healthy darkness. It doesn't matter that Bill, Mary or Douglas rest forever underground, far from their artistic farces. They remain, living and tangible on the screen" (*Las cintas de ultratumba* 129, my translation).

Cinephile and film critic for several newspapers and magazines (*La Nación, Caras y Caretas, El Hogar, Atlántida*), Quiroga fictionalized cinema for the first time in his short story "Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa", in which he expressed his deep admiration for actresses and divas of the Hollywood silent film era. However, Quiroga did not delve into the connection between cinematic experience and horror until later in his oeuvre, specifically in three short stories from his later career ("El espectro", "El vampiro" and "El puritano"). In these stories the mere cinematic condition

allows the emergence and spread of specters and ghosts, providing a surface for such propagation. "El espectro" appeared in the Argentinian magazine *El Hogar* in 1921, and "El puritano" in the Argentinian newspaper *La Nación* in 1926.[2] In both stories cinema plays an important role as a medium capable of capturing and transmitting an actor's particularly lively moments, to the point of being able to transport and make them emerge through the screen, alive or dead. In the case of "El espectro" love for cinema and espectrality are connected from the very beginning of the story:

> Every night in the Grand Splendid of Santa Fe, Enid and I attended film premieres . . . I don't think we disturb anyone, or if we do, it's in a sensible way. . . . Enid and I, apart from the world around us, we are all eyes on the screen. . . . Our intrusion is never noticed, as it is necessary to note now that Enid and I are dead. (252, my translation)

From the first paragraph Quiroga makes apparent that cinema and ghosts are two elements that go hand in hand in his story, highlighting the spectral condition of film and ghosts' predilection for cinema. These two ghosts are "all eyes" on the screen, only interested in what happens on it, abandoning the traditional activities of ghosts (scaring the living): Grant and Enid were moviegoers in life and still are after death. As stated by Miriam Gárate, the two characters are "spectral cinephiles", which Gárate considers a tautology since all cinephile, 'dead' or alive are somehow spectral (11). Todd Garth goes further in his characterization, asserting that "Quiroga's most distinctive slant on the cinema [is] the conception of film stars as a kind of living dead" (85). Although Grant and Enid do not live in the theater, they haunt it, relating to this space in a particular way, as if part of the curse that keeps them on earth requires that they must watch a film every night.

The writer links his narrative with the Hollywood of the 20's, rooting the story in this historic/cinematic space. One of the main characters–Duncan Wyoming–is described as a contemporary of William Hart (1864-1946), famous American actor known for his roles in Hollywood westerns of the early twentieth century. According to Quiroga, Hart was famous for his "deep virtues of manly interpretation" ("El espectro" 253)[3]. Unlike Hart, Wyoming dies young, leaving two unfinished films–*El páramo* (*The Moor*) and the premonitory *Más allá de lo que se ve (Beyond What You See*)–as well as a beautiful young widow, Enid, left in the hands of his best friend, Guillermo Grant.[4]

The development of the story, then, focuses on the guilty love between Enid and Grant, which is intensified by their own prejudices and the growing sensation of betrayal of their dead husband and friend. These fears haunt them—as if they were the manifestation of the ghost of Wyoming—forcing them to attend the premiere of *El páramo*, the late actor's first posthumous film. For the lovers, Wyoming's apparition on the screen has the same connotations of a ghostly apparition, with the consequent recognition of the specter: "Those were his same gestures. The same confident smile from his lips. The same energetic figure that glided and stuck to the screen. And twenty feet away, there was his same woman who was under the fingers of his close friend..." (256). The vision leaves them full of anguish and determination to attend all subsequent nightly screenings of the film.

This forced return to watch the film is a harbinger of the return of the two characters as ghosts and the inevitability of the fate that draws them to the movie theater. After watching the movie multiple times, Grant discovers that his friend's eyes—the eyes of the movie character—begin to move toward them. This revelation opens a space of horror for the characters, revealing the cinema as a medium for capturing vital essences of the actors and for transporting ghosts as well as images. Quiroga plays with the multiple meanings of the term spectrum/specter, proposing that the idea of the light spectrum–itself a product of the dispersion of light—literally converges with the idea of a specter as an apparition of a dead person. The specter of Duncan Wyoming manifests himself on the screen (and beyond it) through the projection of the light spectrum, a phenomenon that can be seen only by the guilty lovers.

The cinema screen functions, then, as a threshold between the worlds of the living and the dead, one that enables the ghost of Wyoming to observe the betrayal of his friend and his wife–despite his body ostensibly rotting underground thousands of miles away. It also serves as a portal, opening a path for the judgmental glare of the dead actor, directed at those who have been watching him in the film: "A thousand miles from New York, encased underground lay eyeless Duncan Wyoming. But his surprise at the frantic oblivion of Enid, her anger and vengeance were alive there, igniting the chemical trail of Wyoming, moving his alive eyes who eventually notice to us" (258, my translation).

The gaze is not the only thing that crosses the screen in this story. The ghost of Duncan Wyoming also crosses, searching with his hands for the body of Grant: "I saw him moving forward, growing, coming to the edge of the screen, looking at me the whole time. I saw him detach himself

coming towards us in the light" (259, my translation). Despite the menacing gesture, the apparition itself does not cause any physical harm to the main characters, who died from fear and shock. The screen becomes the point of entry of ghosts, but also the surface through which they exit: the ghosts of Grant and Enid end the narration hoping for the reopening of the portal to return to the world of the living, obviously through the screening of another one of Wyoming's films: "Now our hope is in *Más allá de lo que se ve*. For the past seven years Enid and I waited. . . . Duncan can make a mistake that allows us to come back into the visible world, just as ourselves, seven years ago, allowed him to animate his film" (260, my translation).

Having to wait for the premiere of the last film of Wyoming–not knowing under what name it would be screened–helps to explain the peculiar cinephilia of the ghosts, doomed to go to the movies "night after night" at ten o'clock, hoping to find the film and thus their salvation. This is a "quiroguiano" twist on the curse oft-repeated in traditional ghost stories—the compulsion that forces ghosts to endlessly return to a certain space or situation. For writer Juan Sebastián Cárdenas, this compulsion constitutes much of the complexity of the ghost's material state: "The ghost is what has disappeared forever and, nevertheless, returns obsessively. It's there but it's gone. It does not just go or arrive, but it besieges, it approaches - that is, it surrounds, it turns, it lurks" (18-19, my translation). Quiroga introduces a little black humor in this tragic fate, as the desolate ghost says his hope is in "Más allá de lo que se ve," that is, a reference to both the film that has not been released yet, but also to the invisible spectrum created by the film, which opens doors between dimensions and allows the materialization of specters.

Thus, the idea of the cinema screen as a portal that allows the entry and exit of ghostly entities and the communication between the living and the dead becomes the central point and the focus of horror in Quiroga's short story. This idea has been reshaped and adapted by several films since the second half of the twentieth century, from different perspectives and genres. *Poltergeist* (1982) by Tobe Hooper is one of the best-known examples in the horror genre, staging the tragedy of a family haunted by ghosts that come and go through the TV, as well as *Shocker* (1989) by Wes Craven, featuring a supernatural serial killer that can travel through TV screens. Outside of the genre, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) by Woody Allen uses a similar idea to shape a romantic comedy, in which an actor emerges from the cinema screen to have a romance with an ordinary woman. The 1998 film *Pleasantville* directed by Gary Ross, inverts the emerging-from-the-screen logic, now portraying characters that become part of a TV show by entering into the screen. However, it is

within the medium of Japanese horror cinema that the subject finds its most acute manifestations and where the similarity with Quiroga's stories becomes more ominous.

Since the mid-90s a new Japanese horror cinema has taken over movie theaters worldwide, revealing a new facet of horror while at the same time overturning the established genre. Productions such as *The Ring* (1998), *Rasen* (1998), *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2000) introduced the Western public to the pale ghosts with their characteristic white dresses and long black hair and demonstrated a new way to film horror (with concurrent influences on American, European, Latin American and Asian cinemas). One of the most important features of these new horror films is the emphasis on the ghost as a source of terror. After the long reign of slashers and serial killers of the 80's and 90's– Freddy Krueger, Michael Myers, Jason Voorhees, Leatherhead–ghosts repopulated the filmic space in the new century.

These Japanese ghosts are different from those that could be imitated by using a sheet: they are more aggressive and mostly representative of children or women; they seek revenge and punishment for those who are unfortunate enough to be caught in their path, whether consciously or unconsciously. These ghosts need to exact revenge on whoever wronged them, no matter how extreme the means necessary to carry it out. This representation of ghosts relates to other ways of portraying angry spirits, as Jay McRoy affirms: "[l]ong a staple within Japanese literary and dramatic arts, the *onryou*, or "avenging spirit" motif, remains an exceedingly popular and vital component of contemporary Japanese horror cinema" (75). The centrality of revenge in Japanese ghost lore fits perfectly with Quiroga's literary interests. Revenge as a narrative motor appears in a great deal of his fiction, in stories as important as "La gallina degollada" ('The Decapitated Chicken' 1909) and "El mono que asesinó" ('The Monkey that Killed' 1909-11).

One of the major innovations within contemporary Japanese horror is how the ghosts move both within and through the film. They can now move further through technology, which means that they are no longer confined to physical spaces, such as haunted houses or cemeteries. As Mitsuyo Wada Marciano states in her article "J-horror: New Media 's Impact on Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema," technology is used "as a medium for the horrific" (20) and in this "medium of transportation" lies part of the novelty and attractiveness of this kind of films. For Wada Marciano "the appeal of J-Horror films can be seen in their textual elements drawn from the urban topography and the pervasive use of technology, elements which are, at once, particular and universal" (18).

Urban topography and technology are essential to the film *The Ring* by Hideo Nakata. One of the most important movies of the new wave of Japanese horror cinema–based on the 1991 novel by Kôji Suzuki–the story follows the rumors of a videotape that kills everyone who sees it exactly one week after viewing. The detailed investigation of the videotape and its viewers leads Reiko and Ryuyi, the main characters, to discover Sadako, a terrifying ghost who created the curse (and the cursed video) and who seeks revenge both on those who killed her and those who find the movie. After the death of Ryuyi, Reiko discovers that the only way to placate and stop the ghost is by creating more copies of the video, triggering a circularity without end (connected with the viral nature of the videotape).

The viewer learns that the goal of the curse is its infinite repetition: the only effective way to prevent the deaths is to make the person who has seen the video show it to someone else, and so on, thus ensuring the continuation of the cycle. As Eric White asserts: "[w]e thus learn that while the curse cannot permanently be dispelled, its fulfillment can be postponed indefinitely by means of a simple technological expedient" (41). Ghosts are thus able to move through electronic media and create it by their own volition: Sadako creates a cursed video that allows her to randomly "choose" the person who will die and is at the same time her way to access and cross the surface of the TV (the screen of the TV). As in "El espectro", this Japanese ghost uses the surface of the screen as the perfect portal to connect the worlds of the dead and the living, carrying out her vengeance against the living. In the climax of the film, Sadako's ghost comes out of the TV with unnatural movements, paralizing the protagonist and killing him with fear.

Both in the Japanese film and in the Uruguayan short story, the movies – the videotape in the first and the celluloid and its projection in the second–are the vehicle that transports vengeful ghosts, while the screen is the threshold that allows their mobilization and their entry from one world to another. The screen becomes an area of transition for specters that emerge from death and appear as surface themselves in flat mediums via viewing devices. They no longer appear as site-specific ghosts, haunting a particular place. Instead they move through the surface of the TV, the lens of the camera, and in the case of other Japanese and Asian movies, the screens of computers and cellphones.[5]

In both cases, the ghosts themselves become surfaces, enabling a greater and better dispersion of themselves in a world full of technological gadgets, fulfilling their goals in a more effective manner. This characteristic connects the literary and cinematic ghosts who surf the screens

with the enunciation of phantoms as surface effects made by the French philosopher Giles Deleuze in his book *Logique du sens* (*Logic of Sense* 1969).[6] He refers to phantasms as a possible topic for philosophical discussion, combining their use with the use that they have typically been afforded in literature and psychoanalysis, expanding the possibilities of dialogue and mobility for the ghost/phantasm. Deleuze takes the term phantasm from psychoanalysis, acknowledging its connections with Freudian (and post-Freudian) formulations, but he qualifies it, including twists that bring his conception of phantasm nearer to the cinematic and literary idea of the "ghost."[7]

This revaluation of phantoms plays a major role in the Deleuzian idea of reverse Platonism (central in the *Logic of Sense*). In the formulations of the Greek philosopher, phantasms are rejected as a vulgar form of simulacrum that prevented the development of more advanced forms of the idea. Deleuze rejects Plato and decides to return to the stoics and their vision of events: for the French philosopher, the phantasm is a pure event that is independent of the battle between the real and the imaginary, concerned only with the corporal state of affairs and its relation with the event as a movement between states. The phantasm moves between seeing and being seen, inhabiting a space of liminality while at the same time remaining undifferentiated. Borrowing the idea of the surface from the stoic philosophers, for whom the events happened in the surface of the bodies, Deleuze, as Stephan Günzel asserts, "pleads for a philosophy of the 'surface', which is neither transcended nor subtranscended by a signifier, a subject, or a god towards the level of meaning, nor toward a sublevel of the 'empirical' world" (*Immanence and Deterritorialization*).

In this formulation, the phantasm rises from the depths (of death, the tomb, or haunted houses) and becomes a product of the surface, created in a specific moment during the formation of the surfaces; a product that can be expressed only by the interplay of grammatical transformations and using prepositions, where no depth is allowed and where both transformation and recombination are possible. In this sense, it allows the emergence of new forms of organization. According to Deleuze:

> It belongs as such to an ideational surface over which it is produced as an effect. It transcends inside and outside, since its topological property is to bring "its" internal and external sides into contact, in order for them to unfold onto a single side. This is why the phantasm-event is submitted to a double causality, referring to the external and internal causes whose result in depth it is, and also to a quasi-cause which

> "enacts" it at the surface and brings it into communication with all the other event-phantasms. (*Logic* 211)

Deleuze raises the issue that the phantasm can move from one space to another with great ease, eliminating the distance between psychic spaces and systems thanks to superficial movements, "going from consciousness to the unconscious and vice versa, from the nocturnal to the diurnal dream, from the inner to the outer and conversely, as if it itself belonged to a surface dominating and articulating both the unconscious and the conscious, or to a line connecting and arranging the inner and the outer over two sides" (Deleuze 21). This formulation relates the phantasms proposed by Deleuze with the ghosts enunciated both by Quiroga, as well as by the aforementioned Japanese filmmakers.

These beings use surfaces as areas of movement and spaces in which to dismiss the depth of the body, and through this movement they become simulations of themselves through technological apparatuses. Thanks to these simulations, they rise from the depths as surface effects that can both propagate a more effective curse and affect more surfaces in a horizontal movement. For authors like Eric White the simulation becomes important in movies like *The Ring* where it is necessary to make a copy of the copy (and so on *ad infinitum*) to escape the curse: "This introduction of the motif of the simulacrum–understood as the copy of a copy–is of considerable interpretative consequence. It turns out that Sadako's revenge upon a cruel world entails the inauguration of a new vary continually from an always already lost original" (138). Sadako creates a video that must be reproduced to ensure her own simulation since her body is buried in a pit. She emerges from the depths and becomes, through the cursed video where she herself is simulated, an effect on the surface capable of crossing the screen of the television and killing the spectator through the fear that she produces in them. Wyoming also emerges from the screen as a ghostly simulation of the dead man buried far away from the theater where Grant loses his life.

The ghosts in these films are not only dealing with surfaces in the movie; they are dealing with the movie as a surface, as a flat space where the images make sense only by themselves and their movement. As Deleuze asserts, "[i]t is only when movement becomes automatic that the artistic essence of the image is realized: *producing a shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral systems directly*" (*Cinema* 156). The surface of images and movement makes possible what Deleuze called the "*spiritual automaton*", the shock of the movement as it passes through the thoughts of the viewer. This shock is reinforced in these kinds of movies, where the

ghosts move in the same, or a similar technological register as the cinema: the images, and the connection between them traveling on the surface of the film. In this sense, the surface–and the screen as surface functions as an in-between "space", both ominous and accursed, fluid and penetrable by nature. It is this ambiguous nature of the surface that makes ghosts, their revenge and their perpetuation possible.

When everyone is a ghost

Complementing and going further with the idea of cinema as a mechanism to capture actors' vital movements (explored in "El espectro"), Quiroga asserts that technology can entrap the spirit of the actors, securing their place within the world of the living even after their deaths. This is the premise of the short story "El puritano," enunciated by the ghost of a dead actor who meets at night in the studio with other deceased performers:

> The photographic impression on the tape, shaken by the speed of the machines, excited by the burning light of the bulbs, galvanized by the incessant projection, has deprived our sad bones of the peace that should reign over them. We are dead, no doubt, but our dumbness is not total. An intangible over-life, just enough warmth to not be ice rules and animates our specters. (416)

The supposed peacefulness of death is interrupted by incessant movement and projection, "over-life" as the narrator calls it, motivated by the movement of the projection machines that animate the ghosts of the dead actors whose lives were captured photographically and cinematically. As well-behaved ghosts, these beings roam sets, corridors and closets that were once their workplace, haunting the studios with a grim determination. They are not vengeful or violent ghosts, ones that spend their time frightening or seeking revenge on the living; on the contrary, it seems that they are passive in relation to their situation, defining themselves as "Ghosts of what we have been [that] continue a subtle parody of life" (417).

The projection of their films is their curse, the anchor that keeps them fixed to the earthly world, because every time one of their films is presented in Hollywood they must act it and relive it again, or at least be present and receive in their specters the "fines impacts of a new projection." The ghosts of "El puritano" show from the beginning the mechanism by which they have become what they are, both on a textual and a metatextual level. The cinema and its technology has sentenced them not to death but rather—in a tragicomic twist of the idea of gaining immortality through art—

to repeat constantly the roles that made them famous. Unlike Duncan Wyoming in "El espectro," who emerges from the screen by will, these ghosts are what they are only because of the technology that has caught them on tape and has forced them to replicate themselves in the projection.

There is no crime or murder to avenge, or unresolved situations that require their presence, only a constant haunting (sometimes interrupted by the projections). Quiroga takes a handful of Hollywood actors and displaces them from their contexts and movies, relocating them in a language (Spanish) and in an environment that is alien to them and from which they cannot escape. The dressing room that serves as a meeting place is then presented as a clear metaphor for their new reality: they are reusable and reused beings who, like clothes used in movies, can be changed and recycled, returning to their origins.

The ghostly monotony of the group is changed and transformed by the arrival of an actress - an unnamed actress, only called the pronoun "Ella" (she) by the narrator and easily associated with any number of silent film divas. She is described as a "beautiful and vivid star, who one night made its entry in the cloakroom between us, dead" (417, my translation). The narrator makes sure to clarify that although dead, she has certain vitality that the other ghosts do not posses. This vitality comes, paradoxically, from being suicidal, having killed herself over an unrequited love for a puritanical man who loved her but refused to leave his wife and son.

The actress is presented, then, as a passionate woman who decides to commit suicide after not having her love reciprocated and becomes a tormented spirit with pending business in the world of the living. She is the only ghost that lives and moves through the studios that has a personal reason not to rest, to haunt her former workplace. This characteristic also differentiates her behavior in relation to the films, as stated by the narrator:

> Because unlike what happened with us, she lived halfway, suffering faithfully the passion of her characters. When our films were shown, we, as I have already noted, faded from the party. She did not. She remained lying there, wrapped in cold, with an anxious and breathless expression . . . when the screening was completed she lay down on the couch expressing her grief . . . It is as if I were the character! ... (418, my translation)

Using images of Gothic romantic stories, Quiroga stages an impossible love that only death interrupted, but that continues to manifest itself in the form of a painful love affair between a dead actress who feels her lover's gaze through the screen and a man who contemplates the last remnants

of the life of his beloved in a movie. The screen, which serves as a portal in other stories, becomes an obstacle in this one, a barrier imposed by the will of her puritanical lover, making the puritan's suicide the only way to break the screen.

Unlike other Quiroga's cinematographic stories ("El espectro", "El vampiro") where the title includes the main character and is somewhat explanatory, the title "El puritano" is a little darker, placing more emphasis on the character of the puritan Dougald Mac Namara and bypassing the actress –who at first appears to be the central character. Why name this story in his "honor" if the plot revolves principally around the ghosts of dead actors? Despite not being able to conjure ghosts at will, Mac Namara has a strong sense of duty to his wife and son - dictated by their religious and moral principles and his Puritanism—a conviction that leads to the development of his initial resistance to the advances of the actress, and then, the rupture of those principles and beliefs to commit suicide with the end goal of facilitating a reunion with her.

Puritanism works then as a trigger of the action in the story, the gears that allow a break in the ghostly normality of the dead actors. This puritanism, typical of the *razas rubias* (blonde races), seems to be also an important condition for the cultivation and production of a movie in the terms in which Quiroga considered it valid. According to the writer, the films of the *razas latinas* do not have the necessary level of realism in their representations to tell a compelling story, to represent reality. Precisely for this reason it is possible to conceive of the cinema as a source of horror, for its ability to replicate and ominously represent reality, to create doubles and ghosts that move through the screens and swarm the cinemas.

This ominous side of cinema and film technology—that steals the lives of actors and allows the mobilization of ghosts—is shared by other media and information systems such as TV, cell phones, and computers (all of them equipped with screens), as Asian filmmakers frequently remind us. It is the case of Kiyoshi Kurosawa, a well-known Japanese director who in his film *Kairo* (*Pulse* 2001) shows an Internet haunted by ghosts, that not only allows them to travel and pass through the computer screen but is also able to transform Internet users into ghosts. As Jerry White asserts in his study on Kurosawa's films:

> Released at the height of the *Ringu* phenomenon, *Pulse* bears some plot similarities to that trendsetter, the most obvious being a ghostly virus spread through the use of technology . . . *Pulse's* plot revolves around another mainstay of modern technology– the Internet–and though logging on the "cursed" Web site produces nothing good,

> the ramifications are more ambiguous and thematically ambitious than *Ringu's* fatal deadline. (162)

What is an isolated phenomenon in "El espectro" (or at least unique to the narration), and a continuation *ad infinitum* in *Ringu,* is viral in *Pulse,* given the speed of the Internet: people disappear leaving only a human imprint on the walls after visiting a cursed web site, a phenomenon that seems to be happening elsewhere in Tokyo. Although the curse is "transmitted" through a specific web page, the Internet is presented as an ominous "space," full of spirits that got trapped and are looking to re-enter the world of the living using computer screens as portals. White describes the sinister moment when Ryosuke Kawashima, one of the main characters of the film, accesses the Internet for the first time: "One night he decides to sign up and is greeted with a series of creepy images, black-and-white snippets of lonely people, obviously from the point of view of the computer . . . The computer asks: 'Would you like to meet a ghost?'" (166).

The ghosts that appear on the web page move both on the surface and through the surface of the computer screen and extend their influence and transformation as the movie continues. Almost every screen of every technological appliance becomes haunted by these entities and is used by them as a medium of transportation and communication: computers (because of the Internet "virus"), TVs (attacked by constant interference) and cell phones (with disembodied voices asking for help). Technology is presented, as in the other narratives, as a *medium* for transforming and transporting ghosts, as a space that provide surfaces for the spirits to emerge from the depths of death and perform their duties (be they of revenge or communication). Thus, ghosts become more effective in scaring and performing one of the most important functions of their status as beings who return from the grave: talking about unspeakable, inexpressible subjects.

In Japanese legends, there is a specific ghost that fits the description of a being that has died in pain and anger, seeking to reveal a secret and exact revenge: the *yūrei* (幽霊). They are ghosts of abused or murdered humans (mostly women) who died burdened with great sorrow, in circumstances that have not been clarified, and are condemned to live in an in-between space amid the mortal and the spiritual world. As Brenda Jordan affirms:

> This in-between world is uncertain and ambiguous; in this state angry or unhappy ghosts can reappear to wreak havoc and haunt their former residences. Powerfully gripping emotions such as spite, love, loyalty, jealousy, hatred, or sorrow can bring a

> spirit back into the world of humanity. Once manifested, the ghost remains until released from its obsession. A great many of these unfortunates are female. (25)

These ghosts (main characters both in *The Ring* and in *Pulse*) have the burden to remind themselves and others of the violence that produced their deaths, in some cases as a warning and in others as revenge. Sadako must remind the viewers of the cursed video (in a sinister and sometimes fatal way) that she was tortured and murdered for being different, while the ghosts of *Pulse*–most of them nameless–"talk" about the profound loneliness that afflicts many members of Japanese society, and their bizarre form of seeking company is dragging Internet users into their afterlife. In this sense, White asserts that *Pulse* is a movie about isolation, and the ghosts that terrorize characters and viewers sometimes can be seen as (living) humans that are so isolated as to seem dead: "The nature of ghosts is one of *Pulse's* more complex questions . . . True 'ghosts' could possibly be humans themselves, disconnected entities floating through life with little or no ability to affect their environment" (169).[8]

Whether because of an advanced degree of social isolation or because of a ghostly virus, the future presented in *Pulse* could not be more devastating: Kurosawa confronts us with a deserted city—almost everyone has died or has been absorbed by the network–and the few survivors can only observe how the city falls apart. It is worth nothing that at the end of the film Michi and the ship's captain, the only survivors of the film, decide to escape Tokyo en route to Latin America in search of survivors of the virus, which we now know is global. Unfortunately, as we know, they will find plenty of ghosts there, some of them as old as Quiroga's stories.

Ghosts staged by Quiroga work in a similar fashion, passing through the surface of the screen to make visible something that has been silenced. In "El espectro" it is the betrayal of friends and lovers, and in "El puritano" it is both the betrayal of the lover who refuses to leave his family and triggers the suicide of the heroine, as well as the technological/cinematographic mechanism that require that ghosts of dead actors reenact their movies each time the movie is screened. Quiroga reminds us that science allows the manifestation of the supernatural, but only because science itself is haunted, haunted and sometimes cursed by the desire for knowledge of a cinephile and inhabited by ghosts that can move more fluidly through magnetic tapes, photographs and cinema screens. As Piotrek Świątkowski asserts in relation to the utility of Deleuzian phantasms, a "properly constructed phantasm allows for a mobility and a continuous sensitivity to the shifting field of problems" (1).

In all four cases (the two short stories and the two movies) an important part of the horror is derived from the technology that creates devices that are able to capture vital moments as well as mobilize ghosts. This is precisely because *The Ring* is not the only *place* where "cursed" videos expand uncontrollably, or where information spreads virally. Since the late nineties of the twentieth century, the J-Horror movie phenomenon has expanded, creating new regional forms (such as *K-Horror* in South Korea and other Thai and Vietnamese variants), leaving its mark on many contemporary horror films and TV series. As Wada Marciano asserts, "the global circulation of J-horror has indeed depended on the less controlled cultural contingencies linked to the rise of digital networking and film piracy concurrent with the popularization of DVD since the late 1990s" (31). The number of sequels, prequels and remakes of the Japanese films also talks about this movement through surfaces: one sequel and one prequel of *The Ring* in Japan (*Ringu 2*, 1999 and *Ringu 0: Basudei*, 2000) and a remake in the United States (directed by Gore Verbinski in 2002), and a remake of *Pulse* also produced in the United States (directed by Jin Sonzero in 2006).[9]

However, it is important to note that although the author and directors find and describe frightening elements within technology, their positions are not technophobic, nor do they advocate a return to a pre-technical world. Instead, recognizing the potential horrors associated with the advance of technology and describing the screens as surfaces that connect different worlds, they leave open the possibility of constant change, of perennial movement and transformation that at any time can be as destructive as they are constructive. These ghosts that move through screens become surface events in constant becoming—in Deleuzian terms—, that is, in constant transformation, almost to the point of becoming something else.

But the ghosts are not the only ones who have mutated: the horror genre has also been transformed, leading to numerous variations and reinterpretations of the figure of the ghost. With their mobilization from the depths to the surface and their use and appropriation of technology, ghosts and their stories are interpreted as events, capable not only of scaring readers and viewers, but also of building narratives powerful enough to persist as a curse of memory. Therefore, although there is no explicit continuation between Quiroga's cinematic stories and the movies directed by Nakata and Kurosawa, it is possible to connect them through their unflinching look at technology and its resultant ghosts, who, breaking with the depths of space and time, transgress screens and present themselves to viewers as spectral manifestations of memory. The curse is active, and the only escape is paradoxically through its very propagation.

Notes

[1] Quiroga's work is not unknown in Japan. Several of the short stories contained in his book *Cuentos de la selva* (*Jungle Tales*) were published as individual children's books in Japan at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Such is the case for "Las medias de los flamencos" ('The Flamingos' Stockings'), "La tortuga gigante" ('The Giant Turtle'), and "La gama ciega" ('The Blind Deer'), all published by Shinseken Limited in 2001. A complete translation of the *Cuentos de la selva* became available in 2017, published by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

[2] According to Uruguayan scholar Pablo Rocca, all four cinematic short stories "were published in magazines and newspapers from Buenos Aires: 'Miss Dorothy Phillips, mi esposa,' was published as a serial saga in the popular collection *La Novela del Día*, n.º 12, on February 1919; 'El espectro,' appeared in *El Hogar*, n.º 615, on July 29th 1921; 'El puritano' was published in *La Nación* on July 11th, 1926; and lastly, 'El vampiro,' came out in the same newspaper *[La Nación*] on September 11th, 1927" (33, my translation)

[3] In *La moralidad en el cine. William Hart*, Quiroga asserts that "Hart personifies, over all, the man" (34) highlighting the strength of his masculine character. Quiroga admired William Hart because he saw in Hart's physical attributes a reflection of his "genuine" interior character rather than any standard of male beauty.

[4] Grant is a recurrent character in Quiroga's filmic stories. Rocca describes him as "invented by Quiroga, although with a last name that keeps certain double references: of an Argentine patrician, frequently of British origin, and of the protagonist of a novel or American film. The character refers to a 30-something man from Buenos Aires, single, of lean fortune and with an imagination excited by the beauty of actresses from trendy films." (33, my translation)

[5] In *One Missed Call* (2003)–first incursion of the Japanese filmmaker Takashi Miike in the *J-Horror*—the ghosts choose their victims among those who are on the phone's memory of the previous victim, sending messages in the setting where the time and date of death will happen, as well as a message with the voice of the dead person.

[6] The importance of surfaces is a topic that has attracted the attention of theorists in several disciplines. For instance, psychologist James J. Gibson used it in his studies on visual perception. For him "the visual space-perception is reducible to the perception of visual surfaces" and "distance, depth, and orientation, together with the constancy of objects, may all be derived from the properties of an array of surfaces" (367). American philosopher Avrum Stroll explains the concept in epistemological terms, and relates it with geographical notions used to organize the world, such as "border"" or "boundary."

[7] The idea of the phantom has an important place in Freudian theory, connected mostly with his works on phantasy. These formulations were later developed by Melanie Klein, for whom unconscious phantasies play the part of the Freudian unconscious wish. Also, following the Freudian postulates, the psychoanalyst Nicholas Abrahams defines the phantom (in *Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology*) as a "metapsychological fact" which haunts "not the dead but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (287).

[8] Isolation is a prevalent topic in Quiroga's narratives as well as in his own life story. Short stories such as "El almohadón de plumas" ('The Feather Pillow') and "El vampiro" present protagonists that live in isolation despite being in relationships or being adored by a public, respectively. Quiroga himself experienced isolation in the jungle of Misiones in multiple moments, including after the suicide of his first wife Ana María Cires and after separation from his second wife, María Elena Bravo.

[9] As Stuart Galbraith IV and Paul Duncan affirm "such films generated a lucrative and initially wholly unexpected income in the form of American remakes (*Pulse, Dark Water, One Missed Call*). In some cases, the original filmmakers have used these as stepping stones toward careers in Hollywood" (168-69).

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