Fantastic Historicity

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History and historicity are two of the most persistent themes in the magical realist mode. Nearly all definitions of literary magical realism evoke history as essential to explanations of the genre. History and historical representation are key elements that distinguish magical realism from surrealism and fantasy. What Wendy B. Faris describes as the second characteristic of the magical, the presence of a detailed phenomenal world, necessarily involves the historical settings of these stories and their importance for the narrative action (7). Kenneth S. Reeds argued that the representation of the historical past is one of its defining characteristics. Reeds defined magical realism as the combination of the neo-fantastic, defined simply as the naturalization of the fantastic in reality, and what he refers to as the "recasting of history," which means the representation of history from perspectives that have been ignored or erased from mainstream historical consciousness (40). The source of the importance of history for magical realism as a mode can be found in the early texts that replaced the individualistic perspective of surrealism with the collectivist ideology of magical realism. Jean-Pierre Durix noted that early texts in the magical realist genre, such as Juan Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, were written as responses to how surrealist literature uses unconscious fantasies to explore individualistic desires (114). In contrast, Durix argues that magical realism uses the creative imagination to explore collective unconscious fantasies (114).

Every genre, every text, narrative or otherwise, regardless of its subject matter, evokes the historical dimension. One of the basic premises for historical materialist interpretation is the mediated nature of History itself. We can never access History directly because its ontological status does not allow for direct observation. History, according to Fredric Jameson, is like the Lacanian Real: it is that which escapes all symbolization and imaginary constructions but nevertheless determines and erupts

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in those spheres (*Political Unconscious* 35). Historical materialist interpretation argues that History is not a text but the ground for all textual creation and interpretation. Magical realism, more so than other genres, takes this ground as one of its primary raw materials for narrative creation. In literature, magical realism continues the focus on historicity from so-called "historical fiction," which was a popular subgenre of sorts in European realism. Georg Lukács theorized that historical fiction represented a new form of realism in literature that avoided anachronous representations of the past. Real historical fiction, literature that rendered the past as radically different from the present with its own structures of feeling and modes of experience, can be found in the realist fiction of Stendhal, Tolstoy, and Balzac. John Burt Foster Jr. refers to this experience as "felt history," the powerful way that literature depicts history as the pressure placed upon the characters or lyrical personae within the work (273). Felt history, as described by Foster, is historical representation that captures the experiential pressures and structures of feeling of a given period. This differs from historical fictions that focus on leaders, politicians, general trends, and overviews of important events. Lukács argued that historical fiction expresses the significant historical dimensions through the representation of so-called "mediocre" characters: the everyday, average people whose personal struggles are written perfectly in such a way that they encapsulate the social problems of the historical setting (Lukács 38). Historical fiction combines adept historical awareness with intricate character studies and high drama so that the representation and comprehension of history as a process is an essential part of the reading experience. Magical realist literature continues this emphasis on the historical dimension, but in forms that differ from European realist historical fiction. History in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is of central importance to the narrative, even though the town of Macondo is not a real historical place. García Márquez created it as an amalgamation of rural spaces in Colombia: it changes according to the collective traumas of the citizens, and then it eventually disappears in a torrent of winds when the final member of the Buendia family dies. In contrast, *Pedro Páramo* is set in Comala, Mexico, but Rulfo has written it as a real ghost town after the Mexican Revolution occurred and the main character starved the town to death. The emphasis on historicity found in historical fiction is transcoded into magical realist allegories.

Other magical realist novels, such as Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, establish a concrete historical setting, even though they include such fantastic events as Oskar's growth paralysis and Saleem's super sense of smell. These magical elements are supplementary dimensions that the magical realist mode uses to expand the horizon of experience and historical consciousness and to confront the secular humanist ideologies inherent in realist forms. Secular humanism was an important ideological discourse for European realism and understandings of human history. The belief in empiricist reason as an epistemological method for obtaining knowledge, and a concrete world that can be captured by literature and dissected accurately through cogent historical analysis, are preconditions

for historical fiction. The separation of real human history from religious cosmology and eschatological understandings of human history from European Enlightenment made history an object for understanding and literary representation. In general, this separation was tied to the gradual shift from feudalism to capitalism and the changes in the political realm put forward by the bourgeois revolution that instituted democratic norms into Western societies (Lukács 22). The creation of markets for labour, commodities, services, and a governable population required the institution of nationalist ideologies that even the members of society with the lowest economic and social capital would adopt. The gradual but widespread incorporation of nationalism into the social collective resulted in the historical process becoming an object of analysis, because narratives were constructed about the nation-state for the population. In England and France, this took the form of identifying irrational past social habits, and in Germany, the interest in the past had to do with finding prior national greatness in order to revive this greatness for the future (Lukács 23). The French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic wars made the past a collective experience that affected all classes of society. European realism subsequently assimilated this historical consciousness into its narrative creations.

Magical realist films' most common way of representing history is through stories that depict an anachronous collective space that is out of sync with the dominant culture's historical development. Like Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* the literal ghost town in *Pedro Páramo*, and the island filled with human souls in *The Invention of Morel*, this anachronous community is isolated from mainstream society. Characters/inhabitants could be physically/geographically isolated, as in *Underground* (1995), *Daughters of the Dust* (1992), *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018), *Dark at Noon* (1993), and *Nucingen House* (2008). They could be isolated through magical means, like the frozen-in-time television world of *Pleasantville* (1998) or the magical kingdom below the surface of the Earth in *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006). They could be socially isolated, like the circus group that Oskar joins in *The Tin Drum* (1979), or the foreigner status that Malyanov is given when working on his medical research in Turkmenistan in *Days of Eclipse* (1988). The depiction of the anachronous community is not homogeneous across the films because each deals with a particular historical episode, but this narrative trope is the primary way in which magical realist films visualize the historical past.

Happy as Lazzaro is a magical realist film from Italian director Alice Rohrwacher, set during an undisclosed time in the past in a rural estate called Inviolata, which is stuck in a feudalist mode of production with fifty workers living on a sharecrop farm. The film references the setting of Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978), a film about the pastoral existence of peasants living near the end of the nineteenth century in Italy. The sharecrop arrangement is enforced by the estate's owner Marchesa Alfonsina de Luna (Nicoletta Braschi), who pays each worker a small wage, but the workers are always in debt after each month because the cost of their food and shelter is always more than they make. The community is so isolated from the rest of

Italy, which criminalized sharecropping in 1977, that de Luna is able to maintain this outmoded form of exploitation without any intervention from the government. It is not until de Luna's son, Tancredi (Luca Chikovani), conspires with Lazzaro (Adriano Tardiolo) to fake his own kidnapping as a prank on his mother that this community is disturbed. News of the kidnapping reaches the local police, and they investigate de Luna's farm to discover her illegal feudalist operation and the lack of education facilities for the children. De Luna is arrested, and her criminal operation becomes known in Italy as "The Great Swindle." During this conflict, Lazzaro accidentally falls off a cliff and knocks himself unconscious. He wakes up approximately forty years into the future to find that all of his old friends, with the exception of Tancredi (Tommaso Ragno), are virtually homeless, living on the outskirts of society as beggars and scavengers.

The film uses Biblical imagery to code the settings and characters. Lazzaro is a strange combination of Lazarus of Bethany from the Gospel of John and Jesus the Messiah from the New Testament. Both characters in the Bible die and then come back to life: Lazarus is healed by Jesus after being dead for four days, and Jesus is healed by God the Father after being dead for three days. Lazzaro was presumed dead by his friends, so when he meets them again, they believe he is back from the dead, when in fact he traveled through time after he fell off the cliff. The sharecropping farm Inviolata is coded as Eden, an ironic version of the pastoral paradise in Genesis where humans lived in perfect community with nature and God. Inviolata is a demonic version of the Edenic paradise, in the sense of Northrop Frye's terminology, in which *demonic* means a parody of divine imagery. Every person's connection to nature is mediated through feudalist exploitation, however, compared to the present-day living conditions that the aged versions of the characters have moved into, Inviolata provided shelter and food and a modicum of security, whereas their lives in the modernized world offer them nothing. Lazzaro assumes the role of the redemptive saviour in the contemporary period when he tries to rob a bank for his poor friends, only to be shot by the police after he fails to escape. The anachronous community living as sharecropper workers and their insertion into the market system provide a dialectical depiction of existence under two modes of production. Neither mode is satisfactory, and the religious institution, the impotence of which is embodied by Lazzaro, is shown to be a useless force in creating a less exploitative system of relations. Like other magical realist texts, *Happy as Lazzaro* uses the magical tropes of time-travel to dramatize historical conflict in Italian history.

Julie Dash's now-famous independent film *Daughters of the Dust* (1992) is a cinematic example of Carpentier's theory of magical realism, *lo real maravilloso*. Carpentier's theory of magical realism locates the magic within the anthropological status of the work. The magic that is combined with the realism stems from the culture itself. Dash's work is situated at the end of a new wave—the "L.A. Rebellion"—in American cinema that began with an ethnographic film program, called "Film and Social Change," in the UCLA film school. This movement was largely influ-

enced by the production methods of Italian Neorealism and New Latin American cinema, along with Senegalese films that told stories explicitly about Black culture and history. The L.A. Rebellion positioned itself against two modes of signification in American cinema: Hollywood narrative films (including the New Hollywood trends) and Blaxploitation cinema. Dash and others from the L.A. Rebellion maintained that these two modes of production barely registered with Black culture and history; mainstream Hollywood did so by ignoring Black experiences, and Blaxploitation was too focused on entertainment. Both narrative strains lacked authenticity, which was corrected by the major films of the L.A. Rebellion: Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1978), Billy Woodberry's Bless *Their Little Hearts* (1984), and Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.

Dash's film is set shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, in 1902, on an island off the coast of South Carolina, called Saint Helena. The island is remarkable because of its cultural demographics compared to the rest of the United States. Most

of the residents are descendants of slaves but have been able to maintain a degree of cultural separation from the rest of the country because of their geographical isolation. Their ancestors also had immunities to very common illnesses such as malaria and yellow fever, which deterred European settlers from taking over this island but rather allowed them to live in relative peace. The *Gullah* culture on the island has maintained many of the traditions of African culture that were erased by the forced migration of their ancestors. For example, the hand signals used by two men in the film reference the nonverbal styles of communication from ancient African secret societies which were passed down over thousands of years (Dash 380). *Gullah* is a *criollo* culture, much like the culture of the Caribbean writers in Central America that Carpentier discussed in his essay on *lo real maravilloso*. Carpentier argued that in the *criollo* culture, a combination of European colonialist culture and African culture not fully erased by the former, the *criollo* people are aware of being Other, of being unique, and being symbiotic, which is an essential aspect of *lo real maravilloso* (100). This relative protective separation from European colonialism preserved the so-called "pagan" spirituality of African cultures, which survived in *Gullah*. The emphasis on ghosts and the spiritual realm, totems to fend off evil spirits, alternative forms of medicine, musical traditions that are more rhythmic than melody-based and more collective, with the call-and-response song forms that encourage audience participation in the music, are all aspects of *Gullah* culture that stand in opposition to Eurocentric cultural forms.

Dash's film examines this culture through the story of the Peazant family, who are deliberating about moving to the urban spaces in the mainland United States. She presents the *Gullah* culture as a matriarchal system of relations in which the head of the Peazant family is Nana Peazant (Cora Lee Day), who has no interest in moving away from Saint Helena Island, but the younger generation in her town want to modernize. Nana Peazant represents the *Gullah* culture and African ancestry in response to younger generations wanting to forego their cultural heritage because it

clashes with modernity. The younger members of the family view Nana Peazant with suspicion and mild contempt because of her adherence to the pagan elements of the *Gullah* culture, which is in conflict with the Christian culture of American society that the young people want to join. Viola (Cheryl Lynn Bruce) is one of the younger family members who wants to migrate everyone to the mainland. She came from Philadelphia with a friend named Mr. Snead (Tommy Redmond Hicks), a photographer and educated American who wants to document the migration, a stand-in for the ethnographic gaze that exploits otherized peoples. There is a side-story involving another character named Eula (Alva Rogers), who is married to Nana Peazant's grandson Eli (Adisa Anderson). Eula is pregnant with a child the family believes to be the product of a rape by an American from the mainland that occurred when Eula was away from the island on vacation. The family refers to the fetus as the Unborn Child (Kai-Lynn Warren), a young girl whose perspective we hear on the voiceover track that alternates with Nana Peazant's thoughts throughout the film. She occasionally shows up as a ghost to the family as a messenger from the future Peazant family. Another important member of the Peazant family is Iona (Bahni Turpin), who is in love with St. Julien Lastchild (M. Cochise Anderson), a young Cherokee man who lives with them on Saint Helena Island and worries about being left behind when the family leaves for the mainland. The island also has a small Muslim community, whose elder is Bilal Muhammad (Umar Abdurrahman). Bilal is the village archive: he remembers the final criminal slave ships off the coast of the island, and when he is interviewed by Snead the photographer, he tells a story about African prisoners that is the historical background for a famous local myth.

Daughters of the Dust registers historicity at the crossroads between past and future. The past is embodied in Nana Peazant, and the Unborn Child represents the unknown future of the family. As a ghost from the future, she intercedes and disrupts the intrusions on her culture. The Unborn Child doubles the enunciation of Nana Peazant, joining the perspectives of the great-grandmother and great-granddaughter into one voice that fights to preserve their *criollo* culture. Her temporal trajectory is the opposite of a ghost: she haunts the present from the future, signifying both the tradition of her people and where they might arrive once they cross this momentous transitionary moment. For most of the film, the Unborn Child is a passive narrator commenting on events; at other times, she intervenes in concrete ways. For example, when the photographer Mr. Snead is trying to photograph the Unborn Child, the Unborn Child appears in the frame and disorients him so he cannot properly document the people of the island. In another scene, she appears to Eli when he loses faith in the beliefs of ancestral spirits after he finds out that his wife may have been raped. The Unborn Child presents herself but is rejected by his lack of faith. The ghost from the future creates a doubled voice that only the relatively young and old characters of this culture can hear/register, while the others do not engage with her presence because they lack the faith required to take part in *lo real maravilloso* (Aldama 50). The circular nature of the narrating presence confronts the simplistic representa-

tion of history as a series of self-contained events that always valorizes the present as being superior to the past. *Daughters of the Dust* presents a magical realist conception of history as a loop in which the ghosts from the future convene with the harbingers of cultural traditions that are threatened by the narrow-minded reduction of all culture to Western modernity.

The most sustained engagement with historicity in magical realist cinema can be found in Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (1995). Kusturica presents the creation of an anachronous community, one that exists out of sync with other historical developments, but also as a product of significant historical events in Eastern European history. *Underground* is an example of a historical fiction narrative that uses magical realism according to the naturalization of the fantastic into the reality of the story-world rather than lapsing back into older forms such as the fantastic genre. Kusturica is one of the few directors who has used magical realism consistently throughout his oeuvre, so much so that he is regarded as the "Márquez of the Balkans" and the successor to Vittorio De Sica's use of magical realism in *Miracle in Milan* (Bertellini 104). Kusturica's early magical realist film, *Time of the Gypsies* (1988), was heavily influenced by De Sica's film, the first magical realist film to adopt the generic codes of its literary counterparts for its entire narrative. *Underground* is also influenced by De Sica's film, in addition to the work of fellow Italian director Federico Fellini, whose work is more surrealist and expressionist than magical realist, but Kusturica's hands transform the *Felliniesque* into magical realism.

Underground is a monumental work, a film that approximates the sophistication of narrative time, characters, and dramatic action of magical realist novels. It is separated into three chapters: World War II (titled "Part One: The War"), the Cold War era with Tito ruling Yugoslavia (titled "Part Two: The Cold War"), and the ethnic conflict between the states during the nationalist reign of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia (titled "Part Three: The War"). *Underground* begins with the intertitle "To our fathers and children. Once upon a time there was a country and its capital was Belgrade. April 6, 1941…" grounding the film in a concrete historical setting. The main characters, Blacky (Lazar Ristovski) and Marko (Miki Manojlovic), are two best friends who are members of the Communist party; Marko has become an arms dealer, and Blacky actively defies the Nazi occupation of Belgrade with his silly antics. Months after the Nazis have captured Belgrade, local artists and theatre performers are forced into entertaining the German military. Blacky's mistress, Nataljia (Mirjana Jokovic), becomes romantically involved with Lieutenant Franz (Ernst Stötzner) from the Nazi military so her younger, disabled brother Bata (Davor Dujmovic) can receive special treatment from the Nazis during the occupation. During an opera performance for the military, Blacky and Marko interrupt the performance, shoot Franz in the chest, and escape with Nataljia. Blacky and Marko force Nataljia onto a ship and coerce her to marry Blacky. The sham wedding is interrupted by Franz, who survived the gunshot because of his bulletproof vest, and his soldiers. Natalija escapes Blacky, and the Germans capture him. He is tortured endlessly, but he is so magically strong that

he burns out the machine used to electrocute prisoners. Kusturica films the torture scene in a magical realist perspective that treats Blacky as though he were a character from *Looney Tunes* cartoons, a magical realist strategy that was made popular by Tashlin and Lewis and a source of inspiration for Kusturica as a director, which led him to cast Jerry Lewis in *Arizona Dream* (1993), Kusturica's English-language film directorial debut. Marko infiltrates the military prison to save Blacky. He strangles Franz to death, and Natalija switches sides again, joining Marko and Blacky as they escape with Marko carrying Blacky in a suitcase.

Kusturica imagines the Serbian community as he depicted the Romani community in *Time of the Gypsies* and in his later film *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998). Marko and Blacky are always partying, with large groups of people of all ages playing music loudly in the streets and dancing with each other; even the animals join in when the zoo is bombed, and they roam free with the people as the geese and turkeys do with the Romani in *Black Cat, White Cat*. Kusturica portrays Serbian people as a culture of excess, modelled after the Romani people that he loves so much, but his depiction foregoes journalistic and historical realism. Eventually, Blacky and his wife (Mirjana Karanovic), along with a devoted group of anti-fascist rebels, are trapped underneath Marko's grandfather's house. The underground cellar began as a hide-out for Communist fighters to protect themselves and their families from the Nazi occupiers, but Marko quickly turned it into a scheme for his personal profit. The people below continuously manufacture bombs and weapons for the wartime efforts above, without knowing that World War II is over, Tito has driven out the Germans, and Blacky's best friend, Marko, has become an important party official. Marko has turned into an opportunist: he married Blacky's mistress, Natalija, and is using his old comrades to mass produce weapons that he sells on the black market. He quickly becomes rich from the work of his friends and maintains their lowly position below the ground, lying to them about the world. In Blacky's absence from the world above, Marko has turned him into a national war hero. He constructs a statue in his honour, and has turned himself into a hero as well through his association with Blacky.

So much time has passed in the underground cellar that Blacky's son Jovan (Srdjan Todorovic) has only known life underground. Marko and Natalija visit them on Jovan's wedding day, and the wedding reception becomes so raucous that Ivan's monkey Soni starts driving the tank and blows apart the cellar, freeing everyone from their captivity. Blacky and Jovan discover a series of tunnels connecting all of the European capital cities to Belgrade, and they finally escape the underground world. The depiction of animals is similar to Kusturica's representations of the importance of animals in the Romani community in his previous work. Soni is like the magical turkey in *Time of the Gypsies*: he is as intelligent as the humans around him and plays an active role in the narrative. Kusturica again characterizes the Serbian community as a Romani culture, with pagan understandings of the universe in which objects and animals are endowed with supernatural significance, inflecting dramatic scenes like this one with magical realist comedy. Even though the people in the underground

cellar are technically prisoners, Kusturica films their living conditions like an ongoing carnival, a nonstop party, and not like a drab prison full of bondage and pain. The Romani mystic beliefs on animals allows for Kusturica to ridicule the machinations of Marko by having a monkey free the people in the underground through an act of accidental liberation.

Kusturica's depiction of this anachronous community in the underground cellar is meant to signify the historical position of Yugoslavia, and the Serbian people in particular, under Tito's rule. The communist rebels are trapped in the mindset of World War II, falsely believing they are fighting a war against an enemy that no longer exists. Kusturica dramatizes this historical ignorance with the repetition of key scenes that stage the interplay between art and political history. When Blacky and Jovan escape the cellar after Soni blows it up with the tank, they inadvertently stumble onto a film set. The crew is shooting a film called *Spring Comes on a White Horse*, an adaptation of Marko's memoirs of his time during the communist resistance and his work as one of Tito's party officials in the Yugoslavian government. Marko wrote about Franz's attack on Blacky and Marko when they were forcing Natalija to marry Blacky on the boat, and turned it into state propaganda. Blacky encounters the scene again; only now it is being restaged as a film. He emerges on the other end of the battlefield, not trapped on the boat this time, and not betrayed by his mistress Natalija either, and opens fire on the actors portraying the Nazi soldiers and, most importantly, the actor playing Franz. Blacky's revenge against the Nazis for torturing him and taking his mistress is a farce. His perceptual misunderstanding, perpetuated by his profit-driven friend Marko, results in the senseless murder of innocent people. Allegorically, it functions as the conflict between a real radical progressive figure and the ideological machinations of a bureaucratic state that has rejected the progressive ideas of socialism. Blacky literally destroys the fictional construction of his past and the past of his country when he attacks the actors filming the movie adaptation of Marko's book.

Blacky's character arc represents the historical narrative of the Serbian people during the last century. He began as a sincerely devoted resistance fighter against the occupying fascist forces, but was ultimately manipulated by the government officials of his own country, represented by the craven actions of Marko and Natalija, the opportunistic collaborator. Marko manipulated Blacky, the true resistance soldier, and received praise above ground while he continued to profit as an arms dealer long after the Germans were defeated. Marko's fictional heroism, which reached its ultimate deception in a state-sponsored film devoted to his life, is turned into a tragedy when Blacky escapes his historical prison and blasts apart the historical misinformation created by the Yugoslavian government. *Underground* uses this slapstick scene to represent how the Yugoslavian state used restagings of their triumphs in World War II so they could constantly exploit the Serbian people. Marko's deception of his old friends becomes so ingrained that the fictional history he has constructed begins to move him emotionally, such that when he erects the statue to his "dead" com-

rade Blacky, he almost cries at the ceremony. Kusturica is mocking how repressive state apparatuses construct false historical narratives to justify their own self-serving actions and to suppress dissent (Bertellini 85). He also implicates his own work into this story of state-organized mass deception with the obviously fake historical footage scenes in which Marko and Blacky are inserted with special effects reminiscent of those Robert Zemeckis uses in *Forrest Gump* (1994). This recalls Linda Hutcheon's observation regarding the primary strategies that postmodern films, magical realist or otherwise, represent history by implicating their own artistic forms and truth in the process of representing history. This postmodern meddling with historical archive footage is doubled in one of the final scenes when Kusturica casts himself as an arms dealer who meets with Marko before he is eventually executed for his crimes. Marko is tricked because he has been abroad too long and does not know the rules of war in the post-Tito era, which mocks Kusturica's own position as a director who has left his country to make movies elsewhere (Bertellini 89).

Kusturica condemns the Yugoslavian state during the Cold War by implicating himself and the Serbian ethno-state within the process of dealing with this historical period. The film's protagonists, Blacky and Marko, lack the traits of romantic heroes who are ostensibly destined to overthrow a corrupt regime. There is not a simple ideology of good versus evil, that places the characters into rigid ethical binaries, in the film; a narrative about Yugoslavian history and the history of a nation within the federation cannot be reduced to the ideology of good versus evil. Blacky and Marko, notwithstanding their carnivalesque actions and quirky personalities, are tragic figures who allegorize the tragedy of the Serbian people in the twentieth century. Even the decisive moment of liberation from Marko's deception is achieved by a monkey, not by Blacky, the foolhardy partisan soldier, or through a moment of conscience from Marko. In fact, Marko immediately crafts another deception that allows him and Natalija to escape to Germany and continue their illegal dealings on the arms market. This is another of Kusturica's moments of self-ridicule and mocking of Yugoslavian statesmen, where the most heroic character is a monkey. Even his human owner, Ivan, the brother of Marko, lacks the traditional qualities of a heroic character, even though he is one of the most sympathetic characters in the movie. In the first act, when the Nazis bomb Belgrade, Ivan, who works as a zookeeper, is horrified to see innocent animals murdered. He is told to ignore the baby monkey he finds in pain and to save himself, a crass gesture that Ivan ignores. Meanwhile, Blacky is eating as much food as he can and Marko is trying to have sex with an escort who eventually leaves him to hide from the bombardment while he masturbates during the chaos. In the final act, Ivan finds his brother and Natalija continuing their illegal arms deals, and he beats his brother to death in front of an inverted crucifix. Overcome with guilt, he hangs himself, an act that depicts the post-Yugoslav people's total loss of innocence and safety during the ethnoconflict of the 1990s.

The final scene of the film, after Blacky drowns in a well looking for his lost son, is a magical realist appropriation of a surrealist dream. All of the protagonists are now

dead, so the dream sequence does not correspond to one consciousness but rather to a multiplicity. Typically, surrealism locates dream sequences in an individual psyche, whether that of a character in the film or the director of the work, whereas magical realism combines the irrational dream logic of surrealism with the notion of the collective, grounding it within a realist context that surrealism totally rejects. Kusturica creates another double by duplicating the wedding scene of Jovan and Jelena that first happened in the underground cellar before Soni the monkey blew a breach in the prison with a tank. We see younger versions of all the characters happily celebrating together, asking each other for forgiveness, and partying with the Romani band in full force. The piece of land they are on suddenly breaks off and floats away in the river Drina (Bertellini 90). After the tragedy of the people from the underground, Blacky's unsuccessful search for Jovan while he became a warlord, and Marko's execution for his crimes against the people, Kusturica subverts the tragic war scenes with a celebration that circles and recaptures the atmosphere of the opening party scene. Even though he tries to undercut the tragedy of the final act, the dreamlike ending has a cynical tone to it because he represents the resolution to the conflict of Yugoslavia as an imaginary solution to real political conflicts. Kusturica dialectically exposes his own historical magical realist fiction as an ideological construction. The joyous feast at the end dramatizes the film's representation of historical representation as a constructed fairy tale, acknowledging to the audience that this is an artistic construction of real history, a tragic undertone to the reconciliation we see between the oppressors and the oppressed in the final scene. The anachronous community in Kusturica's film, a trope that is common enough for magical realist cinema that we can categorize it as one of its main *topos* with respect to historical representation, is a collective tragedy of a culture that was manipulated by the bureaucratic state, a faux-progressive party that manipulated its population by manipulated historical representations.

The anachronous community can take more literal-magical formations like that shown in the American satirical drama *Pleasantville* (1998). In this film, history is depicted through the mass medium of television, and the film covers the period that Jameson has argued was one of the most important for the representation of history in postmodern culture: the economically prosperous Eisenhower era of the 1950s (*Postmodernism* 19). *Pleasantville* presents the historical period of the 1950s through the narrative about a television show also called *Pleasantville*, which the protagonist David (Tobey Maguire) avidly watches while his twin sister Jennifer (Reese Witherspoon) enjoys her time as a popular young woman in high school. David is given a magical remote one day by a television repairman, played by famous sitcom actor Don Knotts in a metafictional cameo, which transports him into the world of Pleasantville. This televisual world represents 1950s America completely in mass media stereotypes: suburban settings, predominantly white communities, middle-class Protestant culture, and rampant sexual repression, and everything appears in black and white. The film presents the 1950s in the same way most of our current

media presents this era in contemporary works, as a culture laden with sexual repression. *Pleasantville* dramatizes the construction of nostalgic images, what Jameson correctly identified as *one* postmodernist film trend among a series of many others. Postmodern film nostalgically represents the economically prosperous times in the United States as a "lost object" of near-Edenic paradise in American history: pre-civil rights movements and at the naïve beginnings of rock and roll, and before the neo-imperialist dreams of American expansionism crashed and burned in Vietnam. The film is as much about the historical period we understand as "1950s America" as it is about the way media constructs our understanding of this period. The anachronous community that absorbs living people from the present is isolated much like the other communities represented in other magical realist historical films. However, the isolation of this community is totalizing, which becomes an allegory for the exclusive and claustrophobic nature of white suburban spaces that were created in the 1950s in the wake of World War II. The world of *Pleasantville* the series is literally closed off from the rest of America: the roads do not lead anyone outside the town of Pleasantville, and there is never any world news on the radio and television sets. This geographic, political, racial, and ideological isolation creates a community of sexually repressed subjects. Jennifer introduces Pleasantville to sex when she has intercourse with the stereotypical high-school jock character, and later on she teaches her friend about masturbation. Her friend masturbates in the bathtub, which transforms her from a black and white character to a "coloured" person. More people in the town learn about sex, desire, and intimacy, which creates an entire community of "coloured" people that now threaten the middle-class values of the suburban space. This leads to widespread conflict for the husbands and fathers living in the town, led by the mayor Big Bob, who decide to protest a nude painting of a well-known housewife of the community in the local ice cream parlour. Once everyone decides to forego white-washed representations of their world, the town starts to sell colour television sets. The highway roads now connect with the rest of the world, signifying the rupture of the real into the nostalgic images of the American 1950s that have imprisoned the town of Pleasantville. The magical element of time travel and the visual shift from black-and-white to colour dramatizes the ideological struggle over conceptions of the past that smooth over real social conflict.

Pleasantville deals explicitly with the concept of historicity as something that has been fundamentally transformed in late-capitalist culture. The film uses magical realist techniques to dramatize the construction of the historical past and the ideologies of repression that nostalgic images themselves excise from the way they put forward images of the past. *Pleasantville* is also very much a postmodern film because it is a pastiche of texts that do not deal with concrete history as older formal strategies would. It is also postmodern, in the sense of Linda Hutcheon's more expansive definition of postmodernist film, as narratives that parody the texts that they are inscribing (Hutcheon 109-10). Fredric Jameson's description of postmodern films as nostalgic films characterizes Hollywood magical realist films, such as *The Purple*

Rose of Cairo, The Green Mile (1999), *Field of Dreams* (1989), and *Midnight in Paris* (2011), but not films made outside the Hollywood system that could easily be categorized as postmodernist, such as those of Peter Greenaway or Raul Ruiz (Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film"). In fact, both Jameson and Hutcheon seem to miss the obvious point of his film analysis, which is that nostalgia is a predominantly Hollywood narrative mode that emerged in the 1970s and became increasingly popular in the 1980s and 1990s, and that describes both magical realist and postmodern films made in Hollywood (Jameson, "On Magic Realism in Film"). We can correct both Jameson's and Hutcheon's contributions to this debate by recognizing that nostalgia film aesthetics is a Hollywood narrative trend, but not necessarily a postmodern one. And if we properly categorize magical realism as a narrative mode within the larger macrocategory of postmodern aesthetics, we no longer need to define magical realist film in contradistinction to postmodernism as Jameson did. *Pleasantville*, then, is a Hollywood film that defies this trend of Hollywood magical realist films that deal with the past. In the same way that Hutcheon showed how postmodern films represent history by implicating their own formal strategies in their representation of the past, *Pleasantville* questions the ideologeme of nostalgic representations of the past. The magical realist *topos* of the anachronous collective in history exists in this film as a literal media text of the past, a fictionalized version of 1950s sitcoms for middle-class audiences, that dramatizes the confrontation between the past and the present in terms of sexual mores and artistic freedom, bourgeois values that are prevalent throughout late-capitalist media. The racial, class, and gender conflicts of the 1950s era are siphoned down to existentialist questions of sexual liberation and human freedom. Issues of anti-Black racism in the US are transformed into media formations that visualize it in terms of black-and-white cinematography and its distinction from colour television, which fails to engage historically with this significant feature of American history. However, the lack of non-radical political ideologemes in *Pleasantvill*e, or rather their absorption into bourgeois-liberal ideological discourses, does not negate this postmodern text's grappling with the idea of history while not falling back on the use of simplistic nostalgic discourses. The film evokes nostalgia so that it can be interrogated. *Pleasantville* follows Hutcheon in the general conclusion on the nature of postmodern films, magical realist or otherwise, regarding problems of historicity: these films pose questions, disassemble aesthetic forms, and show how media actively construct historical subject positions, but fail to provide any answers because they implicate their own creation in the process.

The other formal *topos* in magical realist films that engage with questions of historicity is the "witness" to historical trauma, a marginalized observer that is deeply tied to historical conflict. This figure is tethered to significant events in history without staging this context as one for heroic triumphs. These characters occupy subject positions that are excluded from the dominant classes organized within capitalist social formations. Women, children, people of colour, and the disabled all function as important figures that bear witness to history in magical realist films. The

archetype for this character type in magical realist film is Oskar from Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), an early, pre-Latin American boom magical realist novel that influenced later canonical works in the genre, most significantly Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. Volker Schlöndorff's film version closely adapts the novel, albeit omitting the third act where Oskar joins a jazz band and then inadvertently gets thrown into an insane asylum, and the numerous conversations he has with God and Satan throughout his life.

Oskar's fate is inexorably tied to the place of Danzig (now Gdańsk), Poland. This once-independent city-state is the site of historical conflicts that long preceded the events of World War II, and each main character in the film represents geopolitical communities in this conflict surrounding this region that was previously known as the Polish Corridor. Oskar (David Bennent) is born to Agnes Bronski (Angela Winkler) and Jan Bronski (Daniel Olbrychski), her cousin, under the guise of Oskar being the son of Agnes's husband Alfred Matzerath (Mario Adorf). Agnes is of Kashubian heritage, a small ethnic community that originated from a north-central region of modern-day Poland. Her cousin Jan is of mostly Polish descent, and Alfred is ethnically German. The film dramatizes the effects of Hitler's Nazi party in Danzig before, during, and after World War II. Alfred represents the German community living in Danzig, a resentful group that wants to join the so-called "motherland" of the German state. Jan represents the Polish community living in Danzig: he works at the infamous Polish post office that was installed in the city, a politically significant building that signified Poland's interest in the region. Agnes represents the region of the Polish Corridor itself, hence her Kashubian ethnicity. Her Kashubian heritage is significant to the film's overall structure, which begins with the chance meeting of her parents, as narrated by Oskar. Her father was a criminal fleeing from the police and he was given shelter under her mother's four skirts in a potato field, the comical act that led to Agnes's conception. Agnes, her family, and by extension the ethnic group native to the Polish Corridor are represented as permanently under the thumb of more powerful external powers.

Oskar, the *de facto* main character of the film and the novel, does not represent any particular political power in this nexus of conflict. He is a witness, someone that is shackled to history, like Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children*, an important magical realist novel that is as much influenced by Grass's *The Tin Drum* as it is by *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Oskar, and the magical state he finds himself in—he stopped physically growing at age three while his mind matures at a normal pace—represents not only the irrational and infantile mentality of National Socialism but also a moment in history that has deviated from the linear progression of a liberal-capitalist society. This is one of the features of *The Tin Drum* film that makes it so atypical for historical films about World War II. Oskar, like Blacky and Marko from *Underground*, lacks the qualities of a traditional hero. He is ambivalent and at times complicit with what is happening to his city. Oskar may disrupt the Nazis in certain moments, such as when he magically forces them to dance around with his tin drum,

but he was inadvertently responsible for the death of his real father Jan: he asked him to return to the post office during the famous battle of the Danzig Polish Post Office on September 1, 1939. In the final act of the film when the Red Army has breached the city and defeated the Nazi forces, Oskar accidentally causes his father to choke on an old Nazi pin that he was trying to hide from the Soviet soldiers.

At times Oskar opposes the regime invading his hometown, and at other times he is completely complicit with the Nazis. He joins the Nazi performance group led by Bebra, the actual little person he met earlier when Alfred and Agnes brought him to see the circus before World War II started. Armed with his tin drum and a powerful scream, Oskar becomes an irrational disruptive force that sidelines any sort of logic, tradition, or authority in Danzig society. Nearly all of Oskar's life during the time of National Socialism is marked by grotesque episodes, perversions of romantic imagery, and irrational events. In the weeks following this argument, Agnes obsessively eats all the seafood she can find until she kills herself from overeating. Oskar was privy to his mother's incestuous affair with her cousin, brought along to trips downtown while his mother met up with Jan in his apartment. He witnessed them sneaking affectionate physical gestures under dinner tables or when Alfred was distracted in another room. After his mother and biological father Jan die, Oskar becomes involved in a perverted love triangle with his father and a young teenage girl who works at Alfred's grocery store. Oskar's existence as a man-child with magical powers is a testament of the perverted forms of radicalism that the National Socialist regime represented in the Polish Corridor. Schlöndorff treats this moment in German history with no reverence and mocks the extreme reactionism of the Nazi party in one of the film's final scenes. Oskar is attending his father's funeral with his old girlfriend and her son who is now the same age as Oskar's physical body. He decides he will start growing again, but not before his half-brother knocks him in the head with a rock and he falls in the grave along with his magical drum. In this form of magical realist historical film, the historical past is represented as an aberration from progress, a demented form of arrested development, and the magical realist character in the film exists to bear witness to this horror-show of history.

A much more serious example of the magical realist character as witness to historical atrocities can be found in Jonathan Demme's adaptation of Toni Morrison's landmark American magical realist novel *Beloved* (1998). Demme was brought in later to the production of this film, which was essentially the product of Oprah Winfrey as the producer-auteur when she purchased the film rights shortly after the novel was published in 1987. Like *The Tin Drum*, *Beloved* takes real concrete historical places, events, and structures of domination as its narrative raw materials. The main character of the film, Sethe (Oprah Winfrey), was inspired by the life of Margaret Garner, a former slave who escaped her plantation in Kentucky, sailed across the Ohio River to Ohio, a free state, and murdered her child so the child could not be forced into slavery. The film adaptation of *Beloved* is structured around a series of flashbacks from Sethe's life on Sweet Home in Kentucky, her escape and journey to Ohio, and

her early years in Ohio living with her mother-in-law Baby Suggs (Beah Richards). Sethe's existence is fundamentally shaped by her experience as a freed slave, and her vision of the world is focused entirely on protecting whatever children she has left from becoming a slave like her. Even when an old friend, Paul D. (Danny Glover), arrives and presents a her with a potential for happiness, companionship, and a father figure for her daughter Denver (Kimberly Elise), Sethe is burdened with the past. In one significant conversation with Paul D., Sethe explains how her experience of oppression is compounded by the fact that she is a woman and Paul D. is a man. Her historical position as an individual who is oppressed for two dimensions of her subjectivity makes her doubly aware of the burdens of history that even a fellow slave like Paul D. has trouble comprehending. Sethe's existence is characterized by "re-memory," which is prompted by all of the interlocutors who ask her about her past or newspapers that have recorded her life for others to read. She becomes a witness to history, handcuffed to it like Oskar, forcing herself to experience re-memory, a theme that Morrison dealt with in her prior work *Song of Solomon* (1977) (Foreman 285). The experience of re-memory for Sethe involves becoming a storyteller figure for her two daughters, Denver and the reincarnated Beloved (Thandie Newton). Sethe tells part of her story to Paul D., but he is only interested in hearing it so that she can move on, whereas her two daughters listen to it to hear about their mother and their past and have no ulterior motives. Sethe's connection to history as its storyteller positions her as a *griot*, the name for the storyteller in traditional African cultures. The term refers to a social position in Senegalese society, in which the *griot* figures acted as storytellers, clowns, heralds, genealogists, or reporters for the community (Pfaff 118). In her flashbacks, framed in the storyworld of the film as tales she tells to her daughters, Sethe speaks of Baby Suggs and the services that she would conduct in the forest with the Black community. Baby Suggs would speak about life, philosophy, and spirituality, lead the people in dance and song, and preach to them about their collective identities as freed slaves. Demme films these scenes with a yellow, blown-out colour palette, making the setting appear as if it is scorched by the sun and almost heavenly compared to the dark tones of Sethe's house and run-down garden. These scenes depict the importance of the oral tradition in African culture that was maintained in the United States partly because black people were not allowed to conduct these sorts of gatherings in the public squares or other urban spaces. Sethe's only fond memories of her past that we see are in the forest with Baby Suggs preaching to the collective of liberated slaves. In the present time of the storyworld, Sethe adopts the function of the *griot*, albeit on a much smaller scale, for her children, passing on the lived history of an African American woman to a new generation. The reincarnated Beloved is a physical embodiment of history. She represents history as "felt history," history that hurts, the traumatic events that cannot be repressed but continue to be the subject of re-memory for its victims.

The film's main dramatic moments turn on revelations about the past, foregrounding the active presence that the historical past has on the present. Paul D.,

paradoxically, represents a new future for Sethe when he arrives in the first act at Sethe's house, which is overrun by a poltergeist that Sethe believes is her dead daughter haunting the house. The spirit turns the house red, creates horrific visions for those inside, shakes the walls and furniture, and makes it impossible to live a normal life. Sethe's two young sons left years earlier because they were sick of living in a haunted house, but Denver remained. Paul D. casts out the spirit in hopes of making space in Sethe's life for him to be her companion and lover. For a time, he is able to distract Sethe from the past and help her focus on the present and their future together. But this is interrupted by the arrival of Beloved, an invalid black woman who appears from no place on Sethe's front lawn one afternoon, and they decide to take her in. Denver soon discovers that Beloved is her dead sister, and she keeps this a secret from everyone else. The historical past makes its way back into their lives through Beloved's presence in the home, and her obsession with Sethe competes with Paul D.'s attempts to create a future with Sethe. After Paul D. and Sethe decide to have a baby together, he learns from an older man, who had known Baby Suggs and Sethe since she arrived in Ohio, that Sethe killed her daughter Beloved in order to stop the white slave owners who found her new home from taking Beloved as a slave. This traumatic moment, which Sethe relives when she tells Paul D., scares him away from her and he leaves. Sethe is so resolved in her belief that this was the right choice that she does not let herself be hurt when Paul D. leaves her. Soon afterward, but before she knows it is her dead daughter alive again in a new body, she hears the reincarnated Beloved sing a song that only Sethe's children would know. She is overjoyed to discover that Beloved has made her way back to her. Sethe's immersion in the existence of this new Beloved wreaks havoc on her life in the present. She loses her job and can no longer provide for herself and her daughters. Denver is forced to find work immediately so she can support her mother and Beloved. The reincarnated ghost forces Sethe to remain in the past, locked into an existential state that closes off any attempts to think about the future. The ghost figure in *Beloved* differs from how Dash used the spectral figure in *Daughters of the Dust*. In Dash's work, the spectre intrudes in the present from the future, buttressing the *criollo* culture that the matriarchs want to preserve, whereas the reincarnated ghost in *Beloved* wrests Sethe from any attempts to move beyond her past as a slave. The murder of her daughter was the direct result of her psychological trauma created while she was in bondage, and the reincarnated ghost closes off any attempts for Sethe to move beyond her past. Demme's adaptation of *Beloved* uses magical realism to represent historicity as Marx described how history affects the present, when he noted that "the traditions of dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (Marx 10). Paul D. finds Sethe again, this time alone and distraught because Beloved is gone for a second time. He brings her perspective away from her regret toward the present and the future, at which point the film ends on another flashback of Baby Suggs in the forest, preaching to the Black community about their Hearts, to "love your heart" more than anything else. The two competing images of the past finally resolve

onto this final image of a vibrant community of liberated Black people celebrating their dignity. The community is also what finally saves Sethe from her seizure by the past, embodied in the magical being of the reincarnated Beloved. Sethe's insular and individual relationship to the past is removed once Beloved is cast away by the strong women of her community who decide to cast out the spirit once and for all to save Sethe. This collective recuperation of the past, so that a downtrodden member of the community can experience the potential of the present, is the final image of historical re-memory as a vibrant collective that cares for those in danger.

Magical realist cinema in the transnational context extended and eventually moved beyond the stylistic trends of magical realist literature that originated in Latin America. One dimension of post-magical realism that I have implicitly put forward in this essay is that magical realism as a mode is used in different ways according to various transnational contexts. The two primary ways that magical realist cinema visualizes the past are by depicting an anachronous community out-of-step with dominant cultural structures, and by featuring a "witness" figure who is tethered to the historical conflict that they are experiencing. Magical realist cinema, more so than other cinematic modes, is especially concerned with turning allegorical meanings into literal plot elements, dramatizing historical conflict by extending the stylistic techniques developed by the Latin American boom writers in new ways. The representation of historicity in transnational magical realist cinema shows that the mode has found new ways to articulate historical conflict according to various local cinematic traditions.

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