

Record of Doctoral Dissertation Screening

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Degree Type	Doctor of Philosophy in Asia Pacific Studies
Degree No.	Dr. A No. 116
Date of Award	September 20, 2023
Requirements for Degree Conferral	Persons who comply to the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University Degree Regulations Article 13 Section 1
	Degree Regulations Article 4 Section 1
Title of Dissertation	The Presence of the Freudian Uncanny in 21st century Magical Realist Cinema
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**Summary of
Dissertation
Contents**

This thesis attempts to answer the overarching question: “How is the uncanny operationalized in magical realist cinema?” In so doing it develops a novel approach to the study of magical realism, an underexplored convention in film criticism and to theorize and test that approach to the analysis of visual narratives dealing with trauma, fractured identities, disruption of memory, and unsettled historical conscience specific to contemporary media. It poses two specific research questions: 1) How is magical realism reformulated to address the experience of trauma and decontextualization? 2) How is the uncanny constructed as a defining property of the narrative of magical realist cinema?

The study, by thoroughly text-analyzing three films, *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006), *Spirited Away* (2001), *Children of Men* (2006), reveals that magical realism, as the narrative counterpart of the uncanny and an aesthetical concept describing the role of repressed memories in the experience of dread, better explains those visual narratives that are not postcolonial theme, but are regarded as the threshold of sub-genres such as fantasy and science fiction, often dealing with memory and trauma. To critically address the (re)negotiation process between memory, identity, culture, and historical conscience, this dissertation successfully demonstrates the workability of the proposed concept of “uncanny magical realism.”

Below is the table of contents that evidently shows the candidate’s use of logic and comprehensive flow of discussion in this research, initiated with the research questions to the analysis finds and conclusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF IMAGES AND FIGURES

ABSTRACT

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. OVERVIEW OF MAGICAL REALISM AND THE UNCANNY

1.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1. OBJECTIVES

1.2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3. ORIGINALITY AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP

1.4. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CONCEPTUALIZATION PROCESS OF MAGICAL REALISM:

PRELIMINARY CONCEPT FORMATION

2.1.1. REALISM AND MAGIC: THE TERRITORIES OF MAGICAL REALISM AND REGIONAL DEFINITIONS OF THE TERM

2.1.2. MAGICAL REALISM IN THE POSTCOLONIAL FRAMEWORK: NARRATIVE AS THE LOCUS OF TRAUMA

2.2. CROSS-CULTURAL DEFINITIONS OF MAGICAL REALISM

2.2.1. THE BINARY CONCEPTUALIZATION OF REALISM AND MAGIC: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL MAGICAL REALISM

2.2.2. THE TODOROVIAN FANTASTIC AND ITS DERIVATIVES: COMPARISON OF MAGICAL REALISM WITH RELATED GENRES

2.3.1. PRIME KERNEL OF THE UNCANNY: THE UNCANNY CONCEPTUALIZATION IN FREUD'S OEUVRE

2.3.1.1. THE FIRST CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE UNCANNY: THE UNCANNY (1919)

2.3.1.2. FREUD'S SUBSEQUENT THEORIZATION OF THE UNCANNY: OUTSIDE OF THE 1919 ESSAY

2.3.2. THE POST-FREUDIAN KERNEL: THE UNCANNY AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER 3 THEORY AND METHODOLOGY:

OPERATIONALIZATION OF MAGICAL REALISM, THE UNCANNY

3.1. PAVING THE WAY FOR OPERATIONALIZING THE UNCANNY

3.2. THE CLUSTER OF MAGICAL REALISM AND ITS CONVERGENCE WITH THE UNCANNY: CONSTRUCTING (DECON)TEXTUALIZATION AND TRAUMA AS THE CATALYST OF MAGICAL REALISM IN FILM NARRATIVES

3.2.1. REITERATION AND CYCLES OF DEFAMILIARIZATION IN MAGICAL REALISM

3.2.2. TRAUMA CORRELATION WITH MEMORY AND HISTORICITY

3.3. THE KERNEL OF THE UNCANNY: UNDERSTANDING THE SOURCES AND MECHANISM OF REITERATIVE TRAUMA IN NARRATIVES

3.3.1. THE TODOROVIAN FANTASTIC: THE MAGICAL AND SUPERNATURAL AS FUNCTIONS OF THE UNCANNY

3.3.2. THE FUNCTION OF THE PRECONSCIOUS IN THE ASSOCIATIVE MODEL OF THE PSYCHE

3.3.3. ANXIETY, REPRESSION AND REPETITION COMPULSION: UNDERSTANDING THE AFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE UNCANNY AND MAGICAL REALISM

- 3.4. CONVERGENCE OF THE FREUDIAN UNCANNY INTO MAGICAL REALISM: TOWARDS A UNIFIED CONCEPTUALIZATION OF (DECON)TEXTUALIZATION AND DEFAMILIARIZATION
- 3.5. EXPLORING HOW NARRATIVE REALITY PRODUCES THE EFFECTS OF DEFAMILIARIZATION
- 3.6. METHODOLOGY FOR ANALYSIS: OPERATIONALIZING THE UNCANNY WITHIN MAGICAL REALISM

CHAPTER 4 DECONTEXTUALIZED MEMORIES IN GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S *PAN'S LABYRINTH* (2006): THE FRACTURED IDENTITY OF OFELIA

- 4.1. THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF OFELIA/MOANNA'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE LABYRINTH
- 4.2. OFELIA/MOANNA TRAUMATIC PAST AS THE SYSTEMIC DISTORTION OF THE REALIST TIMELINE
- 4.3. THE TRIALS OF THE LABYRINTH
- 4.4. CONCLUSIONS: GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S *PAN'S LABYRINTH* AS A PRIME EXAMPLE OF MAGICAL REALISM NARRATIVES

CHAPTER 5 ALFONSO CUARÓN'S *CHILDREN OF MEN* (2006): (DECON)TEXTUALIZATION AS THE TOKEN OF THE UNCANNY

- 5.1. THE HUMANIZING PERSPECTIVE OF THE CAMERA IN *CHILDREN OF MEN*
- 5.2. THE MECHANISMS OF REPRESSION IN *CHILDREN OF MEN* (2006): ISOLATION AND MEMORY ASSOCIATION AS NARRATIVE DEVICES
- 5.3. READING *CHILDREN OF MEN* (2006) AS A JOURNEY OF THEO'S REDEMPTION
- 5.4. INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE HAUNTING MEMORIES
- 5.5. ACCUMULATION OF DETAILS AND THE FUNCTION OF THE CAMERA AS A HUMANIZING GAZE
- 5.6. REPRESSION IN *CHILDREN OF MEN*: HUMANITY TRAPPED IN THE PAST
- 5.7. NARRATIVE DEVICES AND THE TOKENS OF THE UNCANNY
- 5.8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

CHAPTER 6 POLLUTION AND SPIRITUAL CONTAMINATION AS THE TOKEN OF UNCANNY IN *SPIRITED AWAY* (2001)

- 6.1. SYNOPSIS OF *SPIRITED AWAY*
- 6.2. THE PLOT OF *SPIRITED AWAY*: HINTING FORGOTTEN TRAUMA AND SPIRITUAL AND MENTAL CLEANSING

6.2.1. *SPIRITED AWAY* MAIN NARRATIVE CONFLICT AND PLOT STRUCTURE

6.3. THE SPIRIT REALM AND THE BATHHOUSE AS THE MIRROR IMAGE OF CHIHIRO'S UNCONSCIOUS

6.4. THE TRIALS OF CHIHIRO'S JOURNEY: SPIRITUAL AND MENTAL CLEANSING

6.5. RESOLUTION OF THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY OF CHIHIRO AND SEN: RECONTEXTUALIZING THE PAST

6.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION: OPERATIONALIZING THE UNCANNY AND THE UNCANNY MAGICAL CINEMA

7.1. REFORMULATING MAGICAL REALISM AS THE UNCANNY MAGICAL REALISM

7.2. BLENDING THE UNCANNY AND MAGICAL REALISM

7.3. ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

7.3.1. PAN'S LABYRINTH (2006): DISSOCIATION AND DOUBLING OF THE PROTAGONIST'S IDENTITY AS A RESULT OF THE TRAUMA OF DISPLACEMENT

7.3.2. CHILDREN OF MEN (2006): ISOLATION AND WITHDRAWAL AS A CONSEQUENCE OF INFERTILITY AND FAILED PARENTHOOD. 182

7.3.3. *SPIRITED AWAY* (2001): NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE TRIGGERING A DISSOCIATION OF IDENTITY AND REPRESSION OF MEMORIES

7.4. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

**Summary of
Dissertation
Screening
Results**

- As all the examiners have agreed on, the dissertation, along with the meticulously thorough review of literature and building of theoretical framework, has very thoughtfully addressed the research questions. It introduces a very novel and interdisciplinary approach to understanding visual narratives, which will intersect different fields such as literary criticism, film/media studies, trauma studies, and memory studies.
- As the examiners noted, while the research questions are very complex, due to the nature of the topic (complex and theoretical); however, the dissertation has fully risen to the challenges brought up.
- The analytical dimensions and the conclusion are both thorough and clearly guided by the questions. It was unanimous among the examiners that the revised dissertation has very carefully reflected all the comments provided by the first round of screening. Thus, the revised version has improved so much in terms of its readability, organization, and thoughtfully placed arguments. (The clarification implemented from the examiners, and the candidate's openness to constructive criticisms, certainly helped to make this dissertation much more logically structured.)
- The dissertation, as the result, successfully demonstrates the capability of the operational concept or theoretical tool of "uncanny magical realism," which has been established by the candidate. This is evaluated as a highly original and versatile approach to analyzing contemporary visual narratives. The candidate's (brave) proposition and exercise of the new concept will certainly contribute to the academic community, not only as a part of intellectual exercise, but more importantly, because it evokes an inquiry that has been hardly tackled comprehensively in any discipline, particularly in film studies and literary criticism areas.
- It is very impressive that this work shows the capability of incorporating classic yet rather old theories in order to explain the contemporary film texts, with a theoretical tool (uncanny magical realism) that underscores a (universally applicable) potential/versatility of psychoanalysis in understanding visual media texts, in particular, the Freudian concept of uncanny.
- Throughout the dissertation project process, the candidate was not only able to answer comprehensibly to most of the questions asked by the examiners, but also able to carry on intellectually stimulating discussions on some concepts and theoretical inquiries even beyond the scope of the dissertation, which is expected to pave a way toward the candidate's future research. In both the written and oral forms, the

candidate has clearly demonstrated his sharp insights into and deep understanding of the topic, as well as the right amount of flexibility/openness for further development.

- In the candidate's response to the question of "how to plan to develop the current research in future," the candidate referred to a couple of possibilities, including: the application of the discussed concepts to investigate Japanese war-themed popular cultural phenomena and materials, while contemplating on how textual representation and social reality link would be reasonably explained in media/film studies. Also, for instance, postcolonial literary work or the magical realism genre originated in Latin American context may be investigated differently from works originated in different contexts (e.g. Asian works), along with significant common understandings of trauma.
- In the end, all the examiners congratulate on the candidate's stimulating achievements regarding the dissertation and are looking forward to seeing further developments from this work.

**Summary of
Examination
Results or
confirmation of
Academic Skills**

The candidate has published some work from the dissertation, including peer-reviewed journal articles, a book chapter, as well as oral presentations at a significant number of international conferences. They clearly confirm the candidate's quite high aptitude in academic performance. Those works include:

Peer-reviewed Academic Journal Articles:

- 1) Avilés Ernult, José Rodolfo (2023). Analyzing magical realist narratives through the Freudian uncanny: decontextualized memories in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2005), *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 2023, Vol. 41, 1, pp. 1-20. DOI: https://doi.org/10.34409/rjaps.41.1_1
- 2) Avilés Ernult, José Rodolfo (2021). The uncanny and the superflat in macabre representations: Iconographic analysis of a Kawanabe Kyosai blockprint, *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 2021, Vol. 39, 1, pp. 59-80. DOI: https://doi.org/10.34409/rjaps.39.01_59

Book Chapter:

- 1) Avilés Ernult, José Rodolfo & Chadha, Astha (2023). Decoding Holocaust narratives in Japanese Pop Culture: Through the lens of *Anne no Nikki* (1995) and *Persona Non Grata* (2015), in Mandal, M. & Das, P. (Eds.) *Holocaust vs. Popular Culture: Interrogating Incompatibility and Universalization*. Routledge. (Chapter 6 pp. 101-112) <https://www.routledge.com/Holocaust-vs-Popular-Culture-Interrogating-Incompatibility-and-Universalization/Mandal-Das/p/book/9781032169736>

Non-reviewed Articles:

- 1) Avilés Ernult, José Rodolfo & Chadha, Astha (2021). A new launch of space cooperation between India and Latin America [Un nuevo lanzamiento de la cooperación espacial entre India y América Latina], *The Koot Neeti* (Español), 2021.
<http://es.thekootneeti.in/2021/03/09/un-nuevo-lanzamiento-de-la-cooperacion-espacial-entre-india-y-america-latina/>
- 2) Japanese 2011 Great Eastern Earthquake [Gran terremoto de Tohoku 2011], *Universidad de Guadalajara Gazzette*, March 2011, No. 652., University of Guadalajara Gazette.
http://www.gaceta.udg.mx/Hemeroteca/paginas/652/G652_COT%209.pdf

Conference presentations:

- 1) AAS in Asia 2023, Asia in Motion: Memory, preservation and Documentation, Kyungpook National University, Daegu, South Korea. Presentation on Uncanny, memory and trauma in Japanese popular culture (case of *Sen to Chihiro*). Jun 24-27, 2023
- 2) 20th Asia Pacific Conference, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Japan [Won the Best Paper Award 2022] Presentation on Analyzing magical realist narratives through the Freudian uncanny: decontextualized memories in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2005). Dec 03-04, 2022
- 3) The Asian Studies Conference Japan (ASCJ 2022), Sophia University, Japan. Presentation title: Aesthetics of the uncanny: Unheimlich and Tasogare. Jul 02-03, 2022
- 4) 19th Asia Pacific Conference, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu,

Japan (Online). Presentation on The presence of the Uncanny in Magical Realist cinema: worldbuilding within Martin Brest's Meet Joe Black. Dec 04-05, 2021

- 5) Western Conference of the Association of Asian Studies (WCAAS) 2021, [Panel CHAIR] Dark Memories and Fragmented Identities: Exploring the power of memory and trauma in the construction of worlds and identities. Presentation on The Uncanny's presence in Magical Realist Cinema: The cycle of trauma and memory Children of Men's worldbuilding. Oct 09, 2021
- 6) 12th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 12), The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) Netherlands and Kyoto Seika University. Presentation on An Approach to Two Analogous Conceptions of Uncanny Aesthetics: Freud's Unheimlich and Izumi Kyoka's Tasogare. Aug 24-28, 2021
- 7) 18th Asia Pacific Conference, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Japan (Online). Presentation on Memory, embodiment and uncanny: The uncanny presence in Stephen King's IT. Nov 14-15, 2020
- 8) AAS in Asia 2020, Asia at Crossroads: Solidarity through Scholarship, Kobe, Japan (Online). Presentation on Memory, Embodiment and the Uncanny: Parallelism Between Freud's Unheimlich and Izumi Kyoka's Tasogare. Aug 31-Sep 04, 2020
- 9) 17th Asia Pacific Conference, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Japan. Presentation on The aesthetics of the uncanny: A comparative study of Kyosai Kawanabe and Jose Guadalupe Posada liminal imagery. Nov 30-Dec 1, 2019
- 10) 13th Annual Conference on Asian Studies, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic Presentation on The Aesthetics of Uncanny: Kyosai Kawanabe's Liminal Imagery. Nov 22-23, 2019

Award:

Best Paper Award, 20th Asia Pacific Conference, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan (2022)