

THE MALE GAZE IN *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT*: AN ANALYSIS OF LARS VON TRIER'S INTERMEDIAL STYLE

O MALE GAZE EM *THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT*: UMA ANÁLISE DO ESTILO INTERMIDIÁTICO DE LARS VON TRIER

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Abstract: The film is a type of media that has evolved in diversified ways throughout time. Some directors present their signatures on every production, allowing the audience to recognize their styles. Recently, Lars Von Trier's signature on screen has promoted heated debates. He challenged critics with his choice for controversial themes and intense use of external references, both literary and artistic. This paper aims at delving into Von Trier's film *The House That Jack Built* (2018) to scrutinize the journey of a serial killer and his cruel crimes, focusing especially on the intermedial references and the masculine gaze. The notion of *auteur*, drawn by André Bazin (1957), studies on intermediality by Irina Rajewsky (2005) and Werner Wolf (2005), and cinematic gaze by Robert Stam (1992) and Todd McGowan (2003) compose the theoretical bases of this paper. This study shows that *intermediality* and the cinematic *male gaze*, fundamental elements of the director's style, sustain the construction of his unique signature in the aforementioned production.

Keywords: Film; Style; Narrative; Male Gaze; Intermediality.

Resumo: O cinema é um tipo de mídia que evoluiu de formas diversificadas ao longo do tempo. Diretores apresentam as suas assinaturas em todas as produções, permitindo ao público reconhecer seus estilos. Recentemente, a assinatura de Lars Von Trier na tela promoveu debates acalorados. Desafia os críticos com a escolha de temas controversos e o uso intenso de referências externas tanto literárias e artísticas. Este artigo tem como objetivo mergulhar no filme de Trier, *The House That Jack Built* (2018), para escrutinar a jornada de um serial killer e seus crimes cruéis, com o foco nas referências intermidiáticas e no olhar masculino. A noção de *auteur*, elucidadas por André Bazin (1957), estudos acerca da intermedialidade de Irina Rajewsky (2005) e Werner Wolf (2005), e o olhar cinematográfico de Robert Stam (1992) e Todd McGowan (2003) compõem as bases teóricas deste artigo. Este estudo demonstra que a *Intermedialidade* e o *Male Gaze*, elementos fundamentais do estilo do diretor, sustentam a construção de sua assinatura única na produção mencionada anteriormente.

Palavras-chave: Cinema; Estilo; Narrativa; Male Gaze; Intermedialidade.

Introduction

Film productions have become more and more diversified in terms of languages and expressive resources that rely on editing and the use of technology. The director or a team of directors is ultimately responsible for the craft of creating a movie, selecting the expressive tools

to instigate specific reactions on the viewer, such as agony, intimacy, or empathy. David Bordwell (2010, p. 35) emphasizes that films are designed to have effects on viewers. In some cases, directors are loyal to a unique way of making their films, raising the audience's expectations for facing the next production. Their decisions during the creation process affect how the viewer interprets and relates to the final product.

Lars Von Trier promotes shocking reactions on the viewers and critics through his productions. The audience can identify his style through observing the selection of controversial themes depicted through a substantial reference to art, music, and literature. Thus, film production is perceived as textuality in a broad sense, whereas the director, due to his strong presence, is seen as an *auteur*, in terms of Andre Bazin (1985).

The most recent production written and directed by Lars Von Trier is *The house that Jack Built*, released in 2018. It is a psychological drama movie that tells the story of a serial killer named Jack, played by Matt Dillon, who murders several female victims, tracing his path towards damnation. Being portrayed in reference to Dante's journey to the *Inferno* (hell), Jack succumbs deep into a trip to hell in the company of Verge, played by Bruno Ganz, who acts as his conscience. Alongside that, the movie portrays Jack's obsession with committing the perfect crime, comparing himself to an artist and the pursuit of a craft to construct a magnificent *oeuvre d'art*. Ultimately, he achieves his goal by arranging the corpses of his victims as if they were artistic elements.

The purpose of this work is to delve into Lars Von Trier's intermedial style, and his signature as an *auteur* in *The house that Jack Built*, and the director's perspective, crucial to the understanding of the male gaze, which conducted the narrative in the production. This analysis, performed through bibliographical research, is based on the notion of intermediality, based on Irina Rajewsky (2005) and Werner Wolf (2005), who point out the complex relations between media and crossing of media boundaries. These concepts are instrumental in deepening the understanding of Von Trier's style, concerning a combination of various media such as art and literature, and film. This research provides an opportunity to trace the process of understanding a media through tracing both the structure and its thematic content. Furthermore, the combination of different media gives a refreshed perspective of understanding the several languages (music, scenery, architecture, etc.) involved in the production of a film, allowing many interpretations, contributing to the discussions on multiliteracies.

This study also bases on the notion of the male gaze, focusing on the director's perspective, following studies by Robert Stam (1992) and Todd McGowan (2003). The male perspective also relies on the centrality of the serial killer, understood through the *Uncanny*,

drawn by Freud (1919) and Bennett and Royle (2004), besides the notion of a monster, drawn by Punter and Byron (2004).

Auteur and style

In film studies, the notion of the *auteur* is central for developing a deeper analysis of both the content and structure of works by directors with a strong signature. The origin and definition of the *auteur* are controversial and subject to solid debates. Nevertheless, during the 1950s, the notion of the director as an *auteur* was specially addressed in the French magazine *Cahiers du Cinema*. The magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* gathered articles written by directors and film critics, focusing mainly on the French, Italian and American films, on the peak of the New Wave cinema. Names like François Truffaut and Eric Rohmer figured among critics and directors who contributed to the magazine. André Bazin, one of the founders of the magazine, published the article *Politique des Auteurs* in 1957.

The *auteur* was a concept used to define a director with a strong signature who produced creative art through filmmaking. The film production is seen as a text in a broad sense, whereas the director assumes the role of an author. The director/ author is responsible for selecting tools to build his/her craft and convey his message, creating his/her own set of languages that compose his /her signature. Within the concept of *auteur*, the director then carries the responsibility of projecting his/her creativeness into the construction of his/her work, building his/her signature. According to André Bazin (1957, p. 255), being an *auteur* means to be a subject that speaks in the first person:

To a certain extent at least, the *auteur* is a subject to himself; whatever the scenario, he always tells the same story, or, in case the word ‘story’ is confusing, let’s say he has the same attitude and passes the same moral judgments on the action and on the characters. Jacques Rivette has said that an *auteur* is someone who speaks in the first person. It’s a good definition; let’s adopt it.

This quote emphasizes the importance of the *auteur* discussed before and brings attention to the broader concept of an *auteur*. The signature functions as traces inserted by the director in the film so that the viewers can distinguish his/her style in every new production. It is about perceiving singular traces that make the *auteur* unique. It consists of “choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses from one film to the next” (BAZIN, 1957, p. 255). In *politique des*

auteurs, Bazin clarifies these questions and defines these traces left by the director in the production, allowing the scrutiny of films helping critics to distinguish art cinema from commercial cinema.

Nevertheless, it is important to reinforce that the *auteur* theory is not common sense among the critics. Even though it has been discussed since before the creation of *Cahiers du cinema*, it was not constructed formally as a single method of investigation. Peter Wollen (1972, p. 77) explains the problematics of adopting the *auteur* theory as a scope of the investigation:

The *auteur* theory grew up rather haphazardly; it was never elaborated in programmatic terms, in a manifesto or collective statement. As a result, it could be interpreted and applied on rather broad lines; different critics developed somewhat different methods within a loose framework of common attitudes.

Wollen's statement clarifies that the *auteur* theory implies the adoption of distinct parameters to investigate different directors. Its loose construction allows critics to broaden their studies on cinema, even though it does not constitute a single method rooted in a single theory. On the other hand, studies based on the notion of *auteur* keep being performed with consistent contributions to film studies, as seen in Massias's research on the Cohen Brothers' production. In order to discuss Von Trier's authorship as a director, it is necessary to address his style, the traces of his signature as an *auteur*.

Lars Von Trier is known for his controversial style due to the choice of the theme/content and the composition/structure that frequently shock both the audience and critics. Subjects such as violence, sex addiction, depression and more recently, the serial killer's sadism are examples of his works' main themes, frequently combined with a constant critique of society and its behavior. These elements are often conveyed in his films through idiosyncratic cinematographic techniques composing his filmmaking style. For instance, frequently, the presence of other media such as art, music, and photography in films helps address critical issues in presenting a theme.

The combination of those elements resulting from the director's choice composes his /her art or artistic creation. They are usually selected with a specific expressive purpose: To shock, create empathy, and build a connection between reality and fantasy or simply provoke a sensation in the viewer that leads him/her to question about the thematic or even how a particular thematic is addressed in society. These issues might hover around the filmmakers while creating their new production and new art. Furthermore, an important point to remember is that: the director makes choices for addressing specific themes/ ideas and how they are

addressed in the production. For instance, the camera position might mirror the director's point of view in certain scenes frequently overlapping by a specific character's viewpoint. As a result, the viewer is confronted with the image conceived in the mind of the director and translated into his/her production as the theme and how he addresses it, which leads to the expected expressive effect.

Lars Von Trier has a distinctive style considering camera use in his productions. The director builds a scenario where the actors are free to engage in improvisation technique in front of the camera, allowing natural movements. The camera sometimes is not even visible to the actors in order to make them feel comfortable to act in their own ways. That is one of Von Trier's signatures, which allows the viewer to feel as if he/she were watching a documentary in a scenario where everything is delivered embedded in authentic and organic expressive effects. Grasping the director's style means deepening the understanding of the director's perspective. The style is the language the filmmaker uses to communicate to the audience and deliver a message.

Pointing out the techniques used by a director in a film is essential to identify his/her style and deepen the overall understanding. Lars Von Trier makes his style explicit: the thematic content and the way he approaches and inserts it in the productions are distinct compared to other directors. Identifying his style allows the viewer to grasp the message he wants to convey and understand the techniques used to compose his art that has sometimes been a startling portrait of society.

Throughout the production, it is possible to identify the elements that compose the director's style. The director inserts footage of actual events that occurred in reality, such as the hunting of a lamb or a deer or records of the Second World War, among others in the film, combining them with scenes shot in a straight angle, through a hand-held camera, producing a documentary effect. The film's framing varies from medium close-ups and extreme long shots, which creates a movement of proximity/ distancing/ proximity between the audience and the characters, producing an effect of intimacy. In the scene where the first female victim is caught in Jack's car, the audience also experiences the sensation of being caught by him. A sense conveyed through an intense game established by the camera angle that provides Jack's glances in his victim, which allow the viewer to feel the tension between the characters, seen in image 1.



Image 1: A shot in close-up, revealing the feeling of the character (VON TRIER, 2018)

The camera distance is essential for the audience to grasp the tension and shift of perspective from Jack to his victims, and its movement also conveys a documentary effect. They allow the viewers to closely observe the feelings expressed by the characters so they can grasp how they react to the events and situations presented in the narrative.

Another aspect crucial for understanding the director's style is the intense use of references from different types of art in the composition, defined as *intermediality*, which is explored in the next topic. Combined with this technique with controversial themes, the experience of watching von Trier's production is disturbing and uncomfortable. Such uneasiness is provoked by the way the production addresses the atrocities humanity can commit, being illustrated through rough images and scenes with documentary expressive camera angles and movements.

Narration in Von Trier's *The house that Jack built*

David Bordwell (2008) divided film narrative into three dimensions: the Story World, Plot structure, and Narration. The first dimension, the Story World, concerns the surroundings and the construction of the story's environment. It focuses on the elements that will be essential to the narrative's development. In *The house that Jack built*, the scenario is composed of places familiar to our everyday lives, such as a road, a park, or homes where Jack visits.

On the other hand, a few places appear in the film more than once as Jack's storage room where he keeps all victims' bodies. Another element present in the story world's construction is a protagonist's presence. Sometimes in certain movies, the protagonist is not clearly defined, creating a mysterious and confusing atmosphere. The identification of such a character depends on how much they appear in the production.

In addition, there are cases in which the protagonist shares his/her role with another character who happens to appear repeatedly in many scenes, trying to fight him/her who is in

the center of the plot. In that case, we can call him/ her antagonist - “the warrior who opposes the protagonist.” (BORDWELL, 2008, p.7) The antagonist in *The house that Jack built* can be considered Virgil, the man who appears to question Jack about his actions and choices from time to time. The movie flows in a dialogue between Jack and Virgil, who continuously gives Jack, the protagonist, a reason to think and fight his inner problems.

The second dimension of film narrative is called plot structure. This dimension concerns the “arrangement of the parts of the narrative as we have it.” (BORDWELL, 2008, p. 6). The plot structure involves the organization of the temporal line in the narrative and the manner how it is embedded in the story world’s construction and development. On that matter, the movie’s division is an essential factor to this dimension. In *The house that Jack built*, we have an inner division responsible for organizing the narrative according to Jack’s murders, agreeing to his character’s development. They are divided into five “incidents” that follow each victim and the events that happened during the acts. The first one is about the first woman he murdered; at the moment, she was only asking for help to fix her broken car. The viewer then faces Jack’s first murder and reaction towards the killing act. In the second incident, Jack’s chase concerning his next victim is presented. He follows her and, with a clumsy action, commits the crime. The first contact with the police also happens following his murderous act, although it does not result in suspicion or arrest.

The third incident focuses on the serial killer’s life after the previous acts. It shows him trying to live an ordinary life, along with his new girlfriend and two stepchildren. Later, the spectator is presented with the following crime committed against his new family members. He plans to lead his girlfriend and her sons to an isolated place, to teach them to haunt. What they did not know, however, is that they are the prey. The fourth incident presents the serial killer with another woman, to whom he appears to enjoy the company. That is when he confesses his crimes, saying he killed over 60 people by that moment. The victim then tries to run but fails, and Jack explains that people only help when it is convenient for them. An entire demonstration of lack of empathy and humanity is presented philosophically and cruelly in the production.

In the last incident, the killer attempts to murder six people with a single bullet. From that moment on, his plans start to fail, leaving him at the mercy of the cops, who are ready to arrest him. He then fights against his unfortunate fate and tries once more to unlock the mysterious door in the storage room full of his victims’ bodies. When he finally succeeds, he starts to revive all of his actions and decides to build a house made of the remaining bodies. Virgil then starts questioning him about his final decision concerning his escape from the police. Then Jack falls into a hole, the only way out in the mysterious room, condemned to a common

fear: death. This narrative arrangement allows the viewer to find an organization to understand the character's construction. It shows the development of Jack's personality through his actions to fulfil his desires.

The last dimension, narration, concerns the "moment-by-moment flow of information about the story world." (BORDWELL, 2008. p. 6) This dimension focuses on how the audience will perceive and understand the story presented by the director. However, it is essential to point out that every viewer does not apprehend the story in the same way. The effect on the viewer might vary, considering that individuals interpret life in distinct ways.

Narration conducts the viewer through the arrangement of the story centred on a character. In Von Trier's film, Jack's sadistic actions lead the audience to question what made him become such a *monster*. The director gives the audience a preview of the protagonist's childhood and the events that followed through his journey, allowing the viewer to understand the character's development in the story.

Bordwell (2008) claims that the style and the *syuzhet* must interact to construct the cinematic narration. In *The house that Jack built* is possible to identify some elements that combine both style and *syuzhet* to cause an effect on the viewer. An example can be found in the use of techniques such as the flashback mentioned before, exposing Jack's childhood. Such a tool may give an atmosphere of suspense or provide new information essential to the story.

The cinematic narration also goes beyond the visual construction of a film. According to David Bordwell (2008, p.15)

In any event, a film's *syuzhet* and style aren't bound by the constraints of verbal communication. Cinematic narration, being an audiovisual display rather than a written text, appropriates bits and pieces of the communication model opportunistically.

We can find the distinction between cinematic and literary narration since we have different media. Therefore, those characteristics define the cinematic narration as a dimension, contributing to the analysis of a film's construction to understand and deepen the knowledge on a subject

Von Trier's style: The Male Gaze

In the narrative of the *House that Jack Built*, the viewer is provided with a compelling character as the protagonist of the movie. Jack is presented as a psychopath with an addiction to

murder people, a serial killer. The psychopath killer has been illustrated in many previous productions of the seventh art, such as Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Norman Bates in *Psycho* (1960), and Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (2000). All those characters depicted in cinematic productions present the disturbing personality of a psychopath.

To understand the construction of the character in this story, it is essential to provide a study on the psychopathology present in Jack's inner self. Psychopathy can be defined as a disorder of personality, which consists of a lack of boundaries in the subject's consciousness. Some traces that characterize psychopathy may be presented in childhood, usually triggered by a traumatic event. For that reason, the relation to the external world is compromised, leading to an extreme need to find sense or meaning in actions that ordinary people submitted to the rules of society usually avoid. It can be explained by the idea that "the psychopath will be in a chronic state of stimulation and sensation seeking and thus, explaining why psychopaths do not become autonomically aroused to stimuli that would otherwise be stressful, exciting, or frightening to non-psychopaths." (ANH; BEECH, 2006, p. 3).

Therefore, such an idea can lead to one of the reasons why a serial killer fits in a psychopath's profile, considering his/her need to seek prosecution on the number of victims, ignoring social codes and principles in his/her pursuit. In addition, there is defiance to the authorities in order to achieve an extent of the pleasure in the hunt for the next victim. That is an example we can find in Jack's journey, especially in the last scenes of the production, in which the race to escape from the police leads to a rush of stimuli to follow his path.

Concerning the psychopathology presented in the film, it is essential to point out society's reaction face serial killers. In a period of media consumption, the image of the serial killer is explored and dehumanized. People were drawn to believe that those who committed unimaginable atrocities could not be human since such actions are unfamiliar and unbearable to ordinary people. That idea developed the thought that those individuals are monsters instead of human beings with psychological disorders. The notion of monstrosity is placed in this case considering the line of normality Jack crossed with his actions. The *perversion* in his behavior is led by the desire and need to feel alive, provoking himself to go beyond the moral boundaries established in society. The *perversion* in the serial killer's subjectivity in seeking satisfaction by crossing the limits of normality fits the notion of monstrosity pointed out by Byron and Punter (2004, p. 263) in Gothic studies:

What is primarily important for the Gothic is the cultural work done by monsters. Through difference, whether in appearance or behaviour, monsters function to define and construct the politics of the 'normal'.

Located at the margins of culture, they police the boundaries of the human, pointing to those lines that must not be crossed.

Monsters can be perceived in the Gothic production as those who defy the normality through physical appearance as the nameless monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and the Pale Man in Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) or through a set of behaviour as psychopaths as Jack in Trier's production. Nevertheless, they might share the crossing of the limits of normality, carrying the ambiguity of strangeness and familiarity. The traces of humanity in the serial killer's appearance cause agony and lead to the disassociation from the fictional monsters.

The unfamiliarity caused by monsters was theorized by Sigmund Freud (1919) as the *uncanny*. According to the father of Psychoanalysis, the uncanny is defined as "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (FREUD, 1919, p. 1).

The serial killer's persona can be delved based on the notion of uncanny, taking into consideration the strangeness of something familiar: "the uncanny is not just a matter of the weird or spooky, but has to do more specifically with a disturbance of the familiar." (BENNET; ROYLE, 2004, p. 34). For instance, the image of an individual conceived as normal/human becomes inhuman due to his/her capacity to crave unforgettable terrible images in the victims' minds. For that reason, it is possible to correlate Jack, a psychopath killer, to the strangely familiar monster whose actions disrupt the notion of humanity.

Furthermore, the characterization of a male serial killer in Von Trier's film who has a preference for female victims evidences the relation of power exercised by him over his victims. Jack justifies his choices to Verge when questioned as "You feel superior to women and want to brag? It turns you on, doesn't it, Jack?" (TRIER, 2018). The answer given by the protagonist is "No, no, but women are easier. Not physically, they're just easier to work with. More cooperative." (TRIER, 2018). This example elucidates the reason why the serial killer believes in the easiness of choosing women as victims since they resist distinctively compared to men, who would fight physically. Considering that, it is essential to mention that Jack sees himself as the hunter and the victims as his prey. While Verge attempts to make Jack confess that the killings are his substitute for intercourse as a form for him to achieve sublimation and relief from the world, Jack denies the killing ritual in which every detail would make a difference.

The misogyny translated as a will to dominate a defenseless female body is conveyed in the narrative as images of white sheep, and gazelle stared by a pack of lions. The film

establishes a connection between Jack and Jack the Ripper, the Londonian serial killer, who in 1888 committed several crimes towards female prostitutes, never having his identity revealed.

In this production, the perspective is predominantly centered on the male point of view. The study of psychoanalysis in the film becomes crucial for understanding the subjects and their construction of desire. According to Robert Stam (1992, p.165):

Psychoanalytic film theory deals with the production of desiring subjectivities—the author's, the spectator's—and thus conceives of enunciation as a process of circulation rather than focusing on its manifestation through specific textual instances.

Psychoanalytic film theorists trace the route of desiring subjects by focusing on the subjectivities of the author/director and spectators. The notions of desire are interconnected with the subject's instances. The desire is explained by Lacan (1978) as marked by the loss of the *object a*, as the individual enters the symbolic order of language and cultural values assuming his/her role as a subject. The subject seeks the lost object in order to fulfil his/her desire and finds only a screen for his/her narcissistic projections. Lacan explains the gaze through Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533).

The subject observes Holbein's painting, not being fully aware of the skull that observes him/her back. While the subject attempts to seek meaning by translating the image into words, he or she simply projects him/herself narcissistically on the image, trying to fulfil his/her desire. The Picture "looks" back, provoking uneasiness on the subject who is confronted with his /her own lack of *the object a* and not the fulfilment of his/her desire. The lack, however, leads the subject to pursue the missing *object a* continuously to fulfil his/her desire.

In the film, Jack seeks continuously to frame the potential victims firstly by projecting his desire narcissistically. In those victims, Jack attempts to find the *object a*, but he can only face continuously his lack, the absence of the object, which is lost forever.

The subjectivity conveys "a process of construction by signifying practices that are both unconscious and culturally specific" (STAM, 1992, p. 126), implying the need to regard the values and customs of a given society. The subjectivity that circulates in a given production can be conveyed under the director's viewpoint projected in the film as specific cuts and/ or the character's perspective.

The style explored by the director in the art of filmmaking defines the perspective through which the audience is going to observe the events presented in a production. Von Trier has a unique style of directing a film, conveying the use of specific techniques and tools that

provide the audience with an intended effect. The *gaze* is constructed by the director when “each filmmaker appropriates and then designates “the look” in a specific way, and this is what characterizes a particular director’s system of enunciation” (STAM, 1992, p. 168). On this matter, the choices made by the director define the audience’s point of view, such as through the use of the camera. The power to focus on the crucial elements to the narrative and leaving in the background - or simply defocusing it - instantly settles the audience’s field of view. The subjective camera managed by the director makes the consumer see what the director wants them to see through a subjective process of identification with the gaze (MCGOWAN, 2003).

The *male gaze* in *the House that Jack Built* is conveyed as “a cinematic structure” that combines “a threefold look: camera, male character, and viewer” (SMELIK, 2016, p. 1). Thus, this idea leads to the relationship between the spectator and the media, which can work as a mirror to the one facing it. Such a situation happens when a process of identification with the protagonist on-screen begins, creating the illusion that reality does not differ much from what is being portrayed in the production. The director’s choices to construct the cinematic narrative reflect directly on the consumer’s reaction and identification with the product. Robert Stam (1992, p. 169) illustrates this idea when he mentions that: “In the classical model of the fiction film, narrative storytelling, seamless editing and secondary identifications (with characters) contribute to the production of an illusory world with its own internal consistency.”

An imaginary world becomes the product of the director’s gaze in the film, and thus, the male gaze in Lars Von Trier’s latest release. The theory of gaze in film studies allows discussions on how the image of women is depicted in cinema under the perspective of a male director. It usually deals with the subjective identification of the audience with the gaze; however, McGowan (2003, p. 30) points out that traditional Lacanian film studies ignore the potential of studying “the spectators’ relationship to the gaze as object—a relationship not of identification but of desire”.

The viewer’s relationship with the gaze as object is not centred on the *mastery* of that gaze (MCGOWAN, 2003) but on tracing the mechanism of desire and production of meaning, which allows questionings the way women are depicted in the productions and how their attitudes and fate in the narrative contributed to the construction of female figures in cinema as objects of male desire. The representation of the male gaze in *the House that Jack Built* lies upon the construction of the main character and women’s roles. The sadistic protagonist presents a preference for killing women on the justification that they are “easier to work with” (TRIER, 2018), as mentioned before. Such an idea presents the male perspective that women are fragile individuals and easy prey to be targeted. The sadistic gaze Jack professes in image 2,

in close-up, conveys his momentary satisfaction after murdering another victim. By doing, so, the audience who observes the screen becomes the target of Jack's gaze, being caught in two experiences. Firstly, through relating with the gaze subjectively, the audience feels an uneasy identification with the killer. Secondly, by establishing a relationship with the gaze as object, the audience experiences a failure for not being able to grasp the meaning of that smile, not fulfilling the desire.



Image 2: Jack's satisfaction after murdering another victim (VON TRIER, 2018)

The director's perspective is conveyed through camera position and movement to the audience, which in turn is expected to join the production, establishing identification with the gaze through subjectivity. Whenever Jack establishes a dialogue with Verge, his point of view is revealed. The camera angles allow the viewer to access the characters' reactions that lead to ultimately build the director's gaze. The audience sees Jack's behaviour in the movie, establishing identification with the male gaze. In addition, the audience looks at the passiveness of women, constructed as objects of male desire, and may draw a connection between fiction and reality. Von Trier depicts a fictional space in which the male gaze dominates and controls, demanding the audience to master that male gaze through identifying with Jack, who appears to constantly challenge authorities beating the system.

Mulvey (1999, p. 838) says that "a woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film", imitating reality. Cultural values are intrinsically inserted in the film production, instigating different reactions in the audience. The images of the murderings are clearly disturbing, causing the female audience to experience them differently from the male audience. Therefore, the female audience becomes the target of the male gaze projected in the film, being gazed at symbolically by the skull that looks back (LACAN, 1978).

Von Trier's style: Intermediality

Alongside the male gaze, Von Trier's style can also be characterized by the presence of *intermediality*, the crossing of media boundaries (WOLF, 2005). Intermediality was coined in analogy with *intertextuality* by the German Scholar Aage A. Hansen - Löve in 1983 to refer to the relation established between "literature and visual arts" in the context of Russian symbolism. (WOLF, 2005, p. 252)

Nevertheless, this idea led to studies centred on the relationship established between distinct media. Intermediality refers to a "transgression of boundaries between media and thus is concerned with 'heteromedial' relations between different semiotic complexes or between different parts of a semiotic complex", according to Wolf (2005, p. 252). The intermedial relations can occur thus between two distinct media or between parts of different media that cross its boundaries, challenging the stability of ways of producing meanings. Wolf (2005) elucidates that the transmedial phenomena have occurred throughout the periods, being observed in the recurrence of certain themes and narratives in distinct media.

Rajewsky (2005) proposes the division of intermediality into three subcategories. Alongside that, it is essential to point out that media can be conveyed in more than one subcategory, which is the case of the movie presented in this study. The first is the *medial transposition*, which the author exemplifies as the novelizations, film adaptations, etc. What happens here can be defined as the "transformation of a given media product (a text, a film, etc.) or of its substratum into another medium" (RAJEWSKY, 2005, p. 51). In this case, it is possible to convey the intermediality in the idea that one media inspires the other to adapt and reframe it to produce a different media. In the film, some scenes can be considered as a medial transposition in Rajewsky's sense, from literature to film, observed through the repetition of motifs and thematic variation. It can be seen especially when Von Trier illustrates the constant presence of a character named Virge, who follows Jack all the time throughout the production. He acts as an illustration of Virgil, the character from the epic poem called *The Divine Comedy*, written by Dante Alighieri in 1472. The poem elucidates the journey of Dante through hell and purgatory, as well as heaven and paradise.

Virgil works as a guide to Dante, leading him towards the cruel and challenging path he needs to face. In Von Trier's production, it is clear the presence of Virgil as the character Verge, who constantly communicates with Jack (representing Dante) and guides him in his journey as a serial killer. Virge questions Jack's choices during several moments, allowing the possible interpretation of being the protagonist's consciousness, trying to reach elucidation. Here, "one

medium [literature] acted as an origin in a process of medial transfer” (WOLF, 2005, p.253) to produce scenes that compose the film.

Besides the transposition between literature and film, it is also possible to see such structure in a relationship embedded between film and painting. An illustration of such elements can be seen in the moment of the third incident when Jack takes his girlfriend and her children to a picnic followed by a hunting lesson. After brutally murdering his family, Jack places his preys on the floor in an organized manner. At that moment, the camera is placed in a high-angle shot or a *plongée*, allowing the audience to see through a panoramic view the landscape with the dead bodies. The audience perceives the bodies and other elements such as green bushes placed in an artistic position, being structured as painting, shown in image 3. The conception of the scene can be explained as a transposition of the painting techniques.



Image 3: Jack's victims on the floor resembling a painting (VON TRIER, 2018)

The second subcategory is *media combination* that is “the result or the very process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation” (RAJEWSKY, 2005, p. 51). Examples of this second type are opera, film, performances, music videos, etc. The media combination can be found in the way the film is constituted, with all the different languages that lead to the construction of the production, such as lights, music, image, texts, architecture, etc. According to Wolf (2005, p. 254), this category can be seen as *multimediality* or *plurimediality* that occurs “whenever two or more media are overtly present in a given semiotic entity at least in one instance”.

Furthermore, the last subcategory of intermediality is called *intermedial references*. In this case, one media evokes the characteristics of another media type. The representation is based on a referential work. The intermedial references, according to Wolf (2005, p. 254), occurs as “the other medium enters as a conceptual rather than a physical presence, and the base medium retains the character of a homomedial semiotic complex.” In this type of intermedial

relation, the production does not engage in a mixture of media. References to literature might be completely accommodated in the media that compose the film language.

The author distinguishes the intermedial references according to the manner into explicit references and implicit references. The explicit references occur as a work of art is shown entirely on the screen or mentioned by a character. For instance, in Von Trier's production, the famous painting by Sandro Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" (1485–1486) is shown explicitly on the screen while being mentioned by the character.

On the other hand, implicit references demand the audience to further investigate the media referred to in the production. They can be related in three ways according to the manner. First, the heteromedial mimesis that occurs as reference through partial reproduction. Secondly, evocation occurs as media A attempts to imitate the effects of media B. Thirdly, the formal intermedial imitation when "the other medium enters as a conceptual rather than a physical presence, and the base medium retains the character of a homomedial semiotic complex." (WOLF, 2005, p. 255).

The second and third types of intermedial implicit references can explain the director's style. An example of the second type, a reference through *evocation*, is seen as the director constructs the scene of Jack and Verge in a boat heading to hell, seen in image 4, eliciting the relation to the painting "The Barque Of Dante" (1822), by Eugène Delacroix, shown in image 5. The painting by Delacroix is already an intermedial transposition of Dante's Divine Comedy. Both Von Trier's scene and Delacroix's painting depict Virgil and Dante's agony with the events that happen in Canto VIII in Dante's famous poem. The scene is constructed with minor movements, almost frozen, with details such as distinct grounds (background, middle ground, and foreground) typically observed in paintings, thus evoking a similar effect as the painting.



Image 4: Recreation of "The Barque of Dante" (1822) with Jack as Dante and Verge as Virgil (VON TRIER, 2018)



Image 5: “The Barque of Dante” (DELACROIX, 1822)

The third type of intermedial implicit references occurs through formal intermedial imitation, as explained by Wolf (2005 p. 255):

This is a particularly interesting phenomenon because the intermedial signification, in this case, is the effect of a salient iconic use of signs. In fact, the characteristic feature of formal imitation consists in the attempt to shape the material of the semiotic complex in question (its signifiers, in some cases also its signifieds) in such a manner that it acquires a formal resemblance to typical features or structures of another medium.

The implicit reference of the third type can be exemplified in a scene where Jack is talking about the traces of a psychopath in a serial killer, using his personality to illustrate it. To do so, he starts to hold posters, seen in image 6, with descriptions of the traces of his persona. He presents posters with sayings such as “OCD”, “impulsiveness”, and “manipulation”, among others. In this scene, Von Trier makes an implicit reference to Bob Dylan’s music video *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, seen in image 7, released in 1965. The music video elicits aspects of the Beat generation, making implicit references to authors like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. Dylan’s music video later became a source of inspiration for other artists to produce their promotional videos. The following images show how Lars Von Trier makes implicit references to Dylan’s music video in his film.

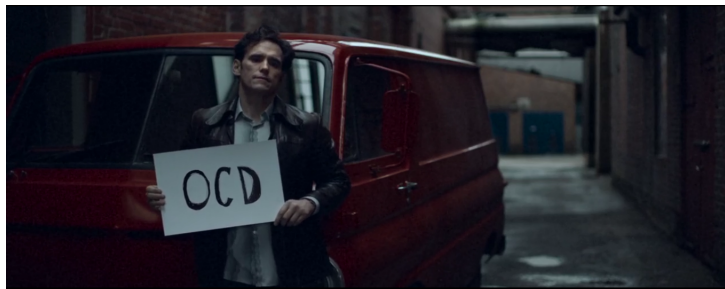


Image 6: Jack holding posters like Bob Dylan in the music video of *Subterranean Homesick Blues*.



Image 7: The source of inspiration, Bob Dylan, in his music video *Subterranean Homesick Blues*.

In addition to what has been pointed out so far, Lars Von Trier also appears to transgress the intermediality borders. Thus, considering the entire range of characteristics of intermediality as a whole, the director appears to display addition to its categorizations. He places an autoreference to his own films, specifically in the scene Jack is discussing art with Virge. Von Trier inserts scenes from his film *Melancholia* (2011) to give expressiveness in his production. This type of media relation does not cross the border of a media, being considered an *intramedial self-reference* being *implicit* through *partial reproduction*. The scene of a field where people are camping under a heavy sky creates a dramatic atmosphere.

Consequently, the intermediality in *the House that Jack Built* can call the attention of the audience accustomed to watching his productions. This is presented, as mentioned before, as part of the director's style and signature as well, justifying the importance of studying the phenomena as a whole, aligned to the peculiarities in the narrative explored by the director.

This study shows how intermedial and intramedial relations can be explored in films, considering the traces observed in a certain production.

Conclusion

The auteur theory has allowed us to trace Von Trier's style in *The house Jack built*. Since auteur is not consolidated as a single theory or methodology, it allowed us to create a new method of investigation specifically directed to Von Trier's production. Von Trier's style in *The house Jack built* is observed in the presence of the male gaze and intermediality. At first, the auteur theory might have sounded misplaced in the investigation of a contemporary film that challenges authorship for the strong presence of external references, which would question the notion of originality.

Nevertheless, Von Trier's strong signature is undeniable in his productions, challenging critics and viewers. The understanding of Von Trier's style also involved the cinematic narrative study, essential to the organization of each part and segment of a movie, allowing tracing the constitutive thematic elements in the production.

The centrality of the male gaze in the film observed in the perspective of the camera reveals to the audience a strange intimacy with a serial killer resulting in an uneasy identification with Jack. On the other hand, by establishing a relationship with the gaze as object, the female audience is confronted by Jack's gaze, not being able to grasp the meaning of his sadistic smile. By mirroring the passiveness of the female victims, the female audience is left with the recognition of the lack of the *object a* and not fulfilled desire.

As directors continuously seek new ways of expressing and communicating, they experiment with media language through combinations, transpositions and references.

This paper represents just the beginning of a sequence of studies that aim to delve into the structure and thematic content of complex objects of media. Aligned to the method of investigation, the style defined as a set of technical language results from the director's choices allows the viewers/critics to analyze the expressive resources in a given production.

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