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## Film, Healing and the Body in Crisis: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Aesthetics of Hope and Reparation

The failure to recuperate from the psychological and physical effects of war is mediated and reconfigured in the closing images of Ari Folman's award-winning *Vals Im Bashir/Waltz with Bashir* (2008). The film's final, animated sequence is abruptly superseded by live-action footage, newsreel material of the aftermath of the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Beirut during the war in Lebanon in 1982. Civilians, mostly women mourning the deaths of their loved ones, are seen first as animated subjects and then re-appear as newsreel 'objects', doubling and, importantly, troubling their presence on screen. The advanced technology involved in the filmmaking process adopted by Folman generates a kind of rotoscope-style visuality,<sup>1</sup> but this is dramatically disrupted in the last few minutes of the film. The hyper-real, fluid corporeality of the film is relinquished in favour of the 'concrete' realism of the live-footage of the same events.

Contextually, the move from one visual medium to another might be seen to neatly articulate a leap from the imaginary, and often dream-like, subjective perception generated throughout the film to an objective, historical frame of reference. Yet, the impact of *Waltz with Bashir's* final moments tends to transcend their diegetic purpose. The specificity of this closing sequence, its innovative combination of digital animation and video images, serves to crystallize *Waltz with Bashir's* most implicit question: how to engage with film, and by extension art, as a reparative object and implicate it in modes of recuperation in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>1</sup> While the images certainly look they are drawn using a rotoscope technique in which live-action is traced over and rendered, Folman has made clear the distinction between rotoscoping and the technique he adopts which is a combination of Flash and 3D animation. See, Niko Pelarcik's interview at *Film Monthly*. URL: <[http://www.filmmonthly.com/interviews/ari\\_folman\\_on\\_waltz\\_with\\_bashir.html](http://www.filmmonthly.com/interviews/ari_folman_on_waltz_with_bashir.html)> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> June 2011].

Throughout its history, the filmic medium has invariably operated as a virtual 'looking-glass' and recuperative space in which cultural crises can be safely negotiated, reconciled or reworked. However, the more risky, destabilising effects of contemporary cinema, in particular, raise new questions about the effectiveness of the medium as a recuperative device and the increasingly varied ways in which it interrogates cultural experience. This article is concerned with the question of how the filmic medium might resemble an object of hope, especially when brought into contact with object relations theory, and its meaning in the context of recent developments in film theory which have sought to question cinema's ontological status and the epistemology of moving image culture.<sup>2</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this article to examine the wider significance of film as a palliative art form, it does endeavour to make profitable connections between the filmic evocation of healing and the viewing experience.<sup>3</sup> I approach the subject of healing via a series of questions which consider how trauma is embedded in the very fabric of the image, namely, examining the implications of acts of hopefulness and embodied gestures of mediation and reconciliation in film.

A specific sense of embodied recovery, recuperation and futurity emanates from the films discussed in this article: *Waltz with Bashir* and Pedro Almodóvar's *Los abrazos rotos/Broken Embraces* (2009) serve to raise questions about healing in contemporary cinema and invite the excavation of what I call cinema's 'hopeful' gestures, of which a framework of embodied film theory is most relevant. *Waltz with Bashir* and *Broken Embraces* differ in their treatment of the subject of trauma and offer unique perspectives on the issue of healing in contemporary cinema; these films are not 'healing' in so far as that they represent or formally propose an end to trauma.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the theoretical models put forth in the work of D. N Rodowick, Daniel Frampton and Laura U. Marks engage with the post-structural thinking of Gilles Deleuze as points of departure in order to examine the metaphysical, affective and ontological status of the filmic apparatus in existential terms. D.N Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) and *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Daniel Frampton, *Film-Philosophy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Cambridge, MA: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For those specifically interested in the notion of cinema as a palliative art form, I recommend Emma Wilson's rich treatment of this subject in her recent book, *Love, Mortality and the Moving Image* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

Rather, the films at the heart of this article probe the nature of human pain and our desire to repair, to acknowledge, and bring to the surface hidden suffering and unspeakable loss. While *Waltz with Bashir* is at the centre of this article's exploration of film's healing 'bodies', my focus on the 'broken' embrace evoked through the title of Almodóvar's *Los abrazos rotos* leads to a closer examination of the physical and psychic conception of 'wholeness' in the film and its especially spatial co-ordinates.

The aim of this article is not to identify a new genre or movement in contemporary cinema. Rather, the subject of reparation, and my concern with film's healing 'body', draws attention to the vital intersection between sensory pleasure, self-affirmation and cinematic fascination which tends to characterize the contemporary film viewing experience. Indeed, given the significant investment in phenomenological discourse in recent years in Film Studies, and the theoretical emphasis on a corporeal cinema, especially in the work of Steven Shaviro, Laura U. Marks and Vivian Sobchack and Martine Beugnet, this article explores the alternative ways in which film encourages the mediation of trauma beyond its representational qualities, and envisages a kind of 'healing' through the very texture of its material attributes and multisensory images. This leads me to contextualize and elaborate on the notion of film as a reparative object, a theoretical model which draws together, and sets in dialogue, object relations theory, in particular, the thought of Melanie Klein, with recent developments in the field of embodied film theory. While my interest in Klein's approach to child psychology suggests that my concern with film as a reparative object amounts to an alternative approach to maternal relations and pre-symbolic discourses in film, this is not the case. Rather, object relations theory enables me to deal with questions of reparation in film and highlight the material specificity of such acts. As we shall see, the image and desire for a maternal presence in the diegesis will be discussed during my analysis of *Waltz with Bashir*, in particular, but I am also interested in how this depiction intersects with the film's broader expression of loss and its imprint, embellishment, throughout the formal aspects of the film.

## Filmic Reparation

*Waltz with Bashir* is ostensibly a film about the subjective recollection of Ari Folman's personal experiences gathered while employed as an Israeli soldier during the 1982 Lebanon war, but its combined use of animation and non-linear narrative opens up the film to wider questions surrounding the usefulness of the filmic medium as a reparative 'object'.

Any point of access to trauma, as a means of negotiating the affects of war and reclaiming of selfhood, is 'hunted' down and chaotically encountered in *Waltz with Bashir*, like the drooling hounds which pursue the protagonist in the first few minutes of the film before their execution. Folman interviews soldiers he fought with, but his memory fails him. A sequence in which Folman is immersed in water, rising from the coast as Beirut burns is replayed over and over, but his interviewees deny the existence of this recollected event. Folman, then, emphasizes the embodied nature of psychological trauma – Folman's only real memory of Beirut is principally experiential, he recalls the burning heat of the flames, the enveloping water and frequent images of his heaving chest intimates the physical exasperation of swimming. Moreover, Folman is positioned as a spectator at the margins of the terrible events unfolding on the beach, marking out his desire for separateness in spite of his complicity.

Yet, *Waltz with Bashir* does not only narratively convey Folman's experience of war, as the closing images of the film suggest. As the film critic Peter Bradshaw observes: 'this is an extraordinary film - a military sortie into the past in which both we and Folman are embedded like traumatised reporters'.<sup>4</sup> Bradshaw's reflection on the film emphasises the embodied nature of *Waltz with Bashir*'s potent exploration of war, I want to focus more closely on Folman's response to trauma as well as its invocation. *Waltz with Bashir* is a film which plays with the specificity of the medium and, indeed, the ways in which viewers are oriented towards the

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<sup>4</sup> See, Peter Bradshaw: URL: < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/nov/21/waltz-with-bashir-folman> > [last accessed 30th June 2012]; Anthony Quinn's review of the film also makes similar claims: URL:< <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/waltz-with-bashir-18-1027847.html> > [ last accessed 30th June 2012].

traumatized mind and body of its protagonist; it makes apparent its filmic properties in order to synthesize the experience of bearing witness to the de-stabilizing affects of war.

For Raya Morag in her article 'Perpetrator Trauma and Current Israeli Documentary Cinema', Folman's film presents a highly relevant account of the somatic and epistemological conditions of guilt – two areas of concern especially significant to my own treatment of the film. Ultimately, for Morag, Folman's redemptive narrative is predicated on a crisis of narrative structure (represented by the protagonist's failing memory), but it is my view that the images themselves evoke a different form of guilt at a somatic and epistemological level, a dimension of the film which calls into question the possibility of the troubled and destabilised body of the 'perpetrator', to use Morag's term, enabling the acknowledgement as well as contestation of the healing body that is indeed at the very heart of this article.<sup>5</sup>

At the close of *Waltz with Bashir*, the general composition, and content, of the two images of the mourning, Palestinian women is the same, but the close-ups of their faces invite an ambivalent mode of address: the entire film is envisaged from an Israeli perspective and thus the final image of the women might be seen to represent the victims of the Lebanon war but, as the film emphasizes throughout its narrative, Folman is also a victim, and therefore the switch from animated image (the visual register associated with Folman) to the live-action sequence is most jarring because it (self-reflexively) foregrounds the inappropriateness and insufficiency of representing the pain of others and their losses. Bradshaw describes this shift as an aesthetic error which undermines the seriousness of the animated images which precede the raw footage, but in my view the switch between two visual mediums is especially striking because it makes the process of representation transparent as one pictorial image morphs into another, reminding the viewer of the futility of any attempt to render visible the intense loss felt by the Palestinian women.<sup>6</sup> The visual switch thus operates, on some levels as a distancing technique which

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<sup>5</sup> See Raya Morag, 'Perpetrator Trauma and Current Israeli Documentary Cinema', *Camera Obscura*, vol. 27, 2 80 (2012), pp. 93-133

<sup>6</sup> See Bradshaw, *Ibid.*

prompts a more ethical mode of film viewing. However, unlike the Palestinian women whose faces and bodies avoid the appropriating gaze of the camera as a result of the visual switch between the two mediums, viewers are rather more in tune with the mind and body of the Folman's protagonist, as well as the other men he interviews; the final moments of the film sever this link with Folman's protagonists in order to map their experience onto a rather more collective form of identity and mediation of trauma. From its very outset, *Waltz with Bashir* builds up layers of embodied experience in preparation for its arresting dénouement; these layers of sensation, meaning and affect fuel the ethic of spectatorship that Folman's film precisely elicits.

Most notably, for Markos Hadjioannou, the distinction between the indexicality of the live images and the animated moments in the film does not interrupt the ethics of the film. On Folman's use of live footage, Hadjioannou writes: 'even if this footage does not indexically contain Folman, it makes him an inseparable component – emotionally, but perhaps also ethically – of his position within the very world that is depicted'.<sup>7</sup> Such an ethics is entirely implicated in the role of recovery in *Waltz with Bashir* and this is made most apparent during the closing sequence when viewers are faced with the live images of devastation in Beirut. Yet, a closer analysis is required of the link between the ethics of *Waltz with Bashir*'s final images and Folman's layering of an embodied aesthetic which, in turn, enables viewers to respond more acutely to the imaging of trauma.

One of the most striking images contained within the rich visual landscape of *Waltz with Bashir* appears towards the end of the live footage in *Waltz with Bashir*. After we have seen close-ups of their faces and the dense fabric which shrouds their bodies, the mourning women begin to disappear from the frame and a child's face enters the orbit of Folman's nightmare, motionless and silent. While the live footage, in its entirety, is utterly disarming, it is the face of the child which is most troubling. After a few moments into the live footage sequence, the fluid

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<sup>7</sup> Markos Hadjioannou, 'In Search of Lost Reality: Waltzing with Bashir', in David Martin-Jones and William Brown (eds.), *Deleuze and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). I am grateful to Markos for sending me a draft of his paper prior to publication.

camera movement falters and then a partially clothed bundle of ashen skin appears, weighted with rubble and dust. With the lingering image of the child's dead body, a 'taboo' image normally edited out of newsreel footage, the hallucinatory tone of the film is punctured. Yet, the 'reality' that the viewer returns to now is also displaced; subjective and objective relations are unsettled, here, in these final moments of the film. Any sense of subjectivity or objectivity is obliterated as a result of the filmic invocation of the trauma of war. Lifeless, the child's face becomes an object of the viewer's gaze and its inability to respond to the camera, to the embodied eye which traces its contours, reminds viewers of their complicity with this gaze, compelling them, it seems, to re-evaluate their perspective. Subjects and objects are indefinitely re-organized.

The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity and its involvement in the experience of trauma in *Waltz with Bashir* can be further analysed according to self/other relations and the film's re-working and, perhaps, contestation of conventional identification processes. Indeed, the point of collapse between self/other relations in the context of trauma is usefully elaborated on by Diana Fuss. For Fuss, 'trauma is another name for identification, the name we might give to the irrecoverable loss of a sense of human relatedness'.<sup>8</sup> Yet, conversely, *Waltz with Bashir's* disruption of identification processes, subjective and objective modes of film viewing, preserves a different sense of human-relatedness, one that is embedded in the ethics of the film itself. The switch from animation to news footage and, by extension, from the diegesis of the film to the extra-diegetic media image, serves as a material and contextual means of negotiating the problem of representation without undermining the real-life experiences of the women walking barefoot through the streets of Beirut. Thus, the formal properties of the film authenticate a kind of mitigation of trauma and express this through their very texture – their 'body'. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, the cinema is 'a sort of psychic apparatus of

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<sup>8</sup> Diana Fuss, 'Fallen Women: The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', in *Identification Papers* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 40.

substitution, corresponding to the model defined by the dominant ideology',<sup>9</sup> but while such thinking suggests that the psychic reality of the cinema replicates ideological conditions Folman's film undoes 'reality' in order to actively make apparent the failures of dominant ideology and its obsession with the subject of truth in materially cognisant terms. This 'undoing' of reality is achieved precisely through the film's 'body' in *Waltz with Bashir*.

As Sobchack has argued in her book *The Address of the Eye*, the formal attributes of film and the apparatus itself constitutes an invisible, embodied 'eye' that has an anonymous existence:

The "film's body" is not visible in the film except for its intentional agency and diacritical motion. It is not anthropomorphic, but it is also not reducible to the cinematic apparatus (in the same way that we are not reducible to our material physiognomy); it is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied "eye" that has a discrete if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous existence.<sup>10</sup>

In my view, the film's 'body', in *Waltz with Bashir*, is a site of recuperation, negotiation and, in this context, the film's 'body' might be seen to be involved in a kind of 'healing' process. The term 'healing' is most appropriate here because it implies both a physical and psychical process of recuperation pertinent to Folman's thematic concern with the issue of amnesia and the memories which haunt the physical world he inhabits. The use of the term 'healing' here aptly preserves a sense of both the literal (material) and metaphorical, emphasizing the relationship between mind and body that is configured in *Waltz with Bashir*. In the context of the film experience, the notion of healing that is constituted via the material attributes of film might refer to a particular form of film experience that corresponds with a cathartic visuality: a point of contact that can only be expressed in filmic terms. There is a sense of pleasure, too, to be found in the cathartic elements of the film experience – pleasure in the knowledge *Waltz with Bashir* shares with us and in its sensuous communication of memory and selfhood. Thus, while Folman's film complicates human relatedness through its complex undoing of self/other

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Cinematography Apparatus', Bill Nichols (ed.), in *Movies and Methods Vol. II* (California: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 531-48 (p. 540).

<sup>10</sup> Vivian Sobchack, 'What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh', *Senses of Cinema*, n. 46. URL: <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/00/5/fingers.html>> [accessed 2 June 2011].



relations, it also fosters a different sense of identification produced specifically through its visceral exploration of traumatic subject matter; as we shall see, this newly forged relatedness is encapsulated through the very title of Folman's film and the sequence it most readily evokes.

During the latter half of *Waltz with Bashir*, Folman interviews Shmuel Frenkel, the commander of his infantry unit. We view Frenkel stepping out from a sheltered position during an attack and manically firing round after round of bullets in a circular motion, his body swept up in a swirl of gunfire. Frenkel is 'waltzing' with the enemy's gunfire as well as his own, somatically, it seems, countering the immense psychological pressure of the endless conflict with this outburst of energetic, yet rhythmically controlled movement. While Frenkel's boots tread between the patter of the bullets, the backdrop to Frenkel's 'waltz' rotates around his body, a whirl of gauzy light and shadows which transform the urban landscape into an abandoned stage. The waltz metaphor underscores the embodied, kinaesthetic qualities of Folman's film and its emphasis on recollection as a sensuous activity.

Diegetically, Folman accentuates the momentary reign of the purely physical and somatic experience of war through the use of Frédéric Chopin's 'Waltz in C-sharp minor'. The music generates a sense of order and kinaesthetic pleasure separate from the violent reality of Frenkel's actions, reminding viewers of the difference between the historic, factual account of war and the sense memories of its survivors and victims which invariably exist in a realm of muddled and inchoate sensation. Furthermore, fear, or any other emotion for that matter, is exorcized during this sequence: the body of the commander is engulfed by the movement of the bullets and it is implied that the relentless loop of action entrances his mind, fixing his thoughts on a visceral wave of repetition. These affects, reinforced through the film's 'body', represent an apt analogy for the overall experience of *Waltz with Bashir* and its unique engagement with the subject of trauma and the way in which the film's body serves to engender a restorative, cathartic film experience. The highly kinetic imagery used to capture Frenkel's distorted sense of space and time as he sprays the air with bullets positions the viewer at a distance from the film's immediate

and subsequent events while simultaneously enmeshing them in the kinetic ‘flesh’ of the film, its material properties. Human-relatedness is here newly constituted as a complex set of responses to both the film’s diegesis, that is, its representational qualities, and the implied sense memories that are called upon by Folman’s interviewees.

By the end of the film, viewers are prepared to negotiate the third mode of address Folman engenders through the switch in his choice of medium, their response fully informed by the viewing conditions and the ethical response to the film’s subjects that have been set-up well in advance of the last scene. Coupled with the frequent repetition of the footage of Folman at the beach during the massacre in Beirut and the film’s largely non-linear structure, Frenkel’s ‘waltz’ offers up to the viewer the material traces of memory, embodied knowledge which resists easy assimilation into any strictly factual account. By opening up the viewer to a more vulnerable and risky experience of trauma which relies on the invocation of pleasure as well as anxiety, Folman restores a sense of one’s own selfhood, especially through sensuous spectatorship, and, in so doing, constructs a more meaningful aesthetic experience.

Certainly, the closing moments of *Waltz with Bashir* move beyond a representational form of filmmaking and cultivate a space through which self/other relations, and subjective/objective binaries, are re-defined and re-negotiated; this is what triggers not the process of recovery, but the acknowledgement of its possibility. For Hadjioannou, recovery is implied through the ethics of the film but, as we have seen, the film’s ‘body’ is implicated in the Folman’s acknowledgement of trauma and the film’s encoding of loss.

If the material properties of film have the potential to shake and unhinge perceptual experience, then, film also holds the potential to ‘repair’ itself, to move from the broken to the whole. Object relations theory, in particular, offers an appropriate theoretical framework through which to further investigate the meaning of film as a reparative object, especially since it directly interrogates the psychic and psychical space of recuperation which, as we have seen, tends to be at the heart of ‘recuperative’ films such as *Waltz with Bashir*.

## Object Relations

The question of how the filmic 'body' might be involved in a kind of reparative process has already been foreshadowed in the work of Laura U. Marks, in particular. In her book *The Skin of the Film*, the particular trauma of cultural displacement is evoked through the manipulation of the material properties of the filmic medium, both in terms of its formal characteristics and its literal, physical attributes, privileging a 'haptic' rather than linguistic mode of communication which awakens sense perception and, for Marks, enables diasporic filmmakers to intimately conjure, and make contact with, the worlds, the objects and places, they have left behind and are now mourning; such processes precisely serve as a kind of healing mechanism. While Marks develops thought on the restorative qualities of intercultural cinema's 'tactile epistemology' through haptic enquiry, the role of trauma in the viewing of embodied images requires further investigation.

The link between trauma and Marks's model of haptic viewing is underpinned by Emma Wilson in her book *Cinema's Missing Children*. She writes:

Marks is concerned with intercultural cinema and with the recovery or recall of sense memory in innovative haptic cinema. The memories she studies, often nostalgic and born of exile, have barely found their way into the public record. Her remarks have resonance in the different context of the cinema of trauma and abuse, where, in different circumstances, the unseeable and unsayable may register somatically.<sup>11</sup>

While Wilson acknowledges the specific context of intercultural cinema which Marks works with in *The Skin of the Film*, her thoughts on the relevance of haptic perception to 'the cinema of trauma', in particular, are revelatory. This location of haptic discourse in non-diasporic or intercultural cinema is felt most acutely in *Waltz with Bashir*, as we have seen, its switch from animated image to newsreel image is disarming precisely because it unbalances the viewer through 'nauseous' reality. The 'unseeable and unsayable' terror of war, then, is registered via the

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<sup>11</sup> Emma Wilson, 'New Jersey Childhood: *Happiness*', in *Cinema's Missing Children* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), pp. 41-53 (p.50).

affective and somatic qualities of the switch from animated image to newsreel footage. The nauseous qualities of such filmic corollaries of trauma, as Wilson suggests, are generated through the viewer's intimate exposure to the live-action footage. The sharp switch from the animated image to news footage embodies something akin to a glove being removed from a familiar hand: an adjustment of vision is required in order to attune to the sudden contours of flesh and bone, exposed and intensified. With the move from animation to news footage, Folman is able to resurrect the televisual image as a commemorative object and preserve its meaningfulness. In *Waltz with Bashir*, reparation is risky, painful and full of uncertainty, but such risks are worth taking for their potential restoration of hope.

Hope is also explicitly invoked in *Waltz with Bashir* through one particular scene in which Ronny Dayag, another one of Folman's interviewees, becomes overwhelmed with guilt as a result of failing his mission, comforting himself with a childhood memory. This scene usefully pinpoints the necessity of hope and its intimate entanglement with the imaginative world of the subject, their sensuous memories as well as, more generally, the preservation of cultural identity. Crouched beside a rock on a deserted beach, narrowly avoiding capture in spite of being recently separated from his fellow comrades, the baby-faced Dayag is seen drifting in and out of sleep, frightened and exhausted. On the film's soundtrack, we hear Dayag describe how his thoughts turned to a childhood memory, helping his mother cook in their small kitchen at home. We see the mother's fleshy arms enveloping Dayag's tiny, school-boy body as she gratefully embraces him, the beige hues of their domestic environ contrasting the bombed-out beach and its darkening shadows as night falls. Ultimately, Dayag is seen here hoping for his mother's forgiveness, for her love and their reconciliation. Confiding in Folman, Dayag admits: 'I wondered how she would react. We were very close...'

For Marks, 'intercultural films and videos use food as an entry to memory, troubling any easy access to the memories food represents. Intercultural "food films" and videos point out that the seemingly ahistorical rhythm of cooking and eating food provides an alternative framework

for the exploration of cultural memory.<sup>12</sup> This connection between food and cultural memory is made explicit through Dayag's recollection of his mother's cooking, emphasising not only the desire for hope, as I have argued, but also the question of its cultural embodiment as indicated through the invocation of 'home'. Above all, Dayag's memory diegetically emphasizes the film's central question of how to recuperate from trauma and construct a new narrative of hope.

If the final moments of *Waltz with Bashir* can be seen to operate as a kind of filmic, healing body, one that is demarcated by a shift in visual style and filmic specificity, then, its material figuration requires further exploration. Indeed, if the word 'healing' connotes physical as well as psychical recovery then its material evocation in film also invokes both the physical and psychical realm. According to the OED's definition, the word 'healing' is taken from the old English *hǣlan*, of the German origin *heilen* – to restore to wholeness.<sup>13</sup> For psychoanalysis, the term wholeness appears in the context of child development and discourses examining the infant's relationship with their mother. Indeed, as Marks points out in her book *Touch*, haptic film experience can also be described in terms of wholeness of, and indeed separation from, the image:

The haptic is a form of visuality that muddles inter-subjective boundaries (...). If we were to describe it in psychoanalytic terms, we might argue that haptics draw on an erotic relation that is organized less by sexual difference than by the relationship between mother and infant. In this relationship the subject (the infant) comes into being through the dynamic play between the appearance of wholeness with the other (the mother) and the awareness of being distinct.<sup>14</sup>

Dayag's memory of his mother and its engendering of hope thus reflects a desire for wholeness according to psychoanalysis but, crucially, it does not entirely fit the concerns of Marks's analogy regarding haptic theory and its psychic ramifications owing, essentially, to its lack of haptic imagery. Similarly, another vivid sequence from *Waltz with Bashir* features the war veteran

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<sup>12</sup> Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, p. 234.

<sup>13</sup> Taken from the OED online: URL: <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/heal>> [accessed 14th June 2011].

<sup>14</sup> Laura U. Marks, 'Video Haptics and Erotics', in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002), pp. 1-22 (p. 18).

Yehezkel Lazarov clinging to the naked body of a giant, voluptuous young woman serenely swimming on her back, a human raft silently floating towards safe shores after an attack at sea: a pictorial imaging of hope and its entwinement with desire rather than a haptic evocation of film as a reparative object. Thus, while the diegesis of *Waltz with Bashir* sufficiently enables an appreciation of film as a cathartic device, sensuous film theory offers a more pertinent framework through which to closely examine the connections between wholeness, embodiment and the restorative aspects of film prompted by my analysis of Folman's film.

The feelings of wholeness Marks describes in relation to haptic perception seem to originate from the intimate gestures of haptic cinema, namely the formal properties of the close-up and its implication in the unsettling of figure and ground. The close-up invites haptic perception in so far as it generates a proximal familiarity with the image. This is especially true for David Trotter in his reflection on haptics and absorption in narrative cinema: 'familiarity is life lived in extreme close-up, by means of a racking of focus which never allows one plane to settle into coherent relation with another. Familiarity is all texture.'<sup>15</sup> In psychoanalytic terms, the involvement of the close-up in haptic imagery prefigures the infant's relationship with the mother's body as a site of absorption and familiarity. Crucially, the thought of Klein introduces a reparative dimension to Marks's psychoanalytic formulation of haptics and the close-up in film. Klein's object relations theory offers an enabling way in which to further excavate the cathartic dimensions of haptic experience.

For Klein (*Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 1918), human responses to trauma often take shape through object relations. Klein's thought has already been the focus of several recent articles in film theory, especially those responding to the ethics of spectatorship,<sup>16</sup> but since these studies

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<sup>15</sup> David Trotter, Lynne Ramsay's *Ratcatcher*: Towards a Theory of Haptic Narrative', *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, Special Issue on 'Cinema and the Senses', Emma Wilson (ed.), vol. 31, no.2 (2008), pp. 138-58 (p. 139).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Suzy Gordon, 'Breaking the Waves and the Negativity of Melanie Klein: Rethinking the Female Spectator', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2004), pp. 206-225 and Leo Bersani and Ulysses Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: BFI, 2004). Alternatively, D. W. Winnicott's object relations theory has been the subject of two recent articles: Vicky Lebeau, 'The Arts of Looking: D. W. Winnicott and Michael Haneke', *Screen*,

adopt a largely psychoanalytic framework the embodied, phenomenological questions regarding the 'objects' of object relations theory remain unanswered. In purely psychoanalytic terms, objects play a part in the phantasmatic expression of certain drives or desires, but the material world prompts a different set of connotations in phenomenological discourse. As a means of exploring cinema's 'hopeful' gestures, as it were, attention must be paid to the involvement of the senses in the formation of object relations in film.

Marks demonstrates how haptic perception, in psychoanalytic terms, constitutes a move away and towards the body of the mother – an oscillation between separation and wholeness. This ambivalent fluctuation between wholeness and separation is rather strikingly prefigured in the work of Klein and her reflection of the role material objects play in the internalisation of an infant's psychical development. Klein's Freudian theory of reparation examines infantile aggression and anxieties in terms of their constitution of an ambivalent drive towards the destruction and subsequent restoration of the mother's body. For Klein, the mother's breast symbolizes the most important object it encounters; the breast is at once a source of plenitude and frustration which, in turn, becomes an object of love and hate. As Hanna Segal puts it:

It is the wish and the capacity for the good object, internal and external, that is the basis for the ego's capacity to maintain love and relationships through conflicts and difficulties. It is also the basis for creative activities, which are rooted in the infant's wish to restore and recreate his lost happiness, his lost internal objects and the harmony of his internal world.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, a cycle of reparative behaviour ensues in order to disavow the guilt of destructive desires and, crucially, this extends to the wider world of objects encountered by the infant. The child's relationship with objects, then, constitutes their externalized anxieties about the mother's body and they are preserved or destroyed as an externalisation of such fears:

The object which is being mourned is the mother's breast and all that the breast and milk have come to stand for in the infant's mind: namely, love, goodness and security. All these are felt by the baby to be lost,

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vol. 50, no.1 (2009), pp. 35-44; Annette Kuhn, 'Thresholds: film as film and the aesthetic experience', *Screen*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2005), pp. 401-14.

<sup>17</sup> Hanna Segal, *An Introduction to Melanie Klein*, fifth edition, (London: Karnac, 2008), p. 92.

and lost as a result of his uncontrollable greedy and destructive phantasies and impulses against his mother's breasts.<sup>18</sup>

Haptics can thus relate to a psycho-somatic schema in which the viewer perceives the image as whole or separate, but unlike Marks's conception of this cognition in terms of identification processes, Klein's thought emphasizes an ambivalent mode of film viewing in which reparation is central. Haptic perception is re-organized, according to Klein's thought, in terms of reparation: the close-up, in particular, functions as an object (a body-part, like the breast in Klein's theory) which can either be seen to be under siege (unstable and fissuring) or 'whole' (stable, soothing). Importantly, the Kleinian film-object is made apparent via sensory perception, but such viewing processes are fractured, like the Kleinian object of *Love, Guilt and Reparation*. Thus, film can represent a reparative object in terms which relate to both its specificity and its multisensory facets.

The main reasons why Klein's work is applicable to film and my particular interest in trauma and reparation are two-fold: firstly, in the context of Marks's haptic visuality, the emphasis on visual and other kinds of sensory stimulation in Klein's model of thought enables a fuller understanding of reparative drives and the soothing properties of film already implied by Marks but yet to be further analysed by existing film scholarship; secondly, the imbrication of both pleasure and pain in Klein's theory of reparation illuminate the troubling notions of trauma and its filmic concordances essential to my comprehension of film's cathartic potential. As we have seen in *Waltz with Bashir*, the healing body of the protagonist and the film viewer's involvement in the apprehension of such a gesture privileges a sensuous experience of film, but I want to ask what happens if the film's 'body' can also be involved in reparative processes, especially in the context of Klein's claims about wholeness – its fracturing and its reconstitution.

### **Kleinian Reparation**

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<sup>18</sup> Melanie Klein, 'Mourning and its Relation to Manic Depressive States', in *The Writings of Melanie Klein*, vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), pp. 344-369 (p. 345).



The filmic notion of the healing body, in the context of Klein's discourse of reparation and Mark's haptic model of thought, is most relevant to the fractured images of landscapes and, as we shall see, close-ups of the flora and fauna on the desolated beaches of Almodóvar's *Broken Embraces*. The film's title, especially its original Spanish title *Los abrazos rotos* calls to mind not an embrace that has been interrupted, but rather an ambiguous relation between broken body parts, severed arms forming an incomplete, surreal and nightmarish embrace. Such an embrace, according to the phrasing of the Spanish title, is formed of body-objects, not so much severed as free-floating and objectified. From the very outset of *Broken Embraces*, the question of wholeness (physical and psychical) is underscored, but Klein's thought reveals the somatic ways in which such themes operate throughout Almodóvar's film and, importantly, uncovers the film's reparative implications. Here, the metaphor of wholeness extends to the representation of filmic space and its embodied reconfiguration of such 'broken embraces'.

As with much of Almodóvar's corpus of work, non-linear narrative moves from the present to the past and, through the device of the flashback, protagonists also move freely between worlds, recollecting, incorporating, or re-imagining their past lives while constructing new desires and identities. While the spatial contours of the films themselves are permeable and mobile, the representation of space in the diegesis also emphasizes temporalized zones. Indeed, as Paul Julian Smith observes in *Labyrinth of Passion*: '*Labyrinth* clearly exploits the extreme density of Madrid, the vibrancy that comes from diversity in close proximity'.<sup>19</sup> While Madrid is also the predominant backdrop to *Broken Embraces*, another space exists in which the psychical experience of trauma is inscribed on the surface of the film and its material registers. Unlike the form of recuperation embedded in the formal specificity of *Waltz with Bashir*, the spatiality of *Broken Embraces* informs an aesthetics of Kleinian reparation. The narrative of *Broken Embraces* explicitly involves the subject of catharsis; its aging, and blind, film director, Mateo Blanco, is haunted by

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Julian Smith, 'Temporal Geographies: Comic Strip and Cinema in 1980's Madrid', in Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (eds.), *Cities in Transition: The Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), pp. 156-62 (p.161).

the death of a former lover and his recollection of their shared past soothes the pain of her loss and jolts his existence out of inertia. However, such themes of recovery are complicated by the film's formal style and the materialization of an aesthetics of 'brokenness'.

During a sequence in which the lovers of the film, Lena and Blanco, leave Madrid, freeing Lena from her failing marriage, the couple enter a strange, coastal territory – El Golfo beach in Lanzarote. Almodóvar films El Golfo (in Playa de famara), a volcanic crater eroded by the sea, with an Antonioni-esque sensibility, it is stark and two-dimensional, a series of lines and curves, solid colours and foamy textures. Importantly, in interview Almodóvar has made clear the significance of El Golfo. On the particular location employed in the film, Almodóvar emphasizes the connections between the film's title, the bodies of the lovers in the film and location:

This is where the title, *Broken Embraces*, comes from (...) They are watching Rossellini's film *Voyage to Italy*, in which archaeologists find the entwined skeletons of a couple buried by lava, together forever. Lena cuddles up to Mateo, and he sets the camera and takes a photo of them, unaware that their bliss will soon be shattered - and the photo torn to shreds.<sup>20</sup>

El Golfo's volcanic atmosphere holds the promise of wholeness, in the physical embrace, and its ossification. The 'embrace' of the film's title, thus not only suggests the lovers of its narrative, and their mortality, but in Kleinian terms, connotes the desire for wholeness with the mother, an 'embrace' which the volcanic lava tubes hidden beneath its sandy shores threaten to facilitate. Indeed, the volatile nature of the volcanic location also embodies an ambivalent entity, much like the mother's body of Klein's theory of reparation; the landscape can be seen to reflect a kind of psycho-geographic topography, or externalization of psychic trauma.

Yet, the filming of El Golfo also intensifies the fissuring nature of space and memory in *Broken Embraces*. While the broken landscapes are filmed in ways which heighten their organic matter and their pictorial presence in the film's 'body', they prefigure the somatic trauma that will

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<sup>20</sup> Annie Bennett, 'The Director, the Artist and the Unframed Work of Art', *The Guardian*. URL: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2009/jul/26/lanzarote-pedro-almodovar-embraces>> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> June 2012].

affect Blanco after Lena's death. Almodóvar's filming of the flat and crumbling terrain of El Golfo enables the film to enter a 2-dimensional plane of reality in which attention is drawn to the surface of the image, much like haptic perception. Dark pools of moss and sand become pictorial forms, shapes which disturb figure and ground; these images are intercut with lingering medium close-ups of grassy textures, azure gashes of water and light, dirt tracks and dust – immersive images which attend to the very notion of wholeness Marks uses to describe haptic imagery. Overall, the sequences which take place at El Golfo disrupts the film's 'body', its visual rhythms and organization of space, locating a precisely material configuration of 'brokenness' and 'wholeness' which, in turn, evokes the ambivalent nature of love in the diegesis. Here, film operates as a kind of Kleinian, reparative object in which viewers must negotiate its fragmented form. Unlike Almodóvar's characteristic use of meta-narrative and non-linear storytelling, his filming of El Golfo is an alternative, material corollary of psychic trauma; it marks a vital development in his treatment of mortality and the melancholy nature of the cinematic experience.

The film's accumulation and assembly of the abstract images of El Golfo necessitate an ambivalent gesture of reparation, of piecing together and negotiating the central trauma of *Broken Embraces*. Here, the film is not so much about the desire for wholeness, for the lover's lost embrace, but for the admission of this desire in spite of its repression. It is thus all the more significant that Mateo is blind and that we should, as viewers, encounter his (implied) traumatized memories through such vivid means of communication: the lush images of El Golfo distort our spatial and temporal conception of the film's narrative, they are like bookmarks in Mateo's memory, inscribed as psychic expressions of his loss. Importantly, these close-ups of El Golfo and their involvement in the 'piecing together' of Mateo's memory parallels another scene in which the older, emotionally crippled Mateo discovers Diego, his agent's troubled son, assembling an expanse of torn photographs chronicling his affair with Lena before her death. Of course, Mateo cannot see the photographs, but they represent another aspect of the 'broken

embrace' whose symbolism overshadows the film, its meaning refracted through the prism of Mateo's unspeakable loss. Indeed, Diego's literal assembly of the 'broken' images mirrors the ways in which the film's 'body' articulates a similar return, or cathartic embrace, typified by the film's mediation between the close-ups of the sparse, volcanic terrain and wider shots of the lovers themselves. In one of the most striking images of the film, we see a collage of torn photographs, their edges touching each other. At the centre of the image, we see half of Lena's face overlapping a dewy shot of the flora and fauna of El Golfo; at the far right corner of the frame we see Lena's whole face, over and over, upside down, tilted, painfully multiplied and, equally, unknowable as her face becomes an object out of reach. The rough, paling edges of the photographic paper curl under each other, enacting a kind of gentle embrace, gathered together as if Lena's image is folded in on itself.

The narrative of the film involves at least two literal representations of physical recuperation: once when Lena is pushed down a flight of stairs and nursed back to health by Martel, the cruel lover she eventually leaves for Mateo and, later, when Mateo is seriously injured during the events which lead up to Lena's eventual death; but the film's 'body' contributes towards the manifestation of the theme of physical as well as psychical reparation. At the end of the film, one final cathartic gesture is diegetically suggested through the restoration and editing of *Chicas y maletas/Girls and Suitcases*, a film whose terrible critical reception ended Mateo's career. The newly edited images of Lena's spectral screen presence in *Chicas y maletas* seems to materially render, and reconnect with, the feelings of loss Mateo is unable to articulate elsewhere – the creative process, much like Klein's analysis of the infant's desire to make whole again that which was lost, is both a psychic and physical gesture not only of reparation, but of hope. This pattern of behaviour, underscored by the film's title, is formally and contextually evoked throughout; as we have seen, it is a paradigm fundamental to the film's aesthetic, its 'body'. Thus, it can be said that while Mateo is diegetically seen to recuperate, at least in the sense that he is forced to reckon with the knowledge of Lena's untimely death, the film's 'body' also offers itself up to the viewer

as an object of reparation. Certainly, in the context of the narrative of *Broken Embraces* and its emphasis on a film-within-a-film which will hold the key to the protagonist's healing, the film's 'body' and its self-reflexivity foregrounds the apparatus as a healing body: the film's 'body' heals itself.

## Conclusions

*Waltz with Bashir* and *Broken Embraces* both respond to the subject of trauma in terms which are open to the possibility of healing and their refusal to engage with modes of representation which offer clear limits and parameters to their investigation of emotion and memory is liberating. The 'healing bodies' of this article have emerged through my exploration of the formal qualities of film, but the viewer's body is also a subject of recuperation. Viewing pleasure can be involved in a kind of healing process. Indeed, the pleasure of some of the earlier images of *Waltz with Bashir*, in particular, must be acknowledged, as I have argued, as part of its recuperative process and exploration of personal and cultural anxiety. Yet, ultimately, the film offers no finite conclusion or comfortable end, but it suggests what an aesthetics of hope in the twenty first century might look like, even if it is problematic and volatile; it mobilizes questions of hope through its specificity and ethical implications. Hope is not a fanciful notion – it insinuates itself in the reality of the films I have discussed. While *Broken Embraces* adopts a visual sensibility which resonates with Klein's theoretical model of reparation, it also draws closer attention to the spatial relations central to haptic visuality, re-organizing these relations in specifically reparative terms.

As I have argued throughout this article, contemporary cinema is increasingly concerned with the question of how to articulate notions of recovery and, indeed, push further the boundaries of film experience as a meaningful and participatory encounter. The answers to such questions lie in the modes of expression and communication that the filmic medium offers us today and its overall, formal capacity as a twenty-first century art form. If film is a reparative

object for the viewer, then, the question is how to treat this object appropriately and fully. The thought of Klein opens up a new discourse of reparation in film and invites other, alternative engagements with film's 'hopeful gestures'.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond the films of Folman and Almodóvar, the future of such a study of film's healing bodies lies in the specific sense of embodied recovery, recuperation and futurity which emanates from contemporary cinema. In dialogue with Klein's theorisation of ambivalent drives, which constitute the subject's experience of wholeness, and post-structuralist, affective models of film viewing, the non-linear narratives of films such as *Hidden (Caché)*, Haneke, 2005) and *The Intruder (L'Intrus)*, Denis, 2004) open up wider questions surrounding the usefulness of the filmic medium as a reparative 'object', especially in the context of recent political and social changes and their intertwinement with cultural anxieties about the material registering of pain and loss. It might also be equally fruitful to more closely examine Klein's theory of reparation in relation to the subject of trauma, temporality and the child in films such as *The Promise (La Promesse)*, Jean and Luc Dardenne, 2006) and *Tree of Life* (Terence Malick, 2011). Furthermore, the crisis of resistance to healing (via nourishment) that is established through the representation of the politicised body in Steve McQueen's *Hunger* (2008), for example, might also raise pertinent questions about the contestation of recovery and irrefutable complexities.

A cinema of healing is many things, as we have seen, but most of all it is the intimate engagement between film and viewer, skin to skin, the transformative meshing of colour, light, sound and sinuous being, the interstitial spaces between renewal and selfhood: all these things point towards a cinema of survival.

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