GHOST STORIES WITHOUT GHOSTS:
A STUDY OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE FILM SCRIPT 'THE SEABORNE'

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ABSTRACT

In 'The Crypt, the Haunted House of Cinema', Cholodenko argues that film is, metaphorically speaking, a haunted house: an instance of the uncanny. This raises the possibility the film script is also uncanny, from the Freudian notion of *das Unheimliche*, the strangely familiar and familiarly strange – and thus also a haunted house. This proposition engenders a search as self-reflexive practice for that which haunts the script – an uncanny process to explore the uncanny. The search requires drawing on Barthes, acting 'as dead' with that process' attendant contradictions and problematics – the most likely ghost in the script being the writing self.

Establishing the characteristics of the writing self involves distinguishing that figure from the author. This requires outlining the development of theories of the author from the concept of authorial will, as per the argument of Hirsch, to the abnegation of the author as a philosophical certainty. Barthes and Foucault call this abnegation the death of the author. Rather than that marking the end of a particular branch of analysis, the death of the author can be considered an opening to the writing practice. From this perspective, the death of the author becomes a strategy in Foucault's game of writing, effecting the obfuscation of the writing self, by placing a figure as dead, the author figure, within the metaphorical topography of the text. Indeed, the author as dead is akin to a character in the narrative but at a substratum level of the text. What places this dead figure within the text is an uncanny writing self, a figure of transgression, brought into being in the experience of Blanchot's essential solitude.

'The Seaborne' written by Matt Marshall, provides an example of a film script that constitutes a haunted house, a site of the uncanny. In terms of the generic characteristics of the film script as text type, its relative unimportance in relation to any subsequent film based on the script becomes of itself a feature of the film script. This makes the film script a site of negotiation and contestation between the implied author as hidden director on the one hand and the implied reader as implied director on the other. This confirms the film script as, using Sternberg's terminology, a *blueprint* text type. Examples of the negotiation and relationship between hidden director and implied director are found in analysis of 'The Seaborne' as are the tensions in the relationship between the individualistic impulses of the hidden director and the mechanistic, formal requirements of the text type as blueprint. These tensions are ameliorated by the hidden director who is then effaced within the constructed layers of the film script text to allow interpretive space for the implied director.

'The Seaborne' as representative of the film script text becomes the after-image of a written text and the foreshadowing of a future filmic one. It therefore never finds completion within its own construction process and its formation begins in templates that accord with the Bakhtin's description of the epic, as is shown by comparing the construction notes for 'The Seaborne' with Aristotlean dramatic requirements. But at the same time there is present in 'The Seaborne' a Bakhtinian dialogism that points towards the individual markers of a writing self. This writing self, referring to Kristeva, is a figure of abjection. It transgresses itself and transgresses its own transgressions. It is a ghost in a ghost story without ghosts.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an examination and exploration of authorship in the film script text type. The essay is a study of authorship in the film script 'The Seaborne', written by me, Matt Marshall. As a basis for investigation and analysis, I pose the question: what authors the film script 'The Seaborne', written by Matt Marshall?

In the first part of this paper I will examine the developmental logic that informed this question and suggested an approach to answering it. Both question and approach emerged from two theoretical strands. One strand concerns the operation of the uncanny and cryptic incorporation within film. The other strand deals with contemporary authorship studies, which arise from the (theoretical) death of the author.

The uncanny is the English translation of the term *das Unheimliche*, used by Freud to describe the familiarly strange and the strangely familiar.[1] Freud associated the uncanny with the state of cryptic incorporation, a psychological rupture emerging from an inability to accommodate the loss of a loved one. In the case of cryptic incorporation the psychological imprint of the departed within the mind of the grieving person is not assumed into the mourner's broader psychic framework. It retains a distinctive and separate identity, very much like a ghost haunting a crypt. The ghost is strangely familiar and familiarly strange. In the psychoanalytic field, Abraham and Torok refined the

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[1] Sigmund Freud (1959) 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol XIV,* Hogarth Press, London: 237-260

concept of cryptic incorporation further.[2] It is their view of cryptic incorporation which

Derrida transfers to a consideration of texts and textual formation.[3] Cholodenko uses

Derrida's theories to argue for a view of film as an entirely uncanny experience from its

inception and throughout the entirety of its history.[4] To support his argument,

Cholodenko refers to one of the first accounts written about the film watching

experience: that of Maxim Gorky.[5]

As regards the problematics arising from the death of the author and the operation of the

author function: Barthes argues that the representational nature of language destroys the

philosophical certainty of the authorial presence within a written text and that such a

circumstance is a precondition for writing.[6] Foucault argues that the metaphorical death

of the author arises from the contemporary cultural and historical mindset.[7] Foucault

then argues the death of the author is countered by a discursive operation used by critics

and readers of a text. That operation is made to behave as an author might. Foucault

calls the operation the author function. Both Foucault's and Barthes' theorizations

address authorial operations within general critical, literary and social discourse. But in

analysing the death of the author, they do not consider any such operations that may exist

within the interiority of a text, or the construction process that brings the text into being.

[2] Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1986) *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, trans Nicholas Rand, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

[3] Jacques Derrida (1994) *Specters of Marx*, trans Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, New York and Jacques Derrida (1986) 'Foreword: *Fors*: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok', trans Barbara Johnson, in Abraham and Torok (pp xi-xlvii)

[4] Alan Cholodenko (2004) 'The Crypt, the Haunted House, of Cinema' in Chris Healy and Stephen Muecke (eds) *haunted: Cultural Studies Review,* Melbourne UP, Carlton: 99-113

[5] Maxim Gorky (1896) cited in Colin Harding and Simon Popple (1996) *In the Kingdom of Shadows*, Cygnus Arts, London

[6] Roland Barthes (1977a) *Image, Music, Text*, Fontana Press, London

[7] Michel Foucault (1979) 'What is an Author?' trans Josué V Harari, in Paul Rabinow (ed) (1986) *The Foucault Reader,* Penguin, London: 101-20

That is, to say, Foucault in particular, and Barthes in some respects, seem to separate the figure of the author from the writer, but neither the death of the author nor the author function account for a consideration of the writer.

However, in works written by Foucault and Barthes subsequent to the theorized death of the author, they both discuss the construction of a text.[8] Foucault and Barthes also posit a role for the writer within the context of the construction process. This role is of the writer as a text brought into interdependent existence with the written work. As the writer creates the text, so the process of textual construction creates the writing self. And, as the identity, meaning, value and operations of a text are not fixed, but mutable, multiple, shifting, contextual and destabilized, so too is the identity of the writing self.

What or who authors any written text, according to the schemas proposed by Foucault and Barthes, is going to be fractured, unstable, multiple, contextual and contradictory. I will argue this is the case for 'The Seaborne'. However, because 'The Seaborne' is a film script, what truly authors it is multiple, contradictory, unstable and so on, but in the particular manner of the uncanny and the cryptically incorporated. What authors 'The Seaborne' is a haunting writing self that has made a crypt of the text. In addressing the question in this paper, I suggest that what I explore in the way I explore it is, becomes, or is in the process of becoming, a ghost story without a ghost.

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[8] Roland Barthes (1975) *S/Z* trans Richard Miller, Cape, London,
Roland Barthes (1977b) *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* trans Richard Howard, Macmillan, London, and
Michel Foucault (1987) 'Postscript: An Interview with Michel Foucault by Charles Raus' in *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* trans Charles Raus, Athlone Press, London: 169-86

To support this, in the second part of this essay I will outline developments in authorship studies and undertake an analysis of certain theoretical trends. I will discuss the theories of Foucault[9] and Barthes.[10] I will also discuss other theoretical positions in the field of authorship studies; positions that in various ways complement or combine with the arguments of Foucault and Barthes.

Burke in *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida*[11] has provided a history and overview of the field of authorship studies. I will draw extensively on Burke's work to analyse several theories of authorship. The theories of Blanchot, Bakhtin and Kristeva are also of particular note regarding the discussion in this essay.

Blanchot's work considers what happens to the writer's identity when engaged in the act of writing.[12] Blanchot calls the experience the essential solitude. The essential solitude is a form of alienation, in which the writing self is alienated from both the work and his, her or its own identity. What effects this alienation is what Blanchot calls fascination's gaze. Fascination's gaze occurs when a person views something so compelling that the viewer ceases to be aware of his or her own existence and corporality. All attention, all awareness is fixed on the object of fascination's gaze. In the case of the essential solitude, fascination's gaze is fixed on the external product of the writing self: that

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[9] Foucault 1967
[10] Barthes 1977a
[11] Seán Burke (1992) *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida,* Edinburgh UP, Edinburgh
[12] Maurice Blanchot (1982) *The Space of Literature*, UP Nebraska, Lincoln

product being the words written on the page or screen. However, because the writing self is taken out of itself, Blanchot argues that in the process of writing, the writing self does not merely think the thoughts, record them and then read them back. Instead, the words appear from somewhere and someone else, from the realm of the essential solitude, and the writing self merely reads them, as though for the first time. I will argue this is doubly the case in the instance of writing a film script, because the screen, from which the writing self reads, is doubled. There is the screen of writing and, as a film script is designed to be adapted into a film, there is the screen of the imagined film within the mind of the writing self.

Bakhtin suggests a view of writing, at least in the case of the novel, as being an action of rebellion, of subversion, primarily in the form of laughter.[13] He defines the novel text type as dialogic where the authorial voice occupies the same plane as all the other voices in the text. He contrasts this with the epic text type, which is monological. The voice of the author is dominant in the epic. Indeed it is the only voice in the epic. I want to consider this dichotomy of text types in relation to the writing of the film script. The film script, in terms of both form and content, is bound by certain generic conventions, as outlined by Sternberg, [14] which suggest an epic form. However, there are dialogic elements within the film script at all levels, from surface to structural, which suggest a novelistic work. Indeed, Bakhtin himself argues that the novelistic infects all other

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[13] Mikhail Bakhtin (1967) 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' in David Lodge (ed) (1988) *Modern Criticism and Theory, A Reader,* Longman, London: 105-36, and
Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) 'The Epic and Novel' in Michael Holquist (ed) *The Dialogic Imagination*, University of Texas Press, Austin: 3-40
[14] Claudia Sternberg (1997) *Written for the Screen: the American Motion-Picture Screenplay as Text*, Stauffenberg-Verlag, Tübingen

textual forms. The film script text type is a hybrid of the novel and the epic. This raises questions about the authorial voice in such a work.

Kristeva presents and develops Bakhtin's theories in her own work and I want to address her views of authorship on that front.[15] However, she also presents a view of the writing self in some of her other works as a disturbed, ruptured, virtually psychotic subject, a transgressive, abjected self that manifests primal rage through misogyny and bigotry.[16] This complements some of Burke's and Derrida's considerations of the writing self as compulsive, self-defeating, as well as literally and metaphorically masturbatory.[17] This is the writing self as monster: not the friendly ghost, but rather the terrifying apparition, the poltergeist, the banshee, the spectre.

In the third part of this essay I will provide a history of the development of the film script 'The Seaborne' through its drafts and attached notes. I will also outline the structural layers and framework of the text, both in particular and in terms of the general film script text type, which has been described as a blueprint text.[18] I will then consider the film script, as general text type and with particular reference to 'The Seaborne', in relation to the theories on authorship that I have already mentioned.

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[15] Julia Kristeva (1980) 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' trans Alice Jardine, Thomas Gora, and Leon Roudiez, in Toril Moi (ed) (1986) *The Kristeva Reader,* Columbia UP, New York: 34-61
[16] Julia Kristeva (1981) 'Psychoanalysis and the Polis' trans Margaret Waller, in Toril Moi (ed) (1986) *The Kristeva Reader,* Columbia UP, New York: 301-20
[17] Burke 1992, and
Jacques Derrida (1976) *Of Grammatology*, trans Gayatri Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore and London
[18] Sternberg 1997

Finally, I will present my conclusions and suggested areas of consideration. Again, I will propose that the writing self within the film script 'The Seaborne' is one that is cryptically incorporated within the development of the film script, while the script is cryptically incorporated within the writing self. Furthermore, I will suggest that the writing self of 'The Seaborne' is not a presence, but rather a palpable absence, an instance of the uncanny, of the spectral and that the film script is a haunting.