

Tren de sombras: memory, genre and film technology

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Abstract: José Luis Guerín's early film Tren de sombras (1997) is used in this paper to question the role of genre and film technology in the discourses of memory commonly claimed for contemporary Spanish cinema production. Technology works in combination with the demands of genre (primarily the Gothic but also mockumentary and found footage), to problematise the connection between technology and the recording of the past. The fragile and deteriorating film stock of Tren de sombras becomes a microcosm of the capacity of film technology to collapse under the burden it is charged with: capturing the spectral illusion of memory amid multiple narratives. This paper ultimately argues that the Gothic genre, together with the technological implications of memory recuperation, obscures rather than preserves memory and demonstrates that memory is always subject to the demands of genre frameworks.

Keywords: Tren de sombras; Guerín, José Luis; memory; Gothic; genre; film technology

This essay uses José Luis Guerín's early film Tren de sombras: el espectro de Le Thuit (Train of Shadows: the Spectre of Le Thuit, 1997) as a way of raising questions about film as a narrative of memory. The association of Tren de sombras with memory seems clear from its central premise: the editing of old home movies made in the early days of film technology, through which we appear to recuperate not only memories of an idyllic summer at a French country house but also the memory of old forms of film technology itself. Abigail Loxham argues:

Guerín's concern in this work is with the image as both memory and archive. This is not to privilege the subjectivity of one over the – presumed – objectivity of the other but rather to call into question the way in which both are created, and the contribution that

the moving image can make to this archive, a material of memory and also an ephemeral (in the form of digital) storage bank (Loxham 2014, 142-3).

And Marsha Kinder notes that Fleury, the maker of the old home movies, has “been rescued from obscurity [...] this fascinating process of recuperation also seeks to enhance the visibility of Spain and its most marginalized filmmakers in the global sphere of the later 1990s” (Kinder 2003, 23). Yet from the very start, Loxham also raises a note of caution about memory, in arguing that Tren de sombras calls both memory and archive into question. I argue here for the idea that the use of film as a memory text is brought into question by the fact that memory is inevitably interwoven with other narratives that go to make up our identities and everyday lives; narratives that themselves constantly shift as we encounter new narratives of varying kinds. The specific kinds of other narratives that I have in mind for this essay are genre and modal narratives, though they too are not the only narratives available to us. Genre as narrative frame is itself a vexed question given that a genre is in itself notoriously hard to define and any definition runs the risk of being circular: nonetheless genre labels have not disappeared and we still talk of romances, comedies, horror and melodrama with some semblance of meaning despite the slipperiness of definition. Kinder recognises the power of genre generally within the film:

We see how genre contextualizes the meaning of images and sounds, and that all generic options foregrounded by Guerín – melodrama, mystery-detection, documentary, art film, and historical reconstruction – can be applied to any movie. He employs genres [...] as a database of alternatives that alter the meaning of perceptions and that call attention to how we actually read the combination of sounds, images, and words (ibid).

Memory narratives can often sit within genre frameworks, but my experience is that the impact of such frameworks are frequently neglected, given the enormous weight currently assigned within academic study to the importance of memory. I believe our notions of the roles that memory plays within the narratives we tell can only be enhanced if we also recognise the

frameworks of genre which go some way to shaping our memories. Tren de sombras works, I will argue, on quite a few generic levels: documentary (given Guerin's reputation in the form), mockumentary (since some of the film is quite clearly faked), melodrama (a family mystery lies at the heart of the film, and this is one framework recognised by Kinder 2003), found footage (since much of the film is based around what is apparently discovered reels of home movies) and more particularly, I claim, Gothic and horror. Guerin does not have a strong association with Gothic and horror. However, a preference for discussing Guerin in terms of arthouse documentary does not mean that horror commentators have not noticed him. Diego López and David Pizarro, for example, include Tren de sombras in their portmanteau view of Spanish horror and the fantastic (2014, 367), thus this arthouse vehicle sits alongside much of Spain's contemporary horror output in their discussion. The Gothic possibilities of Tren de sombras have been implicitly picked up on by Kinder, who argues that: "Sombras (shadows) and espectro (specter) bring to mind the light, shadow, vision, and spectacle that are central to a reflexive meta-commentary on film, but they also evoke the ghosts, death, disappearance, and time that are frequently crucial in melodrama" (Kinder 2003, 18). It is noticeable that Kinder talks of melodrama rather than Gothic, though the latter is certainly encompassed in the former as the links between melodrama and the Gothic are strong.

It is the Gothic mode, I will argue here, that compromises film as a memory text. Yet if genre and modal frameworks play key roles in readings of a film, so does film technology and the ways in which it is required to service multiple narratives, including those of genre and mode as well as memory. Tren de sombras foregrounds the use of film technology through the attempts to piece together the family home movies of the filmmaker Fleury, who appeared to record the summer activities of his family at their house in Le Thuit, France, before he mysteriously disappeared. The film stock is deteriorating, and Tren de sombras is frequently punctuated by the marks of decay, blotches and scratches (and such marks point among other things to the Gothic nature of

the film). An unknown editor runs the footage backwards and forwards, slows it down, zooms in on specific images, freezes the frames, splices footage together and runs it in parallel. We are made aware of the importance of film technology – the materiality of film – to keep a record, to keep the memory alive of people who are now presumably long dead. There are also sequences in which the original events are re-staged, and we can distinguish them by the fact that they are shot in colour rather than the black and white of the original footage. Here, too, manipulation is apparent as the editor slows down or freezes the action: the same scene may also be shot from different angles, drawing attention to the implicit presence of the camera and its need to be repositioned. Yet other sequences in the film seem apparently to be a simple record of life passing in present-day Le Thuit (the local streets, the grounds of the house, the house itself on a rainy night) even though editing of these sequences occurs and even though someone, somewhere, has set up a camera to record these things. Technology is made visible only at certain times. Technology and the Gothic, as we shall see throughout this paper, have a strong connection with each other; and technology becomes a conduit through which the Gothic is channelled. Technology, with its aura of scientific rationalism, may seem an odd ally of the Gothic, with its own aura of the supernatural and the haunted, but the synergies between them can be strong and productive (see for instance, Botting 2015, Sconce 2000). The result of this synergy is, however, an undermining of film as a memory narrative.

That the Gothic genre or mode of the film is not simply a coincidence, and is pronounced enough to be worth considering as much as any other genre or mode, is demonstrated explicitly in the night-time sequence in which the house of Le Thuit is battered by a storm. The dark and stormy night and the mysterious house lashed by wind and rain, are of course staples of the Gothic. Guerin underscores this by the added tension from the music soundtrack, the rustle of leaves and the creaking of the branches; and also by the detail he picks out within the house. In particular, the shadows of the leaves occasionally appear to resemble a monstrous hand crawling

along the wall. The pattern of the lace curtains also casts a shadow that offers up eerie silhouetted figures. The reflections of leaves cast upon the house perimeters and the shadows from the curtains are echoed in turn by the shots of mirrors in different rooms as the camera penetrates further into the house's interior. The mirrors provoke us to look for a reflection within them, but it is a while before we actually see something reflected, and this frustration of our expectations adds to the suspense. Eventually, however there is a reflection – a portrait of Fleury. In the interplay of images within the house, including lamps and clocks as well as the empty mirrors, Fleury's portrait is picked out in a flash of light (the beam of a car headlight), and then cross cut with images of gargoyle faces. The cross-cutting with the gargoyles renders Fleury himself as monstrous. Eventually the images become repetitive and accumulative, almost oppressive in their signaling of absence (reinforced by the empty mirrors), pointing to Fleury's own disappearance and mysterious death. What the film offers us here is the typical haunted house; and the insistence of the overstated music and the constantly repeated and interchanged images that offer a chiaroscuro spectacle simply underline the melodramatic nature of the Gothic secret that lies at the heart of the haunted house. The photographs of Fleury, as well as his family, picked out in this shadow display, are a spectral record of the now-dead inhabitants (though we should not forget that Guerin will make it clear that these are in fact actors, giving living shape to these ghosts of the past and thus a concrete presence, rendered in turn virtual and spectral in a dizzying repetition by the fact that the film form renders any living being a virtual rather than a real presence). While Guerin's camera may appear to have mastery over this entire sequence, symbolized by the very idea of its 'penetration', in the end it is simply another device that reflects the earlier reflected images captured by other cameras and technological devices, the mirror being one of these.

Guerin also offers us opportunities to infer ghosts, through his subtitle "el espectro de Le Thuit" (the spectre of Le Thuit) and by saturating his film with the idea of death and by playing with the

blotches and scratches through which ghostly images appear fleetingly. The mystery of Fleury's death is flagged from the very beginning in the opening titles. At the same time Guerin casts doubt over what we see by pointing out the damage to the film stock done by damp. He notes in an introductory comment at the beginning of the film that these are "imágenes rudimentarias pero vitales, que vienen a recordar la infancia del cine" (rudimentary but vital images that come to commemorate cinema's infancy); the suggestion of a ghost, a revenant, returned, and very much alive. The very first images are smears and blobs on the screen, indicating the materiality of the film stock, but they are also amorphous shapes that are ominous in their significance, suggesting monstrosity; and suggesting, too, that the stock itself is tainted, problematic. In the opening sequence, the photo of Fleury by the riverside carries a large ectoplasmic cloud in the background, ostensibly a smear on a photograph reminding us of the photographs taken by spiritualists in efforts to prove that ghosts exist. Later photos have more obvious stains as with Fleury with his camera by the river. The dissolves of one image into another make for a literal ghosting – a multiplication of ghostly images, since Fleury is dead: multiple Fleurys beyond the grave. The images of Fleury then dissolve into a reenactment in colour of Fleury filming the river; but then he vanishes, the empty space pointing to his absence. The opening sequence thus plays with the notion of presence and absence as a binary that is broken down through the concept of the ghost: Fleury is both there and not there. The sequence also, however, undermines the power of film to preserve the memory of those who are now dead, since the images of those who are now dead are always vulnerable to conversion into shapeless smudges.

The opening sequence sets a recurring motif: the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of characters in the film stock. The present-day shot of a bench on a high hilltop overlooking the river reminds us of a similar shot in the fake footage where the family looked at the view. At one point, in the murk of marks on the film surface, Hortense's face appears blurrily, as she rows a

boat, and then disappears into the indifferent blotches. The maid who forms part of the triangular intrigue at the heart of the film is initially a mere blur: only repeated zooming by the unknown editor allows us to make her out behind the bicycling Hortense. The cuts to the present day inserted at intervals into the film contrast with the ghosts of the past we have just seen: the ghosts haunt a town that seems unaware of their presence as they go about their daily business. These ghosts are for the film spectator only. This haunting quality is redolent of interpretations that emphasise a memory discourse, while nonetheless pointing to the frailty of such memories owing to the technology that contains them and the Gothic framework that encloses them. The memories apparently encapsulated on celluloid are always subject to the possibility of dissolution and disappearance.

The presence of Gothic in the film immediately brings pressure to bear on the ability of technology to record things. Loxham argues that: “Portable, cheap technology facilitates documentary filmmaking but digital editing technology heightens a concern for the truth and veracity of this genre” (Loxham 2014, 140). But Gothic visual images and texts simultaneously uphold and challenge the veracity of what we see, rendering the impossible as concrete while also compelling us to disbelieve our own eyes. As Marina Warner states: “The phantasmata that are now projected into the world, in still or moving images, gain in eerie impact through the photographic medium’s traditional deep identification with truth telling” (Warner 2007, 58). The encounter of technology and the Gothic gives rise to a double bind in which what we see both must be true and cannot be true. For both Fleury and Guerin, technology facilitates the capture of memory and also its reproduction, but the use that both make of it demonstrates that those memories are unreliable. Fleury himself seems to have unwittingly recorded a love triangle between uncle Étienne, the young woman Hortense and a maid. Yet at least some of the found footage that reveals this must be fake – the same actors appear in the black and white reels and in Guerin’s re-staging of events in which colour is over-saturated, the actors are heavily made up

(Hortense appears to age at least ten years in the process), and they appear to freeze in position (an ironic replication of the stop-go viewing and editing of the original footage) while the camera swoops round them. Like the blotches and scratches that show material film to be delicate, these editing techniques draw attention to the “materiality” of the film that digital technology leaves open to question: though film may no longer have tangibility, Guerin explicitly demonstrates that it is nonetheless something that can be actively shaped – and faked.

Fakery has long been seen as a key motif of the Gothic, from what might be considered its ur-text, Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764), in which Walpole only confessed his authorship with the publication of the second edition in 1765. Jerrold Hogle theorises modern Gothic as inherently based on the fake from the very beginning, citing the Gothic revival in architecture and Walpole’s home of Strawberry Hill as an example (Hogle 2001, 293). He continues:

The counterfeit [...] has now become the evacuated “signified” of the Gothic signifier, which is thus the ghost of the counterfeit. The neo-gothic is therefore haunted by the ghost of that already spectral past and hence by its refaking of what is already fake and already an emblem of the nearly empty and dead’ (298).

Technological developments have increased the opportunities for fakery many times over, problematizing still further the connection between the visual and veracity. Warner, talking about the first moves towards film technology in the invention of magic lanterns and cinema projection, observes:

The association between diabolical phantoms and spectral phenomena influenced the content and material of optical illusions, and shaped the characteristic uses and development of those varied and wonderful technological devices that have been used to represent the supernatural, to make present what eludes the senses and to make visible

the invisible. Magic lantern shows sharpened the question that haunts the double: are such visitations phantoms conjured by external, diabolical forces, or are they ghosts within? (Warner 2002, 177).

From the very beginning, then, film technology carries a strong streak of illusion as opposed to reality, along with the potential to capture and appear to make real (or at least, to make reel) supernatural things that cannot exist. It is thus deceptive, and gives rise to doubt as to where the fakery stems from: our inability to determine the source – inside or outside? – creates an analytical gap. (Where do the blotches and scratches of Fleury's home movies come from? Inside or outside?) It is this gap, this hesitation, into which the Gothic erupts. This includes Guerin's reputation as a maker of documentaries. Guerin is, as Hogle would have it, refaking what is already faked, creating layer upon layer of fake narrative to create a mystery that does not in fact exist. As I shall go on to explain later, the purported secret lies in the disappearance of the patriarchal figure, i.e Fleury, as well as his loss of authority (because he does not perceive what is going on within his own family), an authority that Guerin cannot recuperate on his behalf.

The resort to elements of trickery and special effects on the part of both Fleury and Guerin also chimes with the move Fred Botting perceives from modernity to postmodernity:

That delusions or distortions of reality can be caused by technical devices, whether fictional, theatrical or scientific (the 'machinery' of narrative technique, the smoke and mirrors of stage effects, the machines of projection and electrical generation) anticipates the final order of spectrality where there is no reference to reality whatsoever: ghostliness refers only to spectres of other images and phantoms, a move into a realm of simulation and hyperreality in which modernity slips away (Botting 2015, 19).

This definition is the final of Botting's four orders of spectrality, which roughly follow a historical trajectory of science and technological development. Tren de sombras seems to bridge

the third order of modernity (where the spectral becomes part of the system of delusions and distortion Botting refers to above) and the fourth, that of postmodern hyperreality. Fleury's original film reels form part of the third order rooted in modernity, wherein the apparent secret discovered in the post-editing is countered by the basic illusions Fleury indulges in, such as the moving ties worn by the little boys. Guerín's own insertions are on the one hand obvious simulations, as he re-stages the almost primal scene of the secret triangle between the uncle, the niece and the maid, or Fleury's final expedition before he disappears into the mist. The saturated colour of these scenes suggest the hyperreality, which we can also perceive in the apparently random present-day sequences where the camera is simply parked in a spot to film the comings and goings in the local town of the present day. In one sense their "realness" is the ultimate point: they add nothing to the main "action" of the film but seem to offer themselves as real life as opposed to the fiddling with film and illusion that both Fleury and Guerín undertake.

On the other hand, technology reveals that reality is ultimately hollow, and memory cannot be captured therein: *none* of the footage, either Fleury's or Guerín's, actually informs us or indeed touches on a solution to a mystery that is itself fake. In reference to The Blair Witch Project (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez 1999) David Banash states:

Technologies of representation are, as we know, omnipresent. Worse, they are the only possibility we have to engage the world. Yet they are always flawed, always inadequate, always shifting and deceptive. The fact that the witch cannot be captured on the film is the horror of the film, but not because it empowers unmediated imagination. It is horrifying because it dramatizes (shows!) our total reliance on technologies that, if pushed, break, rupture, and give over to chaos (Banash 2004, 115).

This reliance on technology is true for both Fleury and Guerín, and the true "horror" of Tren de sombras is the fact that the mystery cannot be captured on film: as with Blair Witch we are reliant on film but cannot get it to tell us what it refuses to show. Even Guerín's attempt at

restaging does not fill in the gaps left by the original film. Instead of empowering unmediated imagination, the film is reduced in the end to showing images that are real but which have no story to tell and thus no memory to recuperate. It is thus no surprise that Guerin ends the film with random images that are presumably filmed in Le Thuit but for which we are given no contextual information to locate them and interpret them.

Fakery of a sort has begun to pervade the documentary format, with the rise of the mockumentary. Mockumentaries are not in themselves automatically Gothic texts, but – as we shall see with their close cousin, the found footage film – they lend themselves to the raising of questions about counterfeiting that are indeed Gothic. The foregrounding of the editing techniques and Guerin’s simulacra of key Gothic moments in the film – the disappearance of the patriarchal figure, the secret love triangle - suggests Tren de sombras as a form of Gothic mockumentary, since the reframing of these key moments draws attention to the original footage as fake, but also to the Gothic nature of what is being faked. In response to technology as a Gothic problem, it is profitable to consider Tren de sombras in terms of what Papagena Robbins and Kristopher Woofter term “gothumentary”¹, spinning on the notion of mockumentary. For Robbins and Woofter gothumentary does not simply imply a Gothic subject but also implies a “mode of documentary concerned with the notion of knowledge itself as monstrous”. The authors consider it separate from the “fantastical pseudo-documentary” which “only [renders] the world strange through juxtaposing speculation with strings of unanswered questions and evidence often extracted from historical or cultural contexts” (Robbins and Woofter 2012, 54). According to Robbins and Woofter, gothumentary:

re-enacts Gothic and horror genre conventions with the purpose of revealing monstrous ruptures in the real that genre conventions typically convey through patently fictional events and recognizable (because often formulaic) iconographic and narrative constructs.

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Stefanie Van De Peer for drawing my attention to the work of Robbins and Woofter.

Framing the world as though teetering on the brink of the inscrutable and the irrational, the gothumentary points to and disrupts our vague or illusory sense of the real by rendering it through the conventions of the darkly fantastic, while still maintaining a link to the historical world, so crucial within the documentary tradition (55).

It is possible to argue that Tren de sombras is not a gothumentary, but a fantastic pseudo-documentary – or indeed mockumentary – that poses unanswered questions and renders the world strange. Nonetheless I would argue that the film does in fact reveal monstrous ruptures in the real/reel through Gothic conventions, while still maintaining a link, however tenuous to the “real” world (the house and locale of Le Thuit do in fact exist). The house at Le Thuit functions as a Gothic haunted house wherein the phantasmal celluloid presence of the previous occupants haunt the present day ‘occupant’ of the house, the camera and associated investigative crew that surround it (all of whom are of course invisible to the viewer). Indeed, the segments based on the house and its grounds captivate not only the unseen editor of the film/Guerín, but the viewer as well, far more than the town of Le Thuit of the 1990s. The random street sequences of the latter appear to contribute nothing to the buried storyline of the old film reels: such a preference for an old story rather than today’s reality is a pervasive motif of the Gothic. In the end the real has no narrative but simply consists of random events: the narrative draws us because it hints at purpose, but it is nonetheless fake. Thus fake narrative becomes the monstrous thing that irrupts into the real/reel.

To take this idea still further, one can also compare Tren de sombras with the found footage subgenre within horror, popularised by such films as The Blair Witch Project, Cloverfield (Matt Reeves 2008) and [REC] (Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza 2007). There is perhaps irony in this in that most such films work hard to hide the editor, whereas Guerín explicitly surrounds his found footage with editing techniques, and offers a deliberate contrast with the short sequences with a static camera indifferently recording random acts, such as at the end of the film where the

camera records cars and a bicycle passing fleetingly down a street. The basis of found footage is the footage left behind when its makers have disappeared: the recording itself becomes the only testimony – the only memory – of such events, since there are explicitly or implicitly no survivors left to tell the tale. The Blair Witch Project famously blurred the notion of found footage with mockumentary in the marketing campaign, by positing the film as actual documentary footage, rather than (as it actually is) a mixture of scripted and improvised acting controlled at one remove by the directors, with the added felicity that the actors function as the camera crew for Blair Witch itself as well as the documentary they are purportedly making. The use of ‘missing’ posters for the lost actors/characters, and internet material about the (fake) legend of the Blair Witch and further documentary material speculating on what happened to the protagonists, all present the film itself as ‘the real thing’. Blair Witch has been compared to Tren de sombras (Cuevas Álvarez 2001, Kinder 2003), but the Gothic possibilities inherent in this have for the most part not been picked up on as regards the latter film.

The Gothic motif of the missing manuscript comes into play here. Fleury’s home movies are in a sense found footage that contains a dark and unresolved Gothic secret (in fact two secrets: the love triangle and Fleury’s death), but they are also much like the discovered manuscript that forms a common motif in Gothic novels, wherein the secrets of the past come down to haunt – sometimes literally – the next generation. The found footage is decaying much in the style of the discovered manuscript of Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer (1820), which is found to have crumbled away at key points so that the secret at its heart remains partially obscured. So with Tren de sombras: the film stock does not totally give up its secret to the viewer but becomes a mechanical form of the rediscovered manuscript beloved of many a Gothic tale. From Melmoth the Wanderer to more contemporary examples such as the faked book The Nine Doors (Las nueve puertas) that forms a central plotline in Arturo Pérez-Reverte’s El club Dumas (The

Dumas Club, 1993), the discovered manuscript is never totally to be relied on – and yet the Gothic tale it tells is compelling, even though the teller never denies the holes in the story.

The found manuscript or film reel stresses the materiality of the record left behind, memory as physical artefact; yet Gothic found footage films reintroduce the notion of fakery that again induces uncertainty. The reels look real (and we can remember the many responses to Blair Witch who took the film's premise to be true; see Cuevas Álvarez 2001 and the various essays in Higley and Weinstock 2004). Tren de sombras underscores the materiality of film through the splodges and the splices, but at the core of Fleury's film reels as putative physical artefact is the fact that the narrative they contain is fake. An emphasis on the materiality of the Gothic text has been noted by Catherine Spooner, who argues that in a digital age there has been a renewed interest in the Gothic book as physical artefact, arising from a combination of nostalgia and fear in the face of the digital ubiquity of information (Spooner 2014, 186). Tren de sombras's film reels work in a similar way as a physical artefact, with not only its blots and scratches but also the sound of the film winding backwards and forwards as the unseen editor works with the footage. The sense of nostalgia – both in the apparently idyllic family scenes captured on film and the pleasure of being reminded as to what film used to be like – offers a longing for the past that is not to be found in Blair Witch or [REC] but which overlays further the ironies that the Gothic brings to notions of memory; for this nostalgia is ultimately a longing for what is counterfeit. Of course, as Gabriel Cabello reminds us, Tren de sombras's emphasis on the materiality of film is an ironic reminder of “el carácter artificial de una película que no es simplemente una ventana; que puede pretender representar una realidad exterior a ella, pero que no la constituye” (the artificial nature of a film which does not simply function as a window; that claims to represent an exterior reality but does not constitute it: Cabello 2005). Arguably, film by definition is always counterfeit, even in its documentary form, because it is never immediate reality and because technology always already intervenes. The Gothic mode of Tren de sombras nonetheless extends

this to a mise-en-abyme in which the Gothic and documentary infinitely reflect the real/not real of the gothumentary or found footage format and ultimately capture only a moment of hesitation.

Guerín's manipulation of Fleury's film reels, as well as the fact that this is very much a narrative that he himself is inventing, might perhaps suggest that explanation and memory ultimately lie in his control. Nonetheless the Gothic undermines this as well. According to Botting:

In the context of a movement from a modernity associated with rational production to a *post*modernity linked to accelerated technological consumption, Gothic images and horrors seem less able to restore boundaries by allowing the projection of a missing unifying (and paternal) figure. No single framework stabilizes social meanings and identities (Botting 2002, 281).

Both Fleury and Guerín can be seen as potential patriarchal figures in their attempts to record and thus control narrative. Fleury's failure to do this is clear from the memories he appears to record. It is not simply that those memories that are in fact recorded are subject to the wear and tear of technology, but also that he fails to record the key event, which thus cannot be recalled: his own disappearance and death. In addition, when the family photos point once again to the mysterious connection between Étienne and Hortense, the separate portraits of Fleury, who is the first to be picked out in Guerín's night-time photomontage, remind us that he is not only part of the record of the past but the one who recorded it; and yet he seems to have done this unwittingly, unaware of what his own films tell him. He is like the ineffectual patriarchs of narratives such as Sheridan LeFanu's 'Carmilla' (1872), where the father does not perceive that the woman he allowed into his house as his guest is a vampire feeding off and seducing his daughter. Fleury may record, but he does not perceive what he records. Therefore, although Fleury might be the author of what he records he is not the auteur: his vision does not unify meaning in his film reels. Fleury becomes an author without authority.

Guerín might be thought of as the one to fill this gap; and much of Tren de sombras gestures in this direction. It is, after all, Guerín who appears to uncover the secret love triangle, and who steps in to record the missing memory of Fleury's disappearance. But Guerín also fails in the end to become the unifying paternal figure that bestows meaning, because of the very technology he manipulates in order to try to find it. Tren de sombras, and the technology used to make it, proves to be a record of his inability to record, or a documentary of his inability to document. Guerín is caught at precisely the moment Botting specifies, in the move from the rationality of modernity, exemplified in Fleury's efforts to document the real, to a technological postmodernity where Guerín plays with the rationality of Fleury's output but in the end cannot pin down what is real, calling into question (probably deliberately) Guerín's own status as a documentary filmmaker. And by appearing to take control of mystery, Guerín simultaneously precludes memory. Kinder argues:

it [the mystery] is not merely the melodramatic disappearance of a particular Frenchman one morning in the mist, but the disappearance of an entire family, an era, and a way of life. And also the threatened disappearance of an artistic medium that is capable of documenting and projecting the incredible beauty and resonance of the most banal moments of everyday experience (Kinder 2003, 23).

But then Guerín is ultimately powerless: he cannot arrest this loss, and memory is shown to be at best fractured and unstable, undoing his power as auteur.

The loss of authority over memory brings me back to the matter of memory, which I have referred to throughout my discussion. By way of concluding my argument I now turn to address the question more fully. To do this I will refer to Botting again, who here is talking of the link of the technical to the uncanny:

From the start, the uncanny is part of a technical assemblage (tools; words; mirrors; optical devices) which registers the constitution and decomposition of the fantasy of a human subject. The uncanny discloses humanity to be very much a technical effect, a creation of devices, media and systems that retrain the human sensorium in different epochs and socio-political conditions (Botting 2015, 19).

He coincides with Kinder's observation on Tren de sombras which "link[s] an uncanny death from the past to a present fear of powerlessness and obliteration, or a fear of being condemned to silence and obscurity" (Kinder 2003, 13). We should bear in mind, too, that Kinder describes Fleury as an uncanny figure even as she talks of the process of recuperation of his memory (23). In both cases, the uncanny is perceived in terms of the fragility of human subjectivity: while Botting describes it as a technical effect (including optical devices), Kinder understands it as an effect of understanding the past in the present, but both observe that the result is a loss of power. Botting does in fact go on to link the technical/technology to the concerns that Kinder pinpoints. He observes that some 1990s films (and again Blair Witch is mentioned) "linked horror to an array of old and new technical and cinematic devices, situating themselves between nostalgia for modern cinema and the onrush of technological possibility" (Botting 2015, 23). While he later suggests old media as a carrier of human memory (29), such media are still subject to the failures of those who aim to recuperate memory through them. The putative auteurism of Fleury and Guerin implies the subjectivity of the documentary process, but as we have seen, their point of view lacks power and their subjectivity is compromised as a result. Without human subjectivity, however, memory is imperilled and becomes purposeless.

Both Botting and Hogle are, it must be said, deeply pessimistic commentators on the Gothic; the former, in particular seeing it in nihilistic terms of insatiable and unsatisfying consumption. I am not totally convinced that the Gothic has been reduced to this (see also Spooner 2017), but I have to admit that, given the fit of Botting and Hogle's ideas with the Gothic of Tren de

sombras, the latter is at heart a bleak film which the charm of Fleury's home movies cannot totally disguise. To begin with, Gothic as a genre or mode is often redolent of the past but that does not mean it functions well as a carrier for memory. The forgotten 'manuscript' of film reels may call attention to the past but it ultimately fails to recall it in anything like a satisfactory manner. The keys to the past of Tren de sombras that explain Fleury's disappearance and the putative love triangle, are not to be found in the film reels nor in Guerín's reconstruction of them. In any case, the narrative up for recall is not only missing component parts but is faked. As Erica Moore puts it:

the anxiety of memory, the anxiety of accurate representation, manifests contemporary concerns as the memoir becomes a Gothic landscape where issues – including confinement, haunted spaces, childhood terror, and the ghosts of technological mediation – compete for dominance and definition of the individual psyche (Moore 2016, 173)

The ghosts of technological mediation are inextricable from this particular Gothic landscape that produces this particular anxiety of memory, in which accurate representation proves to be impossible. The individual psyche that Moore talks of, refers to her own texts of autobiographical memoir, but there is a parallel with the individual directorial vision of Fleury/Guerín and the anxiety of their own control over what they film. Memory is something that ultimately eludes them and thus control does too. Their apparent control over the apparatus of filming does not help them preserve or recuperate memory.

The film has two endings, a recreation of the past and a return to contemporary Le Thuit. In the first, Fleury and his camera disappear into the mist, en route to his mysterious death; while in Le Thuit we are confronted by the intriguing final image of an apparently open street giving on to the river, with a no entry sign at its mouth. This latter image symbolises neatly what the film leaves us with – an apparent opening to another world but where the view is ultimately blank,

and we are unable to explore further. The sign also speaks for the preceding sequence in which Fleury rows off into the mist in Guerín's restaging, the figure of both Fleury and his camera only visible intermittently in the fog. That camera returned and is displayed among the Fleury artefacts in the house, but it has nothing to tell us about Fleury's final journey. Memory in Tren de sombras, then, is in the end about gaps: it becomes ultimately a void – the foggy scene in which the focal point of Fleury and his camera soon disappears, or the street which we are barred from entering, which apparently leads to the river but also to a meaningless emptiness. Robbins and Woofter note of the gothumentary that "The hermeneutics of gothumentary are negativistic: though interpretations are building up, the void becomes the ultimate focus, the foregrounded possibility" (Robbins and Woofter 2012, 52). The use of different genres, like the use of technology, ultimately serve to render memory itself as a void: enough text is left to encourage interpretations and even attempts to fill in the blanks such as Guerín carries out with his editing and reconstructions. What genre frameworks demonstrate, then, is that they can interfere with the possibility of recuperating and indeed deny this latter process simply because they intervene to insist on their own presence. Tren de sombras reveals itself as a multi-genred, hybrid text wherein the Gothic mode threads through and shows both narrative and technology as failing to deliver; and what appears at first sight to be a memory text is ultimately elusive – the key memories that explain and answer the mysteries set up by the film reels are not returned. Sarah Higley, in response to the comments of Banash on Blair Witch quoted earlier, argues that in regard to technology: "Death and disappearance of the filmmakers and other people who "just want to see something" are the symbolic extensions of this failure" (Higley 2004, 105). As with The Blair Witch Project the filmmaker's death remains an enigma and the film left behind does nothing to explain it, while Guerín's efforts at reconstruction fail likewise. Together, genre and film technology have served, not to recuperate memory, but to underscore the fact that memory cannot escape either the demands of genre or technological imperatives and weaknesses.

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