

Sarah Pucill 15 Feb 2018

**“Coming to Life” and Intermediality in the tableaux vivants in
Magic Mirror (Pucill, 2013) and *Confessions to the Mirror* (Pucill,
2016)**

Prologue

The life and work of the French Surrealist photographer and writer Claude Cahun (nee Lucy Schwob 1894-1954) and her life partner and collaborator Marcel Moore (nee Suzanne Malherbe 1892-72) is the inspiration for the diptych of films *Magic Mirror* (bw, 75min, Pucill, 2013) and *Confessions to the Mirror* (col, 68min, Pucill, 2016). There has been much debate concerning the question of authorship regarding the photographs that initially were presented to the public as the work of Cahun but more recently are often discussed as a work of collaboration between Cahun and Moore. Cahun’s writing dominates both films, which frames the focus of the authorship of the photographs and in each of the photographs re-staged that I discuss here, Cahun’s writing speaks to directly. Cahun was a member of the Surrealist group and exhibited as an artist with the group and of the photographs that are signed, it is Cahun’s signature. Yet since a questioning of authorship is part of the concern in these films, I will imagine in some photographs Cahun directing their collaboration and refer variously to the authorship of the photographs.

The best known small black and white photographs are of Cahun masquerading in different identities. Both films comprise an accumulation of tableaux vivants

that re-stage many of these photographs alongside voices narrating Cahun's written text. Shot in a home studio on 16mm, hand-made life size and miniature sets animate as *tableaux vivants* imitations from Cahun's photographs, many of which she collaborated with Moore, alongside voices from Cahun's writing.

The text spoken in *Magic Mirror* is from Cahun's text *Aveux non avenues* (1930), a Surrealist poetic text that collages poem, essay, monologue, dialogue, dream and letters alongside photo-collages that divide the chapters. The writing is a philosophic and psychoanalytic interrogation of self as word and image, published as a collaboration with Moore who made the photo-gravures that divide the chapters. *Magic Mirror* is shot in black and white, and re-enacts many of the self portrait photographs taken whilst the couple were in Paris during the 1920s and '30s. The text used for the voice-over in *Confessions to the Mirror* is from Cahun's post war memoir *Confidences au miroir* (1945-46). Mixing colour and black and white, the *tableaux vivants* and the text in the film narrate the couple's war experience in Jersey during the Nazi occupation, their anti-propaganda activity and their imprisonment. Many of the photographs re-enacted are still lifes as well as self-portraits taken in their garden, which was next to a church graveyard overlooking the sea.

An important inspiration for *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*, are two films I saw shown together and introduced by the filmmakers whilst still studying at the Slade in 1990: Isaac Julien's *Looking For Langston* (1989), and Sandra Lahire's *Lady Lazarus* (1990). Seeing these 16mm films at a formative time in my career left a deep impression. Both artists (to use Lahire's

expression) “collaborate with a dead artist”. Both collapse time frames through an intense re-working of dead artists’ archive. The use of the word ‘dead’ next to ‘artist’ creates a space to consider what dead or alive means in relation to the life of an artist’s archive. Lahire animated her own rhythms of light and sound to dance with Sylvia Plath’s voice reading her poems (Lahire was granted film rights to use Plath’s voice which to date no Hollywood films since have). Like myself, having started her filmmaking with animation, Lahire’s work stitched together her own optically printed superimpositions with Plath’s writing, weaving together still and moving images with a musical soundscape. In a similar way the film diptych I will discuss stitches Cahun’s words and photographs, the latter of which I imagine Moore collaborated. In *Looking For Langston*, a series of beautifully staged black and white gay men in black and white embrace in frozen tableaux vivants pose, while a camera moves around puncturing the illusion of two-dimensions. The film borrows tropes from the photographs of Van der Zee, George Platt -Lynes from the 1920s and ‘30s alongside Julien’s contemporary Robert Mapplethorpe that are woven together with the voice of Langston Hughes. Through the use of tableaux vivants the film brings together poetry and jazz music of the Harlem Renaissance with house music of the 1980s. This ‘meeting of joins’ between spoken voice and tableaux vivants where time periods and media are crossed is key to what influenced the use of tableaux vivants in *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*.

The seeking of inspiration from a history where black gay narratives within the Harlem Renaissance had been covered over, had a political urgency. The release of the film was followed by a lawsuit because it was seen as a re-writing of

history that would expose Langston Hughes' homosexuality.¹ Lahire, who became my partner in the latter half of the 1990s, was concerned with Plath's critical feminist writing that bears witness to potentially censorious subject matters within mainstream media.² Her choice to call upon the discipline of literature and to collaborate with a feminist artist of another time was core to the thematic inspiration of *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*.

Like the figures sought by Julien in *Looking for Langston*, Cahun had been written out of history and discovered by chance several decades after their death.

Cahun's status as an independent Jewish feminist lesbian, with communist sympathies and affiliation, is likely to have contributed to her lack of visibility within Surrealist circles given the dominating white male heterosexual context of Andre Breton and his associates. The couple's invisibility after their death, like the omission from legitimised knowledge of Langston Hughes' sexuality, cuts a stem that would otherwise be nourishing the potential for artists of difference following later. Whilst the photographs are collected in museums world-wide, Cahun's writing is much less known and one could argue this work has not been given similar status in comparison to her contemporaries.

Coming to Life

It was whilst studying at the Slade in the late 1980s that I was introduced, not only to Lahire and to Julien, but also to Cahun's work by my tutor Sharon Morris who was writing a PhD on her work. My long term interest in psychoanalytic questioning of the self in relation to the world and its objects has framed much of my work and these two most recent films. Photographs, techniques of animation

and the still image are what constituted my early experiments in film and which have continued as a core element in later work.

In what follows I use Thomas Lamarre's theory of animation and Agnes Petho's writing on intermediality in cinema to situate these on-going concerns and in particular the way that they might contribute to an understanding of **my approach to Cahun and Moore's archive** in *Confessions to the Mirror* and *Magic Mirror*. I focus on the use of tableaux vivants, in particular examining qualities that highlight what is significant in the intersecting between media and authorship in the two films.

In Thomas Lamarre's text "Coming to Life", he challenges a traditional idea of animation as both adding movement to an object, as well as the idea that movement equates with a 'coming to life'. There he insists that "animation is not a matter of deceiving subjects by skilfully adding movement to non-living objects or images, by imposing active form on passive materials." (Lamarre 2013, 127) Lamarre's reading of perception theory, which expands traditional divisions between animation and live action, instead imagines the potential of the prolonging of the image as a crucial element of liveness. (Lamarre 2013, 126-130) In the tableaux vivants in *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror* background sets animate whilst centre stage, the performer remains still. The prolonging of the image as a kind of stillness in film allows the image to persist through time and so to bring life to archival photographs through a re-enactment as a tableaux vivant. It is possible to consider this 'coming to life' of the imitated and mostly inhabited photographs by Cahun as a form of animation. As such it

breaks from the convention of 'movement-as-life' at the centre of frame, instead the performer remains still while the background pulsates. In the tableaux vivants I will discuss, the stillness is not a literal stillness since there is movement, it is rather a stillness because the movement is without signification. What is added of significance to the re-enacting and re-imagining of photographs from Cahun and Moore's archive, rather than movement, is time.

Intermediality in the tableaux vivants

In *Cinema and Intermediality*, Agnes Petho describes how, in the past decade, questions of intermediality have been challenged by the growing discussion of the 'post medium' condition. Intermediality, she argues needs to be distinguished from an idea of post-medium mixing where specificity is of no relevance. She quotes David Rodowick "It is impossible to understand multi-mediality without a proper understanding of the individual properties of the media being combined." (Rodowick 2007, 41) Petho speculates whether the most debated intermedial image type is the tableau vivant, a site where, she argues painting and cinema can interact in different ways (Petho 2011, 44). The question raised here concerns the external reference, or *memory* of the painting which is the crucial element of intermediality in the tableau vivant in *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*, where the memory of a photograph is re-staged. What is very important in a tableau vivant, Petho explains, is that it "does not only mediate between reality and fiction or between painting and cinema, but figurates a more complex intermedial relation" (Petho 2011, 44). To elaborate how the tableaux vivants mediate a more complex intermedial relation, Petho quotes Joachim Paech's observation:

“In a tableau vivant we only have the memory of a painting present and not the painting itself before the camera. The confrontation between cinema and painting unfolds on a third level: the level of the theatre. Such tableaux vivants are actually theatrical scenes, in which the penetration of the camera into the picture means an entrance into a stage-like setting.” (Paech 1989, 45)

To borrow Paech’s idea of a confrontation between cinema and painting unfolding on a third level of theatre, the theatrical can be understood in *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror* as the physical performance of staging the photograph. The third level Paech describes is where the ambiguity of the original and the imitated photograph, is punctuated (the third level) by the opening out of the three and four dimensions of the theatrical. Cahun performed in an avant-garde theatre group³ and some of her most known images constitute costumes from her performances: *Le Diable*, *Le Monsieur*, *Barbe Bleu’s wife*. But here the theatricality of the filmed tableaux vivants is the performance of re-staging, the ‘live’ presence of the performer where the camera can pierce through the veil of an apparent two-dimensional, but becoming three dimensional space that is posed in the tableaux. The theatrical is the three-dimensional performance of staging the photograph, of which its physicality is stressed because the moment is both alive and paused at the same time. And this heightened theatricality, where the memory of the photograph from the re-staging arises, is the culminating intermedial moment.

In describing the space inbetween that which is created in the intermedial encounter, Petho quotes Foucault's who writes of the "murmur of the outside", that borders on the "void and 'nothingness", that is "open towards its own infinity"(Foucault 1998, 147-169, In Petho 2011, 326). She describes this phenomenon of the intermedial in a cinematic medium as that which remains open to its outside and constantly gravitates towards an abysmal collapse into its others, i.e. the other arts. It is "something that is in-between, 'things stuck in their state of latency,' a 'language about the outside of language, speech about the invisible side of words.'"(Foucault 1989, 154 In Petho 2011, 326)

The recall of the original photograph that is prolonged creates an intermedial space of ambiguity between multiple polarities: time period, media and authorship. Indiscernibility occurs between the photograph remembered and the re-enacted image 'as if' alongside or overlaying the original image. This interstitial not knowing is the experience of intermediality where the borders between the forementioned categories become indiscernible, for example, to what degree is the experience authored by Cahun, Cahun and Moore or the filmmaker. Am I experiencing a photograph or a performance, a painting or sculpture or text, and which is more prevalent at particular moments? The capacity of a time-based medium to pass between an experience of stillness into movement, or from silence into sound, black and white to colour etc. increases this capacity to switch between different modes of expression, media or languages.

Henk Oosterling compares this experience of intermedial in-betweenness to Barthes' notion of the 'punctum'. "The spectator is hit: affected and moved by the 'punctum'. He considers that this resembles "the impossible experience of the breaks between two media." (Oosterling 2003, 37-38) ⁴⁵ An idea of impossible breaks between media envisages a site of a breaking between the recalled photograph and the filmed re-enactment where 'what was' undergoes a remediation. It is a breaking between the authorship of Cahun, of Cahun and Moore and the filmmaker and crew, between time period, and different media, a breaking of what we understand to be impossible and from which something new emerges.

The prolonging of the image in the tableaux vivants in *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror* emphasises the physical presence as a holding still of the performers. Tactile sensation is heightened because there is time to see and hear the surface textures on screen whilst stillness is performed and prolonged. The act of holding denies further images appearing on screen and so a space is opened to allow other languages to speak such as the sound which takes precedence while the pose is held. The accentuation of physicality occurs from a layering between text, sound and screen. The experience of physicality (it is a virtual physicality) is due to the interaction between the senses; the cut between a two dimensional surface that is punctured into three dimensions, the shock from stillness to movement, black and white to colour, or voices that reinforce or collide with screen and/or aural images.

Petho acknowledges Brigitte Peucker's writing in *The Material Image: Art and Real in Film* (2007) in saying that, "tableaux vivants in cinema are extremely charged instances of intermediality in which, furthermore, the bodily sensation is accentuated, animating the otherwise more abstract image and eliciting a direct, corporeal and emotional response from the viewer." (Petho 2011, 44-45). She outlines examples of intermedial cinema in terms of an immediacy through hypermediacy. In the work of Agnes Varda she sees a personal and tactile language where the filmmaker leaves a trace of her body on the screen, and hails the example of Varda attempting to capture reality within her palm, as if "transforming her body into a camera" (Petho 2011 350).

In both *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*, more especially in *Confessions to the Mirror*, there is a strong sense of the filmmaker using her body as a vessel through which to reproduce both the life and work of Cahun and Moore. The body whether literally or as surrogate inhabits the performer in the photograph, as well as standing, sitting, lying down in her own space whilst projections from Jersey equally inhabit the space. The body stands in as a doorway between Jersey 1940s, and London 2015, the body performs the voices and makes the sets and frames the camera. In many of the shots in *Confessions to the Mirror* the body appears half in frame, half not as a wide, point-of-view subjective camera angle, a device which unites the objective observer of camera operator with the body in frame. An intermediality layers the stillness and movement of the tableaux vivants, with a reflexive presence that is accessed as much through the body of the filmmaker as it is through the hand-made sets and costumes, using whatever-was-to-hand in the same way that the original photographs appear to

have. And like the “desire to reach out and touch the world through hand made pictures” (Petho 2011 350) that Petho describes in Varda’s filmmaking, likewise such a desire is revealed across the *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror* where literally pictures are fabricated as coloured sets from black white self portrait and still life photographs to animate and extend Cahun’s writing.

In both films the theatrical invents a re-imagining of the moment that the photograph was taken, which extends in some tableaux (they all vary) the moment *within* the original image so activating the action already present in the original photograph, such as feathers falling or walking blindfolded and led by the cat on a lead. These performances in the films alternate with the ‘behind the scenes’ acts of preparation and process of taking the photograph. In the following tableaux vivants sections I attempt to outline how the tactile and theatrical operate within the re-stagings as part of an experience of intermediality.

IMAGE 1 “Still Life: Twigs and Snow”, Film Still from *Confessions To The Mirror*, (Pucill, 2016).



The Tableaux Vivants

The tactility of the hand-made sets extends equally to the filmmaking process where camera operation, lighting, set-making and performance are swapped as

roles as is the revealing of the domestic place of filming. These gestures towards the mise-en-abyme allow a materiality to unfold between the body and space. The filmmaker appears either literally or as surrogate as arms or legs attending to the set throughout both films but also as Cahun near or at the end of both films: In *Magic Mirror* in the wardrobe as she paints her own face and that of the mannequin's, and in *Confessions to the Mirror* performing Cahun in one of her last photographic series, *Catwalk*, where she dances blindfolded being led by a cat.⁶

Both *Magic Mirror* (Pucill 2013) and *Confessions to the Mirror* (Pucill 2016) are densely layered, and by their nature of being constitutive of a series of tableaux vivants, are experienced as much as 'parts' as they are as a whole. To quote the artist Greg Pope on *Magic Mirror*, "From act to act, each self-contained drama proceeds like a series of Noh theatre pieces, the total effect is less that of a present action than of a simili or metaphor made visual, the full comprehension of which stays just out of reach. The images and words remain echoing, reflecting and refracting in the mind long after the film has finished." (Pope 2014) In *Confessions to the Mirror*, the sense of separate fragments is less dominant because the film composes a trajectory through Cahun's life from her childhood to her life with Moore.

Still Life: Twigs and Snow

About half way through *Confessions to the Mirror* is a re-enactment of one of the miniature still life photographs made in Paris 1936, of twigs bearing quill pen nibs. As a miniature still life it was relatively easy to reproduce a close imitation,

as the constituent parts were found and not constructed. Intermedial intensity is created from an actual movement *in film* that is already 'caught' in the original recalled photograph (**see Fig1**). The action of the recalled photograph is intensified in the re-enactment as a live moment; the gradual and wavering descent of tiny white feathers onto the bare twigs. The falling is durational, appearing as falling snow. The photograph is overlaid with spoken text of Cahun's writing of the experience of the freezing prison cell: the fragility of the body and emotional exchange that is felt from the text is set against the recalled photograph. The intermedial layering is between screen, sound and spoken text: sounds of ice crackling in cold wind intensify the recall of the original still life. The 'coming alive' in film is mediated between the filmmaker's interpretation and imagining. A sense of time as linear is upset through the mixing of different time periods of the couple's life, as well as the time frame of the homage to Cahun by the filmmaker in 2016. The photograph imitated was published in a book of poems by Lise Deharme, photographs by Claude Cahun, *Le Coeur de Pic*, 1937 Chez Jose Corti.

The Bald Head Tableaux Vivants in *Magic Mirror* (Pucill, 2013)

IMAGE 2, "Two Bald Heads", film still from *Magic Mirror* (Pucill, 2013)



In one of the opening shots of *Magic Mirror*, a re-enacted photograph of Cahun's bald head, stretched, is performed to camera. The raw image evokes that which is exposed, bare, covered with hands to protect being seen. The exposure is for eye and shutter; captive, spiritual, criminal. In the photograph the indexicality of a lens-based photographic process was interfered with during the darkroom process by bending the photographic paper by hand or the bending of the light through a lens possibly held in front of the main lens to achieve the magical elongation. Thus a metamorphosis is achieved that distorts the head, and is overlaid with voices reinforcing internalised self-image warping. Layers of a bending or stretching of truth, be it one's image, or one's words, where mask and masquerade endlessly metamorphose, define much of what is to come in *Magic Mirror* where layers of different media fold and split between a morphing body and language.

Image and voice in the bald head tableaux vivants unite Cahun's writing with the photographs of Cahun with shaven head. Two otherwise separated media from the archive come together, and are re-imagined and brought to life as part of a creative cinematic act. The text and image relationship in this sequence originate from the same time period and the focus of concern matches. This is also the case in many examples that come from a different period of Cahun's life where the relationship is more unconscious.

In the second sequence, **(Fig 2)** two bald heads of Cahun appear facing one another. The filmmaker mimics a photograph of Cahun's two bald heads facing

different directions with the caption *Que me veux-tu?* (There is a drawing or photo-gravure of this image that is signed by Cahun.) This darkroom technique that duplicates an image within a single frame, is translated from a stills camera experiment on celluloid (by Cahun) to that of cine film on a 16mm using a Bolex 'in-camera' effect. The Bolex technique involves re-winding the film and re-filming on the other side of the frame to enable two heads to appear together facing each other. The durational prolonging of the re-enactment opens up what is possible in relation to the original image, which lies in its very impossibility (two heads of the same person looking at each other). The screen image is intensified through the addition of time to the still image. The Bolex camera technique and Cahun's 'trick' is achieved literally and metaphorically in the dark. In Deleuzian terms, the image is impossible: two modes of time together are imaginatively and virtually possible, whilst not in the natural material world. (Deleuze 2005, 126)⁷

The re-filming that layers over the first filming is designed: though the image has left an indexical trace on the film, the process can be seen as between that which has been 'designed' or 'drawn' and that which is photographed. Cahun's distorted head, which is re-enacted as an action in the film, recalls Eisenstein's writing in which he introduces a theory of the plasmatic that he sees as the driving force of cartoon animation, as a "rejection once and forever of allotted form, freedom from ossification, the ability to dynamically assume any form." (Eisenstein 1942, 54). This plasmaticness is "rooted in a phenomenology of our bodily experience, our desire to stretch the flesh and form and reshape matter to the contours of desire". (Gunning 2013, 54) One is curious of the connection here

with Cahun's 'bald head' photographs, which seem to demonstrate precisely a deviant queering of a body and language, along the lines described by Eisenstein: whether pertaining to body or artwork. The movement between body and language, and therein image, is core to Cahun's play between word and image, already an intermedial concern that both films draw from.

The third bald head tableau in the film shows Cahun close up in a highly reflective bendable mirror surface. The stretched image that was 'caught' in a flash in the original photograph is now 'held' and prolonged in film as we witness the act. The photograph, recalled and re-staged, bears the same shock that baldness stirs; focussing our eyes away from eyes instead towards the back of the head, so that the heads look less differentiated. The voiceover speaks of the horror of ugliness in a mirror. The experience is an intimate one; literally laid bare, the scalp, the private anxieties, an engagement with one's physical reflection and the inner bubble we fear to expose. The filmmaker's home studio 'set' embraces this intimacy. As Cahun impersonates a prisoner, criminal, Buddha, Jewish vampire,⁸ so too the performer impersonates Cahun as the spectator inhabits this position too. The stretching of the body suggests it might metamorphose into another body; it is suggestive of a language stretching and thereby transposing into another form. An idea that language and body are separate is undermined.

Animation/Live Action

In *Magic Mirror*, each mini-scene is punctuated with a photo-collage animation that mimic Moore's original photo-gravures made under the direction of Cahun that divide the chapters in *Aveux non avenues* (Cahun 1930). The agitation of the re-enacted photo-gravures does not signify anything in particular with regard to the signification of the movement, instead it serves only to keep us watching, as a pulsating duration. Cahun's words, "the great fairground of human flesh" (Cahun 1930), are heard as part of the soundscape of early fairground organ music, which heightens the experience of the on-screen layering. The original collage images are, as with all the re-enactments, re-imagined. In this way a process of intermedial remediation occurs as a consequence of the superimposing of layers of intensity between Cahun's writing and photographs, and Moore's photogravures and between the interpretation and creative collaboration of the filmmaker.

Near the end of *Confessions to the Mirror* (Pucill 2016), the still lives in the bell jar animate, the mannequin figures 'come to life'; first as a three-dimensional reconstruction in colour copied from the black and white photographs, and secondly as animation, as time animates the recalled image. The original photographs offer a sense of a 'moving scene', which the animation returns us to, such as the mannequin reading a book or waving a sword. This 'returning to' is a heightening of the image. The mannequin reads the book in the photograph and so too in the film, but in the film it pulsates. The pulsating as agitation keeps us looking and encapsulates the layers of sound images and words. The pulsating is accompanied with sounds which carry images, glass ringing, breathing and the found objects bending or scraping, feathers blowing in a breeze, chimes ringing.

We can already guess the movement from the photograph but in the film we *feel* it, as an experience of duration, as *aliveness*. The re-living is experienced as a return. It inverts the relationship between cause and event: between performance as cause and photograph as event. This temporal instability is juxtaposed with other instabilities, contributing to a myriad of intermedial layering; between photograph recalled and re-enacted image, word, and sound.

Lamarre embraces the Deleuzian idea that perception of objects in the world and virtual objects are experienced in the same way thus rejecting the distinction between natural and artificial perception. He says “movement in animation is not a matter of illusion or representation. Animation does not represent movement any more than it fakes it. It affords a real experience of movement, of actual movement.” (Lamarre 2013, 127) The prolonging of the image recalled in the films is considered in light of this observation, that agitation of the animated figure prolongs an uncertainty that stimulates a desire to prolong our relationship with the magical world of animation. Lamarre says this response to the illusion of agitation, as well as its prolongation, is poised between the perceptual and the physical. “What is staged is our wager that is *not to verify* the reality of animation-objects but *how to prolong* the relation between us and the animation world”. (Lamarre 2013, 130)

In most of the tableaux vivants the movement of the remembered photograph hovering in its place is active but effectively static, as if casting a spell on the viewer who keeps looking. The movement does not convey aliveness in the sense of deceiving us that the material is alive, instead it *feels* alive, it holds our

attention, whilst we are open to other media; a soundscape with voices talk to us. Activity is of a background that agitates around a still centre, whether it is the performer who is still or the still life subject. In the animation sequences a sense of aliveness is of a durational materiality that is the entire surface of the screen, having neither centre nor background. In the portrait tableaux vivants, movement is mostly minimal: breathing, eye flicker, pulse of the camera or film rolling. The movement *potential* of the film medium intensifies the sense of stillness of the image recalled. What is most active instead of visual movement is the layering of images produced from the soundscape. Animation is employed as a prolonging which enables the relationship between the re-enactment in film with the memory of the photograph to take up space.

IMAGE 3 “Bluebeard’s Wife”, film still from *Magic Mirror* (Pucill 2013).



Magic and Masks in the Tableaux Vivants in *Magic Mirror* (Pucill, 2013)

Early cinematic experiments in magic and metamorphosis that frame much of the re-staging of self portraits in *Magic Mirror* can be seen in the preceding film *Phantom Rhapsody* (Pucill 2010) which re-stages images from Western Art History. The Melies inspired disappearance, metamorphosis and duplication of ‘magical’ tricks that appear in *Magic Mirror* follow some of Cahun’s own ‘trick’ images of duplication for example her bald heads and Bluebeard’s Wife (**see Fig 3**). In an early scene in *Magic Mirror* a re-enacted photograph of Cahun dressed as “Bluebeard’s wife” appears in an imagined new setting, at her dressing table

before entering the theatre.⁹ The sequence is typical of many in *Magic Mirror* where spaces are imagined in three dimensions that expand what is decipherable in the original photograph. The opening out of the remembered original flat photograph into a three- and then four- dimensional space is significant in regard to the process of remediation which changes how the original photograph is hereafter re-seen. This is an example of where the original image is expanded and extended through an imagining that adds to the original, (whilst being also entirely separate). In the film sequence, we see the photographed character of Bluebeard's wife seated at her dressing table in front of a mirror with lights. From her dressing table she stands up and walks through curtains to the next space, which belong variously to a theatre or living room, pertaining to both original photograph and re-enactment.

The gender politics of the body is important to stress with regard to a fissure within language which is played out in the film double-fold: the female body in the Western History of Art Canon appears as artwork, as inanimate, not as artist. Bluebeard's wife as a mannequin walks onto the stage: herein the recalled photograph is overlaid. Where Cahun split the image of Cahun into two through camera technique, this is re-produced through a Bolex camera so that the re-enacted splitting is experienced in time and as movement. The figure first doubles then divides so the lower half of the body is shared as a single body, and from the waist the two figures divide right and left as if part of a conjuring trick to an audience. The actual movement heightens the experience of the suggested movement in the photograph. The moving gesture already understood is here *felt*, and experienced as a movement, which is an experience of duration. We

experience the actual superimposition that begins as if an overlay in the same place, then gradually the two figures separate until the two top halves appear on right and left side of screen, the lower half still joined.

Intermediality and inhabiting the performer - A Masked Nakedness in *Magic Mirror* (Pucill, 2013)

The re-enacted self-portraits that imitate Cahun, masked and blinded, invite the spectator to 'inhabit' the body of the performer (there is more than one). The liveness of the theatrical that Petho describes in the tableaux vivant in film is active here in the process of identification as an inhabiting. The potential of artists across time to occupy a virtual space and time together is made real through the filmed performances. This virtual possibility is lived by the actor who visits the time and place of the original photograph through the re-enactment, which is offered as a virtuality for the spectator through identification. There are two photographic tableaux vivants in *Magic Mirror* where the performer's mask blinds her vision. In both it seems that the absence of a face and/or sight of the performer increases the potential for the spectator to imaginatively inhabit the performer's place, one might say this is particularly applicable to female spectators. As without the face, which is the signifier of differentiation, the performer 'could be' us, the spectator.

A Masked Nakedness tableau vivant

In the first tableau, the performing Cahun is naked. The imitation of the original image maps a space, which the performer occupies, seated on the floor, sitting on her knees, head up straight, facing the camera. The re-enactment brings awareness of the difficulty to hold this pose. The figure remains frozen in a position that masks her gender, while voices take us to a sea landscape. The blind-fold accentuates the physical sensation of being there, because attention is focussed on non-visual and tactile sensation. The feeling of the cloth beneath one's legs and feet, the bright light, its heat, the camera waiting, the rustling of the camera operator, her lover's eyes through the lens, is felt. As the pose is held still, there is time to notice, the suntan matches the tone of the quilt. Is it make-up, 'real' colouring from the sun, or darkroom manipulation? In this way the re-enactment extends the imaginative knowledge of the original photograph. The image on screen is re-enforced with voices describing a sexual encounter as a rising sun at dawn on a beach: "A troubled dawn. A horizon lost in the mist of the waves. Fragile, sky of glass, blue green. Her eyes become cloudy, paler, her breasts prowl. Their roses of love stand up. Sun impatient beams." (Cahun 1930) The duality of image and text heightens the experience further developed with sound. From relative darkness to brightness, the click of a shutter sounds as the figure is clothed in light. A sudden flash of brightness touches the exposed skin as a sheet of paper in a dark room. The shadow descends slowly back over the body, as a domestic blind pulled or time lapse of a moving sun. Throughout, sounds of sea waves splash over each other; the body like the photographic paper in the dark, has been kissed by the sun, then is splashed in water.

Original photograph, original performance, and re-enactment meet through the elements of light and water. In Greek antiquity the word *ekphrasis* was used to describe the phenomenon of the detailed translation of a gallery of paintings or statues into words. In current day it generally stands for the urge of an artist to express in words alone that which as a visual sense, so there is a crossing over into the domains of the visible. (Petho 2011, 294) An important feature of cinematic *ekphrasis* is “the tendency of one medium opening up the cinematic expression in order to mediate towards the ekphrastic assimilation of another.”(Petho 2011, 296) In this tableau in particular there is an overlay of a journey of a photograph being processed and at the same time a performance of that process runs parallel, which is further over-laid with a spoken text that for the filmmaker inspires the photograph or the other way around. In this regard the mutual translation between photograph, performance and text can be understood as a cinematic ekphrasis, the layers operating separately and in parallel.

IMAGE 4 “Multi Masked Magician” film still from *Magic Mirror*, (Pucill, 2013).



Multi-Masked Magician tableau vivant

The masked photographic tableau vivant in *Magic Mirror* (**fig4**), that re-stages a photograph of Cahun dressed in a black cloak with multiple masks hung over her, expands the original image into a performance on screen. Painted eyes strapped around a head stare back from a stage. Half face, half mask, paint and

photographic film layer between the living and the dead. A theatre audience comes alive through the sounds of murmurs and clapping. Background curtains of a domestic space double as those of the theatre. In the original photographs the domestic curtain suggests a stage. In this intermedial layering that correlates the inanimate and live, domestic and stage, photographer and filmmaker, the interstitial of not knowing quite what one is experiencing heightens intermedial intensity. The opening out of the original flat image into not only a three dimensional space but that of a theatre complete with audience and the gesture of a performance, enlivens and extends the original image.

The blindfold in this tableaux vivants and the earlier example focuses experience within the body, expanding the possibility to imaginatively unite across bodies, a physicality expressed between screen image and words voiced. In this tableau the underside of mask, make up, and costume is visibly exposed to us in the moments of a wig and mask being taken off. This revealing of exposing what is underneath the image as it is peeled off, invites the spectator into the space of the performer and inhabitator of the remembered or imitated photograph. The ripping of the face as the mask and hair is removed, creates a wrenching or splitting as the screen image appears to split, its illusion is undone. At the same time in this moment in the film the image and word meet, and through that cause a break in and between language. The image disappears as a voice exclaims, "I want to change skin. Tear the old one from me." And soon after "Why am I unravelled the minute I close my eyes?" (Cahun 1930) These lines occur as the screen is in darkness. As the screen image returns, a mask is applied to the face of the camera (a point-of-view shot). The performer cannot see in the mask as

the eyes are painted. This idea only becomes significant when the image is animated as a re-staged performance. The sense of blindness during this sequence is conveyed in the gesturing between hand, mask and feet.

The Prison Drawing tableau vivant

In *Confessions to the Mirror* (Pucill, 2016), in a tableaux sequence, about half way through and after the imprisonment and death sentences have been announced, voices describe the couple's experience in prison. Close up shots of hands trace with a pencil Moore's drawing of the prison cell. The body of the filmmaker appears as hands and legs in point-of-view shot, as the drawing is re-enacted on the inside of cigarette wrapping. Cahun's words, Moore's pencil drawing and the filmmakers re-enactment, layer over one another. The journey of re-imagining is laid bare. Intermediality occurs between authorship, media, and time-frame and in the haptic use of the performer half in frame, half out, who traces the drawing. In a following shot, a film projection of a prison in Jersey is projected onto the wall of a domestic space, which is followed in later shots with projections of their home in Jersey. In this way the filmmaker attempts to re-live through Cahun's words by projecting images into the filmmaker's space, where she is situated so they are projected literally into the filmmaker's situation. From interpretation to a creative re-imagining, a journey through the filmmaker's body of digesting and re-visioning the archival material of Cahun's text and photographs, the latter of which I imagine she collaborated with Moore, becomes an interplay of dialogue with Cahun.

The characteristic of “making the cinematic image reach beyond its own media boundaries and into the domain of the unnameable”(Petho 2011, 306) occurs in the indiscernibility of a travelling subjectivity and author in *Confessions to the Mirror*, where distinctions of which performer, which author and between interpretation and creativity are in conflict. The act of inhabitation duplicates and thereby confuses performer and author. Petho speaks of “the sensual presence of things doubled with the absence of the physical reality that the image represents, or in certain cases, a void in the signification that can be pointed out by techniques of intermedial mise-en-abyme” (Petho 2011, 306). The exposing of the process of the filmmaker in the tableau vivant in *Confessions to the Mirror* that traces the original drawing by Moore is layered with voices reading Cahun’s translated text. The projected image of the prison on a domestic wall with the body of the filmmaker both inhabiting the position of lying on the prison bed whilst at the same time tracing the drawing, performs an intermedial mise-en-abyme.

Breton Peasant Woman tableau vivant

In a key scene in *Confessions to the Mirror*, a painted portrait is described in the voice-over, which is overlaid with a screen ‘portrait’. The film creates an important relationship between a self portrait photograph that is re-staged and remediated from black and white to colour of Cahun dressed in a headscarf with a (hand-made) Nazi insignia in her mouth. Upon their release from prison, their house had been ransacked, valuables stolen and many of their photographs that the Nazis had deemed pornographic had been burned. Lines from Cahun (1945-46) describe herself as a “Breton Peasant Woman” (Cahun 1945-52). A defecting

German soldier whom she befriended in prison had given her the Nazi insignia, which between her teeth suggests a cat with a mouse. The sense of victory has much to do with the alliance the couple formed with several German soldiers, which was the aim of their socialist propaganda activity. The sound I use in the film has the sound of a cat growling or purring. The lead up to this moment shows a watery blue-green colour applied with a paintbrush onto a glass screen as the filmed portrait figure behind the glass becomes lit. Following Cahun's words, which continually refer to painting and sculpture, there is an intertwining of language between the word, photograph and paint, and between the life and artwork of the photographing couple and writer. The significance of the biographic detail of the couple in this image in particular is weighted; the toll of the war and imprisonment shortened Cahun's life. The re-enactment serves more singularly as a homage to the couple. Maybe the element of intermediality in this tableau is especially charged as the work of both the writing and the recalled photograph serves as a homage re-lived through an embodiment performed and preserved in film 70 years later.

Theatre Operation tableau vivant

Petho describes making accessible the sensual complexity that includes artworks as 'natural objects' of a multi-medial reality. This tableau vivants visualises Cahun's text unlike any of those discussed thus far, it is not a photographic re-enactment. Yet it is highly intermedial due to its corporeality and the inbetweenness of uncertainty created. The tableau vivant, is a Surrealist literalisation of Cahun's writing of an open stomach (the 'insides being symbolic imaginings as opposed to medically true) in *Confessions to the Mirror*. A

Surrealist dream sequence of being awake in an operation is performed on a painted red stomach. Fingers with traces of red make-up touch hand-made ribs of clay that protect a cold blue stone laid upon red painted skin, whilst voices illustrating Cahun's 'theatre operation' run alongside. A lit candle placed on the navel of a red stomach is blown as voices from *Confidences au miroir* (Cahun, 1945-46) narrate a dream in prison. An orange flame flickers between blue and orange, then turns to smoke as the skin it sits on wavers as lungs inflate. It is between a painted hand-made set that animates, and live action. The body is the skin of a background. The foreground is the inanimate handmade 'set'. The inside of the body is outside, fingers touch the sculpted individual ribs, a gesture which reaches for the impossible. An orientation of what is live or inanimate, foreground or background, real or plastic is disturbed. The instability of not being able to differentiate body and object, real or fabrication, photographed or drawn causes an anxiety that creates a break in the boundary that had held its difference from its other. It is between language and body, idea and material, living and dead.

Summary

The intermedial to-and-fro between media and authorship, moving perpetually between time-frames and space, constitutes the language and experience of *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror*. The collaboration between Cahun and Moore is part of the intermedial collaborative background to Cahun's writing and therein the films questioning of how authorship is categorised and valued. The collaboration between myself and Cahun the writer and between Cahun the

photographer and Cahun and Moore's collaboration in making photographs and in their anti-Nazi resistance campaign, is core to the engagement of the tableaux vivants as is the crossing of time and media.

The intensity that is created through the use of the recalled photograph as a tableau vivant in film is one that can bring the archive of an artist alive into the present. It does so because the voices of the two and three artists are shared within differences of language, time and authorship. And the sharing extends to other film crew including the actual voices and performers as well as to the spectators. Through a performative inhabiting, a meeting of bodies opens out ideas of authorship. A meeting between literature and photography with film, and between artists of different time periods, has created a space of tension that might challenge how we perceive, value and differentiate media, art and life, authorship and time. A joining through time, beyond death creates an exalted moment in film that has a temporality of its own. There is potential in the disorientation of confused layers of time, media and authorship, to catch a glimpse of something that lies outside of our understanding of what orientates our world. *Magic Mirror* and *Confessions to the Mirror* are an attempt to reach for this.

¹ At the New York premiere parts of the soundtrack were muted, Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut*, (London: Duke University Press, 2013), 9.

² Some of the material Lahire (1950-2001) was studying as part of a PhD with Jaqueline Rose before she died included censorship from Ted Hughes regarding Sylvia Plath's sexuality. Sylvia Plath's writing explored subject matter including suicide, anorexia and the holocaust.

³ Pierre Albert-Birot was the director of the group, “Le Plateau” in Paris in which in 1930 Cahun performed as Blue-beards wife, as Le Diable and Le Monsieur, the costumes of which appear in Cahun’s photographs.

⁵ Roland Barthes ‘punctum’ as that which is subjective, unnameable, and which jumps out of the photograph, (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans Richard Howard, (London: Falmingo, 1984), pp40-60.

⁶ Cahun’s *Catwalk* photographic series made shortly before she died suggests the filmic. Each photograph has writing on the back and is sequenced in numerical order. Information from *Claude Cahun et ses doubles*, ed Marion Chaigne + Claire Lebosse, (Nantes: Editions MeMo, 2015) 71-79.

⁷ Giles Deleuze borrows this language of compossible and impossible from the philosopher Leibniz, it is used in relation to philosophic questions of probability within the context of examining philosophic ideas in cinema. *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze, trans Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (London: Continuum, 2005), p126.

⁸ Cahun describes a dream in which she appears with Nosferatu in *Confidences au Miroir*, Claude Cahun, 1945-46, in *Claude Cahun Ecrits*, ed Francois Leperlier, pp572-624, (Paris: JeanMichel Place, 1992).

⁹ Cahun performed with *Le Plateau* theatre company directed by Pierre Albert-Birot, in Paris between 1929-30. Bluebeard is a French fairy-tale where a wealthy violent man repeatedly murders a series of wives. Information from *Don’t Kiss Me: The Art of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore*, Ed Louise Downie, (London: Tate Publishing, Jersey Heritage Trust, 2006).

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Website

Sarahpucill.co.uk (links to texts on all films including *Magic Mirror*, *Confessions To The Mirror*.)
[Wikipedia Sandra Lahire](#) (links to the Living on Air Trilogy)
