

## Passing Through the Pane: Genre, Art and Meta-textuality in Kim Ki-young's *The Housemaid*

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Within his 1979 article 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice' David Bordwell attempts to define and categorise art cinema as a 'logically coherent mode of cinematic discourse'.<sup>1</sup> Here he notes that specifically European films of the 1950s and 60s define themselves 'against the classical narrative mode', refuting traditional 'cause and effect chain[s]' that employ devices of 'generic appropriateness' to grant 'compositional unity' and 'verisimilitude'.<sup>2</sup> This categorisation is anchored within a Eurocentric discourse dichotomous to that of Hollywood. Perhaps, most importantly, Bordwell conceptualises art cinema as having three constituting factors: realism, authorship, and ambiguity.<sup>3</sup> The confluence of these three principles creates a narrative form conceptualised by a singular guiding hand whereby anything that does not assimilate into the audiences' theorisations is deemed the artistic work of the auteur.

Similarly, Steve Neale, within 'Art Cinema as an Institution', theorises a specifically Eurocentric modality of art cinema practice, focusing solely on France, Germany, and Italy, defining it by its opposition to Hollywood and genre film. Here Neale adds an overlaying dimension to Bordwell's work, asserting that art cinema has been 'constantly marked by a combination of commodity-based structure [...] and the culturally reactionary discourses of high art'.<sup>4</sup> For Neale, art cinema not only negatively articulates itself against Hollywood, but also implicitly defines a mode of national cinema during that process. Whilst both of these articles prove useful in beginning to theorise a modality of film practice defined by its ambiguity, each critic, through focusing upon European filmmakers such as François Truffaut and Alain Resnais, begins to reduce the spectrum of art cinema. This essay utilises both critics' work not as a continually critical reference but as a starting point to theorise a global multiplicity of art cinema of the period, recognising the diverse artistry of filmmaking that is gestured to, but inevitably ignored, within both articles.

One such filmmaker that is ignored within multiple theorisations of art cinema is South Korean Kim Ki-young (KIM). 'Mister Monster' made numerous generic works throughout his career – only being assimilated into the critical art cinema economy during a retrospective at the 1997 Pusan International Film Festival.<sup>5</sup> He intertwines expressionism and surrealism with the popular genre of melodrama. This

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1 David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', *Film Criticism*, 1/4 (1979), pp. 56-62 (p. 57).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Steve Neale, 'Art Cinema as Institution', *Screen* 1/22 (1981), pp. 11-39 (p. 39).

5 Chris Berry, 'Introducing "Mister Monster": Kim Ki-young and the Critical Economy of the Globalized Art-house Cinema', in *Kim Ki-young*, ed. by Kim Hong-joon (Seoul: Seoul Selection, 2006), pp. 41-57.

generic mixing occurs most prominently within his film *The Housemaid/Hanyo* (1960). Here melodrama intertwines with horror to produce a fluid generic boundary that explores the converging of influences from such art film directors as Luis Buñuel, Fritz Lang, and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. As an *auteur*, Kim Ki-young destabilises the boundaries of genre in order to express a meta-textual signification of construction. This is most prevalent within his depiction of *mise-en-scène*. Here KIM assumes the role of the *metteur-en-scène*, a term here referring to Sarris' notions of *mise-en-scène* as the primary domain of artistic expression for the *auteur*.<sup>6</sup> KIM's 'socio-sexual division of domestic space' intertwines the traditionally female melodrama with the Freudian conceptions of expressionism and early horror, resulting in a shifting filmic composite of innately patriarchal control.<sup>7</sup> By crafting the pro-filmic event to contain both generic forces, KIM destabilises the iconographical connotations of each.

This essay utilises *auteur theory* as a base in theorising the use of *mise-en-scène*, i.e. the arrangement of scenery, objects and lighting on a film set, within *The Housemaid*. Although notions of the *auteur* (the critical thought that the director is the author of the work) are complex within the present discourses of film studies and far from Sarris' compiling of American directors to present a cohesive 'American Cinema,' the theory still provides an irrevocably useful tool in understanding specific artists and works. In approaching such a text as specifically authored one is able to identify the minutia of its stylistic presentation and assimilate such artistry within the specific socio-political grounding of the piece's construction. This essay aligns the figure of the *auteur* as a *metteur-en-scène*, meaning the artist expresses themselves, in André Bazin's words, 'aesthetically in terms of space, in forms, in the structure of the *mise-en-scène*' (original emphasis).<sup>8</sup> The very physicality of the *diegesis* (i.e. the plot/narrative) is the site of the *auteur* then. The *auteur theory* creates lines of enquiry within a text that highlight the revolutionary aspects of its conception.

Firstly this essay dissects the expressionistic influences upon the *mise-en-scène*. Both the stairs and the diegetic music of the piano become attenuated doppelgangers of their prior melodramatic signification. Here one sees the direct influence of KIM's authorial hand implementing devices of the art cinema paradigm (to use a Bordwellian phrase). This essay will then proceed to theorise the use of symbolic secondary lenses within *The Housemaid* (specifically the use of filming through glass doors), resulting in an act of *cinematic cosmomorphism*.<sup>9</sup> This term refers to a perfect symbiosis within the *diegesis*: characters become innately ingrained within the *mise-en-scène* with which they interact. Here the reflections of characters in *mise-en-scène* such as the piano and the patio doors provide a direct acknowledgment of authorial influence as KIM provides a horrific physical manifestation of his double on screen, becoming internalised within the physicality of the *mise-en-scène*. Lacanian theory highlights this notion of the *auteur* as placed within his work, demonstrating the nature of the meta-textually constructed, infinitely displaced, filmic composite. Lastly this essay theorises space in a more conceptual sense, elucidating the perpetually

6 Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982), p. 252.

7 Kim Kyung-Hyun, 'Lethal Work: Domestic Space and Gender Troubles in Happy End and The Housemaid', in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*, pp. 201-218 (p. 202).

8 André Bazin, *What is Cinema, Volume 1* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 63.

9 Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (London: Macmillan Press, 1982), p. 47.

reformulating topologies of *mise-en-scène* that mirror the work's generic and artistic constitution. Here, through an utilisation of Travis Workman's assertions of 'topos', 'screen', and 'cosmos', this essay theorises that the film produces a 'new kind of mirror'; one that reflects a perpetually shifting filmic fabric of reality and art.<sup>10</sup>

Far from the 'lack of avant-garde' that Kelly Y. Jeong prescribes then, this essay demonstrates KIM to be a highly self-reflective auteur, capable of combining genres, European artistic influence, and meta-textual signification.<sup>11</sup> Through an analysis of *mise-en-scène* this essay expands the boundaries of art cinema demonstrating *The Housemaid's* filmic meta-textuality as it perpetually refers to its own fluid construction as genre, art, and film.

Firstly, one must contextualise *The Housemaid* to identify the kinds of socio-political pressures Korean filmmakers such as Kim Ki-young experienced in order to broaden both Bordwell's and Neale's categorisations. The April Revolution of 1960, or 4-1-9, overthrew the First Autocratic Republic of South Korea.<sup>12</sup> Here for the first time freedom of expression came to Korean cinematic practices as the authority for film censorship shifted from the government to civil organisations, namely the *Film Ethics Committee*.<sup>13</sup> This freedom, both democratic and artistic, was short-lived, however, due to a military *coup d'état* on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1961.<sup>14</sup> The approximate year from the revolution to the new military regime provides a temporal window of artistic cinematic practice and *haebang* (liberation).<sup>15</sup> From 1960 to 1961, Korean auteurs such as Yu Hyun-mok and Lee Man-hui, together with Kim Ki-young, made films that addressed 'dark social realities' such as *Aimless Bullet/ Oboltan* (Yu Hyung-mok, 1961) and *Kaleidoscope/ Jumadeung* (Lee Man-hui, 1961) (along with many more).<sup>16</sup> The socio-political grounding of this cinematic work helps to craft a specifically nationalised cinema extending beyond Neale's 'commodity-based structures' as it demonstrates a collective 'self-articulation within a global context' and innately political medium.<sup>17</sup>

As Nancy Ablemann and Kathleen McHugh state, 4-1-9 was 'a moment at the temporal heart of Golden Age cinema'.<sup>18</sup> This 'temporal heart' is implicit within *The Housemaid*.<sup>19</sup> Kim Ki-young's experimentation between genres and European artistic influences encapsulates the innate conflict of both the freedom and instability of the time. It is the twisting of the Hollywood conventions of melodrama that encapsulates the innate postcolonial framing of the medium, manipulating the filmic paradigms of the coloniser to explore the socio-political and psychological realities of the period. In fact, for

10 Travis Workman, 'Other Scenes: Space and Counterpoint in Cold War Korean Melodrama', *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*, 1/7 (2015), pp. 28-40 (p. 29); Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, p. 45.

11 Kelly Y. Jeong, 'Two Golden Ages of Korean Cinema', *Cross Currents: East Asian History and Cultural Review*, 14 (2015), pp. 241-251 (p. 244).

12 Nancy Ablemann and Kathleen McHugh, 'Introduction', in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, ed. by Nancy Ablemann and Kathleen McHugh (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), pp. 1-13 (p. 5).

13 Hyangjin Lee, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 49.

14 Ibid.

15 Ablemann and McHugh, p. 7.

16 Hyangjin Lee, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics*, p. 59.

17 Neale, p. 39; Kathleen McHugh, 'South Korean Film Melodrama and the Question of National Cinema', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 1/18 (2001), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

18 Ablemann and McHugh, p. 5.

19 Ibid.

Ablemann and McHugh, melodrama becomes the ‘most efficacious mode of realism’ of this time, blurring the already porous line between reality and *diegesis*.<sup>20</sup> *The Housemaid* becomes an intertwining of not only genre and art cinema, but an encapsulation of ‘melodrama, operating in an ever-changing realm,’ acting meta-textually to signify its own socio-political constitution and mimetic porosity.<sup>21</sup>

KIM’s work innately contradicts both Bordwell’s and Neale’s assertions of art cinema being antithetical to conventionalised narrative as genre becomes integral to the production of filmic ‘realism,’ ‘authorship,’ and ‘ambiguity.’ Through Yecies’ theorisations of a ‘localised understanding of the auteur,’ one is able to consider the textual significance of works beyond Bordwell’s, Neale’s, or the *Cahiers* writers’ comprehensions creating a diverse nexus of globalised art cinema.<sup>22</sup> As by locating the auteur within a specific socio-political and geographical climate one may localise the drives of their artistic creation, isolating their unique properties and refuting the generalisation of Neale and Bordwell’s assertions. What follows is an analysis of KIM’s use of *mise-en-scène* to highlight the artistic, generic, and meta-textual formulations of *The Housemaid* in order to contribute to this broadening comprehension of the mode.

Within *The Housemaid* the most prominent generic destabilisation occurs within the use and design of the house’s staircase. Firstly it operates in a symbolic manner traditional for that of melodrama. It represents a ‘desire for class mobility’ as we see Myung-Sook (the housemaid) ascend the stairs to her room on numerous occasions, traversing the newly emerging middle class residence in order to progress further up its spatial workings.<sup>23</sup> The act is symbolically charged as the one-time factory worker seeks to progress further into the operations of Korea’s rapidly accelerating modernity. As Kim Kyung-Hyun states, ‘this staircase [...] effectively spatializes the film’s central themes: the fetishistic desire for an unobtainable object, the struggle to succeed against the odds, and the cruelty and humiliation one must face before, and after the climb.’<sup>24</sup> This centrality of ‘the climb’ directly articulates the core principles of melodrama ‘as a particular form of dramatic *mise-en-scène*.’<sup>25</sup> Characters traverse KIM’s artistically constructed pro-filmic space in order to relate ‘to the given historical and social context.’<sup>26</sup>

This potent symbol of melodramatic convention becomes distorted, however, during the final scenes of the film in which Mr. Kim (the father) returns to his wife after drinking rat poison with Myung-Sook. Here the stairs cast attenuated shadows as single-source expressionistic lighting projects the repeated geometry of the banister onto the far wall. This introduction of expressionistic techniques highlights the deep psychological turmoil of Mr. Kim in a moment intertextually rooted in Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922). The inclusion of the heavily distorted shadows suggests the filmic manifestation of their Id-ish doppelgangers as their spectral corporality remoulds and shifts, mirroring only their difference to their material counterparts. The stairs become a vehicle through which the duplicity of the human psyche may manifest within the *diegesis*, weaving both self and the position of being an object into the overlaying

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20 Ibid, p. 4.

21 Agustín Zarzosa, ‘Melodrama and The Modes of the World’, *Discourse*, 2/32 (2010), pp. 236-55 (p. 247).

22 Brian Yecies, *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 44.

23 Kyung-Hyun, p. 213.

24 Ibid, p. 214.

25 Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama’, in *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and Other Woman’s Film*, ed. by Christine Glendhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), pp. 43-69 (p. 51).

26 Ibid, p. 47.

filmic fabric. The position is that of a person as they appear to someone else from the outside. Through *mise-en-scène* KIM directly combines the paradigms of melodrama, art cinema, and horror, and the iconographical connotations of the stairs thus shift as well. Whilst they still embody the sociologically relevant 'climb,' they also come to manifest the Id-ish duplicity of the patriarchal subject fighting against the 'monstrous' form of femininity that desires modernisation.<sup>27</sup> The stairs come to represent the 'empirical world [that] has become spiritualised' within this ontological duplicity; they shift between the material connotations of class and gender relations to the metaphysical manifestations of the self.<sup>28</sup> Here, KIM's *auteurist* influence on *mise-en-scène* creates a porous filmic composite capable of extending beyond melodrama's material, and horror's psychological, reality, creating art that signifies both its construction and its past. The staircase is, indeed, central to the film, but it acts beyond its physical and topological designation; it provides a centrality that demonstrates its own filmic constitution.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly the *diegetic* music of the piano comes to intertwine both melodrama and horror. Within *The Housemaid* the piano becomes 'iconographically fixed by the claustrophobic atmosphere of the bourgeoisie'; it signifies the centrality of the middle-class, Confucian ideals of the family.<sup>30</sup> Mr. Kim's profession as a music teacher reinforces this sentiment as the piano operates to economically support the family's progress into the upper middle-class. There is, however, a stylistic clashing within the tonality of the music the piano plays. When Mr. Kim plays, the music resembles that of western classicism – reminiscent of Debussy and wider impressionism. This highlights the reinforcement of melodrama's dominant 'musical vocabulary'; one which aesthetically refers to an ordered, tonal atmosphere of tradition and, therefore, patriarchal rule.<sup>31</sup>

Once again, however, this conventional melodramatic signification is contrasted with a darker expressionistic influence. This occurs most prominently during a scene in which Myung-Sook wakes Mr. Kim in the middle of the night by playing the piano. Here the repeated dissonance of the chromaticism (jarring notes that do not belong to the key of the piece) intertwines with the expressionistic lighting as Mr. Kim ascends the stairs, producing an expressionistic mosaic of attenuated forms both sonically and visually. This atonal counterpoint to that of Mr. Kim's ordered patriarchal western classicism reworks melodramatic convention, revealing the horrific underbelly of the 'fetishized topography' of the bourgeoisie.<sup>32</sup> As Workman asserts, there are 'two different kinds of parallelism, one harmonically supporting the dominant melody, which is the essential moral contrast between good and evil, and the other subtly working against or counterpointing this melody.'<sup>33</sup> Much like the music, Kim Ki-young is altering the timbre of both the piano's signification and genre by juxtaposing the two characters' playing styles. The counterpoint to the dominant melody operates in the same fashion as the attenuated shadows; it becomes a distorted doppelgänger of its past self, signifying only its difference. This expressionistic

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27 Kyung-Hyun, p. 214.

28 Zarzosa, p. 246.

29 Kyung-Hyun, p. 214.

30 Elsaesser, p. 62.

31 Ibid, p. 60.

32 Workman, p. 10.

33 Ibid, p. 30.

influence immediately begins to articulate filmic meta-textuality as the subversive *counterpoint* of genre becomes more and more apparent. The expressionistic music works against the melodramatic binary to signify the fallacy of each techniques' generic construction. This *diegetically* resonant musical trope, much like the stairs, comes to signify beyond its apparent presence through this generic intermingling. It becomes a meta-textual representation of filmic construction, combining and juxtaposing the tensions of genre and filmic art forms.

It is not, however, just the tonality of the piano that signifies this generic and artistic confluence. The piano, and the parlour as a whole, physically represent the melodramatic desire to 'fix former domestic property relations as a mode of social life.'<sup>34</sup> These fetishistic prosthetics of the middle class aesthetically mould the *mise-en-scène* to encapsulate the tensions of Korea's rapidly increasing modernity. Melodramatic 'domestic property relations' grant a thematic centrality to the *objecthood* of the piano; it stands as both the signifier and producer of the family's social grounding. Once again, KIM attenuates this potent symbol of melodramatic tension. This occurs most prominently during a scene in which Mr. Kim sees his reflection in the piano's varnished wood. His reflection looks back, distorted through the layers of economic potency this fetishized double lens contains. Here the *objecthood* of the piano becomes infinitely remoulded as the distorted form of Mr. Kim's face comes to resemble its expressionistic double. The piano is no longer solely commodity but a codified mirror, reshaping the patriarchal self-image in a moment of 'horrific self-awareness'.<sup>35</sup>

This self-awareness operates duplicitously. Firstly it highlights the distortion of the melodramatic iconography and remoulds it into the established, meta-textual generic hybrid. Secondly it directly presents a filmic manifestation of KIM's authorship as Mr. Kim gazes into a secondary lens and screen to see, not his melodramatic archetype, but his meta-textually signifying, expressionistic self. The mirroring of both the *auteur's* and the main character's names should also not go unnoticed. This displacement of generic convention creates such authorial self-recognition as the *auteur's* signature tropes physically create his self-image on-screen. The artist exists meta-textually within his work, reflecting the mimetic binary of reality and art through the intermingling of genre. Here one sees what Linda Badley asserts as 'the auteur (theory)... [being] a horror (story)'.<sup>36</sup> For Badley the notion of the auteur is implicit within the horror genre as every constitutional level of the film comes to represent their unconscious impulses. Whilst Badley's assertion proves useful in conceptualising horror broadly, within this specific context KIM's meta-textual manifestation combines genres. Thus his 'horrific self-awareness' becomes meta-textually representative of an experimental milieu as opposed to a distorted, grotesque version of filmic reading. The *auteur* exists both within and beyond the bounds of genre. The *mise-en-scène* not only mixes genres then, but provides a secondary, self-reflective lens; one which asserts an authorial *cinematic cosmomorphism*, placing genre, art, and artist into one physical symbol.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Elsaesser, p. 61.

35 Linda Badley, 'The Darker Side of Genius: The (Horror) Auteur Meets Freud's Theory', in *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 222-240 (p. 223).

36 Ibid, p. 225.

37 Metz, p. 47.

It is the direct representation of the auteur within the reflections of the *diegesis* that portray this perpetual meta-textuality. The *cinematic cosmomorphism* (the act of being in complete symbiosis with the narrative world) engulfs KIM's spectral presence eliding artist and art work into one continually altering generic fabric.<sup>38</sup> This becomes most prevalent through the use of the house's patio doors. Here KIM utilises the dissected glass frames to provide a secondary lens through which to view the film. As characters move between rooms the frame is often repeatedly dissected and distorted by vertical lines creating a staggered *kineticism* within the sequence. This secondary lens meta-textually signifies the film's construction as the geography and physicality of the house directly manipulates characters' corporeality, placing them within their own internal frames. It is this overlaying, dissecting epidermis that provides the multitude of reflections and doubles within the film as Mr. Kim faces the glass to confront his own, and prosthetic *auteurist*, self-image. Here, much like in the case of the piano, Mr. Kim's self-reflection directly positions Kim Ki-young within his work as the position of the patriarchal South Korean male is reflected through the symbolic lens of the camera. One is aware as KIM stands on either side of the lens.

This is the prosthesis of KIM's placement within the film as Mr. Kim becomes reminiscent of a phantom limb, spectrally reaching into the *diegesis* to be at one with, and alter, the *mise-en-scène*. This occurs most prominently during a scene in which Mr. Kim is seduced after the death of a co-worker. Here Mr. Kim and Myung-Sook stand before the patio doors as the housemaid attempts to lead him to her room. The doors operate as a threshold to the fetishized patriarchal desire of the 'unobtainable object' (the object of desire that is always out of reach) which the housemaid symbolises.<sup>39</sup> They also, however, reflect only the figure of Mr. Kim. This reflection acts, like the expressionistic shadows, to simultaneously mirror and distort his form. Mr. Kim exists twice as both a *diegetically* physical presence and as a meta-textually spectral other immersed within the secondary lens of the glass. Here, much like in the case of the piano, there is a direct situating of an authorial doppelganger as the reflection exists to signify the artifice of the film, replicating the depiction of *diegesis* within an on-screen screen.

It is this introduction of a confused *diegetic* and mimetic topology that Lorens Holms refers to in elucidating Lacan's theorisations of the similarities of the topology of architecture and the psyche. Holms states, 'as soon as the subject is introduced, the architectural terms inside/outside become conflated.'<sup>40</sup> Here one sees a direct physical acknowledgement of this notion as Myung-Sook leads Mr. Kim through the symbolically charged pro-filmic layer. This Lacanian ideal can be applied further, however, as the 'architectural terms' come to represent the structures of the medium itself; reality/*diegesis* and inside/outside.<sup>41</sup> The *conflation* that occurs within the reflection of Mr. Kim as the auteur Kim Ki-young works to re-designate the boundaries of the medium, presenting its verisimilitude as something that is infinitely displaced. The very ontology of the image is remoulded as not only a confluence of genre, but as an investment of reality within the filmic layering. Kim Ki-young's diegetic manifestation reworks the

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38 Ibid.

39 Kyung-Hyun, p. 213.

40 Lorens Holms, *Brunelleschi, Lacan, Le Corbusier: Architecture, Space and the Construction of Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 151.

41 Ibid.

polarities of art and reality demonstrating that this *cinematic cosmomorphism* exists in a meta-textual, ultimately unstable, filmic composite.<sup>42</sup>

The patio doors as a secondary lens accentuate the already shifting dynamics of *The Housemaid's* composition. The characters, however, are able to meta-textually step beyond these internal frames, and translucent epidermis, on to the balcony – a seemingly liminal space that connects the Id-ish (that of the unconscious sexual drive) desire of the patriarch (emblemised in Myung-Sook's room) to the socio-political commodity-space of the parlour. Here Workman's assertions of spatial designation help to elucidate the balcony's topological grounding. Workman dissects the film into three categories: topos which refers to the 'diegetic and fictional space [...] the place of the unconscious, the *other scene* for both the film and the spectator', the screen which is 'the site of the visualisation of symptoms' and 'primary and secondary identification', and cosmos which is 'the allegorical universe [of melodrama] constructed discursively, narratively and spatially'.<sup>43</sup> Eliding these categories with Lacan's 'tripartite schema of the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic', Workman compartmentalises the film as a specifically 'post-psychoanalytic', melodramatic work.<sup>44</sup>

This separation consists of the various layers of how reality is constructed. Workman's theory therefore, similarly, splits the narrative world into three corresponding categories. Broadly speaking, these categories correspond to the levels of the psyche: the unconscious (the topos), the conscious (the screen) and the Lacanian Real (everything beyond language, the cosmos). His theorisation can be extended, however, to include the generic interplay and meta-textuality so prevalent within the rest of the film. Characters directly traverse both topos and screen in their movement beyond the secondary frame and lens. This shift combines the *other scene* of the horrific unconscious and the 'site of visualisation', directly amalgamating the expressionistic impulses of the auteur with the generic formulation of melodrama's need for 'identification'.<sup>45</sup> In their symbolic movement the characters combine not only genre, but the psycho-topological designations of the film. They innately displace the connotations of cosmos that Workman prescribes, as the 'allegorical universe' of melodrama is intertwined with the horror of the topos and the meta-textuality of the filmic manifestation of the screen.<sup>46</sup>

The topological formulation and situating of the balcony operates to, once again, displace the compositional layers of the film as this peripheral space allows characters to extend beyond their diegetic manifestations, combining 'the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic'.<sup>47</sup> Christian Metz theorises this quality, stating that the 'unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier [...] stamped with unreality to an unusual degree'.<sup>48</sup> KIM accentuates the duplicity of the medium in order to highlight not only the shifting nature of his film's generic constitution, but to self-reflectively elucidate his own presence. This demonstrates the 'unreality' of *The Housemaid* and, by extension, the medium itself.

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42 Metz, p. 47.

43 Workman, p. 33-35, p.29.

44 Ibid, p. 32.

45 Ibid, p. 33-34.

46 Ibid, p. 35.

47 Ibid, p. 32.

48 Metz, p. 45.



The meta-textual interrogation of the verisimilitude of film creates 'a new kind of mirror'; one which reflects and projects *diegetic* presence, genre, art, and *auteur*.<sup>49</sup>

This 'new kind of mirror' is even present within the credits at the beginning of the film.<sup>50</sup> Here the filmic topology of 'topos', 'screen' and 'cosmos' is, once again, destabilised, manifesting the authorial influence within its meta-textual constitution.<sup>51</sup> During the beginning of the film, as the credits role, the camera tracks in to show Kim Chang-soon and Kim Ae-soon (the children of the family) playing 'cat's cradle' with a piece of string. Here each time a shape is created the opposing child unpicks a length of string and restructures its geometry into a new formulation. The seemingly childish game becomes symbolic of the wider generic destabilisation of the film. Its perpetually shifting and twisting nature reformulates the topological assertions of space, depicting the pro-filmic event as an entity of infinite malleability. Kim Ki-young, as a *metteur-en-scène*, is establishing the constitutional displacement of the film, creating the twisting filmic fabric of genre and art.<sup>52</sup> Lee Yeon-ho (LEE), in reference to this infinitely destabilised filmic composite, states that 'KIM takes the method of granting different conceptions of time, then revealing them through the use of space.'<sup>53</sup> Here, for LEE, the perpetually altering use of space is indicative of a reformulation of the film's temporal logic as the shapes of the string become reminiscent of the circularity of the film's structure.

This reading must be altered, however, in conceptualising the film's spatiality as a whole as the different conceptions of time merge with the spatial reformulation. Here, once again, the porous boundaries of the filmic layering are highlighted as the *topos* (the diegetic and fictional space) and *screen* (the site of the visualisation of symptoms) conjoin in the overlaying of credits (*identification*) upon the perpetually shifting *other scene* of the film.<sup>54</sup> The credits, that reference reality, are intertwined with diegetic reformulation. This intertwining destabilises the melodramatic allegorical universe as there is a meta-textual acknowledgement of the film's continual reconstitution. It is this perpetual reformulation that conjoins Lee Yeon-ho's assertions of temporality and Workman's spatiality, as the interplay of *topos* and *screen* innately refers to a temporality beyond the *diegesis*; that of the viewer.<sup>55</sup> Once again KIM highlights the porousness of art and reality as both the psycho-topological and temporal structures are remoulded in order to demonstrate the meta-textual presence of the film. The 'unreality' of the medium is highlighted as KIM's spatial and temporal manipulation, once again, bleeds the polarities of 'inside/outside' to produce an infinitely displaced composition.<sup>56</sup> This 'new kind of mirror' then is one that continually, and duplicitously, signifies both its own presence and construction as art, genre, and film.<sup>57</sup>

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49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Workman, p.32.

52 Andrew Sarris, p.252.

53 Lee Yeon-ho, 'Introduction', in *Kim Ki-young*, pp.1-22, p.12.

54 Workman, p. 32-34.

55 Ibid, p. 32.

56 Metz, p .45; Holms, p. 151.

57 Ibid, Metz.

KIM's work is one of continual reformulation as space and *mise-en-scène* operate beyond their designation to signify their presence as part of the shifting filmic composite. It is this self-reflective nature that situates *The Housemaid* beyond the bounds of the categorisation of the 'genre film'. In using a 'localised understanding' of the *auteur theory* one is able to interrogate these labels, demonstrating such film makers as part of the wider global nexus of artistic cinematic practice.<sup>58</sup> For Bordwell genre cinema must not question its own verisimilitude and yet within KIM's work one sees the continual probing of filmic textuality, displacing not only genre, but the notion of 'art cinema' and, indeed, art itself.<sup>59</sup> The compositional qualities of 'realism', 'ambiguity' and 'authorship' permeate and remould one another, blurring the boundaries of both Bordwell's and Neale's seemingly defining categories. In approaching the text as specifically authored this essay has been 'able to draw on discourses [...] particular perhaps of each theory, each position.'<sup>60</sup> Thus, much like *The Housemaid* itself, this essay has intertwined the diverse influences of philosophy, psychology, genre and art film studies under the figure of the *auteur* in order to further elucidate the film's meta-textual construction.

In this approach the intermingling of genre becomes a key starting point in redefining art. As such, in the first section, this essay demonstrated that the iconographical intertwining of both melodrama and horror, within the piano and the stairs, created a significance entirely new from each genre. Here the socio-political and feminist connotations of melodrama merged with the expressionistic, Freudian, psychology of the patriarch, creating a *mise-en-scène* that signifies its own construction as a 'central,' combinational duplicity.<sup>61</sup> This duplicity extends to include the manifestation of Kim Ki-young within the work. Here, through the use of expressionistic reflections and a secondary lens this essay theorised an act of *cinematic cosmomorphism* in which reality, *diegesis*, *auteur* and art become intertwined.<sup>62</sup> As a result, the work signifies its own construction as a piece of art, as it not only highlights the porousness of the generic boundary, but that of mimetic constitution and significance. This porousness is extrapolated as Workman's assertions of *topos*, *screen*, and *cosmos* restructure the work's textually spatialized composition.<sup>63</sup> Here KIM intertwines categories, demonstrating that simply through the act of moving across a threshold or playing a game one is able to perpetually restructure the ontological layering of a text. The meta-textual significance of such acts remoulds the notions of both genre and art situating *The Housemaid* in the infinitely displaced centrality of the combination of the terms and expanding notions of what art cinema can be. Far from this text resembling Chris Berry's 'bizarre [...] helter-skelter' of genre, this twisting topology resembles that of the double helix; it is the constitutional minutiae of the perpetually reformulating, meta-textually signifying, filmic composite.<sup>64</sup>

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58 Yecies, p. 44.

59 Bordwell, p. 57.

60 Robin Wood, 'Ideology, Genre, Auteur' [1977], in *Auteurs and Authorship: a Film Reader*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), pp. 84-92 (p. 84-85).

61 Kyung-Hyun, p. 213.

62 Metz, p. 47.

63 Workman, p. 32.

64 Kim So-young and Chris Berry, 'Suri Suri Masuri: The Magic of Korean Horror Film: A Conversation', *Postcolonial Studies*, 3.1 (2000), pp. 53-60 (p. 54).

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