

CHAPTER 6

Spectral Seriality

The Sights and Sounds of Count Dracula

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are concerned with the media logics and serial dynamics of iconic popular figures.¹ In particular, we are interested in the way that Dracula embodies and paradigmatically exemplifies a “spectral” logic that enables serial figures to proliferate across media channels, passing from literature to film to radio to TV and to digital media, exhibiting all the while an uncanny sort of resiliency that is the product as much of the figure’s flexibility as of its iconicity. By *serial figure*, we mean a type of stock character inhabiting the popular-cultural imagination of modernity—a “flat” and recurring figure, subject to one or more media changes over the course of its career (Denson/Mayer 2012a).² We see serial figures as integral and ideologically powerful components of the political and economic order of modernity, part of a system that works expansively to increase commensurability and connectivity. Serial figures operate in this system as mediating instances between the familiar and the unknown, the ordinary and the unusual. It is thus not by accident

1. Parts of this chapter are based on an earlier publication investigating different aspects of Dracula’s seriality (Mayer 2015).

2. For a delineation of the larger contexts and parameters of popular seriality, see Kelleter 2012 and this volume’s first chapter.

that such figures are characteristically liminal, transitional, or border-crossing beings—straddling the divide between nature and technology like Frankenstein’s monster (Denson 2012, 2014), between life and death like Dracula, human and animal like Tarzan (Denson 2008), or oscillating between moral and ethnic positions like Sherlock Holmes, Fantômas, or Fu Manchu (Denson/Mayer 2012b; Mayer 2014, 2016). These figures parasitically appropriate the media ensembles of a given period, taking up residence in them and making them their own. In doing so, they function as markers and active agents of the very process of media change. In a certain sense, they *become* media—epitomizing the fact that media are never only transparent means of transportation but that they also imprint their “traces” indelibly onto the “messages” or “contents” they convey (Krämer 1998: 74). If, following Sybille Krämer, we conceive of media as complex *apparatuses* of meaning-making and world-building, rather than mere practical tools to facilitate communication (94), then serial figures may be seen as the embodiments or materializations of a fundamental medial drive to bring about *and* reflect upon change (Engell 2004). Media are always in transition, but some media changes (such as the contestation of the novel as the prime medium of entertainment in the late Victorian era or the transition from silent to sound film) are more consequential and spectacular than others. These large-scale media transformations tend to be read in terms of “innovations” (or, more recently, “updates”) and thus suggest that media history is a directed and linear process. But serial figures, with their feedback loops and self-reflective logics of iteration, epitomize the fact that the evolution of media systems is a non-teleological process: overdetermined by competing forces, random, accidental, and consequently always also haunted by a sense that “things could have been otherwise” (Denson 2012). In this respect, not only are serial figures subject to constant narrative revision and adjustment for the sake of “retrospective continuity,” but they also invite counterfactual questions (“what if?”) about the course of media history itself, thus situating themselves as the ideal conceptual figures for media-archaeological inquiries.³

In the following, we will flesh out this picture and explain more precisely what a serial figure is, what it does, and how it operates. Our focus will be on the figure of Count Dracula, who perhaps more than any other serial figure accentuates what we call the *spectral* logic of serial proliferation: that is, a ghostly and flickering relation to presence, or the present, which

3. The idea of “retrospective continuity” (or *retcon*) stems from the discourse of comics production and fandom, where it indicates the effort of retroactively aligning different historical manifestations of a comic series or figure in order to ensure overall logical coherence or ideological consistency. On media archaeology, see Huhtamo/Parikka 2011.

characterizes the media historicity of the serial figure and propels its ongoing transformations as it moves between old and new media.⁴ We will focus on the early stages of this process, paying particular attention to Dracula's appearance in the medium of print, and to his audiovisual rendering on the cinematic screen, to show that the figure's instability and its liminality are of fundamental importance for its career. In both the original novel of 1897 and the film version of 1931, the figure oscillates between ascriptions of "backwardness" and "progress," and in both cases the figure's modernity (or lack thereof) is negotiated through mechanisms of medial self-reflection and temporal deferral, as we intend to demonstrate. It is the figure's simultaneous narrative *and* medial spectrality, that is, the fact that it is never completely present—but rather fleeting, shape-shifting, and amorphous—that keeps the figure alive or, more precisely, *undead*: never quite exhausted by a single, definitive instantiation but always available for yet another serial iteration.

SERIAL FRAMINGS AND THE SPECTRAL INTEGRITY OF THE ICON

A serial figure, generally speaking, is a figure that needs no explanation, no introduction, and no elaborate framing. It is *familiar*, even if one has never dealt explicitly with the figure before. We distinguish here between these perennially familiar serial figures, whose existence transcends any particular instantiation, and series characters, which are developed within (and remain more or less contained in) an ongoing narrative, for example, a serialized novel or a saga. Whereas such characters can potentially grow over time to develop a more or less linear biography, serial figures are inevitably characterized by repetitions, revisions, and even the occasional "reboot" of their entire history. Serial figures, as Umberto Eco wrote of Superman, undergo a "virtual beginning" with each new staging, "ignoring where the preceding event left off" (1979: 117). Of course, both types often blend into one another in the course of their narrative unfolding. Indeed, many of the most successful serial figures (such as Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, Fu Manchu, or Fantômas) were first introduced in the continuing narratives of magazine productions and then further developed in novel series before eventually mutating into iconic figures as they jumped across various media channels (Denson/Mayer 2012a, Denson/Mayer 2012b).

4. On the notion of spectrality, which we extend here for media-theoretical purposes, see Derrida 2006.

Serial figures have an extreme affinity to modern media, and they positively thrive on media changes. Though many such figures were established in literary texts, they all migrated quickly to other media, mutated, fanned out, proliferated, and reproduced without losing their distinctive forms, features, trademark equipment, or gear. As a result, they are particularly good at negotiating the culturally or medially “new,” and thus at performing or contesting novelty against the background of a figure’s familiarity. They both exoticize *and* familiarize the foreign or unknown by foregrounding it. This marking and familiarization are achieved not only narratively but also formally, by way of serial iteration, recurrence, and looping.

Even before the comics superheroes of the 1930s took up and adapted many of their characteristics, serial figures presented themselves as both long-familiar and strangely new, at once timeless and hypermodern, universal and particular. Nevertheless, the serial figures of the turn of the century were long read almost exclusively in terms of the atavistic, the primitive, or the unconscious—in any case, *not* the modern. In the wake of Northrop Frye’s theory of literature as an archive of archetypes (in *Anatomy of Criticism*), this reading of the serial figure or form as the “always already known” became canonical. For Dracula, Frye’s impact registers in the assumption that a “majestic immutability” (1995: 130) informed the representation of the vampire through the ages, as Nina Auerbach delineated in her cultural history of the vampire.⁵ This assumption then gave way, in the wake of intellectual history and Foucault’s “archaeology of knowledge,” to a more historical approach, as exemplified by Nina Auerbach’s own take on vampires as “personifications of their age” (1995: 3). Instead of transhistorical continuities, scholarship now foregrounded temporal breaks and radical revisions.

But such cultural contextualization alone is not sufficient to get a handle on the plurimedial careers of serial figures. It is imperative that we pay attention *both* to these figures’ variability *and* to their iconicity, that is, to the restricted parameters within which a figure is free to move and to mutate while still remaining integral as a particular figure and no other. Toward this end, we have to focus on the serial figure’s mediality—or, more generally, its formal framing. However, to understand the constructive force of such framing, one should not stretch the frame too far. If you look not at *Tarzan* but at primate-human hybrids in the history of Western culture, not at *Dracula* but at the vampire from Byron to *True Blood*, not *Frankenstein’s monster* but man-machine configurations since the early modern era, you run the risk of overlooking the specific media dynamics of popular seriality, a dynamics of

5. As a pertinent example for this approach, see Douglas 1966.

modern media. Connected to the inherent reproducibility of technical mass media, this serial dynamics draws on an awareness of something being *retold*, activating a dialectics of recognition and astonishment, of departures *from* and re-anchoring *of* previously staged narratives and images. The more concrete the anchor points and cross-references are in a serial sequence, the more clearly this logic manifests itself. And it is only in terms of this logic that we can recognize the political-ideological and media-material “work” of the serial figure, its engagement with a specific world-historical *era*.

Dracula himself is very much a product of the late colonial era (Arata 1990: 627; see also Richards 1993 and Gibson 2006), and the threat he poses is accordingly “dynamic, totalizing”; earlier monsters operated “on the margins of society, hidden away in their towers,” as Franco Moretti puts it, while modern creatures of horror are figures of expansion and spread. “The modern monsters,” writes Moretti regarding Dracula in particular, “threaten to live for ever and to conquer the world. For this reason they must be killed” (1982: 68). Moretti follows up Karl Marx’s association of capitalism and vampirism and reads Stoker’s novel as both an illustration of this logic and an attempt at alleviating the fears it raises. For Moretti, Dracula embodies the extremes of modern monopoly capitalism *because* he is a “figure of the past” (74). At the end of the novel, both the vampiric Eastern monopolist (who symbolizes the past) and the American financier Quincy Morris (who points toward the future) will be dead, while a pseudo-ethical Victorian capitalism stands victorious and uncontested. But in the long (serial) run, Dracula’s method of unfriendly take-overs will get the better of the ostensibly benign Victorian status quo, which the novel is anxious to retain. The monster that is “transformed into a man by mass culture” (Moretti 1982: 82) will use the powerful alliance of capitalism and modern mass media to push ahead into the twentieth century.

To do so, Dracula needs to adjust to the new and upcoming forms of modernity—and at the same time communicate timelessness. The figure’s flexibility goes hand in hand with a certain constancy. In our imaginations of him, Dracula always has pointed teeth, he always wears a cape, always sleeps in a coffin, and he concentrates on female victims—and these attributes and habits are true even if, during various stretches of his serial career, he got along without some of these habits and accoutrements. In its iconicity, the figure of Dracula mobilizes a whole army of basic conceptual oppositions, pitting them against one another, but without the prospect of resolution: East meets West, the predator threatens civilized humanity, masculine agency preys on the female victim, and, of course, life and death entwine in the vampire’s uncanny body. None of these pairs of terms remains unproblematic or stable in the course of the figure’s long career, but all of them reappear again and

again in various guises and constellations. In his serial specificity, Dracula thus stands out among vampires: he no longer embodies the sensibility of the early Victorian period, and he has not yet assumed that of our late televisual postmodernity. There is a diffuse, indeed spectral, integrity to the figure across its various media instantiations; its iconic appearance will always be superimposed upon any and all possible concrete manifestations, even if (and perhaps especially if) the figure now appears in a different form.

DRACULA'S MEDIA DIALECTICS

The figure's iconic form has been fixed for us above all by Bela Lugosi's portrayal of the Count in Tod Browning's 1931 film version. Yet Dracula's cinematic iconization did not efface his earlier appearances. Rather, it glossed them over, updating them medially, as it were. To apprehend this serial interrelation of new and old, we need to address the media negotiations of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel from which the figure first sprang to—"life." As we shall see, the novel establishes an unresolved tension between the specificity and generality of mediation that will continue to reverberate in Count Dracula's proliferations across the century's audiovisual channels.

More than perhaps any other serial figure, Dracula reveals the active and creative power of technical media already at his literary point of departure. In Thomas Elsaesser's estimation, which follows Friedrich Kittler's seminal reading in *Discourse Networks*, "[Dracula] may be the only original and authentic myth that the age of mechanical reproduction has produced" (2011: 111). Kittler had read *Dracula* as "that perennially misjudged heroic epic of the final victory of technological media over the blood-sucking despots of old Europe" (1999: 86). And Kittler was not the only critic to see in this novel the document of a media struggle, in which an alliance built on modern technologies of communication is pitted against an ancient and totalitarian power (Wicke 1992, Richards 1993, and Winthrop-Young 1994). We agree that Stoker's *Dracula* should be read as a novel about mediatization and media change, but we are not so sure about its actual position within this battle. More specifically, we are uncertain about the novel's sympathies or tacit alliances. Technical media may prove superior in the battle of forces that the novel both depicts and takes part in. But the opposing camps within this battle are far less clear-cut than one might think. This may have to do with the fact that at the turn of the twentieth century, when Dracula first cringed from the light of day, narrative literature as the favored popular medium of entertainment began to face the competition of other media that laid claim to a more effective and

visceral impact than the book. Film was not yet at the forefront of this struggle for clout and attention, but the emerging mass-cultural apparatuses of image production and dissemination with their techniques of condensation and spectacle resound in the novel's take on the effects and effectivity of technologies of communication and transmission (Wicke 1992, Menke 2007, Rubery 2009, and Galvan 2010). Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, we argue, may not openly militate against the media system of the twentieth century, but the novel is by no means as celebratory of its own format's impending replacement as is sometimes assumed.

In line with this reconsideration of alliances and tensions, we contend that Count Dracula serves not so much as an outdated antecedent to the mass-media cultures of modernity but more as an integral element of them, perhaps even their basic principle. He represents, figurally and medially, what Victorian culture has reason to dread. Already at the point of his literary inception, Dracula exhibits a principle of diffusion, of intermedial spectrality, according to which one material form is translatable into another: the humanoid, the wolf, the bat, and fog. This allows him for a time to elude his pursuers, but they too are acquainted with a plurality of media forms: shorthand notation, the telegraph, the phonograph, and the typewriter play instrumental roles in this counterproject. Mina Harker, as Dracula's most important opponent and the driving engine of the international alliance of vampire hunters in the metropolis, is a skilled typist, and she manages to render the fractured records of journals, newspapers, phonograph cylinders, and stenographic notes into the uniform medium of typewritten text, reproduced in triplicate. Mina becomes what Kittler called the "central relay in an immense information network" (1999: 354). This network is a network of the present and of presence, and it works by way of collation and addition: *Dracula's* "narrative time is always the present, and the narrative order—always paratactic—never establishes causal connections," Franco Moretti contends (84). By compiling it, however, Mina also cleanses the new technological media of communication of their "rawness" and authenticity: "I have copied out the words on my typewriter, and none other need to now hear your heart beat, as I did" (Stoker 1993: 26),⁶ she reassures Dr. Seward after reviewing his phonograph cylinders. Simultaneously, and interestingly, she defuses what could be considered the most powerful force field of the late Victorian novel, obliterating the traces of feeling, the trembling and the terror, the horrible events' profound impact on the "soul." At the very end of the novel, her husband, Jonathan Harker, summarizes in frustration that "in all the mass of material of which the record

6. Henceforth cited as *D*.

is composed, there is hardly one authentic document; nothing but a mass of type-writing [. . .]. We could hardly ask anyone, even did we wish to, to accept these as proofs of so wild a story” (*D* 335).

Fortunately, the version of the events that the book ultimately renders is not Mina’s purified, streamlined, typewritten collection of data but Bram Stoker’s lurid and sprawling “imperial gothic” (Brantlinger 1988). Accordingly, the novel counters the “modern” ideal of totalizing data processing with another, older aesthetics of totality—collating voices, perspectives, and media in order to achieve an impression of synchronicity and homogeneity. *Dracula* thus displays its tacit predilection for the media system of the nineteenth century and its unacknowledged skepticism vis-à-vis the technical media of the coming age. But clearly the novel is fighting a losing battle on behalf of its own format. At the book’s end, Dracula will be defeated while Mina has just given birth to a son who shall bear all the first names of the league of vampire hunters. Alas, in the story’s longer run, the powers of reproduction are afforded to the vampire rather than the Victorian lady. What distinguishes Mina in the novel—her interiority, her reflection, her robust presence—disqualifies her for a serial career and confines her to the bounds of the book.⁷ Dracula, in contrast, who is hardly ever “there” in the novel, transgresses its boundaries and lives on by virtue of his capacity to defer closure and synchronicity.

Dracula taunts his pursuers: “My revenge is just begun! I spread it over centuries, and time is on my side. Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine” (*D* 273). In his flickering dispersion he seems to project various options for a future vampiric existence, tentatively envisioning nodes and links to future versions of himself. In that respect, the novel functions—somewhat against its own best interest and almost as if it were being operated by an alien force—as the ideal starting point for the figure’s serial proliferation. Ultimately, Dracula’s spectral quality resides in his uncanny ability to navigate not only (diegetic) time and space but also to spread diffusely through the very real experiential time-spaces that rub against one another in modernity, in the oppositional trajectories of media particularization and convergent totalization. Transcending the novel, Dracula as a serial figure emerges as a higher-order medium of sorts—a meta-medium

7. It is interesting to see, however, that at what looks like the end of Dracula’s serial career, in the 1990s, Mina returns to the scene, figuring as a central character (and not only an erotic projection screen) in narratives as diverse as Francis Ford Coppola’s film *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, Alan Moore and Kevin O’Neal’s popular graphic novel series *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (1999–2009), and the 2013 NBC series *Dracula*. All of these versions of the narrative profess to return to the figure’s literary and historical origins and to explore its ideological and psychological underpinnings. On the serial logic of *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, see Mayer 2014: 101–4, 146–47.

in which the book is contrasted with the emerging audiovisual media into which the Count will successively and temporarily descend in the course of his further career. In the ensuing interplay between first-order and second-order media, the sights and sounds of Dracula will become the sights and sounds of media change itself.

THE ICON AS TRANSITIONAL MEDIUM

The transitional interplay of media figure and media ground is nowhere so tightly focused as in Tod Browning's classic film from 1931, particularly in the iconic image it bequeaths to us of Count Dracula. The film's title card already evidences the plurimedial seriality that the figure had amassed over the previous three decades: "Carl Laemmle presents Dracula by Bram Stoker"—not as a direct adaptation of the novel, but "from the play adapted by Hamilton Deane & John L. Balderston," which in fact refers to two different plays: first a London-based production from 1924 and then a 1927 Broadway play based on it, starring Bela Lugosi. Not mentioned here are Stoker's own theatrical production, performed only once (prior to the novel's publication) for the purpose of securing a copyright; Friedrich Murnau's unauthorized adaptation *Nosferatu* from 1922; or any of the print editions, adaptations, abridgments, and serializations that had appeared since 1897. But what is about to appear on screen will in any case overshadow all of these past interpretations, including the original novel, and it will continue to color our perception of any future instantiation for decades to come.

Significantly, Browning's film kicks off the horror-film cycle of the 1930s, including a series of Universal Studios productions featuring the Count: after *Dracula* (1931) comes *Dracula's Daughter* (1936), then *Son of Dracula* (1943), the monster mash-ups *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945), and finally *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), in which Lugosi reprises his role one last time. The figure, like the horror-film genre, changes markedly over the course of this series, so it is easy to lose sight of the originary media-historical functionality of Lugosi's icon, which is born in the wake of the transition from silent to sound film. By film historian Donald Crafton's reckoning (1997: 267), this transition was coming to its end by the time *Dracula* appeared in February 1931, but as Robert Spadoni (2007) has argued, the film harnessed a lingering experience of the first sounds that moviegoers had heard emitted from the screen—an uncanny or "ghostly" experience resulting from the incomplete phenomenal coordination of sound and image. The Count gave a body to this recently bygone (but unforgotten,

“undead”) experience, around which the horror genre itself was initially fashioned.

In this context, Browning’s film reenacts the novel’s battle between media particularization and generalization, though abstracting it from Mina’s and Stoker’s divergent efforts to coordinate media fragments into a coherent novelistic narrative and transferring it to a probing of the cinema’s recent efforts to coordinate sight and sound into a coherent *audiovisual* whole. Dracula’s body is the central site of the struggle, the media stakes of which are made clear in the film’s first ten minutes or so, leading up to the Count’s appearance and first encounter with his guest. The nondiegetic music with which the film opens will cease after the opening credits, and it will not reappear again until the closing credits. But the opening scene, set inside a noisy horse-drawn coach traveling through Transylvania, locates us more or less unproblematically in the sound era of cinema, as on-screen characters converse and produce audible dialogue. Soon, though, as we move deeper into the wilds of Transylvania, this will stop and give way to an eerie silence. When the sun sets and our traveler Renfield (here playing the role of the novel’s Harker) sets out for Borgo Pass, a series of images show the Count’s distant castle, first from the outside and then its interior, bringing us swiftly to his coffin. There is no sound at all until the interminable silence is broken by the sound of coffins opening, creaking, bumping, and then rats squeaking, wolves barking and howling, as the camera moves in to reveal Dracula, who has silently appeared. The background of silence contrasts palpably with the use of nondiegetic music during the credits. This might be called a *nondiegetic silence*, as it foregrounds the images *as* silent, setting the stage for an uncanny sound, very different from the normalized sound of dialogue that precedes it. The silence has, of course, a diegetic aspect, but it is also double in the sense that it stands out as the spectral *presence* of a media-material *absence*. (By way of contrast, a “regular,” i.e., diegetic, silence might conventionally be marked with the sound of crickets chirping.) Renfield’s carriage arriving now at Borgo Pass brings with it—and takes with it again just as quickly—the normalized (i.e., synchronized) sound we heard in the opening sequences, again foregrounding the uncanny silence of Dracula, who awaits Renfield ominously in his own carriage. Renfield’s somewhat fearful words to the silent count—“The coach from Count Dracula?”—seem awkwardly obtrusive against the background of silence, and the aural register itself alternates as ground and figure with the image of the tight-lipped Count. Visually, Dracula’s bulging eyes accentuate this interplay, as they themselves describe a partially autonomous figure against the ground of the Count’s face—thereby singling out vision and visibility to set them in a volatile and oscillating relation with sound and the sonic—before the Count’s coach heads

off with its passenger toward the castle, where this uncanny give-and-take between sound and silence, aural and visual, continues to intensify.

Along the way, Renfield discovers that a bat has silently replaced his driver, and upon arrival he confirms that the driver is indeed nowhere to be found, while the castle door creaks open, autonomously and ostentatiously. Renfield enters, bats squeak, armadillos rustle. Dracula descends the staircase silently behind the frightened Renfield's back and then pronounces: "I am Dracula." The visibly disturbed Renfield explains hastily that he thought he was in the wrong place. Dracula replies, awkwardly, "I bid you welcome." Wolves begin to howl in the background, and the Count remarks: "Listen to them! Children of the night. What music they make." This self-reflexive foregrounding of sound, captured for the purposes of the uncanny, reimagines *The Jazz Singer's* famous "You ain't heard nothin' yet!" It will reverberate again in Tarzan's famous yell, and—somewhat paradoxically—in the muteness of Frankenstein's monster, all of which stand in a self-reflexive relation to the sound-film transition (Denson 2007, 2008; Spadoni 2007; and Kelleter 2009).

The interplay of silence/sound, noise/speech, visual/sonic continues in London: there we hear the noisy metropolis, the scream of a first offscreen victim, and the music of the opera house, all of which are contrasted with the silence of the house at night, where a bat waits noiselessly at the window and enters without a sound and where an offscreen transformation allows Dracula to appear just as noiselessly at Lucy's bedside. This is followed by the screams of the madhouse and its raving lunatics, including Renfield, contrasted with the concentrated silence of Seward, the other doctors, and van Helsing before he announces that they are dealing with the undead, Nosferatu. Dracula communicates with Renfield without speech, seemingly with his eyes, which, in the Count's/Lugosi's iconic image, are highlighted with precise rays of light, producing an effect much like the bulging eyes earlier, again making vision/the visual the carrier of (a weird, for us indecipherable, sort of) information, while sound is alienated from the image and rendered as incomprehensible noise—thus "denaturing" the recently naturalized, modern system of communication via synchronized sound and vision. It is significant that sound is produced, if not as dialogue then only by objects and nonhuman animals, never by the Count's body in humanoid form, which is perfectly and uncannily silent both in motion and at rest. Later, the Count's lack of reflection in a cigar-case mirror, first noticed by van Helsing, further problematizes sound/image relations, as Dracula is audible while not (mediately) visible. The fact that he "casts no reflection in the mirror" in fact mirrors or translates the fact that his body also emits no sound. Thus, sound and vision are dissociated from one another, both of them operating as channels of significance *and*

its deformation in a joint effort to undo the habitualization of synchronized sound and reveal an experience of disjointedness and material excess at its base. This excess, this spectral materiality, refuses to be contained completely by the new medium of sound film. The latter is shown to be “haunted” by a stubborn spirit of media transitionality, embodied by Dracula, which resists containment in a neat media package just as the Count could not be contained in the novel.

The film reinstates, in this way, the excess that Mina, in the novel, had erased in her transcription of Seward’s cylinders. But it does so in a way that sits uneasily with Stoker’s own attempt to restore a Gothic “spirit” to the Victorian novel, for the film transfers the mechanism of phonography, and its technical capture of the aurally real, from the level of content to that of the medium, which is self-reflexively foregrounded. Accordingly, the material excess of breath (literally, “spirit”) and heartbeat that Mina erased from the cylinders is restored and channeled toward the nervous, embodied reactions of the spectator confronted with the early horror film.

As in the novel, then, but for very different purposes, Dracula again thrives on—and carries forth—an unsettling spirit of media transitionality: whereas Stoker sought to counter the impending changes to the media landscape of the nineteenth century, Browning allows the figure to extend the scope of cinema’s sound transition—and with it the vampire’s own power. Problematizing the coordination of sound and image, Dracula’s uncanny image continually reinstates the distinction between sonic and visual registers, thus thwarting the media coherence of the talkie, obstructing the normalization of a generalized audiovisual mediality. Rather than be contained by the medium of the sound film, Dracula himself becomes the medium in which the particular streams of sound and image can appear, juxtaposed and disjointed, forever at battle. Browning’s film thus continues the trajectory of serialization that the Count embarked upon when he escaped and transcended Mina’s and Stoker’s textualizing efforts in 1897.

The enactment of Dracula as a self-reflexive embodiment of the in-between is not unique to our two case studies, though. Indeed, it manifests itself in most appearances of the familiar figure against ever-shifting medial horizons. In the Hammer horror films that resuscitated Dracula in the 1950s, casting Christopher Lee in his signature role, the Count’s interstitial status is marked through the use of color. Hammer Studios were the first to introduce Technicolor to the genre of the horror film, and their use of color contrasts such as the glaring red of the blood on Dracula’s colorless face energizes the films’ disturbing explorations of the dynamics of sex and desire against the backdrops of propriety and control. Roman Polanski’s *The Fearless Vampire*

Killers (1967) and Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu, Phantom der Nacht* (1979) both use the *Dracula* plot to challenge the genre conventions of the cinema of their days and to revisit earlier filmic techniques of narration and visualization, eliciting alternately the appeal of camp and the grotesque. And more recently, the NBC television series *Dracula* (2013) drew heavily on the *mise-en-scène* of steampunk to transpose the older concerns around the divide between man and beast or life and death onto the dichotomy of biology and technology. In all of these cases, media traditions and innovations are pulled into high relief. The effect, not only on the level of the history of film and moving-image media, is one of defamiliarization and temporal disjunction. The reenactments of the serial figure tend to work against the impression of a regularized temporal *flow* and highlight modes of deferral or disassociation. *Dracula* tends to be behind or ahead of his time, but he is never in sync, never entirely there.

CODA

The careers of serial figures unravel through stages of acceleration and abeyance, and although the Count experienced a serialized revival in NBC's *Dracula* (2013–14), which received moderate critical and audience acclaim, it remains to be seen whether the figure will make it in the twenty-first century. (The series was canceled after one season.) The figure's aesthetic and narrative logic certainly differs significantly from the many popular vampires that haunt the filmic, televisual, and computer screens of our time. As the NBC series exemplifies once more, whenever *Dracula* has been revisited in recent decades, he has been staged as a markedly historical figure in markedly historical settings. This was already the case in Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), a film that seemed to inaugurate the figure's demise: "It may be that Coppola has killed *Dracula* at last and that he will fade out with the twentieth century" (1995: 209), writes Auerbach in her seminal study, which devotes only a footnote to Coppola's adaptation (1995: 16). The film professed to return to the original script of the novel, and it revealed, indeed, in a lavish display of late Victorian ornamentality and decadence, adopting techniques of early cinema such as multiple exposure or rear projection in lieu of computer-generated effects to pay homage to the aesthetic (and media-technical) "spirit" of the period depicted.

In one of the film's many scenes that are not in fact based on the novel, we witness the first encounter between Count *Dracula* and Mina Harker in the streets of London. *Dracula* accosts Mina and asks her, in heavily accented English, about the location of the cinematograph: "I understand it is a wonder

of the civilized world.” Mina, in keeping with a Victorian code of conduct, rebukes his advances primly: “If you seek culture, then visit a museum. London is filled with them. Excuse me.” With this, the filmic Mina stands in sharp contrast to her literary predecessor who welcomed technical innovations wholeheartedly. But the Count’s appeal wins her over, and she finally accompanies him to a public screening of early erotic trickfilms and actualities like the Lumières’ *L’arrivée d’un train* (1895), which forms the backdrop of their erotic encounter. Those critics who reflected in some detail on the film’s adaptation of Stoker’s novel came almost invariably to the conclusion that, in spite of its deviation from Stoker’s original plot, this particular scene proved “paradoxically in keeping with the novel” (Foster 2009: 78; see also Winthrop-Young 1994: 108, 125). Yet the authenticity effect of this scene would seem to have less to do with Stoker’s novel than with Coppola’s determination to create an atmosphere of periodicity that rigorously adheres to, or even feeds on, the familiar visual archive of turn-of-the-century London. Thus, instead of following the cues laid out by the film and its ponderous title and judging it in terms of its faithfulness to the original (or lack thereof), it may be more rewarding to approach *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* as another episode in a larger serial process. To view it in this manner requires that we explicitly set it in relation to those many other “derivative” works that have defined Dracula’s serial career, including, in particular, the many Dracula films that have gone before it—*despite* Coppola’s reluctance to reference their audiovisual repertory in his heavy-handed quest for the authenticity of origins.

Tod Browning’s *Dracula* is an obvious point of reference because it was so eager, as we have seen, to “map” the serial figure in terms of its media transitionality (in keeping with what may well have been a dominant association with the novel in the 1930s). Browning’s *Dracula* is a figure on the brink, marking the novelty and mutability of the media environment in which it nests provisionally while readying itself to move on. Coppola’s *Dracula* also bears witness to the media changes of its day, but in a very different manner. The film appeared in a period of thoroughgoing media change: *Jurassic Park*, which with its use of CGI “heralded a revolution in movies as profound as the coming of sound in 1927” (Shone 2004: 213), was released in 1993. One year prior, Coppola’s postmodern film showed itself acutely aware of cinema’s impending digital transformation but opted for an acknowledgment of media change in reverse, so to speak, signaling back in history rather than projecting forward into the future. While Coppola’s *Dracula*, like Stoker’s and Browning’s, is a liminal figure, this film’s self-reflection in terms of mediality is thus more a plot device than a formal feature. The figure’s uncanny force and intangibility indicate the power of the past instead of the possibilities of the future,

precisely because the film interlinks these qualities with the accomplishments of a technomodernity that is nostalgically revisited *as an irretrievably bygone era*. At worst, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* indulges in a romantic view of history (and of film and media history in particular). At best, however, the film draws attention to its performance of a loop in the figure's serial trajectory, thus attesting to the fact that seriality need not take a sequential, unidirectional, or teleological course, and that the type of seriality embodied by iconic serial figures in fact hardly ever does. Seen from this angle, the actual trajectory of the figure's development could have been otherwise—will paradoxically always already *have been* otherwise. It is in this respect that the figure exhibits its spectral logic, and it is by virtue of this logic that it can repeatedly elude attempts to contain it; against the advances of Mina and van Helsing, of Stoker, or of Coppola, Dracula absconds into an alternate media history, which the figure delineates as an ongoing revisionary process in the face of whatever media transformations are occurring at the moment. The flipside of this is that the figure's continued serial existence is highly contingent upon material processes that are outside its control, so that the future it imagines for itself remains perennially precarious. We simply cannot predict the future fate of a serial figure like Dracula. The only thing we can say with certainty is that it will travel wherever media changes will take it, and that if it persists in its spectral state of undeath, it will continue to reflect these changes and to act upon them, serving both as the object of medialization and as a medium in its own right.

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