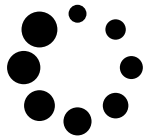


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# Allegories of Immersion

by Filippo Fimiani

Allegory

Ekphrastic fear

Media imaginary

Materiality

Elemental media

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# Allegories of Immersion



FILIPPO FIMIANI, Università degli Studi di Salerno – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9689-5480>  
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## Abstract

*Fish Night*, an episode of *LOVE DEATH + ROBOTS* (S01E12, 2019) based on a 1982 short story by Joe R. Lansdale, can be interpreted as an allegory of the impossibility of immersive experience: if real, it is deadly, because the images are no longer such or ghosts but living beings present in a shared environmental habitat, acting with but also against the subject, in turn no longer a spectator. Comparing the story and film, and ancient ekphrastic literature, I discuss, in a trans-medial imaginary genealogical perspective, the symptoms of this cultural *topos* and of the regressive desire for immersion and for transparent immediacy that shapes and drives it, dwelling in particular on the ambivalent phenomenological and ontological relations between living bodies, pictures and media as deep time-bending.

Keywords [Allegory](#) [Ekphrastic fear](#) [Media imaginary](#)  
[Materiality](#) [Elemental media](#)

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## A premise

*Fish Night* is the twelfth episode of the first season of *LOVE DEATH + ROBOTS*, an animated Netflix series created by Tim Miller and David Fincher and broadcast on 15 March 2019.<sup>1</sup> Directed by Damian Nenow, with Gabriele Pennacchioli as supervising director and Rafał Wojtunik as art director, it was produced by Platine Image studio,<sup>2</sup> based on 1982 short story by Joe R. Lansdale, in an adaptation by Philip Gelat and Miller.

I see *Fish Night* as an allegory of the impossibility of virtual immersion. Obviously, it regards coexistence and interaction in a shared environment by a subject in motion, one no longer merely observing moving images at a remove, and images which are no longer concrete pictures or simulacrum but, to full effect, real living and acting beings. Why would such an experience be impossible? In answering, I will focus on elements drawn from both the literary account and the animated film, seen as trans-medial symptoms of underlying issues which regard the nature of bodies, images, technology, of the medium, and their various interrelations with respect to the fictional immersion and virtual immersivity. I shall cross-analyse the animated short film and its narrative hypotext with another classic literary text which describes what, in many respects, is a complementary immersion.

This approach allows me to simultaneously address: 1) the “quest for immersion” uncovered by Huhtamo’s media archaeology as a constant motif in the reprise and recurrence of narratives and patterns both in media history and, from my point of view, in the trans-medial story of *Fish Night*, which is about ghosts, repetitions and reappearances that ultimately affect the media themselves (the spectator’s body, the images, the car, the landscape, as we

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1 <https://lovedeathandrobots.tilda.ws/index>, accessed September 1, 2023.

2 <https://platige.com/project/feature/fish-night/>, accessed September 1, 2023.

will soon discover);<sup>3</sup> 2) the “[cultural] desire for transparent immediacy” through visual representation found in the genealogy of Bolter and Grusin;<sup>4</sup> 3) “the moment of resistance or counterdesire that occurs when we sense that the difference between the verbal and visual representation might collapse and the figurative, imaginary desire of ekphrasis might be realized literally and actually,” diagnosed by W.J.T. Mitchell as alert for the literary description showing through words and rhetorical tropes a strongly vivid impression of a visual stimulus, object or scene, in summa as “ekphrasis fear;”<sup>5</sup> 4) Paul de Man’s allegory<sup>6</sup> of “potential confusion between figural and referential statement,” between the image and the real.

Of course, the four points just evoked should not to be confused. Quite the contrary, aware of their differences in approach, object and aim, I use them as access points to the question of immersivity as tropism and symptom of a desire and anxiety manifested and treated differently in the literary texts and their media adaptations that I am about to discuss. In the textual and audio-visual issues I have chosen, or, as Foucault might say,<sup>7</sup> in the “myriad events through which – thanks to which, against which –” “the unique aspect” of the cultural idea and *topos* of the experience of immersion-immersivity has arisen, I

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3 E. Huhtamo, “Encapsulated Bodies in Motion: Simulators and the Quest for Total Immersion,” in S. Penny, ed., *Critical Issues in Electronic Media* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995): 160-161, and “Dismantling the Fairy Engine. Media Archaeology as Topos Study,” in E. Huhtamo, J. Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011): 27-47.

4 J.D. Bolter, R. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998): 23ff.

5 W.J.T. Mitchell, “Ekphrasis and the Other,” in Id., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994): 154. See R.P., Fletcher, “Digital Ekphrasis and the Uncanny: Toward a Poetics of Augmented Reality,” *Electropoetics* 3, no. 15 (2017) [http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/eng\\_facpub/56](http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/eng_facpub/56)

6 P. de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1979): 113.

7 M. Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” (1971), in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1977): 147.

shall detect the symptom of its impossibility and sketch its singular trans-medial archaeology<sup>8</sup> and imaginary.

The *topos* points to a yearning for fictional immersion, a performative moment in which saying something brings it into being, making it real in every sense, and fully adherent to the referent, with language and synesthetic perception becoming one. Introduced by a terrified alarm, a seductive invitation or the command of “look!,” the very essential wish is to make subject, image and thing coincide. The intensive alteration of the corporeal identity and peripersonal space that results involves not only the character described, narrated and represented in the act of a self-denying vision that resists classification as merely an ocular, remote beholding, but also the reader and spectator drawn into an embodied simulation of the occurrences and fantasies found in the images, both verbal and visual.

### ***Fish Night*, a never-ending trans-medial story**

I shall intertwine a summary and a commentary of Lansdale’s short story with that of the episode of *LD+R*. In this way, I will point out some differences and sources of their imaginaries, and make some interlinear remarks on both the literary text and the television adaptation, in order to highlight the main theme of this defined trans-medial corpus: the impossibility of immersion-immersiveness.

Two salesmen, one young, the other older, get stuck in the desert when their car breaks down. The hours pass and night falls. At first, the older man bemoans how door-to-door sales are a thing of the past. Then he remembers that twenty years earlier he was in this same desolate landscape, travelling an asphalted road amidst power stanchions and the Rocky Mountains, between Arizona and New Mexico. “There are memories of mine out here,”

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8 T. Elsaesser, “Media Archaeology as Symptom,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 2, no. 14 (2016): 181-215.

he says, “and they’re visiting me again.”<sup>9</sup> In the short story, this is an unmistakable evocation of *Death of a Salesman*, the Arthur Miller play directed by Elia Kazan, winner of the 1949 Pulitzer Prize and adapted on numerous occasions for film and TV, in which past and present collapse into the remembrance of the lead character, Willy Lowman, the disillusioned, exhausted door-to-door salesman who, at over sixty, struggles with a trauma not just personal, but historical and collective.<sup>10</sup> In *Fish Night*, the instant replay of involuntary subjective memory gives way to a re-enactment both psychic and geological, a *Nachleben*, a survival and an afterlife of a story that is more than just human. The desert through which the highway passes will once again be a “petrified primal landscape,” allegorically manifesting itself as a “Hippocratic face of history.”<sup>11</sup>

Lansdale describes the landscape as an immersive – and devouring – space:

It’s fish night, boy. Tonight’s the full moon and this is the right part of the desert if memory serves me, and the feel is right — I mean, doesn’t the night feel like it’s made up of some fabric, that it’s different from other nights, that it’s like being inside a big dark bag, the sides sprinkled with glitter, a spotlight at the top, at the open mouth, to serve as a moon?

The function of the mouth metaphor in the Lansdale’s writing is complex, but here it foreshadows the finale’s explicit immersive embodiment: does one enter an immersive space or get swallowed up by it? Space, we can say with Bataille, “can become one fish that swallows another.”<sup>12</sup> Is immersion-immersivity an experience of “by”

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9 J.R. Lansdale, *Fish Night* (1982), in G. Brown, A.J. Spedding, eds., *Love Death + Robots: The Official Anthology: Volume One* (Bendigo: Cohesion Press, 2021): 193-200. Pages not numbered; all citations in the text.

10 J. Schlueter, “Re-membling Willy’s Past: Introducing Postmodern Concerns through *Death of a Salesman*,” in M. Roudané, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Miller’s Death of a Salesman* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1995): 142-154.

11 W. Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedmann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Mein: Suhrkamp, 1991), vol. 1: 343, trans. H. Eiland (Cambridge MA-London: Harvard University Press, 2019): 174.

12 G. Bataille, “Espace” (1930), *Documents*, no. 1, anastatic reprint, ed. D. Hollier (Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1991): 41.

or “*in*”? Is it penetration or impregnation? Transparency or opacity? Immateriality or the materiality of the environmental medium?

In Lansdale’s short story, evoking the past, the older man brings up Native Americans, the Navajos and the Hopi, and Manitou, the Great Living Spirit “still around” in everything and every being. He read in a science book – he goes on – that the desert was once a sea filled with fish and “fantastical creatures,” maybe even man’s birthplace. “The world’s an old place, and for longtime is nothing but sea,” he concludes pensively. And – dwelling on the thought – those beings may haunt this place the way human ghosts haunt their former homes.

With these musings, the younger and the older man fall asleep in the Plymouth station wagon. Whether dreamed or real, lights from outside the car cause the older man’s eyes to open. Facing him, close to the car window, is an enormous eye. Octopuses, giant jellyfish, molluscs and fish from way back in evolution – Coelacanths, Nautilus, Limulus, marine fauna in existence prior to the great Cambrian extinction, appear in the surrounding environment, where the men, now outside the car, can magically breath. Strange beings, “like nothing [they have] ever seen pictures of or imagined,” are present but almost incorporeal, “ghosts of older world,” disincarnate *eidola* that pass through the men’s bodies, though they still feel and sense them. But “*what*” does a man’s body feel when another body passes through it? Symptomatic of the ambivalence and ambiguity of the immersion-immersivity *topos*, and its impossibility, Philip Gelat leaves this phrase out of the adaptation of Lansdale’s short story for *LD+R*:

“Feel it, boy? Feel the presence of the sea? Doesn’t it feel like the beating of your own mother’s heart while you float inside the womb?”

And the younger man had to admit that he felt it, that inner rolling rhythm that is the tide of life and the pulsating heart of the sea.

Thus the “oceanic sentiment,” the “thalassic regression” debated by psychoanalysis,<sup>13</sup> also characteristic of the “crisis of presence” in magical experiences discussed by anthropology,<sup>14</sup> are pathic and phenomenological equivalents of the sea’s “presence” as a primary medium, a pre-individual fusion and condition for the possibility of life. In this elemental medium, the bodies of the marine beings are, first and foremost, traversable and diaphanous, immaterial media-mediators permitting an equally immaterial engagement. They are “spectral,” like “soap bubbles,” “smoke,” “flashes of light,” flitting and skirting, writes Lansdale. There is no mistaking the kinship with intermedial *ex-empla* of the metaphorical repertoire of philosophies, both ancient and modern, of visual perception, Renaissance and eighteenth-century treatises on painting, plus contemporary theories of optical devices and electric media.

In the *LD+R* episode, the ecstatic young man shouts, “I wanna swim!,” as if he were a man-fish of folk legend brought to life.<sup>15</sup> Deaf to the alarmed pleas of the older man, he joins the school of fish, swimming amongst them in slow-motion,<sup>16</sup> becoming like them. Stripped of his individuality, he is transfigured, weightlessly transported upward, only to have his ascension end in death. All the other creatures flee in fright at the approach of an enormous red megalodon, which, circling the car, devours the slower, defenceless swimmer, meaning the human transformed into

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13 On this essential topic of the symbolic return to the sea, I can only point to Ferenczi, Freud, Alexander and Kerényi, or Sloterdijk, plus the *Mutterleibversenkung* of Eĵzenštejn or slow-motion, in the case of Epstein. See W.B. Parsons, *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

14 E. de Martino, *Il mondo magico: Prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (1945) (Turin: Boringhieri, 1973): 144-145, and *Magic: A Theory from the South* (1959), trans. D.L. Zinn (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015): 85-96.

15 B. Croce, *Storie e leggende napoletane* (1919) (Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1967): 306-313. See G.B. Bronzini, “Cola Pesce il tuffatore: dalla leggenda moderna al mito antico,” *Lares* 66, no. 3 (2000): 341-376.

16 Under the slow-motion effect, our bodies look like “smooth muscles moving through a dense medium in which thick currents always carry and shape this clear descendent of old marine fauna and maternal waters.” J. Epstein, *The Intelligence of a Machine* (1946), trans. C. Wall-Romana (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2014): 29.



a marine being. The Otus megalodon, which first lived at the start of the Miocene period, succumbing to extinction roughly 2.5 million years ago, has returned to the desert between Arizona and New Mexico, only to slowly disappear from view, leaving behind plumes of blood set against the enormous, white, imperturbable moon. Left by himself, the older man is stunned by what he has just seen.

### **From New Mexico to Greece, and back**

In *Fish Night*, the impossibility of immersive experience, i.e. of the elimination of all substantial differences between the gaze, the images and the environment, is tied to the fact that, were it to become real, death would result. Given the trans-medial imaginary genealogical perspective indicated in the Premise, I read the lethal outcome of the way up of the main character of *Fish Night* as complementary to the dark plunge down described in a masterful scene from the *Eikones*, the influential classic of ekphrastic literature and ancient rhetoric attributed to Philostratus the Elder. Reactivating the Ancient Greek, I would then speak of *anabasis* (from *ana-*, “up,” and *baínō*, “to go”), of a fatal immersive ascent, for *Fish Night*, and of *catabasis* (from *kata-*, “down,” and *baínō*, “to go”), of a descent down in the underworld, for the *Eikones*.

Actually, the very protagonist of the episode from the *Eikones* is the penetrating gaze of a lookout scanning the sea, who, perched atop a pole on the shore, can spot tuna in the sea and call out them to fishermen. This fictional vision is enhanced by the pole, depicted as a *sublime lignum* in Negri’s sixteenth-century Latin translation, which acts as a technical mean and as rudimental prosthetic medium, allowing for a more powerful and detailed gaze. Still, the outcome is ultimately catastrophic: for as the lookout’s gaze gradually immerses itself in the maelstrom of moving forms and flashing colours, it becomes less penetrating, feebler, until the fish, barely discernible as shadows, swallow it up, as in the journey of Ulysses to Hades painted by Polignoto and described by Pausania.

In *Fish Night* as well, the immersive moment in which the verbal, the visual and the real all become performatively one, heralded by the ecstatic, ostentatious exhortation to look,<sup>17</sup> winds up being the exact opposite: blindness and terror. And so it becomes an allegory of its own impossibility.

As Philostratus writes:

Now look at the painting and you will see just this going on. The look-out gazes at the sea and turns his eyes in one direction and another to get the number; and in the bright gleam of the sea the colours of the fish vary, those near the surface seem to be black, those just below are not so black, those lower still begin to elude the sense of sight, then they seem shadowy, and finally they look just like the water; for as the vision penetrates deeper and deeper its power of discerning objects in the water is blunted.<sup>18</sup>

In the story *Fish Night*, and even more so in the animated film, what occurs is not simply a metaphorical inversion of the yearning, for immersion and transparency. The change that takes place is literally ontological, rather than phenomenological: the inexorable law of the impenetrability of bodies in space has been restored, having earlier been suspended by the diaphanously spectral, almost immaterial state of the environmental medium. This elementary law of physics once again holds, even in the immersive environment, where the body of the human being has lost some of its species-specific characteristics – gravity, use of the respiratory apparatus and motor skills – while that of the image, finally possessed of a physical consistency of its own, has also gained new properties, enabling it to take actions that truly affect the other entities sharing the surrounding environment.

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17 N. Bryson, "Philostratus and the Imaginary Museum," in S. Goldhill, R. Osborne, eds., *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 266-267.

18 Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*. Callistratus, *Descriptions*, trans. A. Fairbanks (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1936): 57 (I.12); Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W.H.S. Jones, H.A. Ormerod (Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1918): 185 (10.28.1).

## Which medium?

But in the final analysis, what does *Fish Night* tell us about the material nature of the immersive medium and its uniqueness compared to other media and technical devices?

In Lansdale's short story, the protagonist of the deadly immersive experience is the older man, not the younger one, as in the *LD+R* episode. Lansdale has in mind the imagery of *Death of a Salesman* and Willy Lowman's irretrievable historical crisis. Charley, Willy's well-off neighbour, observes that: "A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory."<sup>19</sup> Thus the American Dream is a territorialised rendering of the countryside by the moving automobile, a "hot," prosthetic medium which is culturally, socially and aesthetically expansive, as Marshall McLuhan was to point out soon after, in short an "excrescence of a kinetic ego" and an agent of the "motorized narcissism."<sup>20</sup> The automobile stands as the technological condition that makes possible the conquest of the last frontier, as the material and historical a-priori of the aesthetic experience of the wilderness, be it rebellious or liberating, ostentatious or touristic, with the complementary evolution of the car being its domestication to transport and distribute tangible and intangible goods. At the turn of the 60's-70's,<sup>21</sup> road movies were both reflections and wellsprings of the cultural and mythopoetic *topos* of the automobile as a means to attaining individual freedom or reification, or to crafting the iconography of the American sublime. Indeed, the choice of a Plymouth Fury for the *LD+R* episode may not have

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19 A. Miller, *Death of a Salesman: Certain Private Conversations in Two Acts and a Requiem* (1949) (London: Penguin, 1998): 111.

20 M. McLuhan, *Motorcar: The Mechanical Bride* (1951), in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) (Cambridge MA-London: MIT Press, 1994): 217-222. See P. Sloterdijk, "Die Herrschaft der Kentauren. Philosophische Bemerkungen zur Automobilität" (1992), trans. K. Ritson, *Transfers* 1, vol. 1 (2011): 14-24; P. Weibel, "Medien der Mobilität," in P. Weibel, ed., *CAR CULTURE: Medien der Mobilität* (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2011): 345-400.

21 S. Cohan, I.R. Hark, eds., *The Road Movie Book* (London-New York: Routledge, 1997); A. Cross, "Driving the American Landscape," in P. Wollen, J. Kerr, eds., *Autopia: Cars and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002): 249-258; D. Laderman, *Driving Visions: Exploring the Road Movie* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); D. Orgeron, *Road Movies: From Muybridge and Méliès to Lynch and Kiarostami* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

been random, given that the model was produced between 1968 and 1972, or precisely the years of the psychedelic and hippy culture, as well as the first signs of its impending crisis.

Anyway, the automobile is the technological embodiment of the desire of immersion, a new medium for an old movement and a very ancient desire, as shown to us by the sinking gaze in the sea described by Philostratus. A 1939 advertisement placed in *National Geographic* introduced General Motors' new Oldsmobile model with this slogan: "See America from an 'OBSERVATION BODY!'" The brief promotional text promised a "VISION as wide as all outdoors is yours...", but at the same time a "rhythmic ride" of a "rolling uterus"<sup>22</sup> corresponding to the rhythm of the all-enveloping medium of the sea in which the body of the character from *Fish Night* loses himself in symbiotic fashion. Immersion means, at one and the same time, travelling "in" the landscape, being "part of" the environment, and returning "to" the maternal space. As was recently noted by Ruggero Eugeni,<sup>23</sup> the automobile is a medium-prosthesis which implements a protected, horizontal immersion scaled to human height, so to speak, and the line of the horizon, for drivers traversing urban and exurban landscapes in a personal travelling cave: a feeling of immersion intensified by the setting up of specific sensorial and perceptive processes (both hetero- and proprioceptive).

From this perspective, the regressive desire of immersivity of Lansdale's account stands in contrast to the prosthetic mode of technological immersivity which, according to McLuhan, is embodied by the automobile, and to the mythical example of fictional immersion made possible by the tuna lookout's perch described by Philostratus. In *Fish Night*, the two characters leave the car, technology's outpost for providing the senses with prosthesis and prophylaxis, and for supplying techniques of the

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22 P. Sloterdijk, "Rollender Uterus" (1995), in *Selected Exaggerations: Conversations and Interviews, 1993-2012*, trans. K. Margolis (Cambridge: Polity Book, 2016): 24.

23 R. Eugeni, "La sposa algoritmica: L'automobile come medium e la navigazione del quotidiano," in F. Cavaletti, F. Fimiani, B. Grespi, A.C. Sabatino, eds., *Immersioni quotidiane: Vita ordinaria, cultura visuale e nuovi media* (Milan: Meltemi, 2023): 271-282.

sensitivity for the body and the gaze. Actually, they leave the scopic regimen of spectatorship, and the technological anti-environment created by the window's protective shield, coming into synesthetic contact with the natural environment's forms of life.

Another element in Lansdale's short story illustrates, as a symptom, this detachment from technology. Possibly as a paraphrase of one of McLuhan's *topoi*,<sup>24</sup> Lansdale likens the car to the older man's false teeth. Both are "trappings of civilization" which weigh down, serving as technological prostheses that are mobile and tied to mobility. They are metaphors: means of transport between inside and outside, as well as tools for aggression and conquering space and time.

"This isn't my world. I'm of that world. I want to float free in the belly of the sea, away from can openers and cars and –" [...] "I want to leave here! [...] The teeth! [...] It's the teeth. Dentist, science, fool!" He punched a hand into his mouth, plucked the teeth free, tossed them over his shoulder. Even as the teeth fell the old man rose. He began to stroke. To swim up and up and up, moving like a pale pink seal among the fish.

In the light of the moon the young man could see the pooched jaws of the old man, holding the last of the future's air. Up went the old man, up, up, up, swimming strong in the long-lost waters of a time gone by.

Even before technological and human-focused media as cars or false teeth, water is therefore the oldest medium, just as land and air – "The air trembled like a mass of gelatinous ectoplasm," begins the Lansdale's short story.<sup>25</sup> Water is an elemental, environing medium with its

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24 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*: 57, 82-83, 152 (on teeth and car).

25 E. Horn, "Air as Medium," *Grey Room*, vol. 7 (2008): 6-25; J. Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015): 53-114, especially 55-59, 90-91.

own specific materiality, which becomes invisible in its vital agency as space-binding. Plus, as shown by the media imaginary<sup>26</sup> I have highlighted in my reading of *Fish Night* and the *Eikones*, water can be a “ghostly sea.” It is a very elemental medium acting as a deep time-binding agent between nature and culture, between geological and mythical epochs and historically determined technical cultures, as an ontological entanglement between forms of life which are not species-specific.

“Weren’t we once just slimy things, brothers to the things that swim?” asks the older man in Lansdale’s short story, borrowing Coleridge’s words<sup>27</sup> about a community not only of humans and of like beings, but of “slimy things.” In this inter-textual *topos* between literature, religion and the natural sciences, fascination and phobia, I read “sliminess”<sup>28</sup> as the epitome of the profound time and of the materiality of a colloidal intermediality between technological media (among other types), living beings and elements. Obviously, “sliminess” stands in contrast to the prevailing metaphors or *clichés* of fluidity and transparency, that are frequently used with regard to the media and their relation

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26 E. Kluitenberg, *Book of Imaginary Media: Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium* (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2006); S. Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006).

27 “The very deep did rot: O Christ! / That ever this should be! / Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea” (ll. 125-126), where “a thousand thousand slimy things [with many dead men] / Lived on; and so did I,” said the mariner (ll. 238-239). S.T. Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798-1834), in *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912): 191, 197. See J. Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986): 41-59; J.B. Ower, “Crantz, Martens and the ‘Slimy Things’ in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*,” *Neophilologus* 85, no. 3 (2001): 477-484; S. Estok, “The Environmental Imagination in the Slime of ‘The Ancient Mariner,’” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 2, vol. 34 (2021): 135-138.

28 N. Gramlich, “Sticky Media: Encounters with Oil through Imaginary Media Archaeology,” *Communication + 17*, 1 (2018): n. p. <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cpo/vol7/iss1/3>; see F. Mason, *The Viscous: Slime, Stickiness, Fondling, Mixtures* (Goleta CA: punctum books, 2020): 200; B. Woodward, *Slime Dynamics* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012): 59-64; C. Michlig, *File under: Slime* (Los Angeles: Hat & Beard Press, 2023).

with time and materiality and, in particular, with respect to immersivity.

Finally, “media are *of* nature and return to nature.”<sup>29</sup> that’s what *Fish Night*, read as a trans-medial allegory combining literature and animation, shows us in a complex and compelling way, inviting to rethink about the phenomenological and ontological relationships between memories, images, bodies, technologies and environments. A recurring *topos* and persistent symptom of media history, imaginaries and narratives, this impossible return is both the origin and the end of our desire for immersivity and immersive experience.

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29 J. Parikka, “Introduction: The Materiality of Media and Waste,” in J. Parikka, ed., *Medianatures: The Materiality of Information Technology and Electronic Waste*, (Open Humanities Press, 2011), <http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/books/Medianatures>.

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DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOSOFIA  
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