(D)
URATION

$$\left(3\right)$$

TWENTYSIX

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I) (J) (K) (L) (M) (N) (O) (P) (Q) (R) (S) (T) (U) (V) (W) (X) (Y) (Z)

DECADES: 80S
2019, 379 MINUTES
BY MASHA TUPITSYN

(Fig.01) *The Black Cat* **(1934)**

In the 20th century, each decade had its own style, themes, colors, tones, moods, visual patterns, and sounds. A decade (from the Greek *déka*—δέκα—meaning "ten") is a 20th century phenomenology and bracket of time.

Prior to cinema and television, it was perhaps centuries that mattered.

Like a movie, a decade opens and closes. It introduces something and ends something.

Today neither centuries nor decades exist. At this rate, as I update this 2022 essay in 2025, even hours and days of the week don't really exist. Almost no one wears a watch, except a biometric Apple "wearable" to track their fitness, calories, sleep, and 10,000 daily steps. If you want to know the time, you look at your iPhone.

We are experiencing things without knowing when they are happening. This means we have lost metaphysical time.

In a 24/7 digital news cycle, we have no way of looking at, remembering, measuring, and understanding the world or our lives. The algorithm's invisible typography, which has replaced the phenomenology of lived time, has eliminated chronotopes, and with it, "emotional valences and spatiality within the films of today," as a film critic friend put it to me once.

What we are seeing now cannot be evaluated in terms of years, arcs, or clear patterns. Everything is happening at the same time. Even stranger, everyone is experiencing their own version and timelines of this simultaneity. No one is in a room together at the same time, looking at the exact same

thing, and if they are, they are mediating it with their iPhones. The 21st century is presentist, formless, anti-ontology, and structurally incoherent. Time—exchanged for the predatory algorithm—is no longer countable or shareable. One way I tried to show this in DECADES: 80s (the second installment in my DECADES series; the first was the 1970s) was by creating an hour-long section on sunrises and sunsets. The allegory of daybreak and nightfall is to me an extremely important and moving cinematic phenomenology. The section arrives after an hour in the subterranean worlds of the 80s club scene (Hades in modern form), which always opens its doors onto a daybreak that is both literal and allegorical. The sunrise/sunset cycle in DECADES: 80s is an homage to a lost phenomenology of beginnings and endings. A circadian cycle that—in the case of New York City—is often bookended, as I demonstrate, by the uncanny vista of the Twin Towers—a late 20th century urban lodestar. Films that open over the New York City skyline post 9-11 are never quite the same.

In retrospect, it seems clear from the vantage point of the 21st century, that 20th century cinema is both verité and spectral because it is a record (moving photo album) of all the things that no longer exist. Simply put, 20th century movies are a testament to what life and people were like before the internet. To watch old movies—the 21st century makes everything look "old"—is to encounter a lost world.

DECADES: 80s is the story of a cinematic decade. Like my earlier durational film LOVE SOUNDS (2015), I use cinema to create a portrait of time. I propose that the way we experienced cultural shifts in the 20th century was not simply visual or narrative, but tonal. Like LOVE SOUNDS, a 24-hour film which used only audio (dialogue) from movies to compose a history of love in English-speaking cinema, DECADES utilizes film score and film sound to produce a sonic account for every 20th century decade. Unearthing each decade's particular sound patterns and visual motifs—its themes, politics, anxieties, recurring notes—DECADES asks: What sounds does a decade make? What is each decade's mood and tone? Why do sounds repeat and return? What do the sounds we hear tell us about what we are seeing, what we have seen, and what we expect to see in the future? Finally, what new narratives emerge if we use sound as our organizing principle for images rather than the other way around?

In the movies of the 1980s, daybreak offers relief from political and existential horror—a darkness that is literal and metaphorical; pleasurable and nightmarish—while nightfall entails the coming of struggle, terror, addiction. A dark night of the soul. The sunrise/sunset sequence is both a circadian motif and tautology of obsession and compulsion. It repeats

over and over again. As the opening nightlife sequence demonstrates, sunrise is an opportunity for the nocturnal, underground addict to begin anew. This diurnal taxonomy is both cinematic and teleological. In a decade hell-bent on unprecedented greed and materialism, the sunrise/sunset succession is an uncanny structure and occult passageway. Almost every American 80s movie, however slick and formulaic is imbued with these orphic currents.

Movies as varied as *Possession* (1981)*, Near Dark* (1987) *and Die Hard* (1988) follow a daybreak/nightfall structure. In retrospect, one could say these movie characters come out alive because a material world—albeit one heavily under the spell of occult materialism—still exists to fight for and yet their survival defies all odds (I have always referred to the 1980s as "the decade of nine lives" because in American action movies, at least, the hero never dies. Nor does the body ever break when it falls out of a building. (one of the few Hollywood movies to ever address this is the under-appreciated Last Action Hero, 1993. The 90s would come to be the end of the myth of invincibility).

In the 1980s, night and day open like occult portals—something Netflix's *Stranger Things* (2017) and Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001), both of which mine the American horrors of the 1980s, make use of. In some sense, this kind of taxonomy does away with genre completely. The larger "mystery" was simply the lure of cinema itself. Regardless of genre, the 70s, 80s, and 90s were full of movies about spirits in the modern world—what Victoria Nelson in *The Secret Life of Puppets* describes as the deep but hidden attraction the supernatural still holds for a secular mainstream culture. But this was only because the 20th century's version of the supernatural was and is a top-down occult power disseminated through popular culture as spell-work. In other words, "secular mainstream culture" hid its witchcraft through spell-binding populist entertainment.

In movies from the 70s and 80s, pre-gentrified cities were full of mystery and possibility, which made them wonderful material for film. "Cleaning them up" has completely eradicated these unique and sacred characteristics. Are cities still creative material when they are completely controlled, commodified, and surveilled? In *Tokya-Ga* (1985), Wim Wenders observes, "In our century there were still sacred things." The question is were they ever actually considered sacred, or were those things simply yet to be destroyed? Movies like *Poltergeist* (1982) tell us life was never sacred in the modern world. What is interesting about even the most hollow 80s movie (besides the fact that everything feels deep compared to today's chaotic mono-culture and predictable political sanctimony) is the sacred dualism and archetypal truths that run through nearly every film. As the 1986 movie *Highlander* puts it: "When only a few of us are left, we will feel an irresistible pull towards a faraway land."

I think of 20th century cinema as one such faraway land and DECADES: 80s as an attempt to travel to it by listening to, tracing, and describing (through obsessive compilation) its once-distinct and evocative motifs. The motifs and taxonomies I have created in DECADES deeply depend upon generative polarities, formalities, and dualisms that no longer exist—night and day. This is more and more clear to me as I spend my time these days rewatching old movies rather than seeking out new ones. For this reason, I seem to only like new movies that act like old movies. Which is to say, 21st century movies that still act like 20th century movies.

Writing about F.W. Marnau's *Nosferatu* (which Werner Herzog remade in 1979) in Cinema, Alain Badiou notes: "Overexposure of the meadows, panicking horses, thunderous cuts, together unfold the Idea of a touch of imminence. Of an anticipated visitation of the day by the night." Time of day, and change in light—simultaneously hopeful and uncanny—meant an end to a certain kind of nightmare reality but also signifies the erosion of its borders. In "Nights", Frank Ocean sings: "Every night fucks every day up/every day patches the night up." In Tender Buttons, Gertrude Stein muses: "Light blue and the same red with purple makes a change. It shows that there is no mistake. Any pink shows that and very likely it is reasonable." I recognized this sacred pink in Reba McClane's cardigan and also in the morning rose sky at the very end of Michael's Mann's Manhunter (1986) and saw it as part of the motif of daybreak. The spring color relieves the characters and us of the horrible long night of the film.

In DECADES: 80s, the sunrise/sunset trope eventually evolves into many other cinematic ontologies and chronotopes, one of the being body horror and the home-invasion of televisions and computers. Despite these intimate encounters with and invasions of technology, 70s and 80s horror like David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) was still a body experience, not a machine experience. Likewise, cinema itself is a physical material, celluloid dependent on the miracle of real light reaching (animating) it.

In the 70s and 80s, computers were seen as malignant and mysterious encroachments upon human life, as was the government and law enforcement—a distrust that was firmly established in the 1970s—launched by Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Ironically, the Spielberg fanboys that became the first computer programmers in Silicon Valley were the ones who grew up on these paranoid anti-computer parables.

Predictive Hollywood programming aside, the technocratic control-grid we live in now was born in the 1980s. Yet decades don't always arrive on time. On the other hand, movies like *Enemy of the State* (1998), told us the future was here decades ago—here always—we just didn't know it.

(Fig.02) *Poltergeist* **(1982)**

As I show in the TV/body-horror/technology section of DECADES: 80s, which follows the sunrise/sunset sequence, and mines the ontology of 80s horror, pre-internet horror was tactile and acoustic—fleshy—involving both the eye and ear. When Nancy's boyfriend and next door neighbor, Glen, gets savagely murdered by dream-monster Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), it's not just Glen that gets
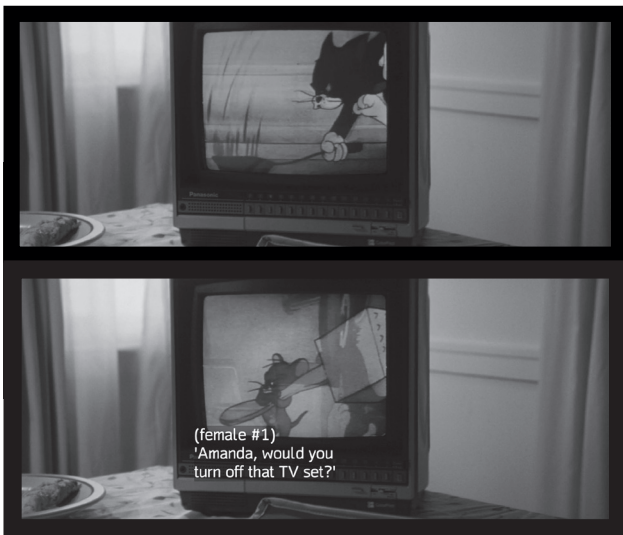
(Fig.03) *A Nightmare on Elm Street* **(1984)**

swallowed by his mattress, it's his television and stereo too.

The TV/body horror/technology section in DECADES: 80s is composed and arranged like channels flipping on a CRT television, which took the incoming signal and broke it into its separate audio (sound) and video (picture) components. Old-style TVs were radios with pictures. The VCR boom altered not only our relation to spectacle and image, but the temporality and spatialty of spectacle and image, making us fetishistic spectators rather than pensive spectators, as Laura Mulvey argues. Steven Spielberg's 80s cinema shows us this, but so do the early films of Michael's Haneke (*The Seventh Continent* and *Benny's Video*) and Wim Wenders, who in his search for Yasujirō Ozu's *Tokyo* in 1984, found a city full of screens instead: "It's a made for TV world. Every shitty television set, no matter where, is the center of the world." Freddy Krueger doesn't just want Glen's flesh, he wants his electronic devices. Eventually, with the arrival of the internet, we even lost the sound of the channels changing. The digital image has no schedule, no double, no frame. It never shuts off. It has no end point or pause. No beginning or end. Digital spectatorship is continuous and constant. As a cinematic trope, the disjuncture and allegorical fusion between the language of cinema and the language of TV in the 1980s also symbolizes the imminent totality of technology.

(Fig.04) *Field of Dreams* **(1989)**

In the 1980s, TV splits the totality of cinema in half. Cinema haunts TV and vice versa. The mise-en-scène is frequently organized around the extra-diegetic (extra to cinema) presence of TV sets which, like the iPhone, are occult portals

that are never really off, that never really close, and show us something about the hidden world that movies don't. A TV that is left on all night while the young characters sleep in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Poltergeist* (1982) is a gateway for demonic possession, invasion, and death. In *Videodrome* (1983), *Halloween III: Season of the Witch* (1982), and *They Live* (1988), TV transmissions emit remote (V2K; Voice to Skull) signals that produce brain tumors, psychosis, and hallucinations in its viewers, now understood as mind control. In Videodrome, James Woods stomach turns into a VCR. His body becomes a VHS tape he can insert into the screen-mouth of a woman. In *Weird Science* (1985), a re-imagination of the Frankenstein and Pygmalion story, male pornographic fantasies, culled from dirty magazines and mass media images come to life, as two geeky teenage American boys program the perfect woman into existence. But in the 80s, the moral of every story is that reality is still better and more satisfying than fantasy.

IN DECADES, the TV/body horror/technology section is about possessions and mutations that are mediated, engineered, unleashed by technology, yet cannot be explained by it. In the 1980s, for the first time in history, everyday people are alone in their rooms with computers and televisions. These private and predatory technological encounters lead to strange and unforeseen things. The small screen is not only woven into the domestic space and diegesis of the movie screen, it is, as so many films from the period show, a kind of white noise that leeches into our dreams. Movies from the 1940s and 50s—Hammer Horror, sci-fi B movies, and American Westerns; films many 80s directors grew up with—play on TV. These TV images and sounds are both primary and peripheral (background), vacillating between onscreen and offscreen. Everyday objects become paranormal. Their electronic wiring is monstrous and secretly rigged. After the 1980s, and the birth of MTV in every home (except mine somehow), it is important to ask to what medium—or realm—do these cultural sounds, images, and events truly belong?

Writer Colson Whitehead remembers the VCR boom that presided over every 80s American childhood: "We acquired our first VCR, and laissez-faire parenting combined with the home-video boom to nudge me into my next incarnation: I had been a shut-in; now I was a latchkey cineaste … My brother and I dropped the stack of Betamax tapes on the coffee table and got to work, two or three movies on Friday night, the rest on Saturday. Once we'd adjusted the tracking on the VCR (the tracking, always the tracking).

The reign of TV that infiltrated American culture in the 1980s (in the 1950s the TV was still a family set piece) via the cinematic imaginary is another important chronotope. TV was the primary parent to the solitary latchkey kid, who was now directly occupied, supervised, enthralled, possessed, or deranged by the gestalt (or as Whitehead refers to it, the tracking) of mass media. Even a true crime art film like James Benning's 1987 *Landscape Suicide* feels haunted by the predatory rise of an omnipotent and omnipresent popular culture. In it, the pop music that blares inside the suburban bedrooms of teenagers is heard from outside the houses, which Benning films in static wide shots. The exterior shots give the illusion of pastoral calm. No one ever knows what is really happening inside. The music—in this case Michael Jackson's "P.Y.T." (the acronym itself makes the song title a kind of menacing predatory code)—is a Peeping

Tom. An ominous acousmatic presence that drowns out and scores—both in life and on screen—crimes that are committed all around us every day. Somehow hearing the music that is playing inside the house outside the house conveys the eerie power of intangible encroachment. All landscapes are crime scenes, Benning says. In Suicide, the image conceals while the audio track makes us see and feel things that are not visible to the eye. Benning's laconic approach to true crime is experimental but his heavy, auditory cuts are investigative and threatening.

♪"PYT" by Michael Jackson plays♪

(Fig.05) *Landscape Suicide* **(1987)**

In the 1980s, technology was still an Other, foreign to most people. With the exception of a handful of examples like Gaspar Noe's *Enter the Void* (2009) and Oliver Assayas' *Personal Shopper* (2016), 21st century cinema rarely engages with or makes narrative use of smartphones in the same way that 20th century features television. Unlike life, which is now ruled and enslaved by smart devices and digital algorithms, the smartphone is strangely absent from 21st century movies because smartphones have, it turns out, no real visual impact, no poetic charge. iPhones have no charisma or screen presence. In contrast, much of 80s cinema is about watching television—TV sets and TV footage are an extra material, an extra presence in movies. It is interesting to watch movie characters watch TV and, as I show in DECADES, there are countless examples of it. The sheer amount qualifies as a kind of genre.

As in life, it is quite simply boring and alienating to film someone on their cell phone. It never makes a good image—we don't know what or who we are looking at (no interiority, no pathos). If anything, as is the case with old novels, we want to escape our digital world when we go to the movies. I suspect the iPhone works as a plot device in Assayas's *Personal Shopper* because the film is a ghost story, making it, like the TV, a conduit for the paranormal. By centralizing the presence of smart devices in our everyday life, by reducing life to our phones, we have expunged technology of all its illustrative otherness, rather like keeping a Great White shark as a pet. Rather than pushing us to fracture or escape, good movies always brings us back to what we hold dear. To quote Heidegger, there may not be what is called human without technology, but if there is nothing but technology, there is no such thing as human. And no cinema either—only streaming TV, which tellingly, features a lot of smartphones. Unlike the 2000s, the 1980s understood this. It may have been the last time we knew the difference.

FIRST LIGHT
BY CACONRAD

fruit fly
born in
hotel
room
died in
hotel room
you think
I asked
for
this
dream
spanning an entire
known world
I might dance
around you if
I get a pair of
bunny pants
no one can
afford to
lose love
I have
explored
the alternative
it is a wasteland

we forget the pledge
of allegiance on the
path to finding No
a flower widening
a crack in the rock
when we excel as
father's least
favorite it's
time to put
a foot in
the poem
I tell you
there's
nothing like
waking in
the flutter
passing
hours of
barbed
wire across
America
the road
beneath
us the only
public space

when you
win the
lottery
every
dollar is
someone
else's dream
once
in a
mirage
listening
into the
open hole for
the fallen
if I see
him again
questions for the
crocodile inside
my old friend
perfume
of fiction
on his
breath
I'm glad I was
there to stop
myself from
gnawing
the burnt ends
of forgiveness

it is a
drastic
cause to
earn joy
they stopped
hands from
writing with
the speed of
thought when
they stopped
teaching cursive
may I remind you
the villain we
all know
once lived
only in the mind
of Shakespeare
I will hang out
in any undulation
I'm feeling one in
this poem
feeling it
liking it
I like
this
poem
thank
you poem

(Fig.06)　　　　　　Masha Tupitsyn, *DECADES*: 1980s, 2019　　　　　379:00 min

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(Fig.07) **Richard Sides,** *Documentary (Taylor leaving the Equinox)*, **2014**   HD video, sound, 16:39 min

(Fig.08) **Frederik Worm & CTM,** *Vind*, **2023**   Video, sound, 43:26 min

(Fig.09)   **Helena Wittmann, _21,3°C_, 2014**   16mm digitized, Dolby Stereo, 16:9, colour, 16:00 min

don't
be such
a mister
mr president
we're not gonna
pull your cape
of dystopia
around us
doomsday industry is
capitalism selling us
what we need to
survive the end
of capitalism
fear keeps
trying to
eat up
the
day
we are not
war machines
mr president
try smelling
yourself
back to
animal

I'm
sorry I
called you
a parasite
you said it's
okay because
you are one
it made me
love you
all over
again
let's add a
little rain to
everything
today
kiss each
other's throats
let our
tongues
feel each
other sing

go ahead
call me a
child for
asking
is there
no war
somewhere
instead of this
daily butterfly
fighting
suck of
fan blade
you should
break up is my only
relationship advice
on the
way to
slaughter
pigs on
truck pass
deer with
broken neck
where love
is merely an
afterthought
we must banish
the intrusions or
become them

they
opened
the soldier to
put something in
no
take something out
each piece
of fallen
hail taken
personally
the inconvenience
of Armageddon a
constant topic
another leader
believes his job
is to march
the world
into oblivion
eventually this
takes something
out of everyone
we make a
grave rubbing
of the poet
who saw
the bird
passersby
only heard

it's a dance a kind of
poetry locomotion
glitter coming out
of everything
never a false
claim against
the sunrise
he is sexy
climbing in
the church
window
with me
racing
to the
bell
we
press
our heads
beneath the steeple
shout READY FOR
TRANSMISSION
we wait while
holding hands

we
want
a ticket to
see through one
another but cannot
find the box office
slice of light drawn
across our faces
trying to fit
the statue
back into
the quarry
there is pain
in this process
internal atmosphere
colliding with friends
we begin to realize
preparation or
prayer are
choices

each thread
added to the
loom was a
moment of the
weaver's life
end of the
world how
did you get
in my imagination
we will not align
with the stone
column
tipping
into the sea
since the day
I arrived
I have
not wanted
to leave

FIRST LIGHT
A (SOMA)TIC POETRY RITUAL

Each morning, I walk outside to write while watching the sunrise. It takes nearly 9 minutes for the light leaving the Sun to travel to Earth, bringing warmth, illumination, and essential nutrients for the health of our bones, blood, and immune systems. Ignition of cells in humans, other creatures, and plants is my focus for writing.

Later in the day, I watch the sunrise on public outdoor webcams on other parts of our planet, like the Tokyo railyards, the astronomical clock of Prague, or the beautiful Byzantine Mosque of Istanbul called Hagia Sophia.

Through my accumulation of outdoor webcams across the planet, I am eventually preparing to write poems through a continuous sunrise for 24 hours. The plan is to begin by waiting for the Sun to appear outside my door and then watch it unfold around the world online until it returns to my door again. The next day, after my writing session through the nonstop sunrise, I will work with a hypnotherapist to search my memory for the first time I saw the Sun as a child. I will then use the video documentation of being placed into the trance to continue my writing. The recall of my earliest contact with our star will expand the experience of watching our planet's sunrise for a full day.

LIST OF FIGURES