

**MUSICAL ECHOES OF A TRAUMA:
LISTENING TO PHANTASMS IN THE DARK FANTASY
PAN'S LABYRINTH (2006)**

Rastko Buljančević*

Employed Doctoral Researcher, Department of Cultural Sciences,
University of Gothenburg, and Graduate School "The Future of Democracy:
Cultural Analyses of Illiberal Populism in Times of Crises (FUDEM)," Sweden

**МУЗИЧКИ ОДЈЕЦИ ТРАУМЕ:
ОСЛУШКУЈУЋИ ФАНТАЗМЕ У МРАЧНОЈ
ФАНТАЗИЈИ *ПАНОВ ЛАВИРИНТ* (2006)**

Растко Буљанчевић

Запослени докторанд-истраживач, Одјељење за науке о
култури, Универзитет у Гетеборгу и Постдипломски институт
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ABSTRACT

This article examines how music in the film *Pan's Labyrinth* [*El laberinto del fauno*] conceptually generates opposing phantasms. Reflecting the trauma of early Francoism, specifically the Spanish Civil War, the soundtrack oscillates between the disquieting chronological reality and the fascinating yet terrifying fairytale world. A special space is devoted to the musical redistribution of the sensible, mirroring the strong affective, aesthetic, emancipatory, and phantasmatic potential of Foley sounds. Such musical resistance undermines phallic authority, fostering a phantasmatic conflict that blurs the boundaries between imaginable and unimaginable reality.

KEYWORDS: *Pan's Labyrinth* [*El laberinto del fauno*], Guillermo del Toro, soundtrack, phantasm, cultural trauma, distribution of the sensible.

* rastko.buljancecovic@gu.se

АПСТРАКТ

У овом раду испитује се како музика у филму *Панов лавиринт* [*El laberinto del fauno*] концептуално производи контрастне фантазме. Одражавајући трауму раног франкизма, тачније Шпанског грађанског рата, музика осцилира између узнемирујуће хронолошке реалности и фасцинантног, премда застрашујућег, бајковитог свијета. Посебан простор посвећен је музичкој прерасподјели чулног, захваљујући снажном афективном, естетском, еманципаторском и фантазматском потенцијалу Фолијевих звукова. Такав облик музичког отпора подрива фалички ауторитет, поспјешујући фантазматски конфликт који брише границе између предочиве и непредочиве стварности.

Кључне ријечи: *Панов лавиринт* [*El laberinto del fauno*], Гиљермо дел Торо, саундтрек, фантазам, културна траума, подјела чулности.

Magical realism is known for blending mundane and mystical elements that blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality. Unlike the traditional fantasy style, however, magical realism is embedded in a predominantly realistic environment functioning according to its own rules, laws, and regulations. Guillermo del Toro's Oscar-winning film *Pan's Labyrinth* [*El laberinto del fauno*] contains such an atmosphere, clearly based on a specific historical event – post-Spanish Civil War – and a specific geographical setting – rural mountains in Nevada,¹ but enriched with vivid Spanish and Mexican folktales.

By interweaving mythological motifs and a horrendous historical context, the film combines the enchanting yet bleak fantasy world of eleven-year-old Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), the tyranny of the sadistic Falange military officer Vidal (Sergi López) and the courageous group resisting against the regime. The juxtaposition of ideologically varied spaces – Vidal's draconian regime grounded in a “culture of rejection,”² Ofelia's imaginative retreat into a culture

¹ Nevertheless, Francisco Sánchez (2014, 173) characterises the film as a “post-national Spanish work” because it transcends conventional national borders and political identities and thus fits into a broader global cultural narrative. Moreover, Dolores Tierney (2014, 173) describes the film as “a mixture of American horror and other transnational generic references, as well as very local, specific references,” emphasising its interplay between the global and the local.

² Stefan Jonsson (2023) distinguishes two contrasting types of cultural representation whose popular movements are highly aesthetically mediated in a contemporary political landscape (but also in a way that, I believe, applies to post-Civil War Spain): culture of rejection and culture of protest. The culture of rejection is inextricably linked to the depiction of Vidal's sadistic extermination of all minorities, while the culture of protest stands for Maquis as an undesirable entity and, in part, Ofelia's phantasmagoria.

of fantasy, and the democratic resistance group's defiance based on a "culture of protest" – fabricates radically contrasting phantasms.³ To convey diverse phantasmatic identifications,⁴ the director resorted to cinematic means like computer-generated imagery, expressive and gestural acting, surreal aesthetics, refined or sudden cuts, a non-linear narrative style, impactful sound design, affective soundtrack, and atmospheric lighting.

Del Toro used *mise-en-scène* "[...] to reinforce rather than reduce the horrors of [early Francoist] history" (Smith 2007: 6). However, the question arises as to what kind of collective trauma lies behind the film: whether the aftermath of the Civil War shaped the traumatic experiences of the characters on a personal and familial level to such an extent that it became a cultural trauma. According to Irene Gómez-Castellano (2013), the film explores a historical trauma, while Keith McDonald and Roger Clark (2014, 136) argue (albeit not in sufficient detail) that it encompasses both the historical and the cultural trauma of the Spanish Civil War. First and foremost, one can recognise cultural references to Spanish and Mexican folktales,⁵ while the frequent reappearance of a lullaby indicates that the collective trauma is not only social and historical, but also cultural. Cultural trauma, understood as the product of a disturbing collective event, expresses how the manifestation of historical violence affects the human psyche and behavioural patterns.⁶ Furthermore, I argue that cultural trauma can have an immediate impact during horrific events such as genocides, wars, and holocausts, especially when totalitarian actors force a degree of cultural assimilation. The relatively short time span (about five years) after the Civil War was insufficient to anchor the intergenerational trauma in the film's narrative, but its phantasmatic resonance can come alive at the level of spectatorship. It is safe to assume that the film "forces" the confrontation with the remnants of the traumatic past, either lived or inherited, on the (certain group of) spectators

³ Here and throughout the article, the term *phantasm* refers to an unconscious mental image that structures the human psyche and conceals, or at least attenuates the traumatic aspects of both inner and outer reality.

⁴ By *phantasmatic identification*, I mean an unconscious mediation process in which people identify with certain imaginary or symbolic constructs. This type of identification often stems from the subject's untenable desires and inner fantasies in order to compensate for their fundamental lack. I therefore depart from Butler's (1993, 93–120) gendered account of phantasmatic identification as a key mechanism through which gender norms and roles are maintained.

⁵ Perhaps the inspiration for Mexican folktales can be traced back to Guillermo del Toro's cultural background and personal narrative style.

⁶ While the term *cultural trauma* is usually associated with the constructivist approach to trauma of the Yale school of sociology represented by, among others, Ron Eyerman and Jeffrey Alexander, I will use this term in a more local context, namely the specific socio-historical and cultural conditions of the early Francoist Spain (for more on cultural trauma, see Alexander et al. 2004).

who, despite the temporal distance from the historical event, may not have yet experienced a direct collision with its unspeakable horrors. Then, if we interpret the film as a “narrative emerging from the suppression of traumatic collective memory about the Civil War” (Luckhurst 2010, 17), this underlines the characters’ unresolved trauma that has yet to be processed in the form of cultural trauma. The director’s initiative to thematise the trauma of Francoism is linked to the fact that Spain was preoccupied with repressing its collective wounds after the dictatorship.⁷ As Paloma Aguilar (2001, 102) points out, there was a widespread conviction that “democratic Spain must from now on look to the future, forget the events and responsibilities of the Civil War.” But the strategies of oblivion – the way in which repressed traumas underline unconscious mechanisms lead by a (Freudian) pleasure principle – need not to be expressed exclusively through visual means. They are also conveyed through less obvious, less representative means such as music, which is known to have considerable potential for affective, embodied and, above all, fantastical transference.

Through a heterogeneous musicological discourse in conjunction with neo-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, narratology and political philosophy, this article aims to explain how music generates certain phantasms and shapes the spectatorial perception, whether through the act of fantasising or through holistic (consciousness-raising) listening. The intertwining of the affective, political, and aesthetic dimensions of the score will be discussed using Rancière’s (2004 [2000]) “distribution of the sensible” to determine what makes phantasmatic sound trajectories audible or inaudible within the rigid confines of post-war Francoist Spain. While the sound design and Foley elements contribute significantly to the overall atmosphere of the film, the emphasis is primarily on the musical aspect of the soundtrack, except when the non-musical sounds shape the spectatorial experience and the overall audio-visual narrative.

REDISTRIBUTION OF THE SOUNDTRACK

The soundtrack contains twenty-one original themes, two traditional Spanish songs and additional leitmotifs which, although not included on the LP, are compositionally reminiscent of some of the marked themes. Javier Navarrete’s score

⁷ In his third feature film *The Devil’s Backbone* [*El espinazo del diablo*] (2001), del Toro had already taken inspiration from the Spanish Civil War to explore its devastating effects. *Pan’s Labyrinth*, on the other hand, premiered the year before the controversial *Ley de Memoria Histórica* [“Historical Memory Law”] was passed in the Spanish parliament. The film “self-consciously takes on the political work of restoring Spain’s historical memory,” particularly as it deals with the repressed traumas of the Franco era (Tierney 2014, 173).

combines a conventional (romanticised) Hollywood score with quite dissonant tonal fragments, Foley sound effects, minimalist orchestration, and a peculiar blending of strings, percussion, harp, woodwinds, brass, synthesised voices, and piano to portray the ambivalences between the ethereal allure of fantasy and the opaque atmospheric tension. Most of the score is composed in the spirit of emotional realism, where the sound evolves naturally from the narrative situation, corresponding to Michel Chion's concept of *internal logic* (1994 [1990], 45–47). This approach allows the composite score to evoke, predict, mediate, and self-construct the essence of the characters, their transgressive desires, and the mood of the story. On the other hand, the film contains unsettling undertones and overtones that, in terms of Chion's (1994 [1990], 47) *external logic*, “serve to reinforce the tension of the action” and interrupt the audience's phantasmatic idyll. Accordingly, I divide the soundscape into four distinct but occasionally interrelated categories:

Table 1. Classification of the soundtrack

Themes of magical landscapes	Themes of mobilising resistance	Themes of authoritarianism	Liminal spaces: music between reality and fantasy
Long, Long Time Ago [00:34–02:42]	Guerilleros [34:36–35:13; 39:33–39:42; 40:13–41:02]	<i>Soy un pobre presidiario</i> [24:33–25:55; 1:03:46–1:04:22]	Long, Long Time Ago [00:34–02:42]
The Labyrinth [03:34–03:39; 06:51–08:11; 1:56:26–1:57:47]	The Refuge [53:54–55:20]	<i>En los jardines de Granada</i> [1:28:49–1:29:40]	A Book of Blood [43:13–44:25; 44:00–46:00; 46:24–47:41]
Rose, Dragon [09:42–11:15; 12:36–14:50]	Deep Forest [1:19:24–1:21:26]	Leitmotif of sinister violence [16:52–17:16; 1:04:13–1:04:22; 1:16:18–1:16:26; 1:32:15–1:33:08]	Not Human [55:31–56:29; 58:27–1:01:57]
The Fairy and the Labyrinth [18:29–21:22]	Mercedes [1:27:03–1:28:47; 1:33:25–1:34:46]		The River [1:02:46–1:03:46; 1:04:28–1:05:25; 1:53:44–1:54:51]

The Moribund Tree and the Toad [26:25–28:32 29:12–29:53; 30:10–32:31]	The Funeral [1:23:27–1:25:24; 1:25:33–1:26:40; 1:57:48–1:58:47]	Mercedes' Lullaby [49:50–50:59]
A Book of Blood [43:13–44:25; 44:00–46:00; 46:24–47:41]	Prolonged leitmotif of sinister violence: female vendetta [1:32:15–1:33:08]	Pan's Labyrinth Lullaby [1:52:03–1:53:44]
Not Human [55:31–56:29; 58:27–1:01:57]		
The River [1:02:46–1:03:46; 1:53:44–1:54:51]		
A Tale [1:06:23–1:08:19]		
Waltz of the Mandrake [1:17:02–1:18:02; 1:54:51–1:56:26]		
A Princess [1:48:06–1:52:01]		
Pan and the Full Moon [1:38:19–1:40:55; 1:42:05–1:44:44]		
Pan's Labyrinth Lullaby [1:52:03–1:53:44]		

The main argument of my analysis is that all these themes potentially cohabit with at least one of the three main musical phantasms: *authoritarian*, *mythopoetic*, and *dissident*. Firstly, I make a clear distinction between a musical phantasm as a broader humanistic concept and a musical fantasy as

a free-flowing form. Musical phantasm is a multi-layered tonal abstraction whose auditory space may exhibit some of the formal characteristics of musical fantasy, but which goes beyond the act of imaginable listening.⁸

Musically embodied phantasms do not consist only of material sonic substrates. In *Pan's Labyrinth* they are detectible through various sensory and conceptual apparatuses, traversing the realm of acoustic physicality. These auditory spaces, both tangible and quasi-semblance, are deeply interwoven with the socio-cultural, psychoanalytical, and personal threshold of the altered Francoist reality. They reflect, mimic, and intensify the war antagonisms, the particularly disturbing myths, the captivating imagination, the paranoid violence, and the phallic narcissism. Diegetic sounds, such as the crawling of insects, the shriek of a baby mandrake, the rumble of thunder, the distant echoes in the labyrinth corridors, and, primarily, the sound of a flying praying mantis, have been digitally processed to empower the phantasmatic dimension of the magical world.⁹ The amplified sounds of rustling pollen differentiate the dissident phantasm,¹⁰ while the Foley sounds of a pocket watch, wine bottle, leather scraping, and horse hooves reinforce the antagonistic cruelty. To properly understand and contextualise the functional role of the soundtrack, one must first define the concept of phantasm and decipher the socio-historical and political context that initiates the loops of dissimilar identifications.

DIFFERENTIATING THE PHANTASMS

*When film employs fantasy but at the same time reveals
the limit that fantasy comes up against, it takes us to an
encounter with the traumatic Real* (McGowan 2007, 168).

While the term *phantasm* has undergone considerable changes in philosophical circles from Plato (1969 [ca. 380 BC]) to the present day, I understand

⁸ I rely, to a certain extent, on Schwarz's description of listening as a fantasy space that arises when "musical-theoretical, musical-historical, cultural, psychoanalytic, or personal thresholds are crossed and enunciated" (Schwarz 1997, 4).

⁹ Hood associates this combination of non-diegetic and diegetic dimensions of the soundtrack with extra-diegesis (see Hood 2022, 183–86). But, since the terms non-diegetic and extra-diegetic music are often equated, they should be used more cautiously. The aforementioned sound effects in *Pan's Labyrinth* are about the simultaneity of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds that are a part of an integrated sonic whole but can be clearly distinguished narratively, as opposed to a transitional or liminal level of narration that blurs the source of the sound itself.

¹⁰ Martin Barnier (2010, 208) highlights the connection between the floating pollen and the rebels, suggesting that the film symbolically unites the realm of fantasy and resistance to fascism.

it in the neo-Lacanian sense: as both an imaginary and symbolic construct that compensates for the inherent lack of being.¹¹ This lack manifests itself in the form of an unfulfilled desire or a perceived void in the subject's identity and existence resulting from the loss of its *objet petit a* – the unattainable object-cause of desire that the subject loses due to its positioning within the Symbolic Order. A phantasm is a pre-verbal and pre-conceptual zone of indeterminacy whose inner resonance is not purely delusional, but rather supersensible. Their dualistic ambivalence is anchored in the liminal realm between reality and fantasy, for it is neither a factual epistemic feature nor a mere fiction. Phantasms structure the subject's desire, they mediate the subject's gaze of the incomprehensible Real, they revolve around the *objet petit a*,¹² and above all, they reflect the subject's position within this order. Moreover, phantasms emerge to fill the void created by the subject's encounter with the Real.¹³ The Real represents an inexpressible, unfathomable, and profoundly disturbing dimension of reality that resists symbolisation and lies beyond the reach of language, normative institutions of power and dominant social constructs. Lacan (2018 [1973], 41) explains that "[t]he real supports the phantasy, the phantasy protects the real," but with the remark that "[t]he phantasy is never anything more than the screen that conceals something quite primary, something determinant in the function of repetition" (2018 [1973], 60). This explains, firstly, how the Real and the phantasm are inseparable through the mechanism of repetition, and secondly, that these repetitions in a state and mental activity such as the dream allow the ephemeral Real to reappear in a manageable, if still daunting, form. Although phantasms offer a way of dealing with the unsettling power of the Real, they can never fully encapsulate or represent it, but at best circulate around it. The Real can thus only be approached figuratively through the unconscious fantasy, which, as Lacan (2001 [1966], 206) suggests, functions as an image within the structure of signification.

While phantasms are typically associated with visuo-mental representations of certain imaginable, if not unimaginable, objects, musical dimension of phantasmatic mediations has often been massively overlooked. In *Pan's Labyrinth*, however, I argue that the composite soundtrack is inextricably

¹¹ For instance, while faun, toad, fairies, and other fantastical creatures are primarily a manifestation of Ofelia's subconsciousness, they serve as symbolic rather than purely imaginary figures that help her cope with her traumatic experiences.

¹² As Néstor Braunstein (2003, 106) emphasises from a Lacanian perspective, phantasy is a concrete expression of a lost object.

¹³ Unlike the subject or their desire, the Real is without rupture or lack (see Lacan 1988 [1978], 97–98; 313).

linked to the creation, maintenance, and repetition¹⁴ of unconscious fantasies, be they phallic, magical, or dystonic.¹⁵ It protects the characters, the audience, and perhaps, even the narrative itself from the Real of Francoism, its cultural trauma or, conversely, its existential destruction. Musical phantasms thus function as a conceptual barrier that conceals the traumatic core of the Real while ensuring that the musical references remain at a manageable distance from the listener's sensory apparatus. In other words, the phantasmatic musical mediation takes place predominantly on an unconscious level of perception and cognition, in a so-called safe sensory-neural area, secured from a considerable affective overload. As expressed in the film, the shielding role of conflictual phantasms – conflictual in the sense that Vidal, Ofelia, and the rebels position themselves differently in relation to the Other's desire – manifests itself in the far-reaching way in which they conceal the inherent flaws of ideologically and politically mediated realities and maintain the subject's (at least illusory) sense of plenitude. By masking these inadequacies, the soundtrack softens the fissures underlying the unstable and chaotic totalitarian power-knowledge system and its signifiers.

SOUNDS BETWEEN REVOLUTIONARY HUMANISM AND INCLUSIONARY POPULISM

The film's plot contains unmistakable elements of populism, but not in the simplistic or pejorative sense that is often used even in academic circles (equated with demagoguery or reactionary politics). Furthermore, there is no consensus among populism scholars as to what kind of phenomenon populism is: is it an ideology, a strategy, a discourse, or a form of political performance (for more on this topic, see Moffitt 2020, 10–29).¹⁶ Cas Mudde, for example, analyses populism in an ideational framework and defines it as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite” (Mudde 2021, 578). Robert Jansen opts for a more strategic approach to populism, claiming that “[p]opulism is not a ‘thing’ or ‘object’ to be studied but ‘a mode of political practice’” (Jansen 2011, 75; see also Moffitt 2020, 17).

¹⁴ Furthermore, the soundtrack consists of a series of repetitive fragments that drastically affect the magical realist setting of the film.

¹⁵ I define dystonic fantasy in a general sense of the term, as Akhtar does, as contradicting “the beliefs held in the prevalent culture” (Akhtar 2018 [2009], 105).

¹⁶ For further insights into a discursive-performative approach to populism, see Laclau 2018 [2005] and Mouffe 2018.

In the case of *Pan's Labyrinth* narrative, however, I believe we can only, to a limited extent, speak of the latent presence of an inclusionary populism: a kind of left-wing populism that identifies the antagonistic groups in post-war Spanish society according to the binary ideational approach: the people and the corrupted elite.

By representing the marginal voices of the Maquis – the republican rebels – the populist traits deviate from the consensual political framework. The dominant Falangists radiate a sense of superiority, purity, exclusivity, and hierarchy that corresponds more to an aristocratic-elitist gaze than to an assertive exclusionary populist propaganda. The Maquis openly addressed their fascist opponents as ferocious tyrants and corrupt elites who were, in a populist sense, the common enemy of the “people.” This may even have been one of the driving forces that led the Falangists to regard the recalcitrant Republicans as a symbol of treason, a pure abomination. However, these dissidents clearly lacked the key elements of mass mobilisation that are constitutive of populist rhetoric. The main instrument of the rebels’ decentralised collective resistance is armed rather than discursive restraint, which frees them from a charismatic leader irreplaceable to the populists’ communal solidarity.

To understand how (if at all) revolutionary and populist sentiments relate to the film score, including the themes that constitute a dissident phantasm, one should relate the aesthetic dimension of the political to Rancière’s distribution of the sensible. Although the French philosopher does not deal with the musical question in detail, he recognises its role in this process:

[In] my work, music distributes and disperses at the same time between two poles where its proper materiality tends to disappear: on the one hand, it becomes central as a dominant metaphor of the partition of the sensible and not as a singular art; on the other, it stands out, incarnated in these tunes, these timbers and these scenes which turn in my head and inspire my moods of looking and listening or my forms of writing. As an art of the muses, music becomes a name for the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2020, 357–58).

From a musicological perspective, the interplay of aesthetics and politics redefines the boundaries of perception by positioning film music both as an affectively charged artistic creation and as a site of political contestation. Accordingly, the score reconfigures the sensible by making the marginalised voices audible to the audience, even if, conversely, they remain conspicuously inaudible in their own sensory diegetic world. The composite score of *Pan's Labyrinth* symbolises del Toro’s dissemination of the sensible and serves as a counterpoint to the categorical imperative of the Francoist prohibition. By

bringing to light elements that could not be seen, heard, or felt within the rigid boundaries of traditional and national categories, the director demarcates the suppressed voices of the “others” that the totalitarian regime had desensitised. In this way, the film not only redefines the artistic canon through an affective and remobilised musical sensuality, but also undertakes a political reconfiguration of spectatorial perception. The soundtrack primarily aims to distance the viewer from the visual horror and totality through expressive musicality, exposing its ruptures in the form of either concordant or dissonant themes. Through this artistically subversive act of the dissent – attenuating social divisions rather than reinforcing them – the film creatively refigures what was once considered peripheral or illegitimate into a central and undeniable presence, forcing a re-evaluation of what can be seen, heard, and understood in the undemocratic socio-political and cultural landscape.¹⁷

The redistribution of the sensible is also structured through the discrepant relationship between the music and the moving image, when incidental sounds of the republican theme underline the fascist terror in the visuals. As part of a dissident phantasm, the “Guerrilleros” theme embodies a highly critical stance towards the totalitarian gestures. It possibly epitomises collective solidarity on a phantasmatic level of consciousness, but above all, it symbolises the perseverance and aspiration of “the people” for justice and liberation. Through the gradual crescendos, the melodic progressions, the joyful fighting spirit, and also through certain melancholic, associative tonal remnants, it creates certain subjectivities that balance and reshape the themes of suffering, sadism, dehumanisation, and murder. Consequently, the music generates discordant affective sensations, the phantasmatic conflict which becomes explicitly visible when Vidal discursively brutalises his political dissidents:

Capitán Vidal: Yo estoy aquí porque quiero que mi hijo nazca en una España limpia y nueva. Porque esta gente parte de una idea equivocada, que somos todos iguales. Pero hay una gran diferencia: que la guerra terminó y ganamos nosotros. Y si para que nos enteremos todos, hay que matar a esos hijos de puta, pues lo matamos y ya está [I am here because I want my son to be born in a clean and new Spain. Because these people have the mistaken idea that we are all equal. But there's a big difference: the war is over, and we have won. And if we must kill these vermins to settle the matter, then we kill them and that's it] (del Torro 2006, [39:53–40:14]).

¹⁷ The film's democratic deficiencies are clearly evident in the radical practices of discipline and control, the massive curtailment of civil liberties, the mistreatment of minorities (racial, ethnic, cultural, sexual, gender, disabled communities, etc.), yet camouflaged by the nationalist cause, limited pluralism, and phallic patriotism.

One might ask why is Vidal's speech not followed by the nationalist Falangist anthem but by the rebel theme "Guerrilleros"? This musical choice is neither coincidental nor a mere foreshadowing; it has a deeper symbolic meaning that subtly erases the fascistoid discursive totality. In the following scene, Mercedes (Maribel Verdú) – Vidal's housekeeper and one of the rebels – attempts to communicate with the other insurgents, indicating that this music clearly anticipates the action towards her. The suggestive affective potential of this theme, however, emphasises the impending fate of the rebels and reaffirms their importance as more than just targets. As the only incidental musical element associated with the rebels, "Guerrilleros" theme conceptually and emotionally undermines the Falangist sentiment, giving the rebels a dignified presence. In its continuous rhythmic pulse, I mainly recognise a tonal embodiment of fighting spirit, endurance, and will. When the musical continuity falters, the fantastic sound image comes to the fore revealing the vulnerability of the republicans: in other words, the insurmountable cracks of the dissident phantasm. Ultimately, this theme is not conspicuously emancipatory, because it makes itself neither effectively audible nor sayable in the public (diegetic) space and acts more as a passive than a productive form of resistance. Yet, as a musical space of contestation and dissensus, it mobilises the viewer's (political, ideological, affective, etc.) imagination, redirecting the narrative flow of the scene itself.

Of all the musical themes, "Mercedes" is the one that most prominently catalyses the retreat of Falangist coercive practices. The sustained rhythmic pulse and cacophonous orchestral sounds, whether temporally or dynamically amplified, epitomise an anti-fascist force against the suppression of human autonomy. Such emancipated sonorities, understood within a Ranciérian dissensual aesthetic regime of art,¹⁸ symbolically point to an overcoming of castration anxiety and, more provocatively, to an effective disempowerment of the oppressor himself. Mercedes boldly disfigures Vidal's face with a knife before fleeing from the militaristic forces into the forest, thus conquering the fear of powerlessness. Mercedes' theme has finally earned its place in the film: it deserves to be heard and embraced with all its allure and discomfort. Although her theme is not a part of the diegetic film world, its multi-layered sensual power repeatedly fuels the dissident phantasm. Interestingly, the dissonant parts of the Mercedes' theme, like the menacing, sustained string sounds, are structurally linked to Vidal's leitmotif of paranoid violence. Both musical

¹⁸ On aesthetic regime of art, see Rancière 2004 [2000]; 2013 [2011].

representations of hostility culminate in unsettling, screeching noises. Vidal's disturbing auditory sensation is emphasised by a razor blade,¹⁹ Mercedes' by a knife. However, these violent overtones populate different gender-specific phantasms of varying libidinal excess. In Mercedes', the prolonged dissonance stands for a tonal abstraction of the female vendetta that inverts the stereotypical patriarchal roles, while in Vidal's it externalises the sadistic power of a phallic totality.

VIDAL'S SOUNDING PHANTASM OF TYRANNY

It is quite evident that Vidal's sadistic *persona* is strongly modelled on the fascist archetype. According to Christopher Bollas (2006 [1992]), the fascist mindset is a rigid ideology that claims a monopoly on truth. The British psychoanalyst argues that this mindset is marked by a deep moral emptiness resulting from "the simplifying violence of an ideology that brooks no true opposition" (Bollas 2006 [1992], 203). Vidal's vigorous cruelty is an expression of this void – Bollas would probably call it "the empty heart of the pervert." This is the source of Vidal's compulsive fixation on the perpetuation of force and intimidation. The excess of authoritarian conservatism he displays is therefore a desperate attempt to create a homogenous social order that cannot be maintained even under the most radical socio-political and cultural oppression.

In contrast to other fantastic elements, Vidal's authoritarian phantasm is predominantly shaped by diegetic musical and non-musical sounds. Particularly noteworthy are the two Spanish songs *Soy un pobre presidiario* and *En los jardines de Granada*, as well as the leitmotif of sinister violence, whose suspense effect appears several times as an amplified signal of the captain's explicit tyranny and malice. *Soy un pobre presidiario* is first integrated into the narrative during Vidal's meticulous shaving. This ritual act of self-discipline – be it through precise shaving, an arrogant, combative stance, or methodical shoe-shining – is underlined by decisive rhythmico-metric and melodic patterns, offering an insight into his disturbing fantasies and obsessive need for control.

¹⁹ But it is not solely the cacophonous sounds of the razor blade that musically shape Vidal's haunting phantasm of cruelty. In specific violent scenes, disharmonious undertones and overtones can be heard alongside the diegetic metallic sounds of the knife, acoustically reinforcing the captain's clearly sadistic tendencies.



Figure 1. Vidal's narcissistic pathologies
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In the two shaving scenes, both of which have such morbid phallic potential, *Soy un pobre presidiario* appropriates conflictual self-identifications and socio-cultural norms. It has not only de-differentiated personal and collective identities, but also deepened emotionally, ideologically, cognitively, and sensually contested socio-political issues. In other words, the song intrinsically embodies irreconcilable opposites, harbouring the constant threat of instability and a possible descent into chaos. Indeed, even the revolutionary theme sung in times of socio-political unrest can appeal to a fascistically interpellated individual if it somehow evokes cultural nationalism. The republican-minded artist Ángel Sampedro Montero (1908–1973) – known by his stage name Angelillo, who reached the pinnacle of

fame with his idiosyncratic blend of flamenco, copla, and pasodoble – originally sang the song. This symbolic, farcical moment reveals the general's inability to construct a personal narrative outside of the collective identity of the military and authoritarian archetypes he embodies. One could even argue that Vidal is subjected to aesthetic ridicule through this subversive song, as the very phrase *pobre soñador* ("poor dreamer") subtly mocks his sadistic endeavours. Vidal's arrogance and military pride starkly contrast the poignant lyrics of the song about a convict longing for freedom. Mar Diestro-Dópido (2018 [2013]: 44–45) surmises that the captain is "deep down a prisoner, not only of the regime but also his dysfunctional relationship with his father's memory." But such behavioural transgressions are only a façade to maintain his antagonistic phallic conflict: the desire for a different kind of freedom that his authoritarian regime would never grant him. The primary determinant of failure is that his paternal identification fantasies shape all aspects of his life. This could explain the shattering of his narcissistic fantasy of perfection – a compensatory mechanism that veils the (fear of) castration – underlined by a cacophony of sounds: dynamically swelling incidental music that culminates in the sharp diegetic sounds of the razor.



Figure 2. The phallic non-existent sonic superstructure of Vidal's phantasm
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Here, the musical component takes on a constitutive role by exposing and in some ways even subverting, the violence of Lacan's Imaginary Order²⁰ and

²⁰ The so-called violence of the Imaginary Order is reflected (among other things) in the subject's identity formation, for it leads to their misrecognition (in the mirror) and insatiable desire.

Rancière's police order.²¹ These unresolved sounds even unveil the inherent fissure of unfulfilled desire, manifested in the captain's blissful gaze at his reflection. The scene also contains digitally processed pocket watch sounds shaped by a phantasmatic logic. This phantasmatic object, an idealised image and a driving force constitutive of the subject's reality, has a non-diegetic sonic superstructure. The ticking sound is rhythmically, temporally, and even tactilely distorted, representing a conceptual signifier of patriarchal militarism, the legacy of his father that has been reverberating since his death. This scene emphasises his libidinous stance, the death drive in its purest form, which uses eerie sound effects to dispossess the spectator and bring them closer to the sensuality of an antagonistic phantasm of cruelty. A certain degree of resistance to phallic authority can be felt in Ofelia's actions, although her musical depiction is much more fairytale-like: coexisting in the fantastical gap between the ghastly material reality and the ambiguously captivating and horrendous fantasy.

SOUNDS OF MYTHOPOETIC PHANTASMAGORIA

Ofelia's affectively mixed supernatural world – intensified by her encounter with a grotesque and mysterious faun (Doug Jones) in the corridors of the labyrinth – is based on themes of innocence, brutality, and the enduring power of fantasy, in which she processes her traumatic experiences. From a psychoanalytic perspective, her identification with fairytales and archetypal figures is merely a mental strategy to cope with conflicting feelings and desires. Ofelia's unconscious fantasies and reveries, however, go beyond naïve, childlike escapism, considering that her dark, almost dystopian mental images are mostly inspired by the turmoil of authoritarian everyday life.

Several mythical sounds characterise Ofelia's imaginary world. "The Labyrinth," "Rose, Dragon," "The Fairy and the Labyrinth," "The Moribund Tree and the Toad," and "A Fairy Tale" are not heard from Ofelia herself – they make her projective identification audible through manifold melodic, rhythmic, agogic, orchestral, and tonal variations. In "The Fairy and the Labyrinth," for example, there is a particularly interesting combination of bowed and plucked strings, piano episodes, a delicate woodwind theme, impatient trills, and electronic simulations of male and female voices, ascending to

²¹ To summarise Rancière (2004 [2000]), the police order is a hierarchical order that essentially redistributes functions in society. It is diametrically opposed to the political order because it assumes division and inequality instead of equalising/reducing social gaps.

immediately descending chromatic scales, whereby the plaintive sigh gestures of resignation retain a particularly expressive and semantic meaning. Through these musical means, the elusive phantasmatic power vividly articulates and reflects Ofelia's unconscious longings and conflicts, aurally structuring the symbolic nature of her inner world.

Ofelia's phantasmagorias – a surreal and unsettling blend of deceptively realistic and imaginary landscapes – also contain dissonant tone-fragments with violent overtones and undertones, such as “A Book of Blood,” “Waltz of the Mandrake,” “Deep Forest,” and “Not Human.” The “Not Human” theme emerges during Ofelia's second task, enriched by her voice-over as she opens a secret portal with magic chalk. Nevertheless, the initially pleasant magical fantasy ends in a formidable encounter with the Pale Man (Doug Jones): a monstrous creature and the film's secondary antagonist.



Figure 3. Eerie awakening of the Pale Man
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This highly saturated and affectively polarised theme combines the diegetic sounds of the Pale Man's bodily gestures with the non-diegetic orchestral superstructure and metallic sound effects (for a slightly different elaboration, see Hood 2022, 184). The increase in musical intensity is particularly pronounced in the second part of the theme [58:27–1:01:57], after Ofelia breaks the faun's rule not to eat from the table. It contains foreboding string tones, digitally processed Foley sound effects, mainly synthesised percussion sounds (glockenspiel in particular), glissando and *pizzicato* strings, buzzing woodwind, brass, and even eerie choral chanting. The affective musical power, expressed through sharp, mysterious harp

sonorities, tremolos, decisive musical gestures in the lower registers of the brass and woodwinds, and textural density, signals a dramatic turn in the narrative. It also makes the encounter with the Real tangible, audible and almost tactile. The emergence of the affectively unpleasant jump scare – Foley *tutti* slap effect (Bartók *pizzicato*) – is synchronised with the awakening of the Pale Man and deviates from the atmospheric continuity. As such, these sonorities conceptualise acoustic abjection: abjection in the sense that Julia Kristeva (1982 [1980]) defines it as a profoundly ambivalent feeling or state between familiarity and strangeness, fascination, and discomfort. These sonic cues disrupt the continuous flow of the musical fabric, the logic of its Symbolic Order. One could even argue that the combination of slap effect and percussion leads the listening spectator to grasp the sublimated traumatic aspects of the magical reality invading Ofelia's wishful fantasising. For in such a dystopian phantasmagoria, the encounter with the Pale Man signifies a confrontation with their own unimaginable foreignness, with the ominous soundtrack playing a powerful vehicle for traversing the fantasy. Indeed, the Pale Man is a fantastic counterpart to Captain Vidal, for both expropriate the brutality of fascist violence, as is made clear by their parallel positions at the food-laden tables and their pursuit of Ofelia (cf. Tierney 2014, 178). Most prominent, however, is the lullaby theme, representing a "structuring *leitmotiv* of the whole film" (Gómez-Castellano 2013, 2). Its motivic core is integrated into the majority of the original score, altered by various compositional means such as augmentation, diminution, register break, timbre changes, and textural density.²²

As part of a mythopoetic phantasm that mediates between the tangible and intangible reality, the lullaby protects Ofelia's torn subject from a direct encounter with the unbearable Real of the Francoist terror while shielding the audience from the disturbing visuo-mental images. Mercedes' nurturing voice becomes a central aural signifier that contributes to Ofelia's regression and transference into her past. Mercedes' spatially and temporally shifting voice, imbued with warmth and maternal overtones, subtly alters spectatorial perception reinforcing the film's underlying tension between mundane and mythical worlds.

²² The themes "The Labyrinth," "Rose, Dragon," "The Fairy and the Labyrinth," "A Book of Blood," "A Tale," and "Ofelia" contain remnants of the lullaby. In contrast, its denotative cues are predominantly, if not entirely, contained in the vocal-instrumental themes "Long, Long Time Ago," "Mercedes' Lullaby," and "A Princess."

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Figure 4. Mercedes hums the lullaby for Ofelia
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This liminal narrative zone²³ debilitates the structural narrative core of music beyond the screen but strengthens its fantastic potential. It belongs to a phantasmatic expanse of indeterminacy, sublimation, ambivalence, flexibility, and transgression. Added to this is the reappearance of the lullaby theme and its struggle for supremacy in the antagonistic film setting. The lullaby struggles to be heard in a world where its ambiguous fantasticality is not only undesirable but also inhibited. In this way, the seven-note melodic motif of the lullaby manifests itself not only as mere nostalgia, but also as an activity of overthrowing established hierarchies, the Rancièrian police order, of transgressing and breaking through the boundaries of narrative existence, the attribute of which makes it “political.” The absence of the textual component is probably not accidental either. Since we know that some nursery rhymes contain disturbing and spooky lyrics disguised by affectively pleasant musical signs, “Mercedes’ Lullaby” most likely also conceals its ghostly semantic content.²⁴ The lullaby thus approaches the pre-conceptual, pre-discursive realm in which the phantasm is located – at the centre of mythopoetic and chronologically based cinematic reality – but never reaches it.

²³ This non-binary level of musical narration can be described by various multi-layered, but in some ways contested concepts: metadiegetic music (Gorbman 1987, 22–23), audio dissolve (Altman 1987), ambi-diegetic music (Holbrook 2004), fantastical gap between diegetic and non-diegetic (Stilwell 2007) or displaced diegetic music (Smith 2009, 14–20).

²⁴ For instance, the popular Spanish lullaby *Duérmete niño* contains a “cannibalistic menace in an invitation to sleep” (Gómez-Castellano 2013, 1).

Despite the lullaby's nurturing function, there is something brooding about it, something inherently transgressive or excessive like the Lacanian *jouissance*, which breaks the symbolic structure of desire. As Gómez-Castellano (2013, 8) astutely observes, the form of the lullaby therefore represents "an ambiguous combination of sweetness and violence [...] constantly alternating between lulling and menacing." One of the lullaby's means is the articulation and coding of the cultural trauma of the Spanish post-war period. It aurally mediates between past and present traumatic experiences enabling an affectively nuanced exploration of how the effects of war are remembered, internalised, and communicated in collective memory. Firstly, the absence of the texts could be understood as a suppression of certain cultural expressions or simply a delay in coming to terms with and remembering the traumatic cultural past. Perhaps it is Mercedes' unique ritual and performative act of singing the lullaby that, in some ways, triggers the cultural trauma, rather than the appearance of the lullaby itself.²⁵ In other words, I argue that the displaced signifiers of the lullaby in such a context enable the clash of different traumatic temporalities, accelerating the ruptures and dislocations of an unimaginable trauma that would naturally unfold at a much slower pace. Through her longing for a nurturing figure (Mercedes and, in a sense, the faun) and space (the labyrinth and the fairytale world), Ofelia seeks refuge from her stepfather's tyranny. This sense of wandering is inscribed in the lullaby itself, which at first glance symbolises something inherently deficient like desire, but also opens a space for a discomfort-based memory-pleasure that enters the visceral preverbal experience that takes Ofelia back to the earliest days of her childhood. One cannot imagine these Pre-Symbolic, even Pre-Imaginary maternal spaces of infancy like the Neoplatonian *chōra*²⁶ relying on the pleasurable affective sensations. It is the pre-symbolic representation of loss that makes this real enjoyment possible during fantasising.

In Lacanian terms, *jouissance* disrupts the flow of the Symbolic Order, forcing an encounter with the traumatic and unassimilable core of the Real. To activate the mechanisms of *jouissance*, one must engage in unpredictable disruptive phantasmatic identification that entails some kind of pain, suffering, and loss, so that these affective states can penetrate the deepest layers of the

²⁵ I came to this conclusion during a stimulating conversation with my colleague Catharina Thörn, who encouraged me to further differentiate the elements of cultural trauma in film and possibly develop my arguments further in a larger discursive format.

²⁶ In one of his dialogues *Timaeus*, Plato (2000 [360 BC]) described the *chōra* as a formless, indeterminate space between being and non-being. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the *chōra* is the earliest phase of the infant's psychosexual development, known for its nurturing and maternal quality (for more on this topic, see Kristeva 1982 [1980], 13–15; 2024 [1984], 23–30)

psyche and catalyse excessive pleasures that the *jouissance* brings. A kind of perceptual disruption to achieve holistic care and safety, perhaps by evoking the tragic cultural memory of Francoism, would initiate a different kind of transnational trauma or conflict in spectators. Nevertheless, such trauma must be triggered to symbolically address the reality of Ofelia's longing: the ever-present need to be mothered and loved. The deviant and powerful force of the *jouissance*, which Lacan controversially describes as a "form of evil" (Lacan 1992 [1986], 189), fuels this immersion. To convey an ambivalent feeling of sweetness and eeriness to the audience, the lullaby should contain aesthetically and sensorially appropriate conventionalised musical signs. A combination of a continuous rhythmic pulse, descending sigh gestures, Mercedes' gently humming voice, and the conjunct melodic motions without sudden fluctuations or chromatic saturation, musically conveys the indescribable feeling of care, yearning, alienated melancholy, agitation, and transience. Additionally, the non-diegetic orchestral superstructure of the lullaby epitomises its sensitive sensual affectivity through its leisurely crescendo passages, the ostinato flow of diatonic chords, and the slow harmonic rhythm with few dynamic fluctuations. Through these means of expression, the music conceals or at least softens the fatalistic power of *jouissance* within the unsettling systemic totality.

The echoing sounds of magical realism stage opposing phantasms and initiate the partition of the sensible by inviting the audience to confront traumatic experiences and the Real of their own desires. Through their dissenting undertones and overtones, these soundscapes either soften or subvert the logic of the patriarchal Symbolic Order. Musical themes characterised by a continuous or decisive rhythmico-metric pulse are deeply rooted in the historical narrative and thus shatter the phantasmatic illusion. On the other hand, liminal tone-fragments, reinforced by haptic sound effects, circulate elusively between the conceptual realms of inner and outer reality and fantasy. Despite the tragic death of Ofelia – accompanied by the spatially and temporally displaced diegetic and metadiegetic sounds of the lullaby – the director decided to end the story with a somewhat more optimistic pathos, in which the rebels, unlike in the real historical events, at least temporarily defeat the fascist tyrants. By assigning a constitutive role to fantasy, he left open the – albeit minimal – possibility that Ofelia's phantasmagorical fairytale world could still offer a glimmer of hope for a better future. In such a scenario, it is the music that protects both Ofelia and the audience from the accumulated traumas and affective horrors of Francoism. Its empathic codes, I would argue, are somehow able to mitigate the perceived vileness, obnoxiousness,

and abusiveness of the coherent authoritarian practices and compensate for the inherent lack of humanness that shatters all the unspeakable, if not taboo, phantasms of opposition.

Almost nine decades have passed since the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, and its spectre still haunts the current socio-political landscape “beyond the grave.”²⁷ For within the actual market-orientated economies, the remnants of totalitarian regimes such as fascism live on through the cracks and gaps of liberal democracies,²⁸ resembling what Wendy Brown (2018) calls the authoritarian freedom of neo-liberal Frankenstein. This inevitably creates opportunities for more antagonistic hybrid regimes like illiberalism to exploit and politically mobilise those suffering from the trauma of liberalism. In our hyper-commodified, libidinous digital age, the affective power of magical realism may still be there, but its pragmatic immediacy makes it unlikely to fully retain its imaginative core – its so-called compensatory phantasmatic potential. As Anna Kornbluh (2024) argues, the most recent phase of capitalism functions according to the principle of immediacy rather than mediation. This immediacy in transmission symbolically undermines a central phantasmatic function of art: its role as a protective shield or veil of the human psyche, replacing it with an irreversible direct collision with the traumatic Real of a terrifying turbo-capitalist reality.²⁹ The mitigating role of art is evident in *Pan's Labyrinth*, where the empathetic soundscapes have not yet reached the impasse of affective immediacy, as is the case with streaming platforms that profit from the commodification of emotions, with music being a prominent tool for such manipulative strategies.

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²⁷ Here I refer to the hauntological aspect of the political in a gloomy, post-Derridian way (for more on this matter, see Derrida 1994 [1993]).

²⁸ Suffice it to look at how so-called liberal political entities such as the Democratic Party in the US – masters of global domination – often regard the victims of their policies as collateral damage (for instance, see Chomsky 2007 [2003]).

²⁹ Anna Kornbluh (2024) provides a further, quite cogent interpretation of Lacan's registers in relation to immediacy. She argues that immediacy keeps us in the realm of the “imaginary real,” where we (deceptively) believe we have access to reality (for further information, see Kornbluh 2024, 53–59).

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РАСТКО БУЉАНЧЕВИЋ

Музички одјеци трауме: ослушкујући фантазме у мрачној
фантазији *Панов лавиринт* (2006)

(РЕЗИМЕ)

Мрачна фантазија *Панов лавиринт* повезује историјску стварност франкистичке Шпаније, републикански отпор режиму и Офелијин афективно помијешан фантазијски свијет. Иако филм обилује изражајним средствима, управо музичка компонента – захваљујући снажном афективном, чулном, концептуалном, семиотичком и фантазматском потенцијалу – непосредно изражава, опонаша, појачава и симболизује ратне антагонизме, дистопијске митове, разиграну дјечју имагинацију и фалички нарцизам. Посебан простор посвећен је естетској димензији политичког, будући да композитни саундтрек разоткрива елементе који се нису могли видјети, чути или осјетити у крутим границама традиционалних и националних категорија фашистичке Шпаније. Видалово ауторитарно реструктурисање шпанског политичког пејзажа подвучено је дијегетским шпанским пјесмама, откуцајима џепног сата и недијегетским злослутним лајтмотивом. Насупрот томе, фантазијске и републиканске (нарочито какофоне и дисонантне) музичке теме симболички се опиру фалангистичким центрима моћи: патријархалном Великом Другом. Сходно томе, у овом раду настоји се утврдити да ли емпатијски кодови музике, посредством фантазама и прерасподјеле чулног, успијевају да умање перцептивну nelaгоду културне трауме Франкизма, како за ликове на екрану тако и за публику.