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| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|------|------|
| Candidate session number | | | |
| Candidate name | | | |
| School name | | | |
| Examination session (May or November) | MAY | Year | 2015 |

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE
(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: HOW DOES THE FILMMAKER USE CINEMATICAL TECHNIQUES TO TRANSLATE THE NOVEL WE NEED TO

Candidate's declaration

This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: _____

Date: 03.02.2015

Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) _____

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

I came to work with _____ after her supervisor had gone on maternity leave. At this point, she was set on the course of studying the film adaptation of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* in comparison with the book. She acknowledges that she underestimated the scope and size of the task and had to do a lot of work at the end. Had she been more proactive and sought advice more regularly throughout the process, she may have been able to research more thoroughly. She did however, make some good observations about the relationship between the film & the book.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

As per the section entitled "Responsibilities of the Supervisor" in the EE guide, the recommended number of hours spent with candidates is between 3 and 5 hours. Schools will be contacted when the number of hours is left blank, or where 0 hours are stated and there lacks an explanation. Schools will also be contacted in the event that number of hours spent is significantly excessive compared to the recommendation.

I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: _____

Date: 29th January

Assessment form (for examiner use only)

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Candidate session number | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|

Achievement level

| Criteria | Examiner 1 | maximum | Examiner 2 | maximum | Examiner 3 |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
| A research question | 2 | 2 | | 2 | |
| B introduction | 2 | 2 | | 2 | |
| C investigation | 2 | 4 | | 4 | |
| D knowledge and understanding | 2 | 4 | | 4 | |
| E reasoned argument | 2 | 4 | | 4 | |
| F analysis and evaluation | 2 | 4 | | 4 | |
| G use of subject language | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| H conclusion | 2 | 2 | | 2 | |
| I formal presentation | 4 | 4 | | 4 | |
| J abstract | 2 | 2 | | 2 | |
| K holistic judgment | 2 | 4 | | 4 | |
| Total out of 36 | 26 | | | | |

Name of examiner 1: _____ Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 2: _____ Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 3: _____ Examiner number: _____
(CAPITAL letters)

IB Assessment Centre use only: B: _____

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Diploma Session May 2015

Extended Essay in Literature and Performance

How does the filmmaker use cinematic techniques to translate the novel, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, onto screen?

Word Count: 3644

✓

Abstract

This extended essay will deal with the comparison of the film: *We Need To Talk About Kevin* by Lynne Ramsay, and of the novel of the same name by Lionel Shriver. It is a study intended to understand the process a novel goes through when being interpreted into film form. Ramsay uses visuals to retell the story, with minimum dialogue, in contrast with Shriver's novel, which is formulated as a series of letters. Despite this, the structural style is kept very similar as well as key scenes. I will be examining how the filmmaker used the medium of cinema to interpret the novel, *We Need To Talk About Kevin*.

I will be examining the question of 'How does the filmmaker use cinematic techniques to translate the novel, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, onto screen?' by analysing and picking out certain examples from both the film and the novel, and studying the visual and representative purpose of these particular scenes. These will be my primary sources as well as cinematic technique textbooks to aid my understanding and depth of the analysis. I will be using support from interviews with the author and filmmaker, as well as a series film reviews.

The investigation leads to the conclusion that the main factors in the process of transforming a novel into film are the cinematic techniques, structure and character. Structure and character are linked closely to the book and are similarly represented through the use of time and acting. The visualisation of the novel, however, comes through heavily by the cinematic techniques unique to the medium of film such as lighting, setting and sound.

Word Count: 271

Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION | 4 |
| APPROACH TO THE QUESTION | 7 |
| COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS | |
| I. CINEMATIC TECHNIQUES | 7 |
| II. STRUCTURE | 12 |
| III. CHARACTER | 15 |
| CONCLUSION | 15 |
| APPENDIX | 17 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 21 |

Introduction

Childhood is the most crucial part of ^{maybe} life and dictates how the child will be once adult. The parents are the usual mentor of the child's mental wellbeing and personality, and so in some cases things may go wrong. Lionel Shriver's novel, We Need To Talk About Kevin, discusses this topic. The story revolves around a mother's reflection of her son's upbringing and whether she was the reason of his extreme sociopathic personality. It starts with the son, Kevin, as a baby after having been given birth to by his mother, Eva. It is immediately evident that they have she has no motherly bond with him- this is obvious throughout the novel. Kevin is constantly behaving monstrously towards his mother, but like an angel towards his father, Franklin, which causes the couple's relationship to seriously deteriorate. Finally, it is revealed to the reader that Kevin performs a school massacre: killing nine classmates, a cafeteria worker and a teacher, as well as his sister and his father. He shows absolutely no remorse, apart from the very end of the novel and is sent to jail for life.

The main themes discussed are the influence of parenthood and the obsolete idea of the 'American dream'. ^{defined as ?} The themes are described from the perspective of Eva who seems to take a negative view of everything in life and so bash these terms of the American dream and parenthood. This is quite opposite to the opinions of her husband, who introduces these as the best thing that life could have given him. In the end of the novel it is apparent that Eva is right, and ~~these~~ celebration of these ideas is futile. Another theme is the subjectivity of childhood, as the novel centres itself on Kevin growing up- it highlights the uniqueness of Kevin's case as he doesn't follow the traditional stages of growing up (at least to Eva). As both the author and the

filmmaker worked together in order to visualise the story, the themes remain the same in the film adaptation.

Shriver is an American novelist ^{so well} who is notorious for her unlikeable main characters, and in making it possible for the reader to feel sympathy and hate toward them at the same time. This is a main technique used by her, which creates a sense of discomfort and complexity to the reader. In this particular novel, the reader must use the information given to them by Eva to determine why Kevin had turned into this 'monster', but this proves difficult, as it seems that Eva, Franklin and Kevin himself, are equally at fault. The novel was released in 2003 after the publisher moved back the release date because of worries that the American public wouldn't welcome such a hard-hitting story directly after the infamous Columbine Massacre: a student shooting. At this time school massacres weren't seen as often and were still new and incredibly shocking for the audience. It was followed up with a film by Scottish director, Lynne Ramsay in 2011. Both author and director worked on the film in order to make both the film and book as closely related as possible. They kept the atmosphere and feel of the story the same in both, by keeping Eva's story telling as detached and distorted as possible. This creates discomfort and unease for the reader.

Both mediums used to tell the story of Kevin use Eva as the protagonist- however this is used very differently. The novel is a series of letters by Eva to her deceased husband written a few years after Kevin's arrest. The film is told with very little dialogue from any character and portrayed visually, rather than having Eva narrate the scenes. Similarly, the film is shot in short clips, which represent the letters or chapters in the novel, both in non-chronological order. However, as necessary in most films, many scenes in the novel aren't represented in the film. Some of these

scenes are important to the characterisation of Eva, Kevin and Franklin and change the audience's ultimate opinion of their personalities. This in a way changes the ^{to} outcomes of the story, by portraying Kevin as completely evil, and Eva as a victim of misfortune. Unfortunately, it also somewhat changes the ideas of the novel ^{about ↑ ?} and makes it more difficult for the audience to determine who is to 'blame' for Kevin's identity, and so deviates from the comparison between Eva and Kevin. Lynne Ramsay uses lighting, sound and camera angle to visualise the memories of Eva, as well as imitating the distorted structure of storytelling as in the novel. The actors replicate the characterisations described in the novel through body language and speech.

These cinematic techniques are what ensure the translation of novel to film. It is important to research the processes needed to transform a written story into a film as it is interesting how a visual picture and audios created in the mind of the reader may be transported onto screen through cinematic techniques.

APPROACH TO THE QUESTION

My approach to the essay is to analyse the many techniques used by the filmmaker to visualise the original novel by Lionel Shriver. ^{exp -} First, I will be discussing cinematic ^{such as ?} techniques used for this, capturing examples from the film and comparing the scenes to the same scenes depicted in the novel. ^{meaning here ?} As structure is a main technique used in both the novel and film, I will be examining its purpose. I hope to examine which techniques or processes were used in order to take literature to screen, and how despite being told through two very different mediums, the story remains similar.

above you say 'changes'

Research Question:

How does the filmmaker use cinematic techniques to translate the novel, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, onto screen?

Cinematic techniques

For a film adaptation of a book to be successful, the film need to be able to imitate the emotions, sound and pace created when reading the book. In the adaptation of 'We Need To Talk About Kevin', it is especially essential to use cinematic techniques to ensure the audience understands the movement of the storyline, the relationship between the characters and their characterisations. The cinematic techniques in this film are what allow the adaptation to be successful. This is because Lynne Ramsay has decided to stray away from Lionel Shriver's dialogue written, diary entry style novel, and told the story almost exclusively visually.

need to get beyond the general

Ramsay uses several examples of symbolism through visual or noise to create dramatic irony in order to foreshadow something to the audience. In the opening scene (see figure 1), the audience hears a sprinkler, and sees a white curtain. There is stark white lighting coming from behind the curtain, making the room where the camera is placed pitch black. The camera is moving towards the curtain (see figure 2) and the sprinkler sound crescendos, until the screen is completely immersed in white and the scenes switches to the present tense. The audience is confused and can draw no connection to this sound and visual- however it is foreshadowing that this scene will reappear and be explained. At 40:47, the sprinkler sound reappears- this time connected with Kevin misbehaving. As assumed, the first scene reappears with the sound of the sprinkler at 99:41, when Eva returns home after discovering that Kevin

killed his classmates with his bow and arrow. This time, as the noise crescendos, the camera goes beyond the curtain and the audience discovers Franklin and Celia's bodies. This completely shocks the audience, as throughout the film it seemed as though the relationship between Kevin and Franklin was good. The sprinkler was used as a symbol of remembrance of Eva discovering the bodies of her husband and daughter.

In both the film and the novel, Eva is the narrator and tells her side of the story in non-chronological order. In order for the audience to understand the change in time, Ramsay uses filters and colour. This is Ramsay's main technique in portraying Eva's emotional state at that particular time. For example, the scenes in which Eva learns of her son's massacre provide the audience with Eva's memory of it, which is vivid and slightly patchy- imitating the confusion. The lighting is dark, and it is filmed in slow motion. The lighting becomes red and flashing, imitating the police lights, creating an aggressive and panicky atmosphere (see figure 5). The mixed colour temperature created by the police lights adds to the chaos and suggests that Eva is feeling two-sided- she is asking herself if her son is alright but at the same time she is suppressing the suspicion that Kevin may not be the victim but the perpetrator. The sounds add to this, by being muffled- they are the shouting and screams of other bystanders outside the school, watching the injured or killed victims being wheeled out of the gym. These effects cleverly imitate Eva's emotional memory of the scene and visualise this, allowing the audience to feel the same. Starkly contrasting to this, the 'present day' scenes where Eva is attempting to live her own life is whitewashed with pastel colours and minimal colour. This creates an eerie, emotionless and almost ghostly setting, adding to the characterisation of Eva's character as hollow and lost to

reality. To create the situation of instability and muted insanity, the lighting contrasts her character's being at that moment, through mellow lighting, and upbeat country music. In the supermarket in this timeframe, the products are generically labelled, as are the name of the stores around her: the name of the travel agency she begins to work at is called 'Travel R Us'. This name was also used in the novel, and fabricated to look tacky. The setting of the new house in which the family move, in the suburbs, fits with the description in the book. The interior is vast, empty, white and cold. Even after they had been living there for some time, it has few pieces of furniture and remains cold and un-homely. The lighting is stark and white, with little music used to exaggerate the emptiness of the setting (see figure 3). This is made to contrast with the beginning scenes, where Eva is happy in her bohemian, city home. The scenes there are colourful, and full of life.

Because the novel and the story are told from the memories of Eva, the camera is kept at eye level. The camera is often pointed at a face, so the angle aids the audience in viewing the face as the main focus. Ramsay further emphasises that this is Eva's story by having the actress present in every scene apart from one. There are some close ups on faces which is generally paired with a crescendo of sound to discomfort the viewer and create suspense. Usually this suspense is averted and the next scene is calm. An example of a rolling close up can be seen in figure 10 where the audience discovers Kevin's passion for arrow shooting. After Kevin shoots perfectly, the camera zooms in on Kevin's eye which is reflecting the bullseye. The camera keeps going until it is completely black, which causes extreme discomfort in the viewer, as they are waiting for the zooming to stop but the shot is exaggerated and lengthy which make it out of proportion with the majority of other shots in the film.

Structure

The aspect that is most unique and particular about the novel and the film is the structure. The novel is written as a set of letters from Eva by 'memory', and so is fragmented and she remembers scenes in non-chronological order, as she attempts to find the cause of Kevin's psychotic personality. Similarly, the film is shot in parts that interconnect and follow the story non-linearly. Using cinematic techniques, these parts are distinguishable. Because of the distortion and the ever-changing timeframe of the development of the story, Eva's character is portrayed as confused and hectic as if attempting to piece together her snippets of memory from Kevin's life.

In both mediums of the story, the beginning is told very vaguely and the scenes are cut to leave the audience confused and wondering. Because it is told non-chronologically, it is impossible for the audience to understand what is meant by some scenes, or why an action is happening until they have read or watched further, when they can begin to piece together the scenes and create an actual timeframe themselves. For example, in the novel, 'Thursday' is used to refer to the day Kevin killed the people in the gym, however the readers are unaware of what Eva is referring to until they have read further. In an interview with the BBC, Ramsay describes the structure as 'its non-linear so she's piercing back all these memories, all these different aspects- some of them exaggerated... its very much filtered through her own eyes, about her own guilt and responsibility' (Ramsay). There are some very short scenes that are exaggerated to show that they are a distortion of her memory such as in figure 4 where she gets the call about the school massacre and feels as if all eyes are on her. Later in the present tense, this becomes a reality as people recognise her from the news.

In Ramsey's film, the use of mirroring and markers allow the audience to piece together information themselves, and anticipate what will happen in the next scene. The most chilling of these markers is the sprinkler. The repetitive hushing sound of the sprinkler is used when Eva remembers finding her husband and daughter shot dead in the garden by Kevin. It is used as the first scene and near the end. In the first scene, the visual accompanying the sound is the open garden door at night, with swishing white translucent curtains. As this is the first scene, it is unknown to the audience what it means and so remains a question in the back of the audience's mind until it is revealed, shocking them.

The time of each scene is visualised and compressed to symbolise the real-time length of each scene. The scenes of Eva attempting to interact and teach Kevin as a child are long and almost boring, which frustrates the audience- bringing them to understand Eva as a character. In contrast, the scenes where Eva learns of the massacre, and discovers that Kevin was the criminal, are short and hectic.

The story in both the film and novel are told ^{and so?} descriptively, ^{by?} with little conversation between the characters. This creates the sense that the audience is not viewing the actual memory, but the memory as a thought very personal to Eva. It seems when the camera is on her face, the audience is intended to see her emotions, and these may not have been actually displayed in the reality of the scene. When another character interacts with Eva, it feels like the scene is back to reality.

needs more clarity here

Characters

The film adaptation of 'We Need To Talk About Kevin' is heavily reliant on visuals and sound to convey the story. In order to make this most effective and representative of the novel, the characters must be thought through and actors must visually fit the role. As much as the individual characterisations make the story, the relationships between the characters are just as important- especially in this story where the point is to discover who is at fault for Kevin becoming a psychotic serial killer. Throughout the play, Eva describes her husband, Kevin and daughter, which is the only evidence of ^{their} character we get. Through telling the story and describing her thoughts and reactions, the audience can characterise Eva. *vague*

The relationship between Kevin and his father ^{is} are starkly different to that with his mother. He behaves completely differently as he is affectionate and converses with him. Throughout the majority of the play, the father does not understand why Eva is so exasperated with Kevin, as in his eyes, Kevin is well behaved. However, near the end we learn that this was all an act. Kevin snaps the day he goes to school to commit the genocide, and says how fake his father is and how he really has no interest in spending time with him. Eventually, the audience discovers that Kevin also murdered his father. This shocks and surprises the audience, as they genuinely believed that Kevin had a good relationship with him. *what to make of this?*

The focus in the film is majorly directed at the faces of the characters. This meant that casting was a very important aspect in the preparation of the film. Tilda Swinton was cast as Eva as she fits the description of her looks in the novel. Her face is generally stony throughout the film, after the time Kevin is born. She smiles very rarely which adds to the idea that after Kevin was born she has lost her personality.

There are some small details in the film that show the stagnation of Eva in her present tense when she wears the same dress to her office Christmas party as she did to her daughters birthday. As the film is partly based on the failures and inadequacies of verbal communication, Swinton's performance consists in the way that she deploys the angularity of her face and body to convey misgivings and trauma that are never spoken (Fisher). Tilda is in every scene apart from one for the purpose of telling a story through facial expression (Ramsay). Ezra Miller was cast as Kevin in his teenage years. Kevin stays very close to the description in the book with the costumes and characteristics. However, in he film he isn't portrayed as regretful as much as in the novel, where he returns his sister's glass eye to his mother- this means the film may be suggesting that some children may be inherently evil (Stern).

The casting director chose these two actors because of their similarities in appearance: the black eyes and straight black hair with their lanky tall figures. Shriver makes much of the parallels between Eva and Kevin, and some of the most memorable shots in the film position mother and son as doubles of one another (Fisher). In figure 6 and 7, Eva is visiting Kevin in prison. Neither of them attempts to communicate with each other. Kevin begins biting his fingernails; the camera is very close up to his mouth, and then cuts to him placing his nails in order on the table in front of him. Eva begins picking at her fingers but then immediately stops. Later, the audience discovers that this is a habit he has learned from his mother and is perhaps imitating this in order to aggravate her. In figure 8 and 9, this behaviour is seen in Eva when she is picking egg shells out of her mouth and lining them up on her plate. The camera angles are positioned exactly the same with the same sequence of shot length to imply the comparison of the characters. At 34:12 in the film, the two

characters are sitting in the exact same position on the floor in the new house. At

34:16, the scene jumps to them sitting in the same position at the prison.

and so?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main cinematic techniques used by Lynne Ramsay to transport the story told in the novel by Lionel Shriver to screen are lighting, camera angle, sound. The actors closely visualise the characters created by Lionel Shriver, and the scenes are cut and edited to form a distorted, non-chronological film, which closely resembles the format of story telling in the novel.

Unfortunately, due to lack of information available from Lynne Ramsay or any of the film team, it was impossible to investigate the reasons for the scenes chosen. Obviously, the novel had to be cut down in order to fit into a 1:51:68 hour-long movie so the film adapters had to pick out specific scenes to turn to screen, which must always involve a reason. In the case of We Need To Talk About Kevin, some scenes were concentrated, or snippets of information added so that the audience have a better understanding of the story. In Ramsay's style, most of this concentration of scenes was done through the use of sound- this adds even more sense of distortion to the audience who are viewing this story through the mind of Eva. However, the ending of the novel is very different to that of the film. In the novel, Kevin cracks and hugs his mother and is deeply regretful of his actions. He even returns his sister's glass eye in a case to Eva as a gesture of regret. In the film however, this scene never happens, and the audience is left with the idea that Kevin is completely evil and possesses very little empathy or regret.

The production of the film, We Need To Talk About Kevin, was intended to make an artistic piece of storytelling, by using audio and visual effects and techniques. The storytelling in the novel is told through a series of letters written by Eva to her deceased husband in a café by the prison where she visits Kevin after his

but the critical act is to make some judgments

arrests. However, despite the letters serving no literal purpose when addressed to her dead husband, it shows that Eva is grieving or suggests she may be slightly deranged. The retelling of Kevin's upbringing in the film serves no purpose and is just intended to show that Eva is reminded of her son's actions every waking moment. This means the story of Kevin is told through the memories of Eva: Ramsay uses this idea in her film through the use of dramatic irony in her sequence of scenes. Shriver uses a similar technique in the novel. To ensure the audience of the film understand which scene is in which time period (pre-Kevin, Kevin's childhood, school massacre, present), Ramsay uses specific lighting, setting and camera angle.

well, the conclusion does conclude what is covered in the essay - which describes the changes and choices in making the film - and how they are transferred. But there is very little that is evaluative of effect or significance. The cited sources might have helped with that.

Appendix

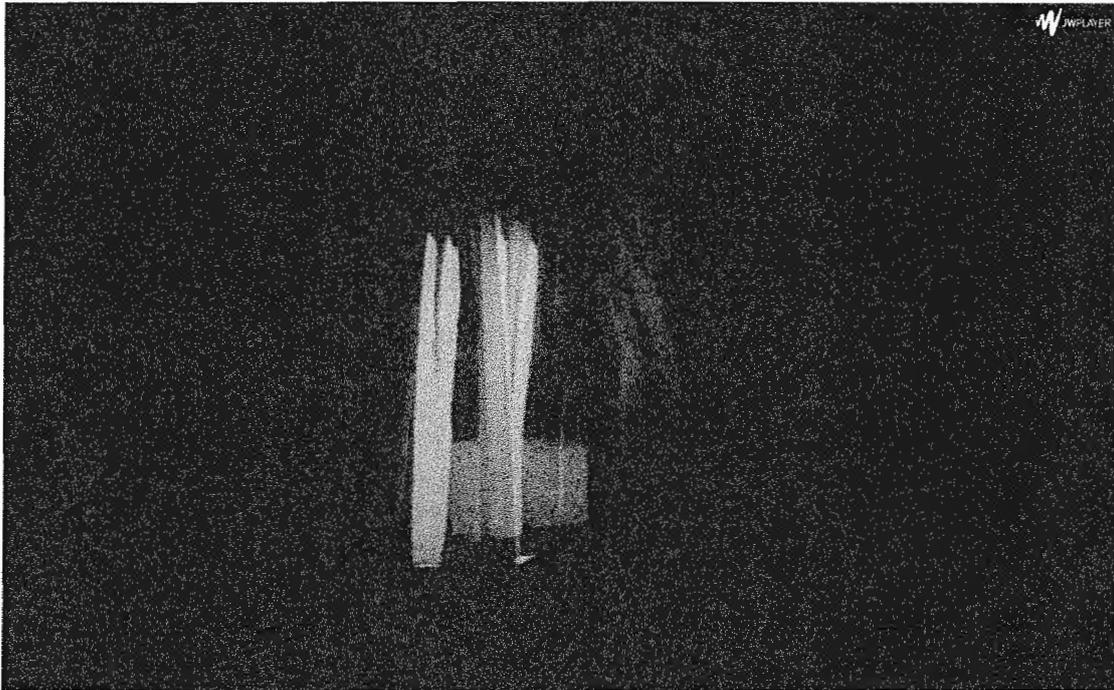


Figure 1



Figure 2

✓

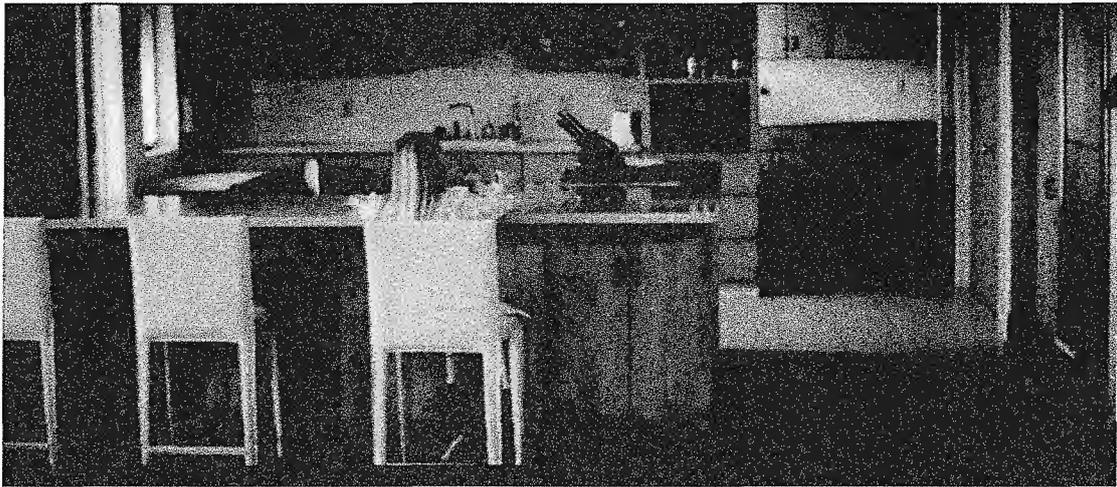


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

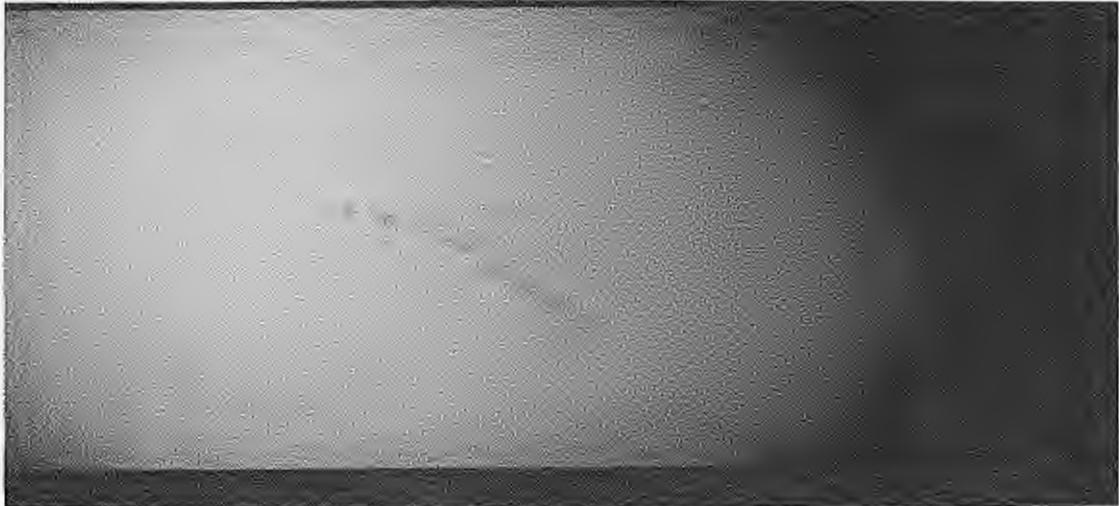


Figure 7

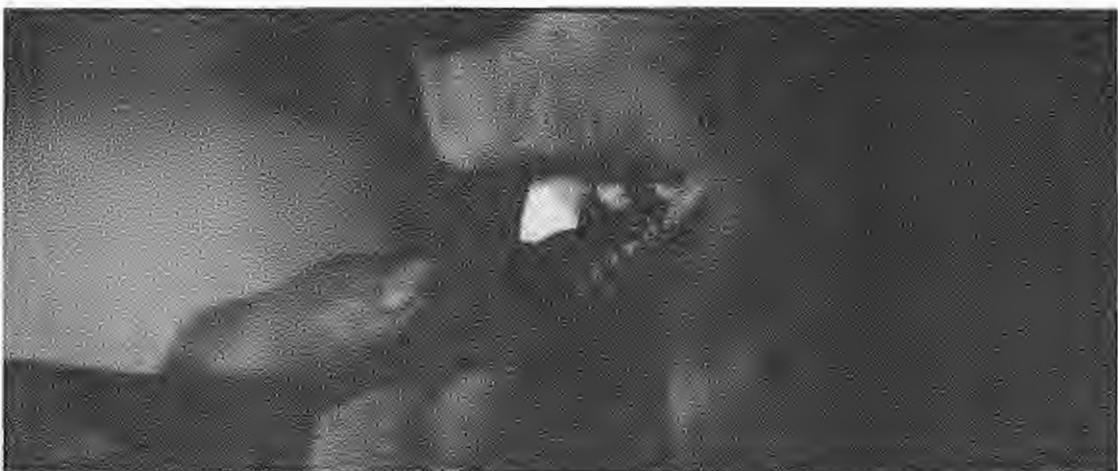


Figure 8

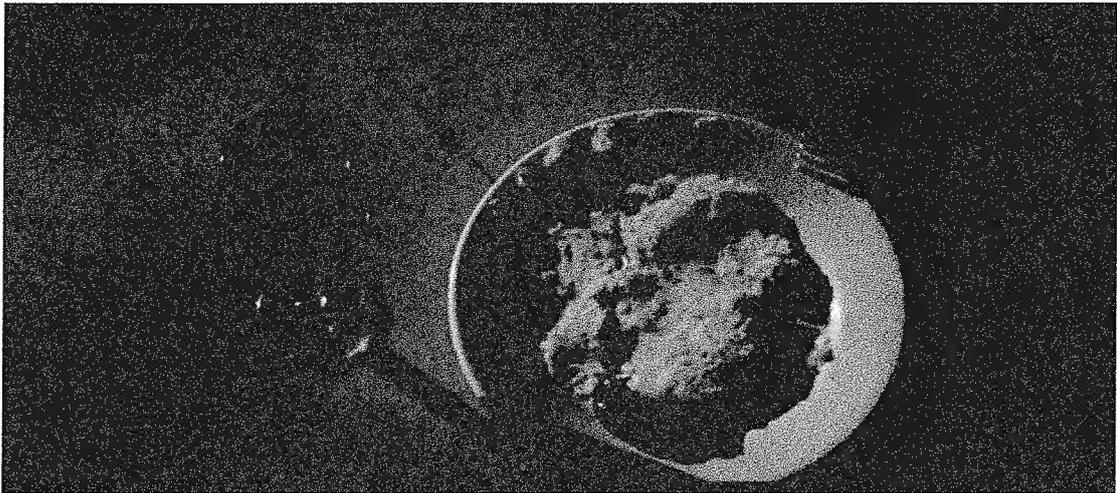


Figure 9



Figure 10

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