FILM / NOWE MEDIA / SZTUKI WIZUALNE

NR 26 (33) 2021 - ISSN 1730-7775 - CENA 21 PLN (W TYM 8% VAT)

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Editorial

The goal of this volume is to sketch a map of contemporary fiction film, to delineate its contours, to point out and describe its basic tendencies. There have been many more attempts of this kind in film studies. It is, perhaps a sign of a state of a certain confusion that contemporary film studies run into. Everything is on the move now, relatively safe and clear conceptual categories, mostly binary ones, like classical/unclassical, genre/auteur, art/commercial cinema, European/American, which organised thinking about cinema for a long time are not satisfactory to do this job any more, and new maps are necessary.

Our present endeavour sketches four groups of films: fast, puzzle, hybrid and slow. To our mind, these groups seem to express the most important tendencies of contemporary cinema, the most characteristic trends and directions of development. Fast cinema belongs to a big family of action films, of cinema-movement, and to its sub-class, cinema of spectacle, being their most evident and clear representative. Puzzle films share many of their features with modernist films, but also with classical film noir, to the point that sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference. Hybrid films belong to the long tradition of impure cinema, where cinematic qualities have mingled with borrowings from other arts, media and spheres. Slow cinema, apart from its own tradition harking back to Rosellini's films from the 1950s at least, also has links to other branches of modernist cinema, embodying perfectly the idea of "image time", which comes to the fore when the movement and the action die out.

The four styles depicted in this volume seem dominant in such a sense at least, that they attracted particularly big attention among movie goers and commentators, although they may differ with regard to the kind and scope of this attention. Fast cinema, which is inextricably linked to spectacle and attraction, has flourished in recent years more than ever, with the Marvel series and sequels, prequels or spin-offs of big blockbusters. Puzzle films and slow cinema have become probably the hottest topics in film studies debates of the last 15 years or so, which is testified to by innumerable books, papers, conferences and presentations. Hybridity can be regarded as a peculiar signum temporis of our time (we have hybrid wars, hybrid cars, even hybrid wax and nails) and also, in many disguises (such as, among others intermediality, intertextuality) it draws strong attention of film audiences and film studies.

The first part of this volume concerns fast films. **Carlo Comanducci** sees fast (and slow) cinema not in terms of thematic and formal velocity, but in terms of tensions between four kinds of temporality: diegetic, cinematic, narrative, and the temporality of reception. It turns out that "fast" cinema can be surprisingly slow, in an aesthetic sense (extensive use of slow motion), in terms of narration (in spectacular scenes of action the story almost freezes, it does not move forward), or ideological message ("the action cinema genre indeed hangs on a balance between the maximum of life-changing, and life-threatening action, and the maximum of preservation of the *status quo* in most of its senses"). What is most important is the relationship between the various elements of film form which determine "fastness" and "slowness" of a film, and not the relationship to any sort of external norm, be it established by fiat or by statistical analysis.

William Brown links speed with norification, that is a constant tendency in Hollywood cinema of the last 60 years to gradually darken the screen. So, the point of reference for Brown's philosophically minded essay is not the average speed of Hollywood film, but – if anything – the speed of light. Darkness is when the speed of light is exceeded, so the light does not manage to reach the recipient. A number of metaphors ensue from this equation. Cinema at the speed of darkness overcomes separation between people and the universe and brings about participation. Darkness opposes the logic of total illumination performed on behalf of control of the capital. It opens the human imagination to impossibilities. Cinema at the speed of darkness "ceases to be one that we can see, but rather one that we feel, it is a cinema of affect rather than cognition. Like in "Interstellar", the speed of darkness allows cinema to be a wormhole, which, connects us to different times and places and makes it possible to reach some neverworlds which enrich our own temporary world. A fascination with quantum physics is evident here, and indeed, Will Brown, its well known adherent, reaches for it, alongside the theories of Giorgio Agamben and others.

Filip Cieślak investigates an issue of spectacularity in modern cinema. At first sight it seems to refer to the old dispute over the relationship between cinema of attraction and cinema of narrational integrity. Although these issues are not new, Cieślak gives them a fresh tack. He does not refer new films to the classical ones, but makes a comparison between subsequent films from action cinema series, focusing especially on five series: *Die Hard, Predator, Mad Max, John Wick* and the *Fast and Furious.* Cieślak analyses quantitative and qualitative dimension of films from the series and on this basis he formulates certain generalisations concerning contemporary action cinema. He is far from seeking one

definite “yes” or “no” answer to the question whether spectacle has superseded narration. Indeed, such a generalisation would be preposterous, as it is plainly visible that contemporary films combine more or less peacefully narration and spectacularity. So, Cieślak does not ask the question whether spectacularity supplanted narration; he asks whether the relationship between these two dimensions has changed, and – if so – what the nature of this change is. His answer to the first question is positive. Yes, this relationship has changed. Spectacular scenes in most recent action films, at least from the analysed series, are longer, more condensed, occupy larger stretches of films; they take place simultaneously in various locations; they use a vast array of visual techniques. The price which is paid for this expansion of spectacle is a simplification of character psychology and narrative complexity, but not in comparison with spectacular films from the classical era – Cieślak does not employ this perspective at all – but in comparison with earlier films from each series.

The next mode described in this volume is called “puzzle”. It refers to what is probably the most hotly discussed phenomenon in film culture of the last 20 years or so, bearing many names, described, among others, by David Bordwell, Warren Buckland, Allan Cameron, Thomas Elsaesser, Steven Hven, Elfetheria Thanouli, Milos Kiss and Steven Willemsen, to name a few. What has fascinated the researchers was and is not merely the sudden flow of “difficult” films which confuse time, space and characters – such films happened before, although not in such a number. What was extraordinary was that this flow appeared not in the art-house niche, but within popular cinema, which was regarded as a stronghold of simple, easy-to grasp films. So, the question appeared, which many researchers attempted to answer, to what extent this wave is a new phenomenon, and to what it is a modified version of “business as usual”, that is well known and well-defined classical cinema.

Barbara Szczekała tackles the same issue as Filip Cieślak, that of the relationship between narration and spectacle, from yet another perspective. She focuses on the mutual influences of two strands of modern cinema: puzzle (or mind game) films on the one hand and spectacular blockbusters on the other. Traditionally placed on two sides of the commercial / art cinema division, here they come closer, mingle with each other. Szczekała points to the aspects of attraction in mind-game films and to the aspects of narrative complexity in spectacular blockbusters, but, above all, she insists that both kinds of cinema elicit the same kind of viewer response, which combine disorientation and some sort of affective discomfort, reminding of “ilinx”, a type of game described by Roger Calloix, which draws a participant into “a state of kinetic or mental chaos.”

Matthias Brütsch asks whether classical cinema should be the point of reference for essays on puzzle films and immediately answers that such a question suffers from a lack of methodological rigour, not least because of the diversity of the films under discussion. Therefore Brütsch limits his research to only one kind of puzzle films, in which a loop appears. Even within this limited scope he refrains from a definite conclusion, but rather takes an "in-between" stance, stating that loop films occupy a wide spectrum of narrative positions from classical mainstream to experimental complexity, as "the same basic time-loop device can be used to forge narrations which vary considerably in their adherence to or departure from classical norms of storytelling." The core of the essay is a set of tools for analysing loop films. It consists of twelve key features with two to three variables for each of them. Theoretically this could give a large number of types of loop, but Brütsch confines himself to only four types, conceding that more are possible. Brütsch also suggests a penchant of each type of loop for some kind of moral philosophy, as well as a film genre.

Seung-hoon Jeong's paper concerns yet another form of puzzle films, called most often "network narratives", analysed extensively, among others, by David Bordwell (2008). Yet Seung-hoon Jeong chooses a different path. His paper belongs to the most philosophically-minded in this volume. He draws on Agamben, Lacan, Foucault, Latour and other eminent philosophers. Network narratives usually present several protagonists inhabiting distinct yet interlocking storylines. What is characteristic of this type of narratives is the tension between chaos and unity. At first sight it seems that they present the world as a site of disparate characters, stories and events which do not make up any sensible whole. Yet, the idea of the whole, of some sort of higher order, which magically or metaphysically unite what seems to be dispersed, hovers over network narratives, either as an intended film message, or as a viewer's expectation. Seung-hoon Jeong examines this tension along a sociological axis. For him a rapid expansion of network narratives reflects an important sociological phenomenon, namely, a transition from community to network. Seung-hoon Jeong focuses on the notion of abjection, borrowed from Julia Kristeva, as a central theme. Along this axis he distinguishes three types of narrative, each of them expressing a different type of societal organisation. First, there is a type of narrative centred around a dominant father-figure "who controls a family, a city, an army, a religious group." This narrative is characteristic of a community, which nurtures the sense of belonging, membership, or nationality among the subjects and forming the boundary between inside and outside, 'us' and 'others,' our friends and enemies — the latter is the potential object of collective abjection. The next kind of narrative is what is usually regarded as typical network narrative – "several protagonists

inhabiting distinct yet interlocking storylines." Seung-hoon Jeong links this kind of narrative with globalisation and its paradoxes: globalisation forms a planetary system of inclusion, and yet it leaves many people behind, generating symptoms of exclusion. He calls this type of film "global network narratives". The third kind of narrative examined by Seung-hoon Jeong is called "*pure network narratives with free-floating agents*". Their characters are also "abjected", that is, excluded from society, but they do not strive for reintegration. These films are built around series of haphazard encounters and events, around aimless *flâneur* – like wanderings and philosophical discussions with various people on free will, metaphysics, situationism. "What matters is solely the continuity of "networking as a process rather than a map or figure," a process of navigational, performative movement liberated from any universal social model that enforces and rigidifies habitual modes of living".

The third part of this volume concerns "hybrid" films. Its natural juxtaposition would be "pure cinema", and a "medium specificity" argument (Carroll, 2008, pp. 35-52). Yet, one can hardly meet anybody today who would advocate a "pure" cinema. Since Bazin's famous defence of impurity in cinema at least (Bazin, 1951), and probably for much longer it has been obvious that cinema thrives on impurity (Rosen, 2014; Helman, Ostaszewski, 2007), in an atmosphere of intermediality, dialogues and exchanges among arts, traditions and cultures. Lucia Nagib and Anne Jerslev are more than right when they state that "the expression 'impure cinema' is a tautology, given cinema's very nature as a mixture of arts and media" and that cinema from its early days "never ceased to be defined as hybrid" (Nagib, Jerlev, 2014, p. XIX). So the question is not whether cinema is or is not impure, but rather, what kind of hybridity is particularly relevant to a given period. There were times when cinema was perceived most of all in combination with theatre (early years), music (the 20s) or literature (the 60s). In this volume we would like to focus on hybridity which is especially characteristic of our times, namely, to mixes of cinema and videogames, an intercinematic mix of live-action with animation, and a combination of comic strips with feature theatrical cinema. There can be no doubt that this kind of hybridity is specific to our times.

It is a cliché to say that videogames have exerted a great influence on contemporary visual culture in general and on feature films in particular, but the exact forms of this influence and its consequences demand ongoing scrutiny. **Warren Buckland** belongs to those researchers who consequently, in a series of papers published over many years, has investigated this issue. His paper in this volume on the one hand summarises his findings to date, while on the other, opens

up new paths for research. Buckland combines a focused, technical perspective, with a much wider breadth. From a technical standpoint, he lists 16 "rules of videogame logic" and shows how they are used in two films, *Source Code* and *Inception*. These two films are, for Buckland, exemplary instances of a hybrid narrative-videogame logic. This hybrid is one more consequence of digitalisation, for videogames are digital by nature. So, a hybrid of narrative and videogame logic is a by-product of an encounter of a tradition of cinematic narration, rooted in XIX century photography and literature, with new phenomenon of digital data-processing. This encounter, in turn, must lead to verification of the notion of realism, and to massive changes in designing and understanding fictional worlds, which do not obey the rules of mimesis and probability. A question can be asked, whether these films signify a transitory stage, where an old order, doomed to vanish, defends itself, trying to adapt to new circumstances, or do they prove that the state of a new equilibrium has been reached.

Another form of hybridity so prominent nowadays concerns an intersection of cinema and comic books. **Tomasz Żaglewski** attempts to explain the unprecedented success of MCU productions, their followers and imitators. In his account, the bedrock of this success was the decision to transfer to cinema a strategy launched by comic book producers in the late 50s / early 60s, which in essence meant a turn "from the 'serialised' to 'universe-alised' narrative model". Basic tools [ingredients] of this strategy, namely "reboot/retcon", "crossover" and "universe/multiverse", have co-mingled with convergence, transmediality and remediation, so characteristic of our times, and this combination produced a powerful explosive. Żaglewski depicts a history of this strategy in comic books, and subsequent early, unsuccessful attempts to adapt it to cinema. These attempts were, in his account, either not good enough, or not brave enough to succeed, but to my mind the real reason for their failure lay elsewhere. They were premature, the film audience was not yet prepared to embrace this form of narration, which essentially consists of rejection of an idea of a self-contained movie (which formed the basis of film experience throughout almost the whole history of cinema) and its replacement with an idea of all-encompassing inter- and transtextuality. In this form, "virgin" (i.e. uninitiated) audience members are sacrificed at the altar of an interconnected reading, once the domain of comic geeks, nowadays probably the most expansive habit of film viewing.

It can be said that the idea of a multiverse, where various timelines coexist, where past, present and future intermingle, where characters from many different comic books meet and interact, where various genres, such as sci-fi, fantasy, teen comedy, thriller and heist movies blend perfectly together, that such an idea

gives a final blow to the concepts of coherence, purity and medium specificity. The latter category, so cherished by film theorists and practitioners for the major part of film history, has also been undermined by another form of hybridity, which, by the way, occupies a prominent place in the *Avengers* franchise as well, but goes far beyond it: a combination of animation and live action. This phenomenon is discussed by **Michał Piepiórka.** For a long time animation and live action films were regarded as oppositional poles of cinema: the former being closer to fine arts, imagination and worlds of fantasy; the latter to photography and realism. Until recently they were kept apart and only exceptionally met in a film, on the screen. Nowadays, in times of digitality, such encounters have become easy to achieve and are very frequent, and a palette of their forms, meanings and possible usages have expanded. Each animation / live action encounter is in essence a form of a multiverse, where radically different worlds clash, meet, intersect, interact and/or intermingle. Piepiórka painstakingly lists and describes various types of relationships between them, pointing out, that while animation "still symbolises what is transcendent towards the world of live-action" and acts as a sign of what is what belongs to a distinct order, at the same time it intervenes in a known reality. Films which combine live action with animation are based if not on paradox, then at least on a constant tension: on the one hand, each form must manifest its distinctiveness and otherness; on the other, they must somehow cooperate, cohabitate and relate to each other.

Slow cinema, the topic of the last part of the volume, is at the other end of the spectrum from fast cinema, which opened the volume. Bipolar opposition seems to be more than natural here, with slow cinema as a form of image time (when action stops and we can experience purely optical or aural situations, juxtaposed to sensory-motor schema of image-movement; as a form of transcendental cinema of quasi-religious experience (Schrader, 2018; Stańczyk, 2019), juxtaposed with materialistic cinema of action; as a radical act of rebellion against the speed of the contemporary world; as a new embodiment of modernist, art house cinema (Syska, 2014), juxtaposed to commercial films; as a kingdom of boredom juxtaposed to constant, ceaseless and breath-taking attraction. The authors of this part of this book avoid these paths and search for other contexts and more diversified structures. **Thomas Elsaesser** puts slow cinema in a double context of cinema and museum on the one hand, and attention and distraction on the other. Both these pairs seem antagonistic and traditionally have been regarded as such. Moreover, they seem to create an antagonistic structure: cinema/distraction against museum/attention. And yet, Elsaesser takes pains to dismantle these oppositions. He proves that the mode of reception in museum and in cinema does not differ so much: in both places concentration of attention is recommend-

ed and in both many communal diversions interfere. Also, both institutions, for the most part of XX century kept apart, while in XXI century they have become close allies to the extent that it is almost impossible today to see a museum which does not make use of moving images. Likewise, the opposition between attention and distraction is being dismantled. Attention is not the opposite of distraction, but one possible mode of reception within the multi-tasking structure of perception in our society; distraction means an ability to concentrate partial attention on several objects or processes at the same time. This is exactly the structure into which Elsaesser puts slow cinema, as a channel of partial attention within a society, where distraction, multi-tasking and a sensory division of perceptual labour are the new normal.

Marta Stańczyk combines slow cinema with sensuous theory based upon the tradition of existential phenomenology. She focuses on rhythm in slow cinema, perceived through the prism of corporeal narratology. She, therefore, rejects theories in which rhythm is perceived as an external force imposed upon film from outside, particularly by editing, but also by music. Metric measures as a form of rhythm depiction are not convincing either. Rhythm is rather a matter of internal feeling and intuition. Slow cinema, in which all external forms of rhythmisation, such as editing, music and action are reduced, is the best tool for emphasizing a pure rhythm, which, in turn, corresponds to the internal rhythms of both filmmakers and viewers. In Stańczyk's "visceral rhythmology" an internal rhythm bonds films with bodies and leads to an embodied experience.

Mirosław Przylipiak in the last essay of the volume refers to Stańczyk when he polemicises with a view expressed, among others, by András Bálint Kovács, that slow cinema is anthropomorphic and it imitates regular human perception, because it is based on continuity of the human gaze. Przylipiak argues that the human gaze is not continuous and that long takes in slow movies are very far from resembling the way human perception works. In fact, they do not produce a reality effect, but rather a *verfremdung effect* which alienates the viewer. This *verfremdung effect* is not a goal in itself, but a "portal" through which slow movies are able to realize their potential in producing transcendental states in the viewers. Przylipiak supports this view with ideas drawn from Amédée Ayfre, Paul Schrader and Henri Bergson, taking as an example *Satantango* by Bela Tarr, an ultimate movie, which combines all of the tendencies discussed in this volume, not only being a paramount example of slow cinema, but also sharing some important characteristics with puzzle, hybrid and even fast movies.

So, four modes – or styles – which reflect dominant tendencies of contemporary cinema. And twelve essays, which reflect dominant approaches of contem-

porary academic writing about cinema. Film studies today display a penchant for philosophical contextualisation of aesthetic means and solutions. In addition, a system of binary thinking, in which a dominant side acts as a background and point of reference for subsidiary ones, is superseded by a model of multiple relations between many factors.

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Panoptikum 2021, 26:19-38 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.01

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Tachyons, tactility, drawing and withdrawing: cinema at the speed of darkness

As cognitive psychologist James Cutting and his colleagues have demonstrated, Hollywood cinema has over the last 75 years become 'quicker, faster, [and] darker' (see Cutting et al., 2011). The distinction between a quicker and a faster cinema is unclear, but as David Bordwell, Barry Salt and various other scholars have thoroughly identified, contemporary Hollywood cinema is indeed defined by a significantly faster cutting rate than classical Hollywood cinema, together with more motion on screen, more movement of the camera and a greater variety of focal lengths (films are more likely to cut between long shots and close ups rather than rest in the mid-range; see Salt, 2004; Bordwell, 2006, pp. 117-189). For this reason, Bordwell terms contemporary Hollywood cinema as a cinema of intensified continuity. Steven Shaviro, meanwhile, goes so far as to suggest that contemporary cinema moves so fast that continuity is lost, meaning that it is defined by 'post-continuity' as we see and hear a blur of images of images and sounds that are designed affectively to excite us more than necessarily to tell a coherent story (see Shaviro, 2010).

Where the speed of contemporary Hollywood cinema is well established, however, less has been said about the third term that Cutting et al. use to describe how Hollywood cinema has changed since the classical era, namely darkness. The darkening of mainstream cinema is in some senses counter-intuitive. For, during the first part of the period that Cutting and his team investigate (1940 to 2015), the transition from black and white to colour film would suggest

at the very least an early shift in the opposite direction (that is, from a darker to a lighter cinema), even if cinema has subsequently darkened again. What is more, the ongoing and increasing illumination of the world via electric lighting would equally suggest, as per the work of Wolfgang Schivelbusch (1995), that cinema has increased in its levels of illumination, since cinema involves images taken in, and often of, that same increasingly illuminated world. And yet, not only has cinema got darker in spite of our increasingly illuminated world, but it has done so in a relatively steady fashion – in spite of the shift from black and white film to colour and in spite of living in a world that, simply put, involves less darkness. Indeed, Cutting and his colleagues report that 'over the span from 1940 to 1960 the films in our sample changed from black and white to color, but there was no average difference between these two film classes grouped across those release years' (Cutting et al, 2011, p. 573). Furthermore, this change has been 'essentially linear' (Cutting et al, 2011, p. 574).

> Cutting and his team suggest
>
> several reasons for the long-term luminance decrease. First, analog[ue] film and its digital successor have increased their dynamic range, allowing for darker darks in a given image. Second, and also due to film stock, studio-era films needed to be shot under very bright lights, whereas for contemporary films that is no longer necessary[…] And third, a darker film in a dark theater allows for greater dynamic contrast, which in turn allows for better control over viewers' attention[…] and the potential of viewers seeing a film even more convincingly as an invisible window into the world in which the narrative takes place. (Cutting et al., 2011, p. 574)

This latter point – that darkness allows 'better control over viewers' attention' – is one to which we shall return shortly. But while Cutting and his colleagues give what amount to technological reasons for why mainstream Hollywood cinema is today darker than it was in the classical era (digital cameras and projectors have different sensitivities/sensibilities to analogue ones), I would like in this article to offer up a more philosophical, or film-philosophical, interpretation of why cinema is today darker than it was in previous eras. For, I shall suggest via detours into physics and philosophy that it is in the darkness of cinema, as opposed to in its light, that we can begin to grasp the nature of cinema and, more specifically, what cinema tells us about the nature of reality itself. That is, by considering how cinema is as dark as, if not more dark than, it is light, we can perhaps grasp how reality itself consists of far greater quantities of dark matter than it does reflective, visible matter. **The darkening of cinema, then, is a visualization of our growing realization**

of the darkness that surrounds us, a growing realization that can in turn be linked to a non-anthropocentric or posthuman turn in contemporary thought.

Writing with darkness?

In terms of its Greek etymology, cinematography means 'writing with movement,' while photography means 'writing with light.' Given that photography is at the basis of cinematography (in that films historically have involved photographs projected on to a screen at a rate of 24 per second), it should not require too great a leap of the imagination to say that light is as central to cinema as it is to photography, meaning that cinematography is as much writing with light as photography is, and that cinematography is as much writing with light as it is writing with movement. Indeed, light is generally perceived as essential to cinema, in that without light, no images would appear on film stock or on a digital sensor, meaning that we would end up watching black images in a darkened room, meaning that cinema-going would become an exercise in sitting in darkness rather watching images on a wall.

However, while we might think that cinema cannot exist without light, it is also worth remembering that darkness is an inherent part of cinema. Mary Ann Doane has written about how viewers of analogue films at the cinema sit in total darkness for about 40 per cent of the duration of a film as a result of the fact that in between the frames that we see, the shutter of the projector closes (Doane, 2002, p. 172). It may be that viewers do not consciously perceive these instants of total darkness, instead believing that they see a stream of continuous action on the screen before them. Nonetheless, this darkness is most certainly there. When Doane says that these moments of darkness are 'crucial to the representation of movement' (Doane, 2002, p. 172), however, she is perhaps mistaken, since the closing of the projector's shutter is not necessary for the representation of movement, but simply a technological limitation of movie projectors. That is, the representation of movement does not require moments of darkness; simply, movie projectors have to close their shutters between frames – with projectors in fact being designed to open and close their shutters fast enough for the image not to flicker, rather than projectors being designed to open and close their shutters fast enough for the image to represent movement (which seems to be Doane's implication; for a more detailed explanation, see Bordwell and Thompson, 2008, p. 10). Indeed, the removal of flickers is achieved by showing each frame twice in quick succession, i.e. by accelerating the speed at which the shutter opens and closes, and thus by increasing rather than decreasing the number of instants that a spectator is plunged into darkness during a film screening.

However, if on one level Doane is mistaken in suggesting that gaps/darkness are 'crucial to the representation of movement' – for there are projectors that do not require shutters – she nonetheless uses the way in which cinema hides this darkness to mount a critique of the medium. For, Doane argues that this making invisible of darkness/this removal of flicker by accelerating the rate at which images succeed each other mirrors the way in which cinema emphasizes an ideology of visibility, i.e. a cinema that does not present to us movement with gaps in it (instants of darkness) but a cinema that presents to us movement as if it were unbroken and/or whole (no gaps, since the darkness has become invisible/there is no flicker). Doane links this perceived plenitude (cinema presents to us a world without gaps) to the other ideological aspects of cinema, in particular as they relate to sexuality (since this world without gaps and flaws is straight, then straightness is flawless, suggesting that alternative sexualities are flawed).

If Doane is slightly misleading in suggesting that gaps are crucial to the representation of movement (in that they are only a structural necessity for analogue projectors, not for the representation of movement in general), we might nonetheless continue by adding that gaps are crucial to the perception of movement, and that by extension they are a crucial part of viewing films. For even if projection need not, human vision absolutely does need to involve moments not just of seeing, but also of not seeing. This comes in several forms, including sleep (during which humans switch off vision of the outside world in order to consolidate memories; see Hobson 1995), blinking (when momentarily we close our eyes, not least in order to moisten them so that they do not dry up and cease to function) and saccades (when our eyes move, and during which movements we do not take in visual information). As I have argued elsewhere, then, gaps in vision (which at least metaphorically I might call 'moments of darkness') are in fact crucial to the representation/perception of movement not on a screen, but in our brains – and to pretend that they are not is only to engage in a partial understanding of what vision is (see Brown 2018). In this way, even if projectors do not require shutters that open and close, that for a long time they did makes for an easy analogy between analogue film projection and vision itself. We do not see 'whole', and what 'wholeness' we do see is as a result of our brains 'filling in the gaps' of vision. Vision, therefore, is an active process that suggests entanglement with the world, rather than detachment from it (there is no 'detached observation').

Digital plenitude?

If the analogue projector must open and close its shutter in order to function, analogue cinema must plunge its viewers temporarily into darkness in order

to work. The same is not true, however, of digital projectors and/or screens. It does remain the case that digital projectors 'flicker' in order to produce images – but rather than a single shutter producing an instant of darkness, the digital projector is typically made up of *millions* of tiny mirrors that flicker at different speeds in order to produce the different picture elements (or pixels) that we see on screen, and each of which has a separate colour assigned to it any given moment (see Cubitt, 2014, pp. 217-221). Rather than all changing colour at the same time, though, the digital projector typically changes colour in waves, as do digital screens – which is why when you try to film a digital (or electronic, i.e. television) screen, you will sometimes see vague black shadows sweeping down that screen as it features in the image taken. What the camera is capturing is the flicker of the pixels – but as can be seen at such moments, only a certain array of pixels is changing colour at any given moment in time, not all of them at once. The result is that while some of the screen is technically in darkness at any given moment in time, the projection of light is on the whole continuous for digital and/or electronics projectors and screens.

In his masterly study of technologies of light, Sean Cubitt understands these processes of permanent illumination as being linked to mankind's desire to control light (Cubitt, 2014, p. 217). As Cubitt and Schivelbusch both outline, the control of light is a long-standing process that is linked to capital. For, with permanent illumination comes the possibility of permanent labour, greater productivity and thus greater potential for profits. This is not without profound consequences for humanity, in that permanent illumination deprives humans of one of the key experiences of existence, namely the experience of darkness. As Jules Michelet noted in 1845 following the development of bright public lighting: '[h]ere there is no darkness, into which thought can withdraw, here there are no shadowy corners in which the imagination can indulge its dreams. No illusion is possible in this light. Incessantly and mercilessly, it brings us back to reality' (quoted in Schivelbusch, 1995, p. 134). Writing of the contemporary age, Jonathan Crary similarly describes capital as working '24:7', such that there is no sleep, which, we might add in light of the necessity for sleep to form memories, means that there is no memory, no dreaming, and thus no possibility of a different future for humans outside of capital – because humans cannot imagine one: '[i]t is impermissible for there to be credible visible options of living outside the demands of 24/7 communication and consumption' (Crary, 2013, p. 50).

And yet, if we are living in a world of permanent illumination, what about the darkened room that is the cinema space itself? Schivelbusch suggests that 'a camp-fire in the light of day is as senseless, even invisible, as a film projected

in daylight' (Schivelbusch, 1995, p. 221). In other words, for the cinema to work, do we not *need* to see films in a darkened space – regardless of whether films themselves are getting darker or more bright? Again, however, we might counter this nostalgic evocation of classical cinema by remembering that in the digital era we now increasingly watch films in what Gabriele Pedullà calls 'broad daylight', for example out of choice on our computers and smartphones, and not out of choice on the increasing number of screens that surround us in our contemporary spaces. For Pedullà, the current era is characterized, then, by an 'exponential growth of entertainment offerings, the multiplication of stimuli, the prevalence of Pavlovian responses (and hence of the represented over the representation), [and] the impoverishment of empathy and consequently of catharsis' (Pedullà, 2012, p. 126). Singing from the same hymn sheet, Crary links the ubiquity of screen-based and audiovisual media to the growth of rates in autism as we shift from a world that featured darkness to a world of permanent illumination (Crary, 2013, pp. 85-86).

While darkness was indeed a technological necessity for cinema in the analogue age, and while gaps (sleeping and blinking) are structural necessities for vision itself, we now live in an era in which cinema is no longer confined to the black box, but instead becomes immanentized across urban and other spaces, and in which the lights never go out. Whither darkness in such an age of plenitude with regard to digital and electric light?

The spatialization of darkness

The pixel has replaced the frame as the smallest unit of cinema. In some senses, this means that the smallest unit of cinema has involved a shift of emphasis away from time (a frame that lasts 1/24th of a second) and towards space (millions of pixels on a screen at any one moment in time) – as Sean Cubitt has pointed out (Cubitt, 2004, p. 33; for more on the spatialization of time in the digital era, see also Manovich 2001). In the growing amount of darkness in contemporary Hollywood cinema, then, do we not also see that what was once a temporal phenomenon (sitting in darkness for about 40 per cent of a film's duration) has equally become a spatial phenomenon (greater areas of the screen are dark at any given moment in time)?

It is not that Hollywood cinema is devoid of original ideas and thoughts, and that Hollywood thus cannot help in the emancipation of the human – in terms of allowing the human to think, perhaps to remember, and thus to imagine a world different from that of 24:7 capital (indeed, arguing that Hollywood cinema in the digital era has the potential to help us to think, and in this sense

to ‘do philosophy’, is one of the main thrusts of my earlier work; see especially Brown 2013). However, if as Cutting has argued in a different essay that, from the perspective of viewer attention, ‘darker images give viewers fewer options of where to look’, then in some senses the darkening of the image functions as a means of increasing the control that images have over viewers (see Smith, Levin and Cutting, 2012, p. 109). That is, to create only a small area of the visual field that is illuminated serves to increase its salience, which perhaps is an important strategy for attracting attention in an era when viewers are not just looking at one screen (in broad daylight), but instead have their attention (at least potentially) distributed across numerous screens (for more on distributed attention, see Wood, 2007, p. 135).

It may be that artists like Scott Barley create films such as *Sleep Has Her House* (UK, 2017), in which we more or less permanently see darkness. What is more, it may be that we need to watch very dark films like *Sleep Has Her House* in darkness in order to see it, since under both natural and electric illumination the computer screen will simply reflect atmospheric light, making the images impossible to see. (It might also be worth noting in passing how when we do look at a dark computer screen in broad daylight, the image that becomes most salient is our own reflection, suggesting that the computer screen is – shades of Charlie Brooker – a ‘black mirror’. In this way, the digital screen does not open up to us vistas of a world beyond us, helping us to think in a less ego- and/or anthropocentric fashion; rather, it encloses us further within a world of self-absorption and solipsism; even when we can see light on the screen, perhaps we are really only ever looking at ourselves, as we similarly are under surveillance from the machine, which notes down what we watch for the purposes of targeting similar material at us again in the future.)

In contrast to *Sleep Has Her House*, the dark contemporary Hollywood film does not want us to look at the darkness. Instead, it wants us to look at the illuminated areas of the screen – and to ignore the darkness. While darkness may have become spatialized, then, it undergoes a similar occultation to the one it underwent in the analogue era, as per Doane’s analysis. What is more, is it really darkness if part of the screen is in light? That is, while the image may be darker, rarely if ever do we experience total darkness, except perhaps in pre-commodified flotation therapy boxes – where darkness functions as therapy to help us deal with permanent illumination, but which, in being precisely ‘therapy’, also justifies that illumination the rest of the time (which is not to mention how flotation chambers are the exclusive preserve of the wealthy – much like the increasingly expensive black box of cinema). On a related note, as screenings become increas-

ingly autism-friendly by keeping the house lights up for the duration of a film, is there not, after Crary, a feedback loop created whereby permanent illumination provokes autism, which in turn demands permanent illumination – not to assuage it, but precisely to perpetuate it?

The noirification of cinema

Influenced by German expressionism, made by many directors fleeing Germany, and produced in the aftermath of a war that ended when atomic light created traumatic moments of total illumination in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (see Lippit, 2005), *film noir* clearly functions as an important precursor to the growing darkness of contemporary cinema. If, as scholars like James Naremore (2008) have outlined, the darkness and mystery of *film noir* reflect not just a masculinity in crisis but also a growing sense of bewilderment with a world in which total illumination creates devastation, then the recent development of global *noir* would seem to reflect the globalization of permanent illumination, which as we have seen equates to the globalization of capital (for studies on global *noir*, see, *i. a.,* Pettey and Palmer, 2014; Shin and Gallagher, 2014).

With this in mind, we might interpret the 'darkening' of contemporary film narration as being connected to a widespread sense of disorientation with regard to the increasingly globalized and connected world that digitization has helped to bring about. Overwhelmed by information, the reliability of which is hard to ascertain, the darkness of contemporary Hollywood and other cinemas might be said to reflect the difficulty of achieving a steady subject position in the contemporary world – a difficulty that is mirrored in the narratives of many films in which the subject itself is unreliable (films in which protagonists are variously dead, inhabit a simulated or false world, or are not who they think they are or claim to be). In this way, we can easily tie the *noirification* of cinema to the rise of the contemporary 'mind-game' or 'puzzle' film that is a staple of contemporary Hollywood (see Elsaesser, 2009; Buckland, 2014).

The darkness in such films thus gives expression to uncertainty and disorientation in the post-truth era, in which alternative perspectives on reality (including those of 'minority' voices, such as the feminist, the queer, the postcolonial and the posthuman) have been deprived of their emancipatory potential in order for all perspectives now not to be equal in their difference, but instead to be deniable because of their difference, and thus ignored or, worse, annihilated. As I have suggested elsewhere, the darkening of the screen thus becomes once again not an opening up to difference, but a narrowing of vision, as we concentrate only on the illuminated areas of the screen (much as we concentrate only on the visible

aspects of the world), and ignore the darkened areas, even though the darkness is right there before us, hidden, as it were, in plain sight (see Brown, 2014).

The *noirification* of cinema reflects, then, the way in which swathes of the world are shamelessly excluded and rendered invisible (even if in other senses those swathes are also under the permanent illumination of 24:7 labour). Furthermore, this *noirification* also reflects the way in which light becomes something not to be shared around, but something threatened by darkness and thus to be protected. With darkness as something to fear, the darkened screens of contemporary Hollywood thus serve to reinforce the logic of permanent illumination, or what Doane refers to as visibility – while at the same time occulting through (unsustainable!) denial those who remain invisible to the workings of contemporary global capital (unsustainable because one cannot deny except through shamelessness what is clearly there for all to see, namely the rendering invisible of large swathes of the planet). Light is not to be shared around; rather, darkness is a threat to be destroyed. Rather than a move away from (nuclear) war, then, the *noirification* of contemporary Hollywood cinema suggests a move towards it: the blinding light that will end the darkness – not through democratization, but through enslavement to labour under permanent illumination and the destruction of thought that takes place as no new memories can be formed or alternative ways of thinking developed. Again, the darkness of contemporary mainstream cinema is not something that we might embrace and enjoy, as per Barley's experimental film; it is rather a technique used to narrow attention, to increase control, to minimize thought, and to perpetuate the 'enlightenment' logic of capital.

Cutting and his team mention how 'by far' the darkest film that they found in their survey was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* (dir. David Yates, UK/USA, 2010), the penultimate film in the initial *Harry Potter* cycle (see Cutting et al., 2011, p. 574). The *Harry Potter* films in fact have a relatively ambivalent relationship with darkness, in that the stories do not simply posit darkness as evil and light as good – as happens in, say, the *Star Wars* franchise. In spite of his name, and the initial belief that he is a bad guy, Sirius Black (Gary Oldman), for example, turns out to be a good guy. Meanwhile, the Deluminator that Albus Dumbledore (Michael Gambon) bequeathes in the film to Ron Weasley (Rupert Grint) is a tool that does not create light, but rather absorbs it in order to cover its user in darkness. Nonetheless, visually the film (and others in the franchise) regularly feature light-emitting wands and other devices that help illuminate the wizards as they move through darkness, with Lumos being a common spell cast to help the protagonists to see, while evil creatures like De-

mentors extinguish light sources in order to attack under cover of, and in some senses with, darkness.

In this way, darkness regularly does feature as a threat in the *Harry Potter* films, with the darkness naturally increasing towards the end of the franchise as the protagonists necessarily face their biggest challenge/experience their most precarious situation yet. If there is a rising trend in global *noir*, and if horror remains a staple of Hollywood's output, it stands to reason that darkness increases in contemporary cinema, especially darkness-as-threat. But as cinema becomes dominated by franchises, which must indeed involve ever-greater threats to humanity/their heroes as each film bids to outdo the last, then it is only logical for films to get visually (and thematically?) darker. What is more, the dominance of outer space as a component of the *mise-en-scène* in that other Hollywood blockbuster staple, the science fiction film, equally means that darkness will be a regular feature of the screen.

Depictions of outer space may suggest a posthuman and/or non-anthropocentric perspective, in that we are reminded of our rare and precarious position in the universe. But while this may be so, a film like *Gravity* (dir. Alfonso Cuarón, UK/USA, 2013) is in some ways also about the threat posed by the darkness of space to Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) as she endeavours to find her way back from outer space and on to Earth. Furthermore, while the *Star Wars* films also feature much space travel, not only is the so-called Dark Side figured as a threat to those who would use the famous Force as a tool for good, but we also see how the films are about the control of light for the purposes of defeating darkness. This comes not just in the form of laser beams, which, as examples of Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation, mean that each blaster in the franchise is a kind of mini nuclear weapon. It also, by the time of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (dir. Rian Johnson, USA, 2017), comes in the form of the deliberate weaponization of the series' famous light speed travel capabilities as Vice Admiral Holdo (Laura Dern) flies her rebel ship through attacking First Order vehicles at light speed in order to split them in half. An impressive set piece within the film, this use of light as a weapon, nonetheless signifies the logic in the film of the control of light for the purposes of eradicating darkness as a threat.

Notably, in the original *Star Wars* movies, achieving light speed was something that the Millennium Falcon regularly failed to do, meaning that the protagonists often struggled to get where they needed to go. Meanwhile, in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (dir. J. J. Abrams, USA, 2015), not only is light speed readily possible, but it is also deployed in the film both as a means of immediate escape (the Millennium Falcon jumps straight into light speed from within

the Eravana in order to escape attacking Guavians, Kanjiklub and rathtars) and as a means of immediate attack (the Millennium Falcon enters the atmosphere of the Starkiller Base planet at light speed towards the end of the film). That is, these sequences suggest not only that light has become more easily controlled, but that light speed logically demands the eradication of empty/'dead' time, in which heroes solve problems, as the film prefers instead to jump simply from action set piece to action set piece. In other words, light is associated with speed and movement as a means also to ward off darkness and death – through the eradication, or the making invisible, of gaps in the action. This in turn suggests that the franchise is driven by a logic of visibility, even if many scenes feature darkness in the *mise-en-scène* in the form of outer space.

Having suggested that contemporary Hollywood cinema employs darkness as a means paradoxically to reinforce the dominance and the domination of light, I wish now to change tack, and to suggest that we can still wrestle something philosophically progressive from the darkened screens of contemporary Hollywood cinema – something that might help us not shamelessly to declare ourselves separate from the world, but to understand our entangled nature with it and with our fellow human beings. We shall do this by looking at the physics of light and darkness and by considering darkness not just as a spatial phenomenon that we can see in the *mise-en-scène* of many contemporary films, but also as a temporal phenomenon that has its own speed.

Faster than light

'Why should we be at all interested in the obscurity that emanates from the epoch?' asks Giorgio Agamben (2009, p. 45). For Agamben, the answer to this question lies in his argument that to be able to perceive the obscurity and darkness of any given era is more properly to understand it. Properly to understand an epoch is for Agamben to be *contemporary* with it: '[t]he contemporary is he who firmly holds his gaze on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness. All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity' (Agamben, 2009, p. 44).

We can perhaps read Agamben's sense of the contemporary as simply being the ability to see through the hype that typically circulates in any era promoting it as the best era that the world has ever seen. Rather than being uniquely brilliant (shining, luminescent), all eras in fact have a dark side – and the contemporary is thus simply someone who sees and understands this: '[t]he ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be

blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity' (Agamben 2009, p. 45). More pertinent to the present discussion, however, is the link that Agamben makes between the perception of darkness and both physiology and physics.

The absence of light, writes Agamben,

> activates a series of peripheral cells in the retina called 'off-cells'. When activated, these cells produce the particular kind of vision that we call darkness. Darkness is not, therefore, a privative notion (the simple absence of light, or something like nonvision) but rather the result of the activity of 'off-cells', a product of our own retina. This means […] that to perceive this darkness is not a form of inertia or of passivity, but rather implies an activity and a singular ability. (Agamben, 2009, pp. 44-45)

For Agamben, to perceive darkness is an act of participation, or what we shall refer to shortly as entanglement.

Agamben goes on to query why the night sky exists, in that if there are that many stars in the universe, then the night sky should be filled uniquely with the light from stars, thereby meaning that there would be no darkness, but instead total and permanent illumination – albeit at different times from different sources (from the sun during the day and from a multitude of other stars during what we typically refer to as the night). The reason why we have darkness, however, is because

> the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the heavens is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light. (Agamben, 2009, p. 46)

For Agamben, the contemporary perceives this light that cannot reach us in the darkness that otherwise surrounds us – at a time when the light that can reach us is used to drown out that same darkness. If you will, the contemporary is able to see not just her own time, but also the times of other galaxies that will never make contact with ours.

Now, Agamben is useful for two reasons, which I hope to show are interlinked. Firstly, he is useful for suggesting that the perception of darkness is an active process that suggests entanglement with, rather than estrangement from, nature (darkness is not just 'out there'; it is also partially 'created' by the physiology of the perceiver via off-cells; if darkness is both out there and in the perceiver, this sug-

gests that the 'out there' and the perceiver are connected with each other, i.e. entangled). And secondly, he is useful for suggesting the possibility that some things move faster than light. This latter is in particular important, since, as we shall see, light is generally considered to be the limit of speed. That is, nothing moves faster than light – and so to posit that something does is in effect to posit the impossible.

Perhaps we can get at this impossibility, however, by considering that light exists both as particles and as waves (photons), while darkness does not have a material existence. I should (pun hard to avoid) 'highlight' a difference here between darkness, dark matter and dark energy, although in some senses the latter two are conceptually useful for this essay. Dark matter accounts for '85 percent of the matter in the Universe, while ordinary matter – such as that contained in stars, gas, and people – constitutes only 15 percent' (Randall, 2015, p. xiii). Dark matter is not dark so much as simply indifferent towards light, which does not affect it when they meet (Randall, 2015, p. 6). But even if dark matter does not interact with light in any way that humans can currently measure, dark matter is nonetheless still matter. Dark energy, meanwhile, has no material existence in that it is simply energy and not matter, even if like dark matter, dark energy is spread evenly throughout the universe (and accounts for about 70 per cent of the universe's energy density; see Randall, 2015, p. 8). In that 'billions of dark matter particles pass through each of us every second' (Randall, 2015, p. 3), and in that 'dark energy density – energy not carried by particles or matter – remains constant' (Randall, 2015, p. 8), both dark matter and dark energy are conceptually useful here, since they tell us that there are invisible substances (dark matter) and forces (dark energy) that surround us, which constitute not only an important but perhaps even the majority of the matter and energy in our universe (85 per cent of matter is dark matter; 70 per cent of energy is dark energy), and yet which we cannot see.

Nonetheless, neither dark matter nor dark energy is quite the same as the darkness that I wish to describe/define here, in that here I want to use the term darkness to refer to that which lies outside or beyond the speed of light. That is, if light is the limit of speed, and yet if galaxies are moving away from us at speeds that are faster than that of light (since the light from those galaxies cannot/does not reach us), then how are we to account for, or to describe, that speed? To move at a speed faster than that of light is, I shall suggest, to move at the speed of darkness.

The speed of darkness

Particles that move faster than light, typically referred to as tachyons, are to the best of our knowledge only hypothetical and not real. Indeed, physicist Lisa

Randall suggests that if a theory of the universe contains a tachyon, then it is by definition incomplete (see Randall, 2006, p. 286). Whether or not incompleteness is in fact a structural necessity in our universe à la Kurt Gödel's famous incompleteness theorem, in which something that is unprovable can still be true (see Penrose, 1989, pp. 138-141), remains beyond the scope of this essay. Nonetheless, I want to work at least conceptually with the tachyon, since if the tachyon were to exist, it would not be visible to us. But more than this, if tachyons were to exist, then they would simultaneously always be receding from our field of view (because moving faster than light, they would always be moving away from us) while at the same time always acting as an ever-thinner but always existing veil between us and the light that we do see (because the darkness would by definition of its faster-than-light speed have pre-existed the light and thus always already be there).

Now, it may seem ridiculous (or an intellectual imposture) to hypothesize something that is thought not to exist (even if being unprovable does not mean that it does not exist). And yet, in always existing as a veil between us and that which we do see, while also always moving away from us, the invisible tachyon – be it unreal, non-existent or otherwise – is always withdrawing, much like the galaxies that Agamben describes. While light comes towards us, darkness always recedes from view while also always remaining invisibly within view. In always withdrawing, darkness requires us actively to imagine it, in the process suggesting not only the role that the mind plays in the construction of reality, but also the way in which the human and the universe are entangled rather than being divorced and separate the one from the other.

If the preceding discussion of tachyons is too speculative, however, we can use some more established physics in order to push the argument further. For while it is accepted that light is the 'fastest' phenomenon in the known universe, there nonetheless remain unilluminated aspects of the physical universe that defy light as the limit of speed – and which convey the interconnected nature of matter in the contemporary universe. For example, polarized particles have been proven simultaneously to respond to stimuli – at a speed faster than it would take light to travel from one particle to the other, a phenomenon that baffled Albert Einstein, who referred to this process as 'spooky action at a distance' (see Zeilinger, 2003). This spooky action at a distance would seem to affirm what Karen Barad (2007) might refer to as the entangled nature of all matter, in that matter is connected across space and time in a fashion that suggests a universe not of separation but of what physicist Niels Bohr called complementarity. Where Werner Heisenberg famously identified that an observer affects the result of an experi-

ment (for example, determining whether a photon is a particle or a wave), such that we can never be certain as to the 'true' nature of a photon (the so-called 'uncertainty principle'), Bohr suggested that there is no true measure beyond the human, and that the uncertainty, or rather the way in which the human affects the experiment, is, as it were, the truth. In other words, for Bohr, humans are not fundamentally excluded from reality, but entangled with it; the two are in this way complementary.

Tachyons do not solve the riddle of spooky action at a distance. Nonetheless, the two have in common the idea of faster than light movement, or what I am calling the speed of darkness. Notably, this spooky action has been demonstrated as taking place not just across space at speeds that are faster than light, but also across time. 'Quantum steering into the past' involves photons affecting each other's behaviour in the past from the present, and thus also from the past and into the future (see Ma et al., 2012; Megidish et al., 2013). In other words, spooky action at a distance would suggest that information can cross space at a speed that is faster than light – and at a speed that also goes against our everyday understanding of time. If you will, like the tachyon that is always withdrawing while also remaining in the same place, quantum entanglement suggests a universe in which information, like galaxies, withdraws from us, while at the same time remaining connected to us – much like a wormhole connects spaces and times that according to our anthropocentric dimensions are impossibly far apart.

Indeed, it is important to note that the so-called Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen (EPR) pairs, which are the spooky pairs of entangled particles discussed above, have of late been equated precisely with wormholes, which are also referred to as Einstein-Rosen (ER) bridges, and which, as mentioned, connect distant points in space and time. Proposing that 'ER = EPR,' physicists Juan Maldacena and Leonard Susskind suggest a new understanding of black holes as possibly being, or connecting to, wormholes. Originally, black holes were understood to be phenomena that are so dense, and which thus have such a strong gravitation pull, that no information nor light can escape from them (hence their blackness). However, since black holes 'evaporate', clearly they give off some information, which after Stephen Hawking is referred as Hawking radiation. Maldacena and Susskind effectively suggest that the Hawking radiation is connected to its parent black hole via wormholes, which could in certain circumstances be traversable and which also are consistent with quantum entanglement (see Maldacena and Susskind, 2013; Wolchover, 2017). In other words, the universe is woven together across both time and space via a whole physics that exists beyond the realm of light and in the realm of darkness.

It is not simply that films like *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1997) and *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, USA/UK, 2014) depict wormholes and/or information (including in the form of humans) passing through a black hole (in the latter film with the help of a tesseract, or a cube consisting of not three but four dimensions). More importantly, it is that we can read the darkening of contemporary Hollywood cinema as a cinema that visualizes through darkness these alternative speeds that exist beyond, or outside of the speed of light.

Existing beyond or outside of the speed of light, the darkness of contemporary Hollywood cinema is in this way a digitally-enabled phenomenon that pushes up against the limits of cinema itself. For if cinema is the control of light (for the purposes of controlling attention), then the incipient darkness of cinema suggests cinema's outside, or the non-cinematic. The darkness suggests cinema withdrawing, while perhaps also remaining before us (we are still seeing films, but cinema perhaps hastens away from us). Or put differently: a cinema that moves beyond the speed of light is a cinema that ceases to be one that we can see, but rather one that we feel. That is, after Shaviro, it is a post-cinema of affect rather than cognition, a cinema of tachyons that is tactile rather than uniquely visible. In the era less of the kino-eye and more of what Lev Manovich calls the digital kino-brush (Manovich, 2001, pp. 307-308), it is a cinema not of photographic representation, but a cinema of digital painting, or drawing. As drawing necessarily entails entanglement, in that the artist must actively make the drawing rather than 'objectively' take the photograph, so does the darkness of contemporary digital cinema suggest 'withness' through drawing, a with-drawing that equally suggests our entanglement with the image, as we come to recognize rather than to overlook its darkness, and to recognize how the darkness complements the light, rather than seeking to extinguish the darkness for the purposes of the light. Furthermore, cinema is perhaps itself a wormhole, a machine that connects us to different times and places existing in galaxies and universes that are not our own, and which we could not reach except via wormholes since they are withdrawing from us too rapidly to get there via the speed of light. These times and places are not real, but they perhaps are complementary to and entangled with our own. In this way, a darkened cinema suggests that our universe consists of darknesses and gaps that are unprovable, but which are in other senses true, or real. Fiction is, as it were, as true as reality; ours is a poetic as much as a scientific universe, with cinema perhaps always synthesizing the two.

We live in an era characterized by communication at the speed of light and 24:7 labour. Light has been controlled for the purposes of capital. To get outside of this era of light, we must enter and embrace the darkness. To move faster

than light is perhaps not really to move at all; while I have written of the 'speed' of darkness, perhaps darkness exists more in a realm outside of speed and thus outside of time. If for Gilles Deleuze the time-image was a means for cinema to counter the controlling effects of the medium, it did so by showing time, or by showing that light itself is the limit of time (see Deleuze, 2005). As we move towards a cinema that is not cinema, as we move towards darkness, we must in some senses move beyond Deleuze and beyond the time-image. Indeed, we must move towards what Andrew Culp might term a 'dark Deleuze': '[t]here are those who have hitherto only enlightened the world in various ways; the point is to darken it' (Culp, 2016, p. 14). The point, then, might be to create a non-image cinema, or a non-cinema.

At the start of *Sleep Has Her House*, titles explain how the last few humans withdraw into the forest at the end of times, thereby inviting us to contemplate and to embrace the darkness. Meanwhile, in contemporary Hollywood cinema and in the global *noirification* of cinema more generally, it would seem that the darkness that rises is a darkness that is subjugated to light for the purposes of controlling attention for the purposes of perpetuating capital. That is, darkness is here a threat to the digitally-enabled, 24:7 culture of permanent illumination and must be extinguished, or at the very least rendered as a threat so that its constitutional/structural necessity remains overlooked and so that exploitation can continue to happen unabated. However, the rising of the darkness would also suggest the unsustainability of permanent light and thus of capital – with the digital also enabling this increased darkness, suggesting perhaps not only the internal contradictions of capitalism in the digital age, but also the way in which the digital era sees capitalism come up against its own limits. Regardless of the role that darkness plays in the individual stories that contemporary Hollywood plays out to us (i.e. regardless of where cinema's different wormholes lead us), the rise of darkness in contemporary Hollywood demonstrates how the struggle for our very future is played out on the different screens of contemporary audiovisual culture. May the darkness always co-exist with, rather than be subjugated to, the light. And may it connect us to and entangle us with other worlds and realities – worlds that never existed and which show us the neverlands and the neverseas outside of time, and which prop up the capitalist world that exists within our time. For, these neverworlds will enrich our own temporary world in ways that the permanent illumination and the relentless exploitation of capitalism, which does not sleep and so which does not dream, could by definition never dream of.

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Abstract

Longitudinal, quantitative analyses of cinema have established how Hollywood is getting 'quicker, faster, darker'. While in some senses the 'intensified continuity' of contemporary Hollywood narration is a given, the increased darkness of contemporary mainstream cinema remains unexplored – especially with regard to how its speed and its darkness might be inter-related. If to darken the majority of the screen during a film helps to draw our attention to the salient aspects of the image that are better illuminated, then of course this also allows for a faster cutting rate: in principle, there is 'less' information for the viewer to have to take in during each shot, meaning that the film can then cut to subsequent images more rapidly.

However, there are other ways in which we can interpret this 'darkening' of contemporary film narration. For example, it perhaps ties in with a widespread sense of disorientation with regard to the increasingly globalized and connected world that digitization has helped to bring about, and which is equally reflected in the rise of the contemporary 'mind-game' or 'puzzle' film that is a staple of contemporary Hollywood. The darkness in such films thus gives expression to uncertainty and disorientation.

More than this, though, we might use physics to understand the darkness of contemporary cinema in a more 'meta-physical' fashion. While it is accepted that light is the 'fastest' phenomenon in the known universe, there nonetheless remain unilluminated aspects of the physical universe that defy light as the limit of speed – and which convey the interconnected nature of matter in the contemporary universe. For example, polarized particles have been proven simultaneously to respond to stimuli – at a speed faster than it would take light to travel from one particle to the other, a phenomenon that baffled Albert Einstein, who referred to this process as 'spooky action at a distance'. Not only does this process suggest what Karen Barad might refer to as the entangled nature of all matter, but it also suggests speeds beyond, or at least different, to that of light. In this essay, then, I shall theorise a 'speed of darkness' that can help us to understand how the darkening of contemporary cinema ties in with the interconnected, invisible ('spooky') and ultra-rapid nature of the digital world. Perhaps it is not in the light but in the darkness that we can identify the key to understanding contemporary mainstream cinema and the globalized, digital world that produces it.

Key words: speed cinema, tactility, darkness

Panoptikum 2020, 26:39-60 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.02

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How Fast is Furious The Discourse of Fast Cinema in Question

> 'who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed'
>
> Allen Ginsberg, 'Howl'

The notion of fast cinema may seem to be too intuitive to need any formal definition. Often enough, 'fast cinema' is taken as the largely untheorised ground against which definitions of slow cinema are given (as noted, for instance, by Grønstad 2016, p. 122), or else the idea of fastness is given a different and more specific definition in terms of hyper- or post-continuity style (Shaviro 2010, pp. 123, 263). Somewhat retroactively, then, the notion of 'fast cinema' seems to depend on – at least in some respects – the aesthetics and critical positions of slow cinema: as Lúcia Nagib writes, 'the idea of "slow cinema" carries within it a politics. It suggests the existence of a "fast cinema" against which it posits itself as an advantageous alternative' (Nagib 2016, p. 26).

Considered in its articulation with an idea of 'slow' cinema, the label 'fast cinema' suggests three characteristics: fast-paced action, hyperkinetic cinematic style, and irreflexive consumption. Not only does fast cinema suggest these three characteristics, however, it also suggests that they directly correspond to each other so that, in a 'fast' film, fast-paced action would be seamlessly rendered through 'fast' cinematic enunciation and this rendering would necessarily result in an escapist, ready-to-consume film product. It is more by this correspondence,

I think, than by any of these elements on its own that a certain understanding of fast cinema is established.

Against this understanding, I want to argue that the impression of fastness and that of slowness are both the matter of a tension between different temporalities and a complex combination of heterogeneous film elements, and that the articulation of 'fast' and 'slow' cinema itself depends less on the formal characteristics of different kinds of film than on a disciplinary understanding of spectatorship, which pretends to derive from these formal characteristics different and unequal forms of film experience.

Fast and loose

The quickness with which we recognise 'fast cinema' and the looseness of its definition suggest that the concept is being used not merely as a label but also as a consensual category. By 'consensus' I mean here a special sort of tautology: a self-explanatory but non-informative coincidence between how something is classified and how it is supposed to work. The concept, in this sense, is central to Jacques Rancière's theory of politics and his critique of the disciplinary logic. Steven Corcoran aptly synthesized Rancière's thought on this issue by defining consensus as an agreement of sense with sense: 'the essence of consensus', he writes, '[...] is the supposition of an identity between sense and sense, between a fact and its interpretation, between speech and its account, between a factual status and an assignation of rights, etc.' (see Rancière 2010, p. 2). To argue against 'fast cinema' as a consensual category, then, means to question the alignment between quick action, dynamic enunciation, and irreflexive consumption that the term implies, and eventually to question the discursive and political implications that this very alignment subtends.

Starting from these premises, I found it useful to distinguish between four kinds of temporality (cfr. Doane 2002, pp. 30, 108-109, 131, 189): diegetic temporality, cinematic temporality, narrative temporality and the temporality of reception. Diegetic temporality would be the temporality of the constructed fiction, time as it exists in the fictional world presented by the film. Cinematic temporality – which Doane calls 'filmic time' and defines in correlation with 'profilmic time' or 'what is generally thought to be our everyday lived experience of time' (Ibid., p. 172) – would name the time, tempo, and rhythm of cinematic enunciation, in all its different codes. Narrative temporality would be the unfolding and timing of narration, which is of course a part of cinematic temporality, but that still plays against other aspects of cinematic enunciation as a privileged code in ways that are significant to the present argument, so that I think

it makes sense to set it apart from the others in this context. The temporality of reception, finally, would refer to the time and the temporal aspects of spectatorial practices before, during, and after the moment of the film's projection. These four kinds of temporality individuate a field of tensions that can then be used to problematize the concept of 'fast cinema', as well as the consensual articulation of 'fast' and 'slow' films and their spectators.

The present article concentrates on three significant junctures within this field of tensions. First, the use of slow motion in 'fast' films, which can be taken as a starting point to question the direct correspondence between 'fast' techniques and 'fast cinema' as a whole. Slow motion can also be used to highlight how films labelled as 'fast' often use meta-cinematic forms of remediation that can be seen to produce a kind of dynamic duration. Second, the trope of the race, which I discuss briefly to problematize the conflation of 'fast' cinema with, on the one hand, 'fast' narration and, on the other, thematic velocity. Finally, the idea of fast-food film consumption, which reinforces the identification of popular culture with mass culture and the distinction between contemplative and irreflexive modes of spectatorship that still underscores the articulation of 'slow' and 'fast' cinema.

In this last respect, Doane critically addresses a tendency to conflate the temporality of the apparatus itself – 'linear, irreversible, *mechanical*' (Ibid., p. 30) – with the temporality of the spectators' reception as part of a 'regimentation of time in modernity' (Ibid., p. 108): it is precisely on this kind of assumption that a consensual understanding of 'fast' and 'slow' cinema is founded and, as such, a challenge to this articulation is also a challenge to the idea that a temporality of the apparatus exists in itself, as an onto-technological property of the medium or as the ground for a classifiable series of cinematic techniques, rather than being a retrospective and discursive effect of films and ways of talking about them.

Slow-motion and spectacular remediation

Slow motion is a prominent feature of 'fast' cinema. A technique developed from overcranking, it creates the impression of decelerated time through an increased frame-rate of recording: as a technical device, slow motion establishes a tension between what Doane calls filmic and profilmic time and, as a textual element, it expands cinematic time in relation to diegetic time.

Slow motion can thus be taken as the technical figure of the complex rather than simple temporality that is often involved in the production of a sense of 'fastness' and dynamism in cinema. Even though velocity and speed are often

expressed through the various techniques of intensified continuity described by David Bordwell (2002, p. 121) like rapid editing, tight framing, smash cuts, quick montage or hectic or shaky camera movements, the use of slow motion in many 'fast' films shows that a correspondence of diegetic and cinematic speed, fast-paced action and dynamic film enunciation, is not the only or the decisive element for an understanding of 'fast' cinema.

Rather than a correspondence between the temporality of enunciation and the dynamic intensity of the action, what we have in 'fast' films is more often a tension between different temporalities. In this section, parallel to some examples of the use of slow motion to represent and signify 'fast' action, I want to focus on how this tension often acquires a meta-cinematic quality in connection with digital video remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1996, p. 339), eventually addressing and manipulating reality itself in cinematic terms.

In a scene from *xXx: The Return of Xander Cage* (Caruso, USA 2017) a man jump-kicks the rider of a speeding motorcycle and takes his place on the seat after having performed a series of acrobatics, all in one swift move. At that moment, the film flow slows down in a clearly perceivable, although not overstated, way. Such scenes are countless in 'fast' films, and even a case like this, in which the slow motion effect is minimal, can be taken to linger on the duration of an action through a specifically cinematic temporality, establishing what we can call a dynamic duration.

This kind of scenes is interesting because what we see in them is, arguably, also a purely cinematic modality of action whose main reality is cinematic slow motion and spectacular remediation. Even if the stunt were actually performed live in front of an audience, this would be an action made to be filmed and (re-) experienced as cinema – magnified, repeated, spatially re-located on a screen, as well as temporally remediated through video.

We can take the Disneyland Paris *Moteurs... Action!* [1] show as a case study of this 'slow' aesthetics of fast action and some of its links with remediation. The origins of the stunts performedin the show is already wholly cinematic (we have typical action movie car chases in a stereotyped French village and, even more clearly, characters from the *Cars* franchise) and the excitement consists precisely in bringing them off of the screen and into reality (figure 1). On the one hand, the show acknowledges the specific value of a 'live' and unmediated presence by freezing the screen on an image of a speed meter during its initial segment and some of

[1] The title is a pun on the French version of the expression 'light, camera, action!' ('*moteur, ça turne, action!'*), which includes the word 'engine', already suggesting that what is at stake is a series of exchanges between a specifically cinematic reality and the profilmic reality of racing cars.

the following stunts. Immediately after, however, the stunts are shown again on the screen, re-experienced in close-up and commented upon. In later segments, stunts appearing on-stage are represented on screen from multiple perspectives (figure 2), explicitly directing the attention of the audience to the use of slow motion and the addition of sound effects, which make them more cinematic. Coherently with Bolter and Grusin's argument, the thrill of immediacy is given through hyper- and re-mediation (Bolter and Grusin 1996, p. 313) and also depends on a considerable, and very much staged, expansion of the temporality of reception.

Figure 1 - Out of the screen, onto the stage… and back.

The very device employed in this Disneyland Paris show appears in some action films, where a particularly intense moment of an action scene can be presented more than once, from different angles. At minute 8 of the first film in the *xXx* series (dir. Cohen, USA 2002), for instance, we see the main character Xander Cage (Vin Diesel) jumping from a car he has just driven off a bridge and open a parachute at least three times. The action is framed from more than ten angles (some of them corresponding to cameras in the diegesis), going over it multiple times. This way of expanding cinematic time and of multiplying our angles of vision clearly establishes this and similar scenes as moments of spectacular contemplation (figure 3). Again, the time of enunciation is actually expanded and the characteristically 'fast' effect happens together with the fore-grounding of spectacular remediation: even in the diegesis, the action is given to be recorded and consumed as a spectacle.

Figure 2 - Spectacular remediation.

One distinctive case of the use of slow-motion to signify and sustain fast action lies at the interface between video games and cinema: it is the so-called 'bullet time' popularised by films like *The Matrix* (dir. Wachowski and Wachowski, USA 1999) and video-games like *Max Payne* (Remedy Entertainment, USA 2001), in which time is slowed down to the point that we can perceive bullets slowly travelling toward their target. In the neo-noir game, the bullet-time

Figure 3 - All of it, again and again…

function can be triggered by either having the character leap in one direction (the action is called 'shootdodge' in the game manual)[2] or while the character is standing still. In either case, when bullet-time is activated, everything in the game-world except the mouse cursor (which acts as the pointer for the player's vi-

[2] See page 18. https://www.scribd.com/document/285367893/Max-Payne-PC-Manual

sion and for Max Payne's weapons) and the orientation of Payne's body (which is directly tied to the movement of the crosshair) moves in slow motion, granting the player an 'ultra-fast' capacity to aim accurately. Bullet-time acquires its functionality and aesthetics through the contrast between two temporalities – in this case, the time of 'reception' or, better, of interaction is expanded in relation to diegetic time – and this tension becomes painfully clear in the quick contortions of the character's body, which inhabits two temporalities at once in relation to the game world[3]. The video game arguably does respect the 'truism' noted by Erin Maclean in a recent conference paper (Maclean 2021, p. 1), which sees the conventional construction of masculinity as a matter of speed, but, coherently

Figure 4 - Apocalyptic and integrated.

with Maclean's broader problematisation[4], does not do it simply by increasing the pace of gaming. The intensity of the action actually integrates 'fast' and 'slow' elements that cannot be completely parsed. What seems to define *Max Payne*'s celebrated dynamic is precisely a contrast of temporalities that becomes functional to the interaction of the player with the diegetic world.

Bullet time is now a function smoothly integrated in many action titles. Hideo Kojima's *Death Stranding* from 2019 is a particularly fitting example for,

[3] Were the player controls to be slowed down as well, bullet-time would lose most of its functionality and become a merely decorative, and potentially annoying, gimmick.

[4] 'I ultimately find this association [between fast pace and masculinity] is taken at face value in news and some academic literature about the shooter genre when speed alone says little about a videogame's machismo' (Maclean 2021, p. 2).

among other things, it also clearly thematises 'slow' duration: the game, a distant Amazon-age offspring of the 1997 film *The Postman*, features very long delivery treks in a post-apocalyptic and hypermediated landscape (figure 4). This is done, again, through a combination of 'slow' and 'fast' temporalities: walking in the game is emphatically slow from the point of view of the players' experience, but space is compressed in such a way that the character covers incredible distances in a very short diegetic time (several hundred miles in a few minutes).

Another interesting example of a manipulation of diegetic time in cinema can be found in Guy Ritchie's film adaptation of Conan Doyle's detective (*Sherlock Holmes*, UK and USA 2009): Sherlock's uncommon capacities of mind are rendered in action sequences that are outlined in voice-over and anticipate visually what the character is about to do. While diegetic time is highly compressed in respect to cinematic time (the sequences are supposed to last but an instant in the diegesis), the flow of the film's enunciation is sped up and slowed down at appropriate moments to better visualise Sherlock's thinking and the actions he is planning to perform. When the plan is actually carried out by the character, the action is shown in real-time and adheres to a more classic temporality and style of cinematic enunciation. In cases such as this, there is a sense in which the cinematic enunciation plays with the diegetic world as if it were cinematic – that is, as if our experience of the world were manipulable in cinematic terms. The same is true, I think, for Christopher Nolan's recent time-buster *Tenet* (USA and UK 2020) which is clearly less about time travel than about exploring some of the potential implications of the use of the 'reverse' video function on the very fabric of reality – or, in other words, it is a cinematic speculation on the ontology of 'reverse' remediation[5].

As a final example of the use of slow motion in the coding of a 'fast' temporality, we can take the characteristic movement of the enraged in *28 Days Later* (dir. D. Boyle, UK 2002). Their frantic, broken, and unnaturally fast gesticulation was likely obtained through an effect that combines slow-motion capture, frame-skipping, and sped-up flow (see Hunter and Boyle 2011: p. 80). This way of representing the infected codes as a purely filmic kind of bodily movement the equivalence between media virality and the biological contagion which was already established at the beginning of the film in more traditional terms, when

[5] Though *Caché* and *Happy End* also address this, both versions of Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* can be considered a very direct reflection on some of the ethical and political implications of this kind of spectacular remediation. Also, in Emmanuel Dreux's 'Où la charrue tire ses boeufs: Du movement inversé dans le cinéma comique et burlesque' ['A cart pulling its horse: Of inverted movement in comic and burlesque cinema'] we can find an interesting discussion, after Paul Emmanuel's Odin, of the implication between the power to construct and deconstruct reality and the reversing of temporality in early cinema.

Figure 5 - Human-machine interface.

images of social, political, and religious violence marked as 'other' and 'foreign' were shown to be part of the animal experiments that result in the outbreak. In a further turn, these are also the elements through which the film re-actualizes old colonial logics and extreme far-right discourses about the origins of violence and the strategies for its containment (Attenwell, pp. 177-179).

The most distinctive scenes from *Crank* (dir. Neveldine and Taylor, USA 2006) and *Crank: High Voltage* (dir. Neveldine and Taylor, USA 2009) can be taken as an example of a correspondence between intense action and a high-speed camera work and chaotic cinematic enunciation which, though not exclusive or dominant, is nevertheless common in 'fast' films. Around minute 15 of *High Voltage*, for instance, Chev Chelios (Jason Statham, who was discovered and launched by Danny Boyle in *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* in 1998) jump-starts his mechanical heart connecting the crocodile-clips of a car battery to his tongue and nipple: in order to signify the following surge of energy (figure 5), the film employs a flurry of scratch video effects including flickering, very quick series of shots from slightly different points of view, short rewind sequences, frame skipping, camera-shaking digital effects, colorisation, blurring and superimposition of shots, almost imperceptibly short freeze-frames, digital 'undercranking', odd camera angles, disorienting micro camera movements, and possibly more. These 'fast' sequences are frequent enough in the film, but remain episodic attractions, firmly set in a narrative structure that remains conventional and not especially fast-paced, and taking place in an overarching temporal pro-

gression that remains perfectly linear: more than this, they can only function when in relation to other, slower-paced, temporally linear, scenes. Action films are indeed a careful alternation of the 'fast' and at times fragmented temporality of action scenes and a narrative progression that, in contrast, can appear as relatively slow: by the standards of the industry, an entire film shot exclusively in the style of *Crank*'s action scenes would hardly qualify as a film.

From this perspective, David Bordwell's 'intensified continuity' (2002, p. 121) and, arguably, even Steven Shaviro's 'post-continuity' – of which he takes *Crank* to be the best example (Shaviro 2010: p. 123) – can be taken to describe a progressive integration of 'fast' and kinetically complex techniques in classical overall structures of temporality and narration rather than an actual disruption of the dominant form of narrative cinema. In this respect, then, the thematisation of narration, continuity, and temporality in films like *Memento* (dir. Ch. Nolan, USA 2000), *Tenet*, or even *Sherlock Holmes*, though not subverting the format of the narrative film, is much more interesting. What I find most distinctive of a film like *Crank*, in the end, is not so much the combination of high-speed complexity and narrative continuity we can find there, but the equivalence it stages between action stunts and remediation: a becoming indistinct of the gestures of recording and those of acrobatic action in what could be called 'camera stunts'.

Dynamic duration

In the 2003 Korean film *Oldboy*'s famous corridor fight scene (dir. P. Chan-wook, Korea 2003), a continuous take and very slow camera movements enhance, by counterpoint, the pace of the action. As Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik) fights an excessive number of opponents, the camera frames the corridor rather statically from one of the long sides, slowly travelling back and forth following the action in a single tracking shot: it is through framing and through a constant rhythmical variation in the choreographed fighting that the scene successfully conveys the impression of nerve-wracking violent action (figure 6). In this respect, the scene is combining elements of the 'slow' aesthetic of duration with elements clearly belonging to the sidescroller video game format. That the intensity of the fight is the matter of establishing tensions and contrasts in temporality can be easily shown by comparing the sequence in the Korean film with the same sequence in the 2013 remake (*Old Boy*, Lee, USA 2013), which reproduces the original scene by using an upbeat and more complex choreography, more levels and more articulate camera movements, rather than through a tight framing of the shot. If Matthew Flanagan called 'de-dramatization' the 'draining emotional distance and narrative obfuscation' provoked by 'extended duration within the

Figure 6 - Slow intensity.

shot' (2008), we can take this sequence from Spike Lee's *Old Boy* as an example of dramatisation: it is through the quality of the gestures and through the articulation of the shots that the scene acquires its intensity. We could classify Park Chan-wook's scene as 'slow', compared to Spike Lee's, because it uses a single take, slow camera movements, and duration. But does it make sense to do so, especially given that the former is generally considered to be much more energetic and effective than the latter?

As Laura Rascaroli has compellingly argued in a recent chapter that puts a special emphasis on the role of framing in establishing filmic temporality (Rascaroli 2020, p. 219), this temporality actually depends on the combination of a variety of factors, 'incorporating cinematic, as well as painterly, techniques,' and drawing on 'narrative, *mise en scène*, performance and choreography, as well as cultural references,' and I would add sound and music. So that, on the one hand, positing a direct correspondence between 'fast' cinema and specific techniques would risk to overlook the greater variety of elements involved in the construction of temporality in single cases and, on the other, greatly emphasizing one of these elements over others may fall short of an effective combination, or analysis, of the whole.

In the bullet-time scenes from *The Matrix*, for example, not only time is slowed down, but the trajectories of the bullets are visually emphasized: without this incongruous – pictorial, more than cinematic – element of the enunciation, a large part of the effect would be lost. Films like *The Fast and the Furious*, as well, frequently give us shots of the speed meter, instead of using a take of a car driving at that actual speed; or else, the speed of the car is signified, through shaking camera movements, sparks, trailing lights, objects caught in the cars'

slipstream, passersby leaping away, enhanced noises, engines steaming unnaturally or becoming red with heat, and other similar effects. In the first race scene in *Fast & Furious 8, The Fate of the Furious* (USA 2017), the main character Don Toretto (Vin Diesel) finds himself racing the slowest car in Cuba against the fastest. Before they even start their engines, speed and lack of it are already explicitly foregrounded in the dialogue and connoted, heavy handedly, through

Figure 7 – Alright, we get it.

the way the cars look (figure 7). Once the race starts, other connotative elements are used to signify the cars' speed: most strikingly, Toretto's engine starts to glow as it heats up and eventually goes on fire. Because the flames are licking his face as he accelerates for the final rush – the wind-shield having been broken earlier during the race – Toretto decides to spin the car around and chase his opponent in reverse drive, providing in this way another indirect representation of incredible speed. Together with all the other details, the emphasis on the car's slowness before the beginning of the race becomes functional in the overstatement of Toretto's own 'speed' and ability as a driver at the end. All in all, we can say that what is characteristic of fast cinema is less a direct correspondence between fast diegetic action and fast techniques of enunciation than the foregrounding of a tension between diegetic time and the temporality of cinematic enunciation, and less a direct representation of velocity than its connotatively and/or metacinematically emphasized signification.

This is true for 'slow' films as it is for 'fast' ones. Neil Archer has pointed out a similar reductionist approach in the definition and analysis of 'slow' cinema, for example in relation to sound (2016, p. 131). The definition of 'slow' film tends to zero on the tension between the temporality of the cinematic enuncia-

tion and that of narrative progression through long takes and duration, which are understood to expand the temporality of reception to an excess that invites meditation or discomfort (see De Luca 2016, 29). This 'core belief in the long take,' writes Archer, is 'worth interrogating, mainly for its failure to recognize the possibilities of a fast cinema, and indeed the culture of speed, within its own terms' (Archer 2016, p. 131). Nothing bars this culture, indeed, from 'slow' temporalities of reception: in episode six, season one, of *Altered Carbon* (Alex Graves, dir. USA 2018) we have a very fast, beautifully choreographed and executed katana fight scene, shot without any slow motion and with little emphasis on camera movements. The result may give the impression that some details may have been lost and thus invites re-watching: in this case, as in many others of this kind, the temporality of reception can become meditative in the form of re-play.

In many respects 'slow' films can be perceived to be 'faster' and can often present more high-speed complexity than many films that are classified as 'fast'. One of the very few films I actually felt compelled to stop from time to time because it was 'going too fast' was *My Winnipeg* by Guy Maddin (Canada 2007), which has a very fast montage and spoken a narration that would warrant its inclusion in Thompson's category of high-speed complexity, but clearly does not meet other, more apparent, criteria which define what fast cinema is supposed to be (like thematic velocity and the connection with irreflexive consumption) and so it is not likely to be perceived as a 'fast' film. *My Winnipeg* is indeed coherent with Archer's appraisal of 'fast talking in slow movies,' as he puts it (Ibid., p. 132), as well as with the general idea of a counterpoint of temporalities that

Figure 8 - Framing and duration.

I am arguing for. In the case of Park Chan-wook's *Old Boy*, a 'slow' temporality of enunciation is used to intensify the pace of an action scene which was not in itself as fast and dynamic as in Spike Lee's remake. In the case of *My Winnipeg*, instead, we see how a use of fast montage and of a fast-paced voice-over narration may be put to the service of a contemplative film about remembrance.

Arrested action

In classical narration, film time tends to be shorter than the real-time duration of the narrated events, as well as shorter than the entire time lapse that the narration covers. Cinematic enunciation tends to eliminate unnecessary attention to the diegetic duration of certain gestures, like climbing or descending several flights of stairs for example, to the advantage of an effective economy of narrative time: narrative temporality usually takes over diegetic temporality in regulating cinematic enunciation. For a similar purpose, cinematic enunciation tends to cut into the integrity of diegetic time, putting actions that are distant in diegetic time closer in the time of narration, even when they are respecting the real-time duration of the profilmic events. Alterations in this conventional and precarious equilibrium may result in a sensation of intensified temporality both in the case of 'slow' cinema (see De Luca 2016, p. 30) and in that of 'fast' cinema.

In 'slow' cinema, the impression of slowness seems to be produced by an exact correspondence of diegetic time, cinematic time, and the time of narration. A good example could be the final scene of *Stray Dogs* by Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan and France, 2013), in which the camera keeps framing a wall after one of the characters has passed by. In the long static sequence that follows, we find foregrounded the pure passing of time: cinematic time unfolds together with absent narration and, in turn, seems to expand the time of reception (figure 8).

But the exact matching between diegetic and cinematic temporality can also be foregrounded as an element in a 'fast' aesthetics. In *Run Lola Run* (*Lola Rennt*, dir. Tykwer, 1998) – a film which is indicated as an example of high-speed-complexity cinema by Thompson (2011, p. 4) – we are given three alternative outcomes of a story in which the main character Lola (Franka Potenti) has 20 minutes to find 100.000 Marks in order to save her boyfriend, who is about to be killed by the mobster to whom the money is due. Each sequence of events lasts exactly 20 minutes in diegetic time and in the time of narration, and yet the film is not supposed to be 'slow' at all. True, it is not exactly shot in real-time: there are minimal discrepancies between these two temporalities that take place within the temporality of enunciation. For instance, there are cuts when Lola runs from a place to another: this allows to 'make screen time' in order to integrate

different points of view in the film's timeframe, without apparently breaking the exact correspondence of narrative and fictional time. We also have moments in which the title character is running in slow motion and which, again, break up the perfect correspondence of diegetic time and the time of narration. I doubt, however, that these 'infractions' alone are enough to produce the impression of fast-paced action that the film is often mentioned for. Another example is Jerzy Skolimowski's film *11 Minutes* (2015), which lasts 81 minutes. This happens because it presents different narrative lines taking place simultaneously in different places, so that narrative time exceeds diegetic time, without this having any specific relation to the pace of cinematic enunciation, so that the film does not seem to fit in either the 'slow' or the 'fast' category. *Run Lola Run*, instead, comes through as 'fast' probably just because it thematises its cinematic temporality while simultaneously sporting some high-speed complexity and being about running and running out of time.

Figure 9 - Fast money?

Indeed, one of the strongest elements in the consensual definition of fast cinema, surely the most direct and often the deciding one, remains thematic velocity. With fast cars in *The Fast and the Furious*, every kind of fast vehicle in *xXx*, drug or electricity-induced action in *Crank* and so on, we see how films are identified as fast because they foreground their presentation of quick and high-powered action. The consensual idea of fast cinema, then, links the represented velocity with hyperkinetic forms of cinematographic enunciation, *Crank* being the most 'consensual' fast film in this sense, since what is fast in the diegesis and quick in the montage is also matched by stunt-like camera work. Here, I would like to spend a few words to question the assumed correspondence between diegetic and thematic velocity.

More specifically, I would to ask what can it mean, especially in the context of hypermediation, that the theme of velocity in 'fast' films is addressed through the trope of the race. Is the link between hypermediation and high-speed racing really so immediate? And is it an alignment of velocity and hypermediation, or is it rather their contrast, that defines the temporality of our times?

As we have seen, velocity and action in 'fast' cinema are not necessarily matched, as thematic elements, by fast-paced narrative flow and, as diegetic elements, by either fast montage or quick camera movements. From the point of view of narration, in particular, action-packed scenes are in many ways moments of stillness: the car chase represents very well the tension, mediated by a specific theme and a particular style of enunciation, between diegetic velocity and the lack of narrative progression. In races, narrative progression is halted, or at least rarefied: from a narrative standpoint, they are long attraction-like build-ups to their decisive conclusion.

Figure 10 - 'Something will happen ... to correct the acceleration of time.'

In *2 Fast 2 Furious* (Singleton, USA 2003), the characters are asked to prove their driving abilities by racing to a police impound lot to retrieve an envelope full of money. If we step back just a little form the film's premises, this feels hopelessly out-dated: a roll of cash in a car, no matter how souped-up the car is, is hardly the fastest way to move money today (figure 9). With globalisation and the digital revolution, in fact, we are confronted with an intensification and a compression of temporalities so momentous that it has become a phenomenon of an altogether different order than that of speed. If modernity could define

itself in terms of velocity and acceleration, post-modernity is a matter of immediacy and ubiquitousness: its temporality cannot be rendered in vectors.

If anything, the temporality which is proper of the hypermediated world is less that of a car race, than that of cars stuck in traffic. We can evoke here the image of the billionaire's limo blocked inside an anti-globalist demonstration (figure 10), or creeping ever so slowly across New York City all while being connected in real time with every bit of information in the world, in Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis* (2003) and David Cronenberg's cinematographic adaptation (Canada 2012). J.G. Ballard, echoed a few years later in a famous passage in Michael Herr's *Dispatches*[6], had already metaphorized late modernity as an gigantic traffic jam in which the entire energy of an age was being revved away:

> 'We had entered an immense traffic jam. From the junction of the motorway and Western Avenue to the ascent ramp of the flyover the traffic lanes were packed with vehicles [...]. The enormous energy of the twentieth century, enough to drive the planet into a new orbit around a happier star, was being expended to maintain this immense motionless pause.' (Ballard 2010 [1970], pp. 265-266)

We can take this cosmological traffic jam and carbon-intense stillness as a visualisation of the tension undermining the connection of speed and post-modernity, velocity and hypermediation, that is may instead be affirmed as natural and unproblematic in the consensual definition of 'fast cinema'. If, in the previous sections, I have noted a correlation between intensified temporality and remediation, mediation itself eventually changes the idea of 'fastness', and thus of 'slowness' as well, and some their thematic and discursive implications.

From this perspective, indeed, racing films like *Fast and Furious* come out as somewhat nostalgic: they celebrate masculinist self-affirmation in the terms of a fundamentally 'untimely' understanding of the world. Such untimeliness is idealised along problematic lines, to be sure, and further codes in populist (where not racist, see Beltrán 2013, 77) terms the connection between 'fast cinema' and hypermasculinity that Palmer discussed in the case of *Crank* (2012, pp. 7-8). Chev Chelios's crazed cranking, indeed, like Tillman's (Gerard Butler) 'runs' in *Gamer* (Neveldine and Taylor, USA 2009), or Will's crunch-time resistance in *In Time* (Niccol, USA 2011) – all of them unsupported lives under terminal neoliberalism but also quintessentially neoliberal heroes – depend on

[6] 'There was such a dense concentration of American energy there, American and essentially adolescent, if that energy could have been channeled into anything more than noise, waste and pain it would have lighted up Indochina for a thousand years.' (Herr 1978, p. 42)

the contrast between the desperately human racers and the hypermediated universe in which human temporality is now embedded.

Irreflexive consumption and aesthetic temporality

At the centre of Jacques Rancière's understanding of power and aesthetics there is a break in the understanding and perception of time. Time, for almost the entire history of what likes to call itself 'Western thought', has been by principle what common people lacked: the time to do anything other than what they were, or rather were deemed to be; the time, precisely, for aesthetics and politics, which is fundamentally a time beyond the time of toil. With the archival research on 19th century workers' writing which informed his book *Proletarian Nights*, Rancière familiarised himself with that particular, interstitial and rebellious, time between the end of labour and the beginning of sleep, that time stolen from the instrumental regulation of life, in which the women and the men to whom time was being negated showed themselves and others that they had time enough to think.

Political revolution thus constantly begins in aesthetic revolution, in the deposition of the whole distribution of the sensible which distinguishes between those who have the time for understanding and action and those who, apparently, do not. Rancière's argument about the emancipated spectator is, thus, not a call for the transformation of passive spectators in active subjects, but a claim to the recognition of the agency of spectatorship as such, which needs neither an enlightened theory or art practice nor recognition from institutions of power in order to affirm itself, but simply practices the opposite principle than that of the articulation of natures and the temporalities that are proper to them: the principle of equality.

For the proletarians of the 19th century, making themselves spectators was a form of freedom.

'By making themselves spectators and visitors [of cities and landscapes], they disrupted the distribution of the sensible which would have it that those who work do not have time to let their steps and gazes roam at random […]' Theirs 'was a reconfiguration in the here and now of the distribution of space and time, work and leisure. Understanding this break made at the very heart of time was to develop the implications of a similarity and an equality, as opposed to ensuring it mastery in the endless task of reducing the irreducible distance' between them and their teachers, them and their masters (Rancière 2009, pp. 19-20).

Cinema – or rather a certain discourse about it – apparently intensifies and re-naturalises the disciplinary distribution of the sensible by assuming and producing a spectator who is assaulted by a universe of spectacular distractions and submitted to the ever faster flow of narratives and images to the point, again, of being deprived of its capacity to think. This understanding – or rather this construction – of film experience is further strengthened if we reduce the temporality of spectatorship to the time of projection, as if spectatorship was not also a matter, as Judith Mayne put it, of what goes on after the spectators leave the cinema (Mayne 1993, p. 32).

Ordinary film experience is already in this sense a form of extended cinema, which constantly puts films in situations, where spectators not only can interpret and re-imagine the experienced films independently, but also deny in practice the assumption that a film's aesthetic or political effects can be derived from its formal characteristics or the technical characteristics of the medium – what Rancière calls an onto-technological assumption (Rancière 2004, p. 31).

The coherence of the various elements that are used in the definition of 'fast cinema' ultimately rests upon an assumed coherence between the form of a film and its effects, between the specific nature of the medium and the temporality of its reception. Recognising the specific temporality of spectatorship thus requires suspending a whole instrumental and disciplinary, onto-technological, understanding of cinema. In this respect, the articulation between 'fast' and 'slow' is much more than a formal classification, of which I have tried to point out some of the inconsistencies and complexities, regarding modes of representing and understanding velocity and time in cinema, but one of the ways in which a logic of inequality attempts to naturalise itself as a form of analysis or as an ontological description of the medium. Matilda Mroz arrived to similar conclusion at the end of her review of various theories of temporality in cinema: the temporality of a film is decided contingently and subjectively (Mroz 2012, p. 41). Temporality is thus a cultural and historical variable, as well as a question of politics and aesthetics, that is, of the free use of films by each and any spectator. It is the process of de-figuration that appears with the aesthetic regime of the arts, Rancière writes, that 'hollows out or exacerbates the gestures of expressive bodies, slows down or speeds up narrative progression, suspends or saturates meanings.' (Rancière 2006, p. 8.)

This invites a completely different way of understanding cinema as well as a different idea of film studies. Maeve Connolly chose to define 'the cinematic', after Claire Bishop and Victor Burgin, precisely as an aesthetic temporality: a 'moving toward an artwork rather than necessarily being bound to the

work's own properties' (Connolly 2016, 86). This particular conjunction of the question of temporality and the suspension of onto-technological arguments resonates with Rancière's broader understanding of cinema being not a specific art, but first of all a regime of understanding of the arts (Rancière 2006, p. 4). It is also, I think, is an important step toward a focus on the politics of spectatorship, rather than remaining within a critical or pedagogical theory of filmmaking, in the way we think about film.

Coda

The reformulation of the question of temporality as being one with the question of intellectual equality in film experience entails a critique of the idea of popular culture that is regularly subtended by the consensual articulation between 'fast' and 'slow' films.

In this respect, we should distinguish at least two, antithetic, senses of popular culture. As Didier Éribon suggests: 'we can talk of popular culture in an ethnographic sense, but in the functioning of the social structure as a system of oppositions [...] there is no "popular culture", or rather this popular culture is precisely that by which "the people" is assigned to inferiority' (2014, p. 227, translation mine). Popular culture can neither be defined as a type of consumption or as a class of works. It is not what 'the people' or other sociologically defined groups consume or interact with, but the declassification of a whole set of discourses on culture, stemming from feminist, post-colonial, egalitarian, Barthesian, psychoanalytic, anarchic, situationist, queer, challenges to the closed temporality of consensus, that temporal and logical loop (Butler calls it 'metalepsis') that ties the exercise of government with the retroactive production of natures, and by which one is supposed to always have been what one is simultaneously required to constantly demonstrate to be.

Reimagining popular culture and the temporality of spectatorship beyond their definition in the terms of the culture industry, the various pedagogies of mastery, and the disciplines of distinction, is eventually a way to 'disembalm' cinematic time and restore it to a fuller temporality, at the same time moving towards ethics and politics, rather than ontology, as our 'first philosophy' of the image.

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Abstract

Considered in its articulation with an idea of "slow" cinema, the label "fast cinema" suggests three characteristics: fast-paced action, hyperkinetic cinematic style, and irreflexive consumption. Not only does fast cinema suggest these three characteristics, however, it also suggests that they directly correspond to each other so that, in a "fast" film, fast-paced action would be seamlessly rendered through "fast" cinematic enunciation and this rendering would necessarily result in an escapist, ready-to-consume film product. It is more by this correspondence, I think, than by any of these elements on its own that a certain understanding of "fast" cinema is established.

Against this understanding, through a variety of contrasting examples, the article argues that the impression of fastness and that of slowness are both the matter of a tension between different temporalities and a complex combination of heterogeneous film elements, and that the articulation of "fast" and "slow" cinema itself depends less on the formal characteristics of different kinds of film than on a disciplinary understanding of spectatorship, which pretends to derive from these formal characteristics different and unequal forms of film experience.

Key words: cinematic temporality, "fast" cinema, remediation, slow-motion, spectatorship.

Panoptikum 2021, 26:61-79 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.03

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Spectacle in Contemporary Mainstream Action Cinema

1. Historical Development of the Notions of *Attraction* and *Spectacle* in the Context of Cinema

It was Sergei Eisenstein who in 1924 introduced the term "attraction" into the theoretical discourse of cinema. In *The Montage of Film Attractions,* he described an attraction as an object, phenomenon or action that is "proven" to exert a certain influence on the emotions of the audience and which combined with others (through the process of montage) may steer them in a specific direction (Eisenstein, 1998, p. 41). By juxtaposing what Eisenstein considers universally pleasant or disturbing phenomena (i.e. kittens and drunken bouts) with images of the proletariat or white officers, cinema may create specific emotional associations in the minds of the audience and hence achieve a truly agitational quality. For Eisenstein, specific attractions need to possess utilitarian value and must thoroughly embody the idea they are supposed to represent – he claimed a car is a more efficient representation of the idea of transportation than a cart (Eisenstein, 1998, p. 57) – a notion he extends to the realm of actor movements which are, ideally, expressive and exert "the same real, primarily physical work on their material – the audience." (Eisenstein, 1998, p. 56). Finally, Eisenstein believes in a future possibility of plot-less cinematic constructions that forfeit presenting specific facts in favour of guiding or moulding the emotional responses of the audience (Eisenstein, 1998, p. 49).

1.1. Attraction through Eisenstein and Gunning

Eisenstein's notion for a long time was used primarily in connection with Eisenstein's films and theoretical writings. It was Tom Gunning who rejuvenated it, giving it new life in a text titled *The Cinema of Attractions[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde* (Gunning 2006b).

According to Tom Gunning, a cinema of attractions is "dedicated to presenting discontinuous visual attractions, moments of spectacle rather than narrative" (Abel, 2005, p. 124). Tom Gunning explored the concept of a cinema of attractions through the work of classic film-makers and film theoreticians like Sergei Eisenstein, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. While film theory in the 1970s was more or less dominated by structural-semiotic critique and psychoanalysis that sought to uncover how popular movies are ideological apparatuses shaping the unconscious desires of a passive, viewing "subject" (see Bordwell, Caroll, pp. 3-36) "these earlier avant-garde thinkers and practitioners saw revolutionary possibilities (both political and aesthetic) in the novel ways cinema took hold of its spectator" (Gunning, 2006a, p. 31), shaping experiences, creating emotional responses and generating new modes of spectatorship. Coining the term "cinema of attractions" Gunning referred to the first decade of cinema which was characterised by The drive towards display, rather than creation of a fictional world; a tendency towards punctual temporality, rather than extended development; a lack of interest in character "psychology" or the development of motivation; and a direct, often marked, address to the spectator at the expense of the creation of a diegetic coherence, are attributes that define attractions, along with its power of "attraction," its ability to be attention-grabbing (usually by being exotic, unusual, unexpected, novel). (Gunning, 2006a, p. 37)

Gunning's formulation arose out of discussions with André Gaudreault in the wake of the FIAF Brighton Project on Early Fiction Film in 1978, the main achievement of which was a critical revaluation of film history. As Frank Kessler notes, the term cinema of attractions has both a historical and formal aspect: it refers to a certain *period* in the history of cinema, ending roughly around 1906, when movies started becoming more and more narration-driven, (although this timeline is contested by some scholars) as well as a *type* of cinematic experience (Kessleer, 2006, p. 57).

Whereas in Eisenstein's paradigm, attractions are indelibly bound with associative montage, Gunning uses the term "cinema of attractions" to define a certain *mode* of addressing and affecting the audience. In other words: Eisenstein focuses on montage while Gunning pays attention to the content of particular

shots. If *diegetic* (or narrative) *integration* emphasises storytelling – the narration[1] provides data for the audience and the latter uses its cognitive capacities and expectations in order to facilitate the mental reconstruction of a chronological blow-by-blow account called a "story," (or *fabula*), complete with deadlines, character motivations, plot goals, plots twists and so on – a cinema of attractions "directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself" (Gunning, 2006a, p. 384). If the former is "inward" and "voyeuristic," seeking to involve the viewer's mind in the story-telling process and the psychology of the characters, the latter is "outward" and "exhibitionist," attempting to appeal directly to the spectator senses and emotions.

1.2. Attraction versus Spectacle versus Narration

There are two methodological problems arising from the concept of attraction: a semantic problem regarding difference between *attraction* and *spectacle* and a formal problem regarding the relation between attraction and narrative.

What about spectacle? Geoff King provides a basic definition: "the production of images at which we might wish to stop and stare" (King, 2000, p. 4). The important word here is "might" – obviously, spectacle elements are only potentially appealing, just as gore or horror elements are only potentially successful in inducing fear. King's terse definition makes the whole concept appear a bit murky by connecting it with viewer reactions which are quite elusive and unpredictable. A more text-based way of looking at spectacle is to refer to what producers and screenwriters call *whammo*: "a burst of physical action, injected to keep things from turning into just a string of conversation" (Bordwell 2006, p. 112). Such a spectacle element may or may not detract from the process of narration (more on that later), but when contrasted with Eisenstein's definition of attractions as visual stimuli holding emotional and ideological value, a *whammo* has a lesser purpose.

Authors who use terms like spectacle or spectacular (Geoff King, Erich Lichtenfeld or Yvone Tasker) focus on kinetic or visually impactful phenomena like spectacular chase scenes, intricately choreographed fights, tense shootouts, death-defying stunts, mind-boggling CGI and special effects or beautiful dancing and singing sequences. If for Eisenstein a "proper" attraction holds ideologi-

[1] I use the term *narration* as understood by David Bordwell: "a process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator's construction of the fabula," see. D. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film,* The University of Wisconsin Press: 1985, p. 53.

cal and psychological efficacy achieved through montage while Gunning examines the same term in the context of a certain *way* or *mode* of interacting with the audience, then it appears spectacle has a slightly narrower meaning and applies to specific instances of kinetic and visual stimuli which may or may not have an additional purpose aside from soliciting the audience's attention and stimulating its nervous and perceptive systems.

Interestingly, both King and Tasker refuse to see spectacle elements as inherently opposed to narration. This brings us to the question of the relationship between attraction and narrative. Eisenstein envisioned a time where cinema could be liberated from the logic of narration and provide in its stead a series of impactful shocks sculpting and guiding the emotions of the audience. In addition, Gunning, even though he insists the mode of attraction was somewhat absorbed by the more narratively-driven post-1907 cinema, still believes in a fundamental difference between the attractive and narrative modes of address[2].

Perhaps, the difference between the attractive and narrative modes lies also in how they affect the viewer. Describing narration as a kind of mental play regulating the flow of information the viewer receives, cognitivists emphasise thinking rather than emotional responses, and it seems the latter are, in fact, more important for the attractive mode of address. Early on, the analysis of emotions in cinema fell in the purview of psychoanalysis and its framework of desires and drives, but the last two decades saw the emergence of theories of filmic emotions and somatic effects based on contemporary psychological research like Carl Plantinga's *Moving Viewers* (2009), Greg M. Smith's *Film Structure and Emotion* (2003), Per Persson's *Understanding Cinema: A Psychological Theory of Moving Imagery* (2003), Ed S. Tan's *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative: Film as an Emotion Machine* (1995), Laura Marx's *The Skin of the Film* (2000), Patricia Pisters *Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (2012) or Thomas Elsaesser's *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (2009). The cognitive current, with its emphasis on the flow of information from film to spectator, was naturally more fixated on narration as the conduit for data transfer. By the same token, psychoanalysis as a discursive activity whose goal is to uncover hidden meaning beneath explicit content has always probed the narrative in search of its unconscious. It hasn't been until recently that film theory has taken a much broader interest in the purely bodily or somatic aspects of the movie-watching experience.

[2] Another semantic confusion arises from Tom Gunning using on numerous occasions in his article the term "diegetic mode of address". Considering the scope of the adjective "diegetic" as denoting elements which simply belong to the narrative world, it appears Gunning is actually talking about a "narrative" mode – a way of telling a story – and opposing it to the above-described mode of attraction.

When Eisenstein and Gunning use words like "shock", "pressure on the psyche", "blows to the consciousness", "visual curiosity", or "direct stimulation of shock or surprise" it seems a cinema of attractions either aims at soliciting emotional responses that are scarcely under the audience's control or relies on different cognitive schemata than the ones required for "narrative absorption" – as Gunning states: "Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its [cinema of attractions'] energy moves outward to an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative" (Gunning, 2006, p. 384). Nonetheless, isn't the energy always flowing outward, from screen to audience? And furthermore, aren't emotions an intrinsic part of any cinematic experience? Even the most classic narration-based films depend on the viewer's capacity to become invested in the story, and almost all films, as David Bordwell stresses time and time again, create certain expectations which, according to neuroscientists, as well as cognitive film theorists, are indelibly bound with emotional responses. Noël Carroll, on the other hand, wrote extensively on the emotional facets of horrors and comedies (Carroll, 1999, pp. 145-160). Perhaps then, it is not the direction but the nature of the emotional energy that is at stake. The classic model assumes that emotions felt by the viewers are a result of a vicariously mediated identification with the characters, whereas more recent concepts stipulate emotions stem from stimuli received directly from the screen.

There are theoreticians who prefer to see the attractive and narrative modes as more closely knit. Like G. King, Yvone Tasker focuses expressly on the concept of spectacle (spectacular imagery of bodies, spectacular action scenes etc.), and according to her, many scholars overemphasising the importance of narrative have too hastily dismissed spectacle sequences as a mere distraction. Coupled with a strong commitment to decoding the ideological stakes of particular narratives and giving analytical preference to dialogue, intellectual montage and deliberate framing, this approach led to neglecting the non-textual effects of movie-watching: emotional reactions, visual pleasure, visceral experiences etc. Tasker claims spectators have "contradictory desires," wanting both to follow the narrative to its conclusion as well as to ponder the details and take in the spectacular visuals put in front of their eyes (Tasker, 1993, p. 6). This would mean cinema, even if predominantly attraction-driven and laced with spectacle, is capable of meeting both the affective and storytelling needs of the audience.

For Geoff King, the contours of spectacular narratives overlap with frontier mythology. The frontier narrative pits characters (often ordinary people) against extraordinary forces and crushing odds, forcing them to overcome obstacles

through incredible feats of physical exertion. The movie itself may operate and be promoted as a kind of "surrogate" frontier that invades the life of the spectator with a promise of delivering a larger-than-life experience (King, 2000, p. 5). Furthermore, in spite of being derisively treated by critics, spectacle, seemingly opposed to traditionally structured narrative and dialogue, may not only provide sensuous experiences but also carry meaning – in Yvone Tasker's view, spectacular representations of chiselled, glistening, mangled, transformed, injured or tortured bodies mediate matters of gender, culture and politics (see Tasker, 1993, pp. 153-167).

It is my belief that the general discussion regarding the "narrativity" of spectacle is not productive. Spectacle may have a narrative component and still be a spectacle as far as it tries to deliver kinetic and visual stimuli of a potentially attractive character.

2. Spectacle in Mainstream Action Cinema

The skydiving scene in Kathryn Bigelow's cult-classic *Point Break* (1991) stood out because Patrick Swayze performed a few jumps himself (and this footage made it to the final movie)[3], but in the newest *Mission Impossible* instalment (*Fallout,* 2018), Tom Cruise not only performed a stunning 106 halo jumps in Abu Dhabi in a specially designed helmet (so the actor's face could be seen on film), but also piloted a helicopter and dangled precariously off its skids[4]. At first glance, "spectacularness" is on another level now and the formal, stylistic and technical arsenal of the moviemaker (CGI, stunt work, special effects etc.) has grown to the point that contemporary directors appear to feel the urge to utilise a plethora of methods, leading to eclectic fiction films such as *Deadpool* (2016), blending humour, postmodern allusionism and puzzle film non-linearity, or even highly spectacular biopics: in *I, Tonya* (2017), *Speed Kills* (2018) or *American Made* (2018) characters break the fourth wall, filters give some shots a VHS graininess, there are documentary-like interview scenes, non-linear storytelling, slow-motion montage sequences with non-diegetic music, CGI, fast-cut, Guy Ritchie-like editing as well as jerky snap-zooms and obscured framing resembling hidden hand-held cameras or smartphones. These formal and stylistic solutions exemplify the kind of eclecticism and technical intensity that has slipped into every nook and cranny of modern cinema, and since attractions are

[3] *Behind the Scenes of Point Break* at: https://skydiveperris.com/b/point-break-skydive-behind-the-scenes/ (accessed 10 March 2019).

[4] J. Guerrasio, *106 Skydives with a Broken Ankle* at https://www.businessinsider.com/how-tom-cruise-pulled-off-the-halo-jump-in-mission-impossible-fallout-2018-7?IR=T#the-quick-decision-that-saved-the-halo-sequence-6 (accessed 10 March 2019).

supposed to prompt emotional responses in the audience then at no other time in cinema history has there been such a vast toolkit available for movie creators to make them.

According to David Bordwell, the fact that contemporary cinema is more spectacular than before does not in any way undermine the bedrock of narration (Bordwell, 2006, pp. 4-6). Elizabeth Cowie, on the other hand, claims cinema has undergone certain changes since the demise of the studio system, the main result being the disappearance of a "consistent group of norms" (Cowie, 1998, p. 188). In her view, narrative pleasure is not always the dominant factor while David Bordwell's definition of classic Hollywood cinema is simply too flexible and universal to even allow the possibility of talking about a post-classical cinema, or, more precisely, a cinema that leans less towards narrative pleasure and more towards non-narrative pleasures.

For me, spectacle has the potential of being meaningful (Tasker, King) or becoming an emotion-modifying attraction (Eisenstein). Similarly, it has the potential to either serve the purposes of goal-oriented and motivation-driven narration or to undermine it. There is a story which is *potentially* pleasurable (and potentially comprehensible) for some viewers and a spectacle that is *potentially* pleasurable as well (again, Tasker claims movies can fulfil both the storytelling and spectacle needs of audiences), both may either go hand-in-hand or stand at odds with each other. Most spectacle sequences are motivated by narrative – the outcome of a fight or chase determines, for instance, which character survives and proceeds towards fulfilling key plot goals. In a movie like *Baby Driver* (2017), there are multiple musicalesque tracking shots of wheelman Baby walking down the street or making a sandwich to the tune of his favourite songs – such sequences may reinforce our impression music is a crucial part of his life. They may have also been compressed into shorter segments and still convey the same narrative information. However, by being prolonged and elaborate they potentially go beyond narrative pleasure and supply other pleasures to the audience. By the same token, this potentiality does not necessarily have to do with pleasure. It may relate to any number of potential somatic or cognitive responses induced during the course of a given movie. There are some spectacular worlds, for instance, which are both visually stunning and disgusting or frightening (i.e. the "real world" of the *Matrix*).

My thesis is that not only has the nature of spectacle in big-budget mainstream action movies changed, but also its relation to narrative, with the latter's complexity being sacrificed in favour of intensifying the former.

By providing case studies of series like *Die Hard, Predator, Mad Max, John Wick* or the *Fast and Furious*, mainstream action cinema, I would like to pinpoint both quantitative and qualitative changes spectacle has undergone in them. The basic quantitative aspect relates to the number and duration of spectacular action sequences, identified according to the tentative definitions provided by G. King or Y. Tasker: scenes of physical and kinetic exertion, like fights, shootouts, executions, car chases or explosions. I take the liberty of omitting scenes which are of a merely descriptive character such as characters moving from point A to B or shots surveying the locales (either way, their inclusion would hardly change the results) and providing rounded-off numbers. However, I will additionally analyse the quality of these sequences, their relation to narrative, as well as the spectacle-related aspect of space, finally, I will provide a chapter on the formal, technical and VFX changes spectacle has undergone.

2.1. Die Hard

The *Die Hard* series did for action cinema what *Mad Max* did for the dystopian genre. The years following the release of Bruce Willis' first major motion picture saw the emergence of many successful movies of varying budgets which recreated the trope of a lone hero taking on bad guys in a specific place – there were "die hards" on planes (like *Air Force One,* 1997), on ships (like *Under Siege,* 1992) and seemingly countless Van Damme/Michael Dudikoff/Steven Seagal movies which piggybacked on the successful formula drawn by director John McTiernan and producer Joel Silver. Nonetheless, *Die Hard*, like action cinema in general, has undergone significant changes as the years went on.

The first *Die Hard* (1988) features 46.1 minutes of Spectacular Action Sequences (henceforth referred to as SAs) comprising 35% screen time (Spectacular Screen Time henceforth referred to as SST). 17 SAs for an average length of spectacular action sequence (henceforth referred to as SAL) of 2.7 minutes, the longest SA being an action scene of 9 minutes and 9 seconds, showing several decisive events near the film's end. *Die Hard 2* (1990) features 39.1 minutes of SAs comprising 31.5% SST divided into 16 SAs for an SAL of 2.5 minutes, the longest SA being the final showdown on a plane taking off that lasts 10 minutes and 50 seconds. *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995) features 59.1 minutes of SAs comprising 46% SST divided into 16 SAs for an SAL of 3.6 minutes, the longest sequence being a bank robbery scene that starts at the 51-minute mark of the movie and lasts 7 and a half minutes. This scene shows characters seemingly effortlessly extracting gold from federal banks, facing no resistance at all, with a non-diegetic *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* by Percy Gilmore playing

throughout. If one were to exclude this scene, this would bring the final tally of SAs to 52.1 minutes, decreasing the SST to 34% and the SAL to 3.5 minutes. Nonetheless, even if the above-mentioned bank heist scene lacks tension, it is a spectacle in the strict sense: a form of kinetic exertion that potentially makes the audience "stop and stare" as King puts it. *Live Free or Die Hard* (2007) features 41.2 minutes of SAs comprising 31.9% SST divided into 14 individual SAs for an SAL of 2.9 minutes, the longest SA being a powerplant action scene lasting 9 minutes and 49 seconds and an 8-minute sequence where John McClane faces off against a F-35 jet fighter plane near the end of the movie. Finally, *Good Day to Die Hard* (2013), which takes place in Russia (actually filmed in Hungary) features 43.2 minutes of SAs comprising 47% SST, divided into just 7 SAs for an SAL of 6.2 minute, the longest SA being a final showdown in Chernobyl that lasts 16 minutes and 5 seconds. The last movie exemplifies the tendency to condense SAs and is not incidentally the one that stands out from the rest of the series.

	No. of SAs	SAL	Longest SA	SST
Die Hard 1 (1988)	17	2.7 min.	9 min. 9 s.	35%
Die Hard 2 (1990)	16	2.5 min.	10 min. 50 s.	31.5%
Die Hard 3 (1995)	16	3.5 min.	7 min. 30 s.	46%
Die Hard 4 (2007)	14	2.9 min.	9 min. 49 s.	31.9%
Die Hard 5 (2013)	7	6.2 min.	16 min. 5s.	47%

All five *Die Hard* movies play out within a time-span of roughly twelve hours and have Bruce Willis starring as John McClane. In terms of spectacle, it could be said that the first three movies are more *spatially focused* – the stories with their spectacle sequences happen in specific locations (Nakatomi Plaza, NY Airport, the streets of NY). The fourth and fifth instalments take their characters to various locations (New York, Washington DC, Maryland, West Virginia, Moscow, Chernobyl etc.).

The relation between spectacle and narrative (or, more precisely, the narrative significance of SAs) has changed as well. The first movie in the franchise is often lauded as one of the best structured three-act scripts in Hollywood history, and in 2017 it was added into the United States National Film Registry. Most spectacle sequences spawn additional consequences: as the terrorists take over Nakatomi Plaza, McClane runs out to the staircase barefoot because he was

practising an anxiety-relieving trick he'd learned from someone on the plane, he kills a terrorist whose feet turn out to be too small and whose brother is also one of the terrorists (two narrative consequences of one spectacular action). Almost every spectacle sequence in the film is a part of a web of cause-and-effect relationships interlinking several narrative players who are competing with or supporting one another: McClane Sgt. Al Powell, the FBI, the terrorists/robbers, Gruber, a brother seeking vengeance, the LA Police. The second movie, though less complex in this regard, still manages to provide plot twists within spectacle sequences and ties together several competing parties. In the third, the villain is not revealed until the 47-minute mark. Spectacle scenes involve John McClane and Zeus solving riddles set around New York by Simon Gruber, there is a prolonged bank heist scene, several chases, fights and a customary elevator spectacle scene (these appear in all but the fifth movie in the franchise) also containing a small plot twist (bad guys masquerading as cops). The fourth is not a major detraction from the previous three, the main difference being the spatial diversification of SAs, as well as an increase in the implausibility of certain spectacular set pieces (i.e. John McClane defeating a jet fighter plane with a truck).

It is the fifth instalment that is really different. As is the case with *Fury Road* and the latest *Fast and Furious*, *Good Day to Die Hard* is an example of spectacle becoming more condensed. There are two SAs which run for more than 15 minutes, one commencing at the 16-minute mark and the other being the final showdown in Chernobyl. As for the narrative aspect, it is no surprise the movie was criticised for its unsubstantial and implausible plot[5]: with an SST of 47% for a movie that is just 97 minutes long (the first *Die Hard* runs for 132 minutes with 35% SST), *Good Day to Die Hard* has little time to spare either on character development or creating a dense web of relationships between the protagonists and antagonists – the story quickly moves the characters from one spectacular set piece to another, and while in previous entries the spectacle sequences took a toll on the protagonist, here he breezes through over-the-top hazards with a demeanour so stoic it verges on indifference. What is more, the two main villains are not in any way developed, either within or outside the seven SAs – a big narrative downgrade in comparison to the previous four movies – and some of their actions lack any logical justification, the most absurd of which was Irina's decision to kill herself by slamming a helicopter into a building occupied by John and

[5] See reviews by R. Roeper at: https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/a-good-day-to-die-hard-2013 (25.02.2019); N. Allen at: https://www.denofgeek.com/us/movies/a-good-day-to-die-hard/60664/a-good-day-to-die-hard-review (accessed 22 February 2019); D. Stevens at: http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2013/02/a_good_day_to_die_hard_reviewed.html?via=gdpr-consent (22.02.2019); R. Collin at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/9868781/Bruce-Willis-in-A-Good-Day-to-Die-Hard-review.html (accessed 25 February 2019).

Jack. Finally, John Moore's direction included several formal decisions which I will discuss in the last chapter of this essay.

The general condensation and diversification of spectacle elements appears to make mainstream action cinema less focused on character development or creating complex sets of connections between all the elements of the story. A good example here is *Skyscraper* (2018), starring Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson as ex-FBI agent Will Sawyer, billed as a quasi-remake of the first *Die Hard*. The movie features a good, "family man" cop (a stark opposite to the divorced, trying-to-get-his-life-back-together McClane) who has to save his loved ones from a burning building overrun by terrorists. If the police and FBI outside Nakatomi Plaza were an important source of narrative complexity, making McClane's task even more difficult, *Skyscraper* treats similar forces as decorative elements that have little influence on the events unfolding in a fictional high-tech building in Hong Kong. Sawyer is pretty much the only vocal and developed character in the movie (alas, he has hardly anyone to talk to), where the sense of urgency is gone since no civilians (aside from Sawyer's family) are put under threat, and spectacle sequences appear repetitive in nature and are focused on Sawyer's singular task of scaling the building and saving his family members. Finally, there is no prominent villain, no sarcastic banter or protagonist-antagonist "bonding" so vital for any *Die Hard* formula[6].

2.2. Fast and Furious

In what was then considered one of the most spectacular movies of the 1990s, *Con Air* (1997), a 67' Corvete Sting Ray C2 is literally hoisted off the ground on a wire attached to a Fairchild C-123 transport plane and slammed into an old airport control tower only to crash conveniently next to three federal agents. Fast forward to 2015 and the car-on-a-plane motif is taken to a whole new level of "spectacularness" in *Fast and Furious 7* where the main protagonists literally drive out of a plane in expensive cars which deploy parachutes and land gracefully in a nearby forest. The stunt required dropping four real cars (albeit without the real actors inside) from the plane. Ten cameras were used, including a helicopter and three skydivers with helmet cams, filming the action from multiple angles[7]. The entire action sequence starts off at about the 41-minute mark and

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[6] S. Mendelson, *Skyscraper is a Die Hard Rip-off that Forgets the Die Hard Formula* at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2018/07/13/dwayne-johnson-skyscraper-is-a-die-hard-homage-that-forgets-why-die-hard-was-great/#96482cd63a7f (accessed 5 March 2019).

[7] J. Guerrasio, *How 'Furious 7' dropped real cars from planes in its most ridiculous stunt yet* at: https://www.businessinsider.com/furious-7-how-they-dropped-cars-from-a-plane-2015-4?IR=T (accessed 12 March 2019).

lasts a whopping 19 minutes and 10 seconds. First the air drop in the Caucasus Mountains (the shooting actually took place in Colorado), then a guns blazing chase after an armoured bus carrying the "God's Eye" (a special computer program Mr. Nobody asks Dom to retrieve), Connor gets in a skirmish with a bad guy on the bus, narrowly escaping death as it slides off a cliff (a stunt scene allegedly shot without the use of CGI[8]), before finally, Dom and a hacker named Ramsey (new addition to the Fast and Furious crew) escape an ambush by hurtling a supercharged car down a cliff. The SST in this movie is approximately 66 minutes, about 48% of the film's runtime. The numbers for *Fate of the Furious* (2017) are 61 minutes and 44% SST while the very first *Fast and Furious* (2001) a modest 38 and a half minutes amounting to roughly 36% SST.

It is not just the number of spectacular action sequences that increased. The first instalment of the franchise features 19 SAS, a SAL of 2 minutes, the longest SA running approx. 8 minutes and 7 seconds (the last truck heist attempt of Dominic Toretto's crew). The seventh instalment has 15 SAs, an SAL of 4.5 minutes, the longest sequence being a final showdown lasting 25 minutes and 40 seconds. The latest instalment has only 7 major SAs, an SAL of 8.7 minutes, and two long SAs running roughly 15 minutes and 31 minutes respectively and happening at the end of the movie.

	No. of SAs	**SAL**	**Longest SA**	**SST**
Fast and Furious (2001)	19	2 min.	8 min. 7 s.	36%
Furious 7 (2015)	15	4.5 min.	25 min. 40 s.	48%
Fate of the Furious (2017)	7	8.7 min.	31 min. 40 s.	44%

In the case of the *Fast and Furious*, pointing out the differences in their approach to spectacle is a fairly straightforward task. The spectacle aspect underwent a strong *condensation*: SAs become sparser but longer. They are also often *network* in nature: the final 31-minute SA from *Fate of the Furious* cross-cuts between Dom, Dom's crew and Deckard (Jason Statham) as all of them try to achieve their goals, fighting, shooting and racing against a small army of mechanised Russian soldiers, a nuclear submarine and a high-tech plane. Similarly, in *Furious 7,* the final showdown has multiple characters involved in a wild, multi-tiered skirmish: a mercenary named Jakande piloting a stealth helicopter and aerial drone which is destroyed by a minigun-brandishing Hobbs (The Rock),

[8] J. Guerrasio, *One of the most insane stunts in 'Furious 7' almost didn't happen* at: https://www.businessinsider.in/One-of-the-most-insane-stunts-in-Furious-7-almost-didnt-happen/articleshow/46818645.cms (accessed 12 March 2019).

Ramsay trying to hack the God's eye device, Brian getting into a fight with Kiet (played by martial arts star Tony Jaa), Dom going blow-for-blow with Deckard on top of a parking lot collapsing due to fire taken from Jakande's helicopter. The scene ends with Dom driving off the collapsing parking lot and tossing at the helicopter a bag of grenades subsequently shot up by Hobbs. Spectacles happening in different locations *simultaneously* and depicted through cross-cutting are also a staple of superhero movies.

While the SST in the *Fast and Furious* franchise has noticeably increased, the spatial characteristics have also changed. The "furious crew" may no longer operate in Los Angeles: it seems it is now imperative the action of any new *Fast and Furious* movie takes place in multiple locations all over the world: from Cuba to Russia, from Los Angeles to Abu Dhabi, America, Brazil, Mexico etc., although, obviously, since the spectacle sequences are shot in, for instance, the state of Georgia in order to lower filming costs, these locations are "faked", often times through clever usage of CGI (more on that in the last chapter of this essay).

The general narrative differences between the first *Fast and Furious* and its newest instalments could also be rendered as *local* vs *global*: the first movie focused on Los Angeles car culture, the seventh and eight are based on international espionage themes with *mcguffins* in the form of weapons of mass destruction. The spectacle sequences in the first movie are all about gradually building the characters and the focal points of a Donnie Brascoseque undercover cop plot – truck robberies, an undercover FBI agent posing as a street racer, a street racer dealing with family issues and disgruntled former associates, an undercover FBI agent gaining the trust of the street racer while putting his disgruntled former associates behind bars, more male bonding by racing, a desert drag race that puts the street racers friend in jeopardy and eventually leads to the revelation of the FBI agent's true identity. At the beginning, the seventh movie in the franchise pays homage to some spectacle scenes from the first (such as the desert drag racing sequence) and uses them to provide information about the state and motivations of key characters (Letty, Deckard Shaw). By the time the air drop commences, the spectacles turn into missions, as it were, having protagonists and antagonists perform different tasks and fight one another (Michelle Rodriguez vs Ronda Rousey, Paul Walker vs Tony Jaa, Jason Statham vs Vin Diesel etc.). The eighth movie's seven SAs, aside from being confrontations between the good guys and bad guys, contain one significant narrative element: Dom going rogue or switching sides whilst performing specific tasks. Interestingly, the very first SA in the movie (lasting 4 minutes and 29 seconds), a street race in Havana between Dom and a loan

shark, is entirely disconnected from the main plotline and serves only to reinforce the fact Dom likes racing and being honourable.

As is the case with *Die Hard*, gradually the *Fast and Furious* series became less occupied with formally creating a dense web of cause-and-effect relationships. The strategy of creating causes for future effects (so-called "dangling causes") and establishing deadlines[9] was quite prominent in the first entry in the series. The spectacle sequences, generally terse but frequent, served to either key a story complication or resolve a previous one, for instance, the destruction of Connor's car which he'd promised to give to Dom served to establish two lines of causality – gaining Dom's trust and investigating Johnny Tran – which are subsequently developed in other spectacle sequences, like Connor sneaking into Tran's garage, getting caught by Dom's brother and acquiring a new car (the motif of owing Dom a "10-second car" remains an important theme right up until the end of the movie). In the latest instalments, most spectacle sequences take the form of elaborate, long antagonist-protagonist clashes while the dangling causes are usually introduced prior to them, therefore making the overall plot look like a string of missions, as it were.

2.3. Mad Max

George Miller and Byron Kennedy's *Mad Max* series is credited with blazing a path not just for dystopian post-apocalyptic movies but for post-apocalypticism in general, embraced by so-called *maxploitation* films, countless dystopian-themed big budget pictures and video games. The *Mad Max* films are also prominent for their reliance on carnage, gas-guzzling machines slamming into one another at top speeds and death-defying stunts, all merged to form the unique atmosphere of madness and destitution permeating the wastelands.

In *Mad Max* (1979) we have approx. 49.5 minutes of SAs comprising 53% SST. The number of SAs is 15 for an SAL of 3.5 minutes, the longest SA being the first and final scenes lasting for roughly 10 minutes and 12 minutes respectively. *Mad Max 2: Road Warrior* (1981) features 54 minutes of SAs comprising 56% SST divided into 14 major SAs for an SAL of 3.9 minutes, the longest SA being the final car chase scene lasting 17 minutes and 4 seconds. *Mad Max 3: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) features 49 minutes of SAs comprising 46% SST divided into 15 SAs for an SAL of 3.5 minutes, the longest sequence being the final chase scene lasting 12 minutes and 20 seconds. Finally, the latest instalment, *Fury Road* (2016), features 65 minutes of SAs comprising 54% SST divided into

[9] D. Bordwell, *Anatomy of the Action Picture*, in: http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/anatomy.php (accessed 16 March 2019).

just 8 SAs for an SAL of 8.1 minutes, the longest sequence being a 16 minute, 55 second chase scene.

	No. of SAs	SAL	**Longest SA**	**SST**
Mad Max (1979)	15	3.5 min.	12 min. 25 s.	53%
Road Warrior (1981)	14	3.9 min.	17 min. 4 s.	56%
Beyond Thunderdome (1985)	15	3.5 min.	12 min. 20 s.	46%
Fury Road	8	8.1 min.	16 min. 55 s.	54%

As is the case with the *Fast and Furious* franchise, the latest instalment of the *Mad Max* series, released more than 30 years after the third movie, is an example of spectacle becoming more intense and condensed. The first movies devoted a larger portion of their spectacle sequences to develop the psychological make up of the characters: Max Rockatansky suffers emotional breakdowns and terrible nightmares in the wake of the death of his friend Goose, whose tempestuous but kind-hearted personality is visualised in at least three spectacle sequences; Toecutter's gang rapes and pillages while he threatens, torments and manipulates his men; finally, Max's psychological transformation into Mad Max is rendered expressly in the movie's final SAs. The second movie uses its SAs to outline core narrative elements. Fuel scarcity, an abandoned truck vital for hauling gas tankers and a pair of main villains are all introduced in the very first chase sequence. There are also at least two specific SAs devoted to emphasising the insanity and despondent homoeroticism of scavengers led by Humungus as well as an SA in which Max's Pursuit Special car is destroyed, leading to a change of heart and Max helping the wastelanders (the movie itself is a post-apocalyptic rendition of the western *Shane* from 1953). The third movie was the first to receive Hollywood backing and used its budget mostly to build a spectacular post-apocalyptic world divided into a few major set pieces, all of which were aesthetically different from one another, including a giant structure that housed hundreds of pigs as the source of Bartertown's energy (see Buckmaster, 2017, pp. 160-185). *Fury Road* does a lot of world-building (though differently than the third movie, more on that in the last chapter of this essay), but also goes back to its automotive roots, with all 8 SAs being stages of a single pursuit involving dozens of war machines. There is relatively little information about the characters provided during their course (these gaps are filled in by tie-in comic books and a sandbox video game), although the peculiar symbolism and slang terms thrown around by the characters convey general impressions about the world they inhabit. *Fury Road* exemplifies both the *condensation* and *intensification* of spectacle. The latest movie is

an even bigger onslaught on the senses than the previous ones: more cars, more explosions, more stunts, more vivid visuals, VFX etc. The narrative is simpler and driven by one dangling cause established at the very beginning.

2.4. Predator

The successful action movie *Predator* (1986), directed by John McTiernan and starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, was followed by three direct sequels. Its titular highly skilled alien became so potent a figure it landed additional roles in comic books, novels and cross-over movies (the so-called Alien vs Predator series). I will focus on the four main movies of the franchise, which were released in 1987, 1990, 2010 and 2018.

The first *Predator* features 48 minutes of SAs comprising 45% SST. 19 SAs for an SAL of 2.5 minutes, the longest running 14 minutes and being a final showdown between Dutch and the predator. *Predator 2* (1990) features 55 minutes of SAs comprising 51% SST. 13 SAs for an SAL of 4.2 minutes, the longest segment being a showdown between the predator, Harrigan and the FBI crew running for 16 minutes and 50 seconds. *Predators* (2010) features 38.5 minutes of SAs comprising 38.5% SST. 22 SAs for a SAL of 1.7 minutes, the longest being an 8 minute, 32 second segment when the main heroes flee from one of the predators. The latest *Predator* (2018) features 51 minutes of SAs comprising 48% SST, divided into 22 SAs, the longest one running for 8 minutes and 55 seconds and occurring in the first act of the film.

	No. of SAs	SAL	Longest SA	SST
Predator (1986)	19	2.5 min.	14 min.	45%
Predator 2 (1990)	13	4.2 min.	16 min. 50 s.	51%
Predators (2010)	22	1.7 min.	8 min. 32 s.	38,5 %
Predator (2018)	22	2.3 min.	8 min. 55 s.	48%

Statistically speaking, it is the second movie, surprisingly, which shows the biggest tendency towards spectacle condensation, while the last two are quantitively closer to the original. Though it is not easy to specify the exact reasons[10], the fourth movie, nonetheless, is the one that stands out the most.

We can use the distinction between *local* and *global* narratives to describe the changes this particular series has undergone. The first three movies, and especially the very first, are focused on particular locations (a jungle, future Los

[10] The script was supposedly written in just three weeks, see Jim & John Thomas, *Writers Commentary track*, Predator 2 DVD: 20th Century Fox, 2005.

Angeles, a jungle on an unidentified planet inhabited by predators) whereas the latest one is more spatially diverse.

There is an unnerving, constant close proximity of danger that characterises the spectacle sequences in the first movie, a quality that also underpinned the close quarters action in *Die Hard*. There are at least 8 short SAs which show the predator's thermal vision from a first-person perspective, emphasising the theme of a hunter stalking its prey (thus, the tables are turned, the specialised commando squad led by Dutch is no longer hunting but being hunted). It takes the film almost 54 minutes before the alien's appearance is revealed. The second movie transports the gist of the first movie to an urban setting. SAs are less numerous, mainly because of the lack of short sequences gradually providing data on the alien (the creature is already known to the audience). The third movie in the franchise is set in a jungle, just like the first, but adds additional sci-fi elements: the action takes place on an unidentified alien planet (CGI used for world-building) and there are other alien species present.

The fourth movie, released in 2018, is by far the most noticeable detraction from the formula devised in the original. Firstly, it is more eclectic narratively and spectacle-wise: there is a "global" plot at work here (the predators want to conquer earth and one rogue predator decided to warn the humans) mobilising scientists, army snipers, dishonourably discharged PTSD-ridden soldiers, a super-intelligent autistic child and government agents. The action takes place in jungles, forests, schools, suburban stadiums, houses, motel rooms, military bases and secret government laboratories. The spectacle sequences, though generally varied, are mostly confrontations between humans and predators, some of them laced with humorous elements (there is virtually no comedic relief in the previous instalments), as the characters briskly move from one set piece to another, hence pretty much dispensing with the spatially focused tension of the previous films.

3. Summary

An analysis of mainstream blockbuster franchises reveals spectacle has undergone changes in the last few years. There are several observable tendencies:

> 1. *Condensation* – spectacle sequences tend to be longer.
>
> 2. *Formal variety* – spectacle sequences are more likely to be filmed from multiple perspectives, using a vast array of cameras. Furthermore, since they are often long-lasting sequences, they are turned into separate set pieces of sorts. The dominant style has grown beyond the *intensified continuity* matrix and has been affected by an accumulation of technical and formal novelties.

3. *Simultaneity* – this is especially the case in big-budget ensemble action films like *Fast and Furious* or the Marvel movies which have a "network" feel to them. Various spectacles (fights, shootouts, chases etc.) take place simultaneously in various locations.

4. *Technical Prowess* – generally, visual effects, especially digital ones, are more ubiquitous, though their nature is often complex and may serve a host of purposes, the one which the author of this article finds of particular note is the application of CGI and modern technological novelties in order to emphasise speed, movement and deliver visual attractions.

About *Big Sleep* (1946) director Howard Hawks famously said "the plot didn't matter at all. All we were trying to do was make every scene entertain. I can't follow the story. I saw some of it on TV the other night and I'd listen to some of the things (Bogart) would talk about it and it had me thoroughly confused" (Duncan, Muller, (ed.), 2018, p. 23). This intriguing statement about a movie lauded for its narration may be more apt for modern productions.

Although narration and storytelling are definitely still present in mainstream Hollywood fare, spectacle has undergone such diversification, condensation and "networking" that this leads to a potentially smaller focus on the psychology of screen characters and narrative complexity and a bigger emphasis on eliciting certain emotional, somatic and perceptive responses from the viewer.

Furthermore, what also seems to be lacking in modern mainstream action cinema is "ordinary people", the kind of unlikely protagonists described by Geoff King, like Stanley Goodspeed in *The Rock* (1996), characters who don't have a military-grade skillset but are forced to rise to the occasion, their emotional conflicts ever-present as they giddily fumble through spectacle scenes (King, 2000, pp. 104-106). Nowadays, the furious crew, comprising former street racers, police officers and hackers, takes on the most outlandish tasks without batting an eyelid, showing little fear, remorse or confusion as they fight evil not unlike their Marvel counterparts. Perhaps it is not that older action cinema was more plausible, but that it often tried to create a dense cause-and-effect web linking protagonists and antagonists in order to make the events seem more credible to the audience[11] – this theory, however, would require a more detailed analysis of a broad range of spectacle-filled films from across a few decades.

[11] Such "realism" and "verisimilitude" qualities being according to Bordwell vital for motivation-driven narrative cinema, see: D. Bordwell, J. Steiger, K. Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Routledge: 1985.

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Abstract

The following article traces the historical development of the notion of spectacle. It first provides an outline of theoretical research on the subject, pointing out various interpretations and approaches. Secondly, comparative-quantitive analysis is used to compare several film series (*Die Hard, Fast and Furious, Mad Max, Predator*) in order to find what changes spectacle has undergone in mainstream action-adventure cinema, and to what extent these permutations have impacted the relationship between narration and spectacle. Finally, key takeaways are summarised and additional questions for future research posed.

Key words: attraction, spectacle, mainstream action cinema

Panoptikum 2021, 26:83-107 https://doi.org/0.26881/pan.2021.26.04

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Loop Structures in Film (and Literature): Experiments with Time Between the Poles of Classical and Complex Narration

Much has been written about the trend towards more complex narrative structures in film and TV series which, starting during the 1990s, gained momentum and breadth in the 2000s, and continues to influence the way stories are told in audiovisual media today[1]. Catchy terms such as 'mind-game films' (Elsaesser 2009), 'modular narratives' (Cameron 2008), or 'mind benders' (Johnson 2005) have been introduced to label the films contributing to this trend. The assessment of the phenomenon has not, however, been unanimous, since a dispute arose over the question whether enhanced narrative complexity should be considered as merely expanding, or rather deliberately breaching, classical norms of storytelling. David Bordwell and Warren Buckland are two major opponents in this disagreement, with the former emphasizing the conventional nature of many narrative devices in films such as *Run Lola Run* (Germany 1998) or *Memento* (USA 2000) and the latter stressing the non-classical and anti- mimetic quality of the same films.

In my opinion, the debate suffers, at least as far as the extreme positions are concerned, from a lack of differentiation and methodological rigour. Bordwell is right to point to the many redundancies in *Memento's* exposition (2006: 78), but do they outweigh the film's innovation in combining backwards narration with a double twist ending? His analysis of classical cohesion devices and aids to com-

[1] I would like to thank Joseph Swann for the revision of the manuscript.

prehension in forking-path films (2002) has its merits, but how many of them still hold true for a film like *Mr. Nobody* (Belgium/Germany/Canada/France 2009), which goes two steps further in narrative experimentation? Warren Buckland, on the other hand, is right to highlight the degree to which a film like *Lost Highway* (USA/France 1996) defies norms of classical storytelling (2009), but does this hold true to the same extent for films like *The Sixth Sense* (USA 1999) or *Run Lola Run*, which in his anthology are subsumed under the same term ('puzzle films') as *Lost Highway*?

Ease versus lack of cognitive control

More generally speaking, how do we measure adherence to or departure from classical norms of storytelling? A simple count of classical versus anticlassical devices is certainly not enough to answer this question. Rather, we need to determine which quality we regard as central for the classical mode of narration. Simplicity of narrative structure comes to mind immediately, since in the ongoing debate classical narration is usually opposed to complex narration. But Bordwell (2006, 72) rightly points out that classical Hollywood could also accommodate quite elaborate structures, such as the flashback within a flashback within a flashback of *The Locket* (USA 1946).

Rather than looking exclusively at structural patterns, we should also assess the way narrations are processed and made sense of by spectators. And in this respect we can safely say that classical narration (as opposed to complex narration) tends to favor a sense of rapid cognitive mastery and to avoid effects of mental overload or dissonance, especially those of an enduring nature. Reconsidered in these terms (which resemble those proposed by Kiss and Willemsen [2017]) as a specific way to dispatch narrative information and to design the sensory impact of audiovisual material, narrative complexity can only be legitimately predicated of films which create in spectators a sense of imperilled cognitive control, either temporary (in weaker cases) or permanent (in stronger ones)[2]. Ease of cognitive control is admittedly not the only criterion for determining the degree of classicism a specific film exhibits, but it is central, considering the direction narrative innovation has taken in the last three decades.

Another problem for any general statement about narrative complexity is the diversity of the films under discussion. Considering narrative structure alone, Charles-Ramirez Berg (2006) has distinguished no less than twelve categories of alternative plot formations (ensemble, parallel, multiple personality, daisy chain,

[2] See also Brütsch (2018), pp. 147–149.

backwards, repeated action, repeated event, hub and spoke, jumbled, subjective, existential, and metanarrative plot). Global characterizations of this broad field of narrative experimentation are bound to be cursory, all the more so considering that each category may harbour widely varying levels of adherence to classical norms. On the other hand, the explanatory power of an examination of a handful of instances from a single category (such as Bordwell's analysis of four forking-path-films [2002]) is also limited, since the results may be relativized by other examples not taken into consideration.

For these reasons, I will opt for a middle way. I propose to examine a large number of films (more than 50) which, although they share a specific narrative design, have so far been discussed under different labels, most notably as 'forking-path,' 'multiple-draft,' 'loop,' 'repeated action,' or 'multiple personality (branched) plot' films. The common feature of my selection is that their narration constructs a fictional world in which a certain period of time occurs more than once, allowing one or several characters to experience specific events in more than one way. Excluded from my sample are instances in which this kind of repetition is only an imaginary product of one of the characters (as when the protagonist of the screwball comedy *Unfaithfully Yours* [USA 1948] goes mentally through the various ways he could react to his wife's infidelity)[3]. Excluded are also examples of multi-perspectivity such as the flashback structure in *Rashomon* (Japan 1950), where the repetition and variation only pertain to the level of narration and not to the events in the story.

I will use the term 'loop film' as an umbrella term for all the variants of this narrative setup, knowing that my broad understanding of the term contrasts with the more restricted use preferred so far by most film scholars. As the title of this article indicates, I will also consider some literary examples, but my focus will be on loop structures in film narration.

A typology of different kinds of loop structure

I will address the issue of the adherence of loop narratives to norms of classical and complex narration in the final section of this essay. First, I would like to focus, however, on questions of narrative structure and genre. In doing so, I will seek to establish a typology of different kinds of loop structure, an undertaking that has helped me come to grips with the large number of examples I have found in my research on loop narratives. In order to grasp the structural diversity of this class of narratives, I propose to begin with a thought experiment.

[3] For an analysis of 'game over and restart' patterns in screwball comedies, see Leebrand 2007.

In his book *The Way Hollywood tells it*, David Bordwell wrote in the chapter on network narratives: 'My colleagues who teach filmmaking tell me that students often hit on eccentric formal schemes before they have worked out the story action. ("I want to begin and end my film with exactly the same scene, only it will mean something different the second time")' (Bordwell 2006, 75). Let us imagine we are teachers in a screenplay or a creative writing class and a student proposes to write a script or story with a time loop in it. What questions could we ask to find out what kind of narrative structure the student has in mind? Here are some proposals: Should the loop structure dominate the whole narrative or just part of it? How long should the intervals be, measured in story time? How many rounds are there? And how many and what part of them are you going to tell about? Who is conscious of the loop and remembers the previous run-throughs? Do the characters redouble with every turn or not? Do they actively create the loop or merely endure it passively? Are the intervals fixed or variable? At what point does the narrative start: before the first round or in the middle of the looping process? Are the repetitions due to a circular time structure or to leaps back in time? Is there a way out of this temporal prison? And do you give any explanation of why time repeats?

We could also ask questions concerning genre, mood or theme of the narrative, of course. But let us stick to the structural component first. My list of questions addresses twelve key features with roughly two to three variables for each of them. If we examine loop films that have already been made and loop stories that have already been written, we can see in table one that there are examples for all the variables listed:

Table one: Questions concerning the structural patterns of the loops

Loop dominates?	yes	no	
Examples	12.01; EDGE OF TOMORROW	DR. STRANGE; THE MISFITS	
Length of interval?	minutes / hours	days / months	years / decades
Examples	SOURCE CODE; RUN LOLA RUN	DAY BREAK; THE MAN WITH RAIN IN HIS SHOES	THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT; *Replay (novel)*
Number of intervals in story?	two / a few	20–50	infinite
Examples	REPEAT ERFORMANCE; BLIND CHANCE	PREMATURE; ABOUT TIME	'12:01 p.m.' (short story); TRIANGLE

Shown in discourse?	one	a few	20–50
Examples	REPEAT PERFORMANCE; THE I INSIDE	PROJECT ALMANACH; RUN LOLA RUN	GROUNDHOG DAY; THE LAST DAY OF SUMMER
Awareness of loop?	zero characters	one character	two / a group of characters
Examples	RUN LOLA RUN; MORIR (O NO)	'Doubled and Redoubled'; PREMATURE	11.22.63; REPEATERS
Redoubling?	yes	no	
Examples	CRONOCRÌMENES; DARK COUNTRY	EDGE OF TOMORROW; BLIND CHANCE	
Time manipulation?	active	passive > active	passive
Examples	ABOUT TIME; PROJECT ALMANACH	THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT; RETROACTIVE	DAY BREAK; REPEAT PERFORMANCE
Intervals fixed?	yes	partly (their beginning)	no
Examples	SOURCE CODE; REPEATERS	EDGE OF TOMORROW; PREMATURE	ABOUT TIME; PROJECT ALMANACH
Discourse entry?	before first round	with first round	middle of process
Examples	EDGE OF TOMORROW; GROUNDHOG DAY	12.01; X-FILES: MONDAY	'Doubled and redoubled'; TRIANGLE
Looping trajectory?	circular time	leaps back in time	not specified
Examples	DARK COUNTRY; TWILIGHT ZONE: JUDGEMENT NIGHT	RUN LOLA RUN; PROJECT ALMANACH	GROUNDHOG DAY; CHRISTMAS DO OVER
Way out?	yes	no	
Examples	È GIÀ IERI; THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT	THE I INSIDE; TRIANGLE	
Explicit explanation?	yes	no	
Examples	SOURCE CODE; EDGE OF TOMORROW	GROUNDHOG DAY; RUN LOLA RUN	

The table suggests that there is a very large number of possible combinations and thus of possible kinds of loop structure. Not surprisingly, however, my analysis of some 50 examples has established a far smaller number of actual

living species out there in the habitat of our screens and books than would be theoretically conceivable. There are two main reasons for this. First, some of these variables work well together while others are mutually exclusive. If the number of reruns is infinite, you cannot have a way out, for example, and if no character is aware of the loop, you cannot have active time manipulation by any character. Second, once a specific combination has proved successful, it tends to be reused for other projects.

Temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day

All in all, I have found four major kinds of loop structure. The first one I call the 'temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day' variant. The most famous specimen of this variant is *Groundhog Day* (USA 1992). But let me show its mode of operation with a lesser-known example, 12:01 by Jack Sholder (USA 1993). Here is a synopsis of the story: Barry Thomas, a low level employee in the human resources department of a high-tech company experimenting with particle acceleration, has a rough start to the day. The alarm clock won't be silenced, his mother calls to inquire about his (non-existent) love live, and a road accident delays his arrival at the office, where his supervisor receives him with a series of admonitions including a threat of dismissal. The situation worsens when his clumsy advances on Lisa, an attractive co-worker from the science department, are harshly rejected and his hopes to still win her over are shattered when she is shot dead before his eyes in front of the office building. After drowning his frustration in alcohol with his office buddy, dropping his cap in the fish tank and knocking over a flower vase, Barry finally turns in to end his horrible day.

Next morning, the vase is inexplicably intact again, there is another road accident to delay him, and the piles of documents he had dispatched the day before are back on his desk. Barry is even more confused when he encounters Lisa alive and without a scratch. It is only when he reads in a newspaper headline that the ongoing scientific experiments could cause time to repeat that he suspects what is happening: he is reliving the same day a second time. He tries to convince Lisa of this fact and save her life, but she won't listen and gets killed again.

On the third run-through, Barry is already more skilled in convincing Lisa about the time bounce (and in flirting with her). He heroically saves her from her killers and wins her heart at their hideaway. The fourth time round, Barry is even quicker in winning Lisa's trust and they find out that Dr. Moxley, head of the science department, has fired the particle accelerator despite orders from the government to shut it down. The fifth retake of the day ends quickly, since Barry, eager to stop Moxley, drives to work too fast and is killed in an accident.

Frustrated at first, but then with new vigour, Barry, in his sixth attempt, succeeds in shutting down the accelerator (thereby ending the looping process) and earning Lisa's love for good.

The following literary and film texts exemplify the 'temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day' variant[4]:

- *Doubled and Redoubled*, M. Jameson, 1941 (short story)
- *One Fine Day*, Leon Arden, 1981 (novel)
- *Groundhog Day*, USA 1992
- *12.01*, USA 1993
- *Christmas Every Day*, USA 1996
- *The X-Files: Monday*, USA 1999 (season 6, episode 14)
- *Stork Days (E Già Ieri)*, Italy/Spain/UK 2004
- *Christmas do Over*, USA 2006
- *Day Break*, USA 2006 (TV series)
- *The Last Day of Summer*, USA 2007
- *Repeaters*, Canada 2010
- *Wake up and Die (Volver a Morir)*, Columbia 2011
- *Pete's Christmas*, Canada 2013
- *Premature*, USA 2014
- *Edge of Tomorrow*, USA/Canada 2014
- *Before i Fall*, USA 2017

The selection of variables for this type, represented in a schematic way, is shown in table two[5].

[4] My list makes no claim to exhaustiveness, especially concerning the literary examples.

[5] Indications in bold print apply most frequently, those in italics apply in some cases, and those in standard print and brackets do not apply at all for the category in question.

Table two: Distribution of variables for the 'temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day' variant

Length of interval?	(minutes / hours)	one day	(months decades)
Number of intervals in story?	(two / a few)	6–300	(infinite)
Shown in discourse?	(one)	(a few)	6–50
Awareness of loop?	(zero characters)	one character	two / a group of characters
Redoubling?	(yes)	no	
Time manipulation?	(active)	(passive > active)	passive
Intervals fixed?	yes	partly (their beginning)	(no)
Discourse entry?	before first round	with first round	(middle of process)
Looping trajectory?	(circular time)	leaps back in time	not specified
Way out?	yes	(no)	
Explicit explanation?	yes	no	

The basic pattern can be summarized as follows: a day repeats itself a considerable number of times, but only one character (or in rare cases a group of characters) is conscious of the loops[6]. He or she (it is usually a he) cannot do anything about it, except in some cases influence the end-point of each repetition. The day usually ends prematurely when the hero dies (*12:01, Groundhog Day, X-Files: Monday, Edge Of Tomorrow, Volver A Morir*) or is knocked out (*The Last Day Of Summer*); in *Premature*, a high school comedy counting on coarse humour, it does so when the protagonist ejaculates. The narration starts before, or with, the first round and ends when the hero has found a way to break the cycle. Thus there is a way out, but rarely any (explicit) explanation as to why the loops occurred in the first place[7]. The temporal confinement is enhanced in some instances by spatial confinement to an island (*E Già Ieri*), a town (*Groundhog Day*), a village (*Christmas Do Over*), or a house (*Volver a Morir*).

What are the attractions of this kind of loop structure? There is potential for irony: the days in question – often festive occasions like Christmas – are supposed to be enjoyable but turn out to be boring or downright disastrous, and

[6] *Day Break* and *Repeaters* are the only examples with two or three characters experiencing the repetitions.

[7] One Fine Day comes up with a quite hilarious explanation, involving the unfortunate coincidence of God's intervention to adjust the speed of the earth's rotation with a magic spell cast by a clairvoyant woman. *Edge of Tomorrow* and *12:01*, the two examples firmly belonging to (or borrowing from) science-fiction, give a pseudo-scientific explanation involving alien super-intelligence and quantum physical machinery respectively.

when they are finally over they start all over again. The irony is even greater, when, as in the short story Doubled and Redoubled, the best day of the protagonist's life begins to recur and turns into hell simply because of its repetitiveness.

The hero is caught in a temporal prison, but as he is the only one who remembers, he can take advantage of his superior knowledge. There is much potential for comedy here, and it can come as no surprise that most of the examples on my list are either full-blown comedies or feature at least a number of comic scenes[8]. The accumulation of knowledge may also help the main character solve a mystery, as in *12.01*, analysed above, or in the TV series *Day Break*, in which detective Hopper, framed for murder, finds a new clue every day to help him prove his innocence.

While the basic looping structure is one of repetition, the main character inevitably changes during the process. The development typically contains all (or some) of the following phases: confusion, disbelief, comprehension, taking advantage, searching for help, anger, resignation, and acceptance[9]. Acceptance and inner change are often the key to finally earning a way out of the vicious circle. Hence the structure is well suited to coming-of-age narratives in which character development is the main topic[10].

A glimpse at Sisyphus

I call my second type of loop structure 'a glimpse at Sisyphus'. My example to illustrate this variant is *Triangle*. In order to elucidate its structure, an extended synopsis is necessary: The film opens with a scene in which Jess comforts her autistic son Tommy, who has apparently just woken from a bad dream. The next scene shows Jess preparing to take him on a sailing trip with her friend Greg, when suddenly the doorbell rings, but nobody is at the door. Arriving at the harbour without her son, Jess explains that he is at school, but she appears confused and says sorry to Greg for no apparent reason. Together with four of Greg's friends they set out, but Jess immediately retires to her berth, falls asleep and dreams of being washed ashore on a sandy beach. Asked how she feels after waking, Jess replies that she had a nightmare but cannot remember what it was about. After sailing for some time, the boat is caught in a storm and capsizes, but the group manages to take refuge on the overturned boat. Luckily, an ocean

[8] *Volver a Morir*, a gory horror film, and *Repeaters*, a violent drama, are the exceptions to this rule.

[9] *Groundhog Day* is a case in point showcasing all the phases in comic exaltation.

[10] Contrary to most reviewers, I consider *Groundhog Day* a parody of Hollywood's propensity to submit its heroes to profound reformation, not least because Phil's character arc is so over stretched, and Bill Murray is so much funnier as a misanthropist than as a philanthropist.

liner soon passes; they wave and yell for help and manage to board it. The ship seems to have been abandoned, but Jess has a strong feeling of déjà vu. They are suddenly attacked by a burlap-masked person who kills everyone except her. She succeeds in throwing the aggressor overboard, but just before she has done so, the attacker implores her in a desperate (female) voice: 'They'll return. You have to kill them. It's the only way to get home!' Shortly afterwards, Jess hears shouting and returns on deck, only to see the overturned boat with herself and her friends standing on it, waving for help. The group boards the liner and events start to repeat. Jess hears an inner voice urging her to kill the new arrivals but decides to break the cycle by refusing to shoot them. She cannot prevent their deaths, however, since a new masked attacker appears and again kills everyone except herself and her second self, whom she witnesses throwing the attacker overboard just as she had done before. At this very moment cries for help resonate again from the upturned boat and Jess realizes that the cycle restarts each time everybody (except herself) is killed. She decides to put on the mask and kill everybody herself, with the intention of saving the next arrivals by not letting them board the ship at all. Jess's plan is thwarted, however, by her newest alter ego, who corners her and throws her overboard.

The next scene shows Jess washed ashore on a sandy beach. She pulls herself up, rushes home and is relieved to see her son through the window of her house. But then she catches sight of another version of herself packing for the sailing trip. Impatient with his autism, this other self begins to chide her son abusively. Upset by this, Jess rings the doorbell, fetches a hammer from the shed, sneaks into the house, kills her double, and tries to comfort her son by making him believe that what he has witnessed is just a bad dream. On their way to the harbour (with the dead body in the boot), a seagull hits the front window of their car. Throwing the dead bird over the edge of the road, Jess discovers dozens of other seagulls already lying there. Back on the road, she is distracted by her son and crashes into a truck. Her son dies and the body of her alter ego lies on the road as if also killed in this accident, while she stands apart, unharmed. She turns away and takes a taxi to the harbour to meet Greg and set off on another sailing trip.

'A glimpse at Sisyphus' is a rarer species than the 'temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day' variant. I have only found five examples:

- *The Twilight Zone: Judgement Night*, USA 1959 (season 1, episode 10)
- *The i Inside*, GB/USA 2004
- *Triangle*, GB/Australia 2009

- *Dark Country*, USA 2009
- *Mine Games*, USA 2012

And among these *Triangle* is also a special case in that it features a loop within a loop. I will get to this particularity shortly, but must disregard it for now in my description of the basic pattern. The structural variables are distributed as shown in table three.

Table three: Distribution of variables for the 'glimpse at Sisyphus' variant

Length of interval?	(minutes)	hours / days	(months / years / decades)
Number of intervals in story?	(two / a few)	(20–50)	infinite
Shown in discourse?	one	(a few)	(20–50)
Awareness of loop?	(zero characters)	one character (only at the end)	*a group of characters (only at the end)*
Redoubling?	yes	(no)	
Time manipulation?	(active)	(passive > active)	passive
Intervals fixed?	yes	(partly / beginning)	no
Discourse entry?	(before first round)	(with first round)	middle of process
Looping trajectory?	circular time	(leaps back in time)	(not specified)
Way out?	(yes)	no	
Explicit explanation?	yes	no	

The interval in this variant is of the order of a few hours or days, but the looping process goes on forever, so there is no way out of it. However, the film only shows one full round: not the first one, but a specimen from somewhere in the middle of the process. Only the protagonists are aware of the repetitions, but – in contrast with the first category – they only learn about it towards the end of the movie when the interval starts to repeat. This discovery is triggered among other things by the confrontation with the second self and the already once experienced scene; so – again in contrast with the first category – the looping trajectory is circular and characters reduplicate. The fact that we are in the middle of an endless repetition is usually visualized by the accumulation of specific items or objects which testify to the recurrence of certain actions. The dead seagulls in *Triangle*, the wine bottles in *The I Inside*, and the graves in *Dark Country* are cases in point.

The events experienced are strange, incoherent and imbued with a strong sense of déjà vu. The mood prevailing is bleak and ominous. The most suitable label for the genre is existential drama, with a strong touch of horror present in most examples. One of the main assets of this structure is the unexpected revelation of the loop, which occurs much later than in the 'lousy day' variant. There are more or less explicit hints to the circular structure throughout, but in the most convincing examples they remain subliminal, with the result that viewers, like the protagonist(s), are caught off guard when they finally discover that the actions of the film lead to the point in time where the story first began.

A three-part loop within a loop

With its loop within the loop, *Triangle* is the most sophisticated example in this regard. In view of Jess's experiences, we realize quite early that she is caught in a loop (the short-lived one on the liner till the next group arrives), and from this point on the dramatic question dominates: will she be able to escape? We first think she will, since she manages to divert events from their preordained path by refusing to play the role of the attacker. But things get more complicated when the killer reappears, apparently as a third version of Jess. The 'first' Jess, by trying to avoid her predestined end, precisely fulfils it[11], since it transpires that the loop progresses not in a two-part but in a three-part cycle, with Jess first being the victim who defeats the attacker, then the observer who tries to divert the course of events, and finally the attacker who is thrown overboard. But the completion of the three-part cycle does not seem to restart it since Jess, instead of resurfacing on the upturned boat (as structural logic would suggest) is washed ashore and free to go back to her son. And only at this point near the end of the film do we realize that she is caught in an even bigger loop which contains every single event we have witnessed and which will bring her back to the ocean liner after all. This revelation takes us by surprise since it comes after two apparent escapes, the second of which seemed permanent, yet still it makes perfect sense (within the twisted circular logic established throughout) because several 'accumulation-scenes' on the liner (showing countless notes, necklaces, and dead bodies) indicated that this shorter cycle is endless as well, thus requiring a re-entry point which the surprise ending provides[12].

[11] This is a common development in loop films of this variant.

[12] It takes several viewings to grasp the structure of *Triangle*. Even if the film's action may be said to follow a certain logic, this logic is manifestly paradoxical. Not all commentators agree on how exactly to unravel the entangled storylines, as the many controversial interpretations in reviews and discussion forums on the Internet demonstrate.

In cases of a two or three-part cycle with the protagonist redoubling at each stage, the disclosure of the recurring nature of events is usually delayed by concealing the identity of the first doppelgänger with the help of a mask (*Triangle*), a disfigured face (*Dark Country*), or a bandage (*Timecrimes*)[13] – a device apt to enhance mystery and suspense. When the confrontation with the other self eventually occurs, the paradoxical nature of the circular structure is made obvious, allowing for allegorical interpretations of a split-personality kind. In the case of *Triangle*, we may speculate about the protagonist's wish to suppress her impatient and aggressive side, which seems unable to cope with her autistic son.

Do the loop-films of this category offer any explanation why events repeat? Three out of five establish with their final revelation the expiatory scenario of a guilt-ridden soul in post-mortem agony trying in vain to undo past misconduct. *Twilight Zone: Judgement Night* has a German submarine captain responsible for the sinking of an American freighter endlessly re-experience his own crime from the perspective of his victims. *The I Inside* features a protagonist killed in a car accident who feels responsible for the death of his brother and perpetually tries to undo what happened. And *Triangle* may also be interpreted in this sense if we construe the car crash scene as the threshold to a life after death: the first Jess we see lying on the road is Jess killed by the accident; the second one standing by unharmed is Jess as a ghost contemplating her own death and then heading off for another round in purgatory. In *Dark Country* and *Mine Games*, no moral explanation of this sort is provided.

The loop structure as described – with the protagonist realizing his or her predicament at the end but not aware of it at the beginning – presupposes a loss of memory from one cycle to the next. In *The I Inside*, this mechanism is made explicit (the hero wakes up in hospital diagnosed with amnesia), while *Triangle* and *Mine Games* interject a scene with dream-filled sleep supposed to be interpreted (in retrospect) as having the same effect.

A display of alternative versions

I call my third type of loop structure 'a display of alternative versions'. The following examples belong to this category:

- *Blind Chance (Przypadek)*, Poland 1981
- *Smoking / No Smoking*, France/Italy/Switzerland 1993

[13] *Timecrimes* (like 'By his Bootstraps' and *Predestination*) only partly adheres to the logic of the 'glimpse at Sisyphus' variant.

- *Too Many Ways To Be Nr. 1*, Hong Kong 1997
- *Morir (Un Moment Abans De Morir)*, Sergi Belbel, 1994 (play)
- *Run Lola Run (Lola Rennt)*, Germany 1998
- *Sliding Doors*, GB/USA 1998
- *To Die Or Not (Morir [O No])*, Spain 1999
- *Notre Univers Impitoyable*, France 2008
- *And Then Came Lola*, USA 2009
- *Mr. Nobody*, Belgium/Germany/Canada/France 2009
- Life After Life, Kate Atkinson, 2013 (novel)

Films like *Blind Chance* or *Run Lola Run* are usually referred to as 'what if' or 'forking path' plots but I prefer not to use this designation, because in my fourth category the 'forking path' and 'what if' elements will be even more prominent[14]. I will, then, exemplify the principles of this type of replay structure with a lesser-known example, *To Die (Or Not)*, directed by Ventura Pons and based on a play by Sergi Belbel.

The film presents seven episodes ending with the death of their main characters: a script writer dies of a heart attack, a drug addict of an overdose, a young girl chokes on a bone while eating, a hospital patient succumbs to a pulmonary thrombosis, an old woman commits suicide, and a young man is run over by a police car. In the last episode, a contract killer is about to shoot an elderly man who implores him to have mercy. The killer gives his victim five minutes to call on God for help, but there is no response and he pulls the trigger. After a fade to black, a sign appears reading 'Not to die', the image (so far black and white) turns to colour, and the scene is reinstated half way through the five-minute deadline. This time, the victim starts to rebuke the killer in a way suggesting that God is talking through him. This saves his life. The other episodes now also resume in reverse sequence from the sixth to the first, which not only turns out to be their proper order, but also reveals unexpected connections between them (the junkie is the young girl's uncle, the patient her neighbour, etc.). However, more important for our concerns is the fact that the killer's reluctance to shoot his victim in the second version of the final episode triggers a chain reaction which alters each subsequent episode in such a way that the lives of their protagonists are also eventually saved.

[14] 'Multiple draft' is another label fitting this group of films.

To Die (Or Not) combines its double draft structure with elements of backwards and episodic narration. Most other examples on my list are less complex, however, centering on the display of two or more versions of certain events. Schematically, the distribution of the variables for this kind of loop structure may be outlined as in table four:

Table four: Distribution of variables for the 'display of alternative versions' variant

Length of interval?	minutes / hours	days / months	years / decades
Number of versions in story?	2–6	(20–50)	(infinite)
Shown in discourse?	(one)	2–6	(20–50)
Awareness of loop?	zero characters	(one character)	(two / a group of characters)
Redoubling?	(yes)	no	
Time manipulation?	(active)	(passive > active)	passive
Intervals fixed?	yes	(partly / beginning)	(no)
Discourse entry?	before first round	(with first round)	(middle of process)
Looping trajectory?	(circular time)	leaps back in time	(not specified)
Way out?	yes	(no)	
Explicit explanation?	(yes)	no	

The basic pattern may be described like this: the length of the intervals varies considerably, but their number is normally between two and four, and all replays are shown. Characters do not reduplicate, they are not directly responsible for the replays and, above all, they are not aware of them. There are simple jumps back in time between the different versions[15], and no explicit explanation is given for their multiplication. In the previous two categories, we shared the superior knowledge – or lack of knowledge – of the protagonists concerning the looping process. In this category, only we know about it, allowing for effects of dramatic irony and establishing a distance between characters and viewers.

The so-called butterfly effect is a central topic in this type of loop film. After some time, the narration reverts to a point already passed in the story, stages a minor or major deviation from the first account, and goes on to show its consequences[16]. One or several nodal situations are thus presented, and the ensuing

[15] *Sliding Doors* and *Notre Univers Impitoyable* jump back and forth between the different versions, while the other examples show uninterrupted run-throughs.

[16] Catching or missing a train or subway (*Blind Chance*, *Sliding Doors*, *Mr. Nobody*) are favoured variables at the crossroads to the different versions.

versions indicate that the slightest change of circumstances may drastically alter the course of events. A sense of openness and virtuality prevails and some authors (e.g. Schenk 2013; Bode 2013) for this reason call these examples 'future narratives.' Some of the examples (especially *Run Lola Run*) exhibit a playfulness derived from computer game logic.

Try to change (your) destiny!

The label I choose for my fourth type is 'Try to change (your) destiny!', and I shall illustrate the structure with the example of the TV miniseries *11.22.63*, based on Stephen King's novel of the same title. Its main storyline can be summarized as follows: in a closet of his diner, Al Templeton reveals to Jake Epping a time portal to 1960. Dying of cancer, he asks his friend to use the portal to prevent the killing of John F. Kennedy, a goal he himself sought to achieve in vain. He explains that each passage through the portal resets the past, erasing the alterations caused by previous interventions. Endowed with Al's insights, Jake transits to 1960, blends into society by taking a job as an English teacher, and secretly investigates the question whether Harvey Lee Oswald had a handler or acted on his own. At the school he falls in love with Sadie, the librarian, who eventually gets to know his secret. Together, they succeed in preventing the assassination; but, during the fight with Oswald, Sadie is fatally wounded. Jake goes back to 2016 only to discover that the world lies in ruins after decades of riots and wars following Kennedy's two presidential terms. Determined to restart life with Sadie, Jake returns to 1960, but a tramp – who seems the only other person to experience the replays – assures him that she will inevitably die again. Jake decides not to interfere with the past again, and looks up Sadie, now an old woman, in the present instead.

These are examples of the 'try to change (your) destiny' variant:

- *Turn Back The Clock*, USA 1933
- *Repeat Performance*, William O'Farell, 1942 (novel)
- *It's a Wonderful Life*, USA 1946
- *Repeat Performance*, USA 1947
- *Peggy Sue Got Married*, USA 1986
- *Mr. Destiny*, USA 1990
- *Retroactive*, USA 1997
- *The Man With Rain in his Shoes*, Spain/France/GB/Germany/USA 1998

- *The Butterfly Effect*, USA 2004
- *If Only*, USA/GB 2004
- *Slipstream*, USA/Zambia/Germany 2005
- *Déjà Vu*, USA 2006
- *The Butterfly Effect 2*, USA 2006
- *The Door (Die Tür)*, Germany 2009
- *The Butterfly Effect 3: Revelations*, USA 2009
- *Being Erica*, Canada 2009–2011 (TV series)
- *Misfits*, GB 2009–2013 (TV series)
- *11.22.63*, Stephen King, 2011 (novel)
- *Source Code*, USA/France 2011
- *About Time*, GB 2013
- *Project Almanach*, USA 2015
- *11.22.63*, USA 2016 (TV series)
- *Twelve Monkeys*, USA 2015–2018 (TV series) The structural variables are distributed as outlined in table five:

Table five: Distribution of variables for the 'try to change (your) destiny!' variant

Length of interval?	minutes / hours	days / months	years / decades
Number of intervals in story?	two / a few	20–50	(infinite)
Shown in discourse?	(one)	two / a few	(20–50)
Consciousness?	(zero characters)	one character	two / a group of characters
Redoubling?	yes	no	
Time manipulation?	active	passive > active	(passive)
Intervals fixed?	yes	partly / beginning	no
Discourse entry?	before first round	with first round	(middle of process)
Looping trajectory?	(circular time)	leaps back in time	(not specified)
Way out?	yes	(no)	
Explicit explanation?	yes	no	

As in the previous type of loop structure, we have nodal situations and forking paths. But here, most of the protagonists go back in time with the deliberate intention of correcting the course of past events in order to prevent major calamities from occurring[17]; so, in contrast with the previous category, the protagonists are active and knowing. And they have found a special gateway to the past, either of a supernatural or of a (pseudo-)scientific kind. It may simply be a portal, door, or cupboard (as in *11.22.63*, *The Door*, and *About Time*), or a sophisticated technological device (as in *Retroactive*, *Project Almanach*, *Déjà Vu*, and *Twelve Monkeys*). Occasionally a divine or magical intervention is necessary (*It's a Wonderful Life, Mr. Destiny, The Man with Rain In His Shoes, Being Erica*).

There are three main variants of this category: First, a plainly utopian version staging a fantasy of retroactive prevention of human catastrophes (*Retroactive, Slipstream, Déjà Vu, Source Code*)[18] or, in the mild version, of being able to catch up on missed opportunities (*Peggy Sue Got Married, Being Erica, About Time*). Films like *Déjà Vu* and *Source Code* demonstrate that in the post 9/11 era, the strong version of this variant lends itself to enacting the illusion of undoing terrorist attacks.

Second, there is a more sober and ambivalent version in which the original goal of the protagonist cannot be achieved, either because destiny, forced to take a different path, still leads to a similar endpoint (*Repeat Performance, If Only, The Man With Rain In His Shoes, The Door*), or because the alterations brought about have unforeseen negative consequences which can only be corrected by giving up the initial objective. *11.22.63* belongs to this subgroup, since the achievement of the goal (the prevention of Kennedy's assassination) not only comes at a high price (the loss of Sadie) but also belies the hope of changing the world for the better. 'Don't mess with the past' could also be the slogan of *Project Almanach* or *The Butterfly Effect* and its sequels, for in these films every attempt at rectification causes new problems[19]. This is why the protagonists ultimately feel compelled to renounce, or even destroy, the means they use to travel back in time, despite the personal loss this implies – perfect for a bittersweet ending.

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[17] In some cases, the (first) leap back in time is unintentional (*Turn Back The Clock, Repeat Performance, Peggy Sue Got Married, The Door*, *The Butterfly Effect*, *If Only*), but the following ones (if there are any) are always deliberate.

[18] *Back To The Future* 1–3 and *Terminator* 1–3 follow a similar logic, even though their focus is more on time travel than on time loops.

[19] The TV series *Twelve Monkeys* (USA 2015–2018), featuring a protagonist attempting to retroactively prevent the outbreak of a deadly virus, builds on all sorts of complications the undoing of past events may entail in order to create new episodes for the TV series now in its fourth season already.

Thirdly, there is an 'educational' version featuring a protagonist discontented withordinary life who dreams of a more glamorous and affluent existence. When the chance comes to 'turn back the clock' and actually live a different life (*Turn Back The Clock, Mr. Destiny*), or at least to see what difference the desired changes might make in the present (*It's A Wonderful Life*), the protagonists quickly realize that their existing lives are much better than the alternatives they had wished for.

Genres and rules of the game

Two genres dominate the 'Try to change (your) destiny!' type of loop structure: drama and romantic comedy. In most cases a love affair takes either centre stage or at least complicates the hero's quest. Horror plots, well represented in categories one and two, are absent here, presumably because they only thrive when the protagonists are at the mercy of the temporal scheme and cannot influence it. Horror also builds on the main characters' awareness of the loop, a prerequisite for their suffering, which is absent in the third category. As in category one, comedy may arise from the display of repeated scenes with minor variations and the superior knowledge shared with the main character. Or it can build (like drama) on the surprises the butterfly effect has in store for the main characters.

The examples on my list featuring protagonists with a portal or time machine at their disposal usually establish specific rules concerning the outreach and consequences of the jumps back in time. Time spans may be limited to a few minutes (*Source Code*), hours (*Retroactive*, *Slipstream*), days (*Déjà Vu*), or decades (*11.22.63*), and only in some cases can they be extended by using extra effort or power (*Retroactive*, *Slipstream* and *Project Almanach*), thus allowing for suspenseful last-minute rescues. Characters using diaries (*The Butterfly Effect*) or their memory (*About Time*) to go back in time are freer to choose their entry point (within the limits of their life span), but they are nonetheless subject to the fact that every return revokes earlier changes and may, through the so-called butterfly effect, have unforeseen consequences for the present. Girlfriends won and lost, or one's own child swapped for a stranger, are some of the bitter lessons careless time travellers experience in this type of replay structure.

Deviations from the established types of loop structure

I do not claim to capture every possible kind of loop narrative with my four categories; within the genre of science fiction especially, time travel to past events, and other forms of time warp, are commonplace, and their diversity far exceeds the prototypes I have established. Nonetheless, I would maintain that the categories outlined in this essay cover a large segment of the fictional

works (especially films) based on loop structures in the broad sense defined above. And I hope that this overview may provide some orientation and serve as a starting point for further in-depth analysis and interpretation of individual examples, especially those difficult to categorise, such as *Primer* (USA 2004) and *Plus One* (USA 2013), or those combining elements from different categories, such as the short stories 12.01 p.m.' (1973) and '12.02 p.m.' (2011), which essentially adhere to the 'stuck in a lousy day' variant but – as in 'glimpse at Sisyphus' – never release their heroes from their temporal prison; or the novel Replay, which also features a protagonist forced to relive not just a single day but entire decades of his life again and again, prompting him to attempt to change his destiny[20].

Between the poles of classical and complex narration

To what extent do loop narratives deviate from established conventions of storytelling? On first sight they appear rather non-classical. That a time span we have already lived through starts all over again is an unnatural phenomenon, alien to our experience. At the same time, it is a process which complicates established rules of narrative presentation, since the basic forward momentum of story time and the coherence of the fictional world are disrupted. Loop narratives seem to ignore classical narration's preference for linearity and consistency and its avoidance of conspicuous repetitiveness and paradox; instead of subordinating their narrative structure to the presentation of story and subject matter, they openly showcase unusual structural patterns. For these reasons, many of the examples on my list are frequently discussed in terms of non-classical, complex storytelling: in Ramirez Berg's taxonomy of alternative plots, for example, the 'repeated action plot' figures prominently (Ramirez Berg 2006: 30–32).

Table six: Overview

Category	Type of loop structure	Prime example analysed
1	Temporarily stuck in a (lousy) day	*12:01*
2	A glimpse at Sisyphus	*Triangle*
3	A display of alternative versions	*To Die (Or Not)*
4	Try to change (your) destiny!	*11.22.63*

Nevertheless, on closer examination many of these examples can be seen to adhere to a number of classical norms. To begin with, in all of my types except in

[20] *Looper* (USA/China 2012) is another interesting example, combining elements from the 'glimpse at Sisyphus' and the 'try to change (your) destiny' variants.

category three, nonlinearity is considerably attenuated by the fact that we follow the perception of the main characters, and their experiences are ongoing and continuous. The repetitions also prove only partial, since the protagonists' knowledge and actions usually divert the cycle from its preordained path. In many instances, especially my categories one and four, a dramatic structure is established, with classical elements such as the disruption of an initial equilibrium and goal-oriented protagonists who, confronted with obstacles, grow with the challenge and finally achieve either what they initially wanted or what they finally realized to be their need[21].

In most categories, the loop structure is made plain early on (and quite redundantly), and an explanation, or at least an implicit motivation, may be offered for it. Moreover, some loop structures, especially of the first kind, even if they initially seemed unusual, have become conventional through the many remakes and rip-offs. And in the genre of science fiction we in any case expect frequent disturbances of the space-time continuum. So, to a certain degree, Thompson (1997 and 1999: 131-154) and Bordwell (2002) are right to stress the conventional and classical nature of films like *Groundhog Day*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, or *Run Lola Run*.

This evaluation does not, however, hold true for all the categories and examples on mylist. Especially the second type, and to some degree also the third and fourth, include instances which clearly defy many norms of classical storytelling. In general, we can say that the following features enhance departure from the classical paradigm:

- late disclosure of the loop structure;
- lack of explanation for it;
- characters unable to alter or stop the looping process;
- a circular looping trajectory instead of jumps back in time;
- redoubling of the characters;
- impossibility of a way out;
- combination of different looping patterns;
- combination of the loop structure with other alternative plot structures.

If some or all of these conditions are met, the viewer's sense of cognitive mastery is severely challenged, the paradoxical nature of the work is reinforced, the

[21] Martin Hermann, evoking the literary tradition of the quest narrative, calls *Groundhog Day* and 12.01 'time-loop quests' (2011: 157–160). This may well be a remote influence, but the more obvious pattern of the two films is the simple goal-oriented single-protagonist action plot of classical film narration, often referred to as the (restorative) three-act structure.

usual concentration on a single, active, goal-oriented protagonist is obstructed, and interpretive closure is impeded. Of the examples analysed above, *Triangle* represents this sort of radical breach with narrative conventions, while 12.01 is situated at the other end of the classical-nonclassical spectrum (and *11.22.63* and *To Die Or Not* may be said to occupy a place in the middle) – which demonstrates that the same basic time-loop device can be used to forge narrations which vary considerably in their adherence to or departure from classical norms of storytelling.

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Timecrimes (Los Cronocrímenes), Spain 2007

To Die Or Not (Morir [O No]), Spain 1999

Too Many Ways To Be Nr. 1, Hong Kong 1997

Triangle, Great Britain/Australia 2009

Turn Back The Clock, USA 1933

Twelve Monkeys, USA 2015–2018 (Tv Series)

Wake Up And Die (Volver A Morir), Columbia 2011

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Abstract

Among the many innovations complex or "puzzle" films have brought about in the last three decades, experiments with narrative time feature prominently. And within the category of nonlinear plots, the loop structure – exemplified by films such as *Repeaters* (Canada 2010), *Source Code* (USA/France 2011), *Looper* (USA/China 2012) or the TV-Series *Day Break* (USA 2006) – has established itself as an interesting variant defying certain norms of storytelling while at the same time conforming in most cases to the needs of genre and mass audience comprehension. In the first part of my paper, I will map out different kinds of repeated action plots, paying special attention to constraints and potentialities pertaining to this particular form. In the second part, I will address the issue of narrative complexity, showing that loop films cover a wide range from "excessively obvious" mainstream (e.g. *Groundhog Day*, USA 1992; *12:01*, USA 1993; *Edge of Tomorrow*, USA/Canada 2014) to disturbing narrative experiments such as *Los Cronocrimenes* (Spain 2007) or *Triangle* (Great Britain/Australia 2009). Finally, a look at two early examples (*Repeat Performance*, USA 1947 and *Twilight Zone: Judgement Day*, USA 1959) will raise the question how singular the recent wave of loop films are from a historical perspective.

Key words: puzzle films, nonlinear plot, loop structure

Panoptikum 2021, 26:109-129 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.05

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Narration as attraction. *Mind-game films* and postclassical spectacles

The map of contemporary digital cinema has two main axes: narration and attraction. Indicating various relations between these two aspects may reframe theoretical approaches towards postclassical cinema and explain the complex way we experience it. One non-obvious type of these relations is analogies between *mind-game films* (Elsaesser 2009) and so-called *post-plot cinema* (Zeitchik); in other words, between narratively complex "thought experiments" (Elsaesser 2017) and astonishing spectacles of visual attractions. It may seem that both phenomena are radically opposite – how can we compare *Memento* (2000, dir. Ch. Nolan) to *Avatar* (2009, dir. J. Cameron), *Arrival* (2016, dir. D. Villeneuve) to *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015, dir. G. Miller), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, dir. M. Night Shyamalan) to *Avengers* (2012, dir. J. Whedon) or Christopher Nolan to Michel Bay and David Fincher to J.J. Abrams? Yet, what I suggest in this article is to consider this problem differently by treating mind-game and post-plot films as two sides of the same coin.

I argue that there is visible feedback between mind-game films and the cinema of digital attractions, which I see as complementary processes of making "spectacular mind games" and "mind-gaming the spectacles". The narrative *estrangements* (Shklovskij) specific to so-called *puzzle films* (Buckland) are in fact a type of attraction that is characteristic of the postclassical cinematic experience. On the other hand, the most recent spectacles of attractions employ narrative techniques which used to be specific to mind-game films. Thanks to this feedback, the recent epic *Avengers: Endgame* (2019, dir. A. Russo, J. Russo) is in fact a mind game, and *Inception* (2011, dir. Ch. Nolan) appears to be a *mise en abyme* of attractions. The aim of this article is, therefore, to establish various re-

lations between mind-game films and postclassical attractions: from examining the similar types of cinematic experiences they deliver to indicating the mutual influences between these two phenomena.

1. Narration/attraction exchange and extensive storyworlds

1.1. The "mind-game" turn in film studies

Thomas Elsaesser considers mind-game films as those which play games with both the characters and the viewers, while Warren Buckland defines puzzle films in narratological categories, underlining their complex or complicated storytelling structure. These films, according to Elsaesser, "put the emphasis on «mind»: they feature central characters whose mental condition is extreme, unstable, or pathological; yet instead of being examples of case studies, their ways of seeing, their interaction with other characters, and their «being in the world» are presented as normal" (Elsaesser 2009, p. 14). Even more disturbingly, mind-game films feel a delight in disorienting or misleading spectators, and the same "perverse" delight is returned by the viewers, who enjoy being misled and challenged by unfamiliar storyworlds. On the other hand, Buckland characterizes puzzle films as those which "embrace non-linearity, time loops, and fragmented spatiotemporal reality. These films blur the boundaries between different levels of reality, are riddled with gaps, deception, labyrinthine structures, ambiguity, and overt coincidences" (Buckland, p. 6). From today's perspective, the phenomenon of puzzle films resonates not only within academic film studies but has also been identified by regular filmgoers as "mind-fuck movies". Mind-game and puzzle films have already been a well-established phenomenon for over two decades. *Memento*, *eXistenz* (1999, dir. D. Cronenberg), *Lost Highway* (1997, dir. D. Lynch), *Donne Darko* (2001, dir. R. Kelly) and *Fight Club* (1998, dir. D. Fincher), are titles which represent 'ideal' mind-game / puzzle structures, along with other titles that explore some of their distinctive narrative and ideological aspects, such as *The Game* (1997, dir. D. Fincher), *Usual Suspects* (1995, dir. B. Singer), *Beautiful Mind* (2001, dir. R. Howard) and *Dunkirk* (2017, dir. Ch. Nolan).

Moreover, film scholars have established other terms that are relatively similar to the ideas presented in Elsaesser's and Buckland's founding essays: *modular narratives* (Cameron), *database narratives* (Kinder), and *forking path narratives* (Bordwell 2002). What is more, the mind-game / puzzle pattern has been enriched with new ideas quite recently. Patricia Pisters introduced the *neuro-image*: films with characters "caught up in the vortex of the contemporary urban city-

scape full of networked electronic and digital screens – screens that are themselves always already connected to assemblages of power, capital, and transnational movements of peoples, goods, and information" (Pisters, p. 2). Steffen Hven develops the idea of *embodied fabula*, according to which the "complexity of contemporary cinema does not primarily rest in a complex, entangled, or complicated *syuzhet* or dramaturgy but owes to a «will to complexity» – understood as an insistence on the mutual dependence of cinematic dimensions that have traditionally been kept apart" (Hven, p. 9). Miklós Kiss and Willemsen Steven extended Warren Buckland's idea and presented the term *impossible puzzle films*, which "are characterized by pervasive paradoxes, uncertainties, incongruities and ambiguities in the narration, and which, as a consequence, tend to elicit a state of ongoing cognitive confusion throughout the viewing experience" (Kiss, Willemsen, p. 6). Last but not least, Seth Friedman introduces the term *misdirecting films*, which "encourage viewers to reinterpret them retrospectively" and "provoke spectators to understand narrative information initially in one manner and subsequently comprehend it in drastically new ways" (Friedman 2017, p. 1–2*).* All these approaches stress not only discontinuation of classical linearity, but also ontological and epistemological changes in the audiovisual narrative paradigm. It will not be an exaggeration to say that we are witnessing a "mind-game shift" in contemporary film narratology.

1.2. Post-plot astonishment and the carnival of attractions

"Attraction", on the other hand, is a less obvious term whose roots reach back to the very beginning of cinema – decades before it became digital. According to Sergey Eisenstein, attraction is "any aggressive aspect of the theatre; that is, any element of it which subjects the spectator to a sensual or psychological impact" (Eisenstein, p. 34). This approach was later developed by the prominent "cinema of attractions" theory established by Tom Gunning, who argued that the spectatorship experience common to early cinema was both shock and amusement. Therefore, the artistic frame of the very first cinematic spectacles was the "aesthetic of astonishment": "rather than being an involvement with narrative action or empathy with characters' psychology, the cinema of attractions solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer's curiosity. The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment" (Gunning 2009, p. 743).

Postclassical cinema seems fascinated by its own technological potential and visual illusion. The similarities between the early cinema of attractions and con-

temporary digital cinematic spectacles are often used to describe attraction-driven postclassical blockbusters, which seem to have intensified their visual impact since the early 21st century, when the rise of the franchise and re-make era began. The similarity of corporal reactions and the relevance of "omnipotent" film technology allows us to apply the category of attraction to contemporary postclassical cinema. As Thomas Elsaesser argues, "The assertion that early cinema is closer to post-classical cinema than it is to classical cinema also reverses the relation of norm and deviance. Now early cinema appears – flanked by the powerful, event-driven and spectacle-oriented blockbuster cinema – as the norm, making the classical Hollywood cinema seem the exception (or *intermezzo*)" (Elsaesser 2004, p. 84).

The analogies between early and digital cinema often stress the fact that contemporary cinema is driven by feedback between narrative complexity and the spectacle of attraction. How can we frame the relations between narration and attraction? Both narration and attraction are designed to appeal to viewers and both narration and attraction create a certain reaction and an "answer" within the cultural communication process provided by the institution of cinema. I suggest going beyond the well-established oppositional thinking that juxtaposes story vs. visuals, tellability vs. spectacle, *narration vs. monstration* (Gaudreault 2009)[1]. Instead, I propose considering narration and attraction as complementary elements of the multidirectional economy of postclassical films – an economy which includes various ties, flows, margins, encounters, contradictions and interdependencies.

The prominent idea of contemporary narrative was introduced by David Bordwell. In his view, action and blockbuster film narration is not disturbed by visual attractions but are even more fluent. His concept of *intensified continuity* indicates four shifts in the narration/spectacle economy: rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements. Thanks to these changes, contemporary film narration is coherent and movement-driven; therefore, according to Bordwell there is no "postclassical" cinema, just a continuation of the well-established classical mode of narration. "Far from rejecting traditional continuity in the name of fragmentation and incoherence, the new style amounts to an intensification of established techniques" (Bordwell 2002, p. 16), therefore the emergence of hyperkinetic editing does not contradict classical cinema but rather confirms it as a dominant paradigm. This is an approach which has been opposed by Stephen Shaviro's idea of *post-*

[1] The tradition of framing "narration" and "attraction" as opposite and complementary categories in film theory was described in this volume by Filip Cieślak in the article ….

continuity editing: "continuity itself has been fractured, devalued, fragmented, and reduced to incoherence. That is to say, the very techniques that were developed in order to *intensify* cinematic continuity have ended up undermining it" (Shaviro 2016, p. 55). My intent is not to indicate the winner of an intensified/post-continuity duel: I believe that both approaches can be used in a non-contradictory manner as different elements of a theoretical spectrum, where – depending on the phenomena, genres, and films – both intensified and post-continuity ideas can find a use. This creates an opportunity for a bottom-up film analysis where a single theory does not determine the outcome of analysis but is a handy research tool. I therefore assume that we may consider the existence of intensified continuity and post-continuity not only in one cinematic universe (*Marvel*) or franchise (*Avengers*), but also within a single film (*Avengers: Infinity War* [2018, A. Russo, J. Russo]) – or maybe even a scene (battle on Titan).

There are also several interesting theoretical propositions which combine narration and monstration qualities. Geoff King introduced the term "spectacular narratives" in order to characterize the specificity of the blockbuster movie. In this view, Hollywood nowadays emphasizes the visual impact but remains rooted in narrative progression even though the storytelling may seem less complex (King). Moreover, King sees special effects as auto-reflexivity – not a "regression" of a narrative but an emphasis: "Sitting back and simply 'taking in' the spectacle, the impact of 'big' special effects seems to be as important a source of pleasure in these films as the joys of narrative", and special effects are "over-insistent narrative rhetoric" (King, p. 29). That is why "watching a movie" has become "riding a movie" (King, p. 176) – a film experience simulates theme-park amusement, with camera rides as a rollercoaster perspective and film narration as "track direction" that connects all the modules of attraction. In this case, as Scott Bukatman argues, there has been a narration/attraction feedback: films became more spectacular and theme parks became narrated (Bukatman, p. 266). The inspiring term *post-plot film* was introduced by "Los Angeles Times" film critic, Steven Zeitchik, according to whom "The way the film is structured, coherence of any kind – why people are literally doing what they're doing, or what the plausible psychological explanations are for what they're doing – seem beside the point" (Zeitchik). Post-plot films of course have a story and narration, yet they are generic and designed not to disturb the very idea of the contemporary blockbuster – a joyful and a carnival-like feast of digital attractions which simply does not need narrative support.

What is more, in contemporary film culture these relations have to expand beyond a single film. World-building is a basic form of expansion of franchises

and seriality in contemporary production culture. Since postclassical cinema dynamics are driven by various types of narration/ attraction exchange, we cannot detach them from the technological changes brought by cinematic digitalization. Postclassical films modify, change or dismiss the conventions of "classical cinema" (Bordwell 1985) or "zero style cinema" (Przylipiak) and are located in a dynamic, transfictional (Ryan 2013) and transmedial (Jenkins 2006) environment. Also the seriality of contemporary culture causes changes in the narration of films. In an era when most superheroes and fantastic protagonists are re-acting the same "rescue-the-world story" and Disney is re-making, re-booting and re-writing its own classics, we no longer wonder "what will happen?" but instead ask ourselves "how will it be shown?".

Since the digital cinematic (r)evolution began three decades ago, one may ask what is so "special" in the omnipresent digital effects? How to create the sensation of novelty within a culture of seriality and repetition? Nowadays, all "special" digital effects have become normal devices and are used in various narrative functions, as indicated by Shilo T. McClean: documentary, invisible, seamless, exaggerated, fantastical, surrealist and hyperrealist (McClean, p. 73–102). In order to fabricate more creative and "attractive" effects, contemporary film spectacles have been becoming more designed/rendered than filmed/recorded. This is the crucial element of the "exhibitionist" nature of contemporary cinema – the "cinema designed" and "engineered spectacle" (Gurevitch) which is driven by "post-cinematic cameras" that "seem not to know their place with respect to the separation of diegetic and non-diegetic planes of reality; these cameras therefore fail to situate viewers in a consistently and coherently designated spectating position" (Denson, p. 196). Steven Shaviro describes contemporary film attraction in a similar way: "the sequence becomes a jagged collage of fragments of explosions, crashes, physical lunges, and violently accelerated motions. There is no sense of spatiotemporal continuity; all that matters is delivering a continual series of shocks to the audience" (Shaviro 2016: 51). A radical critique of such an aggressive film spectacle was carried out by Matthias Stork in his video essay called *Chaos Cinema*. Compared to the action films of the 80s and 90s, *chaos cinema* has intensified its movement and became hyperactive. Post-Millennial cinema "trades visual intelligibility for sensual overload", and in consequence "the new action films are fast, florid, volatile audiovisual war zones" (Stork). In this view, attraction becomes distraction – narration becomes disorientation. Viewers' experiences related to disorientation, distraction or discomfort (perverse pleasures of film) lead us towards *mind-game films* (Elsaesser 2009) or *puzzle films* (Buckland 2009). This is why I would like to consider attraction not only as a digitally designed element of the cinematic spectacle, but also as a narrative *defamiliarization* (Shklovskij).

1.3 Postclassical cinema and its unfinished definition

In her book *Post-Classical Cinema: An International Poetics of Film Narration,* Eleftheria Thanouli indicates significant shifts in contemporary film storytelling. Not only narrative structure is (de)constructed, but also the philosophy and anthropology of the film experience, both of which are influenced by production technology (digitalization) and changes in the sociological landscape (globalization, post-industrial society, new media omnipresence). Thanouli compares the characteristic aspects of classical and postclassical cinema both as opposition and as revisionist continuity. She notes that post-classical storytelling is no longer strongly focused on a storyline driven by the main protagonist. What is more, narrative fluency based on linearity and casual chronology drifts towards the proliferation of narrative lines and the disturbance of space-time unity. "The filmmakers appear to be freed from the tyranny of linearity, as they handle narrative time with the flexibility and omni-directionality that is embodied in digital technology" (Thanouli, p. 129). "Common sense" causality no longer remains a dogmatic strategy for plot structuring. A protagonist turns out to be less credible, less active and less consequent; what is more, the story-world (s) he inhabits becomes resistant to familiarizing; the narration is porous, episodic, complicated, and often auto-reflexive, and editing departs from fluency and traditional continuity. Digital production and post-production processes (including digital special effects) make it easier to manipulate with editing. Moreover, the combination of shots and scenes appears more dynamic and sudden, definitely more disturbing and – most importantly – nontransparent. The storytelling includes less goal-oriented motivation of characters, less proliferated characters and plots, increased fragmentation, complex syuzhet, parallel actions, disturbed editing, digital effects, "hypermediated realism" (increased awareness of the screen culture of our times [Thanouli, p. 45]), and hybrid genres. Postclassical cinema narrates more quickly and less coherently.

Another interesting concept of the latest switch in the postclassical narration/attraction economy is often called "post-cinema". "Post-cinema would mark not a caesura but a transformation that alternately abjures, emulates, prolongs, mourns, or pays homage to cinema. Thus, post-cinema asks us to think about new media not only in terms of novelty but in terms of an ongoing, uneven, and indeterminate historical *transition*" (Denson, Leyda, p. 2). What is more, "contemporary films – from blockbusters to independents and the auteurist avant-garde – use digital cameras and editing technologies, incorporating the aesthetics of gaming, webcams, surveillance video, social media, and smartphones, to name a few" (Denson, Leyda, p. 4). Therefore, postclassical cinema's attraction

can often be the presence of technology which is no longer "transparent" or "seamless" but is openly mediated and exposed, including "spectacular" CGI and FX technologies, as well as "intimate" and everyday devices like smartphone cameras, desktop interfaces (via the emerging sub-genre of *desktop movies*) or CCTV. Postclassical cinema incorporates various technologies which may seem both a source of attraction and a driver of narration, with all the (dis)advantages of technophobia (fear of ideology, surveillance, ontological and epistemological doubts) and technophilia (advantages of progress, facility and empowerment).

Postclassical film narration seems to frame *change* (the main storytelling category and a factor of narrative progress) not as an immanent part of plot structure, but rather as an output of the comprehension of the narration process by the viewer; a viewer who can recognize the film genre and the "mythical" structure of the plot also experiences certain emotions and affects in reaction to the fictional storyworld that (s)he has already inhabited. Contemporary film narration and diegesis are indeed story-worlds (Ryan 2013) which are both narration driven and attraction based. This approach allows us to go beyond the simple narration/attraction opposition towards framing a movie as a spacetime opened to expansion in the contemporary culture of seriality. The concept of a *transmedial world* – a story-world which disseminates its presence (rules, narratives, characters) via various medias (Thon 2015) – frames attraction/narration relations outside a single film towards merchandising, marketing strategies and other cinematic paratexts. I consider world-building elements (settings, characters, costumes, props, production design, *mise-en-scène*, specific storyworld rules, etc.) to be an important source of attractions, but only in correlation with storytelling dynamics: movement, camera trajectory, and dramatic tension.

2. Cinematic experience: affect and embodiment

2.1. Estrangements and the excess of narration

Mind-game films have already been described in the context of both art and classical narration (Kiss, Willemsen 2017). Another theoretical idea that interferes with *mind-game films* is the so-called "cinema of attraction" (Gunning 1990). This is a less obvious framework, yet it does not seem totally inappropriate considering the fact that *mind-game films* evoke not only an urge to rationalize, but also a notion of astonishment and sensory overstimulation; in other words, they combine the process of *sense-making* and the effect of *mind-blowing*, a specific fusion of amusement and cinematic excess which is reflected in puzzle films' vernacular synonym: *mind-fuck movies*. This means that we have to examine

various modes of experience within the horizon of comprehending film narration (as cognitive processes, sense-making, emotional engagement) and attraction, which brings more effective, diffused, incoherent and illusive sensations. As Tom Gunning noted regarding early cinematic spectacles, "The spectator does not get lost in a fictional world and its drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its fulfillment" (Gunning 2009, p. 743). "Attraction" gives rise to a complex cinematic sensation which remains difficult to verbalize. It includes visual pleasure, astonishment, and awareness of cinematic illusion, yet it remains an aggressive moment which evokes corporal reactions (tension, eye movement, thrill, gasps of amazement, etc.). This kind of disorientation or affective discomfort (the perverse pleasures of a film and the notion of being moved by it) is also present in *mind-game films*, with their complicated, non-chronological or subjective narration, spatiotemporal paradoxes and psychopathological focalizers.

Postclassical films tend to be exhibitionist and over-visible, while employing a storytelling structure that becomes an attractive cognitive challenge. This is an example of an interesting relation in postclassical cinema: narration becomes a series of spectacular attractions (ex. in *post-plot films: Guardians of The Galaxy* [2014, J. Gunn], *Mad Max: Fury Road* [2015, G. Martin]), *The Hobbit* [2012–14, P. Jackson]), while attraction may be seen as manipulation in narration. In this case, the "narrative movement" is contemporarily perplexed with "the movement of attractions", which – as I argue – indicates the multidirectional vector of film dynamics. In this view, attraction appears not only as a digitally designed element of a spectacle, but also as a narrative *defamiliarization*.

In mind-game and puzzle films, aspects of narration that appear as cognitive bait include anachrony (especially retrospection), event sequencing and compositional frame. Intensified manipulation dominates the narrative structure and results in *achrony*, which according to Mieke Bal is a "deviation of time" (Bal, p. 97) that cannot be chronologically ordered. The narration aspects listed above are visible in the history of art cinema, and some of these elements can also be seen in film noir or post-classical films which are not considered to be puzzle films. Yet, the very idea of contemporary narrative games focuses not only on introducing some narrative challenges, but also on multiplying them in order to create a pyramid of structural complications. Some *mind-game films* are in fact a labyrinth of storytelling estrangements. The fragmentation, unreliability, chronological and linear disorder, metalepsis, retrospections and futurospections, and the ontological ambiguity of the diegesis are perplexing and overwhelming. The multiplication or cumulation of narrative defamiliarization – which I call

"narrative excess" – may create an experience similar to the cinema of attractions: affective tension and the notion of disruption and disorientation.

So far, the affective and cognitive puzzlement of the cinematic *mind-game* may have found its best realization in *Westworld*. Since it is a television series, the profusion of estrangements refers not only to one episode but has to be extended over one season and eventually the whole series. The narrative seriality exploited by contemporary television indeed serves puzzle structures and seems to reestablish the trend. A mind game can be played within the possibilities offered by the fragmented and open structure that is characteristic of TV series, which may also intensify the ambiguity of a storyworld that reveals a Chinese-box structure of codependent levels of diegesis, which are perplexed or looped. The construction of the interdependent layers of *Westworld*'s multiverse is flexible and based on many temporal relations: repetition, retroactivity, and alternative and circular time. As was shown in the final cliffhanger of the first season, which level of reality is primal or who the god-like figure who governs the mechanics of Westworld is can never be finally established. All this creates an opportunity to "vertically" accumulate more layers, and in fact infinitely add layers to the Russian Doll structure of the film. The embodiment of mind-game films may resemble cognitive dizziness and especially characterizes puzzle films whose narration is entangled in an endless loop or an eternal *mise en abyme. Inception* serves as a perfect example: the structural vortex is also visualized by "special effects" in scenes in which a character is captured in closed spaces (room, elevator) that are spinning around. Yet this "cognitive dizziness" is also present in *Dunkirk* (2017, dir. Ch. Nolan), in which an overload of audiovisual techniques reflects a war zone's overwhelming onslaught of stimuli. This affective "mind-blowing" aspect "sums up" *Lost Highway,* in which the story repeats itself in a retroactive, vicious circle, or in the "schizophrenic" scene of identity transfer between two characters: Fred (Bill Pullman) and Pete (Balthazar Getty). On the other hand, *Donnie Darko* starts with a "mind-blowing" scene in which a cosmic rabbit visits the protagonists, invites them on a psychedelic trip, and reveals his messianic faith. The notion of a strangely moving disturbance may be experienced in crucial moments of *Fight Club* (1999, dir. D. Fincher), in which the true identity of Brad Pitt/Edward Norton's character is revealed, and in *American Psycho* (2000, dir. M. Harron), in which a macabre crime committed by the yuppie character is *de-narrated* and framed as a subjective perception of him as the unreliable focalizer. Scenes like this have a peculiar affective ("mind-blowing") potential which proves that "intellectual" interpretation or rational sense-making are not the main or sole strategy of experiencing *mind-game films*. The affective tension and perverse pleasure of cognitive insecurity that strike us during this type of

ambiguous scene are equally important cinematic experiences and should not be marginalized as this is the very moment when mind-game films' "impact really starts as they attach themselves to spectators, taking hold of their minds and entering their fantasies (Elsaesser, Hagener, p. 151).

2.2. Vertigo of narration and spectacle

The *puzzle film* experience is therefore a feedback loop of sense-making processes (Kiss, Willemsen) and mind-blowing affects. Watching a puzzle film does not necessarily mean "solving a puzzle" or completely reducing cognitive dissonance; it also means being dazed or thunderstruck by the narrative dynamics of the film – mind-game also means "mind blown". This affective character of mind-game films brings us again to Tom Gunning's *aesthetic of astonishment* (Gunning 2009). Despite the fact that this theoretical proposition did not regard narrative complexity, it appears useful for characterizing the affective nature of mind-game films, especially in the case of the rhetoric used to describe the concept, which employs elusive and ambiguous words such as shock, daze or astonishment. What is more, the specific experience of being dazzled by a narrative maze reminds one of another category: *ilinx*, a type of game described by Roger Caillois that aims to draw us into a state of kinetic or mental chaos. A participant strives to achieve a "rapid whirling or falling movement, a state of dizziness and disorder" (Caillois, p. 12) and to gratify "the desire to temporarily destroy his bodily equilibrium, escape the tyranny of his ordinary perception, and provoke the abdication of conscience" (Caillois, p. 44). As we see, this mental vertigo is not an undesirable side effect which should be neutralized, but an intentional state that is associated with perverse pleasure. Again, this notion remains hard to rationalize and therefore to verbalize. Cinematic sensations described in this way will instead remain associated with contemporary post-plot cinema, dominated by the amalgam of digital attractions (in particular with 3D cinema) whose editing and movement sought to simulate controlled kinetic sensations. It seems, however, that speaking about this type of bewilderment is also valid in the case of mind-game films, in which the effect of *ilinx* is generated in a variety of ways through both visual attractions and narrative estrangements.

The narrative excess of mind-game films creates the impression of vertigo – a multidirectional journey of thoughts and affects that both seek sense and derive pleasure from momentary astonishment. This dazzlement of the narrative vortex may be found in *eXistenZ*, which presents a fatalistic multilayered VR game, and in *The Prestige*, which gradually adds more levels of narrative as flashbacks and diaries. On the other hand, *Mechanic* dazzles by means of the pro-

tagonist's stream of consciousness encrusted with snapshots of trauma; *Arrival* presents a retroactive time with ambiguous flashbacks and flash-forwards; and *Adaptation* multiplies the levels of fiction by adding new meta-authors. Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener write that in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004, dir. M. Gondry) "a never-ending spiral is set in motion and we as spectators are no longer certain of our role in the game a film like this is into, tricked as we, like the characters, are into mistaking 'replay' as play". Are we impartial witnesses, active participants or manipulated pawns?" (Elsaesser, Hagener, p. 149). Mirosław Przylipiak finds a similar narrative trap in *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006): "Lynch exposes the illusion in his own way. He reveals the curtain only to show that there is another behind it, and behind that there is another one, so one cannot be sure of anything; what seemed to be true turns out to be a delusion, and a moment later, it takes on the features of objective reality again. And so *ad infinitum*" (Przylipiak, p. 258).

All of these seem to be a strange synthesis of pleasure and discomfort which is similar to Tom Gunning's writing on the early cinema of attractions: "as in the first projections, the very aesthetic of attraction runs counter to an illusionistic absorption, the variety format of the picture-palace program continually reminding the spectator of the act of watching by a succession of sensual assaults" (Gunning 2009, p. 748). Astonishment is not a cognitive process, but rather a sensation or notion – a rapid and momentary experience that can be felt as pleasure entwined with a controlled thrill. Although this type of reception may be characteristic of post-plot "war zone" (Stork) cinema or "post-cinematic affect" (Shaviro) which relies on digital attractions, it seems that it can also be found in mind-game films. As Gunning states, "astonishment and knowledge perform a vertiginous dance, and pleasure derives from the energy released by the play between the shock caused by this illusion of danger and delight in its pure illusion. The jolt experienced becomes a shock of recognition" (Gunning 2009, p. 750). Tom Gunning succeeded in capturing and describing the type of film experience which includes circulation of intellectual aspects as well as elusive and ephemeral affects. Similar affective experiences are part of mind-game films. The emerging aspect of *mind-blowing* and astonishment is a specific mixture of pleasure and discomfort; it is also proof of the coexistence of narration and attractions. Narration and attraction (understood as any reason for astonishment, not only visual enjoyment) in puzzle films are complementary, not contradictory. Narrative estrangements and the entire confounding structure of a film may seem to be the attraction that astonishes or "attracts" us, thereby capturing our attention. This attraction also stimulates us cognitively and evokes a desire to search for meaning among narrative paradoxes and ambiguities.

3. Cognitive attractions and the persistence of mind-game films

3.1. Spectacular mind games

Contemporary mind-game or puzzle films, especially big-budget science-fiction productions, cannot be reduced to an abstract "narrative structure". They are also (or maybe above all?) cinematographic spectacles which use digital post-production technology. The attractions of mind-game films are based on visual impact and narrative disturbance. An astonishing *ilinx* of this kind, or a mind-blowing experience, may be the result of an accumulation of the various types of paradoxes that are present in the diegesis and in the narrative excess. A director who especially made his personal brand out of this kind of viewer engagement is Christopher Nolan, whose *oeuvre* appears to be an interesting case study of postclassical cinema. Films directed by him are visually amusing spectacles with significant budgets and box office success; on the other hand, their storytelling remains complex and sometimes complicated; what is more – except for *The Dark Knight* trilogy and *Insomnia* – Nolan's productions are original films.

An interesting exchange of narration and spectacular attraction may be found in *Dunkirk* and its sensorimotor experience. Christopher Nolan's war spectacle is *moving* thanks to the various types of movement it generates. This type of dynamics is precisely orchestrated with its multidimensionality: within the frame and/or a cut, in editing, camera trajectory, diegetic noises and soundtrack, and last but not least in the proliferated and fragmentised narration. The dramatic tension is based on a sinusoid of acceleration and deceleration and causes the viewer to experience emotional jumps and equilibriums. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener wrote, "the movement-image stands for a cinema of perceptions, affects and actions in which the sensory-motor schema of the human body is a functioning unit. A chain links perceptions to feelings, and feelings to sensations and sensations to actions, which in turn gives rise to perceptions, etc., and puts the human being as agent at the center of the motion that is a movie" (Elsaesser, Hagener, p. 159). Here, where Deleuze's idea of movement-image seems almost corporeal, *Dunkirk* itself illustrates both the etymology and the phenomenon of *kínēma*. In Nolan's film, the essence of cinema – the kinetics – is understood as the ability of films to simulate movement, and thus to move viewers. To embody *Dunkirk* is equivalent to finding a place in a world of disorder intensified by narrative proliferation and absorbing its "war zone" of audiovisual chaos, all of which correspond to the concept of Sergei Eisenstein' s attraction, that is "any aggressive aspect of the theater, i.e., any element of it that subjects the audience to a emotional or psychological influence" (Eisenstein, p. 34).

Nolan's "spectacular narratives" not only accord extensive attractions with complicated narration, but also seem to position narration *as* attraction and create a specific form of "cognitive visual attractions". Loops, retroactivity, Chinese box structures, de-narration, non-reliability, ambiguity and narrative proliferation are the most popular defamiliarizations in his reservoir, all of which create an interesting mode of distributing attraction/narration elements in postclassical cinema. *Inception* is, of course, the most proper example of this strategy thanks to the way it visualizes spatial and temporal paradoxes. The film's characters often create labyrinths and the illusions of *mise en abyme* multiply elements of space; there is a scene that captures the Penrose stair dilemma and a visual motive of a rolling surface when a character moves inside a rotating room. Scenes like this are both "intellectual" and visual attractions that generate astonishment in audiences. This bewilderment is intensified by a specific, multilevel narrative structure, thanks to which the hypodiegetic storyworld not only has a *mise en abyme* shape, but also seems to loop in an infinite repetition. The clarity of the *matryoshka* framework is disturbed, and the linear experience of the film is drawn into a narrative spiral. The "deepening" of successive levels of reality, within which and between which dynamic changes occur, may resemble a vortex that makes our head spin. It is a kind of affect that Brian Massumi described as a "temporal sink, a hole in time" (Massumi, p. 86). The daze of *Inception* is the result of this kind of world-building abundance. Interconnections between cinematic movement and time are, in fact, main issue of *Tenet* (2020). Its multidirectional narration affects both macro-movement of the whole storyline and micro-movement of the story-world elements within a single cut (characters moving backwards, etc.). The climax sequence of Nolan's blockbuster is a contamination of narrative „brain teaser" and visual celebration of cinematic omnipotence.

"Cognitive attractions" may be found in other mind-game films: in *Arrival*, in which a retroactive way of perceiving the timeline is visualized in the circular description of the alien's language, or in *Interstellar* when, at the end, the father visits his daughter's room "from the past" and "from behind" the four-dimensional reality, which is presented as a cross-cut of elongated book shelves. This is of course a mind-game strategy, but also a source of, as Thomas Elsaesser calls it, a "thought experiment" which brings "the hypothetical tense and the gesture of *what if* – both stances that apply to many of the ways we approach reality itself. 'Let's assume that...' has become almost a default modus operandi thanks to the technologies of probability, statistics and the extraordinary advances made in mathematically modeling the physical world in the real time" (Elsaesser 2017, p. 62).

3.2. Mind-gaming the spectacle

This kind of "thought experiment" and "what if" logic are visibly present in the latest blockbusters, especially in the superhero sub-genre. In effect, postclassical cinema not only explores mind-game films by transferring them from independent cinema to the mainstream, but it also "mindgames" the visual spectacles by encrusting them with visual and narrative "thought experiments".

It is particularly interesting that the *Avengers* crossovers change their narrative pattern from a frenetic post-plot to a *mind-game*-inspired spectacle with time travel paradoxes. First, Marvel's superhero ensemble movie *Avengers* had a rather simple story: a group of heroes with outstanding abilities had to stop a grand cosmic villain whose aim was to annihilate Earth with an omnipotent stone. The straightforwardness of the plot generated a perfect background for some aspects that were later capitalized on by Marvel's aesthetics: character development and interactions between heroes, rapid (often ironical) dialogues or punchlines, extensive world-building, and – above all – stunning visual attractions which were a joyful celebration of cinematic movement. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015, dir. J. Whedon) also employed a post-plot pattern with a *deus ex machina* intervention in the climax. While this narrative construction was stable enough to support six characters and two films, it did not seem sufficient to ensure bolder productions like *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*, which engaged more than a dozen superheroes from the Marvel Universe. As a result, the two final *Avengers* films used narrative patterns that are recognized in postclassical cinema yet are not popular for blockbusters: *network narratives* (Bordwell 2006) and mind-game *estrangements*. *Infinity War* proliferates on three main plotlines which are an opportunity not only for additional dynamic action, but also for a specific "fan service" which allows viewers to see unpredictable team-ups of well-known characters. This is a blockbuster ensemble movie in which, according to David Bordwell, "several protagonists are given equal emphasis, based on screen time, star wattage, control over events, or other spotlighting maneuvers" (Bordwell 2006, p. 96). Thanks to this solution, *Infinity War* – the "ambitious crossover", as fans used to call it – was able to maintain coherency and intensify the action at the same time (to the point at which its fluent editing and digital dynamic seemed to be proof of Bordwell's idea of intensified continuity).

What is even more interesting is the film's finale, in which we may observe two mind-game defamiliarizations, or "thought experiments": one narratological, the other visual. At this point of the film, the megavillain Thanos, who wants to kill half of the universe's population, is on his final mission to find the last Infinity Stone; after collecting all six of them he will be able to fulfill his

annihilation masterplan. The Mind Stone is, however, "organically" attached to the superhero Vision's forehead. In order to stop Thanos, Scarlet Witch (one of the Avengers) kills Vision and consequently destroys the Mind Stone. Yet, Thanos, who has already possessed the Time Stone and is able to reverse this very moment, brings Vision back to life, collects the Mind Stone itself, and rapidly erases half of the lives in the universe. Shortly after snapping his fingers (a gesture which starts the annihilation process), we see people turning into ashes blown by the wind. The first of these "attractions" (or anti-attractions?) is an example of denarration – a form of re-telling or canceling the story – when the action runs backwards, almost as if we were watching a VHS cassette or video footage in fast rewind mode. The second one appears as an original and visionary variation of visualizing the mass death with all its pathos and fatalistic course. It is interesting that both "attractions" are not only shocking, moving and astonishing, but also deeply rooted in the ontology of digital cinema. The denarration reminds us about the omnipotence, flexibility, and multidirectional vector of the film medium itself, whereas the dematerialization (or "vanishing people") remains not only the *vanitas* of turning bodies into ashes, but also a visualization of a "digital body" that is decomposed into single disconnected pixels. While "creating" or world-building in postclassical digital cinema is actually an element of postproduction which consists of rigging, match-moving, rotoscoping, animating, rendering and compositing, "annihilating" or "world-destructing" would be the very opposite, namely turning supernatural characters into the smallest parts of their being – their digital atoms, *ergo* pixels. This kind of auto-reflexivity that indicates the nature of contemporary cinema is another yet more subtle 21st-century "thought experiment" which is based on information and digital data. In this reality, as Thomas Elsaesser points out, "history is increasingly understood as data to be extracted from the past and projected along a linear trajectory into a future we inadvertently empty of possibility, of contingency, and radical change (and therefore preempt and prevent" (Elsaesser 2017, p. 62). De-narration and "digital vanishing" indeed seem to be something unpredictable and unpreventable.

The short denarration that summed up *Infinity War* was in fact a foreshadowing of the story arch in *Endgame*. In order to reverse Thanos' actions, the Avengers team has to turn back time, thus opening the film's narration to time-travel paradoxes and looped or retroactive temporality. The final Avengers movie delivers its own time-traveling theory, slightly different from the one presented in popular film narrations of this kind (which are literally mocked in the character's dialogues). In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, time manipulations do not affect the past but create another timeline with its own linear flow which avoids

"the grandpa paradox"; namely, an intervention in the past cannot change the present because our present precedes these interventions and therefore remains in the past itself. This is another interesting case of "mindgaming" a spectacle in which viewers are not only challenged by unconventional temporality, but also by its fictional alternative version.

Interestingly, the latest Avengers productions are not the only case of "mindgaming the spectacle" trend in contemporary blockbusters. Another Marvel production, *Doctor Strange* (2016, dir. S. Derrickson), introduces retroactive causality, a looped timeline and "cognitive attractions" like bent time and surfaces (similar to *Inception's* tricks). The interference between different parallel universes was the idea of the teen-movie animation *Spiderman: Into the Spiderverse* (2018, dir. P. Ramsey, B. Persichetti, R. Rothman). On the other hand, *Captain Marvel* includes a scene that is an interesting example of a "neuro-image" in which, as Patricia Pisters points out, "we no longer see through characters' eyes, as in the movement-image and the time-image; we are most often instead in their mental worlds" (Pisters 2012, p. 14). The main character, Carol Danvers – one of the most powerful fighters in the universe – is brainwashed by the imperial Kree forces and serves them in colonizing cosmic territories. In the crucial scene we "enter" Carol's mentalscape to experience the process of her gaining awareness of her own origins and liberation from the influence of the Krees, who have been manipulating her for a long time. Her inability to break free is presented in a very "plastic" way: Captain Marvel is immersed in a liquid wall that imprisons her powers and consciousness and suddenly becomes a screen of her memories and fears. Carol is fighting her most important battle within her private mentalscape, winning a mind game of her own. Another, even more radical „neuro-image" has been introduced as a world-building base in MCU TV series *Wanda Vision* (2021). Its protagonist, powerful super heroine with telekinetic abilities created post-traumatic reality, where she and her late partner, Vision, can live happily ever after. In this Chinese-box story, each episode is stylized as it was made in different decade of television history. However this postmodern-alike "thought experiment" eventually gives room to a standard magical resolution typical to superhero genre. Mind-game and fantastical spectacle have been blended again.

Moreover, the visible strategy of complicating the narration and abandoning post-plot structure appears to be an "access for all" strategy, as described by Thomas Elsaesser: "*access for all* in this sense does not necessarily imply going for the lowest common denominator, or providing "something for everybody", but can aim at trying to achieve a textually coherent ambiguity, the way that poetry is said to aim at maximizing the levels of meaning that specific words or works

can carry, thus extending interpretation while retaining control over the codes that make interpretation possible" (Elsaesser 2011, p. 248). The blockbusters I have already listed are not "universal" or "transparent" stories for an everyman filmgoer, but rather puzzling and challenging storyworlds ("coherent ambiguity") that may be perceived in various, even contradictory ways, depending on one's mindset, cultural capital or worldview, and which allow various forms of reception and embodiment. This kind of reading is also enabled by the ambiguous ties between narration and attraction.

As we can see, postclassical cinema variously reshapes the distribution of narration and attraction. Mind-game films – once indie or *auteur* productions – are becoming cinematic spectacles. On the other hand, visually stunning blockbusters seem to go beyond post-plot structure towards "mind-gaming the spectacle" and engaging not only visual, but also narrative and "cognitive" attractions. What is more, both narration and attraction may bring similar, affective sensations: the notion of shock and dissonance, discomfort, astonishment, kinesthetic impulse or cognitive stimulation. Modifications of contemporary cinema are therefore shaped by this fusion of narrative and visual excess. The relation between narration and attraction in 21st-century cinema should not be perceived as opposition, but as feedback which incarnates the very idea of the cinema – its unstoppable dynamics.

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Abstract

The article is a theoretical proposal which aims to create an alternative framework for mapping postclassical cinema. This framework is based on establishing various modes of relations between narration and spectacle, especially those represented by mind-game films and post-plot films. Instead of considering narration and spectacle as opposition, I suggest redescribing their complementary dynamics. I argue that there is visible feedback between mind-game films and the cinema of digital attractions, which I see as complementary processes of making "spectacular mind games" and "mind-gaming the spectacles". The article contains an analysis of similar types of cinematic experiences delivered by "narration" and "attractions" and indicates the mutual influences between these two phenomena. Both narration and attraction may bring similar, affective sensations: the notion of shock and dissonance, discomfort, astonishment, kinesthetic impulse or cognitive stimulation.

As for the article's conclusion: postclassical cinema variously reshapes the distribution of narration and attraction. Mind-game films are becoming cinematic spectacles. On the other hand, more and more "post-plot" blockbusters are introducing the "mind-gaming the spectacle" strategy, and are engaging viewers with "cognitive" attractions as well.

Key words: mind-game films, postclassical cinema, "post-plot" blockbusters

Panoptikum 2021, 26:131-152 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.06

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Network Narratives in Global Cinema: The Shift from Community to Network and Their Narrative Logics

Global society: community or network?

Marshall McLuhan's term *global village* coined in the 1960s imprinted the word 'global' on people's mind well before today's full-scale globalization. To look back on it, however, the implication might be somewhat paradoxical. McLuhan's age was already ultramodern thanks to the unprecedented interconnection of all different parts of the world through electronic media, but the consequent contraction of the globe into a 'village' sounds rather premodern. A village, that is, a small old-fashioned *community* where information is instantly shared from every quarter to every point is the new form of society brought by cutting-edge technology. But today, no other notion could better capture our digitally updated global village than *network*. Every day we log in Social Networking Services (not social community services) to reach out and transcend our neighborhoods at the speed of light. Or rather, we are involved in a complex "community of networks" that stretch across cities and nations but also intensify interconnections in existing social clusters; each SNS is thus a social 'network of communities.' Then, how should we understand the partly contrasting partly confusing usages of community and network? What are meaningful differences between them and how are they interrelated in our global society?

These fundamental questions urge me to theoretically investigate community and network as implying a different mode of social organization and subjectivity

each. In this paper, I will take global cinema as a useful stage of this study by focusing on its *network narratives* in comparison with *community-based narratives*. The network narrative is one of the buzzwords in recent film narratology about "complex storytelling" including "modular," "fractal," "puzzle," "hyperlink," "database," "forking-path," "multiple-draft," and "mind-game" narratives (see two anthologies edited by Warren Buckland (2008, 2014) among others). While scholars propose different terminologies and taxonomies of these narrative forms, a general consensus is that they have been increasingly visible since *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994) and palpably challenging classical narrative conventions by foregrounding fragmented space/time, temporal loops, different realities, unstable characters, multiple plots, unreliable narrators, and overt coincidences. The "Tarantino Effect" has indeed permeated "alternative plots" (Berg 2006), also pumping up narratological desires to map and theorize the newness of this cinematic trend from aesthetic, cognitivist, cultural, and industrial perspectives. As its multifaceted background, critics have commonly referred to modernity and postmodernism, globalization and network technologies, new media including video game and virtual reality, and even scientific theories of chaos, chance, and quantum physics. A mirror-like feedback or two-way influence has been noted between such external causes and their narratological effects (Everett 2005, 159). Furthermore, the latter is understood not just as a response to the former but as a reflection of a broader epistemological shift in rethinking identity, reality, and time (Cameron 2008, 2).

What is missing is, however, a coherent philosophical framework of such shifts and their explication in light of lives and worlds depicted in narrative space and time. Their existential conditions in diegesis allegorize or embody new historical changes of subjectivity and society that we undergo in reality. In this aspect, a framework I propose is to highlight the paradigm shift of social structure at large from community to network and their cinematic transcoding into community- and network-oriented narratives. This shift does not merely result from economic, technological globalization but indicates a large-scale transition of the fundamental way in which, I argue, collective life is organized spontaneously and even unconsciously around the core axes of sovereign power and individual desires. I will thus build on a range of critical theory to approach aesthetic narratology, primarily sociological, biopolitical, and psychoanalytic philosophy. The shift from community to network will then turn out to be resonant with the emergence of complex narratives in general and network narratives in particular. Moreover, some network narratives in *global cinema* reflecting global phenomena will indicate the multistep complexity of this broad shift including a problematic overlap of community and network.

I will move from this mixed stage to the stage of pure networking, analyzing their implications and related films.

Mapping network narratives, global community as a totalized network

Let me begin with a comprehensive but concise mapping of network narratives, partly building on David Bordwell (2006) and Charles Ramírez Berg (2006). Network narratives usually present several protagonists inhabiting distinct yet interlocking storylines. Their traditional name "ensemble plot" implies the polyphonic harmony of multiple characters mingling in a single location: it can be as tight as a French chateau in *The Rules of the Game* (Jean Renoir, 1939), a student-share house in *The Spanish Apartment* (Cédric Klapisch, 2002), and a theme park in *The World* (Jia Zhangke, 2004); it can also be as large as a metropolis such as L.A. in *Pulp Fiction*, Taipei in *Yi Yi* (Edward Yang, 2000), and London in *Love Actually* (Richard Curtis, 2003). Of course, there are a variety of middle-sized locales like a district or neighborhood in a big city as seen in *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Woody Allen, 1986), *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999), and *Timecode* (Mike Figgis, 2000). In many cases, time is also restricted just as all events occur within a day or two in *American Graffiti* (George Lukas, 1973), *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989), and *Dazed and Confused* (Richard Linklater, 1993). An ensemble film thus keeps the unity of space and time while often boasting of an all-star cast and revealing a social cross-section. It intermingles several voices or world views and yet does not necessarily privileges one of them or unifying them around a single, shared goal like a planned theft in heist films such as *Ocean's Eleven* (Steven Soderbergh, 2001) and *The Thieves* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2012) and post-catastrophic redemption in disaster films such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972) and *Train to Busan* (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016)—these conventional goal-oriented genre films are not polyphonic though featuring an ensemble of multiple stars.

Polyphonic or not, many ensemble films tend to attenuate the proper sense of networking due to their limited spatiotemporal scope. However, the idea of "ensemble" is shattered in the omnibus-style "parallel plot" that crosses over different times and/or spaces showing different protagonists. This more distributed form of narrative has in fact long evolved since D. W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and via modern masterpieces such as *The Godfather Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974) and *Before the Rain* (Milcho Manchevski, 1994), though the number of subplots hardly exceeds four—hence the "four-plot rule" (Berg 2006, 18). Slightly differently, what Berg calls "the hub and spoke plot" interconnects parallel sto-

rylines at certain points that sometimes last only for fleeting seconds or pass even unnoticed by characters as seen in a variety of (art) films that have two to four distinct parts: *The Double Life of Veronique* (Krzysztof Kieślowski, 1991), *Chungking Express* (Wong Kar-wai, 1994), *The Edge of Heaven* (Fatih Akin, 2006), and many titles in Hong Sang-soo's filmography including *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996), *The Power of Kangwon Province* (1998), and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000). These films draw attention to chance encounters between characters and their simultaneous connections, but paradoxically, such random networking rouse the sense of fate and (often bad) luck and thus stimulate the psychology of "if only" and the imagination of "what if"[1].

Furthermore, there is a case in which characters are hooked up through an occasion such as a metaphysical mystery in *Terrorizers* (Edward Yang, 1986) and successive ceremonies in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Mike Newell, 1994)—whose title tells everything. More palpable in this regard are "converging fates" films that, Bordwell (2006, 97–102) says, unfold a vast network where unacquainted characters pursue their own lives with autonomy but occasionally intersect by accident. Robert Altman's trademark style not only merges many characters into such an event as the lavish wedding in *A Wedding* (1978) and the weekend holiday in *Gosford Park* (2001), but also notably depicts "the sheer contingency of the encounters before bringing nearly all the characters together at the final concert" in *Nashville* (1975) and at the final earthquake in *Short Cuts* (1993). This networking logic evokes "the narrative of simultaneous monadic simultaneity" that Fredric Jameson (1995, 114–16) formulates and traces back to modernist novels such as André Gide's *The Counterfeiters*. Here, Jameson argues that coincidences merely emphasize isolated individuals' ephemeral connections and their "Providence-effect" is little more than a bravura aesthetic gesture. For Allan Cameron (2008, 146), however, this effect also serves as a source of pleasure, "revealing the common temporal medium that unites these disparate characters." Cameron's further point is that the fluid fashion of interweaving multiple stories in this temporal unity disqualifies Altman from making "modular narratives," in which each episode should disconnect the fabula (story) on the level of the syuzhet (plot). Modular narratives, in Cameron's terms, modulate time by creating or using "anachronic" devices (flashbacks/flashforwards), "forking

[1] The "if only"/"what if" effects are explicitly pursued in forking-path narratives (*Blind Chance*, *Sliding Doors*, *Run Lola Run*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Déjà Vu*, *Source Code*) and richly explored as the motifs of thought experiment in "mind-game" films that Thomas Elsaesser (2009, 2018) explores in a philosophical framework, which overlaps with my framework regarding many ideas—I also analyzed time-travel mind-game films elsewhere (Jeong 2019a). However, these films do not necessarily pivot around network narratives but often reinforce the sense and logic of community I will later discuss.

paths" (parallel storylines), an "episodic" series (an anthology), or a "split-screen" (spatial juxtaposition) (15). The last two may apply to some network narratives, but I claim the director's intentional modulation of time in these extradiegetic ways is not essential and even disruptive to my emphasis on 'diegetic' networking. Altman's films exemplify a specific phase of networked if not modular narrativity that deserves full attention itself.

In this sense, let me look into the issues of disparity and unity within network narratives, centering on the so-called L.A. ensemble films from *Short Cuts* to *Magnolia* and *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004). Although an ensemble cast is a selling point, what these films betray is "an impossible sense of 'community' or commonality among all Los Angelenos" (Hsu 2006, 134). L.A., well known for automobile-centered and thus decentered urban sprawl, is indeed "a serpentine network of often jampacked freeways and a crucial node in an international network of commercial, informational, immigrant, and financial flows" (138). This expansive metropolitan network frustrates individuals' attempt to "cognitively map" its totality à la Jameson—which is possible for a community—just as spectators often have difficulty penetrating subplots, images, or 'short cuts' that are rapidly networked in *Short Cuts*. Consequently, people lose a feeling for the public identity based on trust and respect as well as the private commitment to sustainable community building. Busy adjusting to the chaotic network but often stressed and exhausted, people tend to end up with a "blasé outlook" devaluing external stimuli—a protective shell safeguarding the self from contact with the others, as Georg Simmel (1972, 329–30), a precursor of network sociology, pointed out a century ago.

The problem is that this urban ego also grows into the collective selfhood of certain groups distinguished and detached from other groups. While the public space and sphere disintegrate, private desires and privatized power prevail without regulations. Forbidden cities are built and gated communities are sealed with high-tech policing methods against racial, ethnic minorities and the homeless, jobless, or moneyless. Postmodern urbanism not only enhances networking but leads to "an inevitable Haussmannization of Los Angeles," controlling populations and segregating neighborhoods (Dear and Flusty 1997, 158). The network society thus takes back on some qualities of the community such as the territorial, hierarchical boundaries between inside and outside, center and periphery, members and strangers, friends and enemies. The social barriers among different identity groups are rendered ever more permeable on the one hand and yet restructured on all the larger scale on the other hand. The networked whole becomes bigger and bigger while leaving unnetworked people behind, leaving them

even invisible. It is noteworthy that *Grand Canyon* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1991), an earlier L.A. ensemble film, explicitly contrasts the rich white and the poor black, but *Short Cuts* and *Magnolia* depict people of color only tangentially and stereotypically as offering services or threatening white masculinity. This relegation of the minorities to the sidelines makes "a totalizing image of L.A.'s community" (Hsu 2006, 142). The urban network is, I argue, totalized like a community that closes itself by excluding the unqualified, but without the traditional sense of communal belongingness. Said otherwise, today's global community is a *totalized network* without the pure openness of networking. This double bind is palpable in *Crash*. The metropolis here appears as a vibrant multicultural network, but it turns out to be highly vulnerable to daily racial tensions and deep-rooted biases that explode violently anytime anywhere among isolated individuals and segregated classes.

By extension, transnational network narratives reveal an immanent plane of global interconnectedness and its traumatic, disastrous effects at once. Set in Paris, Michael Haneke's *Code Unknown* (2000) shows that a white boy throws trash at a beggar from Eastern Europe, but the police arrests a black man upset by this behavior and deport the beggar who is identified as an illegal alien. Meanwhile, a French woman uninterested in social issues is insulted by an Arab bully, and nobody but an old Arab man intervenes to help her. Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) completes his multi-narrative Death Trilogy—following *Amores Perros* (2000) and *21 Grams* (2003)—in the largest, global setting: a vacationing American couple are injured by two poor Moroccan boys who simply want to test their father's hunting rifle, which was bought from a tour guide neighbor, who in turn received it as a gift from a Japanese man. While this Japanese man loses connection to his teenage deaf-mute daughter traumatized by her mother's suicide, the US government carries the Americans to a hospital by a helicopter and considers the boys' shooting a terrorist act. Pressed by the US, the Moroccan police chases after the boys, shoots and takes away one of them. In the meantime, the American couple's Mexican nanny in the US takes their two children with her as she travels across the border to attend her son's wedding in Mexico. But on her way back to the US, she encounters unexpected events on the border and ends up being deported from the US where she has worked sincerely yet illegally.

Narrative space in these films appears as a global network of random connections with the so-called "six degrees of separation" and the butterfly effect. Unrelated characters are tied together by converging fates or a moving object such as the rifle in *Babel*, which turns from a gift to a weapon like Plato's "pharmakon"

(meaning both remedy and poison)[2]. This undecidability is the dual nature of globalization. It is never fully global, or rather, full of global schisms. History shows: The Cold War ended with two ideological blocs merged into one liberal capitalist globe, but the new millennial antagonism occurred between the entire global system and its remnants with new antinomies debunking it in the forms of terroristic, economic, migration and refugee crises. World politics has given way to the administration of this globe as the "World Interior" of capital including policing measures for security and sovereign violence on its threatening outside (Sloterdijk 2013, 247). Hence the recto and verso of globalization: a single market of social networks, multicultural harmony, and transnational neoliberalism forms a planetary system of inclusion, and yet it generates symptoms of exclusion like inassimilable others and catastrophic risks as inevitable byproducts to control or remove. Non-white or immigrant characters in the films above are thus accepted and often needed but also suspected, humiliated, or even deported by the mainstream society in the name of the law; this exclusion, in turn, triggers their violent backlash or terrorizing return breaking the law. No doubt this loop can be extended to the vicious cycle of terror and war on terror that perpetuates extralegal violence. Here is a crucial turning point. As mentioned above, our global society is not just an open, diverse, malleable and permeable network but even reinforces the way a community demarcates its boundaries, members, and rights, always ready to take actions beyond its own law in order to protect itself against any security threat.

Theorizing community and global network narratives

At this point, let me examine the notion of community theoretically from the biopolitical and psychoanalytic perspectives—I will later take this approach to the notion of network as well. As Jean-Luc Nancy (2008) and Roberto Esposito (2010) suggest, the essentialist view of community assumes an inherent human desire to fuse different others into a unified identity that shares political ideals while building up the biopolitical immunity. The others are then incorporated into the Same or cast out of it if they are harmful, threatening, or too different. This Same makes the totality of the community, the totality that often takes on exclusive purity and tends to become totalitarian as seen in modern projects of nation building and utopian revolution, ideologies from nationalism to fascism, whether rightist or leftist; communism, literally rooted in the sense of community, was fascist in its historical regimes. Here, biopolitics concerns not only

[2] One may recall *Winchester '73* (Anthony Mann, 1950), an earlier network film about the eponymous, prized rifle (a gift-weapon) that is lost and pursued by different characters until its owner reclaims it.

Foucauldian biopower that regulates populations and subjugates their bodies to the nation-state, but primarily, Agambenian sovereignty that creates the boundary between such subjectivated bodies in the state and mere bodies cast out of it. This casting out is what Julia Kristeva (1982) calls *abjection*, which I redefine as the biopolitical deprivation of social subjectivity and rights. When a community wields its sovereign power to declare a "state of exception" to the rule of law, a subject ineligible to be in the community can be 'abjected' like those deported migrants, in Agamben (1998)'s terms, degraded to *homo sacer* who may be killed with the killer's impunity and cannot be sacrificed to gods. The abject is therefore no different from animal-like "bare life" put outside both human law and divine law with no rights and sanctity of life. Only on this biopolitical ground of sovereignty can institutional politics be set up.

The implication is that the desire for community is structured along with power. From this angle, what inspires me is Jacques Lacan (1999)'s formula of "sexuation": not biological sexuality but the unconscious differentiation of the masculine and the feminine logic of desire. Its masculine logic is that all are submitted to the phallic function but one exception. That is, all men follow the law of symbolic castration that, in the name of the father, states the prohibition of incest and the foundation of desire. The desire of the son-as-subject is then destined to fill in the lack of the primordial object (mother) with its replacements (other women) but never reaches satisfaction in the Symbolic Order of reality. One exception to this phallic law is, so to speak, the Freudian 'primal father' supposed to have the phallus and enjoy all women; the mythical father who transcends the law of castration, prohibition, and repression that he imposes upon the others, his sons, in order to sustain the social order as the control system of desire. The name of the father is thus the signifier of the phallus ( ) that all the others lack and desire in vain, the signifier of primary repression for them and of supreme enjoyment for him. The phallic father thus embodies both the superego and the id, the Symbolic and the Real, the law and beyond. Of course, this Father is not an actual father who is another mere human. But this inconsistency is reified through the phallus into an exceptional Other who accesses *jouissance* beyond limited pleasure. Not a biological entity, the phallus is thus a fantasized signifier of fullness, or, an empty signifier into which the full satisfaction of desire is projected and toward which the subjects of desire are oriented. It turns the inconsistent Other into a sublime object of desire, just as God is projected to fill the gaps in our imperfect knowledge as if it is the invisible hand pulling the strings of reality that seems to us often unpredictable and inexplicable.

Psychoanalysis and biopolitics interlock with each other in this context. Their structure of subjectivation is homological, centering on the analogy between the sovereign's divine power and the father's unrestrained desire in terms of supralegal exceptionality[3]. The Father-as-Sovereign, like God, takes the center of his community under his law (he can transcend), thus setting its ideal goal or utopian destination for which a collective but unfulfillable desire is internalized in subjects. This process works as the ideological mechanism of shared subjectivation in the same structure of power and desire. The subject is a particular example of the universal set organized by the phallus-as-sovereignty, while this set is closed because the very exception to it transcendently delimits it and all its particulars. The center of structuration is outside the structure; the democratic multitudes are subject to that big Other and the subjects of that big Other. A unified community then emerges, nurturing the sense of belongingness, membership, or nationality among the subjects and forming the boundary between inside and outside, 'us' and 'others,' our friends and enemies—the latter is the potential object of collective abjection. In this way, a biopolitical topology of the sovereign, the subject, and the abject is hierarchically established.

This biopolitical community, historically patriarchal, typically appears in a variety of films about a dominant father figure who controls a family, a city, an army, a religious group. To take just a few contemporary examples: *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006) stages a post-Civil War fascist Spanish army that hunts Red guerillas to abject in order to make "new clean Spain." The leader of this military community incarnates sovereign power and desire as the near-divine center of misogynic patriarchy and far-right nationalism. In *Timbuktu* (Abderrahmane Sissako, 2014), such a community is run by Jihadist fundamentalists who legally bans music, smoking, clothing in an old town in Mali, while they remain exceptional to the very laws like an obscene superego who enjoys. *Ju Dou* (Zhang Yimou, 1990) depicts rural China where a superego figure embodies the feudal Confucius patriarchy that invincibly continues the Oedipal father-son lineage. In *The Master* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2012), a charismatic patriarch appears as the transcendent center of a semi-religious autonomous community that pursues a utopian alternative to the postwar American society. With all different cultural backgrounds, these films commonly indicate the "all vs. exception" logic of the masculine sexuation[4].

3 More precisely, Lacan's psychoanalysis has an affinity with Karl Schmitt's political theology that underlies Agamben's biopolitics (Reinhard 2013).

4 At the same time, these films also reveal the crisis of this masculine logic that is mostly triggered by female characters even if it does not always bring their liberation. This crisis suggests the point of the shift from community to network, which I will later elaborate.

The global network-narrative films at issue do not exhibit such an authentically unified, self-closed community ruled by a negative father figure. Nevertheless, it is true that their characters experience various modes of abjection (humiliation, deportation, etc.) as a traumatic event and then they struggle to regain their sociopolitical subjectivity and reenter their sovereign community as a totalized network, though often in vain. Reflecting global conditions of life, this structure of abjection and redemption itself is reasonably classical in fact. We can even rephrase it along the large-form "action-image" that Gilles Deleuze (1986, 141–59) dubs SAS' (Situation-Action-Situation modified): A fatal occasion destroys everyday reality, causing protagonists' abjection and action for redemption, and the original state is finally restored with some changes. SAS' is found in many action-driven genres such as the Western, thriller, war, disaster, and adventure. The 'action genre' as such—the umbrella term for all these—could thus be defined better regarding this 'action-image' as a universal narrative form than regarding spectacle. As David Bordwell (2006, 98–103) points out, each storyline in a network narrative also takes this classical form, centering on a cluster of intimate, long-lasting relations arranged in sketchy vignettes and goal-achievement pathways. It has all that is needed for mainstream storytelling: causality, motivic harmony, temporal sequence and duration, character wants and needs, etc. Coincidences are not purely contingent but serve to build "small worlds" of the common goals, obstacles, appointments, and deadlines. In sum, the innovative network structure still resorts to classical norms, working within what I call the community-based narrative logic.

What demands further attention is the ideological dimension of this logic in network narratives. Hsuan Hsu (2006) sharply criticizes the L.A. ensemble films for their apolitical moralistic attempts at redemption. In *Crash*, racial scars end up being sutured between the abject individuals with the liberal gesture of forgiveness and reconciliation; white masculinity threatened by carjacking and a black man driving a nice car is reestablished through a white man's heroic agency to save a passive, victimized black woman. This "melodramatic vision" reduces the institutional, historical complexity of racism to interpersonal relationships and the matter of mutual respect or formal equality. As a paradoxical consequence, it tends to be racially blind, "exorcise this racism by exorcizing race itself," and create "a false totality" of the multiracial ensemble in "a universal neoliberal form of inclusion" (146-49). This vague sense that "we are all in this together" is also brought through the shared experience of an earthquake and a rain of frogs at the end of *Short Cuts* and *Magnolia* each. Such divine disasters falling over the network city evoke "a nostalgia for a lost community" (143) and the holistic desire for redemption rather than emancipation from a materialistic,

intolerant regime. Hsu's point is clear: we should re-politicize racism and find viable public responses to it from socio-structural viewpoints instead of pursuing "facile solutions," melodramatic or religious (149).

Many leftist thinkers take this political stance against the double ethics of globalization: 'soft-ethical' inclusion/tolerance/pity and 'hard-ethical' exclusion/violence/hate[5]. These two contrasting facets, based on the all-embracing attitude of networking and the community operation of self-closed sovereignty, indistinguishably make the 'totalized network' of the global community as already noted. The difficulty, however, lies in that political struggles for freedom and equality have historically led to the soft-ethical system of inclusion while entailing hard-ethical effects, so this double ethics is not anti-political so much as post-political. It underlies the double bind of the totalized network being neither an authentic community nor a pure network, the dilemma that leaves little room for proper political solutions. No wonder it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism as it is often said and also seen in what I broadly call the cinema of catastrophe including disaster films (Jeong 2019c). The catastrophic finales of *Short Cuts* and *Magnolia* could then be viewed not as a nostalgic evocation of a paradisiacal community but as an allegorical exposure of sublime catastrophes immanent in cognitively unmappable yet totalized networks. The sense of being together caused by such catastrophes would not be that we are in a community finally, but that we are all nothing but bare lives vulnerable to abjection. Only based on this abjecthood as the most fundamental commonality of our being could we experience unexpected new connections stripped of established identities even if no utopian political community is possible. People in the films at least have some potential to make solidarity without unity through this commonality without community by sharing their suffering from all causes of individual-level abjection (loneliness, depression, alcoholism, adultery, disease, sexual frustration, loss of dignity). Not necessarily disavowing "the need for more larger-scale public solutions" as Hsu (2006, 137) claims, this intimacy between the abject might open up an ethical alternative to the double ethics of the global system, a precarious yet precious potential that should not wholly be downplayed from the political angle. In effect, we could not ask narrative films—which focus on individual lives—to offer collective solutions that we could not offer in our reality. Cinema as an art form, with all limitations, sheds light on existential singularities above all and their experiment with new potentialities of life.

[5] Jacques Rancière (2004) inspiringly critiques this double ethical turn of politics. My formulation of global cinema starts from this double ethics of the global age (Jeong 2019b).

Pure network narratives with free-floating agents

In the direction of further exploring this cinematic nature, I now move onto another set of network narrative films, which are not reputed as network films but show a more radical type of networking that deserves to be highlighted. These are 'pure' network films in which abject figures turn into the agents of free-floating networking instead of pursuing the reintegration into their original community. In truth, the latter case also implies the crucial point about abjection that, after losing subjectivity, one may try to regain it. The abject are not passive victims but activate *agency*: the causative force to take actions, the capacity to act for a mission. Agency is this abject mode of subjectivity, the transitory and temporary mode of being-in-action. Even when aiming at resubjectivation, the core of agency is thus the potential for 'becoming-other,' challenging fixed identity while underlying the constructivist notion of identity: not an a priori essence but an effect of selfhood produced in the process of being culturally articulated and contesting preconstructed forms of identity at once—this construction of identity is "the necessary scene of agency" (Butler 2006, 201). That is, agency is performative, creating its content at the moment of performing it instead of representing a predetermined entity. Let's call the abject reloaded with this agency 'the abject agents.' They are not limited to genre-specific professional (secret) agents in spy, crime, or disaster films. Abject figures such as the white savior in *Crash* and the Mexican nanny in *Babel* turn into action-leading agents as well. Only in doing so do they also realize the previously unknown possibility of forming solidarity with the (abject) others beyond their former subjectivity[6].

The case I am going to introduce suggests that the abject can be further liberated from any fixed subjectivity and community, thereby increasing the sense of agency and networking to various degrees. They become agents performing a task which may even be just to wander around a networked space with no other goal. Jacques Tati's *Playtime* (1967) is a seminal example. Tati, playing the protagonist himself, takes a one-day roundabout tour in Paris, where he initially tries to meet with a business contact but gets lost in an urban maze of glass and steel buildings. Though abjected in some sense, he then weaves through innovative rooms, offices, apartments, a chaotic restaurant, and busy streets like a modern *flâneur*, a carefree agent of strolling, intermittently encountering an American tourist and her group along with other quirky people. The film stages nothing but this 'playtime' of networking, which entails many actions as sensorial reactions to the artificial environment of ultramodern architecture and simulacra. The teleological trajectory typical for conventional road films dissipates

[6] I elsewhere elaborated global cinema in terms of abjection and agency (Jeong 2019b).

into a sort of spatialized temporality, a series of events which could repeat with random differences in a potential loop.

Updating *Playtime* in the global age, *Holy Motors* (2012) by Leos Carax follows a day in the life of a mysterious man named Oscar. He is driven around Paris by a loyal driver, stops by different places, dresses up in unique costumes, and plays a variety of bizarre, semi-scripted roles in the manner of abjecting himself and becoming others: an old beggar, a sex performer, a father, a musician, a Chinese gangster, a dying man, and an ordinary man whose wife and child are chimpanzees. These roles are "appointments" he carries out as a nearly surreal agent, sometimes on behalf of others but often for no reason. As his name suggests, Oscar is in effect a kind of actor, who misses the days when he was aware of cameras. All those performances are thus fulfilled as part of his actual profession, and his stage is now the real world, where he even shoots someone and encounters other performing agents like him including his ex-lover, whose sudden suicide makes him cry. At the end of the day, we see his car entering the Holy Motors garage where other identical cars are parked after having carried other performers around the city in the same way; the cars even talk to each other, sharing their fear of being outmoded and unwanted—the fear of abjection. No longer a civil community at all, Paris then turns out to be a network platform of nomadic semi-abject agents whose mission is to circulate eternal or ephemeral appointments, as if to disperse and dissolve any memory or trauma in the present of performance without (knowing) a big cause, an ultimate goal, or a sustainable plan. It is a universe of imperfect intimacy or bare relation of witness between different parts of the whole; or, it is a chaos whose cognitive mapping is impossible. What matters is solely the continuity of "networking as process rather than map or figure," a process of navigational, performative movement liberated from any universal social model that enforces and rigidifies habitual modes of living (Munster 2013, 12).

This liberating agency is not preformed but performed only in the process of networking, and potentially reperformed through temporary modulation and flexible adaptation to changing circumstances. It enables the malleable 'reassemblage' of subjectivity facing unpredictable events, crises, wounds, and the like. Networking in *Holy Motors* further blurs the boundaries (or networks) between life and performance, real action and virtual acting, the world and the stage, and humans and cars. More experimental in this regard is Richard Linklater's animated docufiction *Waking Life* (2001), which conveys several parallels to his other network narrative film *Slacker* (1991). The protagonist, from the beginning, feels that his life is ethereal, lacking transitions between daily events. This

experience progresses toward an existential crisis, a sort of psychological abjection. Then, he travels through a series of chance encounters with various people and philosophical discussions on free will, metaphysics, situationism, André Bazin's film theory, and so on. This surreal network flourishes with ideas and observations in a world that may be reality, dreams, or lucid dreams, leading him to realize that he is living out a perpetual dream. He eventually awakens to the meaning of life: that life may be an instant illusion that the individual believes as real while negating God's invitation to become one with the infinite universe. In the end, he suddenly levitates and disappears into the endless blue sky. Although this final 'leap of faith' seemingly marks a teleological 'yes' to God's invitation, the point of the narrative lies in the journey of pure networking driven by the agent of seeking the truth. Crucial is not transcendent truth but its pursuit itself on the illusory ground of life. One may take this perspective in earlier truth-seeking, (anti-)religious network narratives such as *The Milky Way* (Luis Buñuel, 1969) and *Taste of Cherry* (Abbas Kiarostami, 1997).

I briefly note Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2014) in this regard. In the opposite direction of the global-scale *Babel*, *Birdman* stages everything within and around a building in New York City. The film centers on a faded Hollywood actor best known for playing the superhero "Birdman," a half-abject figure undergoing a midlife crisis in both his career and life. But while trying to regain recognition as a real artist, he serves as a mobile agent who introduces and interconnects his team and family at different spots in his theater. Their side stories apparently form a traditional 'ensemble plot' rather than a free-floating network narrative. However, it is notable that the camera autonomously shifts from one person to another the hero encounters, without cutting and often without his presence. The entire film indeed looks like a single-shot long take, which renders palpable the camera's own agency unlike the cross-cutting made under the director's full control. This 'camera with or without a man' is the real agent of networking on the ground, turning the claustrophobic space into a community of micro-networks, whereas the man gains redemption, surreally disappearing into the sky like a bird at the end—evoking *Waking Life*.

One might recall that such a camera-agent embodies the movement of networking in Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974). Though it does not have a single-shot look, we sometimes feel even the camera's hesitation about whom to follow between different characters whose paths cross. This surrealist film is a remarkable precursor of the "daisy chain plot" (Berg 2006, 24–26) in which one character's story leads to the next one's with no central character like the 'Birdman.' An extreme case is *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000), an experimental

documentary film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Its networking principle is the 'exquisite corpse' party game: a surrealist technique of assembling a series of words or images collectively. Each player adds to a composition in sequence, usually by seeing only the end of what the previous player contributed, in the way they write in turn on a sheet of paper and pass it to the next writer for a further contribution. In an attempt to create a unique cinematic version of the exquisite corpse, the film crew travels across Thailand, interviewing random people and asking each person to add their own words to an unscripted story about a boy and his teacher, which is reenacted. The director himself appears here and recruits a hodgepodge of people to continue the story in a completely unpredictable direction creatively. Embodying performativity par excellence, the film is the process of filmmaking itself. It tests and realizes the purest form of networking with no structure and community preplanned and organized, only enjoying the artistic creativity of chance, contingency, and connectivity among real lives.

Theorizing network and the shift from community to network

Now it is time to reformulate network compared to community theoretically. Let me begin with the other half of Lacan's sexuation, i.e., the feminine formula (though it may sound unrelated to the films just discussed). It is that there is no exception to the phallic function, but not all are submitted to it. Like men, women are under castration, thus lack and desire the phallus, but there is no transcendent center, namely no primal 'mother' enjoying all men. This absence of exception suggests that no boundary makes a closed set of women under the Law, that each woman is radically singular and not a member or example of generalized essential femininity. In this Lacanian sense, unlike Man, Woman as universal with a capital W does not exist. This does not mean that the Symbolic is foreclosed, but that the feminine 'not-all' is a phenomenon of discordance with the phallus when it comes to the Real. What underlies this phenomenon is not any positive feminine content of some women or some part of a woman beyond the male gaze, desire, or representations, but a pure formal cut that inherently occurs between the woman for the other (in the man's full fantasy) and the woman in herself (as empty substance). This fissure itself defines the subject as such, the Subject as immanently barred ($). The sexual difference is that a woman knows this fundamental void of content as well as how to veil the abyss, whereas a man believes illusively in some substance in himself, some phallic potential that he wants to realize by reducing her to a partial object-cause of desire (*objet petit a*) in his fantasy projected onto her veil without knowing that there is nothing behind it. The woman then partially enjoys the phallus that the stupid man believes as his own, while still preserving her 'nothingness' out of his possessive desire (Žižek 1995).

This paradoxical freedom opens room for a woman not to fully belong to a biopolitical community in which masculine sovereignty sets the boundaries between inside and outside, self and other, friend and enemy, subject and abject. More precisely, the woman is freed from the phallic function without leaving the phallic order, in the proper sense of being the abject that is neither fully included nor wholly excluded. Like hair just cut off, the abject is by definition no longer part of the subject but not yet a mere thing, and thus lingers in the limbo state between subject and object, between the law of subjectivation and its outside. In this aspect, I emphasize, abjection implies not only deprivation but also liberation from subjectivity, from a particular way of subjectivation under a certain mode of sovereignty. 'Abjecthood' could then be considered as the most universal and foundational mode of being, the degree zero of life unconditioned by any biopolitical subjectivation. Here is the positive power of the pure abject. She takes on "unassimilable foreignness" to the self/other dichotomy (like the *objet a* that is detached from the subject) and floats like an "internal stranger" whose enjoyment may lie in the transgression of subjectivity. She even embodies what any subject might keep as the "unrecognizable yet intimate secret," that is, some latent drives toward an asubjective state of free, equal relations. Neither friend nor enemy, this 'Third' is none other than the "neighbor" in ethics (Reinhard 2013, 30–46), with whom to make the relationship of "beside yet alike, separation and identity" (Lacan 1997, 51). We could then imagine a move from the vertical hierarchy of the sovereign-subject-abject to the horizontal equality between the abject who meet each other as neighbors; a move from the closed totality of 'all vs. exception' bound in their metaphoric semblance to an infinite series of particular abject-neighbors in the 'not-all' of metonymic knotting; a move from a utopian community unified for a transcendent ideal to an 'atopian' connection grounded on no fixed place of identity but only on the commonality of immanent abjecthood without community.

This is the point where I propose to address 'neighboring' as networking. If community forms the totality of all and an absolute exception that fuels the universal desire to make it utopian, network has the infinity of drives to (dis)connections in the way of dismantling the community, yet thereby leaving no exceptional outside. Community is a closed set of subjects who may be abjected from it, but network is an open Whole of endless links along which the subject-abject shift continually occurs. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987)'s terms, community operates as a "tree-like" vertical system of hierarchical units that takes a historical trajectory toward its perfection, whereas network creates a "rhizomatic" horizontal movement of molecular forces that endlessly continues in non-dialectic, non-linear directions with no utopian terminus. Community

works in the 'in/out' mode; network in the 'on/off' mode. People in a network have no binding belongingness to it but simply make connection and disconnection. Network thus has only permeable boundaries if any and proliferates as an open whole in democratic, fragmentary, amorphous, and schizophrenic ways. In a traditional community, Foucauldian "discipline" is a key to subjectivation; the "disciplinary society" confines bodies in an isolated space and for a long-term period, while disciplining them into its skilled members under surveillance and punishment. However, discipline turns into Deleuzian "control" in the "society of control" that does not actually control each individual from the top down but instead promotes flexible agency and continuous modulation, thereby making everyone internalize entrepreneurship and adjust to consequently de-centered environments, whose ever-changing boundaries do not allow any stable outside (Deleuze 1995). This new, anarchic notion of control, I argue, underlies the network that enables self-making freedom and free-floating autonomy with no boundary, no exception, therefore no externality either.

Actor-network theorist Bruno Latour (2009) distinguishes two ways of understanding space. On the one hand, space is seen as a vast ground inside which objects and subjects can reside. If these entities are removed, an empty space remains and reappears. But on the other, many connections between these entities generate their space(s) as they trudge along, so if they are taken out, nothing is left, especially space. The choice is thus not between nature and society but between two different spatial distributions: one in which there is an infinite outside where every organism is cramped, unable to deploy its life forms; the other in which there are only tiny insides, "networks and spheres," but where life forms are fully deployed through their relations. For me, the first case concerns the way a community occupies a part of space, forms its boundaries, and confines its members inside. In the second case, nothing precedes and exists outside incessant relations; there is no space as *res extensa*, the cartesian realm of matter separated from the act of networking which itself creates space performatively. Everything is performed and thus produced in this 'immanent plane of networking,' to rephrase Deleuze's "plane of immanence"—not an actual material ground but the virtual in itself. In an empiricist context, William James' concept of concatenation applies well to pure connectivity. Networked experience as concatenated is assembled and sensed through "ambulatory, peripatetic, and transitory movements" of relations. At the same time, recursion and its redundancies lend a flavor to both "the banality and euphoria of networked encounters" (Munster 2013, 7–11). Here appears a "relational database" (77), relations operating like data that are combined, cut, or crossed endlessly. This network even includes nonhuman connections, opening up "a relational field of both techno- *and* biodiversity"

where neither humans nor things are privileged (7), just as both performers and cars are networked in *Holy Motors*.

In aesthetic and media studies, George Landow (1994)'s notion of hypertext no doubt shows a literary form of network based on new information technology: non-linear, intertextual, nomadic, rhizomatic, and schizophrenic. Such poststructuralist and postmodernist concepts indeed dismantle the totalizing "master narratives" as well as hierarchical frameworks of representation and interpretation. But it should also be noted that earlier modernism—James Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance—experimented with avant-garde techniques such as stream-of-consciousness and surrealism to articulate new connections between classes, religions, sexualities, and histories while aesthetically reflecting a sense of societal fragmentation against totalization (Beal and Lavin 2011, 6–10). In this sense, it is debatable that, according to Jan Simons (2008, 114–23), database/modular narratives conform to the modernist/structuralist paradigm of "spatializing/dechronolizing time." Structuralist narratology revealed a universal structure of mostly classical narratives like myths and folktales—in my terms, the community-based narrative logic—whereas modernist narratives dissolved this logic into a new, network-oriented one. If structuralism illuminated communal systems of narratives, poststructuralism deconstructed them, and this deconstruction aesthetically evolved from modernism to postmodernism. The question is, again, the shift from community to network. In the community-reflecting narrative, time is also structured like a community: linear, accumulative, and teleological with a utopian, redemptive closure projecting an atemporal transcendent point of pursuit. This totality is disrupted or pulverized by the networked narrative time that flows in the perpetual present without origin or orientation. Yes, time is spatialized in database/modular narratives, but as I noted, these are not necessarily network narratives, and a loop of recursive networking does not spatialize time. Networking, in any case, embraces "the contingent, the possible, and the probable" that Simons says is opened up by time.

Pure or totalized networking in global cinema

In conclusion, network narratives by nature perpetuate the present of networking in a space that only emerges at the very time of networking. Global cinema experiments with this unique spatiotemporality to different extents. *Birdman* centers on the hero's organic temporal structure of the glorious past, the abject present, and the redemptive future while also opening it to a fragmentary community of micro-networks beyond his cognition and control. *Holy Motors* hints at the traumatic past of the performing mobile agent but dissolves it into

the potential loop of networked performances by both humans and machines in the eternal present. *Waking Life* replaces the question of the past and the present with that of dream and reality, mingling them in a virtual plane of truth-seeking networks often without the presence of the walking dreamer. *Mysterious Object at Noon* radically goes without the past, or only with the past as a collection of temporal fragments that relay a story through many authors, in a continuous yet contingent, linear yet disoriented way. The crucial point is that these network narratives that spectators appreciate and diegetic networks that characters experience are inseparable, mirroring each other in the almost classical concordance between form and content. And we, as well as they, may live a networked life far from keeping community-based spatiotemporal identity and continuity.

Nevertheless, I briefly reemphasize that the global community contradictorily appears as a 'totalized network' that has both utopian interfaces for connectivity and dystopian symptoms such as mechanized sovereignty/abjection, lost causes, addictive indulgence, and extremist violence. That is why the relatively moderate network narrative films such as *Crash*, *Code Unknown*, and *Babel* deserve critical attention. In particular, the unpredictable eruption of violent tension or action in these films proves the global paradox that ever more connections increase the potential for ever more catastrophes. Terrorism is the most uncontrollable danger immanent in uncontrollable networks, whether it devastates a single American high school as in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) or it randomly explodes here and there in vast China as in Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin* (2013). Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005) most ambitiously highlights how our global network is totalized by such owners of power and wealth as neoliberal corporations, sovereign agencies, political elite, and mercenary lawyers, while they are also vulnerable to abjection from their organization and terrorist attacks from the abject of the global system as such. This dilemma underlies our increasingly networked yet all the more precarious life.

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Abstract

In the backdrop of global interconnection, such films as "Crash", "Syriana", and "Babel" drew attention to the six-degrees-of-separation "network narrative." This type of distributed narrative with multiple access points or discrete threads has long evolved, perhaps since Griffith's "Intolerance" and via modern masterpieces: Altman's "Nashville" and "Shortcuts" weave many characters into a portrait of their social ground unmapped by themselves; Bunuel's "Phantom of Liberty" shifts among characters only through the contingent movement of the camera. These two elements (multiple characters, a floating agent) intermingle now in the way that the protagonist takes the role of the very agent navigating among contingently networked characters in further decentralized directions: "Birdman" centers on the hero's salvation but many other people around him form and cross small dramas; the protagonist in "Waking Life" shuffles through a dream meeting various people; "Holly Motors" stages a Parisian's bizarre city odyssey, with the true agent turning out to be a car/cars; "Mysterious Object at Noon" experiments on the 'exquisite corpse' relay of a story through different people whom the director encounters while moving around... What does this

non-linearity with different causal relations imply? How do mobile agents floating over decentralized events relate to global networks in general? This paper investigates today's network narratives through an interdisciplinary approach to the notion of network as opposed to community even beyond film narratology. For instance, if the masculine formula of Lacan's sexuation (all are submitted to the phallic function but for one exception) underlies community, its feminine formula (not all are submitted to the phallic function but there is no exception) works for networking. Community forms the totality of all and an exception that fuels the universal desire to make it utopian, but network has the infinity of drives to (dis)connections dismantling community, yet thereby leaving no exceptional outside. Community is a closed set of subjects who may be 'abjected' from it; network is an open whole of endless links along which the subject-abject shift constantly occurs in the mode of being 'on/off' rather than 'in/out.' In Deleuze's terms, community works as a "tree-like" vertical system of hierarchical units in the historical trajectory to its perfection, whereas the network creates a "rhizomatic" horizontal movement of molecular forces in non-dialectic, non-linear directions. Foucauldian "discipline" is a key to subjectivation in the community, but it turns into Deleuzian "control" in the network that promotes flexible agency and continuous modulation without exit. As actor-network theorists argue, nothing precedes and exists outside ever-changing networks of relationship. The network narrative will thus be explored as a cinematic symptom of the radical shift from community to network that both society and subjectivity undergo with all the potentials and limitations in our global age.

Key words: network narratives, transnational and global cinema

Panoptikum 2021, 26:155-167 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.07

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Revisiting Videogame Logic: Impossible Storyworlds in the Contemporary Hollywood Blockbuster

Image and Narrative in the Digital Era

In the final chapter of *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich asks: 'How does computerization affect our very concept of moving images? Does it offer new possibilities for film language? Has it led to totally new forms of cinema?' (2001, p. 287). In formulating these questions Manovich addresses the impact of the digital age upon both the film image and film narrative. He lists multiple ways filmmakers have responded to new media, including their assimilation of the 'conventions of game narratives' (2001, p. 288), where he cites innovative films including *Run, Lola, Run* (Tykwer, 1999) and *Sliding Doors* (Howitt, 1998).

Like Manovich, I have explored new media's impact on both the film image and film narrative. In 'Between Science Fact and Science Fiction' (Buckland 1999) I concluded that digital compositing has transformed the filmic image by creating an optical-digital hybrid, a seamless blend of live action and digital animation. But my greater interest lies in the digital transformation of narrative. While Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and other blockbusters are driven by narrative logic (see Buckland 2006), a small group of blockbusters incorporate more than narrative: we can discern a hybrid that combines narrative with a digital or videogame logic.

The following chapter presents a concise overview of my investigations into this hybrid narrative-videogame logic. The first section outlines narrative logic and videogame logic; the second returns to my earlier work on videogame logic in contemporary blockbusters in order to revise and extend it, synthesizing the results; and the third begins to reconceive videogame logic within the broader context of theories of imaginary worlds, fictional worlds and theories of unnatural and impossible storyworlds (in which the videogame logic makes the storyworld unnatural-impossible). At this juncture we encounter a terminological choice: 'Imaginary World' or 'Fictional World' or 'Storyworld'? 'Unnatural' or 'Impossible'? This is more than a terminological choice, as I shall explain later.

I have developed my own particular take on videogame logic by identifying their components from several sources: personal game playing (in the past), theories of videogames (Jesper Juul [2005] etc.), but, most importantly, from videogame manuals (such as *Fundamentals of Game Design* by Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings, 2007). I used these sources to identify the components of videogame logic, plus the rule set that defines game play.

I do not focus on the sensory aspects of videogames or films or interface design; nor do I adopt a hermeneutical perspective to determine the wider cultural and philosophical significance of films influenced by videogame logic; nor do I consider genre conventions. Instead, I isolate and abstract from the surface of these hybrid blockbusters the internal logics of narrative and videogames, which involves determining the specific way they are entangled in each film. (I am reminded of Brian McHale's argument in *Postmodernist Fiction* [1987] that both modernist and postmodernist elements can co-exist in the same text.) I do not, therefore, offer a general discussion of the films or their meaning in contemporary society, or repeat what others have said about them, but instead present a narrowly focused study that identifies and establishes what role video game rules play in structuring these narrative films. I have already referred to this combination of logics as a 'hybrid'. Manovich uses the more specific term 'deep remixability': '*Today designers remix not only content from different media but also their fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression*' (2013, p. 268; emphasis in the original). He calls this remix a new *metalanguage*: 'A work produced in this new metalanguage can use all the techniques, or any subset of these techniques, that were previously unique to these different media' (2013, pp. 268-69).

The Fifth Element (1997), *Source Code* (2011), and *Inception* (2010) are hybrids or deep remixes where the rules from both narrative logic and video game logic become entangled. Medium specificity arguments are irrelevant, for these

rules are not tied to a specific material of expression – this is one reason I always refer to them as a logic. In the dialogue between Christian Metz and Emilio Garroni (1968), which Metz represents in the footnotes of his book *Language and Cinema* (1974), Garroni defined codes and logic in formalist terms, as autonomous from material of expression, whereas Metz developed a more nuanced argument claiming that some codes are specific and others non-specific, according to whether they are tied to the material of expression. In the following chapter I side with Garroni's assertion that codes and logic are separate from the material of expression But this is just an aside. My main point is that a conventional narrative analysis of these hybrid films misses crucial dimensions of their structure, particularly the distinctive way narrative and video game logic become entangled. (The label 'videogame logic' designates a logic characteristic of but not unique to videogames.)

Other films are potentially hybrids or deep remixes of narrative and videogame logic, although each film remixes narrative and video game logics in specific ways, with some containing only minor elements of videogame logic, while others remix both logics equally: *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), *The Matrix* (1999), *Looper* (2012), *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014) *eXistenZ* (1999), and numerous Philip K Dick adaptations, including *Total Recall* (1990), *Minority Report* (2002), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), and *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011).[1]

It is easy to look at the content of these films and identify the rules of video game logic metaphorically: for example, *The Fifth Element*'s cityscape metaphorically represents the film's different levels of play, or the scene in which the mangalores shoot down the spaceship carrying the fifth element metaphorically represents the game user's interactivity. Or in *Source Code*, Captain Colter Stevens (Jake Gyllenhaal) is the game player in his capsule and his avatar is the schoolteacher Sean Fentress on the train. (Although the film is more complex, because Colter is also duplicated: he is an avatar in his capsule linked to his real injured self-sealed in an airtight container; and the game world is also duplicated.) However, these films are fascinating *not* because their visuals or content can be read metaphorically as a videogame, but primarily because their visuals and content are organized according to a hybrid of narrative and videogame logic.

Narrative Logic

The sequence of actions in a small group of blockbusters is not simply constructed from an Aristotelian narrative logic of linear causality, for at certain

[1] Thomas Elsaesser (2014) prefers to discuss the Philip K Dick adaptations as mind games, rather than video games.

moments the 'digital logic' of video games (and other electronic texts) disrupts narrative logic. Narrative logic (or, more precisely, the psychologically-motivated cause-effect narrative logic) consists of distinct stages: the setup, complicating action, development, climax, exposition, and deadlines. There is no need to discuss this further, although in defining the complexity of puzzle films (to which videogame logic films are an overlapping subset), I never denied the continued presence of Aristotelian narrative logic – in other words, I did not say, as some critics have wrongly inferred (Kiss and Willemsen 2017, p. 21) that narrative logic was eliminated and replaced by another logic; instead, I argued that the narrative events become *entangled* with other narrative events and with other logics. After all, if one extracts narrative, videogame logic cannot become entangled in it, which is one of the key concepts I use to define puzzle films. My definition of puzzle films refers in part to the complex level of organization of narrative events, not the elimination of narrative.

The Rules of Videogame Logic

Video games rules are not contingent to (video) games but constitute their very core and their source of pleasure, for ludologists generally agree that 'every game *is* its rules' (David Parlett 2005). For Jesper Juul, game rules are instructions that define some actions in a game as meaningful and others as meaningless (2005, pp. 57-58). Rules set the limits or boundary of meaningful gameplay.[2]

Video games possess 'an excess of visual and aural stimuli' but also 'the promise of reliable rules' (Gottschalk 1995, p. 13).[3] Video game rules are reliable in that they are systematic and unambiguous and are not constrained by the laws of the actual world (or by the conventions of mimeticism). Game play involves the mastering of these rules, that is, mastering the game's logic. The player's desire to attain mastery makes video games addictive, which at times can lead to the player's total absorption into the game's rules and environment. This absorption in turn may alter the player's state of consciousness and lead to a momentary loss of self (see Fiske 1989, chapter 2). The most common video game rules are listed in Figure 1. But why these rules, specifically? In outlining the Russian Formalist method, Boris Eichenbaum wrote: 'We posit specific principles and adhere to them insofar as the material justifies them. If

2 Juul defines gameplay as 'the way the game is actually played when the player tries to overcome its challenges […] The gameplay is an interaction between the rules and the player's attempt at playing the game as well as possible' (2005, p. 56). In other words, the rules are part of the game's underlying system, while gameplay is their enactment or use within a particular game.

3 Some of these rules and structures were first outlined in Buckland (2002) and later expanded and developed in Buckland (2014) and (2015).

the material demands their refinements or change, we change or refine them' (1965, p. 103). My formulation of this list of rules began inductively, and were dictated by the films under analysis and by the content of videogame manuals.

1. In-game tutorial level
2. Serialized repetition of actions (to accumulate points and master the rules)
3. Multiple levels of adventure
4. Space-time warps
5. Magical transformations and disguises
6. Immediate rewards and punishment (which act as feedback loops)
7. Pace
8. Interactivity
9. The game's environment can be open or closed, linear or nonlinear
10. The game needs to remain balanced
11. Some games consist of a foldback story structure
12. In role-playing games, players can usually choose or customize their avatar
13. The avatar possesses a series of resources and entities
14. Typical gaming skills a player needs are strategy and tactics
15. Most games (unintentionally) have an exploit
16. Many games include a sandbox mode.

Figure 1: Rules of Videogame Logic

An in-game tutorial level offers players a quick, partial, introductory experience of a game's design and, more generally, of gameplay (informing the player of the skills necessary to take on the game's challenges, how to use the controls and navigate the space, and so on). Films combining narrative logic and video game logic usually include a tutorial level. *The Matrix* (1999), for example, consists of tutorial levels, as Neo (Keanu Reeves) learns (and bends) the rules in the matrix, the film's game world.

Video games are organized around the serialized repetition of actions for several reasons, including the accumulation of points and the opportunity to master the rules of the game. Players are keen to refine their newly acquired gameplay competence by applying and testing it in similar but more difficult levels (which keeps the game in balance, as I describe ahead).

Space-time warps represent an alternative way to reach another level. They are the video game's equivalent of the hypertext link, for they enable the player to be immediately transported to an alternative space (and time), leading to multiple fragmented spaces, with immediate transportation between them.

The user's accumulation of points acts as a feedback loop to master the rules, since it represents a reward for good gameplay, and confers upon the user the sense that his or her competence is improving and the game is progressing. In similar fashion, the loss of points or a life acts as an immediate punishment for failing to master the rules. A repetition of this punishment leads to the user's premature death and an early end to the game, or a return to its beginning. Serialized repetition therefore involves repeating the same stages of the game – usually at a faster pace or moving up to another similar (but more difficult) level. The player controls the pacing via interaction, which confers upon the player the feeling of control – the manipulation of a character in a usually hostile digital environment. Of course, no interactivity exists in narrative films – they are fixed, predetermined texts. Nonetheless, fans participate outside the text by treating the film as a cult object.

In *Fundamentals of Game Design* (2007), game developers Ernest Adams and Andrew Rollings map out the various environments or layouts a game designer can adopt, from open layouts that allow for a player's unconstrained movement within a game, to closed layouts (usually interior spaces) (2007, pp. 405-410). The open layout has little linear structure, while closed spaces have single or multiple paths the player needs to follow.

Balance is a key game design concept (Adams and Rollings, 2007, chapter 11). As the game progresses, game play becomes easier, because the player gains game experience (if the game becomes too easy, the player becomes bored). To keep the game in balance and to avoid boredom, tasks and challenges must progressively become more difficult.

In the foldback story structure, 'the plot branches a number of times but eventually *folds back* to a single, inevitable event' (Adams and Rollings 2007, p. 200). In other words, several ways exist for reaching the same unavoidable endpoint. This story structure is usually combined with serialized repetition of actions, for a player within each repetition takes a different path to reach the same endpoint. The foldback story structure can also be defined in terms of game design. Games of emergence offer the player huge variations, improvisation, and open play in order to reach the endpoint, whereas games of progression are more linear and closed, thereby limiting the player's ability to stray from the predetermined path. Games of emergence therefore have a stronger foldback structure than games of progression. Because a narrative film is non-interactive in the videogame sense of the term, then it has no foldback structure at all, for the film's structure is pre-determined.

Game designers enable players to construct or modify their avatar, and also confer on it a series of resources.

A strategy involves constructing a game plan on the available knowledge of the rules and the opponents in the game. Because a game conceals information, the player relies on probability and skill to succeed (Adams and Rollings 2007, p. 298). A strategy is implemented through tactics, which carry out a strategy through various actions. Both strategy and tactics need a clear, measurable outcome, although tactics can try to subvert and find short cuts to the strategy, ultimately leading to exploits.

An exploit refers to an unexpected action the player uses to gain advantage within a game. The player usually exploits a weakness, glitch, or bug in the game's design.

Finally, the sandbox mode allows free play, or the player to explore the game without constraints. The player can experiment without devising a strategy or achieving a goal. In this mode, emergence is predominant while progression is insignificant.

A player's immersion in a game is therefore not simply a matter of a heightened stimulation generated by high quality graphics, audio, and animation, but is also – and, I would argue, primarily – a function of structure, the player's success at mastering these abstract rules.

Film Analyses

To date, I have analyzed three films using videogame logic: *The Fifth Element* (Luc Besson, 1997), *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010), and *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011) (Buckland 2002, 2014, 2015). Due to space restrictions I shall limit myself to the two recent films, and only focus on the elements of videogame logic they incorporate into their structure, avoiding for the moment the way videogame logic is entangled with narrative logic.

Source Code*'s Videogame Logic*

The premise of the film is that Captain Colter Stevens, depicted in a capsule, is transferred to a train where he (or his avatar Sean Fentress) exercises typical gaming skills – strategy and tactics – to identify a bomber who plans to blow up the train. The film therefore replicates a role-playing game – it uses an avatar to represent the player (in this instance, Colter) within the game world.

The train carriage is a game environment to the extent that Colter enters it on eight occasions via an avatar, and he needs to perform in there a series of tasks. It is a closed space with limited freedom of movement. The film also replicates

interactivity, as we see Colter moving around the game space and interacting with it via his avatar.

But we need to go beyond the immediate similarities between the film and a video game. The whole of *Source Code* is based on the serialized repetition of action. With each repetition, a form of replay, Colter (via his avatar Sean) learns the rules of the game and becomes more proficient. He receives punishment when he fails (the bomb explodes) but also rewards (once he has identified the bomber, he can phone his father and also save Christina, a passenger on the train). The transition from capsule to train is not smooth, but is dramatic, and involves a space-time warp (or, at least, a space warp), since he travels between two radically different locations – the actual world and possible worlds. These transition shots show Colter's digital transformation as he is manipulated algorithmically, rendered or compiled by the source code technology into digital bits and sent to an alternate universe. The pace increases from one repetition to the next – the editing is more elliptical, and Colter becomes more frantic, because he is working against a deadline.

As with video games, he has several attempts at winning, and he dies in the game, which simply takes him back to the beginning. At the same time, he accumulates in-game experience, and chooses different options that the game opens up to him. But he has few options and few tasks: his strategy is to find the bomb and identify the bomber.

Colter learns to play the game by dying which, according to Adams and Rollings (2007, p. 372), is an old method of learning in the video game environment (this is also key to the film *Edge of Tomorrow* [Doug Liman, 2014], which is similarly structured via a serialized repetition of action). The bomb kills Colter several times, but at least this helps him locate it (since he remembers the direction of the blast). After the blast, he is thrown out of the game; when he returns, he goes back to his initial or default position – sitting opposite Christina.

Colter follows different 'paths' each time to reach the final endpoint – locating the bomb and identifying the bomber. The film therefore has a foldback structure. Colter perceives that the game becomes a little easier on subsequent attempts, because he builds up knowledge of in-game play (the game's perceived difficulty decreases). That is, Colter becomes more successful at implementing the strategy – his tactics improve as the game progresses. To keep the game in balance (a key concept for Adams and Rollings), the tasks must become harder. In *Source Code*, tasks are made more difficult as the film progresses (finding the bomb was quite easy, identifying the bomber much harder).

Colter then sets himself two further goals, which are not part of the game's strategy – to contact his father, and to save the people on the train. Both goals go against the rules of the game, and he is told that they are impossible to achieve, because the world of the train is in the past and therefore no longer exists: the train has already been destroyed, and the source code technology simply sends Colter to an alternate reality in order to identify the bomber (who plans to detonate a second larger bomb). Colter subverts the game's strategy with his own tactics in order to map out his own trajectory within the game.

Colter has very few resources, and therefore few entities. He has multiple lives, the ability to reenter the game once he is killed, but the film does not quantify this resource (although there is a strict deadline, since the bomber needs to be identified in order to halt his second bomb). Colter relies on his skills and tactics rather than specific resources.

Colter finds and uses an exploit, a glitch that shifts the game from a limited rule-following activity to a free play sandbox mode, where he can explore the game world without remaining confined in its closed space or without following any specific rules or game plan. (The way the exploit works is obscure.) This exploit and move into the free play game mode enables Colter to save everyone on the train from the terrorist attack, and to construct a stable future for himself and Christina – at least in an alternate, parallel universe where he exists only as his imaginary avatar.

Inception*'s Videogame Logic*

Inception's main gameplay centres on the invasion and inception of Robert Fischer's (Cillian Murphy) mind, to encourage him to break up his father's company. The film is structured around the following rules of video game logic: two in-game tutorials (the opening scenes showing Dom Cobb's team attempting to steal secrets from Saito's mind introduces the game rules to film spectators by showing them how the game is played, and Ariadne [Ellen Page] enters a dream space with Cobb [Leonardo DiCaprio], where he spells out the game rules to her while she learns to manipulate the environment); the serialized repetition of action (this film is structured around a nested or embedded repetition as the characters move to different dream levels, with each move constituting a space warp); immediate punishment for not mastering the rules of the game during gameplay (in which characters either wake up or enter limbo); an emphasis on strategy and tactics (and the need to change strategy quickly, especially when unexpected problems occur – which happen on all levels of the film); a successful balancing of the game and an increase in its pace, in which

tasks become harder and the risks higher as the game progresses; an emphasis on constructing the game's environment (designed by Ariadne as labyrinths, with a mix of open and closed spaces); plus a significant emphasis conferred on the limbo level, *Inception*'s equivalent of the video game's sandbox mode. In addition, there is a game resource (Somnacin), a small use of disguises, and one use of an exploit.

Unnatural/Impossible Fictional Worlds/Storyworlds/Imaginary Worlds

The films discussed in the previous section create unusual fictional worlds, not just an unusually structured sequence of narrative events. The next stage in studying these hybrid films involves moving from the syntactic to the semantic level, where 'reference' is introduced into the theory, but reference to an imaginary or possible world, not the actual world.

Storyworld is predominately a cognitive concept, while fictional world is a semantic concept. In his book *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), Mark Wolf prefers what he calls the broader, less theoretical and more neutral term 'imaginary world'. A story or fictional world is an imagined totality that is only partly manifest as narrative events in a text. In chapter 3 Wolf outlines the non-narrative parameters of these worlds, ranging from their specific timelines (their entire network of past and future events), their spatial geography, plus their own symbolic systems of kinship, language, mythology and moral values, all of which need to be designed. In the hybrid films under discussion, the videogame logic pushes the films beyond mimeticism towards an unnatural or impossible world, depending in each instance on the combination of videogame rules entangled with the film's narrative logic. (The videogame rules can momentarily or permanently create unnatural or impossible storyworlds.)

Impossible/Unnatural

Storyworlds create an imaginary world distinct from the actual world. Marie Laure-Ryan's 'principle of minimal departure' states that the starting point or default stance towards storyworlds is to comprehend them in the same way as the actual world until instructed otherwise (1991, p. 51). Until instructed otherwise: this phrase is fundamental, for storyworlds do not need to conform to the actual world and to literary realism in all its forms (naturalism, mimeticism, verisimilitude). In 'Impossible Storyworlds – and What to Do with Them', Jan Alber argued that:

> Many narratives confront us with bizarre storyworlds which are governed by principles that have very little to do with the real world around us. […] many narrative texts teem with unnatural (i.e., physically or logically impossible) scenarios that take us to the limits of human cognition. (2009, p. 79)

For Alber physical and logical impossibility are key, while other narratologists such as Brian Richardson develop a broader definition of the unnatural using implausibility (involving incongruous/absurd activities) rather than impossibility:

> An unnatural narrative is one that contains significant antimimetic events, characters, settings, or frames. By *antimimetic*, I mean representations that contravene the presuppositions of nonfictional narratives, violate mimetic conventions and the practices of realism, and defy the conventions of existing, established genres. (2015, p. 3)

Despite these different definitions, what is common to the concept of the unnatural/impossible/implausible storyworld is its radical departure from the genre conventions of realism (psychological or physical), mimesis and verisimilitude.

In 2016 I employed the theory of unnatural and impossible storyworlds to analyze the ontology of the worlds in Michel Gondry's music videos, focusing on his 1997 video 'Bachelorette' which gradually builds up a storyworld structured around unnatural and impossible events, which are manifest on screen via simultaneity, repetition, magnification, reduction, duplication, a loop, and embedded narration, which are combined in the master trope of *mise en abyme*, a recursive form of embedded duplication that opens up a non-linear space in a text, an encased world that repeats the storyworld on a smaller scale. In other words, it creates worlds within worlds.

This leads to my final observation about these hybrid films: within a mimetic framework, the construction of an unnatural fictional world is foregrounded. In other words, world building becomes a theme or subject matter of these films, and characters become aware that the world they inhabit does not conform to the actual world but is a manufactured world. Because world building becomes a theme, it means the constructed world has a boundary which the characters enter and exit. The constructed worlds are contained or embedded within the mimetically-defined film world. This is where the in-game tutorial becomes crucial in films such as *The Matrix, Source Code*, and *Inception*: the new character (and, of course, the film spectator) is taught the unnatural rules of the fictional world. The new character becomes a plot device to introduce the process of constructing storyworlds, and the unnatural rules of that storyworld.

These observations can be developed further by using Stefan Iversen's notion of unnatural fictional minds (2012), to complement the study of unnatural fictional worlds. Also, it is significant to note that Mark Wolf devotes a chapter of his book to this reflexive process of world building (chapter 5: 'Subcreation within Subcreated Worlds').

Conclusion

This chapter represents an intermediary stage of research. More work needs to be carried out. I plan to explore further the dynamic entanglement of videogame logic and narrative logic, examine in more depth the ontological status of the resulting unnatural or impossible storyworlds these logics create, to draw upon Mark Wolf's categories of world structures and infrastructures, and develop a theory of the unnatural characters and their minds who inhabit these storyworlds.

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates how two logics (narrative and videogame) function in a select number of contemporary blockbuster films. The paper is divided into three sections: The first outlines narrative and videogame logics; the second presents examples from *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010) and *Source Code* (Duncan Jones, 2011) to demonstrate how videogame logic structures the events in each film; and the third discusses how these logics create specific storyworlds (imaginary worlds distinct from the actual world) that are unnatural and/or impossible.

Key words: storyworld, blockbuster, Christopher Nolan, Duncan Jones, narrative theory, videogames

Panoptikum 2021, 26:169-188 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.08

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The Universe-al Storytelling. Towards A 'Spatial' Narrative Model in Modern Comic Book Cinema

The supremacy of superhero storylines in today's landscape of popular cinema is an inarguable fact. It is based on solid numbers from global box offices that attest to the 'unsinkable' quality of almost every superhero title. Just before the end of 2017, Marvel Cinematic Universe – the most successful comic-based film series – had become the most profitable franchise in the history of cinema, having earned USD 13.5 billion after just 11 years of its big screen presence[1]. The beginning of 2018 appeared to be even more satisfying for the Marvel producers with the unprecedented and unexpected worldwide phenomenon of Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*, the 18th instalment inside the MCU[2] that earned globally an overwhelming USD 241.9 million over the opening weekend and became only the 4th feature (after Marvel's *The Avengers*, *Jurassic World* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*) to ever sustain over 100 million in gross earnings in the second

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[1] By comparison, a much longer popular film franchise such as James Bond after more than five decades on screens, reaped 'only' USD 7,077,929,291. See: https://www.the-numbers.com/movies/franchises/ [01.03.2018].

[2] Which has already achieved outstanding critical and audience acclaim making it officially the best reviewed film production in history on the popular Rotten Tomatoes website, topping *The Wizard of Oz* (dir. V. Fleming, 1939) and *Citizen Kane* (dir. O. Welles, 1941). See: http://comicbook.com/marvel/2018/02/20/black-panther-ranked-best-movie-all-time-rotten-tomatoes/ [1.03.2018].

weekend of its cinematic run[3]. Right now, with the massive payoff of *Black Panther* and 2019's *Captain Marvel*, MCU easily passes the 18-billion-dollar mark and, just prior to the release of the highly anticipated *Avengers: Endgame* crossover, it surely aims for 20 billion in revenue before the end of 2019.

It is true then that Marvel Cinematic Universe stands today for the ideal model (both financially and critically) of a film-comic relation that seems to have no real competition. However, even the less profitable comic-based productions, such as some of 20th Century Fox's *X-Men* episodes or the DC Extended Universe (the main threat to Marvel's cinematic and comic book dominance), can be regarded as probably the only modern "assurance" of acceptable profits for Hollywood producers. Besides the disastrous reception of Josh Trank's *Fantastic Four* in 2015, which ended with less than USD 170 million in global box office (with an estimated USD 120 million film's budget), there seems to be no sign of audience fatigue or the imminent bursting of the comic book film bubble that could foreshadow the eventual end of the superhero wave. Even the greatest artistic flops or thematically ridiculed titles such as *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (dir. Z. Snyder, 2016) or *Ant-Man* (dir. P. Reed, 2015) have been able to break the figure of USD 500 million with ease, which cannot be said for many other recently made big franchise productions such as Ridley Scott's *Alien: Covenant* (with a disappointing USD 240 million in the global box office) or Michael Bay's *Transformers: The Last Knight* (which admittedly peaked at USD 600 million but at the same time suffered more than a 50% drop in overall box office compared with its predecessors such as *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* in 2011). The almost unstoppable force of modern comic book films is evident when comparing the critics' favourite of 2017 (*Blade Runner 2049*) and the least popular comic book production released the same year (*Justice League*) which were miles apart both on their popular Rotten Tomatoes score (87% to 40% positive reviews) and the final box office figures (USD 259 million to USD 657 million in total gross revenue).

Analysis of the 'raw' numbers, however, will not offer an accurate insight into the source of the worldwide phenomenon of comic book films as well as its impact on modern popular cinema that – almost without exception – seems to follow, albeit rather blindly, the bulletproof model of Marvel and DC's cinematic universes. As clearly demonstrated by the Tom Cruise-driven failure of *The Mummy* in 2017, it is not enough to announce another 'big bang' in the Hollywood galaxy that is supposed to spawn a new 'universe-like' franchise of

[3] See: https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2018/02/26/all-the-box-office-milestones-black-panther-set-in-its-112m-second-weekend/#1fa3f8892340 [01.03.2018].

interconnected film titles to make it a self-perpetuating machine. Where does the difference lie in the case of comic book films? I believe that it is the comic book's original narrative system which does not lend itself to adaptation into any other textual environment, as it consists of many comic book-driven (in its superhero genre) narrative codes, themes and tools that are finally remediated today into their cinematic version. As a final result, we are now witnessing a situation that has never been seen before in film-comic book relations: for the very first time, it is cinema that has to admit the superiority of comic book narration and, consequently, has followed its patterns as opposed to merely adjusting them to the demands of the big screen. This leads to quite drastic changes in the classical modes of cinematic storytelling.

In an attempt to elucidate the 'super-structure' of a given superhero comic book and a 'super-reading' which is required here, Douglas Wolk explains: "Of course, picking up a superhero comic book right now, if you're not already immersed in that world, is likely to make you feel simultaneously talked down to and baffled by the endless references to stuff you're already supposed to know. But immersion in that world isn't just what they require: it's what they're selling. Contemporary superhero comics *aren't* really meant to be read as freestanding works, even on those rare occasions when their plots are self-contained. They're not even necessarily meant to be individual creative statements […] Instead, superhero comics' readers understand each thirty-two-page pamphlet as a small element of one of two gigantic narratives, in which most major characters have thematic and metaphorical significance" (Wolk, p. 90). It would be truly difficult to find a more pertinent yet sufficiently broad definition of the superhero comic book structure than Wolk's. He seems to have underlined all the important aspects of such stories, including their always open-ended plot, great attachment to the previous and next instalments within a single title as well as the overall publisher's 'road map': an obvious requirement for the reader to actually catch up with numerous simultaneous and/or alternate storylines which have an intertextual impact on each other. Finally, there is the invariable apprehension that both the characters and their adventures never truly end but are re-shaped in order to maintain the attention of new generations of readers. However, such devices were not always fundamental for superheroic entertainment. In the very first wave of 'cape and cowl'' comic books (between the late 1930s and 1960s), known as 'The Golden Age' of American comics, most were treated in a much more 'serialized' manner, which means that even if some references between titles were made they generally did not challenge the self-contained structure of the book. It all changed with the dawn of 'The Silver Age' in the middle of 1950s, with its significant turn from 'serialized' to 'universe-alized' narrative model.

After more than a decade during which superhero comic books remained on the defensive on the American market, the 1950s finally endowed the seemingly drained cultural concept with a new quality. The first group of groundbreaking experiments and titles included *Showcase* no.4 (1956) with the re-imagined 1939 classic character of Flash from, *Showcase* no. 22 (1959) with a similarly resuscitated Green Lantern (another DC 'old school' hero from 1940), the cult 123rd issue of the standalone *The Flash* series with its thrilling *Flash of Two Worlds* story, which combined two variations of the same hero for the very first time (Flash of the 1940s and the 1960s) and finally *Brave and the Bold* no. 28 (1960), which presented the initial incarnation of the Justice League of America group. Shortly after the DC comic offensive – led by the publisher's legendary editor Julius Schwartz – another major player appeared in November 1961 with *The Fantastic Four*, a cornerstone for Marvel Comics that was followed by a number of new hit superheroes and their crowning jewel, called *The Avengers,* in 1963. The common denominator linking DC's re-interpretation of the pre-war characters and the fresh approach of Marvel's creators was the general concept of the altered main pattern of a superhero story. Besides the necessary remakes of a character's costumes or their background origins and motives, both DC and Marvel introduced quite novel narrative tools that helped to expand the possibilities of the superhero comic book:

> **reboot/retcon**: according to William Proctor, a reboot (or remake) "*repeat recognizable narrative units* to some extent (Verevis, 2006: 1), while both rearticulate properties from the cultural past in a pattern of repetition and novelty" (Proctor, 2012). The obvious aim of rebooting a character or franchise is to restore it from long or short-term oblivion in a new aesthetic and/or thematic context that could be attractive for new readers. That was the general idea behind the Flash and Green Lantern reboots in the 1950s comics, but the same happened to the famous Captain America who was brought back directly from the comic's past in 1964 (*Avengers* no. 4) when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby decided to re-use the hero from the World War II for the purpose of their newly established 'avenging' squad. In time, the rebooting processes which entailed a significant change of the franchise's previous instalments became a *retcon* which, as Andrew J. Friedenthal observes, impacts not only the present text(s) but also serves as a revisionist tool to undermine the well-known stories.[4] There is an interesting aspect that needs to be noted when considering both the 'classical' reboot and its more radical retcon variant, one which implies an inter-

[4] See: Andrew J. Friedenthal, *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America*, The University of Mississippi Press, Jackson 2017.

textual space between given 'phases' of a franchise (original and rebooted ones). William Proctor continues: "As with a computer's internal memory, rebooting the system does not signify total loss of data. Rebooting a franchise does not imply that its core memory is destroyed. In other words, pressing the reboot button does not eradicate the iconographic memory of the cultural product" (Proctor, 2012). The reboot mechanism triggers a very interesting type of accumulation of the existing versions of characters and their worlds that the readers are aware of. In time, this accumulation would eventually become another tool for the superhero narrative, eliciting the concept of the multiverse (a diegetic world consisting of many interpretations of itself);

crossover: it would be a grave overstatement to say that crossover practices appeared for the very first time to further superhero comics. Historically, the very first instance of crossover – understood as a meeting/connection between characters from different comic books and storylines – occurred in 1907 when Yellow Kid (a hero from Richard Felton Outcault's newspaper strip) met Buster Brown (another of Outcault's creations). The superhero comic book, however, did manage to make crossover its recognisable item from the 1940s when Batman and Superman were fighting the Nazis side by side on the covers of the *World's Finests* series, while Namor and Human-Torch joined forces in *Marvel Mystery Comics* published by Timely Comics (the direct predecessor of Marvel). It was the Silver Age of comics that once again took the 'crossing paths' to another level with massive superhero team-ups such as *Justice League of America*, *Avengers* or the entire crossover-dedicated Marvel line *Marvel Team-Up* (debuting in 1972) which combined the publisher's heroes in pairs. A major revolution in crossover aesthetic and form came in 1984-1985 alongside *Crisis on Infinite Earths* (DC) and *Secret Wars* (Marvel) multi-titled (referring to the main storyarc and its tie-ins) and interconnected stories, engaging almost every existing heroe for the unprecedented changes or even 'purges' of the crowded superhero universes. As Julian Darius noticed: "The crossover is an orgy, a wild celebration of the notion of large narrative structures, of different continuing narratives sharing a universe" (Darius, p. 170).

universe/multiverse: probably the chief yield of the 1960s superhero comic books is the development of the 'universe' concept — an idea that all publishers' heroes and stories occupy the same diegetic space and they should constantly intersect. Marvel Comics reached a true mastery in the concept, as their titles were meant to interact between one another as

> much as possible. The characters would constantly bump into each other and the effects of one hero's struggles often reverberated in the actions of another. By making New York the 'centre' of its cosmos, Marvel implied in no uncertain terms that 'every story matters' since they all create an ever-growing macro-story of the whole Marvel universe. However, that structure was quickly challenged by an even more complex narrative system in the shape of the multiverse, properly introduced in the famous *The Flash* no. 123, in the story entitled *The Flash of Two Worlds*. In essence, the 'modern' (1960's) incarnation of the Flash (named Barry Allen) meets his counter-vision from the comic book's past (Jay Garrick) who was the original Flash in the 1940s. This particular comic book story, written by Gardner Fox, opened up infinite possibilities for future artists, who would thus not only be able to re-imagine a given hero but even create relations between different timelines within a given title (and respective regions of the comic's universe). As Russell Backman suggests, the crucial process of 'alteration' leads here to a situation where "[i]n the alternate timeline, familiar characters become alternate versions of themselves, essentially new characters, with new affordances and narrative potential" (Backman, p. 206). As a direct consequence of such an abundant catalogue of alternate interpretations of heroes, it is easy to imagine not only effortless interchanges following the varied tastes and/or expectations of readers and creators alike, but also crossover-like events such as the Spider-Verse storyline from 2014, combining every mediatic incarnation of the amazing Spider-Man into one fictional story (and one diegetic world for a while).

All the 'narrative novelties' of the superhero comic book as seen above have one crucial element in common, namely that – as I mentioned before – they are unlikely to yield to adaption into any non-comic book environment. According to Russell Backman, the fully developed superhero comic book narrative system exists as a radical expansion of a simply 'serialized' structure, as it challenges the classical cause-and-effect pattern as well as the self-containment of individual parts of the series (Backman, p. 203). Instead, superhero comic books represent a more 'universe-alized' mode of narration with their neverending re-shaping, re-inventing, re-connecting and re-altering mechanisms. Such a complexity truly seems to exceed the possibilities of more 'traditional' narrative media and it surely was beyond the reach of the first wave of comic book films before the beginning of the 21st century.

From the Golden to the Silver Age of Comic Book Film

In order to fully appreciate the abyss between the pre-2000 and post-2000 comic book films, one should perhaps compare two significant quotes from two of the most influential comic book film directors of their times. Tim Burton, the creator of the first two 'modern' Batman films from 1989 and 1992 admitted: "I was never a giant comic book fan […] The reason I've never been a comic book fan — and I think it started when I was a child — is because I could never tell which box I was supposed to read" (Salisbury, p. 71). In contrast, James Gunn – the acclaimed director of *Guardians of the Galaxy* duology – was described almost 30 years later by his brother as follows: "He had boxes and boxes and boxes of comic books. Tons of them. He already had a huge collection by the time I was old enough to notice it"[5]. The disparity between these two approaches seems to account for the main difference between the creative approach of 'classic' comic book cinema (meaning its Golden Age by way of equivalence to the Golden Age of comics) and its present-day re-interpretation, which is more akin to the 'universe-alized' model of the Silver Age. I find it quite symbolic that in both quotes there is the 'comic book box' metaphor that seems to intimidate Burton and fascinate Gunn at the same time. The same intimidation/fascination opposition can be applied to both variants of the comic book cinema, reflecting the more lukewarm treatment of the comic book universes in the past and the complete immersion in their complexity today. Thus we arrive at the definitive distinction between the more cinema-oriented, 'serialized' comic book films (i.e. Burton's *Batman*, *Batman Returns* and Joel Schumacher's sequels after that) and the universe-based 'narrative orgies' that constantly unbalance the self-containment of a given film (as most Marvel Cinematic Universe features do).

However, it would be far off the mark to claim that the fundamental narrative devices of the Silver Age comic books (such as reboot, crossover and universe) had never appeared on screen before the actual launching of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in 2008 with the very first *Iron Man* (dir. J. Favreau) instalment. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that even if the reboot/crossover concepts had been used before 2008, they were basically far from the fully developed mechanisms of original comics and, once again, they were rather cinematic substitutes for the comic book form. And so, before his modern incarnation with Henry Cavill the ideal representative of a the superhero genre – Superman himself – had several on-screen (both in cinema and television) reboots and remakes following the initial *Superman* series from 1948 and its 'spin-offs such as *Atom*

[5] https://www.buzzfeed.com/adambvary/james-gunn-guardians-of-the-galaxy?utm_term=.qoAbRa5mV#.vn07lDB21 [1.03.2018].

Man vs Superman (1950), *Superman and the Mole Man* (1951). Another iteration of the character came with *The Adventures of Superman* TV show (1951-1957), the 1960's revitalization of *The New Adventures of Superman* (1966) and finally the Richard Donner groundbreaking blockbuster (1978) with its sequels. Further television instalments were *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993-197) and *Smallville* (a prequel for a young audience aired between 2001 and 2011), accompanied by another big-budget production *Superman Returns* in 2006, and eventually the most recent *Man of Steel* by Zack Snyder in 2013, conceived as part of a larger DC Extended Universe. However, the list does not include the numerous cartoon series (like the legendary Max Fleischer's *Superman* from the1940s) and other media concepts like *The Adventures of Superman*, a 1940's radio programme or *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*, a Broadway play which premiered in 1966). Still, it is worth noticing, however, that besides the overall impressive number of entries into the Superman screen franchise almost every one of them existed as a complete obliteration of any other – previous or following – Superman story. There were some occasional 'winks' to the viewers like the constantly repeated Superman changing outfit scene in a phone booth for instance, but they were not truly building any deeper connections with any pre-existing titles. The creators of the more "serialized" comic book films before 2008 were apparently more interested in starting from scratch with their own rebooted properties rather than trying to capitalize on pre-existing content. The only exception here was the critically and financially disappointing *Superman Returns*, designed by its director Bryan Singer as a simultaneous reboot and sequel at the same time of Richard Donner's original film. *Superman Returns* builds then a very interesting narrative bridge between these two versions, by trying to re-new and re-interpret the 1970's classic and follow the story that ended in *Superman II* (1980).

Much the same applies to the use of the crossover paradigm that is commonly associated today with the massive success of *The Avengers* macro-franchise (with a trilogy made in 2012, 2015 and 2018), which combined the main characters from the five previous Marvel Cinematic Universe solo features: Iron Man, Hulk, Captain America, Thor, Black Widow and Hawkeye. Similar efforts to create such 'criss-crossing' narratives had been made way back in the 1980s, following the great success of *The Incredible Hulk* TV series aired by the CBS television network. *The Incredible Hulk Returns* (1988) and *The Trial of the Incredible Hulk* (1989), both television-exclusive standalone titles were supposed not only to follow the popular Hulk storyline starring Lou Ferrigno , but they were also interested in pairing Green Goliath with other Marvel characters such as Thor (in *Returns*) and Daredevil (in *The Trial*). It is difficult, however, to be appre-

ciative of that 1980s output, because as Arnold T. Blumberg sums up: "Sadly, the film's production values do not stand the test of time. Shabby settings […], stilted shootings, extremely variable Hulk make-up […], flat lighting, amateurish synthesized music, and cheap special effects leave *The Incredible Hulk Returns* [and its follow-up – T.Ż.] looking and sounding like a curio from a bygone era perhaps best forgotten" (Blumberg, p. 122). Quality seems to be a strong enough point to actually ignore *The Incredible Hulk* crossovers but there is another factor there that seems to work against the comic book's originally harmonious model of intersecting a wide range of heroes. As Blumberg continues: "More importantly, as a first attempt to introduce another Marvel hero through the Hulk, *The Incredible Hulk Returns* fell short. One of the most obvious weaknesses here was the irreconcilable clash between the realistic world that Bixby's Banner [Bill Bixby played the Hulk's human alter ego—David Banner—T .Ż.] inhabited and the overtly cartoonish, mystical origin story shared by Levitt's Blake [Steve Levitt played Thor's human alter ego — Donald Blake — T.Ż.] concerning his possession of Thor's hammer and control over the Thunder God's appearances" (Blumberg, p. 122). The real problem then was to find adequate tools to link such different characters and their agendas – Thor's ridiculous semi-Nordic origins, Hulk's fugitive-like drama and Daredevil's city-avenging *modus operandi* on top of it – in a single storyworld. Quite evidently, the venture lacked the concept of a shared universe which could re-locate every possible hero and their particular aspect within a wider narrative environment.

Again, it would be difficult to argue that the Marvel Cinematic Universe was the first attempt to bring a universe-like structure into the cinematic mode of production[6]. There can be no question, however, that MCU was the first genuinely successful experiment that thoroughly embraced the concept, dwarfing all previous endeavours which were too modest in that respect. Besides the aforementioned quasi-universe of *The Incredible Hulk* that none would wish to see again and the quite frequently shared universe adaptations in superhero-based cartoons, the initial idea to enact the big superhero universe on the big screen was manifested in 1995 in one of the scenes in *Batman Forever*, the second sequel to Burton's *Batman*. But, once again, one does not immediately see the scene as a direct foretoken of the DC Films Universe, since the sequence itself is more of an inside-joke for hardcore fans. In *Batman Forever*, Bruce Wayne – better known as Batman – is trying to convince his future ward and partner in crime-fighting business, Dick Grayson, to stay in Wayne Manor after the killing of

[6] Especially since the 'shared universe' or 'crossover' concept had already been tried in Hollywood with the giant monster brawl *King Kong vs Godzilla* (dir. I. Honda, 1962) or the clash of horror icons in *Freddy vs Jason* (dir. R. Yu, 2003).

Grayson's family, who were circus acrobats. "Where will you go? The circus must be halfway to Metropolis by now", Wayne asks, hinting that Metropolis (the hometown of Man of Steel/Superman himself) is an existing part of a diegetic world of *Batman Forever*. As I have mentioned before, it would be difficult to say today that the inconspicuous hint is anything more than just an Easter egg for the fans, especially as in the continuation of *Batman Forever – Batman and Robin* (dir. J. Schumacher, 1997) – another reference to Superman is much more of a comedic pun. "I want a car, chicks dig the car", says Robin at the beginning of *Batman and Robin,* eliciting Batman's funny(?) response: "This is why Superman works alone." The whole universe-building intention is more complicated here in the deleted scene from the second Schumacher Bat-production. As Bruce Scivally reports, there was an ultimately scrapped sequence in the original script where Bruce Wayne investigates Pamela Isley, the alter ego of Poison Ivy – one of the film's villains – using the Batcomputer to compare Pamela's and Ivy's images. "Amazing what a good wig and contact lenses can do. And I thought Clark Kent got away with murder just wearing those glasses" (Scivally, p. 270), Wayne admits, not only revealing his rather poor detective skills but also suggesting once again that Clark Kent (aka Superman) shares the same fictional world as Batman and his partners. Even if the scene had appeared in the final cut, it would still have been a rather poor 'universe-oriented' effort in comparison with the almost endless and obvious interconnections between characters inside the comic book storyarcs. In defence of Schumacher's 'puns', it would be warranted to assume that at the end of the 1990s, Warner Bros. production company was making some careful preparations for their first foray into the wide universe of heroes. As we know today, there was actually a *Batman vs. Superman* feature pitched right then to a number of Hollywood directors such as Wolfgang Petersen or J.J. Abrams, intended to deliver the big screen superhero showdown already in the 2000s. For a long time, there were also rumours about George Miller's *Justice League: Mortal* on-screen team-up, but both projects were finally dismissed following *Batman and Robin's* low box office performance and Hollywood's consequent distrust of superheroes. Although it may now sound quite improbable that before the beginning of the 21st century comic books were not considered as an attractive area of cultural narratives – for viewers and producers alike – and that there was no interest in enacting the comic books' extravagant 'universe' structures outside graphic novels.

A major shift came with the first iterations of *X-Men* (dir. B. Singer, 2000) and *Spider-Man* (dir. S. Raimi, 2002), which totally redefined both the possibilities of comic book films and the viewers' abilities to follow a mode of narrative exposition which adhered more to the comic books than to the cinematic para-

digm. As modest as they seem today, both *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* did manage to open the form of comic book film to a much more 'universe-al' philosophy as, according to M. Keith Booker, "It features a fairly minimal plot and serves primarily as an introduction to the characters and to the near-future world in which they live" (Booker, p. 74). It is true that *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* were designed as an opposite to the much more self-contained and self-related comic book films from the past (e.g. Donner's *Superman* or Burton's *Batman*) as they constantly referred to characters, plots or future events that a 'general audience' (unfamiliar with the comic books' roots) knew almost nothing about. The risk, however, seemed to pay off as Singer and Raimi-directed franchises reached box office heights and inspired the whole future movement of the Silver Age comic book films, with the Marvel Cinematic Universe ahead. To understand the gigantic impact that comic book films had at the beginning of the modern age – one with which Hollywood is still resonating until today – one should once again underline the chief benefits that interconnected storylines brought to the franchise-addicted popular cinema.

As Matthias Stork brilliantly notes in his analysis of the tremendous financial yield of *The Avengers*: "*The Avengers*, as the flagship of the multiple-film series, is constructed as the emblematic tie-in movie that synthesizes Marvel's roster of superheroes, the spectacle of on-screen convergence serving as a marketing gimmick to please die-hard comic book fans, summer audiences and brand investors alike. […]. The aforementioned *product shot* of the Avengers' on-screen assembly is integral to this logic. Variations of the shot were reproduced for the film's global marketing campaigns and featured in various outlets including posters, DVD covers, animated menus, TV spots, store ads, social media games and other paratexts" (Stork, p. 80). Stork is quite accurate in his conclusion that what makes the whole comic book film movement so successful right now is its basic cooperation (or convergence) with the logic of modern transmedia (and cinema as well) production for which always open-ended, constantly repeated, reconnected and retold narratives are a natural habitat. The Superhero comic book narrative system was always about converging single titles, trans-textualization of given storylines and remediation of particular characters in order to align them with the broader expanse of a 'universe'. All three categories – convergence, transmediality (transtextuality) and remediation – are fundamental to contemporary Hollywood production which does not constitute a self-contained market but rather a planet within the great cosmos of media brands and companies. Economic and narrative 'assembling' (to refer once more to the rallying call of The Avengers) is what makes superhero stories so attractive for producers and viewers, since now is the very first

time in history when the model of insightful and interconnected reading that was the domain of comic geeks is becoming more common than ever.

Hence, the 'universe-al' storytelling – treated as a synergy of convergence, transmedia and remediation tools – exerts its most significant impact by changing conditions for comic book film narratives, which are thus finally free to explore less 'serial-ized' and more 'universe-alized' systems of stories. According to Felix Brinker, due to the inexorable expansion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – as well as the DC Extended Universe or Fox's X-Men franchise which followed in its wake – it would be legitimate to say that right now we are witnessing a radical shift from the classical vertical serialization within a single, linear medium (such as cinema) into a more horizontal system of multi-linear narratives. As Brinker explains: "The MCU take on serial storytelling is perhaps best understood as an attempt to translate what Kelleter and Stein have called *multilinear* seriality of Marvel comics into the medium of cinema […]. Although the serial unfolding of the MCU within the medium of film is relatively linear, the franchise's expansion into television and short films complicates this linearity by introducing additional, media-specific models of serialization […] a movement that gives rise to a complex transmedial chronology and hierarchization of series and instalments" (Brinker, p. 216-217). However, multi-linearity does not really have to imply a multi-media environment (though it certainly reaches completely new levels of complexity as a result), since both Marvel comics and movies clearly display that multi-storyline model within themselves. Each and every individual sub-franchise of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Ant-Man* or *Guardians of the Galaxy* – has its own aesthetic and thematic agenda which nevertheless refers to larger narrative plots not by showing its inconsistency (manifesting e.g. in the 'realistic' Hulk and 'mythological' Thor in *The Incredible Hulk Returns*) but rather through the multi-layered fabric of a fictional storyworld. It is an unprecedented thing in cinema to present a multi-titled narration that comprises a political thriller (the *Captain America* series), a light-hearted teen comedy (*Spider-Man: Homecoming*), sci-fi heist movies (*Ant-Man* and *Ant Man and the Wasp*) and semi-serious fantasy features (the *Thor* sub-franchise). The integration of all these individual yet cooperating elements of a universe is a truly exacting framework – one which is probably sustained the most by the 'integrative' reading on the part of the viewers.

The truth is that comic book cinema has only scratched the surface of the narrative consequences of adopting the multi-linearity of the comic book. Given that we are just before the proper introduction of a fully-developed 'multiverse'

onto the big screen[7], the general audience is still unaware of another level of complexity but also the attractiveness that such a model entails. It has been intimated quite recently by the MCU actor Benedict Cumberbatch who said: "What we've seen happen within the Marvel Cinematic Universe is this ever-expanding coterie of superheroes. And I think now we're at the stage where this universe, even within our world, has gotten quite crowded and it's just about to explode into other dimensions"[8]. This sentence clearly conveys the possibility of introducing a multiverse into Marvel's cinematic dominion, which could re-shape its narrative system once again from multi- to quantum-seriality. The idea itself comes from Proctor's approach, suggesting that: "Marvel multiverse is a sprawling metropolis comprising alternative realities and parallel narrative systems that comingle within a transmedia nebula" (Proctor, 2017, p. 325), and further: "The Marvel multiverse structure allows multiplicity to cohere within an ontological order that subsumes a pantheon of characters within a singular hyperdiegesis representing the largest world-building exercise in any media" (Proctor, 2017, p. 327-328). With the imminent incarnation of a multiverse within a cinematic structure, the viewers will witness completely new narrative conditions that will allow the already known characters (and actors who play them) to be replaced, to create 'collisions' between the various versions of heroes and their diegesis, as well as to combine alternate realities (or even franchises) into multiverse events just like in the *Spider-Verse* comic book storyline with *Spider-Man:Homecoming* star Tom Holland and his 'masked' predecessors: Tobey Maguire (from Sam Raimi's trilogy) and Andrew Garfield (from Marc Webb's unsuccessful "*The Amazing Spider-Man"* remake). It certainly will mark a great shift for the general audience who was so reluctant to watch *Superman Returns* making direct connections to the Christopher Reeve classics, and now will have to embrace the growing legacy of many on-screen supermen (and superwomen).

To recapitulate the above observations concerning the 'universe-alized' pattern of a modern comic book film, one should draw on the classic comic book theory toolkit developed by Thierry Groensteen in *The System of Comics*, a fundamental work in the field. According to the French researcher, what makes a comic book narrative so compelling – and attractive at the same time – is the graphically-narrative connection which remains non-adaptable to any other visual medium, a characteristic which Groensteen calls the 'spatio-topic' quality of comics: "It has been said: framed, isolated by empty space (a redoubling of

[7] In fact, the very first cinematic experiment with multiverse logic was made in 2014 by Bryan Singer in his *X-Men: Days of Future Past* based on the groundbreaking comic book which explored the possibilities of coexisting timelines.

[8] https://www.cbr.com/benedict-cumberbatch-mcu-multiverse/ [1.03.2018].

the frame), and generally of small dimensions, the panel is easily contained by and takes part in the sequential continuum. This signifies that at the perceptive and cognitive levels the panel exists longer for the comics reader than the shot exists for a film spectator. When watching a film, *the cinema spectator does not experience . . . the sensation of being placed in front of a multitude of narrative utterances of the first order that accumulate piece by piece to give birth to the second order narrative utterance, the entirety of the filmic story*. A comics reader, on the contrary, experiences precisely a sensation of this type" (Groensteen, p. 26). I believe that with the dawn of the 'universe-alized' mode of comic book film, the cinema spectator can finally partake in a kind of narrative spatio-topic replacement since they are welcome to perceive a single film feature (a single panel in Groensteen's structure) as both an individual entity as well as part of the 'multitude of narrative utterances' which constitute a larger 'page frame' in the context of a cinematic universe, this means a diegetic framework of a fictional storyworld and its horizontal/vertical continuum. A temporal cinematic narrative is stepping aside to usher in a spatial comic book narrative where the causality of events is existing with their simultaneous diversification of characters' viewpoints and the viewers' points of access to the franchise.

The Homecoming of the Comic Book Film Narration

The growing reliance of the Marvel Cinematic Universe's creators on the new 'spatial' model of narration encourages ever bolder experiments with individual elements of that storyworld. Among them, there are a few standalone cinematic entries that seem to embrace this new comic book-based logic more evidently than others, by engaging the narrative tools and paths which prove the most demanding for the viewer. Here, one can surely list *Ant-Man*, *Captain America: Civil War* or *Thor: Ragnarok* as productions which heavily depend on the reboot/crossover/universe cooperation within a single feature, but in my opinion it is the 2017 *Spider-Man: Homecoming* which stands out as an extremely interesting instance of remediation of the comic book narrative mechanisms. For a start, one has to remember that Jon Watts's attempt at bringing Marvel's famous Wall-crawler to the big screen, being the third after Sam Raimi's trilogy and Marc Webb's two instalments, is actually the first which formally exists within the MCU and can officially cooperate with all other diegetic elements and characters from Marvel's film system. Instead of making a 'proper' origin story of a newly re-imagined superhero (as is still mostly common for initial entries into a sub-franchise series), Watts constructed a rather unexpected story which not only relies on more general MCU events but works as well as a meta-textual reference to a wider perspective of Spider-Man's older versions and cinematic performances.

First of all – and most obviously – *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is certainly a character reboot made, as the restrictive reboot definition implies, to re-induct Spider-Man into a new storyworld. There are many crucial upgrades there: the actor playing Peter Parker/Spider-Man (Tom Holland) is much younger than his predecessors, Spider-Man's outfit is shown to be the result of Tony Stark's/Iron Man's cooperation with Parker (which had been introduced in *Captain America: Civil War*). Also, the entire surroundings of the 'new' Wall-crawler have been re-imagined to bring them into line with the overall Marvel Cinematic Universe (which is probably best embodied by re-casting Peter's Aunt May, now played now by Marisa Tomei whose appeal gives rise to many funny allusions made by playboy-ish Tony Stark in both *Civil War* and *Homecoming*). However, Jon Watts not only seems to be playing with the 'standard' reboot requirements but also appears to exploit William Proctor's remarks about the reboot's ability to create an interesting 'tension' between the different incarnations of a hero. Indeed, Watts

makes good use of that property by making his re-vision less predictable and far more engaging for the viewer. Consequently, *Homecoming* does not feature the irremovable elements of any 'proper' Spider-Man opening instalment which represent the cornerstones of Spider-Man's make-up: the radioactive spider bite and the death of Peter's beloved uncle Ben. Instead, *Homecoming* provides only a short exchange between Parker and his best friend Ned who asks: "You got bit by a spider? Can it bite me? It'd probably hurt, right? You know what, whatever. Even if it did hurt, I'll let it bite me. Maybe. How much did it hurt?" and in response hears simply: "Spider's dead, Ned". The same happens with uncle Ben's tragic fate, which is never explicitly mentioned in the movie except for Peter's ominous remark about keeping his superhero identity secret from Aunt May: "May cannot know. I cannot do that to her right now. You know...". The brave elision of the two most iconic parts of the Spider-Man origin myth have a deeper meaning, as they are strongly connected with the intertextual logic of the reboot. Watts correctly assumes that the audience are quite familiar with both milestones in Peter's biography – having watched previous versions of the character, read comic books and numerous cartoons or played video games – and that it is more creative to just let the intertextual memory work whilst focusing on building stronger ties with Spider-Man's re-gained place within the MCU. The final film actually effects many reboot-prompted, deliberate omissions, dispensing for instance with the iconic "With great power comes great responsibility" phrase, which had been included in the original script yet it was eventually replaced with a slightly more subtle scene, where Peter has to forgo the Homecoming ball he had been looking forward to very much in order to catch the movie's main villain, thus fulfiling the inescapable duty of a superhero.

Actually, one of the main reasons for abandoning the whole storyline featuring uncle Ben was the very significant presence of Tony Stark/Iron Man, who replaces Ben as Peter's mentor[9]. Once again, though Stark's involvement is much more important here for the overall narrative structure, as *Spider-Man: Homecoming* becomes more of a sub-assembled movie, including direct cooperation between two Marvel heroes. As a matter of fact, there is much of Iron Man's background story to be recalled by the viewer as some of his actions are motivated directly by the events of Tony Stark's previous on-screen adventures. In one of the film's most dramatic scenes – the quarrel between Stark and Parker – the Iron Avenger makes a categorical statement: "If you are nothing without this suit, you shouldn't have it. I sound like my dad." while just before that he has revealed: "My dad never really gave me a lot of support and I'm just trying

[9] https://www.flickeringmyth.com/2017/07/spider-man-homecoming-almost-featured-the-with-great-power-line/ [1.03.2018].

to break the cycle of shame." The key thing which enables one to understand the non-obvious pun here is to be aware of the difficult relationship between Tony and his father as presented in *Iron Man 2* and *Captain America: Civil War*, which casts a shadow on his motives towards young Parker in *Homecoming*. The same applies to the unexpected appearance of Stark's love interest Pepper Potts at the end of the film. After her absence following *Iron Man 3* and the unresolved intimation in *Civil War* that she eventually left Tony, she is back and, seemingly, accepts Stark's not-so-direct proposal. It is therefore clear that Iron Man's 'interwoven' narration in a Spider-Man-dedicated feature is something more than a cameo or guest appearance, as the movie consistently follows his own storyarc within the MCU, making *Homecoming* a more intimate yet important crossover which supports larger superhero mash-ups such as *Age of Ultron*, *Civil War* or *Infinity War*.

The inevitable quality of every MCU entry is its general dependence on the broader narrative ecosystem that has been preluded or will be followed by numerous coexisting titles. It is not that common, however, to make a single feature so heavily reliant on connected franchises as in the case of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. From the very first opening scene, it is quite obvious that a deeper knowledge about the cinematic universe is required, just as the movie echoes the disclosure of Stephen McFeely, one of the MCU screenwriters: "We had to make a decision early that we were OK losing virgin audience members. If you don't know some of these movies before you walk in you might be lost, but hopefully you'll still be entertained. We can't do a 'previously in the Marvel Cinematic Universe,' because it would take 25 minutes"[10]. *Homecoming*, as well as many other cinematic comic books these days, are finally abandoning the 'serialized' self-dependence of an isolated entity in favour of an interrelated network of universe-expanding storylines. Hence, the beginning of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is a direct reference to the aftermath of events in the original *The Avengers*, as Jon Watts's future villain – Adrian Toomes aka The Vulture – works as a contractor involved in cleaning up New York City after the superhero showdown with an alien army. Nevertheless, that particular context remains tacit, because the viewer is not offered any explanatory dialogue that sums up what happened in *The Avengers* events while *Homecoming* has to 'trust' the audience, anticipating awareness of the previous films. Much the same thing happens time and again as the main storyarc follows a rather genuine idea which pitches Spider-Man against Vulture: a scrap-collector who literally preys on the MCU's past events (Toomes collects the items from the previous battles of the Avengers) as well as on fans' knowledge

[10] https://www.cbr.com/captain-america-civil-war-writers-admit-new-viewers-may-be-lost-and-thats-ok/ [1.03.2018].

about the fictional world[11]. During the underworld weapon sale a dealer mentions sub-Ultron technology (by way of direct link to the aftermath of *Age of Ultron*), while the first clash between Spider-Man and Vulture takes place when the robber is trying to collect remnants of the Triskelion (whose destruction was shown in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*). There are many interlaced narratives there which enable one to conclude that *Homecoming* is deeply rooted in Marvel Cinematic Universe's circuitry of causes and effects, as the movie itself finally makes its triumphant 'homecoming', not only to the studio's official film super-franchise but also the organically 'universe-al', comic book-like storytelling.

Conclusion

Analysis of contemporary comic book films seems to be one of the most attractive academic pursuits undertaken by culture, film and comic book researchers. In light of the numerous recently published monographs and papers, I still believe that it is crucial to underline the dominant perspective of classical comic book studies in the attempts to re-discover the sources of success achieved by comic book films. It is beyond question that many of the recent 'novelties' in the media industry, such as textual convergence or trans-mediation, are only fresh takes on the narrative tools which have been available to superhero comics for over half a century. As I have tried to demonstrate, the crucial Silver Age categories of reboot, crossover or universe must necessarily be considered in order to fully account for the present-day remediations of both DC and Marvel properties. The most auspicious fact, however, is that what we have witnessed so far as viewers is still only a prelude to a much more extensive narrative evolution in popular cinema, nourished and sustained by comic books. After all the changes and a decade of Marvel-led 'universe-alized' revolution in comic book film, we can but repeat Nick Fury's initial promise made in *Iron Man*'s post-credit sequence: "We've become part of a bigger universe". We just do not know its full potential yet.

[11] On a meta-diegetic level, it should also be noted that the Vulture characterization draws quite perversely on the previous appearances of Michael Keaton – who plays the villain – in the superhero genre. Before joining the MCU, Keaton had already been involved in both Tim Burton's *Batman* films as well as in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2014) – a direct criticism of the surfeit of modern comic books in cinema.

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze modern superhero films through the specifics of superhero narratives in comics. By referring to the 'organic' elements of graphic super-storytelling – like retcon or crossover – the author tries to explain the main shift within comic book adaptations heading towards a 'universe-al' mode of narration. By doing so the analysis concentrates on the most succesful recent cases of superhero films as attempts to achieve a narrative 'remediation' of comic books' spatial organization that requires reconsideration of the status of an individual superheroic franchise (or sub-franchise) within the larger universe of pre-existing, future and even alternate texts.

Key words: modern comic book cinema, superhero storyline, reboot/redcon, crossover, universe, multiverse structure

Panoptikum 2021, 26:189-215 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.09

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Spaces of difference. Narration in animation/live-action hybrid films

Writing about film hybrids, combining animation with live-action, reality dominated by digital images, leads to various problems. If we assume, as Lev Manovich does, that ever-present digital cinema nowadays 'is a particular case of animation' (2001, p. 255) then the difference defining the two categories that I am interested in becomes completely blurred, at least on the ontological level.

However, while watching such films as 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' (1988), 'The Congress' (2013) or 'The Lego Movie' (2014), it is easy for us to separate what is animated from what belongs to the sphere of live-action. What is more, it is on the incoherence of the elements, which form part of the visual layer of this type of film, that their uniqueness is built. I would not like to go into theoretical issues that are irrelevant to the merits of this text, but it is crucial to separate the two meanings of animation. The first one, corresponding to the understanding proposed by Manovich, is associated with using computer technology and it refers to the method of recording the film data. It is therefore primarily connected with the ontology of film image. The second meaning, on the other hand, refers to a certain featured convention, which is rooted in the history of animation medium

and is largely defined in opposition to what is associated with the technology of cinematography, reproducing the appearance of reality. It is realized at the aesthetic level. In the case of the latter hybrid films, an important practice, although not a necessity, is to highlight the difference between animation and live-action. Their hybridity comes to the fore and becomes a meaningful element of not only the aesthetic of an image, but most frequently also the manner of narrating.

Paweł Sitkiewicz reached a similar conclusion. When defining an animated film, he emphasised that frame-by-frame technique 'must be a visible and significant stylistic procedure, never a means to create an illusion of reality' (2009, p. 20). Thus, Sitkiewicz moved the focus in defining an animated film from the medium to the issue of reception, focusing on the function that the animated image performs in relation to the viewers. So if we consider animation in this way, we will automatically eradicate the problem of mixing two spheres – depth and surface or ontology and aesthetics[1], which in this case is like a genotype and a phenotype in biology. In this respect, the depth concerns technological and production issues, whereas the surface is the domain of image aesthetics.

If we agree that contemporary cinema is dominated by digital images, which quite willingly and commonly use their plasticity to realistically blur the boundary between what was shot live and computer animation, then animation/live-action hybrid films are extremely old-fashioned, as they go against the trend of creating this type of illusion. The reason for their existence is the opposite practice: constant highlighting of the difference between animation and live-action. These films even return to the sources of the history of cinema, when the categories of animation and live-action were conditioned by each other, because their definitions were founded on mutual oppositions[2].

[1] Vivian Sobchack used yet another way, but equally effective, to distinguish animation from live-action. She was right to say that it was only in animated films that such an abstract, geometric phenomenon as a line exists. It does not exist in nature, so naturally, it cannot exist in the cinema based on the reproduction of reality: 'The line "belongs" to animation as it never could to photoreal cinema – this not only because, in traditional cel animation, the "(out)line" was a production necessity by which animators guided "inbetweeners" and painters to fill out and in the individual frames; but also because, like the point, the line is ontologically a conceptual and structural object, a formal abstraction that has no substantial existence outside its two-dimensional, planar, graphic representation' (2008, p. 253). What is important from the point of view of the problem taken up in this text, this difference is problematised by the use of the animation/live-action hybrid film 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', about which she writes that its deep structural joke is built precisely on this difference (2008, p. 252).

[2] As Fabia Lin Ling-Yuan recalls, both filmic forms were formed at the initial stage of cinema's development in opposition to each other. She points out that even contemporary dictionaries define 'live-action' as the opposite of animation: '*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "live-action" as "of, relating to, or featuring cinematography that is not produced by animation". On this account it is by contrast with "animation" that the definition of "live-action" can be established as the non-excercise of animation' (2013, p. 269).

Gertie the Pioneer

The beginnings of cartoons are closely related to combining actor material with animation. After all, the three titles, which claim to be the first cartoons in the history of animation, have a significant narrative frame in the form of appearing hands which draw or erase characters, set in motion by the frame-by-frame technique. I refer, of course, to 'Humorous Phases of Funny Faces' (1906) by James Stuart Blackton, 'Fantasmagorie' (1908) by Emil Cohl and 'Little Nemo' (1911) by Winsor McCay. But the most meaningful for the development of hybrid films is the classic 'Gertie the Dinosaur' (1914), which was signed by the last of these three pioneers. The film begins with an acting prologue, which adds a story context to the animation. This was common practice at the time (Sitkiewicz, 2009, p. 62; Crafton, 1993) and it had already taken place in 'Little Nemo'. Winsor McCay bets with the popular comic artist George McManus on reviving the dinosaur, whose skeleton can be seen in the local museum. He managed to do this due to the power of animation, naturally. In the drawing part, we watch the title dinosaur trained by the animator, whose presence is marked only with the help of boards (let me remind you that this is a silent film), on which orders given to the animal by the animator can be read.

These first, classic examples point to a few extremely important issues that were essential to films combining animation with live-action throughout the whole history of cinematography and are so even today. Let us point to these using the example of the 'Gertie the Dinosaur' film. What comes to the fore is the fact that hybridization has a remarkably strong relationship with the way the narration is conducted, since the differences in the materials used structure the narrated story and impose rules for its conduct. In the McCay film, the acting part justifies the creation of animation, which is then shown by the creator to a group of friends during a shared dinner. Although the animated part is closely related to the acting frame, it is at the same time a separate whole and can also function as a short film within a film. The consequence of such a use of these two materials is to create visually diverse, separate spaces, which in these types of films are usually clearly isolated from each other, even if they are in one frame like Roger Rabbit and Eddie Valiant, played by Bob Hoskins, from Robert Zemeckis' film. In the case of McCay's film, animation represents the world of phantasmagoric prehistory, in which there were both brontosauruses and giant sea serpents. In contrast, the live-action belongs to the reality known from the experience of audiences of that time. Another element is also important for contemporary cinema. It is the form of interaction, or perhaps it should be written, the confrontation between these two visually diverse spaces. Without appear-

ing in the frame, but marking his presence throughout the boards with spoken words, McCay enters into a dialogue with a cartoon character, who reacts to his commands. A fantastic world of animation and a realistic world of live-action meet and even interact, thanks to the magic of cinema.

The ways of combining the two worlds can be very different: animation may symbolize what is fantastic, as in McCay's, but also what is imagined, felt, thought out, once lived, dreamed of, alternative. Animation does not have to function as an unambiguous opposite of the 'more real' live-action – it can symbolize the unreality of the whole represented world or it can show the close relations between the two narrative layers. If one looks for the greatest change that has taken place between the pioneering 'Gertie the Dinosaur' and contemporary animation/live-action hybrid films, it is easiest to find it in this aspect.

Postmodernism and transcendence

The narrative dominant of animation/live-action hybrid films is the mutual confrontation – in different ways – of both realities: animated and acting. This practice suggests that the visually differentiated realities created on the screen function as separate, though often very close to each other, worlds in film stories. Quite unexpectedly, this reveals the similarity of these hybrid films to the method in which postmodern authors construct their stories[3]. Surprisingly, as I have already mentioned, the combination of live-action and animation is as old as the cartoon itself, and thus it was born and developed its narrative structure long before postmodernism was constituted. Brian McHale closely linked the category of 'the world' with works belonging to postmodernism, pointing out that the dominance of the postmodern novel is ontological, in contrast to the modernist novel, where epistemological issues were at the forefront. In *Postmodernist fiction* he wrote that postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls "post-cognitive": "Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?". Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of

[3] Also Jane Goodall connected animation/live-action hybrid films with postmodernism, but for another reason. She suggested that hybrid animation had 'begun to admit its resonances as one of the most insistent thematics of an era obsessed with difference, cloning, grafting and taxonomic slippage' (2017, p. 156).

the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured? And so on (2004, p. 10).

From the point of view of the films considered in this text, the most important questions are: 'What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?'. Hybrid films that interest me also seem to ask similar questions, constantly pointing to the artificiality and arbitrariness of worlds, which in various ways collide with each other.

Animation/live-action hybrid films are characterized by the tendency to separate worlds, which then interact with each other: such a use of material duality is closely related to the way the narration is constructed. But that is not all. The precursory films already mentioned indicated one more significant dependency that results from combining animated and acting elements. The primary world is usually linked to live-action, whereas animation is the domain of transcendent, that is, what comes from outside the real world, associated with reality reproduced by means of cinematographic camera. Animation, quite stereotypically but historically justified[4], is usually correlated with what is fantastic, amazing and, indeed, of external origin[5]. After all, Gertie is not a 'real' dinosaur but hand-drawn. She does not 'really' move, but does so thanks to the technical possibilities of the medium. Moreover, she is a dinosaur, an animal that represents an extinct species, so she could not 'actually' appear. Her conventional, drawing aesthetics and material foundation reveal her unreality, which only thanks to the animator's skills was able to interact with the real world, and only by virtue of convention and only for the needs of the film plot.

Today, however, we observe a significant shift. Animation still symbolizes what is transcendent towards the world of live-action, but not necessarily what is fictional or fantastic: animated inner states of 'The Diary of a Teenage Girl' (2015) heroine or Potter's emotions in 'Miss Potter' (2006), expressed through the animated little characters from her books, are not less real than their living bodies, and as are the small, drawn illustrations depicting the real estate market functioning in 'The Big Short' (2015), which are not more fictional than the actual economic processes that they talk about.

[4] After all, it is hard not to agree, as Manovich wrote, that 'animation foregrounds its artificial character, openly admitting that its images are mere representations' (2001, p. 252).

[5] However, it is not without reason that Andrew Darley, who is against the opposition of animation and live-action as media unambiguously connected with fantasy and realism, discusses this belief (2007, p. 70).

Animation as a sign of what is different, what belongs to a distinct order, something external, but intervening in a known reality, perhaps in the best, most comprehensive way was presented in 'Monty Python and The Holy Grail' (1975). In this work by British comedians, the animated insertions (characteristic of their entire work and eagerly used by them) that appear out of the blue are a symbol of what comes outside the represented world. They appear in three situations: they represent God, who turns directly to the characters, initiating the action of the film, as he orders them to make a journey in search of the title The Holy Grail – animation defines a transcendent instance in the face of the material reality of the represented world; animated insertions are a form of short interlude in the form of inscriptions stylized into notes from medieval books, which open the following chapters, so they are a clear indication of the existence of a narrative instance that structures the story being told; also animated is the dangerous dragon which the protagonists encounter during their adventures. The beast would inevitably devour them, but for the fact that the animator suddenly dies of a heart attack. The dragon is as much a fantastic creature, important from the story's point of view as a visible sign of the existence of an external instance – the animator whose work intervenes in the represented world, disturbing the classical principle of narrative transparency. Animation as God, Narrator and Animator in Monty Python has the function of destroying the illusion of objectivity and the 'fourth wall'.

Between the Worlds

The examples of 'Gertie the Dinosaur' and the Monty Python film clearly show, and this is also reflected in many new works, that animation/live-action hybrid films are built on a difference – and not only on the most obvious one, revealing itself in the use of different materials. Hybrid image is only a visible equivalent of the narrative construction of the represented world, whose dominant feature is duality[6] – but a duality of a special kind. It manifests itself, first and foremost, in the way of constructing a film space, but sometimes also in constructing time. David Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction Film* writes that the narration in the film fiction 'is the process whereby the film syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator's construction of the fabula'(1985, p. 53). In this process, an extremely important role is played by the viewer who, on the base of syuzhet, develops the fabula. This happens according to the three principles: narrative 'logic' (casuality), time and space (1985, p. 51).

[6] Fabia Ling-Yuan Lin considers this property of hybrid films, referring to the thought of Gilles Deleuze, who wrote that each identity is based on the difference (2014, p. 4).

What is important is that different films put emphasis on something else when constructing their narratives. The majority, especially those which use the classic narration, focus primarily on cause-and-effect relations, but this is not a rule, and a great example to support that are the hybrid films that interest me – both the ones from the past and the present. Their fictional dominant feature is to create, within the represented world, two realities that interact with each other on the basis of different principles. For a long time, the most popular way of constructing narration in animation/live-action film was based on spatial dependencies, which has changed in contemporary cinema. But one thing has remained the same: the principles which govern the interdependencies between the world associated with animation and reality represented by live-action, condition 'the course cueing and channel the spectator's construction of the fabula' (Bordwell, 1985, p. 53).

The collision of animated and acting worlds once again indicates the similarity of these films to postmodern fiction. McHale considers science fiction as a postmodern genre *par excellence*[7]. He refers to the definition of Darko Suvin, who claimed that this type of story is 'confronting the empirical givens of our world with something not given, something from outside or beyond it, "a strange newness, a novum"' (2004, p. 59). Thus, these novels are governed by exactly the same logic as films combining animation and live-action, which can be observed once again using the example of 'Gertie the Dinosaur'. The acting part represents 'the empirical givens of our world', while the animation depicting a trained dinosaur is evidently 'a strange newness, a novum'.

Although among films that interest me there are many that could easily be included in the science fiction genre (both those made years ago like 'Space Jam' [1996] or 'TRON' [1982] and contemporary ones: 'The Congress' or 'Ready Player One' [2018]), it does not seem that this type of story was privileged in any special way. Hybrid films only took from it the way of constructing the narrative, based on the confrontation of two worlds, because neither 'Gertie the Dinosaur', nor 'Monty Python and The Holy Grail', nor the most famous animation/live-action hybrid 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' can be counted as science fiction. It would be much easier to gather them under the common banner of fantasy film,

[7] In contrast to the detective novel, which according to McHale was the most characteristic genre of modernism.

understood in the broader sense[8]. Nowadays, however, animation is boldly entering other genres, such as political cinema (‘The Big Short’), biography (‘Miss Potter’, ‘Summer’ [2018]) or drama (‘The Diary of a Teenage Girl’, ‘Foxtrot’ [2017]). Nevertheless, these films are built according to the sci-fi structuring principle mentioned by McHale[9], which emphasises the ontology of the constructed and confronted worlds. This was also noticed by Jay P. Telotte, who focused on two – but not the most recent – hybrid films ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ and Ralph Bakshi’s ‘Cool World’ (1992). He showed that the narrative dominant feature of both films is to build the tension between two worlds, understood as spatially as possible, which are inhabited by toons and people in the work of Zemeckis and ‘noids’ (from ‘humanoids’) and doodles in Bakshi’s (2010, p. 180-181).

Collision and integration

Both examples represent the most classic example of the coexistence and confrontation of the worlds of animation and live-action. ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ places actions in alternative Hollywood, where people and toons, literally, live side by side. The latter even have their own separate land, called Toontown. The film’s action is based on the constant intermingling of worlds of humans and animated characters, who are actors in cartoons. Most of the action takes place in the real space, only for a moment the protagonist played by Bob Hoskins ventures to the world with rules known from animated films. Therefore, a more frequent treatment is to integrate drawn characters into the space of live-action. What matters is that both worlds exist on similar principles - they are equally real and together they construct one larger universe, in which there is a place for both people and toon. This is a significant difference to how the narrative in ‘Gertie the Dinosaur’ is conducted, where the two worlds are clearly separated from each other. This does not mean that this change occurred only with the premiere of Zemeckis’ film. The integration of animation with live-action films had already taken place much earlier. Examples include such titles as ‘The Three Caballeros’ (1944), ‘Songs of the South’ (1946), ‘The

[8] It is not without reason that many of these films can be included in this trend, which Polish film studies called ‘New Adventure Cinema’. Jerzy Płażewski described Hollywood adventure films made in the late 1970s such as ‘Star Wars’ (1977) and ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind’ (1977). These films marked the beginning of a genre that has continued to develop successfully to this day. In the book *Kino Nowej Przygody* he lists such hybrids as ‘TRON’, ‘Heavy Metal’ (1981), ‘Beetlejuice’ (1988), ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’, ‘Cool World’, ‘Last Action Hero’ (1993) or ‘Mars Attacks!’ (1996) as belonging to this trend. This does not mean that such films are made only in the field of popular cinema, which is best exemplified by two films of Ralph Bakshi: ‘Heavy Traffic’ (1973) and ‘Coonskin’ (1975).

[9] An exception is ‘Monty Python and the Holy Grail’, in which it is difficult to see the spatial dominant in building a narration - animation rarely appearing during the action has other roles to play in this case.

Incredible Mr. Limpet' (1964), 'Bedknobs and Broomsticks' (1971), or 'Pete's Dragon' (1977).

The fact that in Zemeckis' work both worlds overlap – the drawn characters enter the reality of live-action and the characters played by the actors venture into Toontown – does not mean that creators do not see anything extraordinary in the toons world. They are willing to apply the principle of retardation, shifting the viewers' attention from the action to visual values, that is, the magic of the simultaneous existence of drawn characters and actors on the screen. In such a way, they underline the uniqueness of the world represented and the procedure of hybridisation[10].

Zemeckis' film largely problematizes the practice of combining animation and live-action, emphasizing mise en abyme and focusing on the perfection of technical operations as well as the incredibleness of the represented world. Both syuzhet and style are subordinated to the treatments, which in the first place do not push the action forward, but build film reality largely based on spacial dependencies occurring between the world of people and Toontown. The focus of the plot is, after all, the existence of the world of animated characters, which are put to death by judge Doom.

In the case of 'Cool World' the duality of the film world is similarly constructed. The narration is also based on the constant connection of both realities, which this time are separated from each other to a greater extent, and their connection proves tragic. When the balance between the worlds is disturbed and animations enter the real world, reality seems to be heading towards irreversible extinction.

To these two classic examples we can add newer ones, which also construct their narrations on spacial relations. For instance, not less famous 'Space Jam' or Disney's 'Enchanted' (2007). The space of the world represented in the film about a cosmic basketball duel is divided into three spheres, two of which are inhabited by animated characters. One of them is located in the universe and is home to small monsters, while the other is located underground, where characters known from 'Looney Toons' live. The third space is the so-called '3D-Land', meaning the world inhabited by people, presented in the convention of live-action. These three neighbouring spaces seem to exist only to interact with each other: aliens fly to Earth to take control over the bodies of famous basketball players and Michael Jordan finds his way through a golf hole to the world

[10] It should be mentioned that 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' significantly improved the technique of combining animation with live-action, which contributed to the fact that it is considered by specialists, critics and viewers to be the most important work of this genre.

of toons to help them defeat the cosmic invaders. Eventually, characters famous from cartoons also land on Earth, namely in the house of the most famous basketball player in history. 'Space Jam' owes a lot to 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' and in a similar manner plays with its hybridity, often constructing the action in such a way as to be able to most effectively highlight the combination of animation and live-action. The best case to provide is the final scene, in which Jordan uses the rules that govern the world of animation and unnaturally lengthens his arm/to gain a decisive point.

In Disney's 'Enchanted' the two spaces are also unambiguously separated from each other, although their relation to one another does not have a clear translation into the topography of the film universe. The authors of this film discuss in a slightly self-critical way the mythology of Disney animation, in which the most important place is always given to a beautiful princess and a handsome prince, who saves her at the last moment. In everything, of course, the evil queen must be involved. It is also the case this time, but only until the antagonist pushes the princess into the abyss of the well, which magically transfers the girl to contemporary New York. Subsequent animated characters turn into living actors and appear on one of the busy streets of the metropolis to eventually move the action completely to the real world.

Beyond the Space

The examples mentioned above are no longer the most recent and apart from 'Enchanted', it is difficult to include them in contemporary cinema. That is why Telotte's thesis on the spatial distribution of both worlds does not necessarily fit into the description of newer examples, which is well illustrated by 'The Congress' by Ari Folman which, at first glance, seems to be built in a similar way. Robin Wright (played by the real Robin Wright), a slightly fading cinema star, allows herself to be scanned, so that she can continue appearing on the screen, but only as a digital avatar. Years after signing an agreement releasing her image rights to the Miramount company the woman goes to the eponymous futurological congress, which takes place in Abrahama City, an animated town. She takes a substance from an anonymous ampoule and turns into a cartoon character. At this point, the narration, which is carried out quite classically, changes completely, as does the heroine's body. With time, the scenes cease to be closely related to cause-and-effect relations, space and time become fluid and insignificant. The action and its mechanics is reminiscent of a dreamy vision or narcotic hallucination, in which one moment can be stretched to infinity and decades pass in a second. This fluidity corresponds with the medium of animation, which from

the first moments of its appearance on the screen turns out to be the domain of fantasy, unlimited imagination and total abstraction. The same principles apply to the narration. Finally, it emerges that spatial order plays a much less important role in the way the story is told. What becomes a dominant is the ontological status of the observed world. It appears that the space of animation is a kind of narcotic delusion, imposed on the world of live-action - grey, dirty, completely unattractive, but associated with what is real.

The example of 'The Congress' showed how the perception of space in animation/live-action films and the function of animation itself changes in contemporary cinema. With new innovations come other titles from past years because the rules enabling interaction between these two worlds are practically the same as those of hybrid films. McHale wrote that: 'science-fiction, by staging "close encounters" between different worlds, placing them in confrontation, foregrounds their respective structures and the disparities between them' (2004, p. 60), which would be a great feature of animation/live-action hybrids, if not for the fact that they are much more varied. They not only focus on disparities between the worlds, but also on their parallelism, similarities, the cause-and-effect relations connecting them and many other narrative strategies. While the first animation/live-action hybrid films were constructed around the difference between animation and live-action, films imitating 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' aimed at collision and intermingling clearly separated worlds, contemporary films prefer to emphasise the parallelism of narrative paths expressed in animation and live-action, and even highlight the impossibility of decisively separating these two spaces.

The realism of emotions

This diversity of contemporary animation/live-action hybrid films can best be examined using concrete examples. We should start with two works that combine animation and live-action like no others film in the history of cinema - 'Miss Potter' and, above all, 'The Diary of a Teenage Girl'. Though different in terms of narration and aesthetics, both films are to some extent linked by the way animation is functionalised. In both cases, moving drawings reflect the inner states of the characters. In Potter's biography, animation serves to subjectify the look, because the moving illustrations of books can only be seen by the author. The animation always appears at specific moments - in a retrospective return to childhood or in moments of the heroine's reverie over her own feelings. Moving bunnies or ducks reveal the childish sensitivity of the adult heroine and reflect her moods, as in the case when the sad little heroes together with a woman seem to mourn the death of her fiancé.

Marielle Heller's 'The Diary of a Teenage Girl' follows a more complex narration. It is conducted from the point of view of the title character, who records a diary on a tape. We learn about the girl's sexual initiation and maturation, associated with an affair with her mother's partner and the subsequent erotic conquests. The story is accompanied by numerous animations: the teenager is a keen cartoonist, who dreams of becoming a comic book author. Thanks to animated fragments, Heller uses the passion of her protagonist to enrich the film with visualizations of her inner states - thoughts, desires, imagination, lusts and feelings. If we are talking about any spatial separation of animation from live-action, the place reserved for animation is the girl's sensitivity, consciousness and conscience, and not any physical space.

Interestingly, most of the film has a realistic form, which is dropped only in fragments in favour of exploring the protagonist's interior by using, for example, the imaginary walk of a teenage girl with her favorite, drawn comic book author. Some animated scenes grow into whole sequences, such as the story of 'making a harlot', which illustrates both certain events from the protagonist's life and her emotional relationship. The animation used in this way does not have much in common with what it was in 'Gertie the Dinosaur', i.e. pure phantasmagoria, in 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit', i.e. a collision of spatially separated worlds, or even in the much newer 'Enchanted', i.e. a symbol of fabulousness. What is drawn is neither less real nor transcendent: it is equally important, or maybe even more important and more real than what is represented by live-action. Heller's film, as the title suggests, is an attempt at telling a story about the inner dilemmas of a teenage heart. And these dilemmas are represented in the film by animation.

The Parallel Worlds

'Miss Potter' and 'The Diary of a Teenage Girl', as I have mentioned, are unparalleled. A much more popular way of combining animation with live-action, and rarely seen before, is to juxtapose them on a parallel-like basis. One of the most interesting examples of this practice is J.A. Bayona's film adaptation of Patrick Ness' novel 'The Monster Calls' (2016). 'How does this story begin?' - these words are the starting point of the film, i.e. revealing the plane on which the narrative is developed. The narrator is the protagonist, a teenage boy, as it is he who says these words, but it may well be the eponymous monster, because it is he who answers the question asked at the beginning ('It begins like so many stories. With a boy. Too old to be a kid. Too young to be a man. And a nightmare'). The creators complicate narrative dependencies from the very beginning, as well as the relations between animation and live-action.

The action of storytelling is crucial for Bayona, because these are the stories told by a yew-tree turning into a monster that are presented by means of animation. The creators are not necessarily interested in whether the monster (also presented in an animated form, through CGI[11]) and its stories are real in the same sense as the body, home, parents or school of the main character : it is rather clear that they belong to the boy's dream world, which he himself suggests, and which is confirmed by the late time of the beast's appearance (7 minutes after midnight). Much more meaningful is the other relation between animation and live-action. The monster tells the boy three stories, expressed in the film through animation: about a bad queen and no less bad prince, a herbalist and a pastor, and an invisible boy. Each of them is a fairy tale - definitely fictional and moving the action in distant times. It is precisely for this reason that the boy does not want to listen to them, as he has other problems on his mind - bullying by his schoolmates and, above all, his dying mother.

But it soon becomes clear that the stories are a commentary on his life situation. Between the stories and his life there is a relationship of parallelism, which combines animation and live-action: they explain to the boy the events that happen to him in his life. These relations are also emphasized in the editing and visual layer: when the protagonist enters the world of one of the stories (literally into animation) and, together with the monster, destroys the pastor's house, it turns out that at the same time he ruins his much-hated grandmother's room. The same happens in the scene when the boy takes revenge on his schoolmates who are bullying him. He is accompanied by a monster that only he sees.

Such a use of animation and live-action is not a completely new idea. An almost identical solution can be found in Disney's classic 'Song of the South'. The film has several narrative dimensions, but one narrator, Uncle Remus, an African-American who lives on a cotton plantation and is known in the area as a great story-teller. The main character is a boy to whom the raconteur tells the story of Brer Rabbit. Every time he begins his story, the action moves to the animated world of Zip-a-Dee-Do-Daa days, to the time when Brer Rabbit, the hero of his fairy tales, was alive. Just like in 'Monster Calls', the fairytale world of animation and the realistic world of live-action seem to be closely related on the basis of an evident parallel between two narrative spaces. The stories told by Uncle Remus about the rabbit are an equivalent, and at the same time, a commentary on what happens to the addressee of the story, that is, to the little hero.

[11] A tribute to animated monsters in live-action films is the scene where a boy and his mother watch the famous 'King-Kong' (1933) scene, in which the huge animal is attacked at the top of the Empire State Building.

The two worlds that make up the universe of 'The Lego Movie' function on the basis of parallel as well. Most of the action takes place in a world inhabited by animated people made out of Lego bricks, but it is only at the end of the film that the story told is taken into an extremely important frame. Above the Lego world there is a more important space, which significantly influences what happens to the animated heroes. Viewers learn about it when Emmet, the main character, falls into the 'abyss', which turns out to lead to the real world, inhabited by people played by actors. It transpires that the whole universe of Lego bricks is a mock-up, consisting of various sets that a young boy plays with. The problem is that the bricks belong to his father, who does not like it when his son rearranges anything in this construction. His rhetoric is very similar to that of Lord Business, the main animated antagonist, who wants to immobilize the whole brick universe. The representative of his son in the Lego world is the main member of the Resistance, i.e. Emmet, who defies Business. The impression of parallelism between the world of animation and live-action is completed in the finale, when the creators, using parallel editing, juxtapose the dialogue of the son with his father and the Lord Business with Emmet. Both pairs of characters speak about exactly the same thing: the power of imagination and the right to unlimited creation. The artists even dared to make a visual parallel. In the final scene, the reconciled animated characters go to each other to fall into each other's arms. Exactly the same gesture, similarly depicted in the film, is made by the characters played by actors. The relation between the world of live-action and animation in this film is therefore even closer than in 'The Monster Calls', where the fates of the characters from the history of the beast and the little hero only coincide on the level of the similarity of experiences. In 'The Lego Movie', admittedly at the very end, it appears that the entire plot presented in the form of animation has its full reflection in what happens between the characters played by actors. The world of animation and live-action - stylistically completely different - appear to be analogous. The treatment used resembles that of 'The Congress', in which the final discovery of the hallucinatory nature of the world of animation, indicates the parallelism of the drawn space and the one populated by real characters. The same procedure is repeated in the continuation of 'Lego: The Movie' - 'The Lego Movie 2 - The Second Part' (2019). This time, however, it is not the father who is the antagonist, but the sister who is represented in the world of animation by the queen Watevra Wa'Nabi.

To some extent, the two worlds from Samuel Maoz's 'Foxtrot' are also parallel to each other. Only a short fragment at the end of the film is animated, which illustrates graphic stories from one of the characters' notepads. The action of the film takes place on three narrative levels: on the first one parents receive informa-

tion about the death of their son (as it turns out to be untrue), whose everyday life in the army we observe in the background, while the third one is a return to parents, who this time mourn the real death of their child. The animated sequence is an interlude between the history of the army and the return to the parents. It is an illustration of the father's history created by his son. It is not a realistic depiction of his fate, but rather a form of phantasmagoric family memory, which, as it turns out, has much in common with reality. Before leaving for the army, the father told his son a story from his childhood, about how he sold one of his grandmother's priceless souvenirs - a bible that had been in their family from generation to generation - for a pornographic magazine. The father never revealed how the family reacted to it, or how he felt about his act. This silence inspired his son to complete the story that his father called a 'fairy tale'. It is about the shame that has accompanied his father all his life and is symbolized by the black x on his face. The last sequence of the film explains that the father does live with a sense of shame, but the source is not the sale of the bible, but a mistake made during wartime. The fantasy about his father's trauma has turned out to be true, at least in part. Thus, the animation, despite its cartoon line, is closely linked to what is real and expressed in live-action.

It is worth mentioning the case of 'Mary Poppins Returns' (2018), which is the sequel to the Hollywood classic from 1964, and at the same time a kind of remake of the latter. The title heroine in one of the sequences takes her pupils to the centre of the picture that hides an animated land. There they ride on horses that have escaped from the carousel, sing with farm animals and even dance with penguins. An almost identical procedure was used in the newer version, but instead of the picture the protagonists jump into the painting on the vase where they have fantastic adventures, but also face a cunning rat who resembles one of the characters from outside the animated world - the owner of a bank who wants to take over the siblings' house. While in the 1960s version animation and live-action were not connected by any feature parallel, in the newer version this relation is very well exposed.

The Impossible Worlds

'Mary Poppins Returns', like the 1964 film, is intriguing for another reason. In both cases, animation is not an element representing incredible opposition to the realistically depicted reality of live-action. Both sequences are only different elements that undermine the realistic status of the whole represented world,

in which, as the protagonist says, 'everything is possible, even the impossible'. Both films are musicals (and are already devoid of realism for this reason), one of the neighbours has a ship on the roof, and the nannies fall from heaven and perform various miracles, not only those expressed in animation. Animation is only a complement to this convention, an additional emphasis on the artificiality of the world being presented - its perfectly integrated element.

After all, some films do not wish to emphasize the difference between animation and live- action, but to use the conventionality of animation to undermine the ontological status of the whole represented world. In such cases, the animated becomes a perfectly matched component of a larger whole, which also consists of live-action. In addition to the two films about Mary Poppins, the following examples can be listed: Michel Gondry's 'The Science of Sleep' (2006), Wes Anderson's 'The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou' (2004) or Edgar Wright's 'Scott Pilgrim vs The World' (2010).

The first of these tells the story of a young boy who comes to Paris to start working for a printing company. On the very first day, he meets a girl - a neighbour - with whom he falls in love. The boy is an artist: he not only paints, but also constructs incredible equipment, including a time machine that allows him to travel into the past and future, but only by one second, which also reveals an unrealistic ontology of the represented world. The protagonist's adventures with each subsequent scene become less and less realistic until it is finally not known whether what we see is a man's dream or reality. The narration unfolds in such a way that in the end the division into these two worlds is completely blurred and at the same time completely subjectivised. The protagonist's mother says that since the age of six he has had difficulty distinguishing between dreams and reality. This blurring is also supported by stop-motion animation, thanks to which the shaver can turn into an attacking spider boss, cellophane water flies from the tap, and the typewriter can grow hair and come alive.

In 'The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou' the aim is not to blur the world of dreams and reality, but to undermine - as in the Mary Poppins' films - the realism of the entire film world. The animation was used to show the world of underwater, fantastic creatures, which in the world represented here are not taken for something amazing. Stop-motion animated coral seahorses, sugar crabs or a jaguar shark function on an equal footing with the characters played by the actors, whose characterological characteristics also deprive them of realism. The animation turns out to be a complement to the over-aesthetic, quirky (MacDowell, 2012) form (famous Anderson symmetries, pastel colors and types of heroes), so significant for Wes Anderson's original style.Animation also complements the

aesthetic layer in ‘Scott Pilgrim vs. The World’. It was important for Wright to refer to the comic lineage of the story in the picture. Therefore, when the protagonist’s band starts to play their instruments, not only sounds, but also graphically designed onomatopoeias, lightning and zigzags emerge. In the film there are also graphic elements known from computer games, which the protagonist particularly likes to play. While he pees, a pee bar similar to those that in fighting games indicate the amount of life left appears above his head. On the one hand, these visual ornaments reveal the comic origins of the story, and, on the other, point to the narrative structure of the story, referring to the mechanics of a computer game in which one has to fight other opponents. The character of Scott Pilgrim has to take on the former partners of his new girlfriend. Wright’s animation has one more function, much more classic and clearly narrative - with the help of a drawing line several stories from the main girlfriend’s past and also her old relationships are presented.

Inside and Outside

In ‘Scott Pilgrim vs. The World’ the stories of the title character’s girlfriend expressed in animation have a narrative function that indicate the passage of time. But such a use of animation is not frequent[12]. Much more common, as I have mentioned in the classic examples of ‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ and ‘Cool World’, is to build the narrative with the help of spatial relations. The creators of slightly newer films also eagerly reach for this dependence, yet develop it in a specific way by confronting the interior with the exterior. One such film is ‘Osmosis Jones’ (2001). Its title protagonist is a human-shaped white blood cell that fights against criminals, i.e. bacteria and viruses in the human body, more specifically, Frank’s body, played by Bill Murray. The world represented in the film is divided into two spaces - the interior of the hero’s organism, which inhabit the animated, humanoid beings that make up the organs of the human body, and the external world represented by the live-action. The main plot line, maintained in the style of cinema noir, takes place in the world of Frank’s animated interior, but what he does in the real world has an impact on the fate of blood cells, viruses and other personalized entrails and body fluids. The logic of the narrative is based on cause-and-effect relations occurring between the inside and the outside, similar to those that are responsible for the physiology of the human body. When the animated Jones accidentally hits the nerve, Frank has

[12] Here we can also provide an example of the animated sequence from ‘Kill Bill: Vol. 1’ (2003), which is a recollection of the beginnings of one of the killers - Oren Ishi. Interestingly, it is not the memory of Oren Ishi herself, but of Black Mamba, so it does not serve as classic retrospection, but as a realism-free fantasy about the heroine’s past.

a contraction, and when he eats a dirty egg, a deadly, human-shaped bacterium enters his body and becomes the main antagonist. The whole film and the main narrative idea, which depends on the confrontation of the two interdependent spaces, are based on these relations.

Animation, admittedly, has a derealising function here, because our blood cells do not talk, but at the same time it has a close link to reality, but only by analogy. Two spaces, and thus the medium of animation and live-action, are clearly and spatially separated from one another, but they do not exist independently: they determine each other, which is presented both by the frequent use of parallel editing and by emphasizing the narrative logic based on the principles of cause-and-effect.

However, less disciplined in using the spatial relations between the interior and exterior were the authors of 'James and the Giant Peach' (1996), but in the end, it results in the fact that they also separate the animated from acting. The little James is raised by evil aunts, in front of whose house, thanks to magic, grows a huge peach. Inside it live animated worms, which James joins by getting inside through a hole bitten in the fruit. Again, what is on the outside of the peach is represented by live-action, while its centre is already animated - both the friendly worms and James himself. But the creators are not very consistent and, apparently, they do not care about it at all. Both worms and the boy can leave the inside of the huge fruit and still remain in their animated form. Because the domain of animation is not only the space of the interior, but also what is amazing, magical, fantastic and dreamlike, though the ontological foundations of what is real and what is invented are constantly undermined. The film begins with a scene in which an animated rhino, formed out of clouds, devours James' parents. At first, it seems that this event is presented from the boy's point of view, who visualised the death of his mother and father in this way. Still, over time it appears that none of the protagonists, including the adult ones, calls this information into question. The film has a significant narrative frame. The narrator turns out to be an animated soldier, who in a key scene gives the boy 'crocodile tongues', a visible equivalent of magic. The whole represented world has the traits of fairytale, so the rules that govern it are extremely flexible and far from realism - sleep can blend with reality, dreams with real deeds, and truth with fantasy, exactly the same as animation with live-action. There is no doubt, however, that the original gesture that sets up an animation on the screen, is the entrance to the interior of the peach. The finale of James' fate and his re-transformation into a boy made of flesh and blood is associated with the definite exit from the inside of the fruit. Although the two worlds can merge and interact, it is the logic of the interior and exterior that constructs history.

The same logic has its variations, because the interior and exterior, like entering and leaving, can be interpreted in different ways - for example, as 'entering' and 'leaving' a cinema screen (as in the case of 'Last Action Hero', in which the teenager gets inside the film where he meets, among other things, the character of the animated cat), submerging and emerging from the water (as in 'The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie' [2004], where SpongeBob's underwater world is associated with the technique of hand-drawn animation, and what is happening above the waterline is the domain of live-action), jumping in and out of the painting (as in the aforementioned 'Mary Poppins' film).

The Liminal Space and the Cut

As if the creators did not sufficiently emphasize the spatial order that governs their films, the two separate spheres are often additionally connected by a third one, which can be called 'the place of passage' or 'the liminal space'[13]. It is located 'somewhere between' the world of animation and the world of live-action, but usually it does not belong to any of them, it is a kind of portal (sometimes without its visual concreteness) or a threshold whose function is to unambiguously separate the two spaces. It was presented in the clearest way 'James and the Giant Peach', where James, during his passage through the tunnel in the peach, in front of our eyes turns from a living boy into an animated puppet. But similarly separated spaces are also evident in 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit' (a dark tunnel connecting the streets of Toontown with the road in that part of Hollywood inhabited by people), 'Space Jam' (an underground tunnel leading from a golf hole to the land of 'Looney Toons'), 'Cool World' (a mysterious funnel created by an animated professor) or 'Enchanted' (the abyss of a waterfall and other water objects such as a drink or soup, all of which have the power of a portal that allows communication between the two spaces).

It is no coincidence that the examples cited come from ten ('Enchanted'), twenty ('Space Jam', 'James and the Giant Peach'), twenty-five ('Cool World'), and even thirty years ago ('Who Framed Roger Rabbit'). The separation of 'liminal space', as well as the use of animation to narrativize space, is the most characteristic of films from a dozen or even several dozen years ago. Although it has to be admitted that among the new works there will also be those which use this function of animation and separate the 'liminal space', such as 'The Lego Movie', in which the abyss turns out to be a magical portal connecting the land of Lego with live-action and which is presented once as an animated,

[13] This is, of course, a reference to the category created by Arnold van Gennep and developed by Victor Turner.

mysterious hole and once as an ordinary, cardboard paper roll, decorated with sequins.

In the latest films, the transition between animation and live-action is more direct, not connected by any separate space. The link is a hard editing cut, which juxtaposes the animation sequence with a portrait of the protagonist with a remarkable facial expression, betraying in a way the function of animation. In 'Foxtrot', the animated sequence is followed by the father's face, on which tears of emotion flow; in 'Miss Potter', the retrospective, in which the animation is used, ends with a thoughtful expression on the heroine's face, likewise in some scenes of 'The Diary of Teenage Girl', while in 'The Science of Sleep', after the first sequences, in which the animation appears, the protagonist wakes up, just like one of the pupils of the title heroine in 'Mary Poppins Returns'. When we count 'Summer' in, where sung, musical scenes, accompanied by animated inserts that add punk aesthetics to the video clip form, appear unexpectedly, without any announcement, it turns out that contemporary artists are interested in the integration of animation and live-action rather than in their unambiguous and decisive separation.

Rotoscopy or Beyond the Duality

In the article, I have focused on a kind of hybridization of animation and live-action, in which these two visual conventions are next to each other. Winsor McCay can give orders to Gertie, Roger Rabbit and the character played by Bob Hoskins can shake hands, and the teenage girl can take a walk with her favourite, drawn comic book author, but both characters and spaces always remain clearly separated. This way of on-screen co-existence of animation and live-action is the most interesting from the point of view of reflections on film narration, therefore it definitely dominates this article. However, it is not the only way to hybridise these two types of film. It is worth mentioning that an equally old and visually impressive cinematographic practice is the superimposition of animation on live-action. This technique, called rotoscoping, was used for the first time by The Fleischer Brothers, thus bringing the character Koko the Clown from the series 'Out of the Inkwell' (1918-1929) to life in film. This technique gained recognition and has been used many times. The best known examples come from Disney's studio films, including 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' (1937), but the technique has also gained popularity in quite different areas of animated film production. It was also admired by Ralph Bakshi, who used it for 'Lord of the Rings' (1978).

It seems that it is difficult to speak of a specific, clearly defined narrative function in the case of using rotoscoping. However, the two newer examples slightly contradict this idea, as the visual union of animation and live-action again translates into a mixture of the two worlds in their plot. This technique turns out to be derived to some extent from the output of the previously discussed films. We are talking about the works of Richard Linklater: 'Waking Life' (2001) and 'A Scanner Darkly' (2006). The first one is a philosophical treatise on free will, dreaming, awakening and many other aspects of human life and the functioning of modern societies, but its plot is dominated by the motive of dreaming and constant awakening, which proves to be just another layer of dreaming. Linklater builds the film narration and space of the represented world in such a way that we are not sure whether the main character is dreaming or finally awakens. The viewers are suggested to stay in a state in between, which turns out to be only a delusion. This uncertainty of the ontological foundation of the observed world was to be emphasized by the animation superimposed on live-action. It was best described by Paul Ward, who commented on Linklater's film and wrote that 'the state of dreaming and the state of animation are inextricably linked, and linked in their ability to show a different "state of reality"' (2005, p. 166). This also corresponds to what Mark Langer, the author of the most famous definition of this phenomenon, wrote about rotoscoping (2004, p. 12). According to him 'rotoscoping is detectable in the "simultaneous presence of the drawn and the photo-indexical" image produced by the technique' (Cornea, 2010, p. 156).

In a similar state of suspension between the two realities is the protagonist of the second of these films, 'A Scanner Darkly'. The equivalent of a dream, which curves the image of reality in this case are the drug hallucinations experienced by the main character, who is both a policeman and a junkie, addicted to the substance D. The storytelling device in this film is that the man is following himself. This is made possible by a special suit that masks his true identity. Overlapping layers of personalities, visual representations and ways of perception are presented in the film thanks to the visual equivalent of superimposing animation on the actors' movement. Ward's words about 'Waking Life' could also be used to describe the function of animation here, if only the dreams were changed into hallucinations. In both cases, the superimposition of animation on the live-action was intended to highlight the unclear status of the narrative perspective taken in the film, which additionally casts doubt on the ontology of the world represented. The worlds of dreams and hallucinations are superimposed on reality like animation on the image of live actors.

Motion Capture or Towards unification

The contemporary form of rotoscoping is considered to be the technique which is currently the most popular way of combining animation with acting, i.e. motion capture - this consists in intercepting the actor's movement and turning it into a way of moving a computer-generated character, an avatar. Just like the technology developed by the Fleischer Brothers, it is not associated with a specific manner of building the represented world or conducting the narration. It is also difficult to point to films that would use this technique in a particularly characteristic way, as Richard Linklater's films do in the case of rotoscoping. What is more, motion capture is governed by the logic opposite to that which accompanies the use of rotoscoping or animation/live-action hybrid films. Although it is also a form of hybridization of animation and film with actors (its links with the actor's movement are perhaps even closer than with the film successors of 'Gertie the Dinosaur'[14]) - it has a completely different goal. Its task is to create the illusion of a seamless connection between digital and material - it is employed to blur the differences between used materials and to realistically blend what is animated with live-action. While the worlds represented in animation/live-action hybrid films are characterized by duality, eagerly emphasized by spatial relations, in the case of motion capture the reality of film fiction is homogeneous. The goal of the illusion produced by technology is to create a world that is not built on difference but similarity and coherence of both digitally generated elements and those recorded using cinematographic technology. Gollum is an integral part of Middle-earth, just like Smaug, and Caesar, although at the level of fiction it is characterized by its supernaturality, belongs to the real world even before the Earth turns into the Planet of the Apes. We could look for examples that would contradict this thesis and we would not even have to look far. James Cameron's 'Avatar' (2009) tells the story of the confrontation of two worlds - man and the Na'vi people – and King Kong that devastates New York is, after all, a transcendent element in the face of the urban tissue. These examples show that it is hard to see a principle that, when using motion capture technology, would influence both the way the represented world is built and the way it is narrated.

However, the undeniable fact is that this technology is most often employed to create the illusion of reality, which is generally avoided by animation/live-action hybrid films, and to realistically blend computer-generated elements into the photorealistic world. Films with motion capture tend to create homogeneous

[14] We can pay attention to the connection between fantastic creatures created with the use of digital technology - from Gollum, through King Congo to Caesar - and Andy Serkis' acting work, who lent movements to these characters (Medeiros, www.wired.co.uk/article/planet-of-the-apes-andy-serkis).

worlds where animated elements are to be a reliable element of the whole. With digital animation and motion capture, though, there is such a problem that they are much better suited to creating fantastic creatures than to creating avatars for people. The failure of the program aimed at making an ideal synthespian, i.e. a virtual human being, indistinguishable from the human actor and created by means of digital animation, contributed to the awareness of this fact. This isn the case of 'artificial actors' who worked the mechanism 'uncanny valley', described by the Japanese robotics engineer Masahiro Mori. He stated that robots which only conventionally resemble humans, such as Wall-E or C3PO, evoke positive emotions in humans, while examples of humanoid androids that are too similar to humans, but do not produce perfect illusions, are perceived as creepy.

This rule also applies to digital characters in films. Fantastic digital creatures, even if technically imperfect, can seduce the audience more easily than digital people, which was proved by the chilly reception of such films as 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within' (2001) or 'Polar Express' (2004). That is why hybrid films that make use of motion capture still most often build their plot on fantastic elements that come in contact with what is realistic. But in order to mix su-

pernatural with natural, they no longer need to produce two different worlds, which influence the way of narrating. Nonetheless, the example of Peter Cushing's digital 'resurrection' as Tarkin in 'Rogue One: A Star Wars Story' (2016) shows that we may be facing a revolution that will lead to a breakthrough in the use of digital acting. However, the foundation of a computer-generated human figure will not be a binary digital code, as was the case with synthespian, but, paradoxically, a living man whose movements will be captured by means of performance capture.

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Therefore, combining animation with live-action takes different forms, but the most interesting of them in terms of influencing the way narration is conducted is the one in which the creators clearly point out the differences in the materials used. Their distinguishing feature is building the fabula around the confrontation of two worlds, often located as topographically as possible on the map of the film universe. Based on the difference - visual, spatial, material - they finally tell the story of the meeting, and sometimes even of connection and symbiosis. Animation and live-action, despite their uniqueness, turn out to merge, not only in the story, by pointing to parallels, analogies and similarities, but also visually and ontologically.

Filmography:

'A Scanner Darkly' (2006) by Richard Linklater

'Avatar' (2009) by James Cameron

'Bedknobs and Broomsticks' (1971) by Robert Stevenson

'Beetlejuice' (1988) by Tim Burton

'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' (1977) by Steven Spielberg

'Cool World' (1992) by Ralph Bakshi

'Coonskin' (1975) by Ralph Bakshi

'Enchanted' (2007) by Kevin Lima

'Fantasmagorie' (1908) by Emil Cohl

'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within' (2001) by Hironobu Sakaguchi

'Foxtrot' (2017) by Samuel Maoz

‘Gertie the Dinosaur’ (1914) by Winsor McCay

‘Heavy Metal’ (1981) by Gerald Potterton

‘Heavy Traffic’ (1973) by Ralph Bakshi

‘Humorous Phases of Funny Faces’ (1906) by James Stuart Blackton

‘James and the Giant Peach’ (1996) by Henry Selick

‘Kill Bill: Vol. 1’ (2003) by Quentin Tarantino

‘King-Kong’ (1933) by Merian C. Cooper, Ernest B. Schoedsack

‘Last Action Hero’ (1993) by John McTiernan

‘Little Nemo’ (1911) by Winsor McCay

‘Lord of the Rings’ (1978) by Ralph Bakshi

‘Mars Attacks!’ (1996) by Tim Burton

‘Mary Poppins Returns’ (2018) by Rob Marshall

‘Mary Poppins’ (1964) by Robert Stevenson

‘Miss Potter’ (2006) by Chris Noonan

‘Monty Python and The Holy Grail’ (1975) by Terry Gilliam

‘Osmosis Jones’ (2001) by Peter Farrelly

‘Out of the Inkwell’ (1918-1929) by The Flaischer Brothers

‘Pete’s Dragon’ (1977) by Don Chaffey

‘Polar Express’ (2004) by Robert Zemeckis

‘Ready Player One’ (2018) by Steven Spielberg

‘Rogue One: A Star Wars Story’ (2016) by Gareth Edwards

‘Scott Pilgrim vs The World’ (2010) by Edgar Wright

‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ (1937) by David Hand

‘Song of the South’ (1946) by Harve Foster

‘Space Jam’ (1996) by Joe Pytka

‘Star Wars’ (1977) by George Lucas

‘Summer’ (2018) by Kiriłł Sieriebriennikow

‘The Big Short’ (2015) by Adam McKay

‘The Congress’ (2013) by Ari Folman

‘The Diary of a Teenage Girl’ (2015) by Marielle Heller

‘The Incredible Mr. Limpet’ (1964) by Arthur Lubin

‘The Lego Movie 2 - The Second Part’ (2019) by Mike Mitchell

‘The Lego Movie’ (2014) by Phil Lord, Christopher Miller

‘The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou’ (2004) by Wes Anderson

‘The Monster Calls’ (2016) by J.A Bayona

‘The Science of Sleep’ (2006) by Michel Gondry

‘The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie’ (2004) by Stephen Hillenburg

‘The Three Caballeros’ (1944) by Norman Ferguson

‘TRON’ (1982) by Steven Lisberger

‘Waking Life’ (2001) by Richard Linklater

‘Who Framed Roger Rabbit’ (1988) by Robert Zemeckis

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to focus on the ways of using animation as well as its function in live-action/ animation hybrid films. The usage of animation in narratives of such type of movies can vary. However, what connects them is the way of telling the story, based on the juxtaposition of two different realities that interact in a number of ways. The ways of combining the two worlds can be very different: animation may symbolize what is fantastic, as in pioneer McCay's 'Gertie the Dinosaur', but also what is imagined, felt, thought out, once lived, dreamed of, alternative. The article describes the differences between classic hybrids and contemporary films.

Key words: rotoscopy, motion capture, space in the film, the parallel worlds, cartoon

Panoptikum 2021, 26:219-245 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.10

Thomas Elsaesser

Attention, Distraction and the Distribution of the Senses: 'Slow', 'Reflexive' and 'Contemplative' between Cinema and the Museum

"Slow"

In recent years the term "slow" has acquired a certain reputation among the cinephile community, connoting a range of positive cinematic qualities that brings (mainly non-Hollywood) filmmaking into proximity with "slow food": locally sourced, traditionally prepared and part of a sustainable eco-system. In a discussion of the difference between *still* images and *stilled* images, I once described slow cinema as an "act of organized resistance" to the relentless acceleration of contemporary life in all its aspects (Elsaesser, 2011, 117). It has also been defined as "a genre of art cinema film-making that emphasizes long takes, and is often minimalist, observational, and with little or no narrative,"[1] in which case, it can also stand for an act of organized resistance to the kind of "intensified continuity" discussed by David Bordwell, Steven Shaviro and others[2]. There is remarkable unanimity about

[1] "Slow Cinema", Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slow_cinema (accessed 8 June 2019).

[2] See D. Bordwell, "Intensified Continuity Visual Style in Contemporary American Film", *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 55 No. 3 (Spring 2002), 16-28, and Steven Shaviro, "Post-continuity: An Introduction", in Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (eds), *Post-Cinema* (Falmer: Reframe Books, 2016), a. o. http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/post-cinema/1-2-shaviro/ (accessed 8 June 2019)

which directors qualify for the honorific "contemporary contemplative cinema"[3]: Chantal Akermann, Alexander Sokurov, Lav Diaz, Apichatpong Weerasethkhul, Abbas Kiarostami, Carlos Reygardes and Nuri Bilge Ceylan are most often mentioned, to which are sometimes added, retroactively: Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Andrei Tarkovsky, who wrote: "what a person normally goes to the cinema for is time"[4]. If this is an impressive pedigree for slow cinema, let me not conceal the fact that not everyone is equally convinced: there is also a body of opinion that calls "slow cinema" the "precious and pretentious name for films that are likely to be impenetrable to even the most well-informed audiences"[5].

Leaning more towards the former than the latter, I can name two directors whose work typifies for me some of the aesthetic virtues, but also some of the ethical and physiological demands that typify such slow cinema: Bela Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (2011) which runs to 2 hours 35 minutes, and Pedro Costa's *In Vanda's Room* (2000) which runs to 2 hours 51 minutes. They epitomize much of what the positive evaluations have in mind: their uncompromising reduction of narrative and spectacle, their focused concentration on the sacred moments of the ordinary, their close attention to the everyday, their steadfast gaze on the characters who want neither sympathy nor open themselves to empathy, since we are told very little about them. Among the qualities that keep one riveted are the films' attention to the materiality of objects and the figures' rapport with the spaces they inhabit, physically specific yet universal in their minimalism; and finally it is the characters' refusal to be treated as either victims or case studies, however peculiar their way of life and however dire or abject their socio-economic condition: all this designates them as protagonists of a special kind of cinema[6].

Rather than analysing them in the context of "slow cinema", I want to discuss – and this may be stretching the idea of cinema altogether – these qualities of attention and focused concentration in the contexts of a different kind of post-

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[3] The writer who blogs under the name Harry Tuttle at *Unspokencinema* gives a number of contexts and definitions for what he calls "contemplative contemporary cinema". Here he gives a timeline: http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2009/06/ccc-timeline-2008.html and here he defines 'ccc' as "not to tell us a story but to paint a state of mind" http://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2007/01/minimum-profile.html (accessed 9 June 2019).

[4] This is quoted as the opening statement of Sukhdev Sandhu's "'Slow cinema' fights back against Bourne's supremacy." *The Guardian*, 9 March 2012 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/09/slow-cinema-fights-bournes-supremacy

[5] For an excellent recapitulation and reflection on the debate ("spat"), see Dan Fox, "Slow, Fast and Inbetween", *Frieze* 24 May 2010, who also lists an additional number of films and installation works. https://frieze.com/article/slow-fast-and-inbetween (accessed 8 June 2019)

[6] I have discussed these directors' style also in Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 131-132.

cinema, namely “cinema after museum”, or “cinema of attention in the midst of distraction”. Two detours will be necessary, before I can illustrate what seems to me to be at stake, with examples from pioneering filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, video installation artists Dan Graham and Sharon Lockhart, as well as the sound installation artist Anri Sala.

Cinema and Museum – The Benefits of Being in Crisis

The first detour concerns the relation between “cinema” and “museum”, and why I think together they have both a historical and a theoretical contribution to make to the topic of slow or contemplative cinema, in that it mitigates the notion that slow cinema is only reactive, but also nuances the notion that it is somehow a return to a more ‘natural’ cinema. While the marriage between “cinema” and the “museum” has been one of the most remarkable success stories of the arts in the 21st century, this does not diminish the degree to which these are fundamentally antagonistic dispositifs, both historically and experientially. For the first 100 years of the history of cinema, there was little contact between filmmakers and the art world and museum practice, with the possible exception of the brief period of surrealist films (Salvador Dali, Luis Bunuel, Man Ray). This is not the same as the efforts or aspirations to declare cinema an art form – the 7th art! – quite the contrary: the attempt to validate cinema as art must be seen as part and parcel of an often outright hostility towards museums, regarded by filmmakers (as indeed by much of the avant-garde) in the 1910s and 1920s as antiquated, outmoded and reactionary institutions. On the side of the museum, there was not only the seemingly unbridgeable gulf between high culture and popular culture, but equally problematic was the different aesthetics of stasis and movement: the canons of classical art such as they manifest themselves in painting and sculpture *suggest, intimate and represent* movement (and sound) through stasis and silence, whereas cinema *presents, enacts, embodies and performs* movement (and sound). One only needs to recall Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, fervent advocate of speed and movement, demanding that museums be either burnt down or turned into factories to get a whiff of the outright hostility.

Less radically and less categorically, one can perhaps draw up a map of pertinent parameters, around which the inherent antagonisms can be positioned as differences of degree, or as points on a continuous spectrum: for instance, when it comes to motion and atmospherics, moving images are viewed by a fixed spectator, while the museum houses fixed images with a peripatetic spectator. The museum’s ambiance is – wherever possible – created by natural light, whereas the cinema shuns natural light, and thrives on artificial light as well as artificial

darkness. Hence we have become used to the somewhat simplifying juxtaposition of black box (cinema) and white cube (museum)[7].

The question, then, becomes: why – despite these differences – have moving image and museum nonetheless found each other since the 1990s, to such a degree that they are now almost indispensible to each other? One obvious answer is that both cinema and museums – considered as comparable institutions besides being ontologically distinct dispositifs – are in crisis: with the rapid conversion of cinema to digital, in all aspects of (post-)production, distribution/delivery and reception, yet another 'death of cinema' was announced and dissected[8], before settling for the idea of a 'migration' or 're-location' (Casetti, 2012) of cinema as the more appropriate description of the transformations cinema has undergone in what has also become known as the 'post-cinema' or 'post-film' era (see Stewart, 2007). I have argued elsewhere that this 'death of cinema' sentiment has allowed the museum to take over as the repository of the cinema's heritage and legacy, of which the relocation to art spaces constitutes one end of the spectrum, while the invention (and rapid obsolescence) of the DVDs, the popularity of streaming platforms and ubiquity of mobile screens make up the opposite end (see Elsaesser, 2014).

The crisis of the museum is a more complicated story, but manifests itself above all in the slow but seemingly irreversible transformation of both the classical museum (the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan in New York, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam) and the modern museum (the MoMA in New York, The Tate Modern in London, the Reina Sofia in Madrid) into a multifunctional assembly of art-spaces and tourist museum complexes, following the template of the Museum of Contemporary Art (spectacular architecture, usually near a park or waterfront, and dedicated to temporary exhibitions rather than permanent collections), a concept which is itself modelled on the site specific, city-based but impermanent and individually curated biennials, biennales and documenta's. It makes the museum not only welcome the moving image on monitors as well as screens: it also aligns the institution art with the typical institutional form of (non-Hollywood) cinema, namely the film festival circuit. The resulting synergies can be quickly summarized: there has been a mutually beneficially trade off of their differences, across economic considerations: as museums have trans-

[7] For a fuller treatment of the relevant parameter, see Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art (*Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013) and Thomas Elsaesser, "Ingmar Bergman in the museum? Thresholds, limits, conditions of possibility, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 1:1 (2009), 1-9.

[8] The "death of cinema" debate has been going on for a longer time than anyone can remember. With respect to digitisation and the end of celluloid, it has been most fervently argued in Paulo Cherchi Usai, *The Death of Cinema History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).

formed themselves from elite temples of the arts into a mass medium, catering to a broad public and to international tourists, they welcome the popularity of moving image, itself an emblem of a more fluid modernity, rather than a representative of austere modernism. Furthermore, as costs rise and patronage becomes ever more problematic, also from an ethics point of view[9], museums become ever more dependent on merchandizing, while also integrated into city branding, and thus fully integrated into an experience economy that is eminently cinematic. Conversely, as to the crisis of notably independent and avant-garde cinema, being hosted in the museum means additional prestige, cultural capital, and legitimacy. Equally important, museums have become, for the filmmaker-installation artist *the* most important source of commissions for new work, while also providing attractive and technically well-equipped spaces for exhibition, performance and display.

There have thus emerged a number of convergences and a benign mutuality; but cinema and museum have, paradoxically, also come together by remembering and performing their more antagonistic mutuality. What I called the 'ontological differences' of their respective dispositifs have not disappeared: rather, they return as aesthetic resources and artistic incentives and thus have given rise to a "cinema after the museum", or "post-museum cinema". For this, we need to think of the dispositif less in Michel Foucault's sense, as the assemblage and interaction of various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures that maintain the exercise of power within society or a given social practice (such as visiting a museum or going to the movies), and more as a re-distribution of the senses, how they are internally coordinated and how they interface with the mediated environments of these dispositifs: in short, how museum and movies are experienced as 'live' events, in 'real time'.

The classic experience of the museum is that it is a space of intense concentration and contemplation, with all attention focused on sight and the eyes, and with other stimuli – deemed to be unwanted distractions – reduced to a minimum. An atmosphere of hushed silence prevails, shutting out the noise and sparing our ears. The sense of touch, too, is muted in the museum. It may be elicited by the sensuousness of surface textures, of rich hues of paint and the roughness of canvas, as well as, of course, by the sinuous lines and smooth

[9] For instance, one of the largest donors to museums in the US and UK, the Sackler Family Trust, owners of Purdue Pharma, has been suspended its charity activities, following lawsuits and controversy over its role in the opioids crisis in the US. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/mar/25/sackler-trust-halts-new-philanthropic-giving-due-to-opioid-crisis-lawsuits and https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2019/3/29/domino-effect-have-sackler-donations-finally-become-toxic (accessed 11 June 2019).

surfaces of a sculpted body or a carved shape that beckons and reached out to be touched. But this very desire to touch a sculpture has to be sublimated and translated into the cognitive or ocular register: *Look, but don't touch* – the very concept of the 'haptic' (Alois Riegl) – as opposed to the tactile – hinges on this sublimation and transferral of sensory perception. Clearly, while many a museum of contemporary art has since given up on strictly enforcing this particular regime of concentration and contemplation, it lingers on as a constraining threshold, to be recognized (as taboo), before it is crossed and transgressed.

A (similarly contradictory) set of historically variable conditions define the typical movie experience. Here, too, one can point to a kind of ideal, which in practice is more often flouted than observed. Ideally, people in the darkened auditorium are silently fixed on the screen, the darkness minimizing distraction, and the individualized seats ensuring isolation from one's neighbours. But the theatrical cinema experience is also communal, with a large audience making sounds that bespeak of excitement and anticipation, a festive mood of shared pleasures, mixed with whispered conversation and laughter. And while the events on the screen are intended to generate narrative suspense and thus are aimed at focusing attention, eating popcorn and sipping coke stimulates other senses as well, and can easily be experienced as distraction (for other spectators, if not for one's own body). By aligning both museum visit and cinema experience with the range of sensory stimuli, bodily movement and motor coordination in the way we interact with our environment, we open up our inquiry in a new direction – one for which the traditional division between attention and distraction provides a useful, if perhaps only preliminary compass.

Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht: Alert Distraction over Attention

This then, brings me to my second detour, which requires a closer look at the history of the relation between attention and distraction. By taking attention and distraction as two major poles of sensory – ocular, auditory and cognitive – engagement with an environment, one can clarify the antagonistic mutualities that in the 21st century bind together museum and cinema, and in particular, get a better understanding of how and why their inherent tensions can become an aesthetically *productive* contradiction.

But what exactly is 'attention'? The dictionary will inform us that 'attention' is, "the selective perception of a particular stimulus, sustained by means of con-

centration and the willing exclusion of interfering sense-data"[10]. In other words, attention is predicated on a conscious effort, usually one that requires additional acts of exclusion, separation, filtering and forgetting. Yet in our contemporary knowledge and information society, attention has arguably risen to the status of a universal currency, while also becoming this society's scarcest resource. As such, attention paradoxically emerges as both a problem (for child psychologists, cultural critics and advertisers) and a solution (for audiences and spectators): consider how on-line life and especially social media constantly solicit our attention and spare no effort or expense to retain it. Attention is the *problem* for parents and educators, under the name of *attention deficit disorder*, and for cultural critics who lament the general superficiality and amnesia in our culture, blaming television or video games. But attention is also the *solution* when considered as a response to the dilemmas of overload and over-exposure, because as an act of selectivity, as an ability to shift or switch, it allows for a mode of perception – and by extension, when thinking of cinema, a form of spectatorship – that refuses to be absorbed or drawn in, that resists contemplation or depth, and instead stays resolutely on the surface and remains alert. As Bertolt Brecht once advised his theatre audience: "glotzt nicht so romantisch" – "don't stare like a love-lorn romantic"[11].

Mentioning Brecht is a cue to bring into the debate Weimar Germany's most astute defenders of cinema's modernity, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin. Their interest in cinema, the metropolis, and within cities, in urban spaces of spectacle as well as contemplation made them reflect on the impact that new cultural technologies were having on the senses. Among those cultural technologies, besides cinema, they counted daily newspapers, photography, illustrated weeklies, concerts, trade fairs, exhibitions, night clubs, cabaret reviews, sports, , neon advertising - mediated through economics, institutions and technology, but also through demographic factors, such as crowds, open markets, mass rallies, street fights, political demonstrations and the individual sensorium. Benjamin found in Charles Baudelaire his guide and diagnosticians to this new world, who had defined and diagnosed 'modernity' across a new temporality and time experience: that of ephemerality, chance and the fugitive moment. Baudelaire

[10] There are many definitions of attention, depending on the discipline that studies it. For a good overview see "Attention", Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attention (accessed 8 June 2019).

[11] The phrase was printed on a sign that Brecht posted in the auditorium during the premiere of his first performed play *Drums in the Night* (Trommeln in der Nicht) at Munich's Kammerspiele in September 1922. "Trommeln in der Nacht" *Wikipedia https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trommeln_in_der_Nacht* (accessed 8 June 2019).

associated it not only with the metropolis and its eroticized anonymity, but also with a new technical medium: the emergence of photography, with its confusing and hyper-stimulating *l'émeute du detail* ('riot of detail'), given a heroic-ironic embodiment in the urban rag-picker and the *flâneur*, but also – even more emblematic for our purposes – typified in the 'man of the crowd', a figure taken from the eponymous story by Edgar Allen Poe[12].

Despite its title, Poe's protagonist is not immersed in the ebb and flow of the pullulating boulevards, but glued to his window as if to a screen, watching the crowd over a whole day and night cycle, both switching focus and varying speed. It is as if Poe's narrative anticipates or emulates some typically 'cinematic' techniques of montage and editing, as well as 'televisual' ones, of fast-forward and action-replay, and thus the protagonist becomes not only the well-known boulevard flâneur of the metropolis in Benjamin's interpretation, but already the attention-flâneur of media-immersion and media saturation.

The mode of 'distracted viewing' and the 'montage of attraction' especially advocated in Benjamin's 'Artwork'-essay is, however, best understood as a complex counter-stance not only to bourgeois *Versenkung* (immersion: sinking into the work) seen as necessary to avoid *Zerstreuung* (distraction) but also as a response to a revolution other than the Communist one. For with the emergence and rapid dissemination of mechanically reproduced sounds and images at the turn of the twentieth century, there began a data-flow previously unknown in human history, whose main material supports were the cinema, photography, radio and the gramophone. Time and the fugitive moment could now be stored, without the intervention of any kind of symbolic notation, such as a musical score, verbal language or a chronometer.

The recording and transmission of sights and sounds, thanks to the camera and the phonograph, also meant the proliferation of acoustic and optical data in quantities, and with a degree of physiological presence as well as signal precision ('fidelity') hitherto unimaginable. The impact can be measured negatively: widely resented as a threat to the established arts and their creators, the cinema also occasioned medical warning about eye strain and mental disorders, besides the better-known moral panics about sexuality, drink and other 'depravities' or 'degeneracies' associated with the movie theatres. But mechanical reproduction also gave rise to what has been called 'haunted media' (see Sconce, 2000) extremely popular para- and pataphysical experiments that accompanied

[12] Charles Baudelaire discusses Poe's story in *The Painter of Modern Life and other essays* ([1863] London: Phaidon Press, 1995), pp. 7-8.

the discovery of electricity, electro-acoustics, electromagnetic fields and radio waves. Jeffrey Sconce (who coined the term) has documented some of the rich folklore and fantasy-literature accompanying the introduction into everyday life of the telephone, the telegraph and the wireless– as well as the equally rich futurist predictions, from which it becomes clear that the late 19th century was not waiting for the cinema, and instead expected television and the telephonic transmission of images and sound sounds: in short is was waiting for satellite technology, the mobile phone and Skype, rather than the *Arrival of a Train* or *Workers Leaving the Factory*.

A materialist media theory, such as proposed by Friedrich Kittler (Kittler, 1999, pp. 2-19) would go some way towards answering to Benjamin's dual concerns, namely to identify cinema as the medium appropriate to technical modernity and to elaborate a theory of spectatorship that *combines distraction with attention*. For Benjamin, cinema exposes the contradictions between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* (two kinds of 'experience': the first, integrated and continuous, the second, shock-like and intermittent), and in this sense cinema becomes, in Benjamin's words, modernity's optical unconscious: both hiding and revealing the contradictions of modernity, both the poison and the antidote of modernity[13].

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Poison and its antidote: on the one hand, cinema is, of course, a capitalist invention, and as has been argued, its role is to replenish at the weekend the labour power that the system takes out of the body during the working week. But also antidote, in that for Benjamin, shock is the signature of perception in modernity, meaning that film is the right medium/ medicine for a perception that has to anticipate, protect from, and react to changing sensual stimuli and, insofar as it

[13] Walter Benjamin first used the term "optical unconscious" in his essay "A Short History of Photography" (1931), *Screen* vol. 13, issue 1 (March 1972), 7. It has since been widely deployed and commented upon.

does this successfully, is *a priori* in the mode of alert distraction. In a footnote, Benjamin described distraction as a physiological phenomenon akin to catharsis. What we have to remember, however, is that the cinema Benjamin was thinking of are the films of Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov (i.e. montage), or that of Chaplin (i.e. slapstick), and not the classical Hollywood cinema based on linear narrative and temporal suspense, intended to bind distraction back into attention, in order to lead the viewer to resolution and closure.

Siegfried Kracauer on Distraction

Kracauer's essay "Kult der Zerstreuung" (Cult of Distraction), first published in 1926 in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was most likely one of the inspirations for Benjamin's thinking. Kracauer analyzed the rise of large cinema theatres and saw them, quite naturally, as the sites of mass distraction. But unlike other cultural critics, Kracauer did not judge this a negative feature, that is, he did not argue from the superior value of concentration, but recognized that in these large luxury theatres, as well as at other popular sites of mass entertainment such as amusement parks, distraction – i.e. the shower of different sensory stimuli – is both pleasurable and restorative – countering the intense attention needed to work at machines, or wherever the body is subjected to the rigid regime of the time-keeping clock and the work-day routines – very unnatural for a population that only a few years earlier had migrated from the countryside, where the rhythm of the working week was dictated by the weather, by the seasons and by the bodily needs of the farm animals, and not the unforgiving demands of the factory assembly lines.

Kracauer therefore argues that distraction is, for a modem urban population, a legitimate mode of aesthetic experience, more truthful to their actual situation than the objects or experiences put in circulation as high culture, needing concentrated attention and cognitive immersion. He thus anticipates Benjamin's Artwork essay where distraction also becomes the specific mode of cinematic perception: *Rezeption in der Zerstreuung*. If this "reception in distraction", then, is the default value of the cinema experience for Kracauer and Benjamin, it becomes tempting to keep their model in mind when we think about the contemporary art museum as a mass medium, and of the tendency to turn the museum experience into a spectacle of special effects, complete with a narrative trajectory, and into the register of 'event and experience', modeled on the modern theme park and Benjamin's amusement arcade.

In the end, Benjamin and Kracauer recognize that the cinema is a training ground and exercise yard for the senses: to watch a film attentively in the movie

theatre, means to train the senses for the reception in the mode of distraction, which is necessary, because life-saving, in modern environments, such as cities. These environments are replete with different visual, aural, and tactile stimulations like traffic signals, noises, or passers-by in a crowded street. Formulated in the late 1920s, such insights lead to the question of what bundles of sensations or bodies of distraction we are inhabiting today, where it is less the traffic in the street that demands our vigilance, and more the traffic in the digital realm that solicits our attention.

It is the reed rather than the rooted tree that weathers the storm of data and the assault of images, and it is the cork, bobbing on the water, that survives a flood of media messages. What if the attention economy today demanded choices being made between being 'reed' or 'cork', i.e. between staying put and tactical bending, or altogether cutting loose and 'going with the flow', rather than, as used to be, between 'active' and 'passive' spectatorship, or between 'identification' and 'distanciation'? Today's savvy media users spend days in front of the screen playing video games that train rapid reaction (the reed), or watch their movies on their smartphones or tablet 'on the go': in the train, the plane or by the beach (the cork). The much-maligned figure of the channel hopper, or the alert but pressed-for-time museum goer who spends less than 30 seconds in front of a painting (of which 25 with reading the caption), may yet turn out to be the unlikely heroes of these new 'flexible' modes of perception: witting or unwitting vanguard figures, parrying the double-binds of interactivity like erstwhile Baudelaire's fencers, their bodies engaged with images as if they were objects or people, because images are no longer there to be contemplated, but require different motor-skills or hand-eye coordination in order to be 'grasped'. At once target and survivor, these hard-boiled user-spectators handle the mouse, the track pad or the joystick as much to ward off the ever-increasing army of attention-grabbing spectacle events, as s/he selects avatars in order to appropriate them.

Towards a Genealogy of Distraction

In other words, although we are used to seeing attention and distraction as two opposite poles of our sensory engagement with art, Benjamin (and Kracauer) suggest otherwise: besides breaking up the dichotomy and pointing to their interdependence, they intimate also that attention and distraction are modalities not restricted to aesthetic experience. Instead, attention and distraction pose problems at the workplace and the work-space, especially in a society more and more relying on the eye to steer, to guide and to monitor machines and produc-

tive operations, and to navigate an urban environment where flows of stimuli and perceptions need to processed at speed, in order to stay safe and to survive.

The takeaway from these observations is that an art which understands itself as contemporary has to solicit or *elicit attention from within distraction, rather than against distraction*. And it is this axiom that I want to ponder, when asking how artists in the 21st century enter into and engage with both cinema and museum, as the traditional, if distinct spaces of focused attention, and how they do so with installation strategies that recall, as well as revive, cinema.

Today's perspective on attention and distraction must take account of a heightened distribution of senses – the ear and touch, besides the eye – manifest in the variability of the sources of sensory input, and in the rapid switching of perceptual focus and register, captured by such terms such as "multi-tasking" or "distributed attention". Insofar as these qualities are often said to be more developed in women, trained as they are to doing household work, while also minding children and attending to other tasks, the topic has something to do with "affective labour"[14]. There is a scene of a housewife multitasking in Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* that illustrates how such affective distribution of attention might work today: she changes her baby's nappies while earning some extra money with telephone sex. The scene is also a sardonic pastiche of post-Fordist "flexibility" under conditions of economic precariousness. A different issue arises with conditions at the extremes of attention (such as autism) and the extremes of distraction (such as attention deficit disorder): what, elsewhere, I have called society's "productive pathologies" (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 13-41). The oxymoron flips the sides, in order to reveal the other face of the phenomenon, whereby a nominally pathological state ("autism", "attention deficit disorder") becomes a special aptitude. If certain forms of autism have already become sought-after skills for debugging code in software[15], it may well be that ADD will become known as "rapid reaction response capability" – much the way the wireless mutated into the radio and the horseless carriage became the automobile.

Given the many technologies we use to interact with the world and the many sources or channels of input we keep open, we are all data-multitaskers, making it evident that distraction is in some circumstances already prioritized as the new

[14] For a discussion of affective labour, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) and Juan Martin Prada, "Economies of Affectivity", *Caring Labor* (July 29, 2010) https://caringlabor.wordpress.com/2010/07/29/juan-martin-prada-economies-of-affectivity/ (accessed 9 June 2019)

[15] Miguel A. Perez, "Autistic People as Software Testers", *Blogthinkbig* (7 September 2013) https://blogthinkbig.com/autistic-people-software-testers (accessed 9 June 2019)

normal[16]. What is perhaps more surprising is that such a prioritizing of distraction has itself a long history and a venerable philosophical pedigree. Again, to start with a definition: "Distraction is a state of mind in which we resonate with and respond to a variety of external and internal stimuli that affect the body at the same time" (Löffler, 2013, p. 8). Petra Löffler, from whom I take this definition and parts of the subsequent argument, goes on to explain:

> In the late eighteenth century, [for instance] a debate on distraction arose that questioned the pros and cons of several modes of distraction— absentmindedness on the one hand, diversion on the other. Distraction was no longer only regarded as a destructive and dangerous mental force that must be controlled, but also as a necessary activity of the human body. […] From then on, the term had also a positive meaning, because bodily diversions such as promenading, horse riding, or ball games were recommended as a helpful medicine against mental stress, depression or potential nervous breakdown. (Löffler, 2013, p. 9)

As Rudolph Gasché has argued, already Immanuel *Kant* in 1798 had defined distraction as distributed attention and had distinguished between two modes: *voluntary* (dissipatio) and *involuntary distraction* (absentia): "Distraction (distractio) is the state of diverting attention away from certain ruling ideas by dispersing attention among other, dissimilar ones. If the distraction is intentional, it is called dissipation; but if it is involuntary it is absentmindedness" (Gasché, 2009, pp. 1-28).

According to Kant, distraction is part of the art of living and should be trained and exercised, in order to keep the mind alert, flexible and open to new ideas. Although he did not go quite as far as the surrealists or Freud in praising the virtues of free association, Kant made another important point: to be distracted in the mode of dissipation for Kant meant first of all to be part of and be stimulated by a community, whereas distraction as absentmindedness was un- and even anti-social (Löffler, 2013, p. 15).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the former opposition between attention and distraction was reformulated as a problem of time and simultaneity. The question was now: Can one be attentive to different things at the same moment of time? The answer offered in 1835 by the German ophthalmologist

[16] Whether multitasking makes us more efficient or more stupid, and whether information overload will permanently alter our brains are much-debated topics in both the social sciences and the neurosciences. For an overview of the state of research, see John Wihbey, "Multitasking, Social Media and Distraction Research Review", *Journalists' Resource* (July 2013) https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/social-media/multitasking-social-media-distraction-what-does-research-say/

Carl Heinrich Dzondi was "Yes", because the human mind is able to switch between different objects very quickly, in an unnoticeable fraction of a second[17]. He had studied eye-movement and saccadic cycles – something that has taken on an entirely new dimension, in the form of eye-movement tracking, and the way it is said to revolutionize film making as well as film interpretation.

Interpreting eye-movement in relation to works of art has its precedents, as explained by David Bordwell:

> In 1965 the Russian psychologist Alfred Yarbus reported the results of experiments that tracked eye movements. In some of them, he used Ilya Repin's classic painting *They Did Not Expect Him* (aka *An Unexpected Visitor*, 1884). The dramatic image depicts a hollow-eyed man, gaunt and wrapped in a patchy coat, striding into a comfortable middle-class parlour. First Yarbus simply let his subjects view the picture without any instructions from him. Their saccadic patterns were recorded [resulting in a diagram where] each line represents the fast movement of the eyes from one location to another (saccades) and clusters of lines are the traces of fixations. The denser the lines, the longer and more often a point was fixated. Then Yarbus tried asking his subjects questions about the image, [...] asking one of his subjects to estimate the material circumstances of the family. A very different trajectory of attention emerges. Now the scanning was more purposeful, and it focused on the areas most likely to fulfill the task of identifying the family's social class –clothes, the piano, the children, and other items. Moreover, when given more time to examine the picture, subjects did not roam around every cranny of the frame but returned constantly to the areas they had already examined, the ones that were most relevant to the task. Artists often claim that color, composition, and other features attract a viewer's attention. But Yarbus concluded that while some sorts of visual material, chiefly faces and bodies, were targeted during the undirected scanning, many other features, such as color, edges, light or dark regions, and so on were not[18].

Already in 1910, Hermann von Helmholtz in his *Treatise on Physiological Optics* had shown that switching attention was normal: "It is natural for the

[17] Karl Heinrich Dzondi, *Die Augenheilkunde für jedermann welche lehret, die Gesundheit der Augen zu erhalten*, Halle, 1835 and especially Dzondi's entry for "Aufmerksamkeit [attention]" in Johann Friedrich Pierer (ed.), *Medizinisches Reallexikon*, vol. 1 (Leipzig/Altenburg: F.A. Brockhaus, 1816).

[18] David Bordwell, "Observations on Film Art" 6 February 2011 http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/02/06/the-eyes-mind/ (accessed 9 June 2019)

attention to be distracted from one thing to another."[19] More recently, the entire discussion about attention and distraction has shifted to the neuro-sciences, picking up with PET scans, EECs and tomography where Helmholtz' physiology of optics and Alfred Yarbus' eye-scanning experiments had left off. The basis for "distributed attention" is now sought in the neurological organization of the brain, where the different areas of the brain have different tasks, and where neural networks and nodes constantly create new pathways and "fire" to forge associations. As Tiziana Terranova has argued, "activities such as multi-tasking and reading online hyperlinked texts produce […] a shift of neuronal activity from the *hippocampus* (where brain scientists usually locate activities such as focused reasoning and long term memory) to the *prefrontal cortex* (which is occupied by repetitive tasks and short term memory)"[20].

If Helmholtz' findings easily connect to the neuro-sciences, they were also given a Foucaultian twist by Jonathan Crary, perhaps the most acute scholar of attention and distraction, in his *Suspension of Perception* (Crary, 1999, pp. 29-30). Coming from an art historical perspective, Crary argues that the ways we intently look at a painting or listen to a piece of music is not something innate, but results from crucial changes in the nature of perception that can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Seurat's *Parade de Cirque* – in 2016 on show in a separate exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, serves Crary as one key example.

Crary also highlights the paradoxical nature of modern attention. Attention is both a fundamental condition of individual creativity, supported by the idea of the modern artist as a solitary studio-worker, matched by the silent and solitary nature of the aesthetic experience in front of a painting or sculpture. Yet attention is also a central element in the efficient functioning of disciplinary institutions such as factory, schools, clinics and laboratories – these are the recto and verso of attention, which may explain why attention can be approached from an affirmative and a critical position, either focusing on the inner individual resolve or highlighting the outer, disciplinary power-relations exerted by attention on collective bodies[21].

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19 Hermann von Helmholtz, *Treatise on Physiological Optics* (New York: Dover Publications,1962), 498 [quoted in Crary, footnote 27].

20 Tiziana Terranova, "Attention, Economy and the Brain", *Culture Machine*, vo. 13 (2012), 1-19. Terranova goes on: "Exposure to new media would thus cause a remodelling of different types of memory within individual brains, making individuals faster at carrying out routine tasks, but at the same time less efficient in the ways they carry out those tasks and weaker at deeper comprehension and understanding."(5) https://culturemachine.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/465-973-1-PB.pdf (accessed 9 June 2019)

21 See also Fredric Jameson and Anders Stephanson, "Regarding Postmodernism: A Conversation with Fredric Jameson," in Douglas Kellner (ed.), *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique* (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), 43–74.

Suspensions of Perception thus relocates the problem of aesthetic contemplation within a broader encounter with the unstable nature of perception—in psychology, philosophy, neurology, early cinema, and photography, as well as the socio-economic forces of capitalism. In doing so, Crary provides a historical framework for understanding the current crisis of attention amid both our contemporary technological culture, and its potential for being harvested or monetized amidst a general state of distraction. *Again, distraction turns out to be not the opposite of attention, but more like the* multiplication of sites and the proliferation of moments of intense, if partial attention.

In other words, scholarly reflections on the nature of distraction are extensive, ranging from Kant's observations to Alois Riegl's notion of distributed attention in the sensory encounter between the viewer and the work of art, through Benjamin and Kracauer privileging distraction, and citing the example of film and cinema, to Crary's intervention and the neurological approaches in art history as well as the "new media." The various approaches have become intertwined: some are trying to dissolve the binary opposition by reversing the value hierarchy of the two terms, others are speculating on major changes taking place within human perception – affecting the senses, cognition as well as motor-coordination – which makes distraction, multi-tasking and a sensory division of perceptual labour the new normal.

Katherine Hayles and Bernard Stiegler – each taking a slightly different stance – offer yet another distinction: that between the *psycho-power* of *deep attention* and the *bio-power* of *hyper attention*[22]. They are particularly concerned with the changing nature of attention in the school and educational environment, but one wonders whether the new terminology in fact recycles the old-fashioned attention (positive) versus distraction (negative) debate. Equally significant seems to me another paradox: as our attention is sought for commercial gain, and benefits the likes of Google, Facebook and Amazon, it becomes a scarce commodity and thus it increases in value. However, this value, in turn, requires the skills of variable attention, since anyone participating in the information society and the experience economy – and both movies and museums are fully participant players – has to manage active distraction. Sherry Turkle has documented how in heavily mediated environments, the combinations of different activities, such as listening to the radio while using the keyboard of a laptop and looking at its screen simultaneously have become important social skills, but also new performance anxieties[23].

[22] N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: the Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes," *Profession* (2007), 187-199 and Bernard Stiegler, *Economie de l'hypermateriel et psychopouvoir* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2008).

[23] See also Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

Such everyday multi-functionality generates new bodies of distraction. Linda Stone, a former Apple and Microsoft executive, has labelled such distributed attention "continuous partial attention." Whereas continuous partial attention is a constant crisis-state with a high level of adrenalin output, gendered multitasking is limited in temporal extension and focused on special goals. That is why Stone concludes that continuous partial attention is only useful for a certain period of time. Generally, she believes that the time for continuous partial attention should be over, replaced by what she calls "the Age of Uni-focus", i.e. people who are using mobile media with headsets or ear buds in order to exclude external sensual stimuli, first and foremost environmental sounds. The turn to uni-focus also encompasses such countervailing trends as Yoga, mindfulness and meditation, slow food and indeed, it includes contemplative cinema: all of these activities or practices becoming integral parts of that which they oppose, namely, distraction and acceleration. In other words, even slow cinema does not escape the system, and risks being merely another way of commodifying attention, increasing its value by emphasizing its scarcity[24].

A particular point of interest for film scholars and art historian, however, about any kind of realignment of the senses is the disengagement it promises of the notion of attention from the near total spotlight on its repercussions for visuality and looking – or at any rate, upright, frontal looking which treats the frame – whether of a painting or in a film – as a window on the world, or a mirror to the self. It is symptomatic in this context, how the view from above, or what Hito Steyerl calls "Vertical Perspective" has become part of this reorientation[25]. One finds it in filmmakers, Wes Anderson[26] for instance and installation artist Omer Fast's *5000 Feet is best*[27], the latter hinting at one possible reason for such reorientation, namely the militarization of our perceptual field under the paradigm of surveillance.

The Experience Economy

The reverse side of the surveillance paradigm as symptomatic of the automation of continuous partial attention 'from above', would be the so-called "experi-

[24] Linda Stone, "Thoughts on Continuous Partial Attention" Lecture given at the DLD conference, Munich, January 21–23 (quoted in Löffler, 21 [footnote 20 above]). http://www.neuegegenwart.de/ausgabe51/continuouspartialattention.htm

[25] Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective", *e-flux* 24 (April 2011) https://www.e-flux.com/journal/24/67860/in-free-fall-a-thought-experiment-on-vertical-perspective/

[26] kogonada, "Wes Anderson From Above" https://vimeo.com/35870502

[27] Omer Fast, *5000 feet is best* (UK, 2011, 85 mins) See https://www.filmgalerie451.de/en/filme/5000-feet-best/ A 30-minute extract can be found on youTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-8dW1dg7KY

ence economy", which compensates for "adrenaline fuelled crisis states of continuous partial attention", now increasingly outsourced to machines, by converting Benjamin's *Erlebnis* (perception as shock and trauma) into *Erfahrung* (embedding perception into life-world). It also builds a bridge to my main topic – the interplay of attention and distraction in cinema and the museum – because it provides yet another way of understanding the crossover (or takeover bid) having taken place between the cinema and the museum. The "experience economy" is a term used descriptively by historians, but of course also critically, mainly by scholars who from a Marxist perspective analyse what they see as the next stage or phase of global capitalism and the commodification not only of health and well-being, of education and creativity, but of all of affective life (think once more Facebook's "likes" and Amazon's "preferences"), as well as our emotional and social needs, like sharing and belonging.

To briefly stay with the more descriptive meaning of the "experience economy". For the social historians Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, for instance, the experience economy is simply the name for the dominant contemporary economy, following the agrarian economy, the industrial economy, and the service economy. The characteristics of the experience economy, according to Pine and Gilmore, are that a product or a service needs to have the capacity to generate a memorable narrative for their customers, and that the (anticipated) memory of this event (documented in the form of media: memorabilia, photos, Facebook entries, tweets, etc) should itself be thought of as part of the product – now re-labeled as "the experience"[28]. In this sense, the commodity called "experience" includes interactive, immersive, relational and other forms of aesthetic encounters, and therefore, of course, it includes par excellence the cinema, now understood as a service, designed to produce affects, life-enhancing narratives, events and memory. But it also includes the museum. For the museum adds to an interactive encounter with the artwork also the memory and the feel of place: in fact it amplifies the experience thanks to the importance of its architecture. Often now considered a work of art in its own right – think Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao or Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin – the museum building is not just a container or a display case, but is increasingly designed to function as the site of proto-narrative "events", within which a certain set of stories and encounters can take place.

[28] B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

Degrees of Attentiveness and Distraction

The Berlin writer Volker Pantenburg has suggested that instead of opposing the mobile, peripatetic visitor in the museum to the stationary, fixed and sedentary viewer in the cinema, we should distinguish between the museum and cinema not on the basis of mobility and stasis, but by analyzing the different degrees of attentiveness and attention:

> Attention is a two-part construction, extending between two poles, one of which is that of *perception*, which transforms something arbitrary, ordinary into something of particular interest, allowing phenomena to become tangible to perception in the first place. The other aspect of 'attention' is *selection.* Which category of things, due to their mode of appearing, their ephemerality or velocity, their particular shape or form, their novelty or redundancy demand attention. Here one would ask how attention chooses its object, that is, according to which rules or restrictions, and due to which medial or cultural contingencies. Furthermore, the particular manner in which a given object appeals to one's attention may also be significant, that is, in which fashion does an object draw attention to itself? (Pantenburg, 2014)

Pantenburg's redefinition, above all, highlights the traditional function of the museum – its aesthetics of "display", the "museum effect" of removing one context and substituting for it another, the "diectics" of the gesture of showing, the way an art-work says "here" and "now" (Benjamin's aura), and the self-referential "look at me" of the art object. By recalibrating perception in so many different ways, the museum is both a slow-motion decelerator (of time) and an amplifier or magnifier (of space), because it can accentuate and intensify both aspects of attention: it can slow down ordinary processes and events, so as to make us rediscover what is attention, even under conditions of movement and distraction, and it can modulate space and recalibrate scale by emphasizing selection, either through juxtaposition or by isolating an object.

There are a number of artists – both filmmakers and installation artists – in whose work the challenges of how to refocus attention against the background of everyday distraction can be studied: Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1976) would be one such (well-known) example, where the director splits our attention between the banal, but highly evocative sights of New York street life along 10th Avenue and other typical places) and the banal, but highly manipulative letters written to Akerman by her mother, living (and left behind) in Brussels, while on another level, the sounds of New York – subway, cars, pedestrians, children, the

permanent din and hum so well known to anyone who ever lived in New York – accompany, but sometimes also swallow up the sound of Akerman's own voice reading, indeed ventriloquizing her mother's plaintive, longing letters, chiding her daughter for not writing more fully and more frequently.

Sharon Lockhart's *Lunch Break* (2008) is another well-known example of a film – most often presented as an installation – where the viewer's attention is the main focus, being both slowed down and magnified by the lack of any narrative development other than what the spectator might project into this single tracking shot along a line of shipyard workers in Maine taking their lunch break. A normally busy and noisy place is observed at its own moment of rest or repose, but is then re-animated by the tracking shot, which is subjected to the museum's conventional mode of perception: reflexive, introspective and contemplative. Lockhart's film decontextualizes the site but recontextualizes the time of the event, and thus reorients attention to that which is suspended or absent: assembly line work, labour laws, unionization that safeguards lunch breaks: but it does so with a slow but relentless forward movement that itself mimics the assembly line the workers are temporarily liberated and relieved from.

Two examples may serve to bring me back to my starting point, namely how 'slow' or 'contemplative' cinema might be regarded as 'cinema after the museum', or 'cinema of attention in the midst of distraction', in the sense of making the very differences of the respective dispositifs 'cinema' and 'museum' productive in the antagonistic mutuality of their necessary encounter. In the case of one of Dan Graham's exemplary works from the 1970s, *Past Future Split Attention,* modes of distributed attention – theatre, dance and performance – normally thought as alien and extraneous to the museum that disorient and disrupt the space, and in the case of Anri Sala's *Answer Me* and *Ravel Unravelled*, nearly forty years after Graham, it is sound, noise and live musical performance that reorganises the senses and reorients the museal space, in a gesture as radical as it is contemporary, letting the ear and its ability to orient us in space coax attention out of the amplification of distraction.

Dan Graham's Past Future Split Attention

Dan Graham's *Past Future Split Attention* (1972) is delicately poised between a video that has recorded a unique and single performance, and a template or script for live action, inviting future – repeat – performances. Minimal instructions sketch the situation: "Two people who know each other are in the same space. While one predicts continuously the other person's behavior, the other

person recounts (by memory) the other's past behavior. Both performers are in the present, so knowledge of the past is needed to continuously deduce future behavior (in terms of causal relation)"[29]. One can call *Past Future Split Attention* a dance piece or a 'stand-up Beckett' play, but it is also an encounter that loops a therapy session with a boxing match. Like the latter, there are some ground rules, and a set of (creative) constraints; like the former, there is room for free association and massive transference. The two protagonists share the same space but live in different time zones, as it were. One is conjuring up the past while the other is commenting on the present, but as one predict what we are about to see, the other one has already consigned it to a memory. Words anticipate actions as if by remote control, while physical gestures are being cornered into the past tense. Having apparently shared a lifetime in each other's company (the Beckett situation), the two performers draw on background knowledge; but such is their 'talking past each other' that they also have to stay in the moment, in order to keep up the flow, chasing each other's words while keeping in sync with each other's movements. It is certainly one of the strangest and disconcerting experiences of split and distributed attention one can imagine, as an extract on YouTube makes evident[30].

Graham has described *Past Future Split Attention* "a figure-eight feedback-feedahead loop of past/future'[31]. In a more technical language, one could say that it is the test-run of a system of transfer and exchange where positive feedback and negative feedback are not opposed to each other, but alternate with each other: negative feedback not regulating input-output but tending towards entropy, while positive feedback neither amplifies the signal nor feeds on itself, but pushes its excess energy towards a future that might never arrive.

Describing *Past Future Split Attention* mostly in terms of the temporalities that it intertwines, overlays and loops forgets that the piece also functions as a mirror: a two-way mirror for the characters on the move, so sometimes one of them can 'see through' (to) the other, at other times, the other is completely opaque and only sees him/herself in the mirror, a mirror that incidentally also reflects the spectators. So the audience, too, has to decide: are they included, according to conventional theatrical space of the invisible fourth wall, giving them transparency and access to the action before them, as if looking through

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[29] Dan Graham, "Past Future Split Attention", cited in the *Electronic Art Intermix on-line catalogue* https://www.eai.org/titles/past-future-split-attention (accessed 9 September 2019)

[30] Dan Graham, "Past Future Split Attention", performance at the Walker Art Center, 12 March 2009 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-JCEtI_bA (accessed 9 June 2019)

[31] Dan Graham, "Past Future Split Attention", cited in the *Electronic Art Intermix on-line catalogue* https://www.eai.org/titles/past-future-split-attention (accessed 9 September 2019)

a window? Or, as spectators, are we becoming so intensely aware of ourselves, our bodies, our fatigue, our nervous laughter, our embarrassment at watching painful and painfully performed acts of self-exposure, that the performance is in fact a mirror: designed to be opaque, so as to make ourselves see ourselves in the act of seeing. Combining the conceptual sophistication of a mind-game film with the immediacy of a live performance, its presentational site is indeed the reflexive space of a museum or art gallery, where it is now mostly displayed as a video-installation on a monitor, which forms another loop, across the different media and their separate modes of representation.

Anri Sala, Answer Me

Some forty-four years on, split attention has returned in Anri Sala's 2016 exhibition at the New Museum New York[32], under conditions, where the museum of contemporary art is a mass medium precisely in the sense that it is a place of distraction. If Graham's work must still be seen against the background of a museum of modern art, in which Past Future Split Attention functioned as part of an 'institutional critique', Sala's work belongs into the mainstream of the museum of contemporary art where at first glance it answers distraction with distraction. Its title "Anri Sala: Answer Me", however, initially evokes an interpellation or appeal for reciprocity in dialogue, perhaps echoing the dictum attributed to Jacques Lacan that "you never speak from where I listen", but in either case immediately referring to sound, voice and ear. Yet it also resonates with Graham's description of *his* piece: "One person's behavior reciprocally reflects/ depends upon the other's, so that each one's information is seen as a reflection of the effect that their own just-past behavior has had in reversed tense, as perceived from the other's view of himself"[33].

Sala trained as a filmmaker and came to international attention with *Intervista* (1999), a film that confronts his mother in the present with 16mm 'found' footage of twenty years earlier, when she was a Communist youth leader, making fiery speeches, but whose sound was either not recorded or was lost. When a lip reader recovers the words, and the transferred video is played back to her, Sala's mother is faced not just with her youthful image, but with the lost ideals and dashed hopes of her younger self. Here, split attention structures the unbridgeable historical gap between Stalinist Albania in the 1970s and the political chaos and moral disorientation of the country's first post-Communist decade in

[32] "Anri Sala: Answer Me", *New Museum* 02/03/2016 – 04/10-2016 https://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/anri-sala (accessed 10 June 2019)

[33] Dan Graham, *Electronic Art Intermix on-line catalogue* (footnotes 43, 45)

the 1990s, but it does so across the split between sound and image as distinct affective registers and technological dispositifs.

As Sala disengages 'attention' from its usual associations with the visual, by dramatically contrasting face and voice as well as past and present, he deploys one of a filmmaker's most basic tools, the montage of sound and image. Sala splits the visual and the aural field and then re-assembles them, not to synchronize them, but in order to force the spectator to engage with the separate registers of sight and hearing while still trying to focus on them as both distinct and belonging together. This is not only owed to the specific circumstances of *Intervista* (the fate of his family and his home country), but constitutes the basic structuring principle of much of Sala's oeuvre: a fact amply demonstrated in "Anri Sala: Answer Me", where almost every piece, taken by itself, is a variation on the sound image split, or even more frequently, on the sound-sound split. It is true of "Air Cushioned Ride" (2007), where the signals of two radio stations – one playing Bach, the other Country Music – interfere and alternate, as a car cruises and circles the parking lot of a 18-wheeler truck stop somewhere in the South or the Western United States. It is true of "Der Lange Jammer" (2005), a 13 minute film which shows a musician, his face in close up playing the saxophone, somehow suspended on the outside of a mile-long housing estate in Berlin, while in the exhibition – and thus in the here-and-now – another musician is trying to sync himself with the musician on the screen: a screen which is furthermore suspended and divided into front and back, each side showing a different image. The piece is reminiscent of Andy Warhol's *Outer and Inner Space* (1966) and Michael Snow's *Two Sides to Every Story* (1974), but the dimensions, live performance and the often-extreme close-ups and non-locatability of the saxophone player require the visitor to constantly recalibrate scale, space and orientation, within an already taxingly complex sonic environment. The effect is exhilarating, in the way the experience addresses and sharpens several of the senses, including the inner ear: what at first seem distracting elements serve a richer kind of attention, as the need, but also the desire to focus and concentrate makes one aware of how open our senses are to being engaged separately.

"I make my films as if I was making musical instruments, and I treat an exhibition as an orchestra": Sala's musical metaphor is apt. It describes the New York exhibition, though he might have added that insofar as each room connects to the others by way of a visual cue (often hands) or an auditory motif or instrument, carrying over from one to the other, the parcours or trajectory is also a score, one which each visitors performs. Nowhere is this more clearly in

evidence than in Sala's best-known work, *Ravel Ravel Unraveled*, first shown at the Venice Biennale in 2013, and integral part of "Anri Sala: Answer Me".

The installation consists of three films, responding to the words in the title, and screened in two separate rooms. In the first room are shown two filmed performances of the same piece, Maurice Ravel's 1930 Concerto in D for the Left Hand, originally commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, Ludwig's brother, a concert pianist who had lost his right hand in WWI. "Each film is focused on the choreography of the left hand encompassing the entirety of the keyboard, while the right hand remains still".[34] Projected simultaneously in a specially soundproofed (an-echoic) chamber to absorb sound-reflections such as echo and reverberation, the performances differ in tempo and rhythm. Because they are slightly out of sync, they give the impression of a musical dialogue, an effect that Sala describes as wanting the "space [to] resound consecutively to the temporal gap between the two performances; to paradoxically create an 'other' space in an environment conceived to annihilate the sense of space (by suppressing echoes)". This 'other' – brain-space, as one might call it – is where the visitor processes, besides the music, the visual echoes or mirroring effects of the two left hands, one on top of the other. Moving to the next room, more hands, this time a film of a woman DJ with two turntables, mixing the two versions of the Concerto and trying to bring them together again in a fleeting synthesis, which does not pretend to be a unity.

As has hopefully suggested itself, this arrangement is a composition in both temporal and spatial succession, yet however different in content, location and ambition, *Ravel Ravel Unravel* also structurally repeats many elements of *Intervista*, Sala's first film about his mother (-country) by someone who has since divided his time between Paris and Berlin. Interestingly enough, at Venice in 2013, *Ravel Ravel Unravel* was France's contribution to the Biennale, but it was actually installed in the German Pavilion, echoing the close *entente* between the two nations, who had fought the war that had cost Paul Wittgenstein his hand almost a century earlier.[35] It also – in its sophisticated play with spatial a-symmetry and temporal a-synchronicity within a fragile and unstable dialogical configuration – once more recalls Dan Graham's *Past Future Split Attention*.

[34] Cited in Stefano Cernuschi, "55th Venice Biennale: Anri Sala at the French Pavilion", *Mousse Magazine* (n.d.[2013]) http://moussemagazine.it/55vb-french-pavilion/ (accessed 11 June 2019)

[35] For further extrapolations of the historical entanglements, transnational echoes and architectural reverberations of *Ravel Ravel Unravel*, see Christopher Mooney, "Anri Sala", *ArtReview* (Summer 2013) https://artreview.com/features/feature_anri_sala/ (accessed 11 June 2019)

Conclusion

It may seem that the two detours I have taken through the once antagonistic mutuality of cinema and museum, and the equally interdependent mutuality of ‘attention’ and ‘distraction’ have led me a long way away from the kind of “slow cinema” of Bela Tarr or Carlos Reygadas. But that was my intention: first to put the issue of “slow” at some distance from its opposition with “fast”, where it risks being the subservient term in an always-already-in-place hegemonic power-relation, and instead embed it in the reflexive turn that I associate with the new alliance between cinema and museum, each using a crisis as an opportunity. This allows me to speak of “cinema in the museum” as also “cinema after museum” (which is also “cinema after film”). Secondly, I wanted to disentangle both “slow” and “attention” from its association with measurable parameters (e.g. “average shot length”, “saccadic eye movements”) and instead re-entangle them with the viewer’s experience of temporality, but also of space, scale, synesthesia: against the background not of acceleration, but of distraction and distributed attention. Thirdly, I wanted to argue that the heightened attention and attentiveness which is one of the key characteristics of slow cinema is best seen not in opposition to distraction, but can emerge out of distraction, and even be a special case of distraction. If the conceptual and institutional proximity of the museum is useful for characterizing slow cinema, it is because a museum, ideally, frames attention, so to speak, in analogy to a painting being framed: marking a boundary, a threshold, a liminality within a continuum. This in contrast to instrumentalizing attention, which is the case of the on-line and real-world experience economy, from whose effects, however, neither slow cinema nor video installations are immune or unaffected. And as I tried to show, the museum can frame attention even with means and techniques that seem alien to the fine arts and belong more to the cinema and other time-based arts, such as the introduction of performance, dance, music and sound. Finally, I wanted to bring slow cinema into the complex conceptual spaces and mental architectures that I have explored elsewhere in mind-game films, and films as thought experiments, by adding – in the examples discussed above – the films and installation work extending from the 1970s (Chantal Akerman, Dan Graham) to the 1990s and the present (Sharon Lockhart and Anri Sala). The choice was in some sense arbitrary, more personal than representative, since I could have chosen James Benning and Tacita Dean, or Bill Viola and Eija Liisa Ahtila as filmmakers who migrated to museums or relocated in art spaces, while continuing to interested in the questions posed by slow cinema: stillness and movement, narrative and attention, and sound, silence and their a-synchronicity with image and sight.

It is through these registers of reflexive complexity and both 'framed' and 'distributed' attention that slow cinema can be understood as a critique of mainstream cinema now often considered a site of distraction and acceleration, but also as a critique of museums as sites of contemplation and absorption and thus as elite institutions, enforcing high culture canons of taste and distinction. The slow cinema I am proposing here – filtered through the institution 'museum' and infused by the practices of video installations when engaging with time, space and the spectator's body – may at first glance have little in common with "locally sourced, traditionally prepared". Yet precisely by often being site specific (i.e. *local*) and actively challenging the two-hundred year *traditions* of the museum, 'cinema after the museum' is in line with slow cinema: the more so because it invests its reflexive potential (for disorienting the mind) and its aesthetic capacities (for recalibrating the senses) in staying resolutely contemporary.

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Abstract

A classic definition of attention designates it as “the selective perception of a particular stimulus, sustained by means of concentration and the willing exclusion of interfering sense-data”. In our sense-data rich environments, attention has become a scarce commodity, increasingly valued and sought after, but with the paradoxical consequence that the very pursuit of attention cannot but register as distraction. How do artists confront and art spaces cope with this paradox, and how has the moving image in the museum changed the articulation of time, space and information that is narrative?

Key words: attention, distraction, senses, cinema and museum

Panoptikum 2021, 26:247-256 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.11

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Time Flows: Rhythm in Slow Cinema

For over two decades slow cinema has stayed one of the most poignant tendencies in contemporary art-house cinema (although it is slowly disappearing according to some researchers and film critics – Schrader, 2017; Syska, 2019, p. 23). It is a widely observed, transnational phenomenon which is concentrated in the peripheries mostly. Slow cinema is not particularly known for any distinct themes - instead, its significance lies within its idiosyncratic narrative formula. Its roots could be found in modernist cinema (Syska, 2014), avant-garde cinema (especially in the structuralist tradition of Michael Snow and Chantal Akerman, and in film tableaux of Andy Warhol) and in the relation between movies and visual art in galleries. All these contexts have emphasized temporality which becomes the main theme within themselves. In slow cinema, time determines characters' lives, interferes with diegetic structures and is incorporated by spectators. The chronotopes of slow cinema can be described by their tangibility, embodiment, and somatic resonance. They offer a rhythm that is not subjugated to the outside factors (editing measurements), but interior ones[1].

[1] In this article I have used some reflections from my book about slow cinema (see: M. Stańczyk, *Czas w kinie. Doświadczenie temporalne w* slow cinema, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2019).

The division between inside and outside reflects the temporal dynamics – it can be also described by juxtaposing quantitative and qualitative factors. This first, quantitative group is adjacent to the description of music, poetry, and film theoretical concepts which refers to the former two. For example, Germaine Dulac believed that film narrative structure should be similar to musical compositions (Helman, 2007, p. 33), and Levi Merenciano has written that a long shot is an autonomous segment in which the rhythm is minimised (Merenciano, 2014) (here, rhythm would not seem typical of slow cinema which I would disagree with, based on such cinema's inherently timely and narrative nature). In the case of movies this would be reflected by the length of shots edited according to the visible pattern. The second, qualitative or interior group of factors could be described by words written by Andrey Tarkovsky years ago: "The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm of the picture; and rhythm is determined not by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them. Editing cannot determine rhythm (in this respect it can only be a feature of style); indeed, time courses through the picture despite editing rather than because of it" (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 117). The meter of film can be omitted in the case of slow cinema, but equally, time becomes an intensely experienced dimension due to its slow passing. Among other means of expression which highlight this temporal experience are: reduced editing, long shots (Matthew Flanagan has distincted exemplary length of shots in Béla Tarr's, Albert Serra's or Paz Encina's films, compared it with mainstream, Hollywood cinema and determined that their duration multiplies regular shots [Flanagan, 2008]), dedramatization strategies, and preference for static camera devoid of its narrative functions (for example it can become independent from the main character and his or hers onscreen presence as in *La libertad* [2001] by Lisandro Alonso, or focusing on space composition and not storytelling as in the *Malmkrog* [2020] by Cristi Puiu).

Visceral rhythmology

This intense temporal experience can be compared to boredom. I do not put it in a negative context as is common – feeling bored is similar to the internalized time flow for me. This temporal affect is protracted, slow and therefore the spectators are influenced intrasubjectively (because, as Vivian Sobchack has written, "There are always two embodied acts of vision at work in the theater, two embodied views constituting the intelligibility and significance of the film experience. The film's vision and my own do not conflate, but meet in the sharing of a world and constitute an experience that is not only intrasubjectively dialectical, but also intersubjectively dialogical" [Sobchack, 1992,

p. 24]). "Rhythm, then, is not the metrical sequence of pieces; what makes it is the time-thrust within the frames. And I am convinced that it is rhythm, and not editing, as people tend to think, that is the main formative element of cinema" (Tarkovsky, 1989, p. 119) – the time-thrust Tarkovsky wrote about is a common, embodied sensation due to our bodily dispositions, physical existence and perceptive repository. It is easier to describe the rhythm of Hollywood cinema because it has significant dynamism, acceleration and conventionalised narrative structures. Slow cinema, on the contrary, forces viewers to reject habits learnt from mainstream cinema. Our perceptory system resists that effort and the imposed observation, but – eventually – our body can surrender and allow time to flow through it. Adam Dziadek believes that rhythm is the way to discover signs of embodiment in a text: "Body emits rhythms and signs, it is a source of life and immortality. Rhythm mediates between writing body and reading body" (Dziadek, 2014, p. 24). This scientific stance assumes some level of indefinition; because the inner rhythm is elusive and unstable, we cannot anticipate it and therefore it connects with our somatic rhythms. Inner rhythm influences the spectator through irregular beating or even subtle pulsating. Time flow is stabilized thanks to experiencing, material body.

Visceral rhythmology – as I call the reflection about inner rhythm which is symptomatic for slow cinema – intersects with the reflection typical for corporeal narratology. This research on narrative modes is based on the human body which creates many possible structures of storytelling. "Narrative is corporeal not simply because it needs to use character bodies as a natural part of the stories that it tells, but also because the very ways in which we think about narrative reflect the paradoxes of the body—its ability to give rise to and resist pattern, its position in the world and outside of it, and so on. Narrative, then, always first and foremost depends upon a corporeal hermeneutics—a theory of how the text can be meaningfully articulated through the body—even if narratology has frequently treated it, or seemed to treat it, as something quite different" (Punday, 2003, p. 15). It is an important methodology for this paper but the research is built upon the tradition of existential phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy mainly) which is commonly used in sensuous theory and affect theories. It offers methodical tools for conceptualizing our embodiment in the world, which was prevalent in the film research of Julian Hanich or Vivian Sobchack.

Rhythmology withdrawing metrics and proportions is not a new approach – theoreticians opened up to such experience already in the beginning of 20th century. The issue of rhythm became one of the prevailing subjects in film theory very early on – to mention only Germaine Dulac, Vsevolod Pudovkin,

Semyon Timoshenko, and Václav Tille. Polish theoretician, Karol Irzykowski, created a substantial reflection about rhythm. In *X muza* (Eng. *The 10th Muse*, 1924) he wrote about "optic rhythmisation" (Irzykowski, 1977, p. 238) – the movement of scenes and the movement of matter are dependent on musical rhythm. It is subjective and incorporated by the artist. This concept is based on the lyrics of movement and kinaesthetics, two notions which were proposed by Irzykowski in the same book. Edward Adolf Sonnenschein wrote the essay *What Is Rhythm?* a year later, in 1925. He paid attention mostly to psychological aspects of feeling rhythm, how it is generated in the mind of spectator: "rhythm is the feature in a sequence of events in time which produces in the mind which perceives it an impression of proportion between the durations of the events or groups of events which comprise the sequence" (see: Mitry, 2000, p. 104). For him rhythm is a subjective phenomenon – it is distinctly sensational, not physical. The perspective juxtaposing rhythm with spectators' embodiment became more popular in the second half of the XXcentury. Jean Mitry in *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (Eng. *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, 1965) focused on physiological and partly phenomenological sense of rhythm by emphasizing perception, intentionality and consciousness in a more or less direct way: "rhythm is a kind of dialectic of time rather than a continuity whose intermittent variations distort for us the normal flow of time. In fact, it develops according to a pattern of alternating tension and rest- the expression merely of a constantly renewable conflict. Moreover, if rhythm is rhythm only insofar as it is perceived, its framework is inevitably the limits of our sensory capacities" (Mitry, 2000, p. 104). And quoting Émile Benveniste (*Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Eng. *Problems in general linguistics*, 1966), rhythm „designates the form in the instant that it is assumed by what is moving, mobile and fluid, the form of that which does not have organic consistency; it fits the pattern of a fluid element (…). It is the form as improvised, momentary, changeable" (Benveniste, 1971, p. 285-286). In Éléments de rythmanalyse (Eng. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, 1992) Henri Lefebvre also refers to rhythm: "Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body" (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 9). Derek Attridge in *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (1995) connects rhythm with energy impulses on physiological and psychological level (see: Dziadek, 2014, p. 32). All these theories led us to understand rhythm as closely linked to temporal affectivity which is experienced by the spectators of slow cinema.

Somatic resonance

So how can this somatic resonance typical for rhythmical affect in slow cinema be described? I will not be designating average shot lengths (which is a unit of measurement used by Barry Salt in his cinemetrical research), editing dynamism, and patterns of onscreen movement, set lighting or camera perspective. Rather than that, I would like to define rhythm as something pulsating between screen and viewer's body. This kineasthetic affect mirrors corporeal dynamics and primal, vital intensities. To highlight physical rhythm is to petrify an experience: rhythms is put in numbers, it is described, parameterized, analyzed, and that is why we could lose its quality as experienced, affective temporality. It is also shown that, as Karen Pearlman says, in editors' confessions about their work – contemporary editors are emphasizing intuition and feeling rather than mathematical approach (Pearlman, 2013, p. 1). The author of *Cutting Rhythms* writes about two physiological activities which are fundamental for creating and perceive rhythm in editing: kinaesthetic empathy (based on somatic memory and personal experiences connected with movement and mobility) and mirror neurons (responsible for blurring the border between action and observation) (Pearlman, 2013, p. 10-13). This is a physical evidence that onscreen movement and rhythmization of narrative development are rooted in embodiment – firstly, creators' embodiment, but secondly – through the film body – that of viewers'. They share somatic foundation and "affective condition" (Markowski, 2014).

Slow cinema changes popular understanding of rhythm as a metrical dynamism because of its almost immanent reduction – of pace, story, *mise-en-scene*, acting expression and dialogue, simplistic emotionality, non-diegetic music and editing. Instead of that, it offers a space which is minimalistic, devoid of spectacularity and infiltrated with time. The "aesthetic of slowness" (Flanagan, 2008), based on dedramatization and long shots, activates spectators on another level, through generating rhythm experienced differently. Viewers are pushed to search for it in some way and, consequently, they turn inwards, exploring intrasensorial tension (Sobchack, 1992). Whilst percepting art (including films), their body stays in the state of readiness and it is directed intentionally so that without any significant stimulus it becomes oriented in the opposite direction – toward itself. This is why it could feel its somatic dimension and experience temporality. When we ourselves as well as our environment are static, we can feel our body and hear its inner rhythms. As Michel Henry wrote, we connect with it or renew this contact in the act of self-experience (Henry, 2015). "Suspension of perception" (Crary, 1999) reveals the dynamics which links humans with immanent matter all around them. "Withheld", "dead", slow images are

dominated by the flow and the expression of time and they are autonomous or independent from our intentions and expectations. They exuberate energy that is felt as an inner rhythm of film and is reminiscent of the stream of meanings and affects. In the words of Elena Vogman, "The rhythm of film organizes a whole series of sensual zones of conflict at the level of the material itself. The effects of poetic montage, the departure from the everyday, or even its sudden return, carry political consequence in those moments when cinematic rhythm realizes its potential for opening up new temporal spaces of action both in and through history" (Vogman, 2015).

In that sense, slow cinema creates a particular form of viewership. Lutz Koepnick withstands it with the aesthetic of astonishment which is specific for the cinema of attraction. He names perceiving subject as a wondrous spectator who searches for the sense of novelty, singularity, and self-revelation of the world: "Neither connected to shock nor to the sensational, the concept of wonder registers as quiet and pensive, judicious and discriminating responses to phenomena that strike the viewer as rare and first time. It initially exists outside the realm of the will, defers any demand for instant reply and communication, and defies impatient efforts of narrative integration" (Koepnic, 2017, p. 8). Prolongates (or long takes) are essential, because they suspend our rationalized habits of teleologicality and linearity of thoughts (see: Koepnick, 2017, p. 23) which are typical for the reign of physical, scientific time. Perception becomes more conscious – both the diegetic world with its characters, and the viewers themselves in their embodiment are omnipresent, unreducible, immanent and substantive. Koepnick writes that the aesthetics of long takes unveils time: "They stretch or deflate time not to frustrate our attention spans but to intensify perceptual processes and sharpen our attention for what the rush of the contemporary renders mostly invisible" (Koepnick, 2017, p. 2).

The archipelagos of time

Slow cinema experiments with expanded temporal structures – it lingers, retards, slows down. It can be divided into two intersecting tendencies: Tarrian which is immersed in modernist tradition and creates meandric chronotopes and ornamental time flows, and Diazian which operates with so-called empty time, but also with real time due to accurate representation of space and psychophysical condition. This second tendency is more interesting for me because it highlights alternative time realities habituated by people living on the margins of the contemporary world who either do not want access to it themselves, or are excluded from it. The best film examples to illustrate this are Lav Diaz's movies

as they are the core of this tendency: *Melancholy* (2008), *Florentina Hubaldo, CTE* (2012) or *The Woman Who Left* (2016). Time extensions are often read in Bazinian, revelatory way – long takes should reveal the truth about the world and allow us to experience reality. But "The aim (…) is neither to provide redemptive meanings nor cling to nostalgic images of the past. Rather, they embrace slowness as a medium to ponder the meaning of temporality and of being present" (Koepnick, 2014). Emphasizing the now and restoring it to viewers means also simplification and fetishizing of time. In the time of bringing great narrations down and relativisation of every frame of reference, the cinema of duration, based on reduction of editing and using long takes, cannot be amounted only to being in the world. Such notion infantilizes slow cinema showing it as a mere counterargument to the contemporary cinema of acceleration and the speed of our society. And the creators of slow cinema do not emphasize the nowness – they reach for historical costume (as in already mentioned *Malmkrog*, or *Zama* [2018] by Lucretia Martel and *Jauja* [2014] by Lisandro Alonso) and, moreover, present the fragments of diegetic world as spaces where different temporalities are juxtaposed and intersected: social, subjective, past or present temporalities. In this sense "slowness negotiates today's desires for both memory and presentness by allowing us to reflect on the now in all its complexity" (Koepnick, 2014).

This chiasmatic link between past and present is exemplary for films about (post)war trauma. Aside from Lav Diaz's movies we can mention *Hamaca paraguaya* (2006) by Paz Encina. The shots of everyday duties are taken in full shot and are used alternately with the ones in long shot – two elders are sitting in a hammock, facing the camera. We hear their dialogue, revealing that they are waiting for their son who has never come back from the army (Paraguay has been torn apart by frequent coup d'etats and armed rebels of guerilla Paraguayan People's Army has started in 2005). The sound is superimposed on the image – they are disjunctive so significantly that sound seems unreal and coming from inside. This is accentuated by static take and distance between characters and camera. The audial sphere becomes closer to that of mental dialogue which is full of longing and the characters are blended into a green, jungle background. The prolongates expose deep layers of time. The rhythm and tension are created not by editing, but by an intense sense of lack and nostalgia. The film with its means of expressions becomes a tale about memory. The reduction of *mise-en-scène* and the use of static camera open the viewer to the content of the frame and, therefore, to the flowing time. A similar effect is achieved in *Corn Island* (2014) by George Ovashvili about Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, *The Forsaken Land* (2005) by Vimukthi Jayasundara about the civil war on Sri Lanka, and films by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (for example *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Re-*

call His Past Lives [2010] or *Cemetery of Splendor* [2015]) that can be interpreted as allegories about former wars in Thailand which haunt the present (Loska, 2019). This social perspective is supplemented by personal angle. The main character from *Vitalina Varela* (2019) by Pedro Costa travels on the border between past and present, life and death. After the death of her husband who abandoned her years ago, she moves from Cape Verde to Portugal. She inhabits her deceased spouse's house on the suburbs of Lisbon and shares every day with ghosts. Dark photos and almost baroque darkness all around her are the background of this nocturnal narrative in which the characters cannot and do not want to leave the past behind them. They are still living accompanied by the visions of their former life, now full of ghosts, grief, sorrow, longing and remorse.

If slow cinema discovers the present, it is not through epiphany or apology. Monotonous rhythm reveals cracks in which traumas and anxieties can be seen. Among these anxieties there is a place for dehumanizing routine and violent spaces. In *Sangre* by Amat Escalante, *Parque vía* (2008) by Enrique Rivero, *The Seventh Continent* (1989) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994) by Michael Haneke repeated actions are mechanical – there is spiritual and emotional void in their characters and in the world they are living in. People become automatons due to regular reproduction of particular gestures which is enforced by the capitalist system where belonging to a concrete social class is more important than the sense of community. This contemplative monotony is disrupted violently by the act of aggression in the end. The cruel ending is a logical consequence of systemic and individual, mental and physical violence because every diegesis is full of camouflaged oppressiveness and microaggressions. Exposing brutal truth about these worlds leads us to listen intently to the rhythm of previous takes – we seek its anomalies retroactively. This ostensible sameness is important in the context of time. The characters are imprisoned in it, the rhythm of everyday life is not chosen. Films emphasize malaise, apathy and daunting invincibility which make apparent that the change is impossible. Due to this hopelessness, the future vanishes – people are doomed to the present and the past. Directors who often show lives that are not meaningful are for example Tsai Ming-liang (*What Time Is It There?* [2001]) or Pedro Costa (*Colossal Youth* [2006]) – the characters in their films are not only alone but lonely in spite of living in big cities full of people. The metropolises are indifferent to them, and the passing of time highlights that contemporary acceleration is superficial.

When writing about *Los muertos* (2004) by Lisandro Alonso, Jacques Aumont notes: "there is nothing to see, nothing to figure out, time passes, shapeless, empty, unstructured. This idea of time is not new, of course, it partly comes from

video art, which practised these durational forms before the cinema did, but to transpose them to the universe of narrative cinema is a new sensation" (Aumont, 2017). This is why in slow cinema one can experience kinesthetic empathy (as Karen Pearlman calls it) – we are corporeally synchronized with the other through shared common temporality. Chronotopes of diegesis and embodied perception are coordinated and by that somatic resonance allow us to approach a different reality. Slow cinema engages spectators through time.

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Abstract

In her article, the author describes slow cinema as one of the most important tendencies in contemporary art-house cinema, simultaneously focusing on its temporal emanations. The text emphasizes the notion of rhythm and divides it into two subcategories: external and internal rhythm. The latter is close to the embodied experience, therefore it influences viewers affectively, as a somatic resonance. It enables a spectator's intensive engagement in slow films. The author's argumentation is based on rhythm research and existential phenomenology.

Key words: slow cinema, time, rhythm, embodiment

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Panoptikum 2021, 26:257-274 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.12

On the Margin of *Satantango*. Some Remarks on Slow Cinema

It is difficult to imagine a better film than Bela Tarr's "Satantango" to conclude this volume. This film, released in 1994, that is, at the treshold of cinematic postclassicism, epitomizes all tendencies that we regard as crucial to postclassical cinema and which therefore laid out the foundation to the structure of this volume. With its running time of over 7 hours, it is obviously a famous and proud representative of both slow and long cinema. But other principal categories used here also apply. Most evidently, it shares many traits with puzzle films. It is also a good example of impurity, that is hybridity, although of a more old-fashioned kind than the one which we describe here. Surprisingly, it also shares some characteristics with fast film, if by "fast" we understand films of action, which, I believe, is justified. So, "Satantango" definitely deserves the title of a multifaceted overarching cinematic king [masterpiece].

Affinities with puzzle films are perhaps the most evident. First of all, "Satantango" tinkers with time, and tinkering with time is perhaps the most distinct feature of puzzle films and, more generally, of cinema of the last 30 years. (Buckland, 2009, p.3, 6; Berg 2006). It has a circular structure, in which

subsequent episodes constantly loop back to the point of departure, and, as a result, some scenes appear twice, or even three times, presented from various angles. Time is a topic of conversations between the characters (e.g. between Irimias and Petrina at the Police station) and of reflections spinned by the narrator. Next, ”Satantango” is also a network narrative of sorts (for some researchers network narratives are a sub-genre of puzzle films – Koschany, 2017), especially in its first part. We follow at least 5 protagonists or groups of protagonists (Futaki and the Schmidts; Irimias and Petrina; the doctor; Estike; Halics, the barman and Kerekes in the pub), who seem to live independent lives and whose paths criss-cross unexpectedly at some points. Gradually it turns out that actions take place within a common milieu and time scheme and the story world is populated by people bound by blood, love, desire or a common place of work, which fulfils the characteristics of this sub-genre provided by David Bordwell (2008, p. 201, 203). Incidentally, Bordwell also mentions a package of network narrative devices ”that later filmmakers would retool: repeated scenes, titles that split the film into chapters, and a covert rendering of time that makes the audience gasp when they see the stories mesh” (2008, p. 197). This description matches ”Satantango” perfectly, but it actually refers to another film also released in 1994: Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp-fiction*, which is often regarded as a turning point from which the postclassical cinema started (Berg, 2006).[1] ”Satantango” has also one more trait which – albeit not discussed in this volume – usually is associated with puzzle films, namely – unreliable narration. In its classical form, clearly visible in such classics of this form as *Stage Fright* (dir Alfred Hitchcock, 1950), *The Usual Suspects* (1995, dir. Bryan Singer), *The Game* (1997, dir. David Fincher), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, dir. M. Nigh Shymalan), *Fight Club* (1999, dir. David Fincher), *Memento* (2000, dir. Christopher Nolan), *A Beautiful Mind* (2001, dir. Ron Howard), *Donnie Darko* (2001, dir. Richard Kelly), *The Others* (2001, dir Alejandro Amenábar), *El Maquinista* (2004, dir. Brad Anderson), what we reckon to be real turns out to be either a fraud or the product of a sick imagination, and ”the viewer is misled because the subjective status of the presented events is not revealed. It is only the final plot twist that reveals that what was taken to be reality is the result of not even the “subjectification” but the “subjectivity” of presentation from the perspective of a character” (Ostaszewski, 2021,). This is exactly what happens inTarr's film: what we reckoned to be objective reality – however un-

[1] By the way, it is interesting how many devices which are commonly associated with post-classical cinema had their roots in Central and Eastern Europe: slow cinema and Tarkovsky (according to Paul Schrader slow cinema started with this Russian director); forking path narratives and Kieślowski's *Blind Chance*; stories told backward and *Happy End* (1967) by Oldrich Lipsky; hybridity of animation and live action in Karel Zeman films from the 50s and 60s).

typically told – in the end turns out to be a literary creation of one character, the doctor. At the same time the burden of this morbid reality didn't disappear, so ”Satantango” achieves perhaps the most valuable form of unreliable narration: an effect of uncertainty and ambiguity, where we can't be sure, what is ”real” and what has been imagined. ”Satantango” is also an impure film, in the form that Andre Bazin had in mind when he wrote his famous essay on impure cinema, i.e. the form of adaptation of literature. This film, an adaptation of a novel under the same title written by Laszlo Krasznahorkai, is indebted in its literary source probably more than usual. Relations between the director and the writer are really profound – all Tarr's films after ”Damnation”, that is, after the film in which Tarr established his own, unique and recognizable style – have been based on Krasznahorkai's novels. It is very unusual, I don't know any other case like that. ”Satantango” the film is a very faithful adaptation of the novel. It faithfully depicts all characters, it retains almost all events and their order and it uses some bits of dialogue. Moreover, it copies the novel structure, with a division into chapters, titled identically in the novel and the film. Almost every chapter in the film is concluded with a fragment of the novel, spoken by an off-screen narrator. And, obviously, the messages or general meanings overlap. So, ”Satantango” is a perfect example of hybridity, in which two media combine and work together to produce a work of art.

Most astonishingly in the case of the film which is universally regarded as the embodiment of slow cinema, ”Satangango” also shares some common points with fast cinema. If, as is commonly believed slow cinema is a cinema in which ”nothing happens”, then this description certainly can't be applied to ”Satantango”, for this film abounds in events, often extremely dramatic. Most deeds in this film are sinful, and it is well known that nothing fares as well as sins in the cinema of action. Satantango, a film about Satan dancing in the remote Hungarian desert, can be regarded as a cinematic display of the seven deadly sins. All of them – pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony and sloth – are illustrated appropriately in this film. In less elevated terms, we can easily find in this film such traits of traditional genre cinema as violence, promiscuity, betrayal, police infiltration, and a tear-jerking story of an abandoned child. So, if a fast film is a film full of sensational events, than ”Satantango” fully deserves this name.

However, it is obviously only fast, hybrid and puzzle in a limited sense. Above of all it is a leading representative of slow cinema.

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I have seen ”Satantango” twice. The first time was in the cinema – over 7 hours of screening time, with just one half-hour break in the middle. The film moved me deeply, but I equally felt physically exhausted and fatigued, with pain in my bottom and stiffness in my body. The second viewing was analitical, at home, from a three-disc DVD set bought in London. Once in a while I stopped, rewound, took notes, referred to Krasznahorkai's book, took breaks. It took me three days to watch the whole movie. Certainly, this second viewing was more viewer-friendly, more efficient in grasping many tiny details that had previously escaped my attention, and probably also more satisfying aesthetically, for thanks to the breaks I could avoid fatigue and the numbing of my body and psyche and watch the film with maximum acuteness. And yet, it is this first kind of watching which is proper to slow cinema. Bodily fatigue, numbness of the senses, dwindling cognitive capacity in the course of the screening, all this forms the core viewer's experience of slow cinema.

At the same time, this is certainly not what most people go to the movies for, so it is easy to agree with Paul Schrader when he asserts that slow cinema ”works against the grain of cinema itself. It turns its back on what movies do best. It replaces action with stillness, empathy with distance.” (2018, loc. 383). Schrader's view seems to be almost commonsensical. Many people are bewildered by slow cinema. Most cinema goers simply ignore it, and even those that find some pleasure in it, often try to discern, understand and explain their reactions. Paul Schrader belongs to them. He describes his way of perceiving a slow film (Bruno Dumond's *Humanity*) in the following words:”So what does the spectator do? Well, look at those clouds — the sun has moved, the shadows have changed. What's that sound? Is it a car coming? If so, on which road? The sound passes — no car, but now the goats have moved. Some have left the frame. Will they come back? Oh, look, the sun has reappeared — new cloud patterns. Some goats have returned. Is that a plane overhead? And still the man is only halfway across the screen. (This is an exaggerated example of the opening shot of Bruno Dumont's *Humanity* [1999], which watches a distant character cross the horizon in the upper quadrant of the screen for a minute and twenty seconds. What is happening here? A new movie is being created. A simultaneous movie. The spectator's movie. Bazin scholars describe this as “the democracy of the eye” — given opportunity, the eye will explore. The film-maker has forced the viewer to enjoy the narrative process, creating his or her own narrative. The two films overlap: the director's tableau and the spectator's meditations on that tableau.” (loc. 420). This description of a viewer's activity resembles an old Boris Eichen-

baum's concept of internal speech. According to Eikhenbaum "perception and comprehension of a film are inseparably linked with the formation of an internal speech which links the separate shots together" (Eikhenbaum, p. 13) (although it is worth mentioning, that in his concept the principal aim of silent monologue spun by the viewer is to support the editing by making sense of separate shots combined together). Whether or not we spin such a verbal monologue when watching a film is another issue. What is essential in Schrader's account is the nature of his internal speech. It is very closely attached to what is going on on the screen. It gives names to the objects and events, asks questions about particular actions and tries to answer them. Perhaps it is a personal matter, but this account certainly does not overlap with my way of watching a film, for I never produce verbal descriptions for what I see on the screen, regardless of the kind of film I am watching. But watching a slow film has its specificity. I would call it a two-channel perception. On the one hand, I see what is on the screen. I don't have to name it verbally, I simply see it and I know what I am watching. At one point, when I already know and understand what is out there, and what is out there remains on the screen, much longer than is necessary to recognize objects and actions, my thoughts begin to wander, and some shreds of thoughts traverse a field of my consciousness. Slow cinema is commonly regarded as a kind of meditative enterprise, and watching a slow film reminds me of my experience in meditation. When I tried to learn to meditate (unfortunately, with rather limited success), one of the instructions I was given was to "empty my mind". I tried to empty my mind, to think of nothing, obviously in vain, for it is well known that the best way to think all the time about a blue elephant is to forbid oneself to think about it. So, I tried to empty my mind, not to think, and, as a result, various usually disconnected thoughts constantly floated through my mind. Exactly the same happens when I watch a slow film: I watch what is going on, and at the same time, many disconnected thoughts, reflections, impressions, float through my mind. Sometimes one of them becomes more prominent and occupies my mind a bit longer, but usually they dissolve, disappear, giving way to other thoughts, some stretches of non-thinking, or to the moments when something happens on the screen and absorbs my attention. What is essential, though, and what makes my account so different from Schrader's, is that this mental activity, although triggered by film images and sound, is only vaguely connected to them, is in essence about **something different** than the objects and actions on the screen.

Another researcher who tried to answer the question of what attracts people to something so boring as slow films is Andras Balint Kovacs in his book on Bela Tarr. Kovacs didn't provide such a phenomenological description of his reactions as Schrader, but presented some theses concerning them.

According to Kovács, ”The most basic effect of a long-take shot is the imitation of the continuity of the human gaze, especially when it is associated with a moving camera, which it mostly is. (…) In consequence, all kinds of long takes create in the viewer some feeling of participating in the space viewed. The participatory effect is enhanced by the movement of the camera during a long take, as it provides the sensation of moving about in the space, the spectator discovering the space together with the camera; and it can be attenuated by static camerawork, which gives the spectator the impression that he or she is staring at a scene, looking at it from an outside point of view, rather than being involved in it. (…) Either way, **the long take is always more anthropomorphic than short takes and discontinuous changes of angle.** [emphasis: MP]”. (Kovács, 2013, p. 50). Kovács admits that the matter is controversial and quotes two opposing views. The film critic Scott Foundas ”feels that with the long takes in *Satantango* Tarr ‘is really sort of immersing you in this world… It really is like you're living in these spaces.’ David Bordwell on the contrary emphasises the distancing effect of the same long takes: ‘I don't really see myself as complicit. I do see that it is about dignity, but it is almost an observation from a rather detached standpoint.” (50).

I must say that I have serious doubts concerning Kovacs' stance. First of all, I doubt if a human gaze is continuous. There are many elements of discontinuity on a purely physical level: we blink, sleep, shut our eyes. What is more important, the mechanism of human attention makes our gaze discontinuous: we lose interest in one thing and we move our attention to another one, which is similar rather to the process of editing than to an unedited long take. This was noticed, interestingly, very early, no later than in 1916, by Hugo Munsterberg, in his book on cinema. Moreover, the whole of Kovács's reasoning resembles Andre Bazin's claim that ”Composition in depth means that the spectators' relationship with the image is closer to what they have with reality. It is then true to say that quite independently of the actual content of the image its structure is more realistic.” (Bazin,). Apart from depth of field, Bazin also advocated for long takes, for, as John Gibbs and Douglas Pye rightly state, for him ”staging in depth and extended duration are intertwined” (Gibbs, Pye, 2017, p. 2). The form of argumentation is identical: a long take resembles the way we perceive reality, and therefore in its structure (that is, independently of content) is more realistic. The same idea lies behind the contradictory reactions of Foundas and Bordwell. For one of them long take immerses the viewer in a film world, for the second one it rather alienates, but both critics base their assessement on a purported similarity of a long take to a person's ordinary perception of reality. Yet, I seriously doubt if long takes really resemble human perception. Staring at a static shot for a long

time, in which the camera doesn't move and "nothing happens", is a big challenge for most people, and demands special training in meditation. A human being is wired to constantly process information and stimuli, so a situation in which one receives neither information nor stimuli is unbearable and resembles well-known psychological experiments in sensory deprivation, in which people deprived of all stimuli quickly resigned despite good renumeration. So, mimicking a limitation of stimuli on the screen does not make the perception of the film more akin to "regular" human perception. On the contrary – this kind of perception is so very far from regular human perception that it is justified to call it inhuman.

The situation is not much better when the camera moves, but for a different reason. This time it is not the deprivation of stimuli which makes them inhuman, but the nature of movement. Famous long takes from popular films, which follow intense and very often improbable actions (like the 4-minute long opening shot from "Spectre") are evidently beyond the range of human experience, because nobody is able first to discern a man in the crowd from a high vantage point, then to descend and follow a couple of people through a hotel lobby, an elevator and a corridor to a room when the romantic action starts, then to follow the man who unexpectedly leaves his partner, exits the room through the window, goes along a narrow cornice (seen again from above) and jumps on the roof of an adjacent building. Paul Schrader rightly stated that these "fancy out-the-door-down-the-street long takes (…are little different than conventional film coverage", even though they run long in screen time (loc. 208), but the same concerns much less dramatic camerawork from slow movies. For example, Tarr films are famous for long scenes when we see people walking. The camera sometimes moves in front of them, as if going backwards, sometimes moves behind them, sometimes moves on one side, on a parallel track, and sometimes combines these movements. Most of them are actually unimaginable for the normal person, so they cannot be regarded as an imitation of human perception. Nobody is able to go backwards for a long time looking at the people who are following them. Likewise, nobody is able to go sideways for many metres, accompanying people who are going forward. Even the movement which at first glance seems to be relatively easy to achieve, that is, following behind an object, in practice is rare, for we only rarely follow a person or group of people for many minutes, the way that the camera follows Irimias and Petrina several times pacing empty roads in long strides. The same can even be said about shots which at first glance do not contain anything which is not easily attainable by regular human perception. Let's look at a scene that is over 4 minutes long from the first part of "Satantango", in which Futaki and Schmidt divide money. It is filmed in one shot, and this shot is part of a much longer shot, that is over nine minutes long, and

includes 4 scenes (1. Futaki and Schmidt talk about money and decide to divide it; 2. Mrs Schmidt leaves the room to talk with a neighbour who knocked on the door; 3. Mrs Schmidt comes back and shares the news with Schmidt and Futaki: Irimias and Petrina are coming; 4. Mrs Schmidt leaves for the pub, Futaki sits down and stares.) The camera makes slow, elaborate movements, basically combining tracking, panning and zooming. Sometimes it follows the action, sometimes it doesn't. It starts from a sidelong close-up of Futaki, with a small part of Schmidt's face in the frame. Then the camera slowly tracks towards Futaki (Schmidt's face disappears), goes around Futaki's head (we see a big ear), than pans from behind, so that we can see the back of Futaki's head, Schmidt in front of him and his wife behind him. Then the camera goes back, so that we can see Schmidt's big profile. They start to divide the money, so the camera tracks and zooms in on the money divided into two even heaps, next it leaves the money (which is still being divided) and basically repeats the first move, going slowly behind Futaki's head and panning so that Schmidt's appears again. Although this scene contains neither ”impossible” points of view nor movements which couldn't be done by a human being, it is extremely difficult to imagine anyone who would behave in this way, wandering very slowly from one man to another and then back, peering into the ear of one interlocutor, moving closer to the money and then repeating the route that he pursued before. It does not look like regular human behaviour.

As an aside: an issue of ”naturalness” of camerawork, that is a conviction that the camerawork imitates human perception, was tackled by David Bordwell in his article ”Convention, Construction, and Cinematic Vision” (2008). Bordwell limited his analysis to only one device – a shot/reverse shot. He rejected a natural position, according to which the device ”offers a kind of equivalent for ordinary vision” (58). This position is untenable, because the shot/reverse shot is ”in several respects quite unfaithful to perceptual experience”, has ”no analogous experience in real life”, for ”no single individual could view a scene in this way in real life.” Bordwell lists differences between real life perception of a conversation and its filmic depiction by means of a standard formula of shot/reverse shot, and this list resembles in character what I have done above. Bordwell also rejects an oppositional stance, according to which a shot/reverse shot is purely conventional, and chooses ”a middle way between two positions” (60). This middle way is based on contingent universals, ”practices and propensities that arise in and through human activities. (…) Neither wholly ”natural” nor wholly ”cultural”, these sorts of contingent universals are good candidates for being at least partly responsible for ”naturalness” of artistic conventions” (61). In other words, contingent universals – that is certain elements of real life situations – are picked up and used as a base

for an artistic device. In the case of shot / reverse shot situations these contingent universals are frontal, face to face positions of interlocutors, eyeline matches and turn taking. ”In a metaphorical sense, the prototype of a shot/reverse shot is constructed out of such contingent universals: It is a refined elaboration of them, a piece of artifice serving cultural and aesthetic purposes” (69).

I certainly sympathise with Bordwell when he rejects the Pudovkinian concept of an ”invisible observer” (”We shouldn't think of this camera position as providing the view of an observer, either realistic or ideal. (…) It is not necessary to posit the device as creating an invisible observer. (68)”. I have some reservations concerning the partial anthropomorphization of a filmic device in the form of ”contingent universals”, but above all I seriously doubt if they can be easily applied to long takes in slow cinema. A shot / reverse shot is after all based on the very common situation of a conversation between two people. I don't see such a firm base in the case of long takes in slow cinema. In other words, I can't elicit ”contingent universals” which would ”naturalise” or ”anthropomorphise” them. Kovacs would probably find these contingent universals in the continuity of a human gaze and in the act of ”discovering the space”, but for me both these arguments are doubtful for, as I have mentioned before, it seems quite obvious to me that the human gaze is discontinuous and fragmentary, and that camera movement in slow films does not resemble the ordinary way humans move and discover the space. Therefore I find the concept of dehumanisation much more accurate regarding slow films. And it is tempting to refer here to Ortega y Gassset's classical essay on dehumanisation, as for this Spanish thinker dehumanisation is proper to the high art, whereas anthropomorphization is characteristic to popular art. And although it is inappropriate nowadays to juxtapose high and popular art, it is hard to deny that slow cinema is the antithesis of the popular one.

So, neither of the two quoted accounts about the viewer of slow cinema seems convincing to me. Schrader's account, according to which the viewer names objects and actions that he or she sees on the screen by means of internal speech does not overlap with my experience when watching a slow film, for my internal speech does not follow what I see, but wanders freely, escaping from what I currently see on the screen rather than clinging to it. Kovacs's account seems plainly wrong to me , for I find the concept of anthropomorphic camera strongly far-fetched in general, and particularly with regard to long takes and slow cinema. I am not sure if slow films can be regarded as anthropomorphic, but if they can, it is not because of the camera placement but because of a quite different phenomenon which is common to both slow films and human beings: the rhythm.

Humans are rhythmic creatures, and slow films (and Satantango in particular) are full of repetitive devices which make the rhythm tangible: footsteps, blowing wind, dripping water, bells ringing, diegetic and extradiegetic music, human speech, everyday routines, and many more. As Marta Stańczyk rightly notes, this rhythm ”is not subjugated to outside factors (editing measurements), but interior ones” (Stańczyk, 2021, p ??). That rhythm pulsates between the screen and the viewer's body, ”is the way to discover signs of embodiment in a text” (??). At the same time, suspension of perception, achieved through its dehumanisation, ”reveals the dynamics which link humans with the immanent matter all around them” (??). If a slow film works, it is because it corresponds to the viewer's internal rhythms, and it works only for those who can feel that correspondence.

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It is not very elegant to quote oneself, but I hope that this time it is justifiable. In 1985 I published an article on the evolution of the length of film take (Przylipiak, 1985) in which I questioned the view (rooted in Bazinian legacy) that the usage of long takes enhances realism. In this article I wrote: ”Prolonging the duration of perception over a span necessary to gain basic orientation, motivated by an urge to achieve realism, authenticity, full depiction of reality, brings about an unexpected effect: we start to feel an oddity and strangeness about well-known objects. The phenomenon of photogenia, described so many times, returns, but this time not as a characteristic of photography, but as an unexpected result of the prolonged duration of the shot. (…) A shot length has undergone an unexpected evolution. At first it was dependent on the dramatic potential of events. Next a shot was freed from this dependency under the banner of authenticity, realism and a faithful registration of reality, only to achieve a point in which a prolonged duration has become a means of expression of extreme forms of cinema of creation. (…) In recent years a shot duration has become a means of expression which has fully revealed potentialities of film art, which hitherto were known only in embryonic form: emancipation of the rhythm; sculpting in space; sculpting in time.” (24, 25, 26).

Today I would confirm what I wrote in that article, but with the provision that it is not the shot length that has undergone an evolution, but rather its conceptualisation. Anyway, prolonging shot length does not produce a reality effect; on the contrary, it produces a peculiar kind of verfremdung effect, the impression that people, objects and places are strange. It is because prolonging shot length is at odds with the natural mechanisms of attention proper to human beings. Also, a use of the Bazinian authority to support the idea that prolonging shot length

enhances reality effect is misleading. Bazin did advocate for an inseparable tandem of long takes and deep focus, but not simply because it enhances surface realism, but because thanks to it, as Jacques Aumont rightly stated, ”we have the sense of being placed before the enigma of reality” (Aumont, 2014, p. 28, 29; Gibbs, Pye, p. 3). Bazin's thinking was tinted by something which Hannah Arendt called a Platonian bite, with what is characteristic of it – the division of reality into a mere visible surface and invisible depth, where value is due only to the latter. It is clearly visible in his wordings. Murnau through a long take/deep focus tandem ”strives to bring out the deeper structure of reality, to reveal pre-existent relationships”; for Flaherty ”the duration of the hunt becomes the very substance and object of the image”. In Stroheim's work ”reality admits its meaning like a suspect”; Renoir is ”revealing the hidden meaning of human beings and their environment”. And, crème de la crème, among the three ”propositions” which summarize his classical paper on the evolution of film language, the third one is ”metaphysical”, which extends beyond physical, tangible reality. True, for Bazin all elements of the puzzle fitted nicely to each other. A long take/deep focus tandem enabled reality effect which in turn paved the way to metaphysics. He didn't realize that long takes produce not so much reality effect as rather verfremdung effect, presumably because at that time long takes were relatively short after all and they hadn't revealed their full potential yet.

But, I think, this verfremdung effect is neither the goal nor the termination point of slow films. On the contrary – it is only a portal through which we can see an object or an image anew, in a new light, or – perhaps – we can see through it. Bazin in the abovementioned quotes lists ”deeper structure of reality”, ”the very substance and object of the image”, ”hidden meaning of human beings and their environment”. In this article from 1985 I also analysed three long takes from three films: ”Face to Face” by Ingmar Bergman, ”Hungarian Rhapsody” by Miklos Jancso and ”Stalker” by Andrej Tarkovsky. In each of them I found a propensity to reveal some higher order which shows through images of people, objects and events. And I found it evident that this is a long take which is not functional with regard to narrative necessities (that is – which does not follow the action), that enables the viewer to see through images, to discover some essence of reality which lies behind or beneath the surface. I mentioned three kinds of such ”behind or beneath”: subconsciousness (Bergman), still rules which petrify reality (Jancso), and some sort of religious entity (Bergman, Tarkovsky). I would like to focus on this last option now, for a connection between long takes and religious feelings has been noted many times. Many film directors who are regarded as representatives of transcendental cinema, that is the cinema which evokes some sort of religious ex-

perience, have used prolonged takes coupled with limited action. It is enough to mention Bresson, Ozu, Bergman, Tarkowski, Kieślowski, Dumond. One reason for that can be a structural affinity between long takes and some forms of religious activity. Monotonous, rhythmic passages devoid of information, which rely on multiple repetition of the same content, are characteristic both to slow cinema and some forms of worship, like Buddhist mantra or Catholic hours. It means that this is a way to induce a religious experience.

Another explanation for the religious potential of slow films can be drawn from Gilles Deleuze, or, strictly speaking, from Henri Bergson, appropriated to film theory by Gilles Deleuze. The division of cinema into two forms, that of movement-image and of time-image is known all too well, but what is perhaps not so well known and definitely underestimated is that this division reflects a division between two extreme forms of human neural activity described by Bergson in his "Memory and Matter". At one end all living organisms, including humans, simply react to stimuli from the external world. Bergson compares the human psyche to a telephone switchboard: its only function is to switch a stimulus over to a reaction [to make a connection between a stimulus and a reaction]. The human psyche, like a switchboard, adds nothing out of itself, it only connects stimuli and reactions, it is overwhelmed by practical tasks imposed by conditions of living. At the other extreme the human psyche seems to be completely disconnected from the requirements of practical life, and is dominated by free-wandering memories devoid of practical purposes. This is the world of dreamers. Between these extreme points there are some intermediate points in which actions and memories merge in various proportions, but they are beyond our scope. One end, that of the "switchboard" metaphor, corresponds to movement-image cinema. Its basic mechanism is a sensor-motor connection (a term, by the way, which is borrowed straight from Berson), that is, a connection between a received stimulus and an action. The other end, disconnected from the requirements of practical life, corresponds to Deleuzian time-image cinema, based on a pure optical and audio situation, a cinematic equivalent of Bergsonian free-wandering memories. This one-to-one correspondence of Bersonian and Deleuzian thinking is striking. But Deleuze cuts the Bergsonian argument short, depriving it of a spiritual dimension, which is central (crucial) to Bergson. For Deleuze, liberation of images from the necessity of action, a passage from the sensorimotor process to pure optical or sound situations, brings about an intellectual potential of cinema. For Bergson, a passage from perception to memory, that is, a liberation from the necessities of life and from a stimulus-reaction switchboard leads towards spirituality: "[A]s long as we confine ourselves to sensation and to pure perception, we can hardly be said to be dealing with the spirit. (…) But to touch

the reality of spirit we must place ourselves at the point where an individual consciousness (…) escapes the law of necessity (…) When we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit." (Bergson, 1911, p. 95). So, if our equations – of Bergsonian "pure perception", that is a perception which triggers the stimulus-reaction mechanism, with Deleuzian movement – image cinema, and of Bergsonian pure memory, liberated from a switchboard logic, with Deleuzian time-image cinema – if these equations hold, it is reasonable to assert, on the basis of Bergson's authority, that time-image cinema paves the way to spirituality. And no form of cinema fits the Deleuzian description of time-image cinema better than slow cinema. In that way a combination of Bersonian and Deleuzian arguments corroborates the remarks noted above about an affinity between slow cinema and spirituality.

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It is surprising that such a consummate critic and researcher as Andras Balint Kovacs in his insightful book on Bela Tarr practically passes over religion and spirituality in silence. It is surprising, because Tarr films after "Damnation" abound in religious themes and motives. Religious connotations are obvious in the very titles, such as "Damnation" or "Satantango"; "Turin's horse" tells the story of the end of the world, with numerous references to the Revelation of St John the Divine; also Friedrich Nietsche, mentioned at the beginning of the film, is entangled in religious discourse. "Satantango" is also full of religious references. Some of them lie on the surface, conveyed by names, characters, events. Apart from the film's title, to this group belongs the name of one of the principal characters, treacherous Irimias, which refers to Jeremiah, the prophet, accused by his people of treason and stoned to death. Religiosity is the most evident trait of another character, Mrs. Halics, who likes to quote the Bible and assesses other people through the biblical prism. As far as the events are concerned, the story of Estike, a poor, rejected and abused child, who decides to commit suicide has the strongest religious connotations. Her story, full of traumas and humiliation, can bring to mind the story of Jesus Christ, and is presented as such by Irimias in his speech delivered in front of the pub. Moreover, Estike herself, after having decided to commit suicide, uses Christian imagery, thinks of heaven and angels. True, Tarr alleviates some religious motives which are very strong in Krasznahorkai's novel. Most evidently this applies to the scene in Weinkheim Palace, where Irimias, Petrina and Sanyi, early in the morning, exhausted after a nightlong walk, see the body of Estike (who they put into a coffin the day before), lying calmly in a forest clearing, and then soaring upwards and disappearing into the clouds. Afterwards a discussion full of religious connotations ensues in the

novel, and the chapter is concluded with the prayer ”Our Father” murmured by Petrina. In the film Estike’s body is not there at all, just fog and Irimias kneeling in awe; no discussion abounds in religious connotations, and no prayer at the end. So, Tarr, generally faithful to the novel, alleviated its religious dimensions by skipping some (but not all) of the most evidently religious parts. On the other hand, however, he strengthened the religious dimension of this story, not in terms of the content, that is characters, events and words, but in terms of the form, though formal elements that are often regarded as ones which can evoke transcendental states in the viewer.

According to Amedee Ayfre, a French theologian and cinema lover, perhaps the biggest authority in the field of religious cinema (Marczak, 2000, p. 26), an evocation of religious (transcendental?) states in the viewer requires a combination of two contradictory factors. On the one hand, a film must be faithful to reality. As Mariola Marczak puts it, interpreting Ayfre’s concept, ”Faithfulness to reality is necessary, if we want to show something which lies beyond its borders. We can see only traces, and traces require a material, physical base – a reality” (26). On the other hand, reality ”must be somehow deformed, stylised, if we want to make visible those of its aspects which transgress humanity, if we want to emphasise transcendence (…). Stylisation forces reality to excavate a ”wonder” from its depth without losing anything from the burden of a real world” (26). This is exactly what happens in ”Satantango”. Its world is real to the point of naturalism, with its filth, mud and decay. The way it is depicted, an inhuman style of presentation, allows to see traces, to ”see through” instead of ”looking at”. Ayfre distinguishes two modes which evoke a religious experience, namely, ”style of transcendence” and ”style of incarnation”. Satantango definitely belongs to the latter. In Marczak’s words, ”its essence is in showing human existence in a radical way. (…) Some forms of human experience are especially predisposed to make people realise the dimensions of reality they try to forget about. Life and death, good and evil, sex and blood belong to this experience”(29). Incarnation style can also be implemented by showing a lack, absence, void and by using ellipses. In Tarr’s film we can easily find all these things, and the way ellipses are used merits special attention. Obviously, a recognition of this religious potential is possible only on the condition of special ”tuning in” by the viewer, and what enables it is certainly a correspondence between the film’s rhythm and an internal rhythm of the viewer. ”Satantango” also overlaps with Paul Schrader’s depiction of transcendental style. A crucial feature of this style is a rejection of attractions, such as sensational and spectacular events, expressivity or psychological acting. Schrader calls them ”screens”, for they act as barriers which separate the viewer from the essence of reality. Riveting the attention of the audience to the

surface of reality, they don't allow to see the supernatural character. "By delaying edits, not moving the camera, forswearing music cues, not employing coverage, and heightening the mundane, transcendental style creates a sense of unease the viewer must resolve." (Schrader, 2018, loc. 119). As Mariola Marczak puts it in her interpretation of Schrader's text, the rejection of the "screens" transfers the viewer's attention from superficial events to an internal drama. Emotional engagement in the events must be blocked, because it distracts the viewer and pulls her away from the main subject of the film – that is, the drama of the spirit (Marczak, 2000, p. 36). This is exactly what happens in "Satantango" and many other slow films. Although, as already mentioned, this film abounds in many dramatic and even drastic events, the inhuman form of presentation, a dehumanisation in an Ortega y Gasset sense, blocks standard mechanisms of empathy/identification and opens the gate to transcendental states of mind.

Schrader also depicts two pillars of transcendental style: disparity and stasis. Disparity, "an actual or potential disunity between man and his environment," (loc. 120) "a growing crack in the dull surface of everyday reality" (loc. 120), reveals a paradox of spirituality embedded in matter. This effect can be achieved, among others, by doubling elements of everyday life. It is expressed not only by repeating the same or similar activities, situations, sounds, but also by the multiplication of presented reality. Here, too, Bela Tarr's films provide exemplary cases, such as the "Turin Horse", which is entirely based on the repetition of mundane, everyday activities. "Satantango" is not that extreme, but still abounds in repetitions of activities, gestures, verbal phrases, positions and movements of the camera. And, also, due to its network structure, the presented reality is multiplied, by means of repetitions of exactly the same scenes in subsequent episodes.

Stasis is "the end product of transcendental style", "a frozen view of life which does not resolve the disparity but transcends it" (loc 1367), an incredible unexplicable spiritual action in a cold environment, which entails "an acceptance of parallel reality – transcendence. (…) [T]he psyche, squeezed by untenable disparity, breaks free to another plane" (Schrader, loc. 119). Technically, stasis is "a frozen view", a static image, often – but not always – accompanied by elevated music, which follows a decisive moment, a culmination of disparity and a spiritual drama which ensues from it. "Satantango" abounds in shots of this kind, shots of frozen realities, which come at the end of each episode. And although we should remember Schrader's warning that "decisive actions and final stasis shots are not exclusive to transcendental style" (loc. 1414), that they actually appear in many films which utilize parts of the transcendental style, but are not concerned with the Transcendent (loc. 1423), I would take the risk to suggest that stasis in

this film comes at the final part of the chapter entitled ”Spider Function II”. This chapter follows the chapter entitled ”Comes Unstitched”, which shows the most tragic event in the whole film, Estike's story, which Kovacs rightly regards as the 'master story' of the first part of the film (Kovacs, 126). So, Estike's story would be – in Schrader's terms – ”a decisive moment”, and the aforementioned final part of ”Spider Function II”, where all characters, exhausted after long night of boozing and dancing, lie motionless on tables and benches, and only spiders do their job – fulfils the technical description of stasis. True, in Schrader's terms stasis is also a point of catharsis and ascendant movement to the Transcendent. There is not and cannot be a catharsis in *Satantango*, because this film embodies a variant which Amedee Ayfre calls the satanic sacrum, it reveals evil, so instead of ascending towards the Transcendent, we descend into hell. It is not without reason that spiders are so important in this part, as they symbolise a shadow and satanic powers, and they come from under the wooden floor. It is also meaningful that Mrs Schmidt in one moment kneels down and smells the floor and proclaims that she can smell the odour of the earth.

The transcendental potential of ”Satantango” is also enhanced by other traits which were mentioned at the beginning of this paper and which tint this film with some flavours of film types characteristic of modern, postclassical cinema. Most evidently, it concerns its ”networkish” structure. As David Bordwell rightly noted, ”many network films thematically counterpose accident to destiny (…). Along with the aesthetic pleasure of seeing unconnected events fall into a pattern, many viewers may feel reassured that Chance is just God's way of seeming anonymous. A social psychologist has suggested that many people find the idea of ”six degrees of separation” comforting, because it can be interpreted as a mysterious design, the sign of some spiritual order guiding our lives.” (Bordwell, 2008, p. 213, 214). While it would be extremely difficult to call ”Satantango” comforting, it is only because it expresses ”satanic sacrum”, and the very idea that it can guide our lives seems terrifying. Terrifying as it is, it is enhanced by the sinful character of most deeds in this film, which brings to mind fast films.

Certainly, not all slow films engender religious or transcendental feelings and experiences, but this genre has a special proclivity for that, which can be easily triggered when other factors cohere. This is the case of *Satantango*.

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Abstract

Athough *Satantango* by Bela Tarr is usually regarded as a perfect representative of slow cinema and certainly deserves this reputation, it is worth remembering that it shares some features with other currents of modern cinema. Its networkish structure and unreliable narration place it close to puzzle films; its close affinity with the Krasznahorkai novel, on which it is based, makes it a form of impure – that is – hybrid cinema; due to an accumulation of evil deeds, tragic and sensational events, it resembles films of action. But, first of all, it is a paramount example of slow cinema, and as such it enables one to grasp the essential features of this genre. According to certain views, often built on the foundation of Andre Bazin theory, slow cinema imitates natural human perception and therefore is inherently realistic. This is not true, though. Instead of a reality effect, slow cinema produces rather a verfremdung effect, which in turn enhances the big potential of slow cinema in inducing transcendental or religious states in a viewer's mind. *Satantango* explores this potential, drawing on the religious connotations of Krasznahorkai novel.

Key words: Satantango, slow cinema, discontinuity, anthropocentric gaze, verfremdung effect

Panoptikum 2021, 26:275-285 https://doi.org/10.26881/pan.2021.26.13

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The Yugoslav imaginary of Marko Vidojkovic in the novel *E baš vam hvala.*

In 1991, after the declaration of independence, first by Slovenia and then by Croatia, the SFR Yugoslavia practically ceased to exist. The dramatic disintegration of the federation and its long-term political, economic and social consequences brought about natural questions: could it have been otherwise? Did Yugoslavia have to fall apart? And also: what if history had turned out differently? The latter seems to be answered by Marko Vidojković in his novel *E baš vam hvala* (*Thanks a lot*) (Vidojković, 2017), in which he projects an alternative vision of the history of Yugoslavia. A novel that escapes unambiguous genological classifications, and therefore requires consideration in the context of close, though not identical, literary genres: science fiction and alternative histories.

Considerations on the possible, but never existing, course of historical events do not constitute a new phenomenon in literature. After all, as Natalia Lemann points out, projections of variants of history alternative to extra-literary reality appear in ancient texts (Lemann, 2016: 86). Nevertheless, alternative stories as a literary genre, usually situated in the genological framework of fantasy literature, long remained outside the mainstream of literary studies. Yet the question:

What if? is one of the most common ones that a person sets for themself, not only in relation to their own individual fate, but also to the community to which they belong, both on a local and global level (Wąsowicz 2016: 93). This alternative scenario of the life of (post) Yugoslav society is proposed by Marko Vidojković in his novel, which brings it closer to the genre framework of alternative histories. In her definition of the genre, Natalia Lemann lists its essential features:

> (…) It is a genre of fictional, speculative prose, the plot of which takes place in a world where historical events took a different course than in reality. Thus, alternative histories creatively develop probabilistic speculations by answering the "what if" question. The mechanism of alternative histories consists in showing different variants of the course of the historical process which, although possible, did not come true. (...) The species principle is the so-called POD, *point of divergence*, i.e. an event initiating the divergence of official and factual history with virtual history. (...) The author of alternative stories, choosing the moment at which the paths of history diverged, has to plot the consequences resulting from a different course of events. (...) Alternative stories are as much based on the past as they are on the present, being a resultant of social and political news.(Lemann, 2012: 380-388 in Wąsowicz 2016: 94)

In the novel *E baš vam hvala*, socialist Yugoslavia not only does not fall apart, but by 2017, when the novel takes place, has achieved the status of a world superpower, military, economic and technological power similar to modern China. The turning point, the novel's *point of divergence*, with which the alternative course of history begins, is the date June 3, 1989, when the leaders of all the Yugoslav republics die as a result of a tragic air accident. This is how the main character of the novel, Mirko Šipka, a forty-year-old officer of the Yugoslav secret services recalls this event:

> A kod kuće, na sva tri kanala, ista vest: srušio se avion u kome su bili svi članovi Predsedništva SFRJ i svi predsednici jugoslovenskih republika, i to baš kada su poleteli ka Dubrovniku, na prvi, i to tajni, sastanak o budućnosti zemlje. (...) Mislili smo došao je kraj. Ko će da brine o zemlji ako je celo rukovodstvo izginulo? Srećom, predsednik SIV-a Marković i vojni vrh nisu bili u avionu, pa se stradanje Novih narodnih heroja pretvorilo (...) „u signal jugoslovenskim narodima da se trgnu iz reakcjonarne apatije, te da smognu snage za još jedan veliki napor kako bi nastavili putem bratstva i jedinstva i ekonomskog napretka, pod senima šesnaest mučenika, njihovih sekretara i sekretarica, te članova posade boinga 737-300, koji su u to ime položili svoje živote". (Vidojković, 2017: 21)

After the party members and the military who were absent from the plane took power, SFR Yugoslavia entered the path of rapid economic development under the conditions of the socialist system, leaving behind not only the countries of the former Eastern bloc, struggling with the challenges of capitalist transition, but also the countries of Western Europe, and even the United States. In 2017, the life expectancy of the Yugoslavs reaches 85 years, cancer is practically non-existent, and state-owned enterprises are becoming economic giants. Technological progress – symbolised in the novel by, among others, the highest-class electronic equipment produced by domestic enterprises, the YUNEBO satellite, computer software developed by native IT specialists, the Yugoslav Internet search engine (and coverage of the entire territory of the country with access to free wireless Internet), or the Juskipap communicator – makes Yugoslavia independent of any import needs, apart from cheap labour from Central Europe. In the international arena, the state maintains contemptuous neutrality. Economic progress goes hand in hand with a kind of moral liberalism – drugs are legal, open relationships are not condemned by anyone. The high level of control of citizens by the state security services, signalised from the very beginning of the plot, casts a shadow on this idealised picture.

According to the genre definitions, alternative stories focus on the past and their distinctive feature is the presence of a clearly defined moment of change in the course of history (Wąsowicz, 2016: 95). These conditions are met to some extent in Vidojkovic's novel. The past serves only as a peculiar point of reference, illustrating the scope and pace of Yugoslavia's economic expansion. On the other hand, the POD is a fictional event, simulating only a historical fact, and its credibility is to be given by the historical figures[1] participating in it. The plot is also credited with the use of dates when describing more or less significant (fictional) moments in the history of Yugoslavia's development – e.g. the construction of a system of underground expressways in 2000-2010 or the legalisation of marijuana in 1995.

Magdalena Wąsowicz, in the article *Alternative stories in Polish literature: typology, themes, functions,* presents a proposal for the division of functions of alternative histories, developed on the basis of Polish books representing the genre: 1. compensatory, allowing to react to national traumas, constituting a remedy for improving well-being; 2. historiosophical, consisting in reflection on the course and meaning of history and the mechanisms that govern it; 3. revisionary – allowing reflection on national myths and symbols; 4. educational, increasing the

[1] Ante Marković, who appears in the novel, was in fact the prime minister of Yugoslavia in 1989-91 who, by introducing economic reforms, stopped galloping inflation which led to a recovery in the economy, but suffered political failure as a result of which he resigned.

historical awareness of readers, 5. cognitive – a strategy for understanding history better; 6. politico-social – alternative history is a commentary on the past but also engages in a discussion on current political events and social problems; 7. entertainment – the historical background in such novels is a pretext to show an interesting, adventurous adventure, and the change in the course of history is an element that is intended to make the plot more attractive (Wąsowicz, 2016: 99-103). *E baš vam hvala* fulfils four out of the seven mentioned by the researcher:

> 1. compensatory: alternative Yugoslav history, at least in terms of their economies and economic successes, allows us to deal with the difficult post-Yugoslav reality.
>
> 2. historiosophical: the plane crash that changes the course of history turns out to be in fact a deliberate action, planned by several security officials in order to halt the break-up of Yugoslavia in the political reality of the time.
>
> 6. political and social: in the alternative Yugoslavia refugees from the Middle East are not accepted, the Roma are still called gypsies, the society is xenophobic.
>
> 7. entertainment: the reader from the area of the former Yugoslavia will easily read the references to the absurdities of reality before the collapse of the state, which return in an alternative version of events.

Although the structure of the plot of *E baš vam hvala* meets a number of features that distinguish the genre of alternative stories, it goes beyond its limits. Alternative history is only one of two parallel storylines. It is the first to appear, and under the influence of the supernatural factor (the crack of the seam between the two alternative worlds and the opening of a portal that allows the inhabitants of one dimension to enter the other), it is joined by a second, parallel plot set in the post-Yugoslav realities. The event that led to the survival of the SFRY in an alternate course of history did not take place on a parallel plot level, as a result of which the further development of events in this plot scheme is in line with the historical truth: Yugoslavia collapses in a bloody war, and the newly created nation states struggle with their economies and economic backwardness, social anxiety and political instability. This way of conducting the plot brings the novel closer to the genre of science fiction. However, taking into account the fact that science fiction is "a genre of speculative prose, which, with the help of scientific or pseudoscientific means, gives the optimistic or pessimistic appearance of possibilities impossible from today's point of view" (V. Graaf in: Pater, 2011: 33), and the futurism of science fiction is one of its main genre distinguishing features, great caution should be exercised when trying to classify *E baš vam hvala* as

a science fiction novel. First of all, the plot does not meet the basic determinant of the genre, because it is not about the future, but about an alternative past and present. Scientific or pseudoscientific means are relatively few – although there is a supercomputer calculating the date of the overlapping of two dimensions, the characters express theories in the field of quantum physics, there are finally two parallel dimensions and portals that allow people to move from one dimension to another, but they are more an element making the world presented in the novel more attractive than its dominant. And although Serbian literary critics delightfully describe the novel as a science fiction work, it seems more reasonable to place it within the convention of science-fiction novels, and not strictly assign it to the genre. Undoubtedly, some elements of the presented world, as well as the features of the plot structure, refer to science fiction literature, but a series of alogical sequences of events somewhat distances the presented novel from classic science fiction literature.

The main character and first-person narrator of the novel, Mirko Šipka, a devoted communist, son of an even more devoted communist Yugoslav, a retired high-ranking security officer, is an inspector at the Office for the Analysis of Unexplained Phenomena at the Secretariat of the Interior. The unexplained phenomena that he researches are most often supernatural phenomena straight from local folk mythology – vampires, nymphs or strigoi – in view of the development of science, confirming the existence of UFOs, only the above-mentioned phenomena meet the conditions of unexplained phenomena. The work is a source of frustration for a hero who dreams of being a "Yugoslav Fox Mulder," but actually only verifies (most often false) reports of supernatural beings in various locations. Through the prism of the main character, the novel first presents the world of the ideal SFRY. The situation becomes more complicated when in this universe (current for Mirko Šipka and possible for the reader) Chetnics and Ustashas start appearing from somewhere, although they have been presumed dead for 25 years. More or less at the same time the protagonist meets his son from the second dimension in a dream. In order to explain this phenomenon, he slowly discovers the existence of a parallel universe (possible for him and valid for the reader), which, it seems, is a mirror image of the real world of separated, independent South Slavic states, humiliated and disregarded by Europe and the world.

The theory of possible worlds with its main opposing binary current-possible pair was created in quantum physics in the early 1990s, and due to the growing interest in literary studies in fantasy and science fiction, it was also implemented in literary studies. If we assume, following Umberto Eco, that literature is "a machine for producing possible worlds, then among all of its varieties, the most pre-

destined for this task is probably fantasy literature, including science fiction." In her book *Virtual Narration* Snežana Milosavljević Milić distinguishes about 10 key places, or more precisely simplified discussions of the assumptions of quantum physics, which in the mid-1990s radically shook the foundations of classical physics, and significantly influenced the fact that the theory of possible worlds had become the basis for explanations of the multiverse narrative. To understand the functioning of parallel worlds in the novel *E baš vam hvala* we distinguish the following assumptions of quantum theory: removing the linear principle of processes in nature in favour of discontinuation; the existence of an intermediate possibility, i.e. hazy positions or intermediate states, which are mutually exclusive in classical theory and the logic resulting from it, so that in quantum physics, truth and falsehood may also be allowed. The quantum world is a world of superposition that "collects alternatives" and allows states that combine YES and NO, possible and impossible, here and there, and creates a context in which the phenomenon of multiplication of literary heroes can be explained; in the quantum world there is the principle of complementarity, according to which the alternatives do not refute each other, but complement each other (Milosavljević Milić 2016: 76-77 in Bečejski 2020: 265). The narrative universe depicted in the overarching story first functions as up-to-date, but then, through the Epilogue we measurethe possible concept that the entire story is a virtual narrative (Bečejski 2020: 271). For in a novel it is impossible to draw a line with absolute certainty between what is actualised and what is not, because in the text itself there is no signal that the events in the world of the story did not actually happen: the narrative truth of the "first" world penetrates more and more into the "other", introducing fantastic events into it, ie relativising each narrative truth. Thanks to this, you can move from one dimension to another, be alive and dead at the same time (and even go to your own funeral), have a son and at the same time not have one, find and "evacuate" the person who died in the first universe. In the novel, occultism and mysticism are intertwined with science fiction, you can meet real and mythological creatures (e.g. a meeting with a crow, which makes the protagonist in one universe realise that he is dead in another, or with fairies who warn him that "between the two universes; a wound sustained in one universe also hurts in another, etc.), contacts coexist and migrate between both worlds. Thus, both worlds in the novel seem to be both possible and actual worlds at the same time.

In both universes, events take place in the narrative present, so temporal axes multiply on a synchronous level (temporal alignment occurs), but also a diachronic perspective, most often in the form of dialogues and short digressions-memories, when the narrator compares the events taking place in the past in one

universe with events taking place at the same moment and in the same space, but in another universe. Such looks into the past, however, are limited: in both worlds they are possible only until June 3, 1989, the day when the universe split and two alternative versions of events emerged, one of which is worse (historical reality is the prototype) and the second, at least the first impression, is better (which is the realisation of the (anti) utopia).

In Marko Vidojkovic's novel, critics and researchers see a specific form of Yugonostalgia (Bečejski, 2020: 264). The homeland he longs for no longer exists (and in this dream form it has never existed, unless as a collective utopia and a subjective vision, in which the longing for childhood and dreams about the future are also projected). From worlds in the mental consciousness of the reader, the historical knowledge of readers from the South Slavic area who spent their childhood or youth in SFRY and witnessed its tragic disintegration is also necessary, to nostalgia, which is the result of empathy, but also of genuine empirical experience.

It is important to mention here that yugonostalgia is not given here as a feeling which "means turning to the past and least of all a longing for teleportation to some happier and less complicated epoch"; it is about a different form of yugonostalgia "than babbling about a red passport welcome at every border crossing, smuggling from Trieste, cheap Adriatic holidays and other myths. Yugoslavia is a name for me for a specific future, or for many of them, which never came true, but whose promise continues, even in its craziest form. This kind of "yugonostalgia" could best be described as nostalgia for the future, as Dinko Kreho (2017) emphasises (Bečejski 2020: 264).

By referring to the "first" dimension of the historical past before the breakup of SFRY, the two timelines of diachrony are connected and the theme of a shared history is introduced, which quite clearly reveals the yugonostalgic position. Invoking the elements of the historical SFRY world, in which the economy, education, social policy, tourism, sport, external politics, etc., flourished on the foundations of brotherhood and unity, was emphasised by the introduction of specific brands and symbols: giant factories, such as EI Niš, Obod Cetinje, Gorenje, Zastava from Kragujevac (which in the present-day novel of the first dimension produces electric cars Yugo 655, 556 and the most modern weapons, clothing and footwear factories "Varteks" and "Yassa", "Startas", "Sport", Sarajevo Drina and Filter 57 cigarettes, Kokta and Jupi drinks, Borba and Politika newspapers (which survived the collapse of SFRY). All these brands and products remain deeply rooted in the collective consciousness of post-Yugoslav society. Before Christmas on May 1, and in the classroom (through mental simulation,

the reader "moves" to the desk). They evoke strong yugonostalgic feelings, which is the best proof that "paradise lost", or at least the vestibule of paradise, in some form really did exist at one time. The creation of Yugoslavia as the best state in the world was made possible by an air accident (staged by the security service) on June 3, 1989, in which all the presidents of former republics and members of government, the so-called new national heroes, whose monument in the form of symbolic black hands protrudes from the ground on the left bank of the Danube, can be seen from many parts of Belgrade. And while civil wars break out in the "second" dimension and the population suffers the hardships of a life limited by sanctions, threatened by bombs and crime, in the "first" world the state continues the path of prosperity in all areas. An underground motorway network built in the period 2000-2010, three underground lines built in the late 90s that solved the traffic congestion problem, electric cars, magnetic levitation railway, JNA satellite, Juskipap instead of Skype, Yugoslav encyclopedia online, work of Yugoslav policemen comes down to removing cats from trees, helping lost children and sobering drunkards", only in the tourist season" they have to deal with savages who come to our seas and our mountains, mainly from Western Europe" – these are just some of the examples of prosperity, which the whole world envies. The pinnacle of cynicism is the respect world powers have for the SFRY (an example is the agreement between Yugoslavia and the US, which requires any CIA agent to offer direct help to a member of the Yugoslav security services if their life is at risk). Vidojković replaces the Eurocentrism that is present in the non-fictional reality with fictitious yugocentrism, ironically distorting Yugoslav xenophobic images as well. The inverted image of the world through which the novel activates the issue of memory and forgetting the second, traumatic experience (disintegration of the state, experienced and perceived cruelty, corruption, the murder of the prime minister in 2003, etc.) is shown through the prism of inevitable irony from the title itself *E baš vam hvala* (Thanks a lot) until the very end of the book. It destroys the narrative truth and tells us that also in this progressive Yugoslavia not everything is as perfect and socially healthy as it seems at first glance.

The call for the social responsibility of individuals tramples over all individualism and independence, developing a collectivist spirit in which all are good soldiers of the communist state. Orders are obeyed without discussion or consideration of their ethical aspect or possible effects. The main character, admittedly, undertakes several independent actions, but thanks to his good socialist upbringing, which tells him that the enemy never sleeps, he returns to the right path; accepting a punitive assignment, although he considers the death penalty to be a slightly lighter life sentence in the "second" dimension for life. In the face of

the influx of undesirable newcomers from the "second" dimension, Goli Otok[2] is also reactivated, therefore, instead of a memorial park, it also serves as a concentration camp in the "better" universe, and the elimination of parallel Yugoslavs takes place with the same shouts as the "raising" of Stalinists in the former SFRY: "Death to the gang – freedom of Yugoslavia!" with the same willingness of the authorities to announce the mass killings of innocent people as a side effect of the pursuit of higher goals. Numerous organisations, boards, councils, assemblies and other institutional bodies of the communist one-party system assigned to celebrate jubilees and conceal the insidious political killings carried out by the security service, which can be identified by the endlessly long list of multi-segment names along with their abbreviations, have been parodied, and have also left their mark on the former Yugoslavia. With a few allusions and ironic statements about Serbian nationalism, the face of "brotherhood and unity" was shown (Croats are consistently overlooked in the division of prominent positions). The "better" SFRY has banned accepting refugees from the Middle East, but drugs can be obtained through official distribution. Marijuana was legalised in 1995, and production and trade remain under the monopoly of Kosovar and Macedonian Albanians.

Alternative stories are entangled in a whole network of cultural, social and political relationships. These relationships become clearly visible with careful reading. For what matters is not only the way in which the novel shows the past, but also what historical event is chosen as the point of divergence between real and fictional history, the consequences that this event has for the reality of the novel (they are connected with the assessment of both the past and the present). History's entanglement in social and cultural relations is also evidenced by their plot structure and the intertextual games they undertake with the reader. This game with readers is undertaken by Marko Vidojković in his novel, and apparently the readers from the former Yugoslavia feel at home in it, since in the year after its premiere in Serbia, the novel had ten editions, and it was also published successively in Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia, symbolically uniting the reading community of all the countries that made up the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia more than thirty years ago.

[2] Goli Otok is an uninhabited island in the northern Adriatic Sea, that was the site of a political prison, which was in operation between 1949-1989.

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Abstract

Although it has not formally existed for over thirty years, Yugoslavia continues to be an attractive subject for literature. Against two dominant currents of prose orbiting the SFRY – the settlement and nostalgic one, Marko Vidojković's novel *E baš vam hvala* stands out with its attempt to answer the question: what would Yugoslavia be like in 21st century if it had not fallen apart. In this article this alternative scenario is considered in the context of close literary genres: science fiction and alternative histories.

Key words: Yugoslavia, alternative history, science fiction, theory of possible worlds