Едиција • Edition

# ФИЛМОСОФИЈА • PHIL(M)OSOPHY

# ФИЛОЗОФИЈА И ФИЛМ

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# PHILOSOPHY AND FILM

## Conference Proceedings

**25 May 2021 ZOOM platform**
**11. Philosophical Film Festival**

**Organized by Philosophical Society of Macedonia,**
**in cooperation with Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje and**
**Faculty of Dramatic Arts - Skopje, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University - Skopje**

Philosophical Society of Macedonia
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# PREFACE

This volume is a collection of the papers presented at the First International Conference *Philosophy and Film* held as part of the 11. Philosophical Film Festival (27 May – 3 June 2021). The conference took place online on 25 May, 2021. It was organized by the Philosophical Society of Macedonia and co-organized by the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje and the Faculty of Dramatic Arts – Skopje, both institutions affiliated to Ss. Cyril and Methodius University – Skopje. Having in mind the topic of the conference, the institutional co-organizational blend was not accidental.

The Proceedings are the second publication in the newly established *Phil(m)osophy* edition, published by the Philosophical Society of Macedonia. With more than a decade long experience of exploring film as a medium for thinking trough moving images while organizing the Philosophical Film Festival, this edition's aim is to finally dedicate written space for this kind of investigation. The first publication is the translation of the book *Inventing Peace: A Dialogue on Perception* by Wim Wenders and Mary Zournazi in Macedonian language. The Society also dedicated the 21st and the 26th issue of the journal *Filozofska Tribina* (*Philosophical Forum*) to the topic *Philosophy and Film*.

The organization of the conference and the publishing of this volume have their genesis in the beginnings of the Festival. The Festival has its roots in the Academia (Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje), but its substantial development was outside the Academia, where was intended to - in the Agora. After hundreds of events and thousands of people infused with the magic of film-philosophy, this conference is returning the Festival back to the Academia.

In the history of philosophy, the philosophical topos always transitioned from the Agora (or as **Öztürk** in this Proceedings put it, "the marketplace") towards the Academia, from the city square towards the school.

The Festival showed that the opposite direction is possible, i.e., the transition from the Academia towards the Agora. The idea behind this transition was that the philosophy should be happening not only in the Academia and should communicate with a wider public. Philosophy emerges in all aspects of everyday life and cinema can be easily transformed in a place where ideas can be exchanged and developed. However, this transition has never meant that the Academia should be suspended. The Philosophical Film Festival has never forgotten the need for reflection of the cinematic phenomena and this is the reason why the Academia for the past years was always a place where film-philosophy topics have been reconsidered over and over again. The organization of this first international conference *Film and Philosophy* represents the highest and the most suitable form of contribution towards the reflective segment of film-philosophy. This process can be seen in terms of Hegelian synthesis, where the film-philosophy is getting to know itself, to objectify, to find itself again, to liberate itself and to connect firmly with itself.

The Proceedings are comprised of 12 research articles, a substantial part of the papers presented at the conference. The contributions deal with wide and diverse ideas considering the various ways and levels of bringing the conjunction of film and philosophy. Since every text is initiating different and manifold concepts, as well as various lines of thought, the structure of the Proceedings follow "loose" criteria of the organization of the texts; just to point, not to interpret. The editorial "struggling" with the structure of the contents again showed the complexity of the field of film-philosophy. Six thematic sections were defined (each comprising two texts): *Approaches, Structures and Narratives, Concepts, Experiences, Arts* and *Fields*.

The *Approaches* section starts with the text of Serdar Öztürk, who discusses the different approaches towards the relationship between cinema and philosophy, while introducing a new one – cinephilosophy. Considering "film as philosophy or movie-made philosophy", he tries to bridge the separation between cinema and philosophy introducing new genre of doing philosophy beside the oral and written philosophy, cinephilosophy - philosophizing trough cine-images. According to him, cine-images offer new

expressive possibilities for philosophy, which the written philosophy does not have – the possibility to create an idea trough emotions and affections.

Senka Anastasova coins a new concept *femfilmosophy*, in which she encompasses feminist approaches towards documentaries through the lenses of historical materialism and social reproduction theory. In her article *Fem Filmosophy: Aesthetics of Documentary Cinema and Social Reproduction Theory in Post – Pandemic Times*, she examines the feminist documentary through Rancière's concept of "distribution of the sensible" while contextualizing it in the new pandemic paradigm. Feminist cinematic documentary thinking, as a new direction of cinematic thinking and a kind of reinvention of cinema after times of crisis, includes not only observation or reproduction of the real, but also intervention and action of change in society confronting inequality.

The *Structures and Narratives* section encompasses Chateau's and Smiljanić's contributions. In an abductive manner, that according to the author "does not kill the aesthetic filling", Dominique Chateau examines the paradoxical, irrational, contradictive, convulsive narration and the structure of the film *Before the Rain* in his contribution *The Film is Not Round: Milcho Manchevski's* Before the Rain (Pred Doždot, 1994). The filmic structure and storytelling (as dysnarrative) is seen from the perspective of a circle and roundness concerning filmic time, social issues, spectator experience, while analyzing several critical passages in the three parts of *Before the Rain*. The narrative and formal structure of the film which takes form of a dyscircular circle, is conceptualized by Chateau, in the notion of "the film that dreams" where the discontinuity takes place.

In his contribution *What Makes a Dream Sequence Philosophically Relevant?*, the author Damir Smiljanić examines the cinematic technique of „dream sequence" and its philosophical implications, especially, its epistemic potential, while analyzing films that follow formative tendencies, like fantasy, horror and mystery films (*An Andalusian Dog*, *Spellbound*, *Dead of Night*, *Waking Life*, *An American Werewolf in London*). He problematizies the issues of distinguishing reality and illusion, the structure of cinematic narrative, the "change of attitude" of the viewer's consciousness and the social dimension of dreams.

Opening the *Topics* section, George Arabatzis and Evangelos D. Protopapadakis undertake an analysis of the treatment of the metaphysical concept of quintessence in a blockbuster movie, in their text *Luc Besson's* "The Fifth Element" *and the Notion of Quintessence.* The treatment of this concept, argue the authors, reflect the contemporary approach of solving the "riddle of existence" in an immanent and temporal context, where aesthetics dictates the rules. Under the paradigm of techno science and the development of the icono-sphere, Arabatzis and Protopapadakis argue that *The Fifth Element* contributes to the metaphysicism of the image.

Darko Štrajn explores the issue of the transcendental and transcendentalism in post-war cinema trough Deleuze'e lenses in his contribution *The Question of Transcendentalism and Cinema.* Štrajn concludes that in Deleuze's attempt to restore Kant's notion of transcendental as opposed to its Hollywood understanding (Schrader as representative) in metaphysical context, Deleuze introduces the transformation of the film form from image-movement to image-time. In relation to this interpretation, the author brings into consideration the discussion of the style of slow cinema and the close relationship of thought and film, conceiving "the screen itself as the cerebral membrane". Štrajn leaves open the discussion of the notion of transcendentalism in the digital age and the question of the disappearance of the boundaries of image-movement to image-time.

Ó Maoilearca's and Kennedy's papers constitute the *Experiences* section. In the text *Continuity Errors and the Indivisibility of Change on Cinematic Time Travel*, the author John Ó Maoilearca examines the concept of time travel in the film *Somwhere in Time* (Szwarc, 1980) trough Bergson's concept of time. The concept of time travel without extrahuman agency, but only by willpower and mind manipulation, the author correlates with the concept of expanding, multiplying and defragmenting one's temporal present horizon that is similar to Bergson's concept of "attention to life". The indivisibility of change in different kinds of present can be maintained by "attention training". The continuity errors which appear in the cinematic phenomenon of time traveling, Ó Maoilearca thinks that can be equally attributed to the inherent discontinuity of cinema.

Niall Kennedy focuses his article *Film Making in the Subjunctive: Fantasy in the Films of Nacer Khemir* on Nacer Khemir's works, especially on his "desert trilogy", in order to shed new light on its dominantly "Eastern" interpretations. Kennedy analyzes Khemir's specific cinematic, aesthetic and political approach through three theoretic points of view. First, through Cavell's notions of "fantastic" and "uncanny" he explains the relation of the real and magical. Second, through Deleuze's theory of transition between two "regimes of image" he explains the discontinuities and ambiguity between the real and the unreal. Third, through Deleuze and Rancière, he elucidates "the otherness" and the possibility of rehabilitation of a politically marginalized subject.

The *Arts* section consists of two contributions that are treating the philosophical aspects of the specific relationship between film and literature. The three aesthetic categories: the sublime, the terrible and the ugly are investigated considering the genre of cosmic horror as an artistic and philosophical setting, both at film and literature, by Tijana Petkovska, in her text *The Sublime, the Terrible and the Ugly: An Exploration of Cosmic Horror in Film and Literature*. Starting her theoretical endeavors with Burke and Kant on the sublime and terrible, the author further analyzes the categories within the narration of *The Thing*, *Annihilation,* and *Stalker* and the issues of human/alien imbalance, cosmic indifference, anti-anthropocentrism etc. The complex relations of the sublime and the ugly, on one side, and the terrible as embodiment of the first two, on the other, Petkovska connects with the perspective of the audience and the affirmation of the subject in the flesh, now, outsideness, astronomical and metaphysical.

In his contribution *Cinematic Iconography of Movement as a Model for Understanding Ontology of Graphic Literature and Comic Book Art*, the author Boshko Karadjov intersects the fields of philosophy of film and aesthetics of comic books and graphic literature. He questions the premises of the cinematic theory of comics which, according to him, does not explain adequately the media ontology of graphic literature, reducing it to a kind of undeveloped films. Having in mind the philosophical presupposition of McCloud's theory of the ontology of comic books emphasizing the features of "call and response" and "comic book time", Karadjov accentuates the recep-

tive and cognitive acts and possibilities of comic books aesthetics, as well as the concept of closure seen in the active epistemic participation of the reader.

Yanakieva's and Kokalanov's papers constitute the *Field* section, the final section of the Proceedings. Slava Yanakieva takes the "Book of Job" as a hermeneutic key for analyzing the topics in the film *The Tree of Life* in her contribution *The* Tree of Life *by Terrence Malick and Its Jobian Theme*. She examines themes like loss, sorrow and suffering, and correlates them with biblical motifs such as loss of the original purity, loss of the blessed intimacy between man and God, the sacrifice of Christ, personal aspects of the final fulfillment of eternal plan, salvation etc. According to Yanakieva, *Tree of Life* has surpassed Malick's previous films in their filmic narrative, both in its historical all-encompassing aspects as well as in its successful micro-macro plot panorama.

The topics of *The Environmental Ethics of Honeyland* is the main theoretical preoccupation in Sasho Kokalanov's contribution. In the documentary and filmic narration of *Honeyland*, Kokalanov observes strong social and existential issues, especially in the context of the moral relation of man to the ecosystem. He examines these issues in light of two perspectives: anthropocentrism and the ethical consequences that proceed from the human-centered world view, as well as the notion of responsibility to nature that leads toward a sustainable development accountability to future generations.

Taken together, all the papers provide new perspectives on the relation of film and philosophy based on various methodological and thematic similarities. I hope that they will contribute to the future theoretical endeavors in this emerging and open-ended field of inquiry where philosophy and film meet.

I wish all the readers inspiring inner dialogues with the texts and a real intellectual delight!

Jasmina Popovska, Editor-in-chief

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# CINEPHILOSOPHY: A NEW WAY OF DOING PHILOSOPHY

## Abstract
One of the most intricate challenges within the discipline of philosophy and film is how to construct a relationship between the two. A great number of philosophers believe movies can be a vehicle to illustrate philosophical concepts. Some philosophers claim that philosophy reflects on problems and creates concepts, whereas films make us see them. The film director, according to this view, knows how to create a concept as an experience. However, the most neglected element in discussions about the relationship between film and philosophy is the medium. Philosophy was born as an oral medium in the Agora in Ancient Greece, and over time the written text became dominant medium for doing philosophy. With the invention of cinema, a new possibility emerged for doing philosophy through what I call "cinephilosopy." Cine-operations like shots, frames, camera angles, camera movement, montage and lighting take the concepts to audiences through heart and senses, rather than through rational mind. Rather than talking about film and philosophy, I believe, we can suggest cinephilosophy, written philosophy and oral philosophy. Film and philosophy are not separate fields. We can approach written philosophy via the medium of writing, oral philosophy via oral speech or we can engage in cinephilosophy via cinematic images. It is demonstrated in this study that cinephilosophy as a new way of doing philosophy offers a great opportunity to engage with philosophy through senses and create new concepts and thoughts.

## Keywords
cinephilosophy, cine-images, medium, oral philosophy, written philosophy, cine-operations

I would like to start with simple but very significant questions: How can we construct the relationship between cinema and philosophy? What is the best way of making a distinction between philosophy and cinema? Or do we think that, in fact, there is philosophy but there are different ways of doing philosophy? If so, can we think that film as a medium can do philosophy in its own way, with its own technique?

I would like to disscuss these questions in my paper. First, I want to start with the meaning of cinema and philosophy. What is cinema? It is a huge question but, to put it simply, cinema can be thought of as a composition. What kind of composition? Movement images and time images produced by camera movement, camera angles, shots, frames, montage, colour, sound, lighting, music, screenplay and acting. Gilles Deleuze classified images in cinema as basically two main images: movement images and time images. We can use a short description to classify these images: cine-images. Cinema is made of cine-images.

What is philosophy? Of course there are many definitions of philosophy. Kant characterized philosopy as the attempt to answer these basic questions: What can I know? What should I do? What can I hope for? Deleuze and Guattari claim philosophy means creating concepts. Philosopy does not question everything, wherever it finds a problem philosophy reflects on it. Alain Badiou thinks that philosophy considers paradoxes. According to him, if there is not a relationship between some things, philosophy reflects on this. And finally, Henry Bergson claimed doing philosophy means an intervention in common or usual thinking. In daily life, we think that we think, but in fact it is a common sense. We should get away from ordinary thinking in order to engage in philosophical thinking.

As you see, these philosophers put an emphasis on problem. In philosophical thinking there always must be a problem. Therefore, here is a problem: on the one hand, cinema is made with cine-images; on the other hand, philosophy is done by concepts. What kind of relation can we see between them? Is it possible to think of cine-images and concepts, cinema and philosophy together?

Plato claimed that images mislead us. Images are outside of the real world. For him concepts or Ideas belong to true world, fundamental world, the world of Ideas. Plato himself believed that since art imitates physical

things, which in turn imitate the Forms, art is always a copy of a copy, and leads us even further from truth and toward illusion. According to him, works of art are at best, entertainment, and at worst, a dangerous delusion. Philosophy, for him, enlightens us and tries to help us get away from the delusion of images.

A number of philosophers agree with Plato. According to them, images and concepts or truth are against each other. As Badiou claims, if there is a relationship between philosophy and cinema, this might be a relationship of hate. Philosophy throughout its history has hated images and to some extent still keeps this position.

From these explanations we can easily understand the reason why many philosophers generally reject cinema in favour of thinking and concepts. They believe that cinematic images can distract attention from the full intellectual and logical universe; cinematic images belong to entertainment or to the art world; they may objectify some philosophical concepts at best.

The second problem I would like to put forward is the opposition between art and the mass appeals of cinema. Assessing this paradox Badiou calls cinema a "Mass Art." What is mass art? Films are loved by millions of people all around the world at the moment they are made. At this point, I would like to draw attention to the key expression "at the moment". Of course millions of people can go to ancient historical places, but when films appeared at the time, many people go to movie theatres, or watch them at their homes. Charlie Chaplin's movies were watched by people all around the world at the time his films were made. Today Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* can be watched all around the world, in every corner, even on cell phones by millions. In this movie we witness genetic elements, which are profound and essential for all human beings. All people actually depend on the fate of the world, our home. Our home, the world, is much more important than our daily issues or political, or economic clashes with each other. This film presents this fundamental element for us. The "mass" dimension of movies can reflect and construct a generic humanity.

Cinema is also an art. This double regime of cinema, meaning mass and art, conveys a paradoxical relationship. Mass is both an industrial and political category. The cultural industry produces products for making mon-

ey and distributes them to people living all around the world. But mass at the same time implies political activism. Today, people can get together both in physical and virtual spaces in order to resist political pressures. On the contrary, art basically belongs to aristocratic category. Why? Because art includes creating aesthetic and artful products that not everyone can tackle. Besides, understanding the meaning of art requires education to a certain extent. In brief, cinema belongs to the political and industrial category, on the one hand, and the aristocratic category, on the other. This is a paradoxical relationship.

What is the meaning of this paradoxical relationship? Paradoxical relationship refers to a philosophical situation. Philosophy focuses on paradoxes. Wherever philosophy finds a paradox, there emerges thinking. It means, now that there is a paradoxical relationship between cinema and philosophy, or mass and art; philosophy thinks about it. Plato dealt with images because in his view, images had no relations with Ideas. Wherever we find a "no-relationship" situation, we may encounter philosophical situation. We may ask why images and rational thinking, or cinema and philosophy, or mass and artistic concepts convey the philosophical situation. Philosophy considers relationships among things or situations that share no relationship with one another. Images and concepts are foreign to each other, mass and art are foreign to each other. Therefore, philosophy reflects on cinema. Between them, it has a distance, an interval.

This is one of the general views on the relationship between cinema and philosophy. You can put cinema on the one side, and place philosophy on the other side, divide them; claim that there is no relationship between them. But is this really so? I want to discuss this. In my paper I want to focus on the idea based on the features of media, but before I do, I want to clarify different approaches to the relationship between cinema and philosophy and why philosophers are interested in cinema.

A philosopher may be interested in cinema for a few reasons. The first one is for latter's entertainment aspect. As Béla Balázs claimed, cinema, first of all, has the fundamental capacity for entertaining people. It is a natural feeling for any person to want to be entertained. Even Wittgenstein spent time watching movies. Philosophers need to get rid of the pressures of rational thinking and logic.

The second reason why a philosopher might deal with cinema comes from cine-images. What is their ontological status? Are they psychological entities or beyond our subjective viewpoint? We know that Bergson and Deleuze discussed the concept of images. Some questions emerge here: What is movement? What is time? Are images real movement or artificial movements? Certain philosophers discuss these issues. In *The Republic*, Plato, with the famous cave allegory, took up the issue of images. **We may call this approach *the philosophy of film.*** An approach about the ontic status of cine-images.

A third reason why a philosopher might care about cinema is because she or he wonders about the film experience. Watching a movie is a different experience than reading a book or listening to a musical performance. With movies we live the experience both visually and aurally. We are inside the cine-images while watching. But reading a book requires us to imagine the written medium rather than living the experiences as they are. **We may call this approach *Philosophy and the Cinematic Experience.***

Another reason for a philosopher to engage with cinema is the illustrative aspect of movies. What does it mean? In the philosopher's mind there are some concepts like ethics, freedom, being, life, death, happiness, existence, and so on, and films illustrate these kinds of concepts. Today philosophy teachers can benefit from movies or movie scenes in order to teach philosophical themes to students. A common example is the movie *The Matrix*. What is reality, what is appearance? Reality has attracted many philosophers in the history of philosophy. In *The Matrix*, humans of digital world live like the slaves of Plato's Cave, while machines set up the phenomenal world for humans. Machines live in the foundational or Ideas' World. **This approach can be called *film about philosophy***, a term for movies that illustrate philosophical ideas.

In fact, some movies bring up serious philosophical issues to the central. If a director focuses on a philosopher's life or his basic concepts, a film can be about philosophy. Films about philosophers' lives or their views can attract many philosophers. These are philosophical movies, such as *The Matrix* triology by the Wachowski Brothers, *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick, and *Wittgenstein* by Derek Jarman.

Although there are some differences between these approaches, they share a similar idea. There is a reference point called philosophy.

This means that ratio, logic and concepts come first. And cinema is just an instrument for philosophy. Cinema is used to illustrate philosophical themes. Cinema, according to these views, is like a shadow and a phenomenal world of philosophy.

Now I would like to turn my attention to a different approach to cinema: ***film as philosophy,*** **or** ***movie-made philosophy*** **or as I put it,** ***cinephilosophy.*** What is it?

Films can do philosophy with their optic and sonic images, or *cine-images*, with their own style. What I mean is that the basic medium of film is not a written or verbal medium; it is a visual medium or cine-image. Films can do philosophy with cine-images rather than through a written or verbal medium. I call it *cinephilosophy*. Daniel Frampton defines this approach as *Filmosophy* and Thomas Wartenberg and Tal S. Shamir calls it *cinematic philosophy.* Whatever we name it the important thing is that films can do a different philosophy, this is another kind of philosophy, it is a kind of movie-made philosophy. This philosophy does not reject written and oral philosophy; it is just a different philosophy. Now, I would like to discuss its basic features.

In philosophical discussions many philosophers and social scientists generally neglect "the medium". A medium is a kind of a layer on which you can load and transfer your ideas. For example, in order to make my speech and convey my ideas, I use an oral medium and a digital medium. Before I made my speech, my ideas were on a paper. The written medium in this example is another medium. Cinema is a different medium, a cinematic medium or layer done with images. We should delineate the details of the features of mediums and the relationship between medium and philosophy.

Philosophy began with Socratic dialogues in the Ancient Agora in Ancient Greece. These dialogues were made verbally and Socrates particularly was against the written medium. He believed the written word could not answer all questions. It is a rigid form of media. For him the written text freezes the poetic and dialogical speech. The written medium, Socrates argued, repeats itself when it is read. It is impossible to change the written text. Besides, the text cannot defend itself. Socrates comes to the conclusion that writing has a lower status than dialogue. Dialogue is the best medium for achieving truth.

During the Socratic Era philosophy was done by oral dialogues and no one claimed whether or not it was a philosophical discussion. As you see during the Socratic Era, the new medium, the written word, was an invention that was used to do philosophy. It was new, and Ancient philosophers had been living under an oral tradition. They organically connected philosophy with oral speech, not the written word. Over time, when they internalized the written medium, forms of doing philosophy changed. The practice of writing and reading came first.

Socrates had been wrong by not perceiving the potential of the new technology, meaning writing, during his time. Today, in our contemporary world, I think some philosophers are making the same kind of mistake by not seeing the new medium, cine-images. Cine-images have the potential of the cinematic medium to engage with philosophy.

What I want to clarify is that there is no pure medium for creating philosophy. Philosophy was not born with writing. It means philosophy is not objectively and purely connected to writing. Doing philosophy with cine-images is a new possibility for engaging with philosophical thinking. There can be different ways of doing philosophy: through an oral medium, written medium, and with cine-images. There is no hierarchy among them. We can just say that every medium has its own style, and is different from the other.

If so, I would like to move to another issue, the relationship between film and philosophy. In this paper, I mentioned the paradoxical relationship between philosophy and cinema. And also, I emphasized that it is wrong to make a distinction between philosophy and cinema. I want to express that cinema is just another way of doing philosophy. Medium is a key term to understand this point.

In fact, the new paradox emerges from my discussion about the medium. Accepting that cinema is another way of doing philosophy, does it mean that using the conjunction "and" between "philosophy" and "cinema" is a mistake? If we use the expression "cinema and philosophy", it means that there is a gap, a distance between cinema and philosophy. In fact, according to my argument, there are different ways of doing philosophy, and cinema can not be separated from philosophy. At this point the use of "and" in "film and philosophy", or "cinema and philosophy" is unnecessary.

Consciously or unconsciously, we suppose that cinema is not a natural medium for doing philosophy. Many philosophers think that directors produce movies and philosophers reflect on films. Philosophers believe that films just illustrate written philosophical ideas.

But if we adopt the *cinephilosopy* approach, we should understand that it is a mistake to make a separation between cinema and philosophy. We can use *cinephilosophy* rather than using the film and philosophy dichotomy. After that we can divide philosophy into three categories: oral philosophy, written philosophy and cinephilosophy.

If we make a comparison with Spinoza's thinking, we can reach a better understanding of my argument. Spinoza made a distinction between "substance" and "attributes". There is one substance and attributes are just manifestations of the substance. Attributes are expressions of the substance. In my discussion, the substance is philosophy, and attributes are different media like oral, written and cine-image. Different mediums are extentions of the substance, meaning philosophy. Each medium provides a different and authentic access to philosophy. Doing philosophy with the written word, meaning written philosophy, is not superior to philosophy done with cine-images, meaning cinephilosophy. If we accept this idea, naturally there could be room for the possibility that films can create a philosophy by themselves.

Interestingly, many philosophers think films just illustrate philosophical ideas and do not want to discuss the relationship between oral philosophy and written philosophy. In Ancient Greece, Socrates was doing oral philosophy, and Plato wrote these dialogues after Socrates. No philosopher has claimed this argument up to this time: "written philosophy is an illustration of oral philosophy. The main philosophy is oral philosophy done by Socrates, and Plato just illustrated Socrates's ideas. Plato is a typewriter, representing Socrates's dialogues via the written text." It is a ridiculous idea to claim that Plato was a typewriter for Socrates's arguments. Every philosopher accepts that Plato stands on his own as a philosophical creator.

The relationship between philosophy and cinema can be raised on these basis. It has a variety of mediums, each of them offers different perspectives, and philosophy and cinema are connected with each other. One medium like cinema cannot replace another medium like writing. Each me-

dium has a crucial linkage with one another. Rather than talking about film and philosophy, I believe, we can suggest cinephilosophy, written philosophy and oral philosophy. Film and philosophy are not separate fields. We can do written philosophy via written medium, we can do oral philosophy via oral speech or we can do cinephilosophy via cine-images.

Each medium has limitations and possibilities. Each medium has the potential for engaging with philosophy. Each medium leads to the creation of different types of philosophical works. It is a contribution to philosophy, different types of medium presents a variety of possibilities. For example, we can create a rational discussion and use concepts with a written philosophy more easily than cinephilosophy. Why? Because cine-images are basically affective, they touch our bodies, we can be affected emotionally and sensually. Emotion and affection are not totally outside the rational dimension. David Hume, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze, and many current neuroscientists emhasize this point. Cine-operations like shots, frames, camera angles, camera movement, montage and lighting reach the audience through heart and the senses, rather than through the rational mind. Film, through its moving images, makes us see the world and experience it as it is. Philosopher directors as Orson Welles, Ingmar Bergman, Akira Kurosawa, Andrey Tarkovsky, Stanley Kubrick, Alfred Hitchock, Joseph Losey, Robert Bresson, Jean Luc Godard, and Luis Buñuel know how to create an idea as an experience. In the written text ideas are abstractions of the mind but in cine-images ideas are sensations as perceptions of the body. It means cinema can merge an idea with a sensual experience.

If we put together our brain and physical body via different types of philosophical platforms, I believe, philosophy can come down from the ivory tower to the Bazaar, to the Agora. I call cinema as the Philosophy of the Bazaar, as well as Art of the Bazaar. Everyone who has the ability to see and hear can reach the philosophy of movies. Therefore, cinema is a democratic medium for doing philosophy.

One of the biggest diffences between written philosophy and cinephilosopy is based upon the separation between reflection or imagination and experience. To put it simply, written philosopy reflects or imagines the problems or paradoxes whereas cinephilosophy makes us live the experience as it is. A film has the potential to make us see or experience the thinking in

action. But the written text requires us to imagine or reflect upon the ideas. A film creates this experience with its instruments like camera movement, camera angles, montage. However, the written text is static and stands on the paper by itself. By reading, we imagine the meaning rather than experiencing it. Films show the idea as an event in motion and text makes us imagine the idea.

Experience is a key term here. As Kracauer claimed, in modern life things are lost; they become invisible. Our pragmatic view, ideological apparatus, science and technology frames the reality. Heidegger made a distinction between calculative thinking and meditative thinking. Calculative thinking is in connection with the dominance of science and technology in our life. How can human faces, animals, plants and inorganic world be visible? As Béla Balázs stated, films let people see human faces which had been lost since the invention of printing press. With letters, we just read about the human faces in the books and imagined them. We could not experience the intensity of faces with all the lines on them. But films made human face visible again. Kracauer argued films not only showed human faces but also other things including inorganic life. Today streets, faces, homes, railway stations lie before eyes but in fact they are invisible to us. Our pragmatic life, customs, habits, scientific and technological gaze make them invisible. So films revealed the abstract life surrounding us. Written philosopy generally works with abstractions and generalizations. This abstract thinking is outside of the Agora, where philosophy was born. Films can concretize abstract thinking. Whitehead said: "When you understand all about the sun and all about the atmosphere and all about the rotation of the earth, you may still miss the radiance of the sunset." How can we experience the sunset as it is without abstraction? Whitehead claimed art and aesthetic education can give this experience. Kracauer argues cinema can help us "touch the reality, not only fingerprints, but to seize it and shake hands with it." For the first time cine-images made us possible to experience the material life from bottom to top. Other arts and written philosopy proceed from top to bottom. But cinema starts with raw material and helps us to appreciate our given material environment. As Kracauer said films "virtually make the world our home." To make the world our home, to experience our home as it is. This is one of the basic characteristics of cinephilosophy.

To end my paper, I would like to sum up my arguments. The first argument posed that philosophy started mainly as an oral tradition in the Greek Marketplace, the Agora. Then, with the written word, philosophy abandoned its origins and transferred itself to the academic ivory tower. Philosophy became synonymous with writing and later printing and then they influenced philosophy. Philosophical written and printed texts were thought to be philosophy. What is the price of this? We have paid a very heavy price, meaning that philosophy was alienated from common language, common people, everyday life. In the beginning philosophy was with young people, everyday people at the Bazaar. But now, philosophy is alienated from its origins. It became aristocratic thinking. I believe cinephilosophy is a great opportunity to make philosophy accessible once again. Cinephilosophy can make a great contribution to creating new concepts and thoughts in philosophical thinking. Cinephilosophy is a new way of doing philosophy.

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# FEM FILMOSOPHY: AESTHETICS OF DOCUMENTARY CINEMA AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY IN POST-PANDEMIC TIMES

## Abstract
This paper is focused on exploring fem filmosophy as discipline and pro-feminist film thinking during and after Covid-19 Times. I will be focused on raising issues related to documentary cinematic thinking and social reproduction theory, especially during the global pandemic, thinking from the position of lockdown, risky positions of the essential and front line workers, and retelling processes of feminist philosophes. I will be focused on the new *Hypatia, Journal of Feminist Philosophy's* film "Gathering of Feminist Voices in Time of Covid-19" (created in June 2020), produced by Cambridge (2021), where I argue about fem filmosophy from the position of an author, together with Bonnie Mann and Brooke Burns). I will develop questions related to feminist documentary as genre and social theory concepts related to specific geo-location during filming, experiments based on narrative devices used in philosophy to prompt global drama of health crisis and essential issues in pandemic times. Some of the general philosophical issues that I will open in this paper will be related to the cinematic thinking and geographic distance, lockdown, raising voices against systemic racial and economic injustice, unequal distribution of vulnerability and suffering in the time of Covid-19, and inadequacy of government responses. Feminist reflection on the multi-dimensional crisis stances would be important, together with imagining "the world after", reflection on activism and structural injustice, and the possible development of new femfilm epistemologies and politics of the feminist documentary genres today.

## Keywords
fem filmosophy, social reproduction theory, feminist documentaries, global (post) pandemic, feminist philosophy

This philosophical essay is about the relation between the philosophy of documentary cinematic thinking, and philosophical aspects of feminist social reproduction theory in (post) Covid-19 times. The epistemological background stays beyond cinema studies entering relation to the Real, social justice feminism, and social reproduction theory. What documentary film has to do with Marxist Feminist reproduction theory before and after pandemic? A philosophy of *documentary* film enters implications for broader film philosophical and theoretical concerns. Feminist philosophy, related to documentary film, opens variable epistemological and metaphysical capacities to document reality. Feminist cinematic thinking always stays inbetween the leaving visualization and transference of the truth, or distortion of the Real in a social context. Jacques Rancière's work on cinema and democracy is the ground for my approach to reconstitute the *possible philosophy of the new wave of feminist documentaries* and women labor documentaries in the anticipatory sense of the process of shooting (but not as a final product) in post-pandemic times. In this sense, I am not going to analyse actual films, but to elaborate on the philosophy of documentarist thinking and what kind of feminist documentaries one might expect in post-pandemic times. The response of documentary cinema is a priori related to essential issues, and logic of aesthetic relation between documentary cinematic art and politics. I shall open further epistemology about resistance in social changes into society, and show what anti-aesthetic staging of post-pandemic cinematic thinking of documentaries have in common. I called this concept - *femfilmosophy*, explaining that it should relate feminist documentaries and feminist historical materialism and social reproduction theory, while proposing an analysis of the order of political and social changes through documentary films about women labor (in times of crisis).

*Hypatia – Journal for Feminist Philosophy* created a feminist documentary, curated by Bonnie Mann, Senka Anastasova, and Brooke Burns in 2021. At that time, gathering together was not possible, especially across the geographic distance, *Hypatia* created this film for Covid-19 in June 2020. Later, in 2021, Cambridge University Press produced it in a final format. Speaking from many different geographic locations, the scholars who are featured in this video are all board members or editors of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. This feminist documentary happened during the

first days of the world global quarantine. It is about the unequal distribution of the political and economic issues associated with the many-layered politics of pandemic and pandemic's structural injustice. Imagining the 'world after', something we are living in right now in (post) covid times, waiting for another year to come. Participants in these films are philosophers: Linda Martin Alcoff (CUNY, New York, USA), Bonnie Mann (University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA), Senka Anastasova (University of UC Berkeley, USA), Shannon Hoff (Memorial University, Toronto, ON Canada), Kris Sealey (Fairfield University, Fairfield, CT USA), Rocío Zambrana (Emory University, Atlanta Georgia USA/Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico), Annabelle Duforcq (Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands), Falguni A. Sheth (Emory University, Atlanta Georgia, USA), Vrinda Dalmiya (University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honololu, USA), Rosaura Martínez Ruiz (UNAM, Mexico City, Mexico), Camisha Russell (University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, USA), Alexandra Kokoli (Middlesex University, London), Yolonda Wilson (Encore Public Voices Fellow, Washington, D.C), Robin Zheng (Yale—NUS College, New Haven, CT USA). The feminist philosophers in this film reflect on the current situation in their own communities and countries. They share their experiences and thoughts about the lockdown, uprisings against systemic racial injustice, and the lopsided economic impact and lethality of the pandemic. Describing the unequal distribution of vulnerability and suffering in the time of Covid-19 and the inadequacy of government responses, these feminists offer their reflections on the multi-dimensional crisis, and where it is taking us. Imagining future days after the pandemic, they reflect on structural injustice, intersectional feminism, hopes, and a better future to come.

As one of the authors, curators, and philosophers included in the film creation, I will present the feminist historical materialism related to the documentary. Or better said, material realities related to creating possible new directions of a documentary which can respond to times of crisis and to social reality. The first aspect I am going to discuss is the documentarist dimension of cinematic thinking as a reflection of concrete time, as an interpretation of social phenomena. I would avoid interpretation of visual (and formalist) coherence of the documentaries, not reducing the documentary to the 'static frame', but with focus on the camera correspondence that relates more to the content of the times of crisis of representation, and

less to the motion of the images. What is specific for the documentary film in times of crisis? Construction of a specific documentarist cinematic space first might be related to the aesthetics of the sublime under the sign of the *transition* of the images through the urgent content of certain times. The new materialism in the documentary I am speaking about is an *onto-epistemological turn* and reflects the representations of the current context. Socialist reproduction theory in relation to cinematic thinking in times of crisis moves away from the 'naked' representational paradigm in the analysis of documentary cinema. I would be distanced from the pure interpretation of the aesthetical language as the political value of a specific documentary genre and would comment implying of the Feminist Marxist theory of the cinema through changing the focus from producing cinematic thinking to the *transformability of actual beings* in the film art from the 'historical mission' of the time. I am using new feminist historical materialism of the documentary not just as related to the film representation in its material specificity (that is not only concerned with a narrative plot, construction, technologies, framing, editing, voice-over, subject matter, structures), but the new materialism that could refer to the manner in which documentary film engages with bodies and with the matter of the social world, and *potentially,* this film changes the world.

I understand that new materialism in feminist documentary cinema only relates to the content, not to the textual structures, formal strategies, or means of production. Only related to the distribution and exhibition of the *sensible* which reveal feminist voices in the organization and legitimization of social inequalities. Historical materialism related to cinematic thinking is important for engaging with bodies and with the matter of society and the Real. Feminist documentary cinema in my relation to the new materialism is understood as a form of *countervisuality*, as the anti-visual culture of representation, with a strong relation to the Real of social inequalities, gender paid gaps, health crisis, humanitarian crisis, issues with governmental response to the crisis, and the imagined alternatives to it.

The concept of feminist filmosophy, or fem filmosophy, connected to social reproduction epistemology, relates the questions of the Real in film and in society as well. The aesthetics of the documentary film in social sciences and humanities is reliable to the truth and the Real. The

capacity of the Real gives the documentary a poetical value needed for the interpretation of the social reality. Documentary cinematic thinking is a world of its own. It consists of a compressed reality, not just transferred, but constructed Real. When documentary cinematic thinking is related to archives, facts, documents, women's struggle movements, then the question of the Real is understood in a speculative way that gives a flux terrain for developing broader concepts in the philosophy of documentary making. Documentary cinematic thinking has become a dominant world, in which one lives. It is not just the substitutional world of the Real, but it is constructed, reported, and documented world that is built on one's perception and understanding of the Real and reality. In times of global crisis, this is more essential since documentary cinematic thinking represents the one who is surviving (not ignoring the health issues, death, necrotizing processes, millions of deaths) while one gets to grips with the moving images, that people come up with a sufficient range of conceptual frameworks by which to understand it. Moving images philosophy, or political philosophy of moving images, opens a question of the *effect of cinematic thinking in society*. That effect is a *political* one but happens on an emotional level.

Rancière's aesthetic philosophy and the concept of *distribution of the sensible* is the core discussion of this essay. The pandemic paradigm gives another dimension to what Rancière calls 'politics of aesthetics'. In other words, the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene is the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration in times of crisis, and ways in which they distribute spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular. Documentary 'politics' of feminist documentary in times of crises potentially changes normal coordinates of sensory experience. The ways of relating the constitution of a material form and of a symbolic space are part of the documentary configuration of cinema and politics of cinema that treats the transformation of the essential labor processes that became a substance for surviving. Documentary cinema does not constitute permanent realities but is about *realities in crisis, realities in progress*, about the distribution of the *sensible in crisis,* or dependent material form on a specific regime of identification in global suffering.

The feminist documentary would not be understood traditionally here as a 'non-fictional' motion picture intended to document reality. But, it inclines toward a specific form of a much more general relationship that exists between the autonomy of the spaces reserved for art and art's involvement in improving forms of the Real, and the will for change. I am in front of the philosophical challenge of how to define the regime of identification of art, or better, a specific relationship between practices, forms of visibility, and modes of intelligibility that enable one to identify the feminist documentary and social reproduction theory as belonging to documentary art or to *a documentary* art in crisis? It depends on the regime in which it is apprehended.

There are three effects of feminist material practices in documentary cinema. The first effect is that films operate as feminist countervisuality devices that reframe realities from a gender-aware perspective. A pattern that films shares is that the filmed subjects are empowered as they enact their right to appear as political subjects in the public space. How does feminist philosophy engage with film? How does it reflect engagement with reality and the nature of cinematic thinking? Documentary cinematic thinking is an act not just of aesthetic experience as a form of knowledge, but it is also a part of the aesthetics of resistance, as well, a part of the aesthetics of living democracy, against the affirmative approach of times of crisis.

Lise Vogel in *Marxist and the Oppression of Women* (2013) examines the goal of Marxist theory for feminist economics today and why it is important to be related to women's oppression in capitalist society. During the 1970s, social feminism developed a relationship to understanding women's oppression as grounded in *socio-material relations*, intrinsic to capitalism, rather than as ideologies. With a focus on exploring the relations of material-discursive apparatuses of communication, and the perception of the value of labor related to information and digital social media, has created gendered issues, which have become a subject of critical inquiry. Times of pandemic just increase the urgent interpretation of these questions. This includes the understanding of cinematic thinking and values under conditions of a dynamic globally spreading new media world practices today. Why is important to connect the reproduction of capital, female labor, and cinematic thinking for *the new epistemologies of feminist filmosophy?*

One of the main points is the reproduction of labor-power that requires a critical social account of capital. As Lise Vogel shows (2013, xxxi) this is not possible without a theorization of the daily, social reproduction of labor-power and the *social organization of the relation between gender,* and *capitalist mode of production* that must be actualized for gender-oppression and exploitation of social media in capitalism and capitalist society. In this instance, female value labor could be investigated at the economic, social, and cultural levels of communication. Gender productive market exchange value enables social material worth investigating at the *symbolic* and *substantial* level of thinking. Work women and essential labor have become *active* in the circulation of the capital in post-pandemic times, giving themselves in the *social media producing process as well,* through reports about social hierarchies and power. In this sense, the connection between female labor activities, global health care crisis, and cinematic thinking of reporting is very *material,* which means *female bodies* are interwoven *into* technology. Understanding bodily material (of female social media labor) is not just a linguistic variant of interaction between body and phone interfaces, but it is also important for the laboring bodies processes and constructions of future of feminist cinematic thinking formations in the documentaries industry, which is the core element of the components of feminist political economy as a critique of documentaries.

First, the feminist documentary, as a form, is a specific category as a product of art, that might impose a long-standing movements for change (at the level of representation that is related to the constitution of a plausible appearance that combines the imaginary and social justice theory). I argue in this paper that feminist documentary has a tiny connection of aesthetics to the social reproduction theory, which means the aesthetic regime of art is not related to technical performances of the cinema but to a specific form of sensory apprehension. Raymond Williams in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* explores the words and boundaries of the discipline, and social justice feminism related to the meanings of change. As it is put in the introduction to *New Keywords*:

> For Williams, the point was not merely that the meanings of words change over time but they change in relationship to

> changing political, social, and economic situations and needs. While rejecting the idea that you could describe that relationship in any simple or universal way, he was convinced that it did exist - and that people do struggle in their use of language to give expression to new experiences of reality (Williams, 1976, note 44, at xvii).

Philosophy of documentary relates the poetic nature of the documentary and the genre's scientific potential function of engaging into the social reality. The relationship between aesthetic and scientific intercourse is about the relationship between epistemology and feminist documentary film that potentially gives different use of the visual images, different expressions to the new experiences of the Real in times of crisis. Feminist documentary as an art form related to social reproduction theory inclines to the political 'politicization' of art and film, to the political emancipation of the reality, since it deals with politics of social reality. My approach deploys defending both a methodological and artistic expression, that covers understanding of documentary poetics in social sciences and relationship to aesthetics as a discipline.

Politics is a politics of configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular experience. Politics is politics that is in conflict and contradiction with its own forms to those constructed by the dissensual interventions of political subjects. Such politics-related art forms then, actually ought to be called *metapolitics.* Feminist cinematic thinking counts metapolitics as thinking in the Aristotelian sense, as expressing the *political as the capacity to place the just and the unjust* in common via art. My rereading of Aristotle means demonstrating the effort that aims to overcome political dissensus by switching scenes, by passing from the appearances of democracy to the underground movements. This distribution and redistribution of places and identities in arts and in documentary films, this distribution, and redistribution of the visible and invisible is something that Rancière calls 'distribution of the sensible'. Feminist Marxism has represented the ultimate form of metapolitics, returning the appearances of politics to the truth of the productive forces of documentary cinematic thinking and relations of production, aesthetic metapolitics cannot fulfill the promise of living the

truth that it finds in aesthetic suspension except in the process of revoking this suspension, which is transforming the form into a form of life (Rancière 2009, 39). That is the core focus of documentary cinematic thinking as a specific form of 'politics' specific to the aesthetic regime of art. Here comes the main question: who possesses the voice in the politics of the becoming-life of documentary art and the politics of the resistant form of the cinema?

Aesthetics of metapolitics and politics of aesthetics are in effect implicated in the documentary by which I identify the philosophy of feminist documentary film as the object of specific life experience. In my approach metapolitics of the documentary film opens terrain for 'rethinking' documentary as thinking that draws attention to itself as a created product (like biopics or documentaries with strong self-reflexivity, self-references, replications). But also that means rereading the relationship between aesthetics of politics and the 'politics of aesthetics'; in other words, in the way in which the practices and forms of visibility of art intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration.

Contrasting feminist documentaries with hermeneutics and Rancière's theoretical background gives to the feminist documentary political and social phenomena, related to basic structures in society, with an inclination of cinematic thinking toward political philosophy. In that vein, documentary thinking as an art form is not excluded from the philosophy of institutions and social practices that includes rights, equality, health issues, redistribution of power. Instead of explaining or theoretically supporting the representation of the existing (or possible) political structures, regimes, and institutions, I am interested in the multiple ways of changing these structures, and norms.

Jacques Rancière's work stimulates a different kind of orientation than what *political* means *in* democratic theory related to cinematic thinking. Rancière gives tools for a 'new topography' in cinematic thinking. Foucauldian or Deleuzian investigations go more into "micropolitics" of cinematic thinking. Rancière belongs to the contemporary theoretical constellation as he does with the one preoccupied with 'the axioms of rupture' emergency, or what he dismisses as the radical experience of the heterogeneous. Rancière is not a thinker of the 'event' (like Badiou is), but rather he is a thinker of emancipation as something within its own tradition, with

a history that is not just made up of great striking deeds, but also of the ongoing effort to create forms of the common, different from the ones on offer from the state and the democratic consensus.

Rancier explores *an-archic* (not anarchist) challenges for these art structures, which lay bare social injustices and political construction and propaganda. Essentially two issues are meant by the order of representation for feminist documentaries. It is a certain order of relations between what can be said and what can be seen about Real. The Real is not just transferred but it is constructed through the cinema's medium. The political efficacy of feminist documentaries stays in front of the challenge in post-pandemic times, to *correct human crisis* or reality, against 'spectacle' and commercialization of the health, abuse of the power position, to mobilize artists against injustice and health crises. It is about the critique of the 'spectacle', 'abuse', 'inequalities' (economic, health, social, cultural) that are directly bonded to *form in the transition* of the cinematic thinking toward potentially new forms of expression. This is the new challenge of the 'politics of feminist documentaries', and escaping the raw representational mediation. This afterword focuses on Rancière's conceptualization of the relationship between democracy as a politics without arche, rule without qualification, and the singular acts of political subjectivization and democratic appearance that brings this contingency to light and enact it on the public stage.

Aesthetic efficacy means a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the ruptures of any determinate link between cause and effect. The ruptures happen with every contextual crisis. Every crisis constitutes new directions of cinematic thinking. That is why I treat feminist cinematic documentary thinking as an attitude of apprehension. Cinema must reinvent itself after the crisis and find itself in a completely unprecedented perceptual space. In a Deleuzian sense of understanding, after wars, after huge historical destabilizations art should renvented itself. In general, the collapse of the sensory-motor schema mirrors a world becoming more and more incomprehensible after the crisis, and its films are, indicative of the deeper forces afflicting human agency, that is, the ability to make connections between seeing, thinking, acting at the social stage of movements. On this point, it is worth quoting Deleuze and the thesis Rancière challenges:

> . . . the crisis which has shaken the action-image has depended on many factors which only had their full effect after the war, some of which were social, economic, political, moral and others more internal to art, to literature and to the cinema in particular. We might mention, in no particular order, the war and its consequences, the unsteadiness of the "American Dream" in all its aspects, the new consciousness of minorities, the rise and inflation of images both in the external world and in people's minds, the influence on the cinema of the new modes of narrative with which literature had experimented, the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres. . . Certainly, people continue to make SAS and ASA films: the greatest commercial successes always take that route, but the soul of the cinema no longer does. The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions and affections on which cinema had fed up to that point (Deleuze, 1989, 206).

I take Rancière related Deleuze for the way Rancière unnecessarily delimits the capacity of cinematic possibility. Rancière's critique attempts to restore possibility to the practice, thinking, and analysis of cinema. It does this by connecting the cinema to the combination of different poetic inheritances, and emancipation of the cinematic thinking toward the social and economic status of the documentaries. Feminist documentaries express not 'observation' of the Real, but intervention into it. It can be raised through something I called politics of imagination, emancipated from the textual. Rancière argues that in Deleuzian terms, each image functions both as movement-image and time-image. Every film is composed not of images but of image, functions that both supplement and contradict each other. The distinction between two images would be strictly transcendental. And they can convey the social questions only through imagination and engagement with the social systems.

Deleuze's insistence on the possibility of a new image of thought emerging from the ruins of the sensory-motor schema. Deleuze intends to describe a certain state of cinema, the point to be made from Rancière's perspective is that such descriptions are themselves political. They shape the meaning of what presents itself to sense and indicate what is possi-

ble with respect to the political. Cinema is more than simply the reflection of a pre-established reality; Feminist documentary thinking goes beyond the aesthetic language of ethnographic documentary and engages itself in imagination to convey knowledge and action of change in society. That is one of the means by which one discovers and contests the boundaries of what is sensible, thinkable, and possible. It distributes and redistributes the sensible. Through our encounters with this art, one inhabits new worlds, that can be brought into conflict with the world as ordained. As Rancière thinks, an art is never simply an art; it is always at the same time the proposition of a possible world. Exiting from the logic of incapacity, the question thus becomes: what kind of world does one want to create?

## Aesthetics and Sensing Equality

Epistemological conversation of equality is implicit in many artistic practices and often obscured by the tradition's conceptualization of the aesthetic experience. Rancière does a successful attempt by making equality central to conversations, developing the concept of cinema that allows having a sensible approach to what we struggle for. Rancière's justification of equality is related to imagination, measured in terms of one's ability to overcome obstacles to collective action, and to challenge the sensible context in the society. Here comes the question, what enables subjectivities to create connections, affirm equality, and depart from the overall sensory logic of the day? What distributes and redistributes the sensible? What are the processes of politics and artistic invention? Philosophical aesthetics reflection, more than simply conceptualizing existence, invents new forms of relation, new modes of being, and new sensible configurations.

Cinematic thinking related to social reproduction theory gives to me a space for the connection of Rancière's concept of equality in art with the concept of an unequal distribution of precariousness fostered by gender power relations, socio-political infrastructures issues, and lack of response in times of the pandemic. Connecting cinematic documentary thinking with the philosophy of labor, as Lise Vogel puts on a question of laboring bodies could be open, or, better, the *laboring-self*, through technologies distribution, or, bodies that are hierarchically already ordered by a capitalist world. All essential works and documented essential workers' dramatic

struggle during the post-pandemic time, open Hardt and Negri 'affective labor' issue that concerned 'women's work' or 'labor in the bodily mode'. But this labor is immaterial, too, in social reproduction theory. Evelyn Nakano Glenn says:

> The term social reproduction has come to be more broadly conceived, particularly by social historians, to refer to the creation and recreation of people as cultural and social, as well as physical, beings. Thus it involves mental, emotional, and manual labor. This labor can be organized in myriad ways – in and out of the household, as paid or unpaid work, creating exchange value or only use-value – and these ways are not mutually exclusive (Glenn, 1992, 4).

Political concepts of documentary thinking should provoke historically and aesthetically situated democratic theorizing, along the lines of investigations into radical educational reformers, film thinkers, socialism, contemporary cinema, rather than a stream of "rigid" theory. Social reproduction theory in cinematic thinking means filming and telling stories that have been neglected while there is a connection between image and politics of cinematic thinking in resistance, to be explored besides the evocative images. Varda's declaration: 'le cinéma c'est le mouvement des sensations' ('cinema is the movement of sensations') means that the film is only a material race of encounters or praxis, aesthetics, reception, geography, emotional labor, not just physically experienced space but emotionally experienced, something that it is a part of the caring economy as well. Rancière attempts to move the aesthetic from the aesthetic experience towards a consideration of the new relations of equality woven by the aesthetic regime of thinking. Rancière's reading of aesthetic theory as the inscription of equality in a sense it is a concerted effort needed to direct it away from its reliance on hierarchy.

The philosophers who initiated aesthetics did not invent subversion in the forms of presentations, neither did they invent the break with the hierarchical order that has defined which subjects and forms of expression are reconfigured, nor invented relations between the visual images of motion but they have grasped and conceptualized the fracturing of the regime of identification in which the products of art cinema have been perceived

and thought, the ruptures between *poiesis* and *aesthesis* established by the norms of mimesis. At this line of challenge, thoughts stay open to the documentary cinematic thinking toward the concept of the intersectional epistemic thoughts of feminist documentaries. Hence, the relation between aesthetics and social reproduction theory is illuminated at the domain of the thought whose object is 'sensibility', located on the terrain of the way of thinking the paradoxical sensorium that makes possible to define the phenomena of philosophy of cinematic thinking toward social context. What are the relations between aesthetics and equality? If aesthetics is the thought of the new disorder, then this disorder must have a correlation to implification that the hierarchy of subjects, cinema, and social context does not become rigid. It implies that art and documentary films no longer refer to those who commissioned and established them but relate to the social orders in the Hegelian sense. What are the connections between the aesthetic regime and in terms of Rancière's own position, the connections between aesthetic experience and the experience of equality? One basic aspect is the transfiguration of the aesthetic experience of Rancière related to equality and practices of art as indifference to the subject matter and stylistic form. In its displacement of the hierarchical system of values that formed the representative regime, the aesthetic idea of art affirmed that anything could become the subject of art and that there is no necessary way in which a subject must be presented. Hence, cinema, cancels the hierarchies, investing its powers in visual innovations. Once the cinematic world is removed from the hierarchical regimes of sense understanding, there is more space for the political economy of the meaning of the context.

Does aesthetic freedom serve, as it did for Athens's democracy, as one moves from subjective experience to equality in society? According to Kant's aesthetic philosophy, it is about the democracy of aesthetic experience, rooted in freedom. Kantian 'sublime experience' develops epistemological tension of ethnographic film related to the functions of the aesthetics in society as the epistemological principle of documentary scientific knowledge in cinematic practices. To think aesthetically for me is like in Rancière – Marxist way, i.e., to make disruptions of the cinematic way of thinking responsive to times of crisis. Aesthetics and disruptions between film fiction and facts. That flirting between fiction and fact of streamed filmed stories

makes to live a film life, documentary film life and to make the justice happen for real in dark times. How you intervene in the Real while you are shooting the reality, how do you remake it and change it, all that is important for women's movements, black lives matter, invisible injustice, gender paid gaps. I would refer to the documentaries before Covid-19 started: *American Factory* (2019) by Julia Reichert and Steven Bognar, to *The Real Work* (2016) by Jamie K. McCallum, and to *Honeyland* (2019) by Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov, where the labor is one of the core topics. *Honeyland* illuminates more in a poetic way the last female bee-keeper labor processes in Macedonia. *The Real Work* and *American Factory* refers to the low-waged hard work and economic representation of the society through a radical critique of the current capitalist society in the United States of America. From the epistemology of the fem filmosophy, all of these mentioned documentaries imply that documentary is not simply a preproduction of reality, it is its own world with its own intentions. Reality appears from another world, now it is about the transfiguration of reality, and perception, one's perceptional power, and now related to labor and specifically women sensate labor. Cinema allows to re-see reality, expanding one's perceptions, and showing a new Real. The documentary film challenges one's view of reality, forcing a phenomenological approach about how reality is not just perceived by one's mind but how reality is disrupted, rebuilt, changed in a long-term quality process against inequality. Most cinema starts with a recording of reality, but the reality is understood through cinema only in relation to the reality it records. That is a specific moment of change about a distinctive political documentary. Like movies by Agnès Varda. Film theory has seen significant critical extensions *via* phenomenology, philosophy, and intersectionality, offering potentially 'critical openings'. Varda's shows in her movies the re-situation within the cultural and political context. Varda's movies are about cinema of resistance through to a commitment to represent women's neglected issues within the history of feminist and political cinema in conception and messaging. Or, "running film", something that could be expressed in times of crisis like double entendre for live capture *and* the traveling camera, as an implied, almost material strategy for conjuring a plot frame, something that could provide a new way for rethinking new post-pandemic feminist documentary cinema.

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# THE FILM IS NOT ROUND: MILCHO MANCHEVSKI'S *BEFORE THE RAIN* (*PRED DOŽDOT*, 1994)

**Abstract**
Milcho Manchevski's movie *Before the Rain* (Pred doždot, 1994) is a convoluted, but a very sensitive film. Besides having deep political and human resonances, its form is unusual and intriguing. We are strongly tempted to explain it rationally, but its own rationality, the product of a perfectly concerted structure escapes the most common narrative logic. Deviations from the expected logic are summarized in its motto "The circle is not round," an apparent paradox that invites us to consider both the filmic form and the immersion of the spectator.

It is a great pleasure for me to write on Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain*, perhaps because I particularly like films whose very structure is enigmatic. "The film is not round". I gave this title to my text for two reasons. Firstly, because *Before the Rain* is known to be complicated as the French Journal *Les Inrocks* says when it speaks of a "convoluted narrative structure" and Ian Christie, when he speaks of a "never-ending story." Secondly, the title has to do with the fact that the film repeats a strange sentence several times: "The circle is not round."

"The circle is not round" has become a motto. It can be at least used to explain the comments of critics who have found the film complicated. I even guess it is a key to the explanation of the film, but a special key. The director may have conceived the film as a lock for this key, but my method, if I may use this challenging term, is to do so, to insert this key into the lock, and this way of working and thinking about it will determine what the perspective of philosophy of film allows.

Not only a key, but "a very special key". Actually, this key is not suitable to the film insofar, as it would close it with a final interpretation. It rather opens interpretations; it opens discussions and probably a never-ending discussion.

Film philosophy, as explained, is not an applied philosophy where a philosophy or a philosopher simply superimposes it to a film. No. Film philosophy, as I mean it, is the attempt to give an account of the spirit of the film with the help of philosophers, other thinkers such as scientists, critics, and artists, and, most of the time, with thoughts that come directly to the mind — unfortunately, to my mind.

Erwin Panofsky called this method "iconology", a way of considering a work of art "which one could name a 'philosophy,' if it would have formed a rational system." *If it would have formed a rational system*: yes, although a film is not a system, at least not in the same sense as a philosophical discourse. Moreover, regarding *Before the Rain*, the search for a rational system is likely to be disappointing insofar as one would associate with the idea of rationality those of order, logic and normality. If *Before the Rain* has to do with logic, then it is in a broader sense. More specifically, in the significance of this special type of logic which is called paraconsistant logic, meaning a logic which is opened to contradictions. This special type of logic is my special key.

To begin the deconstruction, consider the contradiction between circle and round. This idea of the circle that is not round irresistibly alludes to the Zen circle, the *ensô*, a symbol of both emptiness and completion that appears frequently in Japanese painting and calligraphy. Made by hand in a single jet, it has both the perfection of the circle and the imperfection of the instantaneous hand motion. The Zen circle is never quite round, it is either broken, or blurred, or associated with some sign of imperfection (an old rusty nail for example, symbolizing imperfection, or the decay of time). I do not claim that *Before the Rain* is a Zen film. Simply, the inspiration by the philosophy of the Zen circle and my no less modest knowledge of the Japanese culture suggest me that the way the film is organized around its leitmotif is a good hypothesis to understand it.

In regard to *Before the Rain*, two questions come to my mind. The first investigates its filmic structure as such, given the general tendency to

qualify it negatively. The second debates the spectator's activity, given the various assumptions that the complex structure of the film implies. Unlike criticism that focuses only on the film content, I think that structure is the business of analysts or theorists who benefit from converting the films into academic papers and lectures. Structure is strongly implied in the spectatorial activity, even if it remains unconscious, and it weighs no less strongly on the aesthetic judgment.

*Before the Rain* perfectly illustrates this point. The film belongs to the category of works of art which give the impression of a disorder comparable to that produced by shuffling the cards. The film is divided into three parts: Words, Figures, and Images. Their narrative succession looks clear, at least if the order of appearance is disregarded in the film, an unexpected order or disorder where the first comes second, the second comes third and the third comes at first. No one could do better!

Putting these parts in the "right" order, we get, at least apparently, the "simple" story of a war photographer, Aleksandar (Rade Šerbedžija), who, leaving Anne (Katrin Cartlidge), the woman he loves in London, returns to Macedonia to meet his childhood sweetheart, Hana (Silvija Stojanovska), who asks him to protect her daughter, Zamira (Labina Mitevska). Zamira runs away, takes refuge in the cell of a monastery where Kiril (Grégoire Colin) – a young monk and the photographer's nephew, falls in love with her. He protects her, until she is tragically killed. All this happens in the context of ethnic-religious rivalries between Macedonians and Albanians, whose communities respectively perpetrate the murders.

Like many fictional feature films, Milcho Manchevski's work is not limited to its plot. Not only it is enriched by underlying themes: silence, face, images, and so on, brought to the visual surface by various motifs involved in the narrative, but what defines it above all is a manifest will to disturb the normal order of a story, the expected causality, the ineluctable progression which goes from the beginning to the ending.

However, this vocabulary falls into the defect that I wanted to avoid. Nevertheless, this is to consider negatively the structure of the film as suggested by the word "convoluted", meaning, about a story or a sentence, overly complex and uneasy to follow; in the same way, the endless story's idea which denotes a break with the time standard.

It is true that Manchevski emphasizes negativity by repeating his paradox of the circle that is not round. More precisely, just before we see an imperfect circle built by children with twigs to serve as an arena for a turtle fight, a monk, Brother Marko, first pronounces the aphorism increased by a consideration of time: "Time never dies." It reappears in the second episode as graffiti on a brick wall near Aleksandar who is calling a cab. It is pronounced again by the monk who says to Kiril, during the final reprise of the initial scene: "Come. It is time. And time does not wait. And the circle is not round."

In order to hypothesize that the cinematographic idea underlying the overall shape of *Before the Rain* has to do with this enigma, without even quibbling about the difference between circle and round (we should probably think about the difference between line and volume, figure and form). In any case, we will look for what, in this film, by prolonging time, the circle is prevented from closing. But, before that, we must return to this circle. Following the disruption of the order of the parts that would otherwise have constituted a clear scenario, an overlap occurs that is likely to spawn the idea of a temporal circle: the end of the third part, where Kiril picks tomatoes before returning to the monastery. This scene repeats, with some variations, as the beginning of the first scene.

Overall, the film can give the impression of a story that goes round in circles, in the manner of the so-called Ourobouros form, the snake that bites its own tail (possibly associated with the Zen circle), a form often invoked by writers and filmmakers of the "Nouveau roman", such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, whose *L'Homme qui ment*, *The Man Who Lies*, 1968, is a brilliant example: after many restarts, its narrator "resets" his story at the end.

As in this film, between the initial story of *Before the Rain* and its resumption there is a variation of representation prefigured in the variant that affects the basic aphorism "The circle is not round". The accident of the third occurrence illustrates particularly the idea of the imperfect circle in its fundamental contradiction, while, supposedly, the circle contradicts the arrow of time that stretches forward.

I am not indifferent to the ideological and political aspects of this film. At the time when I discovered the cinema of North Macedonia, not only with *Before the Rain*, but, to take another shining example, 2019 *God*

*Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija*, directed by Teona Strugar Mitevska, I was also interested in *1947: Earth*, one of the films in Deepa Metha's beautiful trilogy, which also shows the unfortunate consequences that wars between religious communities have on human relations. *Before the Rain* and *1947: Earth* are powerful pleas for the overcoming of communal rivalries. Kiril is Macedonian, Zamira is Albanian, Aleksandar is Macedonian, Hana is Albanian, and it is as if this transgression of socio-religious barriers was passed from uncle to nephew.

Beyond this notable aspect of the film, my attention was mainly drawn to the apparent defects of the film — *apparent* as we talk about the apparent movement of the planets, that is to say, what seems to be the real movement but is not. Apart from spotting jump cuts and goofs, film analysis is not a bug fixing, and everything leads us to believe that the defects of the film are voluntary. The process of analysis, establishing a back-and-forth between distant passages of the films, leads to hypotheses.

This intellectualized spectatorial activity of the film professor is comparable to abduction, which is, according to the semiotician and philosopher Charles Peirce, a mode of reasoning that is mobilized when there is "the feeling that a theory is necessary to explain the surprising facts". By this way, in contradiction with the anti-intellectualist opinion shared by some film critics, the analysis does not kill the aesthetic feeling. On the contrary, it offers new nourishment to this kind of taste.

On the other hand, I am fully aware of the fact that analysis can quickly and definitively distance us from the initial spectatorial state which, admittedly, is as abstract as the Roland Barthes' zero degree of writing, given the inter-individual disparities, but reunites our consciousnesses in the consented abandonment to the filmic flow, in which resides the best of the cinephile pleasure.

Approaching *Before the Rain* in this state of mind, my first experience was rather hazy. I had the vague feeling of narrative overlaps and apparent inconsistencies. In terms of aesthetic feeling, a certain uneasiness quite conductive to triggering the desire to know more. It made me feel a little uneasy, but the kind that, instead of making me move on, made me want to know more. I then entered in what Paul Valéry names "the aesthetic infinity": characteristic of the reception of artworks, instead of extinguish-

ing the desire like eating when one is hungry, it calls for its prolongation. One of its possible extensions consists in deepening the analysis of the film not to kill the desire, but as Freud suggested in front of Michelangelo's Moses, to put the reason at the level of the emotion produced by the artwork.

So, I immediately started to inform myself about the film (via Internet), and I started to analyze it by rewatching passages several times, in the hope of making the process of "abduction" succeed, this Peircian concept which means roughly, intrigued by a strange form, I invent hypotheses to understand it. My pleasure has not diminished. On the contrary, in any process of deciphering an enigma, it is the enigma itself that provokes the greatest pleasure. This sort of disturbance of aesthetic enjoyment can be compared to the aesthetic verdict of what foreplay is to orgasm.

I have therefore first taken into consideration what varies in the apparently duplicated representation of the beginning of the first part and the end of the third part, and thus gained a foothold in the paradox of the imperfection of the circle. The main variation between the first scene and the reprise is that, first, we only meet Zamira when Kiril discovers her hiding in her room. In the reprise, we see her running towards the monastery where we can assume she will hide. The closing of the circle, in order for it to really go round, is marred by this discrepancy between the two versions that sanction the possibility of representing the same event from two different points of view. This film element is emblematic of parallel versions of the duel in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (John Ford, 1962): the same scene is shown from two points of view, the second one revealing who really is the man who killed Liberty Valance.

In fact, the theme of time that does not die is contradicted both by Aleksandar's time and the movie's time. For Aleksandar, time stops with his death. For the film, time stops exactly where the film stops. Because of this closed, finite and ineluctable character of filmic time, Jean-Paul Sartre said that film is the opposite of contingency. Manchevski does not abolish this constitutive feature of the medium, insofar as no one escapes it, even by the longest film in the world; but he circumvents it by drawing a series of circles and intersections in order to avoid sinking into the boredom of perfect circularity.

Already attenuated by the imperfection of the repetition of the same scene at the beginning and at the end of the film, the apparently dominant cinematographic idea of a restart that sounds like a narrative translation of fatality is countered in favor of a dysnarrative work. This concept of "dysnarrative" has been coined by Robbe-Grillet not with the greek prefix *dis-* which denotes division, but with the greek prefix *dys-* which denotes difficulty, or crisis (think of *dyslexia*). It means that regular storytelling in many of its aspects is placed in an unstable state, in crisis, that can be interpreted in the light of the not round circle. The Zen circle is in such a state; the circle is not round means something like a *dyscircular circle*: as well as the *ensô* may be opened, roughly drawn, blurred or counterbalanced by an old nail, the narrative forms may be opened, rough, blurred, convoluted or contradictory.

Consider now a series critical passages located in each of the three parts of *Before the Rain*, because they contain an unexpected dysnarrative form. In both the common and the technical sense (in other words, two levels of abduction): the common sense obviously refers to the perplexity of the spectator in front of the unexpected anomalies, while the technical sense refers to the exercise of the specialist. But, even the amateur of so-called convoluted narrations – as I'm afraid to be – the simple first vision does not allow the viewer to find the serenity of a perfect comprehension; the film leaves us in a kind of fog as long as we reason with the old patterns of the classic narrative form, based on the worldview we have internalized from our daily experience of the world. But for most of us, even though the real world is the only possible world, we know and we like that works of fiction, in cinema as in literature, propose other possible worlds.

1. In the real world you die and then you are buried. A weird dysnarrative sequence of *Before the Rain* proposes the opposite. After Kiril's meeting with Zamira, we attend a funeral with Macedonian villagers, some of them heavily armed. There is a fleeting glimpse of the body of the dying man and his face: long hair, mustache and beard. It's not clear how the viewer could identify the person. It is by rewatching the film that we can identify him: this seems to be Aleksandar already died, unless he will be killed only at the movie's end. The sequence, given the dysnarrative reversal of the course of

events, can be understood retroactively as a foresight of what will follow. It is more than a premonition given the weight of reality that the representation of the funeral conveys. Immediately afterwards, armed villagers stormed the church of St. John at Kaneo and then the monastery in search of Zamira. This Albanian young woman who is wrongly accused of having killed a Macedonian (who?).

2. Something strange happens again during the funeral. Suddely, the camera pans to a young woman, alone in the landscape, who says "Oh, my God!" Clearly she is witnessing the scene like the viewer: is she the mediator of our gaze? This young woman is Anne, Aleksandar's girlfriend from London; but let's remember we will only discover their relationship in the second part of the film. Moreover, there is no evidence that she made the trip from London to the Macedonian village. The opposite seems even more plausible.

3. In the second part of *Before the Rain*, there is another disturbing detail whose obvious effect is to break the linearity of the narrative as well as to counteract the sense of circularity: Aleksandar, before leaving Anne to return to his village in Macedonia, gives her some photographs he is supposed to have taken that shows Zamira dead, Kiril by her side, with the police and a filming photographer who could be Alexandar but does not look that much like him. In this scene that is obviously reminiscent of Antonioni's *Blow up*, Anne looks at the photographs with a magnifying glass on a light table.

4. After her examination of the photos, Anne receives a phone call from someone who, speaking in French, asks for Aleksandar. Just after we see the photographer on his way out, in front of this brick wall where is written: "Time never dies. The circle is not round." Who phones Anne? Kiril? But he has taken a vow of silence. Why does he speak now? And why does he speak in French? Because the actor who plays him, Grégoire Colin, is French? Unable to decide what it is, what means this moment of transgression of the narrative pact, one obviously evokes Jean-Luc Godard. In this particularly troubling moment, we do not know at which stage of the story we are, and the enigma will not be cleared up later.

5. It might seem that the last part escapes the dysnarrative work. But if "work" can be understood here as in the Freudian expression of "dream work", it is quite the opposite. Aleksandar has returned to his native land;

asleep in bed, he is awakened by the village teacher who, after he has rejected her advances, asks him: "Still dreaming about Hana?" He finds this last one with her family; she welcomes him freshly, but, when he leaves, she gives him a sustained glance.

6. Hana/Anne: this duality is a crucial element of the film. Its second part focuses on Anne, the third one, on Hana. Anne tries in vain to reach Alexsandar by phone in Macedonia; the operator of the village post office does not speak English. This failure could have decided her to meet Aleksandar in Macedonia, as the shots of the first part might suggest. However, she would have arrived too late to attend the funeral... This hypothesis is no more substantiated than the rest. The film has resolutely shifted from Anne to Hana, in parallel with the fate of Alexandar.

7. But it could just as well be that we are in a kind of a twilight zone between reality and dream, a back and forth between the two. After various scenes concerning, among other things, the murder of which Zamira is wrongly accused, Aleksandar, once again asleep in his bed, sees Hana in a dream in the back of the room. He suddenly wakes up and says "Hana!", but there is no one there. He goes to fall asleep again and this time is awakened by a presence; first the movement of a shadowy figure, then Hana herself asking him to help her by protecting Zamira, "as if she were yours" she tells him. Aleksandar has taken Hana's hand, this tactile contact intended to give physicality to the scene. But nothing forbids, given the first scene where Hana appears fleetingly, to see it again as a dream or a hallucination.

I coined the concept of "the film that dreams", about David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. The text appears in the book *Story*, published by Amsterdam University Press, in order to consider more carefully the fact that what Freud named *the work of a dream*, beyond the content of a dream, could apply to some kind of film structures. In the "film that dreams" genre, the work of the dream characterizes not only what happens in the story, the dreams of the characters, but the narrative and formal structure of the film as well. In this type of film, the normal order of the story can be disrupted. In *Before the Rain* the narrative cards have been shuffled, or rather reordered skilfully. Precisely, Aleksandar is supposed to have filmed in Macedonia the final scene of the first episode, while in the second part, he is supposed to

return to his country, while in the third he dies before Zamira to allow his escape to the monastery.

Structures at distance, what I call *telestructures*, which are present in the film are of particular importance. In any film, there are many references at a distance that serve to give consistency to the narrative, in addition to the relations of close order. In *Before the Rain* there is more: a network of formal telestructures creating another film that is not only superimposed on the first film, but above all crosses it and innervates it like a neural network. Neural networks have the property of plasticity while telestructures give plasticity to the film.

To conclude, why *Before the rain*? This is another leitmotif of the film in addition to being its title. From the brother Marko, who evokes its arrival at the beginning and at the end, to Aleksandar's final line after his murder, it is omnipresent in the occurrential link with the aphorism of the circle that is not round.

We can still make different assumptions:

– The rain may be related to the circle, to the cycle, the cycle of Mother nature;

– Or it may be a reference to the line of time that advances ineluctably;

– This time will also come at some point, but it is also a moment of rupture.

Again the circle is not round. Some people have only one idea, to take shelter. This is the advice that brother Marko gives to Kiril. Others, who were looking forward to it, see it as a blessing from nature. Rain either soaks us or saves us.

At the end of the film, the rain washes away the blood from Aleksandar's wounds, while Zarima seems to enjoy for a moment the same rain that washes over her face. Kiril is already in the shelter, but this freshness is waiting for him. So, again there is this underlying network which I did not explore all the extent which gives to Manchevski's work all its density, that of a film which does not turn round because it is detracted from itself.

The limitations of this study are that it is impossible to analyze all the relevant sequences such as the long scene in the restaurant, which leaves me perplexed. I have not solved all the enigmas of the film and maybe

some of my abductions are false. This is why, after having enjoyed seeing Manchevski's film, and seeing it again and again after the analysis, I continue to watch it with that kind of fascination which represents the idea of the aesthetic attitude some theorists of the 18th century, in particular Archibald Alison, whose *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1890) are little known but extremely valuable. Film philosophy comes to this heart of aesthetic attitude when we assume that film analysis accompanied by philosophy does not only turn explicit elements into implicit ones, but faces the challenge to give an account of the very fact that what philosophy helps making explicit remains definitively implicit in the film.

## Filmography

*Before the Rain* (*Pred doždot*), Milcho Manchevski, 1994.
*Earth* (*1947: Earth*), Deepa Metha, 1999.
*God Exists, Her Name Is Petrunija* (*Gospod postoi, imeto ì e Petrunija*), Teona Strugar Mitevska, 2019.
*The Man Who Lies* (*L'Homme qui ment*), Alain Robbe-Grillet, 1968.
*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, John Ford, 1962.
*Twin Peaks* (season 3), David Lynch, 2017.

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# WHAT MAKES A DREAM SEQUENCE PHILOSOPHICALLY RELEVANT?

## Abstract

Ever since René Descartes let his evil daemon run amok, if not earlier, the demarcation between dream and reality has become a great challenge for philosophical thinking. On the other hand, rethinking the line between different spheres of reality is also challenging for the art of film. Taking into account the possibility of fruitful interpenetration between philosophical motives and film images, the author will explore the epistemic potential of so-called *dream sequences* in selected films. Dream sequences do not only represent technical solutions of the problem of creating the uniqueness of dream worlds in narrative contexts, but also they can be a reason to question the demarcation line between reality and dreams or even mislead the expectations of the viewer in such a way that he/she falls for the trick by believing in the seeming compactness of the presented scenes even though it does not exist. Thus, the use of dream sequences is more than a subtle technique. Especially the multiple nested sequences can initiate a deeper phenomenological reflection about the role of immersion and interruption in constituting our view of imagined realities or – which amounts to the same thing – real phantasms in films.

## Keywords

dream, reality, philosophy, film, dream sequences, immersion, interruption

Distinguishing reality from illusion is equally challenging for both philosophy and art. While philosophy is concerned with clearly drawing the line between being and non-being, art blurs this line of demarcation. Certain forms motivate philosophers as well as artists to deal with these boundaries anew.

*Dream* is one of these forms. As the beginning of his *Meditations* shows, René Descartes started from a disturbing assumption: "When I think this over more carefully I see so clearly that waking can never be distinguished from sleep by any conclusive indications that I am stupefied; and this very stupor comes close to persuading me that I am asleep after all" (Descartes, 2008, 14). Ever since Descartes' no less disturbing thought experiment about the *genius malignus*, philosophers have wondered whether what is happening around them is real or just part of a dream. In contrast, art tends to create dreamlike realities in which the recipient can recover from "stress" of everyday life. Film art, specifically, is characterized by the creation of such dream worlds. According to the well-known German philosopher and sociologist, Siegfried Kracauer, the art of film follows two opposite tendencies: the *realistic* and the *formative tendency* (Cf. Kracauer, 1997, 30–37). Considering the fact that the film evolved from the medium of photography, it should rather tend towards a realistic depiction of physical reality. Nevertheless, many filmmakers often opt to create fantastic worlds in their works. Dreams are particularly suitable as the subject of these films that follow a formative tendency. Setting aside Kracauer's favoritism of realism, "the redemption of physical reality",[1] and accepting the forcing of formative tendency as a completely legitimate choice in filmmaking, we can agree with the statement that the depiction of dreams has a special significance for those creators who give fantasy precedence over reality. Hence, it is not surprising that dreams play an important role in fantasy, horror and mystery films.

There is a special technique that can be used to bring the dream to light within a motion picture. It is called *"dream sequence"*. A "dream sequence" is a film scene that usually stands out from the rest of the story and the content of which can vary from a more or less compact wholeness to a series of unconnected events. Although it bears this name, a dream sequence does not necessarily have to reflect a specific dream content. Considering the fact that their structure resembles the process of dreaming, it makes sense to name these film sequences in this way. I will use two examples to show how a dream sequence can work well without referring to a special dream content or how another can literally bring a dream to

[1] This is the subtitle of his famous theoretical work.

life using means of filmic expression. A whole film can look like a dream sequence. However, just as a single dream sequence can represent a "movie on a small scale" or even a "film within a film".

A film sequence does not have to deal with dreams to be a dream sequence. As an example, consider one of the most famous dream sequences in film history – the surrealistic masterpiece *An Andalusian Dog* [*Un chien andalou*] (1929), directed by Luis Buñuel and written by Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. Although the film seems to depict scenes from real life, its plot follows the "dream logic". Actually, there is no plot, the story does not have any sense. This is shown by the discontinuous chronology of the "events" in the film: eight years have passed since the beginning scene, then one looks sixteen years earlier, and, finally, the film ends one spring without any other specification. In order to realize their main art intentions, trace the surrealistic pattern of creation, and the so-called "automatic writing", Buñuel and Dalí refused to tell the audience a conventionally structured story as they avoided a rational explanation of the presented scenes and hoped that the audience would perceive the stream of images without reading a fixed meaning from these images. Both drew the inspiration for the disturbing images from their dreams. Buñuel said that in one of his dreams a cloud sliced the moon in half "like a razor blade slicing through an eye" (both was shown in the legendary opening scene of the film). Dalí dreamed of a hand and of ants crawling out from a wound on its palm. These two bizarre dreams motivated the film makers to create some unforgettable sequences that can be taken as paradigmatic examples of what is called "dream sequence". What does the example of this film show when it comes to the philosophical relevance of "dream sequences"? Obviously, these sequences do not necessarily have to be related to the filmic narrative. Moreover, they themselves do not have to be narrative at all! Dream sequences are autonomous, because they follow a special logic – the "dream logic". Within a cinematic work, they can mark a unique sphere of reality that has its own cognitive style, a typical form of spontaneity, a specific time structure and social dimension. Although the scenes from *An Andalusian Dog* do not represent the traditional understanding of a dream, there are structural similarities between dream sequences and dream fragments. Because of that, we can consider them dream sequences *par excellence*.

The following example shows us how a single dream sequence could be the key to an adequate understanding of the plot of a film. It represents the missing link between events that have emerged in the past and events that are yet to come. It may not surprise us that Alfred Hitchcock, the famous "Master of Suspense", used the dream motif in his films. This makes sense because it is well known that the British director was very interested in the method and insights of psychoanalysis. Produced in 1945, his film *Spellbound* is the very first film in which the great filmmaker has explicitly dealt with psychoanalytical topics, literally because one of the main protagonists of the film is the emotionless and distant psychoanalyst Dr. Constance Petersen, played by Ingrid Bergman. She works at *Green Manors*, a mental hospital in Vermont. Things change when the surprisingly young Dr. Anthony Edwardes (Gregory Peck) takes on the role of director of the hospital, replacing the much older Dr. Murchison. Constance falls in love with the new colleague but also begins to doubt his identity when she realizes that the newcomer is suffering from a disturbing phobia: he always becomes agitated when noticing parallel lines on a white background. This is not the only disturbing discovery. Constance finds out that he also suffers from amnesia and believes that he has murdered the real Dr. Edwardes whose patient he actually was. His real name could be John Brown. After he fled, Constance tracks him down to a hotel. The two decide to get to the bottom of the matter and reveal Brown's true identity. Dr. Alexander Brulow, the former mentor of Constance, is providing shelter to the refugees. At his home, they are hiding from the police. During their stay with Dr. Brulow the situation is slowly beginning to unfold. The false Dr. Edwardes retells his host and Constance one of his dreams which becomes the key scene in the film.

In John Brown's dream, John is playing cards in a gambling house. The curtains in the house are covered with huge eyes. One person cuts up the curtains with giant scissors. All at once, an attractive young woman comes closer to John and then suddenly starts kissing everyone in the room. Then, an older card-player is accused of cheating by the masked owner of the club. In the next dream fragment this old man falls from a roof of a house. This is a mysterious masked man hiding behind the chimney with a distorted wheel in his left hand. In the last dream fragment, John is running down

a hill, haunted by a gigantic shadow that looks like a pair of wings. What does this enigmatic dream sequence mean?

Based on the interpretation of John's dream, Constance and Brulow presume that a skiing accident happened in Gabriel Valley in which the real Dr. Edwardes died. John and Constance travel to this place and try to reconstruct the circumstances of Edwardes' death. John recalls that his doctor fell off the cliff, but he also remembers that he unwillingly caused his brother's death as a child. The latter was the shocking experience that led to amnesia as he suppressed this experience. As a result, he remembers that his real name is John Ballantyne. After the police investigation shows that the real cause of Edwardes' death was a revolver shot to his back, John is arrested as a potential murderer. Fortunately, Constance manages to find the true killer as she returns to *Green Manors*. Dr. Murchison turns out to be Edwardes' real opponent, who wanted to get rid of him in order to regain his managerial function at the hospital. Murchison then threatens Constance with the same revolver he shot Dr. Edwardes, but she is unfazed and decides to call the police, prompting Murchison to commit suicide. Finally, John and Constance find their happinness in marriage. This happy ending depicts that Hitchcock had to obey the unwritten rules of the film industry in Hollywood.

Despite of this quite conventional ending of the story, Hitchcock's film *Spellbound* represents the introduction into the filmic representation of psychoanalytical problems and situations with a similar climax as in films like *Vertigo* (1958) or *Psycho* (1960). Hence, it is not surprising that the famous director was interested in dreams for two reasons: one as a shortcut to the unconscious of his characters, and the other as a challenge for the use of filming techniques.

The analysis of the aforementioned dream sequence should take into account two aspects: its narrative relevance and the plausibility of its technical realisation. From a narratological point of view, this sequence is of enormous importance for clarifying questions posed in the film: *Who is Dr. Edwardes' doppelganger? Did he kill Dr. Edwardes? How did the murder happen?* Without the dream sequence and especially without its adequate interpretation the plot would be meaningless and it would not be possible to find the right answers to these questions. The answers presented in

the dream are given in a hidden form: the masked owner of the club who threatens the old card-player is Dr. Murchinson despite the fact that John Ballantyne does not know the real identity of the threatening person (this explains why this man is wearing a mask); the crooked wheel held by the masked person is actually a revolver with which the crime will be committed; John's escape down the slope is an allusion to the skiing during which the accident happened. The latter escape is important to John for another reason. His return to Gabriel Valley gives him the opportunity to get rid of his guilt complex caused by the childhood trauma when he, due to unfortunate circumstances, knocked his brother onto a spiked fence. Remembering this shocking event leads in a psychoanalytical manner to a direct confrontation with the repressed past releasing him from psychic pain. This makes it also clear why John gets panicky when he sees parallel lines on a white background (like the traces in snow, these lines remind him every time of the accident when Dr. Edwardes was killed). He incorrectly projects his guilt over his brother's death to the event that happened in Gabriel Valley, convinced that he is responsible for Edwardes' death.

When it comes to the technical aspect of the dream sequence, the fact that Hitchcock designed the sequence in collaboration with Dalí gives it a special hallmark. Someone who was the co-author of a film in which the difference between the real world and a dream world begins to disintegrate was ideal for conceiving such an important film scene. Surreal motifs dominant in Dalí's work prevail in that scene: big eyes, giant scissors, unusual buildings, a distorted wheel etc. In the dream sequence there is no continuity. The scenes abruptly change and unknown people are appearing (even with a mask on the face). Indeed, these are typical attributes of dreams: fragmentation, distortion of form and size of objects, hidden symbolism, lack or concealment of personal identity (as indicated by the mask). The narrator's experience is purely visual, although we can hear Miklós Rózsa's Oscar-winning original score but in the viewer's perspective the fusion of sound and images intensifies the surreal effect of the sequence. Even though it does not last even three minutes, the dream sequence in *Spellbound* is crucial in order to understand the plot of the film (solving the murder of Dr. Edwardes and revealing the true identity of his "double", John Ballantyne, including his release from the "guilt complex"). The rest is history.

If we take the broader perspective, an interesting case when the whole film consists of dream sequences should be analyzed. This is the case with the anthology horror film *Dead of Night* (1945).[2] The viewer has the impression of following the plot in real time until the end of the film but then they find out that the plot is actually a succession of dream sequences. Each story about an incredible case happened to the narrator themself or to a single dream. By the end of the film there is a round-robin of dreams. At the beginning of the film, the architect Walter Craig arrives in his car at the property of Elliot Foley with whom he should consult about the renovations of his house. In the house, there are also several other people. Craig claims that regardless of the fact that he does not know any of Foley's guests, he had a dream wherein all these people appear and at its ending he is going to do something terrible – kill one of them! After Craig gives such an ominous warning, each one gathered in Foley's house retells a story about an unbelievable and scary event, sometimes mixed with humor, as in the scene with the golf players.

The most interesting is the dream of a hearse driver, the only recognizable dream sequence, a "dream within a dream". Hugh Grainger, a racing car driver, dreamt about a horse-drawn hearse in front of the hospital where he was recovering from a car accident. Suddenly, the hearse driver exclaimed, "Just room for one inside, sir!" Then, an incredible event happens. Grainger, who is discharged from the hospital, wants to get on a double decker bus whose conductor with the same face as the hearse driver in Grainger's dream says the same sentence: "Just room for one inside, sir!" Grainger does not take the bus, having a premonition that something terrible will happen. And indeed, a moment later, the bus veers off the road and crashes in an attempt to avoid a collision with a truck. Was Grainger's dream a kind of warning of a possible car accident? The lucky man is convinced that the hearse driver in his dream was sent to him as a warning as if it were a kind of providence. Doctor Van Straaten is skeptical about this interpretation and believes that the patient was still obsessed with his car accident, so the crash made him reluctant to board any kind of vehicle, especially the mentioned bus. Behind Grainger's belief in the power of providence lies only

[2] Several directors worked on the film: Basil Dearden, Alberto Cavalcanti, Robert Hamer, Charles Crichton.

the suppressed fear of a new car accident. The psychologist, Dr. Van Straaten fulfills the role of a "doubter on duty" who does not believe in the credibility of the dreams retold by his interlocutors. This distrust will literally cost him his head as revealed at the end of the film.

After the last amazing story about a ventriloquist and his alter ego, the dummy Hugo, has been told, Craig asks everyone in the room to leave him and Dr. Van Straaten alone. When that happens, Craig enters into some kind of delirium and strangles the doctor. In that distracted mental state, he begins to hallucinate and finds himself in each of the stories told by the guests. In the final sequence the dummy Hugo attacks Craig in a prison cell and then Craig wakes up from a nightmare. It becomes clear to the viewers that none of the scenes shown were real, – just a series of dreams culminating in the murder of Dr. Van Straaten. Fortunately, Craig receives an invitation from Mr. Foley to visit his property and to give him some expert advice, which the architect accepts. At last, the film ends with the beginning scene when Craig in his car arrives at *Pilgrim's Farm*. But is the re-arrival at the farm real or is it just a dream again? Will the events that Craig dreamed of really happen or not? The film allows those questions to simmer.

What makes this film philosophically fascinating is the indecision between dream and reality.[3] At the end of the film, which is, paradoxically, also its beginning, we become aware of the fact that everything we saw may have been just a series of dream sequences. In the words of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, there happens a kind of *Verfremdung* of our consciousness: the same scene appears twice, i.e. the arrival of Walter Craig at the property of Mr. Foley. The film ends with the change of connotation, i.e., the same scene has a completely different meaning. The main question remains: Will Craig really kill Dr. Van Straaten? Or, is it just his nightmare after all? Or, is it a "dream within a dream": Craig dreams of himself waking up from a nightmare and starting another one? Where is the beginning and where is the end of the vicious circle? Craig's complex dream has a circular structure. Although each event or dream told in *Dead of Night* seems to be

[3] Although he is quite skeptical about fantasy films, especially those that deviate too far from physical reality in their depiction of fantastic events, Kracauer praises the qualities of *Dead of Night*, believing that the depiction of fantastic scenes here corresponds to the specific character of the film medium. Cf. Kracauer, 1997, 91–92.

a story in itself, they are interconnected. This is shown by the scene after the murder of the doctor, when Craig himself appears in each of the "stories". Perhaps the key moment of the whole film is when Craig wakes up from the nightmare, because that moment could suggest that he is at least conscious while dreaming. In other words, the series of depicted events is part of a *lucid dream*. However, as noted, it remains unsolved whether the events that have occurred to Craig in his dream will really happen or whether Craig's awakening as well as his return to Foley's farm is still just a dream. In the first case, the dream would really be an anticipation of future events (a kind of "providence") as it was in the episode with the hearse driver (Grainger's dream). In the second case, it is not known what really was going on in the film, except to assume that we had seen an unusual dream (exactly: a web of dreams). The charm of this 1945 film lies in the fact that it does not give a clear answer to these questions but leaves room for further philosophical reflections.[4]

The indiscernibility between waking and dreaming is a common motif in other films which portray show the dreams of their protagonists. For example, a recent film Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001), an amazing film is actually a combination of animation and real scenes shot with a video camera, which draws us literally into the inner world of a nameless young man who in his dreams experiences encounters with different people. Unlike *Spellbound* or *Dead of Night*, there is no recognizable narrative in *Waking Life*; there are episodes of a young man talking to other people or episodes in which other people appear, including some famous scientists, philosophers and artists, discussing philosophical topics such as the meaning of life, problems of free will, metaphysical issues, etc. What increases the impression of vagueness of the scenes shown in the film is the fluid character of the images achieved by *rotoscoping*, a special animation technique. The main protagonist slowly realizes that what is happening to him is not real, but a part of an extended dream from which he cannot just "get out". Even when it seems that he is awakening, he still continues to dream. This means

[4] How inspiring *Dead of Night* was can be shown by the fact that under the influence of watching this film, Fred Hoyle, a famous astronomer, developed his *steady state model of the universe*. Cf. Gregory, 2005, 36–37.

his awakenings are *false*.[5] Thus, the question whether the main character dreams only occasionally or all the time remains unresolved, although the last scene when he begins to levitate and, finally, flies away, far from the ground, may suggest that he has a transcendental experience. Therefore, it could be concluded that the main point of *Waking Life* is that we need to broaden our horizon of experiencing reality.

Linklater's film is philosophically relevant for two reasons. First, it deals with philosophical conversation about various aspects of human existence. Secondly – and this is even more important in the context of this paper – because it literally addresses the problem of distinguishing between (material) reality and dream. The case of lucid dream is especially worth noting . At one point, the main protagonist of the film becomes aware that he is actually dreaming. A little later, he faces an even more intriguing question: "How do I know that I'm *not dreaming*?"[6] He finds himself in the unenviable position of the dreamer in Zhuangzi's writing who dreams of being a butterfly but finally wonders if he is not just a butterfly who is dreaming of being a man (Cf. Zhuangzi, 2020, 21). In one of the last scenes of the film, the young man begins a conversation with a pinball player who is played by the director himself, Richard Linklater. During that conversation, the latter formulates a metaphysical hypothesis that life is just an illusion, in fact the willing rejection of God's invitation to become one with eternity.[7] Since he gained that insight in his dream in which he found himself in the land of the dead, the interlocutor recommends to the young dreamer to accept the fact that once he will not be able to wake up from his dream. Finally, it turns out that dreams could be the key to understanding the enigmatic nature of reality. And the fact that the director himself pronounces these words in the film gives special weight to that assumption. Taking all this into account, Linklater's film *Waking Life* could be interpreted as an artistic

[5] Maybe Walter Craig's awakening from his nightmare was also false, which would complicate the interpretation of dream sequences in *Dead of Night*.

[6] One of his interlocutors suggests the following trick to check this: if he sees a light switch, he has to try to activate it – if the light does not appear, it means that he is dreaming. (In one scene, he really tries to do it, and since there is no light, his conclusion is that he is dreaming.)

[7] In his words: "And so time is actually just this constant saying 'No' to God's invitation." (*Waking Life* (2001), 1:31:03.)

variation of the Cartesian scenario of questioning the boundary between dream and reality.[8]

What makes dream sequences even more interesting for philosophical analysis is that a film director can play with the viewer's perspectives by using such sequences. A dream sequence can put the viewer to sleep but can also shake them abruptly if their expectations have lulled them and dulled their attention. In a phenomenological manner, we could speak of a "change of attitude" as far as the viewer's consciousness is concerned. As already mentioned, a series of dream sequences can raise our doubts about the real character of what is presented in the film. On the other hand, it is also possible that one single dream sequence confuses us and puts us out of beat, so that we need to reawaken the context of the scene just shown. Especially the *horror* genre provides a multitude of possibilities for this kind of "reset" of the viewer's consciousness. One example may illustrate this. In John Landis' cult film *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) elements of horror and comedy are skillfully mixed. During their tourist stay in England, two American students, David and John, get lost in a moor and are attacked by a creepy creature – a werewolf. Only David survives, but since he was bitten by the beast, he will invariably turn into a werewolf during the first full moon. While recovering from the near fatal attack, David is tortured by nightmares. In one of these disturbing dreams, David is in his family house where his father is reading a newspaper, his mother is washing dishes in the kitchen and some kids (probably David's younger brother and sister) are watching the *Muppet Show*. Someone is knocking on the door. The father opens the door and then the horror begins. A group of mutated Nazis brutally kill the whole family and burn down the house. At the end of the scene, a villain cuts David's throat. Finally, David, drenched in sweat, wakes up and realizes that he just had a nightmare. He tells the dream to nurse Alex who takes special care of him. She calms him down with the words, "I've just the thing" and goes to remove the curtain. But just at that moment another Nazi mutant, hidden behind the curtain, appears and stabs Alex with a knife. David wakes up from the nightmare for the second time but this time for real. This is a surprise for the viewer of the film as well. The viewer might

[8] Therein lies the possible didactic relevance of *Waking Life* – the film could be shown to students in Epistemology courses and be discussed with them.

remain confused after seeing this scene but that is actually the point, to perplex the viewer.

What makes this dream sequence so effective is in a sense, that the film viewer has been deceived. Namely, their expectation was not met. At the moment when David woke up from the first nightmare (brutal massacre of his family) the viewer is convinced that the further action takes place in the "real" world and he expects "relief" of the situation in the sense that there is no longer any danger, which calms them as well. However, the situation changes abruptly as the viewer is suddenly shocked by the unexpected attack of the monstrous killer. That means: the nightmare continues. Fortunately, David wakes up again and we finally know that the horror is over. It seems as if René Descartes was directing this movie scene. His famous demon is incorporated in a dream sequence. The moment that David's nightmare was over, viewers fell for the demon's deception. The whole problem can be described in phenomenological vocabulary. There is a certain expectation ("David woke up from a nightmare and nothing terrible will happen again."). In Husserl's words, the "intentions of anticipation" (cf. Husserl, 1973, § 21, 87) will not be fulfilled; on the contrary, there is "disappointment" (ibid., 88) ("David is still dreaming and the horror is not over."). Our own expectations deceived us and we did not anticipate the rest of the scene properly. The problem does not lie in a deceiving demon, but in ourselves. The presented dream sequence in *An American Werewolf in London* gives us an example of how the film can revise our ingrained perceptual habits and rethink our focus on the reality we take for granted.

Instead of continuing to list other relevant examples, at the end of this paper I want to sketch an ambitious task for a philosophical analysis of dream sequences. According to the idea that there are different realities, including the world of dreams, we should examine what happens to the viewer's *consciousness* during the reception of the film and how dream sequences affect their attention, at least to a certain extent. *Phenomenology* could be helpful here, especially when dealing with the epistemic status of multiple realities (for example, in Alfred Schütz). Thus, let a phenomenological observation round out the consideration of dream sequences in films.

In his posthumously published work *The Structures of Life-World* (1973), co-authored with his student Thomas Luckmann, the Austrian sociol-

ogist and philosopher Alfred Schütz developed a theory of "cognitive styles" that characterize various forms of consciousness depending on the type of reality referenced to. The uniqueness of a certain cognitive style correlates to the coherence of the corresponding province of meaning. Schütz lists several of these provinces of meaning such as everyday life-world, the world of science, the world of religious experience, the world of artistic creation, etc. The fact that these provinces of meaning are "closed" means that one of them cannot be reduced to another. Building on Kierkegaard's terminology, Schütz argues that a "leap" is necessary for transition from one province of meaning to another: "This 'leap' is nothing other than the exchange of one style of lived experience for another. Since, as we shall soon see, a specific tension of consciousness belongs essentially to the style of lived experience, such a 'leap' is accompanied by shock experience that is brought about by the radical alteration of the tension of consciousness." (Schutz/Luckmann, 1973, 24.) Thus, falling asleep is a "leap" from the world of everyday life to that of dreams. It is especially interesting to consider the interaction between the dream world and the world of moving pictures. It is one thing to dream in everyday life and quite another to dream within the world of film. Therefore, let us apply the sketched terminology to the depiction of the dream world within the film art.

What Schütz considers a "shock experience", associated with "leaping" from one province of meaning to another, can be nicely illustrated by the use of dream sequences in films. At the end of *Dead of Night*, the cognitive attitude of the subject watching the film changes; he now realizes that the film did not show real events at all, but only a multiple sequence of dreams that one of the film's characters had in his mind. The scene in which Dr. Van Straaten was strangeled leads to the tension in the viewer's attention, but the next series of told dreams and events, in which the main character suddenly appears in a strange way, indicates that something is wrong with the plot. Ultimately, there is a sudden "relief" in the viewer at the moment when Craig wakes up from his nightmare. Still, the viewer ends up spinning around, when they see the opening scene again (Craig arrives by car Foley's farm). There is no discontinuity of attention when watching Linklater's *Waking Life*, because, due to the dialogues of the main character, we find out that he is dreaming. While in the first film, the

focus was on getting into the dream in the right way, in the second one the focus is on exiting.

Dream sequences do not only have the function of gradually immersing the viewer in the dream world as a separate province of meaning within the film – they can also literally "put someone out of time" by shocking the audience and thus forcing it to accentuate events on the screen differently. Similar to the case of cinematic immersion in the dream world by presenting a continuous sequence of film images, the interruption of presence in this world can also be apparent and thus deceive the viewer. This is effectively shown by the retold dream sequence in *An American Werewolf in London*. The moment the first part of the sequence ends with David's awakening, the viewer almost automatically shifts the focus of reality from the bad dream to the alleged world of everyday life (hospital room). The shock is also greater when the attack of the scary Nazi assassin is repeated, considering that this time it was even less expected. Unlike the first case (David's first awakening), when the viewer experienced a kind of relief that it was just a nightmare, in the second case (David's second awakening), he/she is taken aback and irritated for a moment. Suddenly it seems to the film spectator as if he/she had a nightmare of his/her own.

However, the most philosophically interesting cases of dream sequences could be those when the difference between dream and reality is no longer clear. In that case, our consciousness is involved in that *game of perspectives* the consequence of which is a kind of mental state we might call *"harmless confusion"*. It is harmless because the viewers do not sleep and are able to become aware of their situation at any time, whenever they want, so that the nightmare shown in the sequence does not affect them directly. The game of perspectives can turn into playing with different levels of dream when the dreamer in the movie knows that he or she is dreaming.[9] Thus, what could be the further task of the analysis of dream sequences is to conceptualize a phenomenological theory of the attitude of the film viewer and explore the possibility of reaching different levels of dream experiencing and maybe also the possibility of perceptual paradoxes that can completely confuse the audience.

[9] You can find such complex shifting from one level of dream to another e.g. in Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (2010).

As a final thought, something needs to be said about the social dimension of dreams. Heraclitus once said that we all share the same world while we are awake, and that everyone lives in their own special while sleeping (Cf. Heraclitus, 1987, frag. 89, 55). Therefore, we could say that dream sequences in films reverse such a state of affairs, just by watching such films the viewer come out of the solipsistic state which is reached when an individual falls asleep. In other words, watching a movie is an unusual experience while watching a movie in the cinema, *we are dreaming together*.

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# LUC BESSON'S *THE FIFTH ELEMENT* AND THE NOTION OF QUINTESSENCE

## Abstract
*The Fifth Element* (1997) is a French science-fiction film in English, directed and co-written by Luc Besson. The title and the plot of the film refer to a central notion of Greek philosophy, that is, *pemptousia*, or *quintessence*. Pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes and others, were convinced that all natural beings – in fact, nature itself – consist in four primary imperishable elements or essences (ousiai), i.e., fire, earth, water, and air. To these four, Aristotle added *aether*, a fifth essence (*pemptousia*). The introduction of aether gave birth to a great tradition in late Antique and Medieval philosophy, and eventually it came to signify not an additional primary element, but the core-essence of all beings, their fundamental ontological structure. Besson's film draws its inspiration on this philosophical tradition but its cinematographic rendering of the concept of Quintessence is typical of the contemporaneous views on the core characteristics of matters. The modernity that stimulates the film is equally anti-transcendentalist and anti-essentialist. Thus, the fifth element of the film is existentially personified and genderized making the traditional philosophical significance of the term to be adjusted by modernity in an immanent and temporal context where in addition aesthetics plays a crucial role.

## Keywords
The Fifth Element, quintessence, Aristotle, Pre-Socratics, Roger Bacon, Galileo, Immanuel Kant, Technological Spirit, Metaphysicism, Iconological Turn

It is always justifiable to assume several affinities between philosophy and cinema, especially when it comes to seminal philosophical films such as Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* and *The Seventh Seal* (Hibbs, 2016), or Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (Tumanov, 2016; Reeh-Peters, 2021, 111ff). Movies may also be regarded as an excellent way to illustrate complicated thought experiments, as it is with Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (Bragues, 2008; McGregor, 2014), or *The Prestige* (Mencik, 2020). When it comes to blockbusters though, more often than not, the spectators entertain no high expectations as to any rich philosophical background, or complex philosophical connotations.

*The Fifth Element* (1997) is a science-fiction cult classic, directed and co-written by Luc Besson, featuring, among others, Bruce Willis, Mila Jovovic, Gary Oldman, and Prince. The title and the plot of the film refer to a central notion of Greek philosophy, namely *pemptousia*, or *quintessence* (*quinta essentia* in Latin), the fifth element (Heilbron, 2015). Pre-Socratic natural philosophers such as Thales, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes and others, were convinced that all the natural beings – in fact, nature itself – consist in four primary imperishable elements or essences, namely fire, earth, water, and air (Barnes, 1982). To these four, Aristotle added a fifth element, *aether* (*quintessence*) (Barnes, 1982, 253ff). The introduction of aether as a fifth element gave birth to a great tradition in late Antiquity and Medieval philosophy, and eventually, it came to signify not an additional primary element, but the core-essence of all beings, their fundamental ontological structure. It is exactly this philosophical tradition that Besson draws upon, but his understanding of the concept is typical of contemporaneity and the ways it tends to explain the riddle of existence. Thus, the fifth element in the film is portrayed as existentially personified, and also even gendered, adjusting thus the traditional philosophical import of the term in accordance with modernity into an immanent and temporal context where aesthetics plays a crucial role additionally.

The plot is the most typical of the kind. In a somewhat dystopic future, earth is in great peril due to the imminent prevalence of the invincible forces of evil. The only hopes of mankind rest on some extraterrestrial being, who returns to Earth every five thousand years to make sure that humans are protected by means of four stones which restore balance and

equilibrium, and each one stands for one of the four elements: fire, water, earth, and air. These may only be activated by the alien being, thus, presumably serving as the fifth element. The plot twists when the spacecraft that carries the fifth element back to earth gets attacked and destroyed by the forces of evil, and only what is left of the fifth element surfaces on earth. Happily, the remains are collected, and a team of scientists manage to rebuild the fifth element in the form of a perfect female being under the name Leeloo. When Leeloo manages to escape, she stumbles upon the taxi driver and former elite commando Major Korben Dallas, who helps her to escape. Leeloo asks him to help her accomplish her mission. The forces of evil – as well as their local proxies on earth – spare no effort to retrieve the four elements and annihilate the fifth, but are hindered by a resolute Korben Dallas. When Dallas and Leeloo finally reach the temple where the four elements may be activated, and place the four elements in their proper positions on the altar, they discover that there is still something missing to activate the weapon that would destroy evil. The fifth element appears to be something else, and not Leeloo. It was not until Galileo, who changed the acceptable way of talking about matter and its motion by introducing one and only corporeal element, that is, matter, that the Aristotelian universe lost its standing. Up to Galileo, Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and scholastic cosmology distinguished neatly between the super- and sublunary regions. The superlunary region and the celestial bodies within it were composed entirely of aether. This "fifth element" or quintessence was devoid of all change other than that of perfect, unending, circular motion. The sublunary region comprised the remaining four elements fire, air, water, and earth, which by nature observed finite linear motion upwards or downwards. In addition to finite local motion, bodies composed of the sublunary elements continuously underwent generation and corruption. In these respects, the superlunary region was superior to the sublunary one. Indeed, even within the sublunary region, according to many authors, the four elements were organized hierarchically, with earth as the dullest and grossest element at the centre of the cosmos, and fire as the nimblest and subtlest sublunary element, akin to the neighbouring celestial region. The fifth element, aether, is still present in Bacon's cosmology in the form of *active* or *pneumatic matter*, relevant to the celestial realm, in contrast to *passive* or *tangible matter*, that is akin

to the terrestrial realm. Even Immanuel Kant finds the inclusion of aether rather convenient in his master's thesis *On Fire* (Kant, 1986, 1:369-384). To Kant aether can be established *a priori* as an all-encompassing element, an elastic medium that permeates the molecular interstices of bodies and makes possible the emission of heat and light (Lugovoy, 2019).

Leaving all particular explanations aside, some of which tend to be evidently queer, the introduction of aether by cosmologists and physicists serves the purpose of explaining phenomena that at times seemed impossible to be dealt with, be it the emission of light and heat, or the existence of a seemingly unchangeable celestial cosmos that surrounds terrestrial beings that are subject to constant change and obey the irresistible forces of matter. In a word, the notion of aether has been introduced as the only possible solution to an impossible problem, not at all unlike the assumption of the Higgs boson, the particle of God, by modern physicists. Science advances based upon what is tangible and sensible, but also by assuming what escapes observation and proof, but has to be existing if the system, any given system, is to be explained and proved. In that sense, aether indeed permeates and consists all as the ultimate solution to the riddle of existence, and the way Besson portrays it, is absolutely accurate, save for aether in this case is unconditional, desperate love that eventually saves the day. In a sense, Besson claims that what makes the world possible, and this is the heyday of his story, is love – and this is his answer to the riddle of existence.

The question about the cinematic form is central here. The cinema-goer enters the world of spectacle through channels which are rather familiar to him and are often none other than his well-known cinematic genres. The various legible genres (e.g., adventures, westerns, romance, comedy, detective fiction, etc.) involve the sense of intimacy that is necessary to tune in to the rhythm of cinematic visioning that some film critics see it close to the process of hypnosis. The titles of the film intro together with the musical theme, in addition to the information they provide, serve to calm the soul and the body of the viewer and to facilitate the basic psychological functions of watching a film, such as identification. Thus, a film, in a hypnotic environment, approaches very much the dream world, even in the waking state, as well as the desired images that are not

missing from the common life but are inserted in even the most ordinary activities (Metz, 1982).

Among the most popular cinematic genres is that of science fiction although in recent years it tends to be sidelined by the genre called fantasy. As a genre, science fiction has a special interest as it is associated with the "world" – "cosmos" in the two meanings that the term has had since ancient times. The world, first of all, refers to the physical species and bodies that make it up, to the forces and energies that are expressed and exercised within it. In the second sense, the world-cosmos, as it was understood later in antiquity, is the mass of people, the municipality, people. These two concepts are still valid today in everyday Greek language. As for the cinematic science fiction, it really connects the cosmological interest with the collectivity and has the applause of the society (see the great success of the *Star Wars* series).

There is, however, another idea by which science fiction is associated with the world. That is the critical and, sometimes, satirical mood with which it treats the social world around it. The future, the interplanetary action depicted in the films is often nothing more than a commentary on current social action.[1] From this point of view, science fiction is particularly suited to the cinematic medium which, as we know, is characterized by its realism although in cinema, realism means the imitation of movement in terms of renaissance perspective, which in Western culture has taken the obvious feature of naturalness (Comolli, 1986). In addition, the realistic nature of cinema, which one may perceive as ideology, allows for a much more dramatic performance of special film effects, for example, the ones related to the stellar space. Thus, a script for a spaceship that begins its journey in space, when captured on the screen acquires real operatic dimensions (Chapman, 2013).

The fifth element of the film relates to science-fiction in a semi-caricatural, semi-loyal manner, and its genealogy of the metaphysical in a highly technical culture covers the metaphysical function of its technology. It is important to understand more widely that the most powerful rise of techno-science, such as the one depicted in the film, goes beyond European

[1] On this point, the novels *1984* by George Orwell, and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley constitute the flashing evidence.

modernism and is part of a long history. It is the history of the institutionalization of the technological spirit. This institution, on the other hand, is a purely metaphysical movement (Ellul, 1964).

Modern science, as is well known, does not allow for itself any ultimate purposes (such as, for example, universal happiness) but captures and engages in processes of producing scientific objects under conditions of refutability rather than verifiability. Techno-science, on the other hand, sets clear historical aspirations such as man's domination of nature either as an intellectual superiority that brings man closer to God or as a simple domination of the human species over other natural species on the big stage of the world. Techno-science, thus, replicates the world in order to construct a world compatible with the desires of a subject of dominant action, conventionally called the human subject such as the film spectator. In this way, techno-science begins by constructing a world-image or, in other words, by constructing a system of general representation and, therefore, is in fact a metaphysics.

Human culture is distinguished by the transformation of natural species into cultural beings. In techno-science, however, this transformation is colored by destructive tendencies that lead to a kind of solipsism of the human species and in the medium of film it may be parallel to voyeurism. Nowhere else is this solipsism as obvious as in the modern development of the *icono-sphere* or the dominance of the media. As time goes on, it becomes more and more obvious that one of the goals of critical philosophy should be the study, analysis and normative determination of the new pictorial universe. In this way a new development in the critical effort has appeared, going from the linguistic turn of the 20th century to the iconological turn of the 21st century (Mitchell, 2021 and 1994). The *Fifth Element*, in the light of the above, is contributing to the metaphysicism of the image and its often caricatural identification of metaphysical quintessence with love is situated on a field beyond criticism, in a space that is both cinematic-typical and semi-romantic.

It is true that the film in its newly hedonistic romanticism, with its adventure and special effects' commercial panoply does not allow for any measure of *distanciation*. Yet, it is also true that the identification with the conditioned imaginary of the film is never total. There is a part that remains

irreducible to cinematic control that would take the form of the techno-science of film viewing. There is still the nostalgia for the child-like universe of wonder and also the desire for the body of the young woman protagonist. The cinematic complementarity of these two elements, the splitting and duality of the fifth element, in its paradoxical nature, produces the part that remains safe beyond cinematic framing.

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# THE QUESTION OF TRANSCENDENTALISM AND CINEMA SOCIAL

## Abstract
The moving images do not affect external thinking and they are not left to a language in the narrow sense of the word. Even in neurosciences it is already established that they integrate into thinking, one might say, metaphorically, that they impregnate it. Deleuze remarks (*The Image-Time*, 1985) that "the screen itself is the cerebral membrane". Elsewhere in the same book he says, "a flickering brain, which relinks or creates loops – this is cinema." This has been implicitly exemplified also by Walter Benjamin (*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1935) in the earlier period of cinema, in his critical remarks at the expense of conservative Duhamel, who felt that moving images "replaced" his thoughts. And more than that -- a film reflects, illustrates, even co-creates the inseparability of thinking from emotional states. Films of Ozu, Resnais, Welles and others led Deleuze to his finding of the transcendental dimension in the post-war cinema. He fully appropriates the Kant's sense of the word 'transcendental' by opposing it to the empirical and metaphysical attributes, which are forgone in the time-image. As for 'electronic image' and (at the time) nascent digital image, Deleuze remarked that the relation of it to cinema "remains to be determined." Now we have to think further on the question of transcendentalism within what is lately conceptualised as *post-image*.

## Keywords
film, philosophy, transcendentalism, brain, image

## Introduction

In his book *The Time-Image*, Gilles Deleuze legitimizes himself as a thinker of continental philosophy, who, when meeting a writer from American culture, identifies two philosophical traditions, different logics, which are based on a perpetuating misunderstanding. However, this at least three centuries lasting misunderstanding has often been very productive. The examples of interpretations of Wittgenstein's works, concerning the concepts of language, totality and psychoanalysis, are persuasive illustrations. Deleuze's writing itself is an example of the productivity of this misunderstanding, as he uses Peirce's classifications of signs without much additional explanation in both of his books on film. Considering diverse questions about the meaning of the concepts of the *transcendental* and the *transcendence*, the "misunderstanding" becomes transparent. When he analyses Ozu's films, Deleuze mentions Paul Schrader's interpretation of the same cineaste. He disagrees with Schrader's definition of the difference between the "everyday" and the "decisive moment" in Ozu's films; however, this not very severe disagreement turned out to be a conceptually justified definition of the difference in understanding of the subject matter. The problem is the notion of the *transcendental*, or what Deleuze points out in a footnote in the relevant context of his text. He states, "Unlike Kant, Americans hardly distinguish between the transcendental and the transcendent: hence Schrader's thesis which gives Ozu a taste for 'the transcendent', which he also detects in Bresson and even in Dreyer. Schrader distinguishes three phases of the transcendent style of Ozu: the everyday, the decisive, and the 'stasis' as an expression of the transcendent itself" (Deleuze, 1985, 24).[1] In the concluding chapter of the book, Deleuze is even more explicit when, again in a note, he writes,

> Paul Schrader has spoken of a 'transcendental style' in certain cinema-authors. But he uses this word to indicate the sudden arrival of the transcendent, as he thinks he sees it in Ozu, Dreyer, or Bresson (Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Dreyer, Bresson, extracts in *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 286, mars 1978). It is thus not the Kantian sense, which in

[1] Curiously, the cited part of the footnote is missing in the English translation.

> contrast opposes the transcendental and the metaphysical or transcendent (Deleuze, 2001, 332–333).

From the phrasing and placement of the reference of Schrader's book, in the whole of Deleuze's context, it is clear that references to Schrader's thinking about Ozu were given the "function" of conceptual leverage, for one of the many articulations in the explanation of the transformation of film form in *time-image* coordinates: from image-movement to image-time. Objection against Schrader acts as an illustration of this *process of becoming* by constituting a diametrically opposite interpretation of Ozu's work. On the bases of apparently relatively insignificant question of how to understand the individual sequences of Ozu's films, the huge question about the thinking that is at work arises. I note, however, that Deleuze is talking about Schrader's book, which was published by then twenty-four years old film student in 1971, and was in 1978 available to Deleuze in the French translation in *Cahiers du cinema*. In any case, it is clear that Deleuze's reading was more than just symptomatic. Within the centuries long philosophical "misunderstanding", we might even be able to search for a basis of a sophisticated interpretation of the origins of the difference between European and Hollywood film. This would mean that we accept the notion that culture in its social essence acts as if it is controlled by the Hegelian spirit in its production of cultural artefacts. Among them, the cinematographic films are most visible and characteristic for the industrial age.

## Kant in Hollywood

According to Deleuze (1985), Schrader uses the notion of *the transcendental* in accordance with his affiliation with American culture, since he denotes with this term something that, according to Kant, is exactly the opposite of the notion of the *transcendental*. Namely, the *transcendence* as a metaphysical category. Kant's notion of the transcendental is the indispensable notion of his epistemology, which is based primarily on the rejection of the sheer empiricist and sensualist approach to the interpretation of the cognition of external objects. "I call *transcendental* all cognition that deals not so much with objects as rather with our way of cognizing objects in general insofar, as that way of cognizing is to be

possible *a priori*. A system of such concepts would be called "*transcendental philosophy*" (Kant, 1996, 64). Kant dedicated his entire *Critique of Pure Reason* to this problem in which, among other things, he substantiated the categories of knowledge *a priori* as opposed to knowledge *a posteriori*. The notion of the *transcendental* cannot be explained with one brief definition; it can be fully understood only through a consideration of the entire Kant's categorical system. Regarding the nuances and the final validity of the meaning of the categories of Kant's philosophical system to this day even the various Kantian schools do not completely agree. However, accepting Deleuze's point, one would tend to see an error in Schrader's use of the concept of the *transcendental*. The error actually stems from his disregard or perhaps ignorance of the double reflexive "process" by which a cognition of external reality is the result of a dialectical progression of perception. Within it the categories of pure reason play a decisive role. To put it very simply, without prior conceptual schemes, without knowledge *a priori* formed in the mind, a knowledge of experiential things is not possible. They, if not reached by the mind in a representation, remain *transcendent* in the sense of a thing in itself (*noumenon*). Schrader's understanding of the "transcendental" does not even need to be explained by simplification, as in both modulations of the term it denotes "something beyond" and something "spiritual", which means that he moved from an epistemological theory closer to theology because God or any of the concepts it is replaced with – such as "nature" in Ozu's supposed Zen vision – is in a final analysis "transcendent." Schrader's error was mainly caused by his superficial knowledge of the distinctions in the philosophy of German idealism. However, it is obvious that his use of the term, if understood strictly only in the sense of the concept of *transcendence*, is not entirely wrong in the final analysis. In relying on his interpretation of Ozu's films, Schrader does propose something similar to the definition of transcendence. The viewer, who according to Schrader is interpellated into commitment, accepts the "(...) philosophical construct which permits total disparity – deep, illogical, suprahuman feeling with a cold, unfeeling environment. In effect, he accepts a construct such as this: there exists a deep ground of compassion and awareness which man and nature can touch intermittently. This, of course, is the Transcendent" (Schrader, 2018, 75).

Before returning to Schrader, let me mention that the explicit exposing of the topic of the relationship between the category of the transcendental and film before Deleuze's intervention in film theory, which irrevocably "philosophized" this theory itself, was not very common. However, the most eminent representatives of critical theory, Adorno and Horkheimer, perceived the fatal attraction between Kant and the philosophy of film when they remarked, "Kant intuitively anticipated what Hollywood has consciously put into practice: images are precensored during production by the same standard of understanding, which will later determine their reception by viewers. The perception by which public judgment feels itself confirmed has been shaped by that judgment even before the perception takes place" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, 65–66). I do not enter into a discussion on the whole socially critical context of the quote here, but I can say that Horkheimer and Adorno have shown that the agency of the *transcendental* frames the operation of the cognitive apparatus, which with the invention and operation of the film camera and projector – with all the consequences in terms of film industry – becomes materialised and thus also instrumentalised. In this sense, Dziga Vertov was probably the first and greatest spontaneous Kantian, as his camera acts as an extension of the mind with a feed-back.

## The transcendental style of *slow cinema*

The exchange between Deleuze and Schrader becomes even more interesting due to the new edition of Schräder's book *Transcendental Style*, in 2018, which came out with an extensive new preface, where we do not find an explicit answer to Deleuze's terminological correction. However, Schrader obviously decided to give a concise summary of Deleuze's contribution. To be specific, he praises Deleuze above all for his invention of the notion of *time-image*. Anyway, he thereby indirectly admits his mistake by saying: "Deleuze is getting at the nuts and bolts of transcendental style. This is what I was struggling to apprehend. Our minds are wired to complete an on-screen image" (Schrader, 2018, 5). Although Schrader did not fully clarify the terminological problem in this new preface four decades and a half later after the first edition of his book, it could be said that he understood the issue of *the transcendental* in film albeit in his own way by adopting

Deleuze's notion of time-image. Thus, he says that post-war filmmakers "/... / realized that just as movement-image could be manipulated to create suspense, time-image could be manipulated to create introspection. We not only fill in the blanks, but we create new blanks" (Schrader, 2018, 6). Certainly, this is somewhat psychologized approximation of the Kant's meaning of the transcendental as it turns to what is intrinsic in thinking instead to something beyond. In addition to perceiving that post-war film was not interested in the primary "storytelling," Deleuze discovered another complex feature of time-image based on Bergson's key notion of duration. According to Schrader, Deleuze implicitly initiated a recent film phenomenon; namely, so called *slow cinema*. "Time allows the viewer to imbue the image with associations, even contradictory ones. Hence the long take. What began as a four-second shot of a passing train in Ozu grows to eight minutes of meandering cows in Béla Tarr" (Schrader, 2018, 5). However, as Schrader points out, slow cinema cannot be equated with the transcendental style, as it is supposed to be "/.../ one of several precursors to slow cinema" (Schrader, 2018, 21).

What is crucially important here, however, is that Schrader catches up with Deleuze in a view that affects the relationship between thought and film and thus implicitly philosophy and film. What specifically determines the distinctiveness of Deleuze's writings about film is his focus on the functioning of the film form. But he is far from ascertaining just the aesthetic meaning of this never fully explainable concept. A form is always definable only in relation to a content, whose form it is. Schrader realised that Deleuze focused on the "nuts and bolts" of the style, hence, on the key processes of thinking about film, that is, on the images that a film arranges in shots, frames, editing, angles, light shades, cuts, and so on. Correlatively on a theoretical level, Deleuze recalls the physiological "apparatus", the brain pulsating in resonances with the film image: "The screen itself is the cerebral membrane where immediate and direct confrontations take place between the past and the future, the inside and the outside, at a distance impossible to determine, independent of any fixed point (...). The image no longer has space and movement as its primary characteristics but topology and time" (Deleuze, 2001, 125). Accordingly, it is necessary to see the style

of slow cinema in the utilisations of practical film procedures. Schrader's description of slow cinema differs from a number of other similar theories precisely in his reliance on Deleuze. In order to create its effects, which are the product of an intertwining of thought and film images, a reverse author's reflection of their action on the brain, upon thought processes, is noticeable. *Slow cinema* emphatically uses specific sets of cinematic means of image creation. For Schrader, whose exposition I summarize here in a very concise form, film technique in this kind of cinema emphasizes the dissonance between time and narrative (Schrader, 2018, 12-16). In this type of cinema the authors use – of course not all of them in all films and not in the same way – wide-angles, static frame, minimal 'coverage' (i.e., change of angles), offset edits (i.e., the cut does not follow the subject's departure from the frame), images preferred over dialogue, highly selective composed music, heightened sound effects, a visual flatness, repeated compositions, doubling, non-acting (minimal movement, players as 'models') and a colour and screen ratio. Schrader also cites a number of filmmakers whose films recognizably fit the definition of slow cinema, which has virtually dominated some distinctive film festivals in recent years. Apart from predecessors such as Dreyer, Ozu, Bresson and Tarkovsky, Schrader mentions as representatives of this trend, for example, Chantal Akerman, Nuri B. Ceylan, Claire Denis, Alexander Sukorov, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, of course Béla Tarr, and a number of others.

In the "genre" of *slow cinema*, which as a film trend or perhaps already a very special film form, which at the time of Deleuze's viewing-writing had not yet exist, except of course in our retrospective view, Schrader actually tries to think in Deleuze's terms; thus, extending his thinking about cinema well after his death. Deleuze worked from the perspective of his time, which was the era of film highpoints, especially the more intellectually profiled ones, and he also perceived the potential of new technologies that had not yet been refined in his time. Namely, not until the 1990s, filmmakers began to shoot more seriously with the use of digital technology. Deleuze, however, noted that "the electronic image, that is, the tele and video image, the numerical image coming into being, either had to transform cinema or to replace it, to mark its death" (Deleuze, 2001,

265). The question which still needs to be answered, in relation to the *slow cinema*, concerns the transcending of cinema – as never fully unanimously defined art – after its "death".

## Conclusion

More than 120 years moving images are interfering into visual perception. In the era of the digital creation and distribution of all kinds of imagery the definitions of the perceived reality are increasingly more complex. The imagery impregnates the mind. Neurosciences are increasingly accumulating evidences about this. Walter Benjamin was among the first, who actually articulated the consequences of the interactivity between moving images and the levels of perception. Starting from Duhamel, who complained that" [his] thoughts have been replaced by moving images", Benjamin further developed a range of concepts, which define mass perception of moving images (Benjamin, 1969, 239). More relevant in the opposition between *concentration* and *distraction* of the observing public in the age of reproduction is the latter, "Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise" (Benjamin, 1969, 240). The distracted perception, therefore, became a ubiquitous mode of comprehending art, not only film, in the age of cinema. These Benjamin's assumptions are only half-way definitions of changes that the mind is undergoing in the digitally reproduced moving images. Although Benjamin was avoiding philosophical categories in his conceptual setup, the background of the transcendental epistemology as foundation of the ontological notion of *das Subjekt* is evident in his explaining of the operation of cinema. Deleuze's claim that "the screen is the cerebral membrane", which I mentioned above, must be completed with another assertion, "The film does not record the filmic process in this way without projecting a cerebral process. A flickering brain, which relinks or creates loops – this is cinema" (Deleuze, 2001, 215). In the final analysis a film reflects and even co-creates the inseparability of a process of thinking from emotional states. The film trend of *slow cinema* within so called art cinema exposes and accentuates the transcendental "processing" in the cognitive activity of a viewer.

As we are entering the age of a comprehensive digital transformation also the transcendentalism in any processed imagery becomes imminent. "With digitalization, the image becomes equipped with algorithms that gather, compute, merge and display heterogeneous data in real time. The result, however, is a different kind of image, no longer a solid representation of a solid world – a 'hardimage' as it were – but an unstable algorithmic configuration of a database: a 'softimage'" (Hoelzl and Rémi, 2017, 72). Hoelzl and Rémi further on claim that we are entering the age of "post-image." This new point of the line of thinking introduces a shared transcendentalism with a far more complex machinery than just film camera and projector. As Schrader also perceived, the *slow cinema* – and we should not be misled by the appearance that this trend signifies insistence on concepts from the history of analogue cinema – indicated the disappearance of the boundary between art forms and the boundaries between image-movements and image-times. It is precisely this disappearance of boundaries that transforms thinking in a film form, in the digital age.

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# CONTINUITY ERRORS AND THE INDIVISIBILITY OF CHANGE: ON CINEMATIC TIME TRAVEL

## Abstract

'Can we *will* ourselves to go back in time? In one sense, Henri Bergson thought that we could do so. He was an advocate of attention training - educating our senses to the specificities of every image in order to expand our experience of time ('duration') - or what he called an 'attention to life'. This image perception was not simply about noticing spatial differences alone; however, for, in expanding one's attention, one also expands one's temporal horizon - at least according to Bergson. One 'travels' into the so-called past (if only for a few 'moments') by expanding, or defragmenting, one's present. This is not a super-sensuous escape from perceiving the present, but rather an expansion of the present through a deepening of the senses - an excess of materiality rather than a disembodying spirit. This paper will cross-examine Bergson's 'attention to life' by intersecting it with Jeannot Szwarc's cult film of 1980, *Somewhere in Time*. We do this in order to unearth the strange conception of time-travel underlying the story (one different to Bergson's in part, but still kindred). From Richard Matheson's film script (adapted from his own 1975 novel, *Bid Time Return*), through to the ideas of time, attention, and memory that it relays via the metaphysical theories of J.W. Dunne and J.B. Priestley, we will see that, as with Bergson, it is not through any disembodied, supernatural will alone that the hero of the story (played by Christopher Reeve) operates his time machine. Rather, it is also through his use of ordinary objects and performative acts (self-hypnosis being one) and an attention to reversing certain discontinuities within his surrounding imagery that a kind of Proustian space-time-travel is activated: not by escaping the present, but by expanding and multiplying 'it', in a manner compatible with Bergson's theories. And, indeed, it is Szwarc's film itself - taken as a set of actual images in the process of defragmenting them-

selves - that demonstrates how we might create a new (dis)continuity with a so-called 'past', thereby offering us a model for image-based time travel that is both material and spiritual, at once.

**Keywords**
time-travel, Richard Matheson, J.M.E. McTaggart, continuity, cinema

## Introduction

Can we *will* ourselves to go back in time? In one sense, Henri Bergson thought that we could do so. He was an advocate of attention training – educating our senses to the specificities of every image in order to expand our experience of time ('duration') – or what he called an 'attention to life'. This image perception was not simply about noticing spatial differences alone however, for, in expanding one's attention, one also expands one's temporal horizon – at least according to Bergson. One 'travels' into the so-called past (if only for a few 'moments') by expanding, or defragmenting, one's present. This is not a supersensuous escape from perceiving the present, but rather an expansion of the present through a deepening of the senses – an excess of materiality rather than a disembodying spirit. This paper will cross-examine Bergson's 'attention to life' by intersecting it with Jeannot Szwarc's cult film of 1980, *Somewhere in Time*. We do this in order to unearth the strange conception of time-travel underlying the story (one different to Bergson's part, but still kindred). From Richard Matheson's film script (adapted from his own 1975 novel, *Bid Time Return*), through to the ideas of time, attention, and memory that it relays via the metaphysical theories of J.W. Dunne and J.B. Priestley, we will see that, as with Bergson, it is *not* through any disembodied, supernatural will alone that the hero of the story (played by Christopher Reeve) operates his time machine.[1] Rather, it is also through his use of ordinary objects and performative acts (self-hypnosis being one) and an *attention* to reversing certain *discontinuities* within his surrounding imag-

[1] The source of the title is Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Act 3, Scene 2: 'O, call back yesterday, bid time return'. Dunne's work (coming mostly from his 1927 opus), *An Experiment with Time*, was a great influence on Priestley, as seen in his own later work of 1964, *Man and Time*. See Ó Maoilearca 2019 for a discussion of Dunne's influence on *Somewhere in Time* and *Bid Time Return*.

ery that a kind of Proustian space-time-travel is activated: not by escaping the present, but by *expanding* and *multiplying* 'it', in a manner compatible with Bergson's attention to life.

Opening in 1980, *Somewhere in Time* relates the tale of Richard Collier (Reeve), a man who travels back to 1912 through the agency of sheer willpower and mind manipulation: he has no time machine, time tunnel, Tardis, DeLorean car, or any other mechanical device. He only has his will, plus a set of props, costumes and performative acts (used to train his belief, or 'alter' his 'consciousness', if you prefer) to propel him through time. Nor is sleep used as a mode of time-travel (as in the story of Rip van Winkle who sleeps through 20 years or, more spectacularly, Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973), whose protagonist wakes up 200 years later), or a time-slip in space, as in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* from 1889. Instead, Richard journeys by, firstly, dressing and grooming himself in such a manner as to offer the appearance typical of a 'man of this period' – June 27, 1912 to be precise (Matheson, 1998, 302, henceforth, *BTR*). He also immerses himself as best he can in an atmosphere of the past, namely, The Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Michigan – a kind of 'Proustian space' that will help him re-create, and inhabit the past. He further adds to the period authenticity of the space by removing (again, as best he can) all the contemporary objects from his hotel room: he will have to 'dissociate' himself 'entirely from the present'. Once this preparation is complete, he then attempts to hypnotize himself into thinking he is in 1912 through a form of auto-suggestion. As Matheson's *Bid Time Return* puts it –- the earlier book using the date of 1896 as its target: 'Using the principles of Psychocybernetics, I can "re-program" myself to believe that I exist, not in 1971 [the book's setting], but in 1896. The hotel will help because so much of 1896 still exists within its walls. The location is perfect, the method sound. It'll work! I know it will!' (*BTR,* 3). And it does, after a few false starts.

## The A, B, C of Time

What *Somewhere in Time*, alongside its original source, *Bid Time Return*, offers us is nothing less than Matheson's own take of the metaphysics of time and time-travel. A helpful way to explore Matheson's metaphysics of time is through the framework of J.M.E. McTaggart's 'A-Theory' and 'B-

Theory', first expounded in his 1908 essay 'The Unreality of Time'.[2] In this schema, McTaggart offers a useful categorisation of the two primary ways in which we think about time. 'A' and 'B' are two quite different theories of time, according to McTaggart, each with their own vocabulary of 'A-series *determinations*' and 'B-series *relations*'. Change, says McTaggart, belongs to the A-series: it pertains to what we call 'dynamic time' or 'temporal becoming' with its three determinations of 'past', 'present', and 'future'. Yet time can also be seen as a set of relations between events that are 'earlier', 'simultaneous' with, or 'later' than one another. This is the B-series. Who are the A-Theorists? Well, Bergson's identification of passage or becoming with time certainly makes him, like most process philosophers, an A-theorist on this score. And all language of 'past, present, and future', is A-theory language too, given its in-built dynamism. This would seem to make Matheson an A-Theorist as well (Collier travels to the 'past', not to the 'before'). But what about *travelling* per se within this type of time? Isn't that just what Bergson would call 'spatialisation' – treating time erroneously as a dimension of space – a line – that can be travelled over? Matheson's film is called 'Some-*where* in Time' after all, not 'Some-*when* in Space'. And yet there are complications – for here is the rub: for McTaggart, the A-theory is paradoxical in as much as any event having three *incompatible* determinations (past, present, and future) is contradictory. Hence, the title of McTaggart's essay is the 'Unreality of Time' because, as a good (British) Hegelian, he believes that time in unreal, or rather, that absolute reality is atemporal, something he describes in terms of his concept of a 'C-series' of timeless relations.[3]

This third series is not unlike Gilles Deleuze's third synthesis of eternal return ('Aion' or 'Virtual') introduced in his 1968 thesis, *Difference and Repetition.* It is also similar to what J.B. Priestley called 'Time 3'. As Matheson/Collier explains in *Bid Time Return*:

> Priestley speaks of three Times. He calls them Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3. Time 1 is the time into which we are born, grow old, and die; the practical

[2] Matheson himself, however, does not use McTaggart.

[3] McTaggart's ideas on this topic developed further after his 1908 essay, especially as seen in his epic, two volume *The Nature of Existence* (1921/1927). For a recent reinterpretation see, Ingthorsson 2016.

> and economic time, the brain and body time. Time 2 leaves this simple track. Its scope includes coexistent past, present, and future. No clocks and calendars determine its existence. Entering it, we stand apart from chronological time and observe it as a fixed oneness rather than as a moving array of moments. Time 3 is that zone where 'the power to connect or disconnect potential and actual' exists. Time 2 might be afterlife, claims Priestley. Time 3 might be eternity. (*BTR*, pp.74-5.)

Time 2, alternatively, is Proustian. There is an extreme depth of field shot in *Somewhere in Time* (famous amongst its devotees) when Richard and Elise, still both in 1912 but each thinking that the other has left *The Grand Hotel* forever, unexpectedly rediscover each other on its grounds: foreground (Richard) and background (Elise) are kept in perfect equal focus through the use of a split-diopter (*Figure 1*). This special optical effect arguably demonstrates the 'fixed oneness' of Time 2 where past (distal) and present (proximal) are equally real. Yet, for Bergson, such a realism towards the past does *not necessitate a lack of movement or vitality*, that is, an *after*-life; even less does it require any concomitant spatialisation when 'traveling' in this time.

*Figure 1: Richard and Elise in Simultaneous Focus*

In his 1911 lecture, 'The Perception of Change', Bergson says that '... *the preservation of the past in the present is nothing else than the indivisibility of change*' (Bergson 1992, p.155, my italics). The past is preserved *in* the present, but not by existing *alongside* as a ghostly double haunting it, so much as being a *new, broader* present that *incorporates* that narrow present and its so-called past. As such, what we call the present is relative:

> Let us reflect for a moment on this 'present' which alone is considered to have existence. What precisely is the present? [...] My present, at this moment, is the sentence I am pronouncing. But it is so because I want to limit the field of my attention to my sentence. This attention is something that *can be made longer or shorter*, like the interval between the two points of a compass. [...] Let us go further: an attention which could be extended indefinitely would embrace, along with the preceding sentence, all the anterior phrases of the lecture and the events which preceded the lecture, and as large a portion of *what we call* our past *as desired*. The distinction we make between our present and past is therefore, if not arbitrary, at least relative to the extent of the field which our attention to life can embrace. (Bergson 1992, pp.151-2, my italics.)

Bergson's philosophy of past and present actually, then, concerns an 'attention training' that reveals an indivisibility amongst different *kinds* of presents, multiple presents, each a different *durée* subtending the next. Consequently, his picture of time-perception should not be seen in terms of one present haunted by the past in general (an eternal Aion or Virtual), but in terms of multiple presents that constantly vie for (our) attention. Bergsonian time-travel, therefore, does not concern a *past that is being preserved*, but rather *which present is being attended*. There is a real effort in undoing the cut or fragmentation between past and present – an effort of will.

## Continuity Errors And the Indivisibility of Change

When *Bid Time Return* describes Collier's passage between time zones, it is first described as a '*flicker*', and later as like 'slipping' through film: 'A physical sensation akin to sliding backward through a film [...] the zone of conjunction, whatever it may be – an entryway, an opening, a film – is something very close and very thin' (*BTR*, 100, 107). How this idea is visu-

ally represented in the 1980 film adaptation is significant here, because, for any moment such as this in a time-travel film, there is the optical problem of *connecting* two times in transition, short of simply using a dissolve (or fade out/fade in), which would only be to connect them *ad hoc*, as it were. Computer-generated morphing technology (unavailable to Szwarc anyway) would be (literally) superficial (what would the interim shapes be – surreal objects from no time ever)?

How, then, to show this becoming? Still in 1980, Collier places his head on a patterned blanket, and falls asleep while performing his auto-hypnosis. The camera zooms in on his face until only a small portion of the blanket's leaf-trellis pattern is still in shot. There are then a number of cutaways – one of them an unfocused point of view shot as Collier begins to regain consciousness. Then we cut back to this close-up, still with the leaf-trellis pattern in view, only it is changed in colour and texture.[4] Indeed, as the camera pulls back, we see that the fabric has changed to that of a period sofa cushion, and that Collier is rising up to the vertical, not from a bed but a period couch from 1912 (*Figure 2*). There are other changes during the transition, namely to the lighting and background sounds (horses' hooves on cobbled stones become prevalent).[5] But why this odd *continuity* in the one element of our field of vision other than Collier (his face)? That the trellis pattern exists on a blanket in 1980 and a cushion in 1912, in exactly the same point in space within the hotel (and indeed the world) does seem highly improbable.[6] Even were the pattern to prove to be an emblem of the Grand Hotel, rendered in the exact same style and scale for at least 68 years (it is not, by the way), that Collier should choose to rest his head on it in one

[4] The leaf-trellis pattern can also be seen as a cellular diploid, a shape I have written on extensively before: see Mullarkey, 2006, 178-81.

[5] In the moments leading up to Collier's actual shift in time, partial dissolves are shown of his bedroom's walls beginning to alter, but it is unclear whether they are objective or subjective (being in Collier's 'head' when in the middle of self-hypnosis). The final leap in time is accompanied only by a change in lighting and sound-effects. By contrast, Collier's eventual and forced return to the modern world is shown through a point of view shot of Elise shrinking into darkness followed by a fade out to/fade in from, black.

[6] Of course, this point assumes space to be an absolute, a container, rather than having its own undulations: to consider it otherwise, however, would obviate any need to employ spatiality – a setting with its contents and surroundings – as a means of temporal transport, which, of course, is the premise followed in *Somewhere in Time.*

zone, and for it to appear still in the next zone under his head as he awakes, seems, again, unlikely (to say the least).

*Figure 2: Time-Travelling Patterns*

Now, of course, we know why this was done and do not need to speculate any further: it creates a *material* continuity that allows a metonymic Collier (his face) a 'smooth' transition – a visual bridge, so to speak. An extreme close up of his face *alone* filling our visual field would be too

subjective (leaving the journey *a product of his imagination from the very start*). He must carry another image with him to make the transition real *for us*, but still not as a diegetic object that is visible *to him*, for that would thereby ruin his transport, at least according to Matheson's logic of the need for complete dissociation from the present (hence his roughly correct period-clothing is allowed).[7] Yet this *continuity* for us also creates the odd effect of something *not really travelling at all, right in the middle of the transition scene.* There is (literally) a continuity error in what is *retained* (made continuous) rather than what is left out – for, irrespective of what Collier notices or not, it is *he alone* who is travelling in time: nothing should make the journey to the past *other than Collier*, given his means of sheer volition.

However, had the film-makers more faith in the inherent discontinuity of cinema – its fragmentation – then they might have achieved a 'normal' transition – only one based on *heterogeneity*.[8] What would that look like? Quite ordinary in fact: for the truth is that *no* film has ever represented a supposedly 'real', continuous time when it has involved more than one continuous shot (and even then...).[9] This is not the case because film lacks the ability to capture real time, but because there is no pure, single, continuous time to capture (this being Bergson's process view of course). Or rather, real time just is the host of *different kinds of* time being made continuously – a continuity of the heterogeneous (and in cinematic terms, images in the process of fragmenting and defragmenting themselves). Continuity versus discontinuity, therefore, is a false opposition

[7] In the novel, after 'arriving' in 1896, Collier learns that his suit is not, in fact, in period, being a decade out of date. Why this realisation did not break the spell of his time-travel is never explained.

[8] See Mullarkey, 2009 for more on this inherently discontinuous, and refracted, nature of the film image.

[9] Even Warhol's real-time film, *Empire* from 1964 (composed of a single eight-hour shot of the Empire State Building) involves variation in the technological context of its capture (micro-details of the material components, which we might call the memory of the recording system) that echo the same durational changes of an enduring stare. Even were one to attempt to iron out (irradicate) these cumulative effects with a digital capture device, 'fixed' lighting, and so on, there would still be micro-variations in atmosphere, light, and physical mounting that would alter the shot over time (not to mention the *durées* of the analogical that subtend the digital).

when time actually comes in different varieties, with no one time transcending all others (Newton's 'absolute' time that 'flows equably without regard to anything external' – the putative one-dimensional clock-time of the universe). The error is in a certain *continuity of the same – homogeneity*. And what we have just said about set décor could equally be said about cinematography, dialogue, or even character psychology: discontinuities, inconsistencies, or 'unevenness' may actually be precisely the right formulae for travelling in time.

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# FILM MAKING IN THE SUBJUNCTIVE: FANTASY IN THE FILMS OF NACER KHEMIR

## Abstract

This paper problematises the work of Franco-Tunisian film-maker and author Nacer Khemir, known in particular for his 'desert trilogy', which includes *Les Baliseurs du désert* (1986), *Le Collier perdu de la colombe* (1994), and *Bab'Aziz: Le prince qui contemplait son âme* (2006). Khemir's work has been relatively underanalysed in film-studies and film-philosophy. The interest of his desert trilogy comes from its mixture of fantastic and realistic or historical elements to tell stories drawn from the myths and legends of classical Islam, perhaps thus reclaiming or recovering these legends for a modern audience. Yet, in interviews concerning his later work, Khemir has stated that his desire is not to mythologise but to reveal a modern political truth, and to challenge Western negative perceptions of Islam in the post-9/11 era. Such an apparently surprising move raises the question of the status of fantasy, vision and irreality within his films. Those critics who have chosen to engage with work, such as Ridade Öztürk or David Sander, have frequently focused on his relationship with Sufi mysticism or other aspects of traditional Islamic philosophy. However, I believe we can shed further light on Khemir's films by studying his work from within the French, and the broader film-philosophical tradition.

I intend to explore Khemir's films using the work of three film philosophers: Stanley Cavell, Jacques Rancière and Gilles Deleuze. I will examine the use of visions, myths, and fantasy as a cinematic device, and will discuss Khemir's work as an example of what Cavell terms "Film-making in the subjunctive" – a strategy which he contrasts with literary or cinematic examples of "magical realism". I will consider whether the apparitions that people Khemir's deserts should be considered "fables" or "fabulous" in the sense used by Rancière and Deleuze.

**Keywords**
Nacer Khemir, Fantasy, Islamic Cinema, African Cinema, Tunisian Cinema, Stanley Cavell, Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze.

In this paper I will attempt a re-evaluation of a particular cinematic author, a film-maker who, despite having attracted some critical acclaim throughout his career, has, academically, been neglected. Franco-Tunisian film-maker Nacer Khemir (born 1948), has, in a career spanning over 40 years, directed a relatively modest total of 7 feature films, including three documentaries. Critical and academic interest in Khemir has, to date, read him without qualification as an 'Eastern' or 'Islamic' film-maker: one whose inspirations and intellectual influences, which include both Sufi mysticism and the *Arabian Nights*, can entirely be contained within the Islamic world. Yet Khemir is a Francophone intellectual who has chosen to spend decades of his life living in Paris. Furthermore, in interviews and talks Khemir has sought to position himself as a cultural figure occupying an intermediary point between East and West, and who aims, in that privileged position, to encourage dialogue between the two. There is, therefore, in my view, an interesting and under-studied gap between the academic reception of Khemir's work, and the complexities of his background, his self-understanding, and his intended audience.

The three most important and acclaimed films directed by Khemir are collectively known as the 'desert trilogy': *Les Baliseurs du désert* (The Wanderers of the Desert) (1986), *Le Collier perdu de la colombe* (The Dove's Lost Necklace) (1991), and *Bab Aziz: le Prince qui contemplait son âme* (Bab Aziz: The Prince Who Contemplated His Soul) (2006). These three films share with their director a problem of definition and have an indeterminate character which springs from an indeterminacy of origin. All three of these films are largely set in the desert. In the case of the first and third in the trilogy, this unnamed, formless desert exists in an undefined territory of which the exact location is deliberately vague, and at a point in time which is similarly so, and to which we receive various contradictory clues. Only the second film, *Le Collier perdu de la colombe*, has an identifiable setting – medieval, and thus Moorish, Granada. Khemir's cinematography in these films is both

politically and philosophically provocative. While the images we see in all three films are undeniably a representation of Islamic history and culture, they seem to interrogate the nature of the Islamic world, both because of their own indeterminate character, and by their blending, impossibly, tradition with modernity and the fantastic and the magic with mundane reality.

My intention in this short paper is to consider an alternate critical frame of reference from the one in which Khemir has up until now been understood. As I previously stated, critical discussion of his work in the existing literature seeks to understand him solely from within an Islamic political, philosophical, and aesthetic context. There has been little attempt to bring his work into dialogue either with a Western literary or cinematic tradition, or with Western philosophical ideas, particularly from within the discipline of film-philosophy. By complicating the function of the fantastic elements in his films, I hope to demonstrate that he can be usefully interpreted from within these Western traditions too. First, however, I wish to analyse the political and aesthetic motives for the perplexing geographical and temporal indeterminacy in these films.

Indeed, this indeterminacy is the result of a deliberate aesthetic choice, one which has a political foundation. Khemir deliberately attemps to give a 'pan-Islamic' character and tone to the films of the desert trilogy, and this impacts on cinematography, costume, setting, and choice of actors. The films deliberately mix shots and settings from different countries in the Islamic crescent into one sequence. As an example, in a 2005 interview with Nawara Omarbacha, following the release of *Bab Aziz,* Khemir described a particular sequence in that film in which the characters look out of the window of a palace in Tunisia, to see, in the subsequent shot, a desert located in Iran (Omarbacha, 2005). As a cinematic technique, such mixing of locations is of course not uncommon. However, Khemir intended it to have in this film a particular meaning. For him, the technique serves to 'define the territory' of his film: it not only reveals its fundamental cultural pluralism but also demonstrates that '*Bab Aziz* wanders through the Arab-Islamic world' (Omarbacha, 2005). The desert, which Khemir refers to as a special character in his films, has too its own abstract and constantly shifting nature reinforced by the effect of indeterminacy produced by these particular directorial choices. Khemir states that 'The desert is a literary field, and a

field of abstraction at the same time' (Omarbacha, 2005). Finally, Khemir's diverse casting choices, which include Indian, Syrian and Palestinian actors, is a further means of accomplishing this same effect.

The decision to give these films, a broadly defined 'pan-Islamic' character arises not just from aesthetic, but also from political motives. The first film in particular, *Les Baliseurs du désert*, is an attempt to intervene in the post-independence debate in Khemir's own country of Tunisia and throughout the Arab-Islamic world more generally. The central metaphor in this film is the striking image of a troop of all the young men of the region, condemned by a curse to wander the desert forever without ever being able to return home. For Khemir, this image represents the elite post-independence generation in Tunisia, whose obsession with (Western) modernity had led them to despise their own heritage. He portrays a young generation without an identity, without roots, without its own creativity, free-floating and directionless. While Khemir does not reject wholesale Western epistemology or culture, he argues that the wholesale Westernisation of Tunisia was neither possible, nor desirable. This would lead only to second-rate imitation of the West, while the country became culturally impoverished through the loss of its own intellectual heritage. In an interview with *The Arab Weekly*, he stated "We gave up on a legacy that has grown too heavy for us to carry, and we tried to catch a ride on the West's wagon. With time, we discovered that we did not have a place in the vehicle of the other." (al-Saghir, 2019)

In the 2005 Omarbacha interview, however, Khemir turned his attention to the perception of the Islamic world beyond its borders. He laments the fact that 'Fundamentalism, as well as radicalism, is a distorting mirror of Islam' and makes explicit his intention with *Bab Aziz* to depict 'an open, tolerant and friendly Islamic culture... an Islam that is different from the one depicted by the media in the aftermath of 9/11 (Omarbacha, 2005). Such a project must be an intervention in a debate about Islam taking place outside of the Islamic world, and thus shows that the intended audience, or at least a large part of it, is not Islamic but Western. Khemir's intention throughout, however, in both the Arab-Islamic and the Western discourses he intervenes in, is to offer a third possibility of viewing Islamic culture and heritage: neither the disdain and abandonment of the Tunisian post-independence elite, nor an extremist fundamentalism which rejects everything about the West.

Situated mid-way between the Islamic and Western worlds, and attempting to talk to both of them, Khemir himself acknowledged that his voice was louder in the West than in the East, claiming for example that he had only ever received invitations to speak from Western universities, and none from any institution in his own country (Arsiya, 2017). Given this, the critical focus of the relatively limited research published on Khemir, which presents him principally as an *eastern* film-maker speaking first and foremost to audiences in the East, seems misplaced (see Armes, 2010; Papan-Matin, 2012; Öztürk, 2019)[1]. I wish to argue that Khemir's films do not offer simply a revival of an Arab-Islamic identity, and that a rigid focus on Khemir's *easternness* omits to fully consider a series of aesthetic and narrative choices which, in my view, might be fruitfully analysed from a Western philosophical tradition.

Central to these films are elements which are, to Western eyes, not simply exotic, but also mystic or fantastic. In the different films of the central trilogy there are many elements which present a challenge to a rationalist mode of thought and which operate as a kind of cinematic magical realism. Each of the desert trilogy films depict characters who experience dreams, prophecies and visions which later on come to life. As already mentioned, the central and most striking image in *Les Balisseurs du désert* is the recurring depiction of entire villages of men compelled by a curse to wander through the desert without hope of returning home. *Bab Aziz* features a character, Omar, who, when fleeing from the husband of a woman he was paying court to, falls down a well and thus enters an enchanted palace, which could be located in Paradise or in a kind of indeterminate dream-world. Omar then moves back and forth between the real and the supernatural world in a short but striking narrative sequence which also seems to jump back and forth in time, and, at the end of the sequence, laments his inability to return to that same palace. The characters around him debate whether he has seen miracles, has been given a foretaste of the afterlife, or is simply a madman.

All three films also feature characters who appear to be apparitions or spirits, who have the ability to foretell the future. One of the key ap-

[1] It should be noted that Roy Armes does argue for the importance of some Western cinematic influences, such as that of Alain Robbe-Grillet, on Khemir.

paritions in *Le collier perdu de la colombe*, for example, is the legendary Princess of Samarkand, whose coming was foretold to other characters in a destroyed prophetic book, but who later makes a real appearance in the film, disguised as a man called Aziz. These mystical elements do not however form a logically coherent 'film-world'; one which is understood or easily explained by the characters, for whom these fantastic elements are as difficult to comprehend as they are for us, the spectators. This problem is made worse by the fact that these films also contain sequences depicting the modern technology-driven world which seem to coexist, without any formal explanation, with the mystic and fantastic elements, as well as with a seemingly medieval setting. In *Les Balisseurs du désert*, for example, the protagonist is a teacher in a national school system, who is taken by a modern bus service to his new desert home, and when attempting to solve the mystery of the desert wanderers, later has recourse to a modern police force. *Bab Aziz,* a film largely concerned with dervishes and Sufi mystics, also features a sequence depicting a contemporary urban landscape, thus further adding to our confusion about place and time. How, then, should we understand the profoundly disruptive irruption of the fantastic in these films?

Roy Armes correctly notes the profound influence of oral storytelling traditions on Khemir's narrative structures, and in particular, folk beliefs in the meaningful presence of the invisible. Armes argues these influences are almost entirely Arabo-Islamic, drawing in particular on the stories in *The Arabian Nights*. Armes also argues that medieval Andalusian Sufi poets, as well as Iranian mystic poets, are a profound influence on Khemir, repeatedly noting the influence on him of Sufi literature, music, and traditions. Ridade Öztürk, writing within the discipline of film-philosophy, also argues that Khemir's narrative techniques reflect his fundamental philosophical orientation, a way of understanding the world which is particular to Sufism (Öztürk, 2019). For her, *Bab'Aziz* can only be understood by reference to a conception of knowledge which is fundamentally different from Western epistemologies: one based not on logical precepts but on the pursuit, by the believer, of knowledge gained from direct experience. The pursuit of knowledge is accomplished, literally, by a journey, and thus by a gradually unfolding process of discovery.

It is certainly true that Öztürk's work is rooted in careful and convincing analysis of the different elements of Khemir's films and what she sees as their Sufi antecedents. We can also plausibly demonstrate a link between these Eastern philosophical foundations of the films and the director's aesthetic choices. Armes, for example, notes Khemir's preference for 'processes of fusion, juxtaposition and collage of images and sound, rather than a simple narrative line' (Armes, 2010, 71), and also notes the presence of constantly repeating elements in the narrative, including the fact that characters from different films, and different story strands in the same film, often end by experiencing the same fate. To these aesthetic and narrative choices we could add Khemir's frequent preference for great circular sweeps of the camera, particularly when filming the dunes. This preference for visual as well as narrative circularity is seen particularly in the third film, *Bab Aziz*, where the camera also discovers circles in mosques, and in palaces. Armes argues that these visual and narrative choices are a product of the strong influence of Arabo-Islamic narrative traditions, and are a repudiation of a Western linear narrative. Yet Armes has also noted possible Western antecedents for Khemir's circular narrative style and unresolved, recurring plots, such as Alain Resnais' *L'Année dernière à Marienbad (Last Year at Marienbad)* (1961). Is there therefore anything substantial we can say, drawing on Western philosophical and cinematic traditions, to discuss Khemir's preference for these disruptive, fantastic, and indefinable elements which define his films? In the remaining part of this paper, I want to suggest two possible ways of investigating these films which could prove a fruitful counterpoint to existing work.

I believe a fruitful reading of Khemir's films can also be accomplished by reference to the work of American film-philosopher Stanley Cavell. The fantastic played a huge role in Cavell's thought, and indeed he sought to give it a central place in the development of American literature. In fact he believed that the 'fantastic', or, as he termed it, the 'uncanny', is essential to philosophy itself (Cavell, 2005). What does Cavell mean by 'uncanny'? His delineation of this concept argues that an encounter with otherness is at its heart, and that this encounter therefore necessitates a concomitant process of distancing and estrangement from the familar and commonplace. It is the juxtaposition, or the relation between the familiar and the strange, the real

and the magical, the situation of a philosophical work 'on some boundary or threshold, as between the impossible and the possible' (Cavell, 2005, 147) that defines 'fantastic' for Cavell.

Cavell believes the medium of film is uniquely suited to the display of the fantastic or uncanny. This is so, because of the unique power of cinema to bring together and juxtapose magical and fantastic, and everyday and mundane elements within the same *Mise-en-scène*, in the same shot or the same sequence of shots. Cinema, more than any other art form, thus has the power to disorient the viewer by bringing these elements into conjunction with no clear demarcation between them, and with nothing concrete to distinguish one world from another. Cavell thus states, 'I have in mind... film's unaided perfect power to juxtapose fantasy and reality, to show their lacing as precisely not special' (Cavell, 2005, 151). This juxtaposition compels the spectator in the cinema to hesitate between these two worlds: the world of empirical established fact, and the world of unrealised dream, wish and desire: what we might call the world of the subjunctive mood. A scene at the end of Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* provides what Cavell believes is the perfect illustration of this effect: a husband, curled on the floor of his empty house, is circled by a vision of his longed-for, but deceased wife. A dreamlike vision of a desired woman is, of course, a theme which echoes through Khemir's films also.

The discontinuities, disruption, circularity, and ambiguity between the real and present, and the desired but absent, that we note in Khemir's films can also be related to Gilles Deleuze's argument in *Cinema 2* about the transition between two 'regimes of the image', from that which he termed the 'movement-image' to the 'time-image', a transition which heralded the dawn of the 'cinema of poetry'. This transition was marked by the breakdown of the ordered 'sensory-motor schema' characteristic of sequences dominated by the 'movement-image' (Deleuze, 2005). In a given cinematic set, scene, or sequence, the relationship between concrete and real, and fantastic or unreal elements determines which image-regime the filmed sequence can be classified under. In the 'sensory-motor schema', which is also the cinema of 'organic description', or a cinema which has as its purpose the representation of a reality which pre-existed the act of filming, there exists a relation between different shots and filmed images which is broadly logical, ordered and predictable. As Deleuze argues,

> In an organic description, the real that is assumed is recognizable by its continuity – even if it is interrupted – by the continuity shots which establish it and by the laws which determine successions, simultaneities and permanences; it is a regime of localizable relations, actual linkages, legal, causal, and logical connections. It is clear that this system includes the unreal, the recollection, the dream and the imaginary but as contrast. Thus the imaginary will appear in the forms of caprice and discontinuity, each image being in a state of disconnection with another (Deleuze, 2005, 126-127).

Contrast this with the second regime of images: also termed the 'crystalline' regime, and marked by a close and interpenetrating relationship between 'actual' and 'virtual', or 'real' and 'imaginary' elements in the cinematic set, one which develops to a point at which these two different classes of image become indistinguishable from each other. It is only through the process of disorientation and dislocation caused by the transition to the time-image that, for Deleuze, 'pure optical and sound situations' can emerge, which he deems to be moment at which a truly poetic cinema can be identified: 'this is a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent' (Deleuze, 2005, 126). When such a point is reached, the narrative of this cinema, as well as the cinematic space in which these images are arranged, can no longer be said to respond to imperatives of conflict, the resolution of tension, or the pursuit of goals. The multiplication of false and impossible narratives in this cinema, and the abandonment of any notion of an objective truth which could be searched for, frees the camera to create 'pure optical and sound situations' which have a visionary, hallucinatory and poetic quality. Such is the cinema of Nacer Khemir.

Yet, for both Deleuze and Cavell, this analysis of the power of the false and the fantastic in cinema does not result in simply the creation of an aesthetic effect, and their concerns are far broader than simply the aesthetic. Instead, the fantastic, in literature and film, has for both Deleuze and Cavell a political function. As Cavell argues, it is the only way for us to access what he calls the 'sublimity of otherness', thus allowing us to borrow the eyes of another so as to look through them. It is only through fantasy and storytelling that we can guarantee an encounter with this 'other' whom, according to Cavell's reading of strict philosophical scepticism, we ought not to even be

able to prove exists. This encounter with the other is developed, by Deleuze as well as Jacques Rancière, into the possibility of a rehabilitation of a politically or economically marginalised subject. Thus, for Deleuze, the adoption of the 'power of the false' by the cinema of poetry allows us to subvert the notion of truth, to allow for the emergence of marginalised narratives: "it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonisers; it is the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster" (Deleuze, 2005, 150). Rancière too believes that cinema "has to consent to be nothing but the surface where the experience of those who have been relegated to the margins of economical circulations and social trajectories, can be organized in new figures" (Rancière, 2019, 142). All three of these theorists thus see, just as much as Khemir does, the potential that cinema, particularly a cinema which disrupts and falsifies existing epistemologies and narratives, has for constructing new political narratives, and for undermining dominant discourses and dominant representations of those who have been politically marginalised.

The fantastic elements of Khemir's desert trilogy serve a purpose which goes far beyond simply stamping these films with some form of an 'Eastern' or 'Islamic' character. The juxtaposition of these mystical and fantastic elements with modern elements, the fact that the mystical elements remain mysterious to the characters within the 'film-world', and the director's stated aim to create a new vision of the Islamic world both for young audiences in the East, as well as audiences in the West, all demonstrate that something deeper is at play. It is my view that the use of fantastic elements in these films are a way for Khemir to accomplish the very aim he has explicitly stated in his interviews. The ambiguities and discontinuities at the heart of these films are a way to challenge and disrupt dominant representations of sense, and in so doing are a way for the Islamic film-maker to overcome the critical and aesthetic marginalisation of his subject. The films, therefore, become a way for the Western and well as the Eastern viewer to access the otherness of the classical Islamic tradition, a tradition which nonetheless is more open and pluralistic than contemporary representations of an extreme Islam hellbent on a 'clash of civilisations'. These films thus open up the nuance and complexity of Islamic societies to modern audiences both inside and outside the Islamic world.

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# THE SUBLIME, THE TERRIBLE AND THE UGLY: AN EXPLORATION OF COSMIC HORROR IN FILM AND LITERATURE

## Abstract

It might be scandalous to think that the Sublime can be found in a genre driven into pulp fiction by camp, and kitsch, but the complexity of *cosmic horror* has much more to offer than just its obligatory body gore and screams. While its superficial layer diminishes astonishment into the revulsion of the ugly through the aforementioned mannerist obligation, a deeper exploration into the genre should reveal its imagery as multifaceted, both in film and in literature. The main themes commonly found within cosmic horror narratives (such as man vs. the unknown and/or unknowable) will be explored with consideration of their distinctive specificities according to the scopes and the limits of both art forms. Primarily based on the comparative analysis of such films as *The Thing*, *Annihilation*, and *Stalker* with their respective literary counterparts, this exploration of cosmic horror will show that, within it, the interconnectedness of *the Sublime* and *the Ugly* creates a unique aesthetic experience. *The Terrible*, as the embodiment of this particular aesthetic conjunction, can sometimes serve to either obscure the presence of sublimity or to negate the obvious manifestations of ugliness. Furthermore, this niche genre proves as an interesting example in which the maxim "show, don't tell" can be explored, in regards to film and literature as art forms, and also towards the representation or presence of the Sublime as an aesthetic category in its terms.

## Keywords

the Sublime, the Terrible, the Ugly, cosmic horror, cosmic indifference, body gore, aesthetic representation

On February 14th, 1990, before its cameras were powered off, the NASA probe Voyager 1 sent back an image of planet Earth floating in the Cosmos, resembling a speck of dust suspended in a beam of light. This image, deemed *Pale blue dot* (NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory-Caltech, 1990), is what I would ask you to keep in mind while considering the meaning and scope of cosmic horror. The minuscule planet, with its minuscule inhabitants, stands in stark contrast to the mystery and magnitude of that which lies outside of it and what might, intentionally or not, visit and interrupt its Cosmic rest. That *thing* might even already be here, lying dormant, waiting to be awakened in all its magnitude and force.

The marvelous Carl Sagan wrote on this notion of the lonely speck of dust and was transfixed by the importance of its inhabitants, seemingly aware, conscious, and knowledgeable of themselves as well as the Cosmos while imagining their better tomorrow within it (Sagan, 2003). He saw humanity as hope, love, and authenticity. The authors of cosmic horror do not see the same in that cosmic picture. This might be an oversimplification to which one might generally succumb when faced with the perpetual doom that comes from the early years of cosmic horror, but its message is not understated. In the push-and-pull of life as we know it and that of which we know not, lies equally the possibility of sublimity and terror, aesthetically if not also ontologically. Ugliness does not go unnoticed in this odd interplay, and in fact, might be the most affirmative instance of aesthetic representation in its meeting with the Sublime and the Terrible, particularly when seen through the prism of such a thing as cosmic indifference.

## Expedition Objectives

This paper is first and foremost an exploration of the mentioned interplay of the trio of categories and is not a finished and fixed meditation on the problems presented in it, by far. It is much rather a sketch drawn out with very broad strokes, envisioned as the mere beginning stage of a longer investigation into the aesthetic problems of the Sublime, the Terrible, and the Ugly. This paper should, in a sense, set a base in which their interconnectedness can be considered, and elaborate on some of the investigative questions considered when working on the problem without a firm methodology, but with a clear theme. Most of the definitions and concep-

tualizations of the Sublime and the Terrible therefore will be set around Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's aesthetic concepts, using them as a platform on which to ground the primary questions and perspectives. Cosmic horror appeared as an interesting investigative playing ground, where these aesthetic issues can be pitted against each other, so to speak. In that vein, the explorative function of this presentation has a double meaning: to explore the dimensions of cosmic horror on one hand, and on the other, the interconnectedness of the Sublime, the Terrible, and the Ugly. However, not to superimpose these categories on the genre by all means. If allowed to consider *cosmic horror* as an artistic and philosophical setting, then a door towards magnificent questions and problems, some of which grounded, others abstract, and some, dare I say, weird and curious, will be opened.

## Expedition Headquarters and Control

Often situated in the meeting between (supernatural) *horror*, (science) *fantasy* and *science-fiction*[1] - *cosmic horror* seems to have eluded more precise genre definitions. It is, in a way, a subgenre with very few examples that capture what is unmistakably *cosmic horror*. A few staples of the genre remain across the board, however, mostly influenced by the genre's forerunners such as H. P. Lovecraft. For the most part, this genre can and should remain open to a wide range of interpretations. Furthermore, the more specific it becomes, the less it incorporates the greater possibilities of its base themes and can further fall into pulp and camp, characteristic for genre fiction and relating to style and concept among other things[2]. *Love-*

[1] All of these genres have a combined history, and while I am not a proponent of genre theory necessarily, I have decided to include a miniature retracing of the location of cosmic horror in genre fiction, for an easier understanding of its place within literature and film. Furthermore, the mentioned place presupposes an understood reference to genre convention, whether literary or cinematic, thematic or stylistic, narrative or visual.

[2] While pulp and camp certainly have their own place and importance in art and mass media, especially when understood through the aesthetics of ugliness (Eco, 2007, 408-438), relying too much on their entertainment value and socio-cultural context might block the potential for further development in any direction, be it artistic, philosophical or imaginative and experimental. However, the purpose of this investigation of cosmic horror is not to find some pretentious way of elevating a genre, but to explore the faculties which might make it philosophically and aesthetically more rewarding than merely labeling it *pulpish* and throwing it aside, as if it was a mere part of the unimportant cacophony of pop culture.

*craftian horror*, as a part of *weird fiction*, operates in different dimensions of the horrific and as it changes, or as the *genre's mantle* has been passed on to other authors and artists, so its relationship with the Sublime further develops, as well as with theme, style and so on. While I will not be considering the changes which occur in the genre itself, nor present a complete account of its workings so far, I would like to note that my view of what can be called a work of cosmic horror incorporates films and novels that are not generally considered as such, mostly because of the home it has found in Lovecraft's work[3] that seems to be treated as a kind of paradigm (Cardin, 2017, Weird and Cosmic Horror section). John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) and Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018) fall neatly into that category within popular culture contexts, but Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979) is a wholly different matter. While I will not be arguing that *Stalker* is an example of cosmic horror that has somehow slipped through the cracks and is to be considered a neglected piece of cosmic horror, I believe that both the film and especially the novel on which it was based upon, *Roadside Picnic* (A. Strugatsky & B. Strugatsky, 2012), share some striking similarities with certain of its aspects, that can further the understanding of both the genre and the aesthetic problems raised in this investigation. Lem (1983), commenting on the novel after its release, found it to be a strange example of first-contact science-fiction, already noticing some of its cosmic horror elements in both the mysterious nature of the *visitors* and the ambiguity with which the Strugatskys' approached the concept. In his view (Lem, 1983, 320), the novel breaks with the popular conventions of first-contact science-fiction of the time and compared it to his novel *Solaris* (Lem, 2003), which was also adapted by Tarkovsky into a film bearing the same name (Tarkovsky, 1972). Lem has a similar approach to science-fiction as the Strugatskys', substantially so in the mentioned novel, that I almost used it as a comparison in this paper as well. Tarkovsky's adaptation of Lem's novel bears the same marking of an author who is more concerned with the psychological

[3] H. P. Lovecraft's influence on authors from Stephen King to Neil Gaiman, and from John Carpenter to Guillermo del Toro is immense and does not simply stop at the novel and film as art forms or forms of media. Moreover, it has a wide influence on video games, graphic novels, and comic books including manga, animated movies, and anime, as well as other forms of contemporary digital media and content.

and internal ambiguity of the characters, while Lem and the Strugatskys' are more interested in the ambiguous parameters of the story, theme, and concept. In that sense, their works are much closer to the cosmic horror genre and science-fiction genre conventions than the films themselves are. The same can be noted about the *Area X* trilogy, but since the story spans over three parts, it has ample time to dive into the internal workings of the characters. The *Area X* or *Southern Reach Trilogy* by Jeff VanderMeer (2015), which found its partial adaptation in *Annihilation*, is considered a contemporary work of *literary fiction*, but its own writer found a different solution to its peculiar literary belonging. This genre, dubiously coined *the new weird* still needs to find its footing in academia, but it does loosely string onto the weird tradition of Lovecraftian fiction (J. VanderMeer & A. VanderMeer, 2008). Similarly, Campbell's novella *Who goes there?* from 1938 is considered a *science-fiction* classic from the so-called golden age of science-fiction and, even though at least one of its cinematic adaptations has been deemed Lovecraftian, it has generally stayed out of the conversation surrounding cosmic horror. The reasons behind this omission are surely many, but, just like *Roadside Picnic*, and the widening of the cosmic horror narrative, they have not been reconsidered more closely within its increased scope.

As suggested, one of the core ideas in cosmic horror, but not the only, is that of the *first contact* with alien civilizations[4] far more *advanced* (for instance - technologically) or in some other way, shape, or form *superior* (meaning - stronger or more powerful) to humankind. The horror aspect of the genre takes advantage of this imbalance or contrast between humankind and that which is alien to it. The alien, taking monstrous shape, a shape which is more often than not difficult to even comprehend, whether in its magnitude and/or power, is a kind of attacker or violator of the perceived normalcy and/or reality of nature, and, with that, of humankind. Many themes arise from this conflict, that have been explored in varied ways in cosmic horror, and one might even say horror and science-fiction more broadly. But most importantly, the mentioned imbalance between hu-

[4] In this case, using the term *civilization* might be a bit of a stretch and it applies more specifically to *Lovecraftian* cosmic horror. The ambiguity of this idea will become more apparent in the next stages of the essay and is pivotal to understanding the concept of *the alien thing* within cosmic horror.

man and alien being/force/thing (a significant ambiguity and obscurity in definition), the minuscule versus the gargantuan whether in size or force, is also a source for experiencing sublimity within that context. Here, the expected and implied horror and terror are functional by way of genre, but not necessarily the end-all of the entire work and its possible aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the ambiguities that exist in the genre provide the nuance and further dimension, to surpass the guttural response of fear, horror, or shock. The ambiguity is that which intensifies the mysterious and, sometimes quite simply, inexplicable nature of the *alien thing*, that comes into the story with moral and epistemological neutrality, not always easily deduced from the aesthetic of the medium that goes hand-in-hand with the Ugly. It is the Sublime that also might reside within this layer of mystery and the Terrible, implied in a sensualistic manner, intellectually remains the missing category.

## The Expedition: Into the Zone

Having outlined the foundation of cosmic horror as the investigative playground, the next question, though also a bit of a leap, is how these aesthetic categories in both film and literature are to be considered. Furthermore, considered in the unique aesthetic experience of cosmic horror, the interconnectedness (or interplay) of these categories, can be further understood, and their experience deepened. To answer simply, but without simplification, I shall consider the mentioned aesthetic categories not as the set parameters working in an either/or fashion, but rather in the formation and transformation of the aesthetic experience through the cinematic and temporal dimension of film, or narrative movement within the novel. Regarding the Sublime and the Terrible, Edmund Burke already opens the possibility of such an understanding of these two categories. In his sensualist approach to the problem, he starts distinguishing sublimity and beauty from one another and places the Sublime and the Terrible in the same class of the passions: that of self-preservation.

> Whatever is fitted of any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is at any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source

> of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke, 2008, 39)

The difference between the two is the one most obvious: the relation and closeness of said pain and danger. This difference brings us to Immanuel Kant's view on the Sublime, which was inherently influenced by Burke, though greatly transformed within the context of his philosophy. Experiencing sublimity, from his point of view, though limited within the arts and found mostly in nature, is a kind of negative experience, or negative pleasure - by the ways of both attracting and repulsing the experiencing subject. Umberto Eco in his recounting of the *History of ugliness* (2007, 271-331), I believe, finds the connection of the Sublime and the Ugly precisely in this *negative pleasure*, when he reviews the romantic astonishment with the Ugly and the disturbing: as the uncanny, mysterious or sinister. In Burke, we find it as the *delightful horror* of sublimity. It is in this sense of the word that we can speak of the interconnectedness of the Sublime with the Terrible as well as with the Ugly. Furthermore, the cinematic disallows the formation of a single homogenous experience throughout. Rather, it moves both the imagination and the mind, as well as sensation, through the action of story, concept, and *representation* (simplified - as the audiovisual faculties of the medium itself). The barrier between the Sublime and the Terrible, becomes increasingly leaner, as the experiencing subject moves together with the cinematic. Can cosmic horror also allow for a seeming indivisibility between the two? Or do the instances of experiencing appear as fused, just to be outrun by the sheer affective force of terror, stopping the possibility of forming appropriate distance for contemplative peace to delight in the Sublime nature of that which is so overpowering as to break down the bonds that bind that which is human as well as its body?

The final experience of the Sublime, needing of this distance, for Immanuel Kant happens on the basis of the affirmation of the faculties of the reason of the experiencing subject (Џепароски, 2008, 41). The triumph of reason over imagination, in their free play/battle, is itself the affirmation of the human subject as superior to the forces outside of them, even over nature. This anthropocentric perspective, while completely in line with

Kant's project and the humanism of the Enlightenment (Kant, 2009), stands in contrast with the anti-anthropocentrism and anti-humanism usually to be found and, even, expected from cosmic horror. In fact, some authors or critics of the possibility of a Kantian reading of the Sublime in cosmic horror, state that the principle of *cosmic indifference* found in *Lovecraftian cosmicism*[5] negates such a reading altogether (Ralickas, 2007). This *cosmic indifference* is not to be contrasted to the *aesthetic indifference* which we find in the contemplation of beauty in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant, 2004), nor should they be equalized. The indifference in cosmicism is that which contrasts the moral feeling in the further affirmation of the subject found in the work of Kant. It is the indifference of the starry sky to the human being, the indifference of the monstrous and gargantuan alien thing to the minuscule existence of the human and humankind. Any appeal to the moral feeling within *us* is an appeal meant only to drive one to madness[6]. Namely, there are two ways to leave this clash between moral feeling and cosmic indifference in cosmic horror: either in ugliness and madness; or in the acceptance of a state beyond good and evil, in the acceptance of the change which occurs in the turn toward that which is alien (the complete negation of the human subject). The second is an aspect more prominent in *the new weird* fiction of Jeff VanderMeer than in Lovecraft, where the first resolution is more often found. I believe that the Lovecraftian resolution which finds madness after confronting that which causes the human subject to be in fact subjugated to the power and vastness of the Cosmos is exactly a tool left from modernity, and does not negate the importance of the subject. Rather, it reaffirms reason to the point of madness, when faced with *alterity* or that which is other to it or, moreover, completely inexplicable. While the sublime turn might not be experienced, the subject,

[5] This is a relatively new term and is not to be conflated with Russian cosmism.

[6] With the intention not to load the main text with too many concepts, I will simply state that there is much to be said on the problem of *madness* in the context of cosmic horror. Understanding the full scope of the genre's themes epistemologically, as well as aesthetically, would call for the defining of reason and madness, the normal and the pathological, as well as clarifying the full account of what a *subject* might mean, beyond the Kantian perspective. In this essay, some things might only appear suggested, but not clarified. Further investigation into the problem would lead to authors such as Georges Canguilhem and Michel Foucault, as well as Friedrich Nietzsche.

though in a way - tormented, still remains. To say the least, the subject, the human, affirms its own importance as the locus of experiencing pain and of recounting the mentioned experience. Ugly and minuscule though it may be or appear, the human is as yet not negated by learning of the Cosmos and the magnitude of forces that might be operating in it. I believe that cosmic indifference can only be fully achieved if the human itself becomes indifferent to its own suffering - as pain and terror - and its own voice. Can this lead to a complete anti-anthropocentric view of the Sublime? An equation of the aesthetic indifference with the ontological, cosmic one? Or would it turn nihilistic, instead of asking for a transfiguration of value, as *the human* itself is being deconstructed? In that case, can terror and ugliness be subjugated into the Sublime?

Before venturing further into the Zone, a moment to expound a little more on the problem of the Ugly. Unlike the Sublime and the Terrible, it lives in the embodiment of the image, it is the image of horror itself, it is also a part of the equation of inference of the Terrible and the Sublime. As previously mentioned, it is an aspect of the break or the transformation when the human is faced with the magnitude of that which is difficult, if not impossible, to understand. In cosmic horror, this is actualized most often in the form of what is called *body gore*. It is the gruesome transformation of the human body into the other, and in both *The Thing* and *Annihilation* this holds the pivotal aspect of the sinister, the uncanny, and the ugly. Both films, as well as the books, explicate the gruesome matter in detail, but in both instances, the transformation happens within a crucial constraint. In order to be *transformed*, the human must first be mirrored or refracted, in body, and possibly also in mind. The maxim "show, don't tell", which filmmakers are very fond of, works in quite a literal sense when it comes to the Ugly. Carpenter uses these techniques in *The Thing*, in full light contrary to the trends of the time, with practical effects, stretching the limits of the human-alien chimera in scenes that might not have aged perfectly well, but still grasp that which is both eerily familiar and utterly unfamiliar into one inexplicable creature. He does *horror as ugliness* justice in this film, but the Sublime and the Terrible do not have such a relationship either with the inexplicable or with aesthetic representation. Moreover, the Sublime in both film and genre fiction seems to live in those

moments of inference that happen somewhere in between the mixing lines of the Ugly and the Terrible. The visual nature of film itself possesses the greatest difficulty when searching for sublimity within it. And in cosmic horror, it is twice the problem. Since it uses its best tool to explicate on the inconceivable - ugliness - to stimulate both fear and repulsion, does it leave even less room for the required distancing of the experiencing subject to occur if we return to Burke and Kant?

In contrast, in the new weird, the *Area X Trilogy* ends with the book aptly named *Acceptance* and leans toward a *vitalist* interpretation of change in an exceedingly anti-anthropocentric manner. Can the Sublime not be found in this acceptance as well? In the transfiguration itself? Here, the Sublime is inferred as a qualitative magnitude, but not as a quantitative monolith. The enormity of the natural objects and the dynamic force of nature, become seen in the transformative power of life. It is too big to be completely comprehended and represented, so between the messy and gory visuals, tense music, and dark mood, sublimity conceptually slips through the cracks for the experiencing audience, if not always for the characters, or at least not for all of them, always. In that sense of the word, there is appropriate distance for the audience to regard that which is Sublime, though still close enough to be terrorized by the knowledge that not everyone makes it on the other side. Or at least, not everyone human. In a poignant scene from the film *Annihilation*, when the main protagonist is left alone with one of her companions from their expedition into the mysterious Area X, considering together all they have been through, and feeling the influences of the Area on themselves, her companion, before transfiguring into the Area itself, says: "Ventress wants to face it. You wanna fight it. But I don't think I want either of those things." (Garland, 2018, 1:20:55).

So what do we *see* in cosmic horror? Is it a clash of the modern and "postmodern" (and I use the term postmodern in quotation marks to denote the differentiation of the treatment of the subject in both an epistemological and aesthetic sense)? Or is it a border not fully crossed, since cosmic horror and the Sublime still operate with some of the tools of the modern, both in a narrative and a representational manner? It is as if we are seeing the moments of the brake, as a transfiguration of value,

beyond good and evil, beyond beauty and ugliness, beyond the sweet simplicity of *kalokagathia* towards the heterogeneous complexity of that which can be neither[7].

## Notes on the Expedition

Instead of a conclusion, aware that this essay hasn't delivered the full account of what was promised in the title, asked more questions than provided answers, left cosmic horror as mysterious as ever, I would like to leave you with this final image... There is nothing more perplexing than feeling that vague borderline between the rising delight in the Sublime and its seeming counterpart terror when experiencing something akin to cosmic horror. A scene that I believe illustrates this borderline perfectly is one from *Stalker*, which comes almost at the end of the film, and, in a way represents the completion of the journey of the trio of characters the audience has been following through the Zone. This is the scene that leads me to believe that we can and should speak of this film in the context of cosmic horror at all. It is one moment of eerie serenity when the characters are finally faced with the mysterious Room, the inexplicable remainder of an alien passer-by, and at that point something contextualized in a completely different way for the characters, as well as the audience. This is a moment in which *we* - the audience have a double role to play. We see the perplexed and tormented faces of the characters peering at the Room, and through them, we experience the sheer force and potential of what it might

[7] Before concluding this essay I would like to mention a few examples from science-fiction that stand in contrast with cosmic horror themes and especially the concept of cosmic indifference. When it comes to first-contact tropes, and in keeping with the already mentioned authors, Carl Sagan's *Contact* and its film adaptation are thematically and conceptually in line with his *Pale blue dot* ideas and speak to a much more welcoming Cosmos. Secondarily, Carpenter often states that what contrasts his film *The Thing* is one that came out the same year, Spielberg's *E.T.* - a story of cosmic affection and togetherness. One of the newer examples would be *Arrival*, which in a way presents a subversion of the cosmic horror genre: playing with a similar ambiguity and the expectations that come from it, and holding certain symbolic nods to Lovecraftian fiction. The best example that contrasts Garland's and VanderMeer's vision of *life* in cosmic horror is a film that strictly functions by way of *kalokagathia*, equating ugliness with evil and finding its only opposite in Beauty: *The Fifth Element*. Here the transfiguration of the alien works in the opposite direction, turning the alien - *truly* human. This turn depicts the ultimate anthropocentric fantasy that what is human must be the supreme being.

represent to them. Overstated and overused interpretations of the Room as human desire and want aside, what we are interested in this essay is not the human - that which desires, but rather the unfathomable - that which leaves its trash on Earth as one might in a roadside picnic, though still grand and powerful enough to grant a human all of its heart's desires. This is not the realm of the internal and the psychological, or even the existential. The roadside picnic is the external, the outer, the alien - the eponymous Zone and Area X. And *we* - the humans should be minuscule to think of it as anything otherwise than that which might grant our deepest desires and know them better than we know them ourselves, while it remains fully alien. Here the Strugtasky's were much better aligned on the side of cosmic indifference than Tarkovsky was. He was in his way limited by his *pathos* in the Stalker as a human louse, bound to his circumstance, yet ever attracted to the Zone and its foreboding quietude. With that comes the second role of the audience, it also being bound by its own *thrownness*, in its own minuscule circumstance. Our second role as the audience is to be peered at by the characters with their perplexed faces. Tarkovsky gives us neither terror nor delight in this almost 5-minute long cinematic moment (Tarkovsky, 1979, 2:19:19). What then can *we* experience?

> The collapse of a certain rationality needs to cut its own limbs, and the human body is less a temple than a receptacle for pain. Rather than the opposite, this is a strange parallel to the sheer terror of knowledge discovered in the cosmic horror experienced by Lovecraft's protagonists. What both share is the unveiling of the insignificance of humanity, the extensive hubris of thinking that humanity can be viewed as central to a universe of screaming, biting heads and/or cosmic indifference (more laughter). Humanity as a *waste* object. (Cunningham, 2020, 492)

It is important to recognize the grand scope that cosmic horror allows its audience when considering the Sublime, the Terrible, and the Ugly. *Cosmic horror* simultaneously places *us* - the audience in the distinctive position in the Cosmos on the *Pale blue dot* as fleshy and vulnerable beings, which may, or may not, succumb to the indifference of both the (monstrosity and monstrosities of the) Cosmos and that of ourselves. In that sense of the word, sublimity is not that of the mathematical or the dynamic, but pos-

sibly of the *astronomical* which discretely combines and recombines both forms of sublimity, by terrorizing them into submission to the *ugly* body. The affirmation of the subject is not then found in reason, but in the flesh and the now. An exploration of cosmic horror would mean looking onward and outside, rather than simply inward. Not in the pseudo-psychological that divides the normal and the pathological or speaks of desire, but to see further on into the metaphysical, just to be horrified by the lack of complete vision. However, the Sublime of cosmic horror does not find its full resolution in *The Critique of the Power of Judgment* but rather remains skeptical of any resolution at all that bases itself on any category of reason. Maybe the passions do remain its only true witness, even in art? Or is that a sign of camp? Meanwhile, the Terrible remains a missing category, yet ever-present.

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# CINEMATIC ICONOGRAPHY OF MOVEMENT AS A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING ONTOLOGY OF GRAPHIC LITERATURE AND COMIC BOOK ART

**Abstract**
The focus of this article is on the interference between the philosophical and theoretical approaches to film as an artistic discipline and on the academic and scientific attempts to understand the aesthetic nature of comic books and graphic literature in general. In order to explore these issues, this paper is a cross-disciplinary study about the impact that the knowledge and insights of film-philosophy approach have on the theoretical considerations of graphic literature and comic book art.

**Keywords**
comic books, graphic literature, film, cinematic theory of comics, closure, invisible art

## Introduction

For a long time there was no theoretical interest in comic books and graphic literature because of the two eminent scholars in the 50s, who had very influential devaluing positions on the phenomena in mass culture. Those scholars are Fredric Wertham, a German-American psychiatrist, who wrote the extremely influential book *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) and the American writer, film critic, social critic and philosopher Dwight Macdonald, known for his article *A Theory of Mass Culture* (1953). Fredric Wertham in his book *Seduction of the Innocent* labeled comic books as dangerous kitsch "literature" directly responsible for the rise of crime and juvenile delinquency in the USA of the 1950s, because of the representation

and portrayal of graphically disturbing images of violence, eroticism, crime, morbidity, etc. (Wertham, 1954). Although Wertham's claims are outdated now, the book seemed progressive at the time. Its Marxist pastiche, as well as the author's concern of the influence of comics' marketing propaganda in the creation of *commodity fetishism* and his belief that he had found sexist, racist, and fascist "values" in comic books, resulted in the acceptance of the book by the contemporary intellectual elite as yet another fierce critical observation of mass and pop culture, similar to that of the preeminent philosophers of the time such as Theodor Adorno, Dwight Macdonald, among others. The book raised the social alarm, but it also stirred anti-comic hysteria that resulted in a radical campaign calling for censorship and prohibition of comic books. As part of the campaign, comics were ceremonially burned and publicly stigmatized as an ideologically dangerous social phenomenon. Even the highest political body, the US Senate, formed a subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency, which held the famous 1954 hearings of comic book publishers. Under political pressure of complete prohibition, comic book publishers organized a voluntary body responsible for self-censorship and revision of each comic book through the prism of the adopted 1954 Code criteria, which explicitly banned many portrayals and themes (Караџов, 2018; Jeet, 2008).

On the other hand, Dwight Macdonald, as one of the most influential philosophers and social critics of the time, wrote the essay *A Theory of Mass Culture* in which he assessed the comics as worthless achievements and junk literature with homogenizing effects of kitsch, which blurs age lines in the sense that they adultized children and infantile adults (Macdonald, 1953). Under the strong influence of these derogatory value positions, comics have long been considered as *schundliteratur phenomenon* in pop culture, and additionally not only "responsible" for "nurturing" the bad literary taste, but also for the moral corruption of the youth. Based on this, they were defined as completely worthless for any scientific, theoretical or philosophical approach to it.

However, after the 1970s, several important events and publications in comic culture took place. Those publications made it possible to overcome these assumptions about comic books as a worthless achievements and junk literature. The first such publication was comic book *Maus* by

American comic book artist Art Spiegelman, which received the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for literature. Later, a ground-breaking series appeared in mainstream comic book art, which began to take political and social issues of the time seriously. Next, within the so-called British invasion appeared higher artistic level comic book achievements of Alan Moore, Dave Gibbons, Brendan McCarthy, Glenn Fabry, Steve Dillon, Philip Bond, Neil Gaiman, and Dave McKean. Comic book masterpieces have appeared in French, Italian and Spanish pop culture and some of them are: Mort Cinder, Eternaut, Corto Maltese, Dylan Dog, etc. Additionally, comics became a platform for raising women rights in the Islamic culture through the graphic novels by Marjane Satrapi, titled *Persepolis and Embroideries.* Joe Sacco has created civic comic journalism as a genre reporting in the medium of comics from the military hotspots around the world. All these achievements enabled overcoming of this long-standing stereotypes about comic book art. However, this overcoming of the negative reception of comics has opened up space for a posibility of scientific research on the history and philosophy of comic book art and a posibility of research on the complex forms of ideological power and political reflections that the comic as a phenomenon of pop culture brings in itself. Academic, cultural and professional public was convinced in the undeniable value and aesthetic legitimacy of comic books. We even speak about the special science of comics called "panelology." Nowadays it is more than justifiable to speak not only about the prehistory of the comic book, but also about all the aesthetic issues that comics draw as a narrative gender. Especially after the recent news that the Columbia University's Department of Education has allowed Nick Sousanis to complete a PhD dissertation titled Unflattening: A Visual-Verbal Inquiry into Learning in Many Dimension, which was written and painted entirely in the form of a comic book (Sousanis, 2015). This unusual doctorate produced in a form of a comic book carries with itself some kind of academic legitimacy of graphic language and through the deconstruction of the usual academic discourse it offers an astonishing graphic art of visual telling that examines the human power of cognition and pedagogical perspectives of graphic literature. But it also opened up the possibility of exploring the media ontology of graphic literature and aesthetic nature of comic book art.

## Aesthetic legitimation of film as art

Historically speaking, film as an art, first went through the process of legitimation and justification of the aesthetic claim that film has deserved to be considered an independent art form. This legitimation and justification required philosophical research on the ontological structure of film. During this period while graphic literature fought for their aesthetic recognition, legitimation and justification, the film as an art form and the subsequent theoretical and philosophical reflections on its technical nature and media characteristics, already had built and established its own aesthetic legitimacy and established the most important philosophical reflections on the media and ontological nature of film. For example, Hugo Münsterberg at that time already established narrative technical devices which distinguished film from the theater as an art form (Prica, 2014). Rudolph Arnheim presented his idea on film ability to present moving bodies (Arnheim, 1957). André Bazin focused on the image and those that emphasize reality (Bazin, 1967). The phenomenon *transparency thesis* was already established and the classical theory of film in which the film is understood as a process of invents and as something that arranges visual images. This established approach to the philosophy of film has strongly influenced the philosophy of comic books and graphic literature.

## Cinematic theory of comics

Based on the aesthetic authenticity of the film as the most complex form of artistic creation and its great pop-cultural influence, we can witness within the theoretical studies of graphic literature and comic book art some certain and dominant cross-disciplinary theoretical and philosophical views which define graphic literature and comic book art through the prism of the cognitive, sensory-motor, visual and technical aspects of film as art. This philosophical approach which uses film as a model for understanding the media ontology of graphic literature and aesthetic nature of comic book art is called *cinematic theory of comics*. The theory starts from the interpretation that comic books and graphic novels are cinematic phenomena because the pictorial and fabular elements in comics are structured in a framed juxtaposed narrative proto-cinematic deliberate sequence (Eisner, 1985). According to the above mentioned, this approach assures that com-

ic book art is *sequential art*, but, in addition, considers every comic and graphic novel to be objectified ontology of movement. In other words, the being of the comic book art was born when we had reification of the first pictorial attempt to express the movement. In one of the rare theoretical books about comic book culture in Macedonia, the author Tomislav Osmanli asserted, "the movement in comics is not ontologically present, movement is an ontological property of comics as an aspiration or something that wants or should be/or become" (Османли, 2021). Considering this view, the final consequence of the determination of comic book art as *iconography of dynamism* is that comic books and movies have the same structural essence in an attempt to represent the movement, but only with a small remark that in the film [and in animation] this type of representation is optically fused and mingled. Hence, this interpretation of comics as optically detached and fractioned cinematography considers comic books as part of cinematic experience with moving images.

However, I believe that this interpretation of ontology without ontology is problematic and difficult to accept for a number of reasons. One of the reasons being that interpretation does not recognize the elements that constitute comic books logic of sensation. More precisely, these *cinematic theories of comics* do not adequately explain the media ontology of graphic literature and aesthetic nature of comic book art, and moreover, this cinematic paradigm of defining comics does not at all legitimize comics as a separate, autonomous and independent artistic discipline. If the difference between a comic book and a film is only in the optically fused or optically detached representation of the movement, then comic books are nothing else but some sort of unfinished or imperfect films, unrealized films, semi-films without optical cohesion, not yet ecranised films but represent some types of storyboards. In other words, comic books portray one type of E. Muybridge's chronophotography.

## Comics as invisible art

Precisely because of these implications, another theoretical perspective and philosophical approach will be analyzed in this paper. The ontological essence of comic books is not included in this chronotopic optical detachment. Graphic novels are on the creative border between painting

and literature. They take from literature the methodical articulation of storytelling, the temporal pictorial narrative and other narrative strategies. And comic books take from painting the possibility for visual concretization of each individual detail of the story and the possibility for independent artistic and figural exposition of the moment. In terms of discovering autonomous media ontology of graphic literature and aesthetic nature of comic book art, one of the key metacomic book achievements in the ontology of graphic literature that can not be ignored is the master study of the American comic book artist and theorist Scott McCloud, titled *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* from 1993. What the Gilles Deleuze's books *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time Image* means for philosophy of film, also Scott McCloud's book *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* means for philosophy of comics.

In short, Scott McCloud explains the ontology of comic books by indicating its two essential features and calls them: 1) call and response) and 2) comic book time. An essential aesthetic feature of comics is the balance between the visible and the invisible in it. This balance operates on the basis of the aesthetic principle of call and response, which is a kind of reader experience. Specifically, the comic book author allows us to visualize a certain act within the illustrated panels (*call*), but also leaves us an empty space between the panels, the so-called gutter to imagine the composition of events for ourselves (*reader response*).

The comic has its own aesthetic *modus operandi*. The reading experience is realized in these two key receptive and cognitive acts and possibilities: a) the visual experience or experience from the impressionistic pictorial stimulus from the painted part (call) and b) the possibility for (meta) imagining provided by the empty receptive space between the panels (response). In other narrative art forms, such as literature and film, this principle is partly absent. Literature does not have the pictorial stimulus, but has the receptive opportunity for active and cognitive representation and imagination of the contents and the action. While in film and animation there is no significant imaginative freedom and the possibility of different and personal imagining, because the visual stimulus is completely given, predetermined and pictorially defined by the author of film and animation. Film makes use of audiences' imagination for an occasional

effect, not like comics which do this essentially and constantly. There is no significant ontological possibility in the film for a different pictorial experience from the author's visual solutions. Similarly, there is no significant ontological possibility in the literature for artistic and figurative incentive and visual stimulation of imagination and representation. But comics and graphic literature had the two things that film and literature lack. Specifically, ontological possibility for pictorial stimulation and ontological possibility for active and cognitive imagination. Autonomous media ontology of graphic literature and aesthetic nature of comic book art is exactly in this concept of *closure* and the reader's role in *closing* narrative gaps (gutter) between comics panels. These elements making the comic books to be identified with the so-called *invisible art*. Hence, the Being of the comic book art is called *closure*. According to Scott McCloud, closure is a cognitive and epistemological phenomenon. This means observing the parts but perceiving the whole. In film, closure takes place continuously in persistence of vision. It is an automatic closure. But in comics, the use of closure is like no other. In comics, audience is a willing and conscious collaborator with the help of the role in *closing* narrative gaps (gutter) between comics panels. In the Nothingness of (gutter) between panels, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them in to one single idea. This Nothingness and its cognitive function create the ontological essence of comic book art (McCloud, 1993, 64-74).

## Conclusion

Comics and graphic novels are part of multimodality and of the visual rhetoric as sophisticated texts including complex literacy. A long time in history reading has been connected to the concept of literacy and learning to read has been connected with learning to read words. But the reading of words is a subset of a much more general human perceptual activity, which includes symbol decoding. The reading of words is one manifestation of this activity, but there are many others such as reading of pictures. Comics and graphic novels use several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product. They are texts whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code. Relationship between image and text is mutually constitutive and mutually infused. In other words, comics and graphic novels present a

fusion of image and word, like a double vision of literacy. There is a new term for this "imageword". Iconography of the comic book language and its authentic multimodal literacy are a subset of a much more general human perceptual and cognitive activity, which includes the reading of pictures in the sense of Deleuzian designation of "thinking with concepts" and "thinking with images".

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# *THE TREE OF LIFE* BY TERRENCE MALICK AND ITS JOBIAN THEME

## Abstract

Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011). The Job's theme, which is easily recognized from the introductory biblical verses of the film, announces in a peculiar way the eschatological *topos*. Job's suffering is, in fact, a problem of theodicy. The disturbed chronology of the personal narrative, drawing from a mournful memory of a loss, and its expansion to the time-limits of the Creation makes the *Tree of Life* a *par excellence* eschatological film. Its vision is perfectly organic to the theological premises of Christian eschatology. Starting from the "normative justice" of the implied "God from the storm" of the Creation (which is conveyed in large-scale cosmic and natural pictures and end with the birth of the protagonist Jack) the cinematic narrative reaches the end of the "earthly days" in order to bring back to the present day the vision of the final reunion with the beloved people in the promised "new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Through this extraordinary and indeed extrahistorical circle, the film "shows" the eschatological meaning of the Christian belief that things actually are "as they will be." The cinematic eye literally acquires eschatological sight. Special attention is paid to Malik's specific "decentralization" of the multipersonal voice-over, its almost symphonic composition together with the visual element and the extradiegetic sound of the film. God as "mercy" antinomically unites with God of the Law, as we witness "the first mercy" in the history of the Creation (the mercy of the CGI dinosaurs). Both visual style and central themes are traced back to Malik's earlier works, in which the *topos* of memory-conscience is integrated. Another peculiar element of the "anatomy" of Malick's cinematic imagery is his masterful visualization of the all-relatedness of being (nature-world-kindred-God). It is considered in connection with the eschatological "healing" of the suffering Jobian world.

**Keywords**
Book of Job, mourning, Creation, theodicy, eschatology, mercy, memory, Malick

The sixties of the twentieth century. Texas town. The postman rings and carries a letter. A woman (Mrs. O'Brien) takes it, opens it, and her grief pours out in a torturous cry. Next, a man (her husband, Mr. O'Brien) takes a phone call. He is devastated. Their son has died[1]. This, it turns out, as we can see through the reminiscence of his (the dead son's) already grown up brother Jack, a successful architect from Houston whose visions of his own childhood in a rural town in the 50s and slow transformation from an innocent infant to an anxious and confused teenager, design the plot of Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life*. We see an arrogant, dominant, eternally preaching the "truths of life," but also deeply attached to his family and in fact, touchingly ridiculous father played by Brad Pitt. Jessica Chastain plays a loving tender mother, whose bright and playful presence brings harmony to everyone's life. Jack has two brothers, one of whom carries the special softness and kindness of their mother. He is the tragically deceased brother. Admittedly this correct, albeit brief exposition of the film's plot, conveys no more than the narrative bare bones. This and the sparse provision of historical framework are by no means enough for an adequate account of a large-scale cinematic events such as *The Tree of Life*. Those who are familiar with Terrence Malick's previous works already know that his sometimes succinctly simple and devoid of suspense films reach far beyond the scope of their "plots"[2].

However, *The Tree of Life* differs in at least one respect from all previous Malick's films. In all four of his earlier works diverse personal tragedies are present – deep fateful events – which, if presented with the means of

[1] The main characters of the story are: the father, Mr. O'Brien (Brad Pitt), the mother, Mrs. O'Brien (Jessica Chastain), the grownup Jack (Sean Penn), Jack and his 'blessed' brother as young boys (respectively: Hunter McCracken and Larry Appler).

[2] Peter Greenaway complains that "film's original ambition was to be a great visual art, but as the narrative element has grown to dominate the medium, even the most creative cinematography has been subordinated to the story. Movies (...) have become the art form of the Philistines.". "If Greenaway correctly diagnosed the aesthetic crisis of modern film, *The Tree of Life* is the remedy," insists Alan Stone (Stone, 2012, 1-2).

conventional cinema only, and through the causal sequence of their plots, would move the viewer to tears. Such examples include, the unfortunate discordance of the characters and Bill's demise in *Days of Heaven* (Malick, 1978); the torments of the exiled Pocahontas and her untimely death in *The New World* (Malick, 2005); the seemingly meaningless victims of the Battle of Guadalcanal in *Thin Red Line* (Malick, 1999) (we may recall the emotional story of *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg, 1998), with which Malick's film is compared). These deaths, however, seem to pass as if in a trance, as if by the law of nature; and the author neither aims, nor even allows the moisture of compassion to permeate them. In order to be able to be compassionate, one must identify her or himself with the suffering person, but the author does not allow such a possibility. Each identification requires a specific shortening of the distance to the character, some intimacy of his or her features, gestures, timbre, or life circumstances. Yet Malick's camera is a restless eye; it cannot be confined in static frames, it rarely uses commonplace angles. The subjective POV of the camera-eye seems to spontaneously become the objective element (the angle from which we observe the event is impossible for a naturally situated viewer). Pocahontas and John Smith touch each other, but it is more like a love game of wild animals ("they [the indigenous people] looked like a herd of curious deer") and there is nothing familiar about it, no eroticism, and no sensuality. Their innermost words are rather poetic stanzas uttered as a voice-over. Speech in Terrence Malick's films is proportional to all the other cinematic means of narration[3]. Driven by our routine expectation, we look for a familiar pattern: a touch of a hand in close-up, eyes crosscut to the eyes of the other, lips that utter tender words – the features of the beloved, yet already changed by what is said, etc. This is the key to our involvement. As we join the love scene, we are already inside the fiction. But nothing like that happens in the love scene

[3] The voice-over "provides a counterpoint, directing our attention subtly to the separation between knowledge and power, voice and vision, vision and knowledge.(...) Malick not only subverts the centrality of the human voice in film sound, ironically by conforming to realist expectations of sound and proximity, but also challenges the "imperative of synchronization" by which sound recreates the "real" through the wholesale reconstruction of the soundtrack." Rijsdijk, Ian, 'The Belvedere and the Bunkhouse: Space and Place in *Days of Heaven*' in (Tucker and Kendall, 2011, 140) quotes (De Lauretis and Heath, 1988; Chion and Gorbman, 1999; Crofts, 2001).

from *The New World*. Our expectation is constantly aborted and this creates a peculiar tension-'sobriety' towards the experience.

Let us, however, see how Malick "gives" us the already mentioned parents' experience of the loss of their son in *The Tree of Life*. We see only part of the postman's back, from below, as if the 'onlooker' were crawling behind the postman towards the front door of the O'Briens' house. From the inside, Jessica Chastain (the mother) takes the letter in medium shot. Through the door from the inside out we get a glimpse of the hasty wave and retreat of the postman. We follow J. Chastain. Her hands, holding the envelope, are almost on the border of the frame (noise from unfolding sheets of paper). A downward look. She walks slowly (the eye of the camera behind her anxiously 'tries' to catch her). She starts to read the letter, and the music that has sounded since the previous lyrical scene (John Tavener[4]) gradually subsides. The secondary noises noticeably rise: the fall of the letter on the floor, the wind in the branches of the trees outside, a dog's bark. The shot is cut, but the next shot's angle barely changes (the image literally flickers – jump cut) and then the camera suddenly rises ('now everything's changed'). It is only then that a cry of pain unleashes, cut off at its very beginning by the sudden transition. The next episode begins with an extreme close-up of Brad Pitt (the father) with the telephone receiver in hand trying to hear something (loud noise from aircraft engines) – we can read on his lips: "What? What?" He moves away – the eye of the camera follows him from behind (the noise from the engines disappears). He bends down (seems like he bows) facing the setting sun (the sun itself is obscured by an airplane's wing). With this movement he almost leaves the frame. Bell ringing. The camera surrounds him from behind. The plane. Now we see the back of his head against the setting sun. He bends down. Again bell ringing. It is not clear if he performs this movement twice, or the moment is 'given' to us twice in succession, each time from a different angle. The transition to the next scene is shot from the point of view of the camera, as it is 'bowing' (in its own turn) in front of the light of the setting sun, which seeps through the branches of a tree in another, obscure location.

[4] Sc. (Academy of Ancient Music, George Mosley, Paul Goodwin, Andrew Manze and The Choir of the AAM, Mosley and Goodwin, 2005).

Later on, the camera follows the parents as they enter their home. The mother walks past a room – we see a bed, a guitar... she passes on. The camera does not follow her, but enters the room: we see close-ups on the guitar, on a handful of paint brushes (the blitz-shot of a child holding a guitar and the mother's face lying down and looking at him from below does not tell us much – we will understand it later). Church, condolences and consolations. A random shot with shadows of children on the street, seen as if from the point of view of the lying mother from the blitz shot before.

The tragedy of the lost son, around which the film's plot is centered, is "told" for about seven minutes, while the connection between what is seen and what is happening is gradually built throughout the whole film's length, thus requiring from us considerable strength of senses and memory.

Despite the limited filmic time, the tragedy is "given" to us emphatically enough. We are aware that it will not just pass and fuse with the rest of the events of the story. Neither it is unexpected. We have been prepared for this tragedy since the very first moment of the film, albeit indirectly. The biblical quotation from the *Book of Job*[5] marks the very beginning of *The Tree of Life* and draws our attention to the Old Testament sufferer and the circumstances of his tragedy.

Let us dwell on this book for a moment, as it appears to be contextually important for the overall understanding of the film event. *Book of Job* differs significantly from the other books of the Old Testament. Its final revision is considered to be the latest of all books in the canon of the Old Testament. The short prologue (chapters 1–2) and epilogue (42: 7–36), both written in prose, frame a massive poetic section containing Job's conversations with his friends (chapters 3–31), Elihu's speech (chapters 32–37) and the Divine address (38–42: 6), from which the introductory quotation is taken. The prologue tells how Satan persuades God to allow him to test the faithfulness of Job, who is famous for his righteousness (*a blameless and upright man* (Job 2:3)), as he is being too generously rewarded for his fidelity, with abundant property and a large household. In a single day, Job loses all of his property, his children, and finally, as a final test, even the integrity of his own body (*Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.*

[5] Here and elsewhere the biblical quotations are from *The New King James Version (NKJ)*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982. BibleWorks, v. 10.

*But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!* (Job 2:4-5).

We should be aware of what this means in the context of the ancient poem (ca. 5th century BC). Job's trial is particularly severe[6] as it is allowed in the context of a theodicy of distributive justice. The righteous are rewarded with a good life – with property, children etc. The unrighteous, the evil-doers, are punished with taking away their goods. The loss of property and offspring, and then of health, in the eyes of Job's friends and, for that matter, in everyone else's (in the time before the revelation of the afterlife) is a clear sign of Job's God-forsakenness. The only reason for such a great misfortune could be some transgression against God and His ordinances – a sin. However, it is precisely because of Job's knowing that he has not transgressed against God's will, i.e., that he is righteous and innocent, that his situation is tragic. Since for some unknown reason God, whom Job believes and trusts to the end, has allowed the misfortune, which He otherwise imposes on those who are not faithful to Him. Can God do injustice? No. Can he be cruel and arbitrary, reversing the law He Himself has given, breaking thus the covenant He has made? This is unthinkable. Job knows his heart and cannot doubt his own righteousness (whatever that means in such an archaic context). Job is in an aporetic position. It can only be solved by the One who knows every secret and every plan. So Job is fighting neither for his dignity, nor for his property – what torments him, is not the loss. Job is not fighting against God's decision, but on God's side (bold as that may sound). He refuses to accept that God may not be a righteous judge and rewarder. Moreover, Job knows that God's justification can only be given by God Himself. But how could God be justified in His immeasurable greatness?; How could such a thing be expected? *What is man… who can hinder Him? Who can say to Him, 'What are You doing?'* (…) *For though I were righteous, I could not answer Him; I would beg mercy of my Judge… If I called and He answered me, I would not believe that He was listening to my voice* (Job 7:17; 9:12, 15–16). In the scriptural text, previously to these words, Job himself describes God's power in the Creation.

[6] Later in the film the O'Briens listen to a church sermon on Job's loss and the potential suffering that awaits everyone. On Kierkegaard's influence on this sermon, cf. (Kierkegaard, 1992, 109ff); for a possible interpretation of Malick's work through Kierkegaard, Derrida, and Dostoevsky, cf. (Handley, 2014).

This is a kind of prelude to the place (chapter 38) at the end of the book when the unthinkable happens: God has heard his voice and replies to him.

Job, as we have said, is tested to his uttermost by the loss of the most precious thing, which, in the given archaic cultural and religious context, is his body, his health. His well-being before the tragic ordeal is generously described: *... And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.* (Job 1:2-3).

How are the O'Brien family "blessed" (if we may recognize them as the ones being "tested") before their tragic loss?

In a few short episodes we observe the happy childhood of the mother: as a little girl she holds a lamb in her arms[7], later the father (her husband) blesses the table,... they all play under the tree in the yard while the voice-over (the mother's voice) relates in a confession-like mode the blessing of what is seen.

> *A man's heart has heard two ways through life. The way of nature. And the way of grace. (You have to choose which one you'll follow.)*
> *Grace doesn't try to please itself. It accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked... It accepts insults and injuries.*
> *Nature only wants to please itself... Get others to please it too.... It likes to lord it over them... To have its own way. It finds reasons to be unhappy. When all the world is shining around it. And love is smiling through all things.*[8]

[7] The lamb is a traditional symbol of Christ, but even beyond this specific and familiar semantic function – the vision of an innocent child embracing an innocent animal is clear enough in its message.

[8] The striking resemblance between these lines and Christ's words from *Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis has been noted more than once:

> *The Beloved: My son, you must carefully notice the ways in which nature moves, and grace; these two ways are completely opposed, but so fine and hidden as hardly to be told apart...*
> *Nature is (...) ever having her own ends in view; (...) Nature is loth (...) to be repressed or overcome, to be obedient or to be a willing subject; Grace seeks to (...) be under authority, desires to be overcome, (...) and has no desire to lord it over anyone else (...) she is ready to submit humbly to every member of the human race (...)*

> *They taught us, that no one who loves the way of grace, ever comes to a bad end.*

What specific end is she talking about? Is it a new covenant beyond the end of the earthly days, or is it again that old promise of an earthly bliss, known to us from the story of Job? "I will be true to you... Whatever comes ...," the mother's voice-over whispers behind the scenes.[9] And it happens. Immediately, with the subsequent tragic episode, which we described in detail earlier. However, we have been already warned about this by a sono-sign: from the first frame onwards, throughout the "vision", all the way to the mother's painful cry, we have been listening to the background music of John Tavener's *Funeral Canticle*.

* * *

Terrence Malick was born in 1943 in Illinois, but he grew up in Texas, in a rural town, just like Waco from the 1950s, in which the film's story occurs. The plot is based on his own biographical memories as evidenced by some members the team of *The Tree of Life*, who grew up in a similar milieu.[10] The story of the O'Brien family is therefore a story marked by personal memories and experiences. In this film, the narrative of the family's life in the small American town is presented through a traumatic reminiscence of the grown-up oldest brother Jack, Malick's first contemporary character since

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> *Nature is glad to receive honour and respect* (...) *Nature is afraid of disgrace and scorn; Grace is glad to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.*
> *Everything Nature does is for her own profit and advantage;* (...) *She is anxious that people should set great store by all her deeds and donations. But Grace seeks no reward in time...*
> *It is not long before Nature starts grumbling when things are scarce or when trouble comes; Grace endures poverty as long as it lasts.*
> *This Grace is a supernatural light, a kind of special gift of God.*
>
> The conclusion though is different: *It is the peculiar seal of those whom God has chosen, and a pledge of eternal salvation...* cf. (Thomas ā Kempis, 2005, 137–9).

[9] It is hard for me to agree with (Plate, 2012, 535), who insists that voices never turn to God, given that there are situations when there is simply no other possible addressee.

[10] Jack Fisk, his unchangeable production designer until 2017, remembers how as a child during the anti-mosquito campaigns in his own town he too – just like the children in the film – used to jump in the DDT clouds. Cf. (Desowitz, 2011).

Badlands (Malick, 1973). It should be emphasized that all of Malick's previous works carry with them the estrangement of their historical remoteness. Jack O'Brien however is our (his) contemporary, who lives in the glass urban world of modern Houston, while his childhood is intimately close to the author's own childhood in rural America of mid-twentieth century. On no account is Malick trying to "lie" to us, to simulate authenticity. Rather the intimacy of the visions is an identity marker that gives a peculiar meaning to this work, especially in the context of the director's previous works, where intimacy is practically absent.

Conceived entirely in the tradition of Malick's polysemantic cinematic language, *The Tree of Life* not only "gives" us the opportunity to identify with the characters and thus to empathize with them, but also has this identification as a meaningful strategy. The identification with the "I" of the film poem becomes a precondition without which the proposed transcendent journey is impossible. As it is a journey of love (of forgiveness, of reunion, and ultimately of salvation), which is always personal, even when thought of in terms of traditional religion.

The first "thing" that appears on the screen after the introductory words from the *Book of Job* (the words of God towards Job) is a vague and mysteriously attractive multicolored light that stands out against the black background – a flame without a visible source.[11] It appears several times, "theophanically" cutting through the cinematic flow.

I will not try to analyze the exact meaning of the various "appearances" that abound in the film. We are constantly surprised by the visual fluxes

[11] This vision is an invention of Thomas Wilfred (1989–1968) – a photo-kinetic installation of a chamber containing glass disks, through which light is transmitted, in order that their movement may project ever-changing light "fluids". The mechanism of these chambers is designed so that when the discs are left to their own movement – the same combination of rays could be repeated only after a long period of time – sometimes longer than a year. Wilfred is one of the pioneers of light painting, but at the heart of his work is an ambition of a higher order – the invention of a light organ that has a spiritual impact on viewers, similar to that of music (on listeners). *Clavilux* is the Latin for "light played by key". In the beginning of his career Wilfred was a performer of pre-modern music. He coined the word *Lumia* as a term for the art of light. From his art-works only some thirty survived – most of them are owned by the Epstein family. Malick obtained permission to film them long before he started to shoot *The Tree of Life*. The installation used in the beginning of the movie is *Opus 161* (Wilfred, 1965).

(much alike the stream-of-consciousness style in literature) – not only the sourceless light, but also visions of "the tree" with light seeping through its branches; of the gates that strangely appear in the middle of a wasteland; of the broad sublime river and the elements, etc. Suffice it to say that the mysterious light appears at the beginning and at the end; thus, framing Malick's film poem (Alpha and Omega?).

* * *

Only after the reminiscence of the tragic incident do we see the face of the adult "hero" of the plot.[12] Jack (Sean Penn) lives in a spacious glass house in which trees are no more than parts of the decoration. His face is tormented, his movements inside this house are restlessly wandering, in which he and the woman he lives with never really meet. Jack lights a candle (a decorative one – just like his house). This act gives start of visions in which the adult Jack is grieving together with his still young parents; visions of him wandering in a desert landscape, images that will be resolved only at the end of the story. A memory of the future.

Temporality, in most of Malick's works, is in a mode of constant deviation from linearity. But in *The Tree of Life*, as in no one of his previous films, surprise attacks the viewer's senses and forces him/her to patiently welcome what is offered to him or her in the hope that it will come to a resolution – which eventually happens, although not in ready-made fashion, but in the living-through the film-experience. This experience presupposes that the viewer keeps in mind what he/she has seen (heard, read) until the final completion of the narrative mosaic.

That is why I would now go back to the initial quotation from the *Book of Job*,[13] with which the film begins. Job's ordeal and his unsolvable – in terms of Old Testament theodicy – torments have already been mentioned briefly. Their sudden resolution in the biblical poem occurs in chapter 38 (wherefrom is the quotation).

In it, Job's wife together with his three friends and Elihu offer their seemingly logical arguments, respectively – that Job suffers because God is

[12] It is only for convenience that we call Jack the protagonist of the film.

[13] For further discussion on *Book of Job*, sc. (Hubbard, Barker and Clines, 1989).

cruel (the wife), that Job committed some terrible and hidden sin for which he was punished, because God punishes only the guilty (the others). Job listens to them but remains faithful and disagrees, though he cannot offer an explanation for his sufferings. Ultimately, God Himself speaks out from the tempest. He affirms the truthfulness of Job, but does not explain why he had to suffer. God does not give arguments. Instead, He asks, "*Where were you when ...*" Instead of an explanation, the mighty story of the Creation of the world unfolds before us:

> *Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me.*
> "***Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?***[14] *Tell Me, if you have understanding.*
> *Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?*
> *To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone,*
> ***When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?***
> *"Or who shut in the sea with doors, When it burst forth and issued from the womb;*
> *When I made the clouds its garment, And thick darkness its swaddling band;*
> *When I fixed My limit for it, And set bars and doors;*
> *When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!'*
> *"Have you commanded the morning since your days began, And caused the dawn to know its place,*
> *That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, And the wicked be shaken out of it?*
> *It takes on form like clay under a seal, And stands out like a garment.*
> *From the wicked their light is withheld, And the upraised arm is broken.*
> *"Have you entered the springs of the sea? Or have you walked in search of the depths?*
> *Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?*

[14] The quoted verses are *in bold-italics.*

This astonishing greatness overwhelms the spectator. Suddenly, like a powerful symphony of colors, the 'pictures' of the Big Bang, the birth of the galaxies, stars, constellations, planets, of the water that separates from the land follow one another. Then the scale of vision swiftly decreases and we witness (literally at a molecular level – the rapid DNA helices) the origin of life, the "origin of species."[15] The camera-eye makes monstrous movements – underwater, on land, in the midst of fire and ice, until it reaches... the dinosaurs. This is really the last thing we expect from an author who has always shunned the use of CGI effects – even where they have long been routine. We must however acknowledge that although the dinosaurs are CGI-modelled, the way in which they were introduced works entirely in the tradition of documentary cinema – stalking camera, spontaneous framing – just like wild life shooting in a natural environment. But why is this episode so impressive? It is certainly not the method that is important in this case. There is a story here. A micro-plot unfolds on the prehistoric river-bank. The camera changes

[15] This impressive picture of the Creation is a result of long-time efforts. Many have worked on it. Initially, Terrence Malik started a project with the strange title "Q", which includes the theme of the origin of life. The film is conceived as a large-scale fiction story focused on a love affair, which takes place in the Middle East during the First World War. The introductory part commences from the prehistoric times. It was this prologue, together with the vast material collected over 40 years, that came into use for the *Tree of Life* (the vision of Creation and the end) as well as for the two later documentaries: (Malick, 2016a) and (Malick, 2016b). Malick took his crew on an expedition around the world. They filmed the Antarctic glaciers, the mountains of Nepal, the steppes in France and the microscopic jellyfish on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. Due to disagreements with Paramount, the expensive project was abandoned for a long time. When the idea of *The Tree of Life* turned to a real project, Terrence Malik invited the famous author of the special effects of Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) Douglas Trumbull to join the crew together with Dan Glass (*The Matrix: Reloaded)* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 2003). "We worked with chemicals, paint, fluorescent dyes, smoke, liquids, C02, flares, spin dishes, fluid dynamics, lighting and high speed photography to see how effective they might be," says Trumbull. "It was a free-wheeling opportunity to explore, something that I have found extraordinarily hard to get in the movie business. Terry didn't have any preconceived ideas of what something should look like. We did things like pour milk through a funnel into a narrow trough and shoot it with a high-speed camera and folded lens, lighting it carefully and using a frame rate that would give the right kind of flow characteristics to look cosmic, galactic, huge and epic (...) He didn't want a mechanistic approach that would be set in cement," observes Trumbull. "He would rather have mysterious phenomena spontaneously occur while the camera was rolling." (Sweeney, 2011).

its strategy – after the documentary introduction to the dinosaur era, it now shows a conventional series of plans and perspectives. The montage becomes "dialogical" in the most traditional narrative sense of the term. A large, predatory-looking animal, a dinosaur, crosses the river and rushes to the shore, where another dinosaur, of a different and smaller kind, is lying wounded on the ground. The inertia of the attack is retained, the attacker's foot stamps on the docile and somehow submissively lying 'enemy', they exchange glances and suddenly the attacker gives up, "takes pity" on the defenseless wounded animal. The story of the "first mercy" is yet another, logical and quite well integrated into the rhythm of the creational/evolutional visions element. Then a meteorite falls to the Earth and puts an end to the ancient species.

The pseudo-evolutionary visualization of that "*Where were you when* ..." continues with the beginning of the 'human' history, which is actually the story of the O'Brien family from the moment of the loving union between the mother and the father (a transition introduces us to the adult Jack, who wanders through a strange limestone wasteland). We witness some pre-natal vision from beyond – a female figure (unrecognizable) leading small children dressed in white (souls?). The coming of the baby out of the womb is represented as his emerging from an underwater nursery with a bed and a lamp and even a teddy bear toy. The mother's actual labor pains and the childbirth follow.

I will not dwell in detail on the history of the family, but rather on a few significant themes and episodes that cannot be missed. We rapidly follow the appearance and growing up of the children in the family – they play among other children on the street; among local animals; listen to stories from the books (the book appears even in the pre-natal scene, it is also in the underwater room of the womb). This childhood story's "personae" pass through Jack's memory (his character being the only one to "gather flesh" noticeably), playing, talking, arguing with each other, at the family table, in the woods, in the yard, in the church. At first, the camera-eye looks around from the height of a toddler, through his gaze in which every object is a miracle. Sometimes the camera observes through the eyes of the fish in the aquarium (with its "fisheye" lens). The first words learned from the mother, the first rebuke, the first steps with the father and the first wound that the mother gently bandages.

The state of blessedness of the mother and of one of the boys (the one who dies young) becomes clear in various situations. The mother endures the spontaneous rudeness of the father and encourages the joy. The blessed brother somehow naturally does not participate in the atrocities of the other boys, he rarely speaks. He doesn't like to argue and fight – even when his father tries to teach him how to fight back. The softness of the mother and the brother possesses the reproving ability of every holiness, in the face of which every lie and every transgression seems especially unpleasant. In fact, the little brother initiates a conversation only once. At the dinner table, when the father (Brad Pitt) exerts himself by humiliating and undermining everyone, the boy utters in a very low and timid voice: "Be silent!" Without aggression, barely heard – not "Shut up!" or "Stop yelling!" but "Be quiet!" This provokes the outburst of his father's rage (a guilty conscience?). Additionally, the only resistance on the part of the mother in defense of the boy (the desecration of the blessed cannot be tolerated).

Mr. O'Brien, an otherwise boorish and boastful, unrealized musician, who loves to rule (remember the "path of nature"), actually has a relatively complex place in the invisible order of the family. He is the Father – the *nomos*. Malick gives a special ontological depth to his character. His is the house ("It's your house. You can kick me out whenever you want to," Jack says at one point); he plants the tree that will measure the lives of his children; he takes care of the weeding, teaches Jack to weed and water; he punishes the transgressions. The father gives the law: "...come back here son, stay out of there. That's Spencer's yard, okay? You see this line? (The line is invisible – the yards have no fences. The father draws it with a stick on the grass.) Let's not cross it, you understand? Do you understand? ... Okay, now come back here son. Come on back." The camera glides around at the height of the dog's gaze – the POV of a real dog that we see playing around.

The law is also learned through the ubiquitous book which the mother reads: "Now, my dears, said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, you may go into the fields or down the lane. Don't go into Mr. McGregor's garden! Your father had an accident there." A real hare runs into the garden. The establishment of the *nomos* is framed by the sense of the Divine presence, "the blue beyond" (we hear the voice-over of the small boy), and then the mother points upwards with a kind of gesture that you will point to the house of a friend

or relative "God lives there." After which the solemnly jubilant Smetana's symphony *Vltava* (Czech Philharmonic, Václav Smetáček, 1994) resounds.

This basic ontological place of the father as a holder of the law and therefore part-taker in the divine is eloquently expressed in *The New World* (Malick's last film before the *Tree of Life*). There, obedience to the law is naturally inherent in the blessed inhabitants of the "Promised Land" (America) and is constantly neglected in the settlers' camp. At the most tragic moment when the father-chieftain informs Pocahontas that she has been banished forever from his settlement and tribe, she performs a specific ritual gesture, which testifies to her obedience and reverence for her father. The same gesture is performed by the "subjects" towards her, as a chieftain's daughter, even though she has been already in disfavour, even when she is on her way to the land of the whites and is no longer "one of them". The sense of the unfailing validity of the authority as a kind of reflection of the divine law is characteristic of the "primeval" human being. In the camp of the settlers (image of the fallen into civilization human), on the contrary, power changes with every trial, and changes brutally, without shame.

As he enters the adolescence, Jack gradually loses his sense of his father's authority. He first mocks his father (in his absence), then dares to express his mounting hatred, and finally Jack wishes for his father's death (the prayer, "Please God, kill him. Let him die. Get him out of here." – as he stares at the jack, supporting the heavy car under which his father is lying).

At first glance the situation is Oedipal *par excellence*. Even on a visual level: the optically deformed elongated image of the father, folded under the low ceiling of the upper room from Jack's early memories, no longer fits.

* * *

Overcoming paternal authority leads to an episode of struggle against God. The rejection of the *nomos* was followed by resistance against the *Nomos*. The encounter with death, the acknowledgement of mortality (the first sign of boy's "falling" from the heavenly state of innocence) causes not only the expected anxiety but also a revolt in Jack. After witnessing the unfortunate drowning of a boy in the pool, where all the children swim on hot days, his voice-over asks: "Was it bad? Where were you? You had a boy die. Would anything happen?" (symbolic vision: a boy with a scar on his

head, fire) "Why should I be good? If you aren't?" This is, in essence, a Jobian question, as the unspoken meaning reads: "Was death a punishment for this boy and his relatives? If he wasn't bad, why have You punished him? And if You didn't want to punish him, why didn't You do anything to save him? Where are You? Give me a sign that You are there!"

The maturing adolescent worldview criticism might be read as a search for the Divine, though it strongly resembles the rebellion against the father – "He says don't put your elbows on the table. He does." On the other hand, the young boy does not perceive his friend's death in all its existential depth. Jack still has no fear of the limits of being. This is an archetypal fear of losing the loved ones. "Will you die too? You're not that old yet mom." (Voice-over). Jack comforts himself with a fairytale imagery (accessible to him through a 'story' from the book) of immortality – death is not final, it is a dream after which awakening is possible. We see – first in a long shot, then in a close-up – the mother laid in a glass coffin in the woods.

* * *

The musical aspect of Malick's cinematic language enters into various meaning-making combinations with vision, situation, voice-over. Themes and personalities are introduced with certain melodic motives. The father – the unsuccessful musician – solemnly moves his fingers on the multi-row keyboard of the church organ and his *Toccata and Fugue* (Helmut Walcha, 1999) trumpets with all its strict discipline. Jack stands timidly next to him ("am I listening as I should?") And as the measured rhythm of the organ sounds, we see Jack's father imposing on him seemingly meaningless and excessive punishments ("shut the door quietly fifty times", "weed the garden", "plant it"); then in the next scene we see his vices (gambling, flirting); and then again the camera returns to the organ. Only this time there is a change in Jack's eyes and posture: his fingers are wiggling, imitating his father's, as if to say "I can do it if you can!" His expression is almost ironic; he relaxes and sits on the bench next to his father.

Father's musical encounter with the 'blessed' son sounds quite different. After a regular family row at the table Mr. O'Brien sits in front of the piano and starts to play. Couperin's light and serene melody (Hanan Townshend, 2011) is picked up by the child, who is sitting with a guitar on a chair

just outside the room. Everything is easy, free from any coercion or discipline. The father accompanies on the piano; the two play together. The boy makes a mistake and stops, but then smiles and continue. Couperin's motif is a sono-sign of harmony (*Siciliana* by Otorino Respighi (Rico Saccani, 1995) brings a similar mood). The boy's distinct "blessing" is felt by all; he is loved by all. His "chosenness" however arouses Jack's envy – a sort of Cainian feeling. Two events mark the accumulation of this jealousy. In both we see ritually tested brotherly trust. In the first, Jack suggests that his brother put a wire in the socket of a night lamp. The brother hesitates, but finally does it. Nothing happens. The lamp is safe. "I Believe You" – is one of the few lines we hear from this silent character. In the second case (meanwhile, the anger and the hatred for the father have already peaked) the boys are playing in the woods, firing an air rifle when Jack challenges his brother to put his finger on the barrel. Although reluctantly, the brother agrees to take this risk. Jack fires. The child's face wrinkles in pain. He cries and runs away. With that event comes the reversal. Jack's guilt of everything done so far has built up to a level that cannot be bared anymore. He is crushed "What I want to do I can't do. I do what I hate." [16] – Apostle Paul words of are spoken by the boy's voice-over. In a touchingly simple, entirely pantomime scene, the wounded brother forgives the truly repentant Jack ("I'm sorry, you're my brother"), signifying this by placing his hand on his brother's shoulder (a gesture by which the mother repeatedly comforts her children and by which she seems to give "blessing").

The accepted repentance is followed by a rapid lift of the camera above the branches of a tree. In most Malick's work, such camera movements usually refer to a divine presence. The gesture of laying hand on someone's shoulder is in turn transmitted by Jack to the "scarred boy" (an anonymous boy with the scar on his head) in the next scene, when for the first time he voluntarily shares "what is his" in the game. "What was it you showed me? I didn't know how to name you sin. But I'll say it was you. Always you were calling me" – his voice-over whispers, and the camera contemplates the calm waters of the river.

[16] Sc. Rom. 7:15–17 *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me...*

The reunion with the desolate father follows. The father's voice-over articulates his own regrets: "Always you were calling me. I wanted to be loved because I was great. A big man. I am nothing. Look, the glory around us. (Close-up on the mother's face.) Trees and birds. I lived in shame. I dishonored it all and didn't notice the glory. A foolish man." The plant is closed, the father is out of work. Is this his Jobian trial? "I never missed a day of work. Tithe every Sunday." Old Testament's spirit and bitter repentance unite in this character. He feels it is his fault that the family has to leave their home. So does Jack.

* * *

Let us however return once again to the problem of Job, which seems to set the hermeneutic key to most of the themes in the film. We may agree that admittedly the loss of the beloved child could not be accepted as the sole cause of all the torments and restlessness of the characters. We have to look for the real and deeper loss here, and only then – for the "cinematic Job", if possible.

The parents in the film have lost their especially bright and gracious child. Jack has lost his brother. Besides, the father has lost his job, and all of them – the home of their happy and carefree life. Leaving their home is dramatic. It is especially difficult for the children who try to comfort each other. The little brother buries his 'treasures' in the roots of the tree of their games: the long dried fish from their infancy (the one that has been looking through its "fisheye" lens from the aquarium). Separation from childhood and home takes on a metaphysical dimension.

Actually, Malick's films are populated by the image of the "lost Paradise". In his first film *Wasteland* the twin protagonists, Keith and Holly, build a house in the woods and live briefly in the idyll of their tree dwelling before they have to flee and are caught by the consequences of their crimes. In *Days of Heaven*, cars with seasonal workers fleeing the unbearable urban conditions pass through a symbolic fenceless arch over two pillars in the form of wheat-ears. The only prohibition they have to obey is not to approach the Farmer's house. Bill and Abby violate the ban, and the result of their transgression leads to their leaving the place of security and satiety forever. *Thin Red Line* begins with the incredible peace and

solitude of a pristine primitive village, where two deserters hide from the military authorities. One of them swims with the local children, talks to their friendly mothers and longs for a peace which cannot be disturbed by death. War changes everything, even where the settlements are not physically destroyed, they are permeated by fear and the heavenly peace has disappeared. *The New World* as a whole presents a metaphor for the ruined paradise of as yet unconquered America, the innocence of whose inhabitants in their union with nature is opposed to the camp of the conquerors. The indigenous people do not fence themselves, do not divide in a complicated hierarchy of power, have no property, live under the branches of the forest. The first thing the settlers do in the newly obtained land is to cut down the trees in order to make a fence. Entering the gates of this fence means 'coming out' of the abode of primordial innocence.

At the beginning of the film we see Jack wandering around his soulless house, whose walls, though glassy and transparent, create a mood of hopelessness. Among the impressive modern buildings of Houston in a flash Jack sees the tree from his childhood – a memory of Paradise. He suffers. Each accidental image evokes in him another one from his past – radiant, full of joy and hope. "Brother... Mother... It was they who led me to your door," his voice-over says at the beginning as we contemplate the "light of Creation." "How did you come to me? In what shape? What disguise?" Jack's voice sounds against a multicolored amorphous swirl (*swishpan*). His next words come in response to his own questions – "I see the child I was. I see my brother. True. Kind." And then (the introduction of the sorrowful event): "How did I lose you?" (The tree). "Wandered" (Deserted landscape). "Forgot you" (Stormy sky). We see Jack wandering in a deserted place. He bends down and washes his face. "Find me!" – his brother's voice – a distant figure on the beach, the same beach (as we will see) from the "end of days."

Again, the mother's voice speaks at the second appearance of the "light of Creation" (the sourceless flame) - "Was I false to you? Lord... Why? Where were you?" Her literally Jobian question: "Was I false to you?"- as if to say: "Did I break the vow I gave You (to be always faithful to You, no matter what happens) that you are punishing me!" These words are also God-seeking words, but they differ decisively from Jack's words at the shock of the drowned child. The mother's words do not accuse, but seek justi-

fication. "Did you know? Who are we to you? Answer me." Her voice-over sounds against the astonishing lamentation of *Lacrimosa* (part of Zbigniew Preisner's *Requiem* 1998) and the impressive backdrop of the beginning of the world.

As we can assume that Terrence Malick did not leave to chance the combination of these three (the words of the mother, *Lacrimosa* and the vision of Creation) – it is worth trying to read the seemingly paradoxical synthesis. *Lacrimosa* is the last verse of the *sequentia* "*Dies irae*" (*Day of Wrath*), an integral part of the composition of the classic *Trent Requiem* (*missa pro defunctis*). Its meaning points to the Last Judgment[17]. But *lacrimosa* also means "shedding tears," "weeping." That is, there is a certain tension between the "Jobian" questions – questions of the innocent sufferer on the one hand and the anticipation of the day when everyone will have to give account for their guilt on the other. At the same time, the sorrowful voice-over of the mother asks: "Did you know (God, that I will lose him so early)? Who are we to you? (*What is man, that You should exalt him, That You should set Your heart on him*, Job 7:17) Answer me!" – simultaneously with the birth of the universe. According to some liturgical researchers, the text of the *sequentia 'Lacrimosa'*, "unlike other earlier hymns on the Last Judgment, puts personal *eschata* in the center of attention"[18], i.e. it integrates the personal expectation of the final fulfillment of the eternal plan into the universal eschatological picture. And it does this in terms of sorrow, since the mourning of the loss of the beloved son and home is also a "type" of the universal tragic "prototype" – the loss of the original purity and the atoning Sacrifice of Christ.

"We cry to you. My soul. My son. Hear us. I search for you. My home. My child", the mother's voice-over continues to whisper. The "I" of the questioner has become a 'we' and the addressee has also turned to plural. In the disenchanted world of Jack's present the blessed intimacy between man and God has been be lost. The same intimacy that once was attained through every genuinely loving bond – to a son, to a tree, to a home and once ac-

[17] "Ah! that day of tears and mourning, From the dust of earth returning. Man for judgment must prepare him. Spare, O God, in mercy spare him. Lord all-pitying, Jesus blest, Grant them Thine eternal rest." (*The Roman Missal*, 2014, 370).

[18] Sc. (Vellekoop, 1978, 11), in: (Зорге, no date).

quired, can be bestowed – by laying a hand on the shoulder – to the sons, to the husband, to the brother or to a friend; and the closeness, the kinship that it begets is comforting. In the union of this love commitment, every loss is taken away.

Job's central tragedy is that he feels the thirst for a *mediator between us, Who may lay his hand on us both* (Job. 9:33). This thirst for a mediator between God and man presented through the poetic image of the laying on hands – "flesh upon flesh" – is, in hermeneutical terms, a premonition of the Incarnation and deification of human nature.

The family leaves their home. We hear the peculiar prayer (which sounds much like a testament) of the mother. Her voice-over is heard as Jack puts his hand on the shoulder of his brother, who has just "planted" his "pre-fall" childhood memories at the root of a tree. "The only way to be happy is to love. Unless you love, your life will flash by (an exhortation that doesn't have a clear addressee). Do good to them. Wonder. Hope." The last words are clearly part of a prayer that can only be directed upwards, to the "Miracle Worker". The mother becomes a gracious mediator for her children. "You spoke to me through her. You spoke with me from the sky. The trees. Before I knew I loved you ... Believed in you. When did you first touch my heart?" – the words are uttered by the adult Jack's voice-over at the very beginning of the Creation (and the film).

Back to the present: the emptied paradise of the "original" home is replaced by the flame of a candle and then cut to Jack, who goes up (in a lift), and again cut to a sequential movement upwards tracing Jack's rise from the sandy depths of a cleft to the same deserted place, which we initially called "a memory of the future." There he stands again in front of the lonely fenceless gate (the life's earthly exit? An exit from the world of objectivity?)[19], through which he failed or did not dare to pass, following

[19] Cf. (Kilbourn, 2014, 35): "(...) the "sublimity" of Malick's film does not lie in the many justifiably lauded shots of natural settings and phenomena. *The Tree of Life*'s Heideggerean allusions to one side, the uncanny doorway through which Jack steps in the latter part of his psycho-allegorical desert sojourn may represent the doorway of a faith that one needs to re-enter through an act of will: the will to give up one's will. It is also disturbingly close to a literalization of the root meaning of sublime as *sub limen*: below the threshold, beyond which lies a region unsusceptible to sight or reason or representation—a sense directly contradicted in this most un-sublime of images: the world on the other side looks

himself as a boy, when we saw him there for the first time. Although not without hesitance, this time he moves on to find himself in the trans-historical reality of the "end of days." The vision spreads into a wide shot of a cosmic view. We observe a cosmic cataclysm. The sun engulfs the Earth, burning it to ashes. A voice-over: "Keep us. Guide us. To the end of time." The last sunset ends to the sounds of *Agnus Dei* from Berlioz's *Requiem* (Sir Colin Davis *et al*., 1998)[20]. Beyond the doorway, Jack is led by the child-Jack (we see the already familiar vision of the bridge from the beginning) and passes through a dead city, where a dead bride rises from her bed. Jack reaches a spacious seashore, where in the water (as if on the water) once again he sees the figure of his dead brother, who (as we may remember) called him by his name at the very beginning of the film. Gradually, like the seagulls' flight in the sky, human figures gather from all sides of the shore and hover around each other and towards each other – all together again: the old Jack and his young father, his mother and his dead brother with his shiny childish face, the neighbor's child with the scar on his head.

In a new vision, the mother, surrounded by two female figures (she, as a young woman, together with, it seems, Jack's childhood sweetheart), gives a comforting homage to the light[21]: "I give him to you. I give you my son." Jack's spiritual journey ends with his return down in the lift of that same Houston skyscraper, but after this coming back from the "upper world", everything around him is already "different". Everything has acquired new meaning – the glass buildings are still there, but they are no longer lifeless. Now the sky is reflected in them multiplying thus its image as if everything is filled with heaven. The iron bridge shines in the setting sun like the neck of an ancient dinosaur, and the eternal river flows mightily beneath it.

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the same as the world Jack leaves behind." As we shall see later – the world on the other side is the same and in the same time not the same (the-same-that-will-be).

[20] *Agnus Dei* is the eighth part of the Requiem, during which the Host is being broken (the one that will be sanctified later). The words of the hymn "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us" are a periphrasis of John the Baptist's words: "*Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Jo. 1:29).

[21] The immense variety of lights and reflections, the "divine" light that appears without logic and explanation, as well as the gesture described, "reveal the luminous play between Being and being", if I may borrow the words of Sinnerbrink, who thus tries to justify cinema before Heidegger's accusation of metaphysicalism: (Sinnerbrink, 2006, 36).

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Everything we know so far about Malick's cinematic language can also be found in *The Tree of Life* – a whispering voice-over; successive editing of different shots or angles of the same emotional state of a character or the same object; the soaring hand-held camera (at least since his previous film, *The New World*); surprising POVs as well as the impressive musical part. What differs decidedly in *The Tree of Life* is the scale of the filmic narrative. The natural limitation of his previous film stories – their selective coverage and detachment from the supposed "larger" historical narrative; their shunning from the classic plot development (Malick stories seem to always begin with "and then he / she" and end with "and so on") – has been overcome in an undoubtedly ambitious way. Malick's story in *The Tree of Life* is not limited to the familiar human history (anthropocene), but is extended to its (so far only) imaginable limit – since it begins with the biblical "*In the beginning* ..." (Gen. 1:1) and ends with "Amen". It begins with the flame of the Creation and ends with the last days of our Earth and the "*new heaven and a new earth*" (Rev. 21:1) of the salvation. Such an all-encompassment of the story; its integration in the biblical meta-history of the pre-eternal divine plan brings the plot of *The Tree of Life* closer to the genre of pre-modern chronicle. What is more: through the micro-plot of Jack's childhood and adolescence, which is organically personal (even biographical) Malick succeeds to domesticate the universal cosmic panorama.

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# THE ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS OF *HONEYLAND*

## Abstract

The documentary *Honeyland*, by directors Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov, with all its awards, recognitions and nominations, on different continents, received a clear aesthetic verification from the global film community for its cinematic values. Consider what gives this work of art an extra and a very, very specific value is the ethical paradigm that the film depicts on the big screen and a strong, unequivocal message of responsibility to nature, to the world we live in and to the future in which the subsequent generations should live.

This article is an attempt to re-read the film, exclusively through the prism of environmental ethics that carries the story and its leitmotif: "Half for me, half for the bees".

Thirty years ago, the UN set up a commission to deal with issues of economic development, environmental protection and accountability to future generations. Named after its first head, former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Brundtland Commission published a book, *Our Common Future*, which offered something that has become the standard ethical definition of sustainable development; namely, "sustainable development is development that meets their needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The story of poor Atidze Muratova, who survives in miserable conditions thanks to honey from wild bees, is the story of a woman on the brink of extinction and far from civilization (and maybe exactly because of that), but who still remains fused with nature and responsible for the survival of her family and the bees. Doesn't Atidze, through her personal environmental ethics, actually translate Brundtland's definition into a simple, powerful message, expressed

in understandable, humanized language, and told through her warm, touching, intimate human story?
Joseph Desjardings, in his *Environmental Ethics*, addresses some vital issues for humanity such as asking the question: Should present generations sacrifice for the well-being of future generations? Does posterity have rights, and do we have duties to people who do not even exist? Do all presently living people bear the same degree of responsibility to future generations, or does that vary depending on such things as wealth or cultural affiliation?
This article explores the answers to these questions through the film language spoken by *Honeyland*.

**Keywords**
*Honeyland*, film, documentary, ethics, environment, ecology, sustainability.

The documentary *Honeyland*, by directors Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov with all the numerous awards, recognitions and nominations, on different continents and multiple festivals, received a clear aesthetic verification from the global film community for its cinematic values. What gives this work of art an extra and a very, very specific value is the ethical paradigm that the film depicts on the big screen and with a strong message of responsibility to nature, to the world we live in and to the future in which the subsequent generations should live.

If surveying among moviegoers as to who is the main character of the movie *Honeyland*, undoubtedly everyone who has seen the movie - even those who have not seen it but have been exposed to media articles about it - would relate that it is a story about middle-aged woman Atidze Muratova and her attempt to survive in miserable conditions thanks to her profession of cultivating wild bee honey. And, of course, this is true. Not only at the level of a layman's impression of a moviegoer, but also by zealously following the principles of dramaturgy for storytelling and drama structure. However, this presentation seeks to open a slightly diverse point of view, without challenging the traditional postulates of dramaturgy, but with the ambition to free them from their necessary anthropocentric worldview. Consider that the main characters of the story are the bees from the wild and their struggle to survive, in conditions created by the miserable human nature.

You may sense eco-fundamentalist vibes now, but there is still an important and fundamental explanation of this specific reading of the film *Honeyland*.

From a thematic point of view, the film *Honeyland* deals with existential and social issues. It tells a story about the culture and philosophy of living in a deeply sensitive and challenging economic setting. If we want to go to extreme borderlines of thinking, we can say that *Honeyland* with its own ethical and aesthetic views tells us why modern society is doomed to decay.

In this sense, the ecologist and philosopher Mark Sagoff states that if we recognize that (1) utopian capitalism is dead; (2) the concepts of resource and welfare economics are largely outdated and irrelevant, then the public will have to look for other concepts and cultural traditions to solve environmental and social problems. To set these priorities, we need to distinguish the pure from the polluted, the natural from the artificial, the noble from the mundane, the good from the bad, and the right from the wrong. These are scientific, cultural, aesthetic, historical and ethical differences (Sagoff, 2007, 22).

In order to set a new attitude towards the world and life, a new discourse towards us and our planet, as well as to understand how *Honeyland* as a single work of art may advance these purposes. This is where digging deeper into the environmental philosophical thought will illuminate multiple dialectical and ideological contradictions it contains.

So, what do we actually mean when we say environmental ethics? According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Environmental Ethics is a discipline in philosophy which studies the moral relation of man to the ecosystem, as well as the value and moral status of the environment and its inhuman contents. This discipline covers topics such as: the challenge of environmental ethics to the anthropocentrism in traditional western ethical thinking; the connection of deep ecology, feminist environmental ethics, animism and social ecology; the preservation of biodiversity as an ethical goal; the broader concerns of some thinkers with wilderness and poverty; the ethics of sustainability, climate change, etc. (Brennan, 2021)

There are direct links to film *Honeyland* in almost every one of these topics. In anthropocentrism, literature on environmental ethics concerning the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value has been of considerable importance. For instance, bees have an instrumental value for

humans because they feed on the honey obtained from them, and feeding is a means of survival, so do bees have a value of their own, independent of humans. If we believe that everything exists because of humans, then we are adherents of one of the dominant anthropocentric conceptions of the world. Many traditional western ethical perspectives, however, are anthropocentric or human-centered. For example, dramatists most often like to quote Aristotle's *Poetics*, which maintains that "nature has made all things specifically for the sake of man" and that the value of non-human things in nature is merely instrumental. Generally, anthropocentric positions find it problematic to articulate what is wrong with the cruel treatment of non-human animals, except to the extent that such treatment may lead to catastrophic consequences for human beings.

Since anthropocentrism is the essence of the main conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist in the movie *Honeyland*, the main character Atidze believes that bees have the same value as humans in nature; the honey is theirs, so she will use the verb "take" several times in the sense that she appropriates something that does not belong to her. On the other hand, the nomad Hussein, who moves to her abandoned village with his family and his cattle, believes that everything can be cultivated, and in doing so, it becomes human property. He asserts that the bees belong to him because the hives are his, and he has full rights to their honey as well as the right to decide about their destiny. At one point, he even threatens Atidze that if they went to court, he would win the dispute. And yes, he probably would win.

This moment in the film is a reminder of a famous proposal by the ecologist and lawyer Christopher Stone from half a century ago, who proposed that trees and other natural objects should have at least the same standing in law as corporations. Notably, a famous case in the past litigated by the Sierra Club tried to stop Walt Disney Enterprises to build highway through the Sequoia National Park for their purposes. Stone reasoned that if trees, forests and wild animals could be given standing in law, then they could be represented in their own right in the courts by groups such as the Sierra Club. Moreover, like any other legal person, these natural things could become beneficiaries of compensation if it could be shown that they had suffered because of human activity. When the case went to the U.S.

Supreme Court, it was determined by a narrow majority that the Sierra Club did not meet the condition for bringing a case to court. In a dissenting minority judgment, however, justices Douglas, Blackmun and Brennan mentioned Stone's argument: his proposal to give legal standing to natural things, they said, would allow conservation interests, community needs and even business interests to be represented, debated, and settled in court (Brennan, 2021).

To conclude, thousands of bees can be killed in the wild but this is not a murder for which one will be responsible because those bees are non-entities and belong to nobody. On the other hand, if someone destroys someone's beehive, they will be liable for the damage done. Dozens of cattle may die due to negligence (as it happens to the nomads in *Honeyland*), but no one is held responsible because cow lives are owner's property, and the owner bears the economic damage himself. This is how our anthropocentric world looks like. Anthropocentric orientation mixed with capitalistic consumer madness inevitably determines the value system we live in.

Even when we are caring for animals, we do it for selfish reasons. We are building their dwellings. For example, beekeepers construct their beehives instead of natural habitats in the hollows of trees or rocks. In order to bring food closer to people, hives are placed along the roads, not because it suits the bees but because it suits us - the people, as consumers. Impressive is the scene in *Honeyland* with a close-up in which two bees rescue each other from the puddle in order to help each other to climb the leaf. One symbolism refers to solidarity as an ethical value, and the second, perhaps more important for the attitude of the film, is that the bees, left alone, will fight the dangers that lurk without anyone's outside, artificial help, guided only by their instincts. In that context, Atidze's care for her old and frail mother, the self-sacrifice to be left alone, without any family, so that she does not leave her mother, is the very powerful message of solidarity and humanity. But, the second symbolism, the appeal of the bees throughout this movie, "Leave us alone", is an important aspect of environmental ethics and so-called deep ecology.

In the scene in which Atidze and her mother eat watermelon from the rural fair, they have the following conversation: "Is it mild?", asks the mother. "Yes, it is from the garden." "Not like those on the market. No chem-

icals," answers Atidze. Note the imposed taste versus the original taste. This reminded me of something. When a friend of mine was on a business trip to Africa, one of the biggest impressions she got was the taste of bananas. Ok, but, how different can the taste of bananas be? Bananas taste like bananas. "No, no", she said, "they have nothing to do with those in our markets." It can be concluded that the original taste of bananas was modified when they were brought closer to human communities and to consuming continents. If this was the only transformation, then there may be some marginal allowance. But it was not. We learned how to chemically get something similar in taste and aroma. So today in the supermarket, you can buy a mineral water with a taste of banana and guava, for example, but that water has nothing to do with either banana nor guava. It is very likely that you have never tried guava in your life, but in the meantime this mineral water has become your favorite. False tastes, aromas, false stimuli for the senses, all this inevitably leads to false values. Because if you become a regular consumer of a lie, it cannot but become a value to you. People tend to justify their behavior, so if they are users of a lie, in order to justify themselves and others, they are forced to treat the lie as a value.

As a possible solution to this social construct, we come to the next important issue - sustainability and care for future generations. The Rolling Stones spouts this lyric, "You can't always get what you want." Is that a bad thing? Should society, education, arts, and government policies always tend to seek people to be supplied with all they want? Should artists, movie makers, play a role in teaching citizens which wants are of value and which are not, or should they remain neutral on such questions? (Desjardins, 2013, 73).

Thirty years ago, the UN set up a commission to deal with issues of economic development, environmental protection and accountability to future generations. This Commission published a book, *Our Common Future*, which offered what has become the standard ethical definition of sustainable development: "It is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Desjardins, 2013, 74) The story of impoverished Atidze Muratova is exactly the story of a woman on the brink of extinction and far from civilization (and maybe exactly because of that), but who still remains fused

with nature and responsible for survival. Doesn't Atidze, through her personal environmental ethics, actually translate this definition into a simple, powerful message, expressed in understandable, humanized language, and told through her warm, touching, intimate human story? What is that "Half for me, half for bees", if not care about the sustainability of whole nature, not just the humans.

Joseph Desjardings, in his *Environmental Ethics*, addresses some vital issues for humanity: Should present generations sacrifice for the well-being of future generations? Does posterity have rights, and do we have duties to people who do not even exist? Do all presently living people bear the same degree of responsibility to future generations, or does that vary depending on such things as wealth or cultural affiliation? (Desjardins, 2013, 76)

"Take half, leave half, so that your bees do not attack mine", says Atidze in the movie. Lost harmony means disharmony, and disharmony means trouble for all, not just for one, because the community is a part of the whole. When we eat all the honey, the bees must attack other bees in the wild to survive. As a result, balance is disturbed. Is not that briefly the history of mankind, which is a history of wars and conflicts?

The ethic of preserving, protecting, and reasonably using resources to provide for those who are yet to be born has become as important as the ethical rules of how to treat the now-living people, animals, and other living beings. This care contains a trap. The film depicts that trap very well when Hussein greedily squeezes all the honey out of the hives and thus destroys both his own and Atidze's families of bees. He then explains this to his rebellious son saying, "I am doing this for you. I don't need anything. I already have what I need. Not much, but enough. But you don't." The future of children, of future generations, of the nation and similar demagogic nonsenses are always a cover for evil. Children often serve as an excuse, which is disgusting.

In the end, the environmental ethics of *Honeyland* seems to prevail. I will emphasize the glimmer of optimism in the film where mankind leaves the matrix of anthropocentrism, or the world will find a way to get rid of us. "Will there be spring?" Atidze asks her blind mother. "Of course, there will be spring," announces her last line Atidze's mother, just before she dies. Yes, there will be spring. With or without us.

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