

# The Narrative Role of Films in Four Contemporary Novels

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*Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by due permission of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki in lecture room 5, University Main Building, on the 23rd of September, 2017 at 10 o'clock.*

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# Abstract

In my doctoral dissertation I explore the narrative function of cinema in twenty-first century fiction. In this study literary representations of films are regarded as a narrative strategy through which literary texts accentuate, reflect, and give rise to their principal themes and questions. Since filmic insertions have a noticeable impact upon the narrative construction and hence turn out to be pivotal in the reader's inferential process, I also investigate this narrative phenomenon in the context of reader's meaning-making.

I have chosen four novels for my study, namely *The Book of Illusions* (2002) by Paul Auster, *Point Omega* (2010) by Don DeLillo, *The Understudy* (2005) by David Nicholls, and *The Ice Cream Man* by Katri Lipson, published in Finnish in 2012 as *Jäätelökauppias* and translated into English in 2014. In these works the dominant meanings are closely linked to the representations of cinema, and films appear both at the discourse level and within the fictional world. Owing to the diversity of the chosen texts in terms of style and genre, my study provides a comprehensive view of the ways in which recent fiction has utilised "moving images" in narration.

In this study I draw on the theoretical concepts of intersubjectivity, framing, *mise en abyme*, possible worlds theory, and indexicality in order to analyse the narrative function of films in the novels and the subsequent effects in the reader's hermeneutic process. I demonstrate that the literary use of cinema greatly affects narration and the reading experience: it disturbs the conventional narrative hierarchy and the subordination between the primary level and the embedded one. Simultaneously, it violates ontological stability, which separates the fictional "real" from the filmic "unreal". My case studies testify to the importance of the reader's role as an active interpreter whose knowledge of and experiences with cinema contribute to the textual processing of the novels. By pointing out the intricate interaction between audiovisual and verbal sign systems in these texts, I show how the audiovisual upsurge in contemporary society has altered how we read literature.



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# Abbreviations

## **Paul Auster**

*BI*                      *The Book of Illusions* (2002)

## **Don DeLillo**

*PO*                      *Point Omega* (2010)

## **Katri Lipson**

*J*                          *Jäätelökauppias* (2012)

*ICM*                      *The Ice Cream Man* (2014)

## **David Nicholls**

*U*                          *The Understudy* (2005)

## **Manuel Puig**

*BMA*                      *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976)

*KSW*                      *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1979)



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

- [...] [G]o on.
- We can discuss it later if you want, or tomorrow.
- Okay, but go on a little more.
- A little bit, no more, I like to leave you hanging, that way you enjoy the film more. You have to do it that way with the public, otherwise they're not satisfied. On the radio they always used to do that to you. And now on the TV soaps.

(KSW: 25–26)<sup>1</sup>

It could be argued that *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, a novel written by Argentinian Manuel Puig (1932–1990), is permeated with and determined by cinematic signifiers.<sup>2</sup> On the surface, the novel is a story of two prisoners locked in a cell and the close relationship, both mental and physical, that gradually follows. The novel is imbued with a cinematic atmosphere, thanks to half a dozen films related by the two men, which dominate the dialogue and make up most of the narration. The principal storyteller of the films is Luis Molina, a homosexual window dresser and enthusiastic cinephile, who relates his favourite films to his young cell mate, Valentín Arregui, a political activist, as a way of passing the time in the evenings. In the course of the novel the ostensibly innocent act of relating film plots turns into a driving force of

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- [...] Seguí.
- Después lo comentamos si querés, o mañana.
- Sí, pero seguí un poco más.
- Un poquito no más, me gusta sacarte el dulce en lo mejor, así te gusta más la película. Al público hay que hacerle así, si no no está contento. En la radio antes te hacían siempre eso. Y ahora en las telenovelas. (BMA: 31–32)

<sup>2</sup>Not long after its publication in Spanish, Puig's fourth novel was translated into English by Thomas Colchie.

narrative progression, and subsequently affects the textual process of the work as a whole. The recounted films thus govern both the narrative development and the reader's inferential process.

The purpose of this study is to examine the narrative role of verbal representations of films in novels written after the turn of the millennium. More specifically, I investigate the function and narrative impact of literary manifestations of films and how using films contributes to the construction of the narrative and the reader's meaning-making process. In other words, I explore both the narrative and the hermeneutic consequences resulting from transpositions in which cinema is displaced from its original channel of communication to a literary medium. I have chosen four books for my study, namely *The Book of Illusions* (2002) by Paul Auster, *Point Omega* (2010) by Don DeLillo, *The Understudy* (2005) by David Nicholls, and *The Ice Cream Man*, a novel written by Katri Lipson, which was published in Finnish in 2012 with the title *Jäätelökauppias* and translated into English by Ellen Hockerill in 2014. I analyse the novels in separate chapters and concentrate on various narrative strategies through which these texts accentuate, reflect, and give rise to their principal themes and questions by means of cinematic representations. As for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, I deploy Puig's modern classic in the theoretical part of the thesis in order to illustrate the discussion of the narrative phenomenon itself.

There are several reasons why I have limited my choice of novels to twenty-first century fiction. First and foremost, I am interested in the ways film refashions literary modes in contemporary societies, which are characterised by an ever-increasing amount of visual and audiovisual information. In this respect, Puig's novel turns out to be an interesting starting point, as there is an earlier study on verbal representations of films in fiction by Gavriel Moses (1994), which concludes with an analysis of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. In *The Nickel Was for the Movies* (1994), Moses provides a comprehensive analysis of the literary use of films in certain novels written before the late 1970s.<sup>3</sup> For me, Puig's experimental novel published four decades ago serves as an interesting literary "prelude" to the study at hand, as it appears to entail many features and consequences of filmic insertions in more recently written fiction, as we will see. Thus, besides eliciting fruitful comparisons among the novels under discussion, comparative analysis enables me to surmise that my principal findings on the function of filmic representations in these novels pertain more generally to literary

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<sup>3</sup>Here Moses scrutinises works by Luigi Pirandello, Vladimir Nabokov, Alberto Moravia, Nathanael West, Walker Percy, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Christopher Isherwood, and Manuel Puig. His approach, however, differs greatly from mine, insofar as the focus of his study is on the formal realisations of film aesthetics in fiction.

narratives that make use of cinema.

As for the four other novels, there are various reasons for choosing these particular narratives. In all of them, films contribute to the narrative progression and construction. The novels involve audiovisual material, both on the level of discourse and in the reality of the storyworld. Films are recounted and discussed in the novels, enabling the narrators and characters to convey various meanings, either explicitly or indirectly, to other characters and to the reader. With regard to *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the films related there serve as mental and communicative devices for the characters, reflecting the characters' lives, features, and desires, which are otherwise difficult or even impossible to convey. Thus, cinema has varied effects and consequences, both for the lives of the characters and for the novels' textual whole. I also decided to choose works that differ from each other in terms of genre, narration, and style in order to provide a broad selection of how contemporary fiction has exploited cinema.

These four novels make use of films in distinctive ways, ranging from the minutely detailed recountings of fictive films in Auster's *The Book of Illusions* to brief, yet repeated references to real films in Nicholls's romantic comedy, *The Understudy*.<sup>4</sup> As for linguistic and cultural variation among my case studies, Lipson's novel, originally written in Finnish, serves as an exception to the others, which were written in English and in an Anglo-American cultural domain. Furthermore, her novel differs in terms of context, as it is mostly situated in post-war Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, all the novelists share a larger cultural background, namely that of the Western world, and hence their works make up a compatible corpus for my study.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the discrepancies among the novels analysed, all make use of films in similar ways, albeit with varying emphases. It appears that by evoking and promulgating certain topics in their representations, the inserted films compel the reader to recognise similarities between the films and other parts of the narrative. For example, in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* the narrated films bear noticeable resemblances to the events and characters on the diegetic level. What ensues is that the films determine the way the reader processes the narrative in general. Thus, film has a dual function: besides serving as an initial catalyst for the narrative situations and

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, incorporation of a film within a novel can also be non-verbal: in multimodal novels, which comprise various modes and media adjacent to verbal narrative, cinema can be represented as still pictures, for example. However, non-verbal representations of film in literary work are beyond the scope of the present study.

<sup>5</sup>This pertains to Puig as well. Although born in Argentina, Puig can be considered cosmopolitan and well aware of Western culture, as he lived abroad — partly in exile — for considerable parts of his life, in cities such as Rome and New York.

events, it turns out to be a reflexive element that mirrors and duplicates the embedding level. Indeed, in all the novels literary representations of films steer the reader's attention and horizons of expectation as he or she becomes aware of the films' narrative and reflecting power. Thus, movies function as hermeneutic tools or provide indispensable clues for arriving at a more internalised engagement with the novel as a whole.

In the present study I investigate whether the reflecting role of the embedded films results in blurring and even breaching the narrative hierarchy in which the filmic level is subordinate to the diegetic level. Although part of a literary text, the films seem to refuse to remain within their artistic frames. Along with delving into how films obscure the borders between narrative levels, I am interested in how they generate instability in the fictional world. Cinema crosses the borderline separating the so-called movie reality and the storyworld reality in which the films are shot, perceived, interpreted, and recounted. Thus, I consider the possibility that the films in the novels violate the pre-established conception of the storyworld reality in which the films recounted are ontologically subservient to the fictional reality and are experienced as such, both in the fictional reality and by readers.

This is evident in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*: for both Molina and Valentín, the narrated films grant the chance for them to become the "filmic Other" within the reality of the storyworld. By adopting roles learned from the films and repeating the events taking place in the narrated films, the characters blur and undermine the distinction between the level of fictional reality and that of cinema. The (melo)dramatic conclusion of Puig's novel provides its most tragic manifestation of the fluctuation between two distinct ontological divisions: after being set free, Molina is delivering a message from Valentín to political activists when he is shot to death. The climactic nature of Molina's death repeats the fates of filmic *femme fatales* he so admired and whose melodramatic stories have dominated the narrative from the beginning.

While Puig's novel constantly highlights its narrative structure by calling into question the distinctions between the ontological and the narrative levels, it also epitomises the quality of an artistically constructed form of narrative communication. By drawing attention to the unstable entities, the narrative urges the reader to become more aware of the metafictional function of the films depicted in the novels. In other words, literary renditions of cinema make the reader more attentive to topics and problems related to representation in general, such as various modes of illustration and referentiality, as well as being more aware of originality and authenticity. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* problematises this further by recounting *both* actual



and invented films, leaving the reader uncertain whether the latter are also fictitious on the diegetic level. In this study I consider how these questions related to ontology, referentiality, and representation are manifest in the chosen novels.

Here we come to the interaction between metafiction and the communicative aspects of literary narratives. In Puig's novel the verbal representations of films raises the question of the function of storytelling: why does Molina engage in recounting these specific films to his cell mate? Are half of them simply made up for the sole purpose of entertainment — and narrative seduction? On a higher narrative level, we might ask what the implied author wants to communicate to the implied reader with the help of the films being recounted.

I will be exploring how the novels illustrate diverse motivations for the use of films. I also consider the possibility that the distinct parallels drawn between the narrative levels, the subsequent violation of the fictional reality, and the aesthetic illusion of cinema encourage readers to re-consider their understanding of those concepts in terms of *acting*, *faking*, and *feigning*. As for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the films it mentions often touch on betrayal and duplicity. Deceitful actions are repeated on the embedding level, as the motives for inmates' actions remain uncertain. Like the film characters, the inmates engage in playing certain roles. Thus, the "imaginary"<sup>6</sup> level of cinema reflects and serves as a metaphor for potential treacheries that might take place in the storyworld reality.

To sum up, in the course of my study I explore whether literary representations of film essentially function as reflecting narrative structures that impair both a clear-cut distinction between narrative hierarchies and discrete ontological levels of the fictional reality and the filmic imaginary. Such an outcome raises more general issues, such as narrativity, artistic enterprise, acting, and representation. This dissertation is also an investigation of how habits in reading and writing have been altered in an era characterised by the pervasion of visual material in all cultural domains, including literature. As for the reader, he or she is forced to become more conscious of the inferential process of reading and interpreting novels "through" and with the help of another medium, by experiencing literary fiction via the medium of cinema, which

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<sup>6</sup>I am aware of the complexity of the term "imaginary", which "largely resists definition" (Iser 1993: 171; see also *ibid.*: 171–246) and which, according to Iser, cannot be "definitely grounded" (*ibid.*: xiv). In this study "imaginary", when used as a cinematic attribute, refers to the nature of the content level of films as not actually existing in the physical world. The aesthetic illusion of film, in turn, creates an *imaginary* experience for the viewer. This experience differs from cognitive illusions, which produce "real-world beliefs" (Schaeffer, *LHN*, Paragraph 8), although these two experiences are often deliberately mixed in the novels under discussion. This approach does not ignore the fact that films as audiovisual artefacts also have a concrete aspect and can entail elements that have counterparts in the real world, such as historical figures and locales.

originally functioned in another fashion and on broader levels of sensory experience.

Thus, the interaction between distinct modes of representation in a literary text makes the reader more aware of the cultural memorabilia related to cinema through which he or she is able to decode a literary text while bearing in mind the differences between the two artistic mediums. Simultaneously, we begin to discern how the novels analysed here react to and reflect through their forms changes in the contemporary world in which they have been produced and are now interpreted. To borrow Ernst van Alphen's notion of art as "a frame for cultural thought" (2005: xvi), I see filmic insertions in literary texts in a similar way, as frames that give rise to diverse cognitive, perceptual, and cultural practices by virtue of which human comprehension of the external world develops in general.<sup>7</sup>

## Theoretical Framework and Previous Research

As mentioned above, my primary interest lies in the *narrative* role of filmic manifestations in literary texts, and my research question implicitly necessitates the notion of a *reader* who engages in the process of narrative comprehension. These aspects define to some extent the scope of my theoretical apparatus. Generally, I make use of classical narratology (Genette 1980, 1988, 1997) and post-classical narratology (Margolin 1996, 2001; Richardson 2006), yet I also draw on other areas of narrative literary theory, such as literary theory and psychoanalysis (Maclean 1988; Brooks 1993, 1994), as well as trauma studies (Caruth 1996; Hirsch 1997; Rothberg 2000). Besides the usefulness and the indispensable role of narratological terminology in analysing narrative and hermeneutical processes related to literary representations of films, in chapter five on Nicholls's *The Understudy* I explore the reader's mapping of the storyworld by means of possible worlds semantics (Pavel 1986; Ryan 1991, 2006; Ronen 1994; Doležel 1998).

As for individual concepts, the term *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach 1989) is extremely useful here, especially in chapter four, where I focus on DeLillo's *Point Omega*. *Mise en abyme* also has a link to *textual framing* (Wolf 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c), specifically, to the formal and concrete physical frames that the reader discerns in a literary narrative. Because the chosen novels more or less address the possibility of breaking down the established and realistic borders separating the embedded level of cinema and the embedding level, Gérard Genette's concept of *metalepsis*, which

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<sup>7</sup>See also Simone Arcagni's article (2015) on "postcinema", which exceeds the concept of cinema as an archival cultural memory and "expand[s] into the network to contact, wander, and become object of re-readings and interpretations" (ibid.: 209) in the digital age.

refers to a violation of ontologically different narrative levels, is also highly relevant.

As mentioned, the prominence of the features and consequences of literary representations of cinema — the heightened significance of storytelling, filmic duplications, transferences between the fictitious and the filmic levels, evocation of the notions of acting, faking, and feigning — differs to some extent in each novel. Thus, I apply the theoretical concepts mentioned above in accordance with their relevance to a specific novel. In some instances, I also revise the prevailing conception of both the essence and applicability of certain theoretical terms, such as *mise en abyme*.

Readers will see that I have decided not to employ a fixed theoretical framework in this study. Rather, instead of trying to adjust the chosen novels to a certain methodology, I have proceeded from the bottom up, so to speak, trying to be sensitive to the structuring principles of the novel in question and seeking the most relevant concepts to illustrate the ways that the films function as part of the literary whole. It could be said that, in this respect, I side with Mieke Bal, who in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002), pleads for a return of close reading as the primary practice in cultural analysis (ibid.: 10). In my study I have chosen a path suggested by Bal, whereby concepts are used in order to understand more thoroughly and on its own terms the object of the analysis. This kind of “methodological openness and reflection” (ibid.: 13) enables me to better acknowledge the special characteristics of the novels. As result, heuristic and methodological power is derived from the concepts, not from the method itself (see ibid.: 10–11).

As for the main concepts chosen here — intersubjectivity, frames, index, and terms related to possible worlds semantics — they can be regarded as “travelling concepts” in Bal’s vein, as they originate from other disciplines and have been applied to literary theory. Bal holds that a provisional exploration of a particular concept’s meanings can result in “gain[ing] insight into what it can do” (ibid.: 11; emphasis original). Thus, irrespective of certain incompatibilities among the concepts, they are used as analytical tools to shed light on the workings of films in literature from various perspectives. This multifaceted approach leads to a broader understanding of the narrative phenomenon in general.

Besides refusing to employ a rigid methodology, I have opted for a certain kind of “semantic looseness” in my way of using certain binary concepts to define our understanding of what is real/unreal, factual/fictional, and true/false. This is intentional: in the course of the study we find that these terms which we use on a daily basis and which determine our shared cultural conceptions of various ontological, referential, and epistemological matters, are difficult to define precisely. More im-

portant, by rendering these common dichotomies questionable, the novels remind us that the oppositional categories we have adopted to understand the world may not be the best ones with which to approach the complexity of what we term “reality” and our interaction with it. As for the term “reality” itself, I find it worthwhile to quote Katherine Hayles, who, in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), writes that

to speak of an objectively existing world is misleading, for the very idea of a world implies a realm that preexists its construction by an observer. Certainly there is something ‘out there,’ which for lack of a better term we can call ‘reality’. But it comes into existence for us, and for all living creatures, *only through interactive processes determined solely by the organism’s own organization.*

(ibid.: 136; emphasis original)

In the course of this study, we will see that the novels exemplify these “interactive processes” by virtue of which our experience of reality is essentially constituted, and they do so by elucidating the role of various kinds of communication, such as social interactions and language, both oral and written.

Last but not least, I contend that, before establishing a firmer theoretical and methodological basis for studying filmic representations in literature, we need to examine novels in which cinema is used and outline the guiding principles for how these novels work. In my concluding chapter I sketch some preliminary groundwork for the poetics needed for representations of films in fiction. I argue that such representations do not lend themselves to methodologically clear-cut and reductionist scrutiny. This is why I hope that future writings about the general aesthetics of this narrative phenomenon will be sensitive to methodological open-mindedness in Bal’s vein.

Bal’s writings about interart relations and their analysis also turn out to be fruitful for my approach. In the preface to the new version of her seminal study *Reading ‘Rembrandt’* (1991), Bal writes: “I think the relationship between textual and visual ‘discourse’ has not been understood in all its subtleties, even today” (2006: v). Although the enormous increase in visual culture and its effects on other cultural domains has attracted academic attention from disciplines such as interart and literary studies, there still seem to be gaps in our understanding of the interaction between text and image and moving images in particular. In spite of the “visual turn” of verbal texts propounded by W.J.T. Mitchell in his *Picture Theory* (1994), and regardless of the scholarly interest in the ever-increasing interconnections and forms of interme-

dial exchange between audiovisual and literary forms of art,<sup>8</sup> to my knowledge there is no comprehensive study of representations of films — both actual and imaginary — in contemporary fiction which investigates narrative and hermeneutic consequences of intermedial connections between the two art forms. Thus, the present study fills a lacuna in the research on the hidden and unexplored “subtleties” between contemporary fiction and cinema.

Only recently has research on literary representations of films been carried out. The key concept has often been *film/cinematic ekphrasis*, an updated version of a term that refers to “*the verbal representation of visual representation*” (Heffernan 1993: 3; emphasis original) in order to adhere to the auditive and verbal dimensions of cinema.<sup>9</sup> While I am aware of a variety of definitions of modern ekphrasis from the last half decade,<sup>10</sup> James Heffernan’s definition is easily adaptable to the study of cinematic representations in fiction: in his own words, it is “simple in form”, yet “complex in its implications” (ibid.). In his *Museum of Words* (1993), Heffernan explores the history of ekphrastic poetry, ranging from the epics written in antiquity to modern and postmodern poetry of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that the texts he analysed differ greatly from the ones I examine here, his analysis of the development of ekphrasis illuminates the evolution of ekphrasis from an “incidental adjunct” suspending the narrative flow to a “self-sufficient whole” (ibid.: 137), which projects the essential meanings of the textual whole. Thus, Heffernan’s understanding of the evolution of ekphrasis pertains to my conception of a postmodern film ekphrasis as a dynamic narrative device that is fully involved in the process of *semiosis*.<sup>11</sup>

Research on the topic thus far has mainly consisted of doctoral dissertations, which are not likely to have gained a wide readership. Furthermore, the scope of these studies has often been limited to describing changes in media surroundings at the turn of the millennium, the increase in (audio)visual imagery in fictive prose, and the impact of such imagery on the representative nature of fiction (e.g. see

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<sup>8</sup>For earlier studies on the dynamics between literature and film, see e.g. Keith Cohen’s *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (1979); Laura Marcus’s *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (2007) and a collection of essays entitled *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* (2011), edited by Timothy Corrigan.

<sup>9</sup>Heffernan (2015) himself has approved the term “ekphrasis” in conjunction with literary representations of films. However, every now and then, “film ekphrasis” refers to the converse, that is, films representing words, usually poetry (see Surliuga 2009; Netto 2004). Juha-Pekka Kilpiö (2016) has recently suggested a new, replacement term, “kinephrasis”, to refer to literary representations of films.

<sup>10</sup>See e.g. Hagstrum (1958: 18); Spitzer (1962: 72).

<sup>11</sup>On the function of ekphrasis, see also Clüver (1997, 1998) and Yacobi (1997, 1999, 2000).

Mortensen 2012). Elsewhere, attention has been paid to a certain aspect of filmic representation and its effects in a literary text (see Ece 2010; on film aesthetics in earlier fiction, see Moses 1994). Yet wider narrative aspects of the literary phenomenon have often been overlooked. The present study combines a narrative (and narratological) approach with these broader perspectives of reader engagement and word-image interaction in contemporary culture.

In his introduction to the recently published symposium *Imaginary Films in Literature* (2015), Massimo Fusillo shares my observation on the scarcity of research on literary representations of films by remarking that

[t]he comparative analysis of literature and cinema is still primarily focused on the multifarious problems of adaptation of word into film, a widespread field of research that has recently received new input and developments thanks to Linda Hutcheon.

(2015: xiii)

The articles in *Imaginary Films in Literature* attempt to compensate for the lack of previous research concerning “[t]he inverse relationship” (ibid.) between literature and cinema. The title, however, reveals that the main interest lies in textual representations of films that are as fictitious as the literary narrative.<sup>12</sup> Although it may be true that the symposium demonstrates “how deeply cinema is now inscribed in literary imagery” (ibid.: xv), by ignoring the interaction between “literary imagery” and the actual films used in fiction that have been seen by the reader, the book provides only partial access to this literary phenomenon.<sup>13</sup>

Conversely, in my study I pay attention to literary manifestations of both fictional and real films and to the potential differences in their narrative function and reader reception. Thus, I provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between the two mediums, irrespective of a film’s ontological status outside fiction. In the course of the present study we will see that the actual films serving as intertexts for certain novels have different effects in terms of narrative meaning-making and comprehension, stemming from the possibility of comparing the original with the literary version. Owing to the limited scope of previous research, I maintain that there is a need for thorough investigation of the narrative dynamics and interpretative consequences of the narrative phenomenon under study — a challenge I take up in the following chapters.

<sup>12</sup>The same goes for Mortensen’s (2012) study, as she focuses on “notional” filmic ekphrases that have no counterparts in real life.

<sup>13</sup>Having said that, some of the articles do in fact touch upon the literary use of actual films.

As suggested above, my study also demonstrates that we are not merely dealing with hermeneutic and semantic qualities of the analysed texts. Instead, what is at stake here is the culturally-equipped mind of the reader whose task as an interpreter is intricately interwoven with other domains of culture that play a role in a literary narrative. In Bal's (1991) terms, literary texts bring to light the competence of human beings in "reading" images in another medium. Thus, my study reveals not only how audiovisual media appear in contemporary literary forms, but also how we, as readers and decoders of the surrounding reality, make use of and interact with various kinds of "cultural products". Thus, the study contributes to various fields that so far have explored the dichotomy between cinema and literature only from certain narrow perspectives, namely literary studies, interart studies, cultural studies, as well as reception studies.

Insofar as previous research on the chosen novels and on the film aspect in particular is concerned, there is great variation among the books. For *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *The Book of Illusions* by Auster, numerous articles have been written on both, and scholars have often investigated the role of cinema in these novels. Similar to the multiple analyses written about Puig's novel, *The Book of Illusions* has often been interpreted by juxtaposing the films described in the text with the primary narrative level. For example, Jesús A. González holds in his analysis of Auster's novel that the function of filmic recountings is to establish "relations of analogy, similarity, and contrast between the diegetic story and the hypodiegetic ones" (2009b: 42).

By the same token, in his article on the reflecting role of films in *The Book of Illusions* James Peacock (2006) uses the notion of "framing". He argues that "[i]n tandem with [the protagonist's] commentaries, the films reflect, indeed enact, the permeable and amorphous frames through which every person and every action is viewed" (ibid.: 65). Subsequently, the way the narrative emphasises acts of re-telling and re-framing draws the reader's attention to both an illusionary capacity and an evident deception of these acts of framing. This is seen already in the title of the novel, which "boldly refers to itself as an aesthetic artifact" (ibid.: 54; see also González 2009b: 42). In a similar vein, Alan Bilton (2011: 239) takes up the interrelation and vacillation between dichotomies of reality/illusion, and absence/presence in Auster's novel.

Previous research on *The Book of Illusions* thus bears similarities to my general assumptions on the narrative function of cinema in fiction: the represented films serve as reflections at the diegetic level. What also happens is that the films give rise to metafictional contemplation by problematising the distinction between what is con-

ceived as “real” and “unreal”, of what “*our embodied understanding of the situation*” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 102; emphasis original) really is. I take these findings into consideration in my chapter on Auster’s novel. However, I find that too often academic attention has been placed on the potential unreliability of the character-narrator David Zimmer and hence of the narrative whole. This tendency is most likely associated with the novel’s conspicuous effort to amplify the nature of cinema as a medium that produces cunningly realistic simulations of the real world.

In defiance of these interpretations I claim that, although the narrative accentuates human deficiencies in perception through filmic comparisons, in Auster’s novel cinema has the capacity for healing the characters from a lapse that is much more serious than perceptual shortcomings and possible narratorial inaccuracies, namely the false conception that an individual is able to live with and endure absolute solitude. Besides pointing out the significance of this *intersubjective* aspect of human life as one of the novel’s main themes, I call the reader’s attention to narrative peculiarities that further reinforce the nature of the self. Specifically, in chapter three I argue that with the help of the less common “we” and “you” narration, which are used especially during recountings of films, the novel delineates its essential themes, namely the need of the self for the Other on the one hand, and the ultimate separation and autonomy of the self with regard to the external world on the other. To my knowledge (and surprise), no one has taken serious notice of the usage and function of these narrative techniques in *The Book of Illusions*.

With regard to DeLillo’s *Point Omega*, I see two major lines in the literary analyses. The first regards the work as a criticism of contemporary society. For example, in his article on the novel’s non-human vastness, Pieter Vermeulen (2015) sees *Point Omega* as representing “posthuman time”, an embodiment of geological and biological time which denounces globalisation and capitalism. Similarly, David Cowart (2012) and Liliana M. Naydan (2015) in their respective articles consider *Point Omega* as a commentary on 9/11 and hence a literary response to the violence and terror that plague the world.

As for Cowart, he holds that DeLillo’s novel epitomises the decline of civilisation and American imperialism after the terrorist attacks. Naydan, in turn, argues that DeLillo aspires to “reinvigorate[...] the novelist as a visionary rhetorical force that fosters contemplation via questions and advocates for compromise rather than extremism” (2015: 94). With regard to my study, what is relevant is Naydan’s contention that the author carries out his statement by portraying artistically altered media violence (see also Gourley 2013). Here I am referring to the way the novel



opens and concludes by describing an actual conceptual artwork, an installation by the Scottish artist Douglas Gordon (b. 1966) called *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) in which Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) has been slowed down to last twenty-four hours. Naydan calls attention to the re-mediated and sutured screen violence of the video installation and contrasts it with the characters' discussions about the war in Iraq that are devoid of concrete and calamitous manifestations of military acts.

Another line of research focuses more explicitly on the filmic dimension of the narrative as well as on the dichotomy between words and images. Here too we find a palpable criticism of what is depicted in the novel. In his article on the function of *Psycho* in *Point Omega* and in Manuel Muñoz's novel *What You See in the Dark* (2011), David Banash (2015) considers the literary use of the film (and Gordon's version) as a critique of the immersive power of cinema.<sup>14</sup> In general, research on *Point Omega* has thus far regarded the art in the novel rather negatively.<sup>15</sup>

To some degree, the aforementioned arguments are valid; furthermore, some of the claims are relevant and applicable to my own analysis. Having said that, I find it surprising that the majority of DeLillo scholars interpret his challenging and abstract work with the help of *other* abstract concepts. Previous research has not sufficiently illustrated how the novel constructs its meanings by setting forth a narrative game for the reader in which the representations of *24 Hour Psycho* play a pivotal role. As for the political "agenda" of the author claimed by certain scholars, DeLillo himself has denied any such intentions in an interview (DePietro 2010) published shortly after the novel's publication.

Thus, instead of regarding *Point Omega* primarily as an implicit response to the state of the present world or as a contemplation of the tensions between literature and visual media, I approach the work from a constructive and inferential perspective, which, among other things, sheds light on the topics discussed above. I do this by investigating the novel's narrative structure and the way it encourages the reader to see the narrative whole and its progression with the help of *frames*, both textual and ontological, that define the borders within the fictional world. In other words, I analyse how acts of framing — that of video, in particular — produce meanings in the novel, albeit undefined ones.

The final two novels analysed here, namely *The Understudy* by Nicholls and Lipson's *The Ice Cream Man*, have not previously been examined in academic texts. The lack of previous research gives me the opportunity to initiate a scholarly discussion

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<sup>14</sup>On the passivity of visual imagery, see also Naydan (2015).

<sup>15</sup>On art stalkers in DeLillo's works, see Herren (2015).

about the two books, each of which is engaging in a unique way.

## Outline of the Study

Chapter two, entitled “Reading for the Plot, Reading through the Film”, serves as the introductory and theoretical part of the dissertation. Here I provide a comprehensive presentation of various narrative and hermeneutic consequences of filmic representations in fiction. As mentioned, I use *Kiss of the Spider Woman* as an illustration of the theoretical discussion, as it contains all the essential characteristics related to the adoption and manifestations of cinema in fiction encountered in my later chapters. Besides making use of Puig’s novel as an example of the literary realisations of cinema, I also draw attention to the novels which are thoroughly analysed later on in separate chapters. Chapter two also lays the foundation for the theoretical concepts I employ in the subsequent analysis of each novel.

Chapter three, “Filmic Illusions of the Self and the Other in Paul Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*”, serves as the first analytical chapter. Here I focus on the narrative role of the film representations in Auster’s novel as indicative of the themes of the textual whole. Specifically, I investigate the ways in which the character-narrator’s proclivity for recounting films arises from the novel’s essential themes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Firstly, the stories of the narrated films touch on highly individual sensations, such as losing the self and loneliness, as well as the more intersubjective experiences, such as the capacity and crucial need to understand one another.

Secondly, and perhaps more intriguingly, the notions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity are evoked in the reader by means of the digressive uses of “we” and “you” narration in the recounting of the films. *The Book of Illusions* thereby arouses readers’ individual responses to the unfolding filmic story, and an intersubjective need to understand the mind of the “Other”. This experience is shared by the reader, the character-narrator and the filmic characters. Moreover, owing to the second-person point of view, the reader frequently finds it difficult to decipher whether “you” is addressed to a textual “you” or directly to the reader. As opposed to the difficulties in locating “you”, the plural first-person “we” used in verbalising the films is transformed into a communal experience of viewing the films shared by the character-narrator and his audience on both the textual and extra-textual levels.

The communicative aspects of narrative fiction as well as the reflective nature of filmic representations are both present in chapter four, entitled “The Novel Engulfed by the Video: Framing in Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*”. Here I turn my attention to

the novel's literary use of *24 Hour Psycho*. Unlike the usual narrative “bluntness” in Auster's fiction, *Point Omega* does not explicitly instigate representations of a video installation. Since the middle section of the novel deals with other matters entirely — two men in the middle of a desert discussing a documentary film project and later on the disappearance of the daughter of one of them — the narrative problematises the motivation for filmic storytelling while giving it prominence with regard to the narrative comprehension of the novel as a whole.

In my analysis I concentrate on the ways in which the textual frames of the narrative as well as the ontological framework that distinguishes between movie reality and storyworld reality are conspicuous, yet also are distressingly disrupted in the course of the novel. I demonstrate that the embedded *24 Hour Psycho* reflects and duplicates the crude aesthetics of the embedding level, a feature which makes the representations of the video *mises en abyme*, mirroring the semantic looseness of the novel proper. Furthermore, the sovereignty of the storyworld reality is severed by motifs and figures that are related to the video and the main characters of the horror film, as these motifs and figures are repeated on the diegetic level. In this fashion the narrative transforms the inserted video into a porous element. As a result, the video turns out to be a paradoxical *mise en abyme* that swallows up the narrative entity within which it is embedded.

Chapter five, “Film Entering the ‘Real’: Acting, Faking, and Possible Worlds in David Nicholls's *The Understudy*”, presents an alternative approach to the problematics of perpetual change between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema, the potential of film to devour a fictitious reality into which it is inserted, and the subsequent activation of narrative self-reflexivity and fictionality. The use of possible worlds semantics in examining Nicholls's romantic comedy, which frequently exploits the cultural archive related to the history of cinema, soon makes it clear that the storyworld is determined by filmic associations.

For one thing, the dream world in which the protagonist prefers to linger instead of in the somewhat harsh reality abound with references to films he has seen and liked. Since the protagonist hopelessly attempts to utilise gimmicks and scenarios derived from the far-too-idealistic context of cinema, the narration constantly brings into focus — and at the same time obscures — the line between the “true” state of affairs and the not-so-true ones. For another thing, because of the repeated analogies made between films and the actual events disclosed by the extra-diegetic narrator, films also function as metaphors for the acting, faking, and feigning taking place in the reality of the storyworld.

Chapter six, entitled “Filmic Indexes for a Traumatic Past in Katri Lipson’s *The Ice Cream Man*”, concludes my study of filmic representations in fiction, their narrative role, and the consequences of being parts of a literary whole. Similar to the other novels analysed, Lipson’s challenging book gives rise to the relationship between the reality of the storyworld and the aesthetic illusions generated by cinema. In the case of this novel, however, the line between the two mediums has disintegrated for good. The narration makes it impossible for the reader to construe a coherent and realistic storyworld, as the interrelations between the characters residing on discrete narrative levels remain unresolved and hence impede clear distinctions between the filmic and the diegetic levels.

I approach the inferential obstacles set out in *The Ice Cream Man* with the concept of “indexicality”. I am aware of the origin of the term “index” in semiotics — a term coined by Charles Sanders Peirce, which designates one possible way in which a sign may refer to its object — and thus in my treatment I transform the term into a “travelling concept”. In this study, “index” stands for a trace of something that is not articulated or present, while “indexicality” is understood as an indirect mode of literary representation through which the reader is able to discern the hidden and unspoken meanings of the narrative. These meanings motivate the narration in the first place and have an enormous impact on a storyworld and its characters. I demonstrate how the narrative employs indexicality, especially in terms of cinema, with films depicted serving as crucial indexes for what remains unsaid on a narrative level. I show that filmic indexes also function on the diegetic level, as the characters reflect and even enact their lives, both past and present, via cinema. Ultimately, I argue that the incongruity and epistemological instability of the storyworld model a traumatised mind of a film director whose film inaugurates the narrative, while ultimately turning out to be a pivotal index for the novelistic whole.

I complete my study by summarising my findings (“Conclusions”). I recapitulate the ways in which the literary use of cinema has greatly affected and continues to affect the narration and the subsequent reading experience. I stress that, by inserting cinema into their narratives, the authors of these novels exemplify the complexity of the relationships established between such concepts as the original and the copy, the real and the imaginary, and ultimately, between life and art. As previously mentioned, I also attempt to outline a rough framework for a poetics of filmic representation in literature.

## Chapter 2

# Reading for the Plot, Reading through the Film

In this chapter I take a closer look at the theoretical concepts and methods I have appropriated for my study. At the same time I thoroughly investigate essential features and consequences of the literary use of film in fiction. As mentioned, I demonstrate how these concepts can be applied and how the narrative dynamics of filmic insertions into fiction is realised in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. However, I also anticipate the case studies that follow by linking the methods and narrative qualities to the four novels.

I begin by ruminating on the function of films in fiction from the perspectives of communication and motivation related to representing films as part of a textual whole. Notwithstanding the differences between the narrative situations<sup>1</sup> established in the novels and their diverse literary uses of films, the novels set out an intricate communicative framework in which incentives for narrating films are crucial. As for the reader,<sup>2</sup> he or she enters the act of rendering and sharing filmic representations and thereby becomes aware of the communication between tellers and listeners participating in the dialogic process of “narrative production and interpretation” (Brooks 1994: 50).

Thus, representations of films in fiction emphasise the act of communication and its motivations, regardless of the form and nature of the narrative situation. In terms

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<sup>1</sup>By “narrative situation” I refer to the way in which the events of the story are organised and presented in the narrative.

<sup>2</sup>In this study “the reader” refers to the *implied reader*, a concept coined by Wolfgang Iser (1978), which takes into account both the role of the reader and the properties of the text in the construction of textual meaning. In Iser’s words, the implied reader stands for “an expression of the role offered by the text”, which is “the conditioning force behind a particular kind of tension produced by the real reader when he accepts the role” (ibid.: 36; see also Iser 1983: xii).

of communication, to embed a film in a new medial context is to frame an act of communication within another (see Yacobi 2000: 719). Since all representation is determined by certain communicative goals, the reader most likely endeavours to seek incentives for filmic re-contextualisations on the level of narration as well as on the level of the implied author. As will be seen in the following section, Puig's novel embodies the narrative outcome of (re-)telling films as an interactive and dialogic act by palpably illustrating the functions, consequences, and catalysts as well as the reactions to sharing film stories in fiction.

After scrutinising the question of communication in terms of storytelling and its narrative motivation, I turn my attention to a phenomenon implied in the first section, namely that of film reflecting the essential features and meanings of the literary whole in which it is embedded. The conception of filmic representations as mirroring, or, *mise en abyme* structures, predicates an existence of a textual framework in which film as a separate artwork is inserted or embedded within the totality of a text. In other words, the inclusion of another medium within a literary text evokes and creates borders between the framing parts, which represent the reality of the storyworld, and the framed parts, which represent the imaginary realm of cinema.

Intriguingly, while underscoring the ontological differences between the primary narrative level and the subordinate film level, all the novels studied here also denote the instability of the very framework itself. In other words, the films not only affect the storyworld, but also “enter” into its reality in a fashion that reverses the ontological hierarchy between (fictional) reality and an embedded artefact. Thus, in the third section I investigate the realisations and consequences of the inconsistency between the storyworld regarded as “real” and the films connoting “unreal”, a paradox that is perpetually taking place in the analysed novels. We also find that the novels use motifs of acting and faking to reinforce the vacillation between ontological entities. Simultaneously, the question of “what constitutes reality” turns out to be crucial in most of the novels under study. This encourages me to consider the outcome of the incongruity created between the supposed reality of the storyworld and the imaginary level of cinema within that fictitious reality.

In the final section I ruminate on the concept of “representation” itself and its adaptability to the literary manifestations of cinema. I conclude the theoretical chapter by suggesting that literary films epitomise the dynamic *performativity* which characterises art — and our engagement with it — in general. To conclude, in the course of the preceding chapter we shall see that the literary use of films allows for complex playfulness within fiction, a narrative process that compels us to look more closely

at our ways of comprehending art, external reality, and ourselves as we interact and seek to come to terms with the surrounding world.

## Sharing Film Stories: Motivations, Responses, Consequences

At the outset, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* foregrounds the importance of relating and conveying stories in the novel, as it begins in the midst of storytelling:

- Something a little strange, that’s what you notice, that she’s not a woman like all the others. She looks fairly young, twenty-five, maybe a little more, petite face, a little catlike, small turned-up nose. The shape of her face, it’s... more roundish than oval, broad forehead, pronounced cheeks too but then they come down to a point, like with cats.
- What about her eyes?
- Clear, pretty sure they’re green, half-closed to focus better on the drawing. She looks at her subject: the black panther at the zoo, which was quiet at first, stretched out in its cage.

(KSW: 3)<sup>3</sup>

Gradually, the reader begins to comprehend the nature of the situation he or she is witnessing: that the story told on the diegetic level is based on a movie, that the storyteller is a man called Luis Molina locked in an Argentinian prison, and that the listener and commentator on the unfolding story is his cell mate, Valentín Arregui.

From the very beginning, the narrative creates an intimate setting for relating the film plot. An absence of an omniscient narrator accentuates the intimacy of oral filmic storytelling; the novel is mainly comprised of the dialogue between the two inmates. Here, as will be shown elsewhere in the study, the act of recounting films establishes a pivotal impetus for narrative transactions between storytellers and listeners on different levels of the narrative. More often than not, this interplay between the participants turns out to be a complex interaction that reinforces the incentive and the narrative role of the recounted films. Peter Brooks has described

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– A ella se le ve que algo raro tiene, que no es una mujer como todas. Parece muy joven, de unos veinticinco años cuanto más, una carita un poco de gata, la nariz chica, respingada, el corte de cara es... más redondo que ovalado, la frente ancha, los cachetes también grandes pero que después se van para abajo en punta, como los gatos.

– ¿Y los ojos?

– Claros, casi seguro que verdes, los entrecierra para dibujar mejor. Mira al modelo, la pantera negra del zoológico, que primero estaba quieta en la jaula, echada. (BMA: 9)

these “channels of communication” as an act of transmission and transference in which “the listener enters the story as an active participant in the creation of design and meaning” (1994: 51). Along with Molina’s intradiegetic narratee in the cell, the reader too is invited to take part in the dialogic act of narrating films, as he or she enters the “transferential space” (ibid.) of sharing and interpreting filmic stories in order to grasp their meaning for the text as a whole.

The novels analysed here create differing narrative transactions between tellers and receivers on discrete narrative planes. In this fashion they emphasise their intricate communicative construction and the need for different channels of communication in the reader’s process of narrative comprehension. As for Puig’s novel, Valentín serves as an audience within the reality of the storyworld who actively contributes to the process of meaning-making with Molina the filmic storyteller, a role that, for Brooks, “provokes a situation of transmission and transference” (ibid.: 89; see also Maclean 1988: 72). Thus, the dialogues revolving around the films connote “the dialogic relation of narrative production and interpretation” (Brooks 1994: 50), as Valentín endeavours “ ‘to discuss the thing a little, as you go on with it’ ” (KSW: 16).<sup>4</sup>

Besides the dialogue between the inmates, there are footnotes to the primary text, which present different theories explaining first the origins of homosexuality and subsequently the emergence of sexual identity in general. Furthermore, Molina’s discussions with the prison warden provide disconcerting information about Molina. The way the supplementary material creates secondary narratives that run along with the main text embodies the play of hidden, indirect, and/or ambiguous voices and messages that operate on different narrative levels.

A closer look at the narrated films and other textual material in the novel shows that, even if the reader may initially identify with the position reserved for Valentín, he or she gradually becomes aware of the differences between the narratees who reside on different levels and the messages conveyed to them.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the functions of the verbalised films appear multifarious, as their narrative significance varies according to who is doing the telling and to whom: Molina to Valentín, or, the implied author to the authorial audience.

Auster’s *The Book of Illusions*, for its part, constructs a hypothetical audience for the filmic recountings by the character-narrator, David Zimmer. By means of compelling rhetoric, David encourages the reader to participate in the act of seeing the film he is verbalising. The movies recalled and recounted by David serve as a precon-

<sup>4</sup>“[...] [C]omentando un poco la cosa, a medida que vos avanzás” (BMA: 22).

<sup>5</sup>On an “extra dimension” of the films constructed by the author, see Merrim (1987: 276).



dition for the events in the novel: without the films there would be no story to tell. Besides functioning as the primary incentive for writing the story which comprises the novel in the first place, the films also accentuate essential questions about the relationship between the self and the Other, topics on which the narrative primarily focuses.

Thus, the way in which the films are recounted emphasises the main themes of Auster's novel, namely subjectivity as individuality and intersubjectivity as something shared between people. In spite of the differences between the novels by Puig and Auster with reference to "channels of communication" and themes, the reader finds in both works that messages for the narrative audience diverge from those intended for the authorial audience by the implied author. Furthermore, in both novels the act of narrating films serves as an impetus for the reader to discover implicit complexities related to the act itself.

*Point Omega* presents a somewhat different interplay between agents in the narrative exchange, yet in this case too the represented film, or more precisely, video, greatly affects the reader's understanding of other parts of the novel and hence contributes to comprehension of the narrative whole. Although DeLillo's novel differs from Auster's straightforward narration by setting up an intricate and perplexing textual framework in which the relations between narrative parts are not explicitly explained or motivated, both novels invite the reader to discover thematic, narrative, and aesthetic conformity between the inserted audiovisual material and the textual whole. All in all, both novels, as well as *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, encourage the reader to search for the motive to narrate the films by making him or her ask: how are these films related? Why does the narrator — either the character-narrator of *The Book of Illusions* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, or the extra-diegetic narrator in *Point Omega* who resides outside the diegetic level — tell the specific and/or implicit audience in the fiction, and ultimately the reader, this particular filmic story?

As opposed to the novels by Puig, Auster, and DeLillo, which touch upon a strictly limited number of films, in *The Understudy* by Nicholls the use and motivation for filmic representations turn out to be somewhat different. Brief and metaphorical references to famous films and film genres serve as an entrance into the mind of Stephen, the protagonist, a Molina-like cinephile, who is hopelessly idealistic and has a proclivity for blurring reality with his private dream world, which is largely determined by the films he has seen. Thus, unlike DeLillo's novel, which perplexes the reader with the seemingly unjustified and mutilated imagery of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Nicholls's romantic comedy plays with readers's horizons of expectation by frequently

compelling them to draw on their knowledge of cinema to decipher the meaning and repercussions of awkward situations in which the hopeless protagonist frequently ends up.

Even though *The Understudy* employs cinema in a deviant fashion and for a different outcome as opposed to the other three novels, the narrative purpose and communicative transactions are in principle identical. Apart from establishing a cinematic lens through which the protagonist perceives a less glamorous reality, the extradiegetic narrator, who initially provides access to Stephen's inner life, frequently makes use of filmic similes to bring to light the difference between the gloominess of the storyworld reality and the cinematic "schemas" that Stephen hopelessly applies to that world. By repeatedly resorting to metaphors derived from the phantasmical world of cinema, the narrator emphasises the superficial and deceitful nature of certain characters in the novel who crave for stardom both on the theatre stage and on the cinema screen. Furthermore, by repeatedly juxtaposing the shallowness and pretence emblematic of those characters with terminology derived from acting and performing in audiovisual media, *The Understudy* underlines the way in which reality itself is furnished with elements signifying that some kind of representation is always taking place, be it make-believe or pure pretence.

Akin to the blurred line between the fictive reality and the embedded realm of cinema created by the filmic parallels and references that permeate *The Understudy*, Lipson's *The Ice Cream Man*, the last novel analysed here, also deals with the difficulties in discerning the line between the storyworld reality and the imaginary world represented in the form of cinema. Once again, films function as a "smoke screen" through which characters are projected and from which they gain a powerful impetus for living and defining their lives. Whereas in *The Understudy* the narrative accentuates the palpable difference between the cinematic dream world and the storyworld's more mundane state of affairs by playfully blurring the border between these two ontological entities, *The Ice Cream Man* irrevocably subverts these borders with distressing consequences. Thus, the reader's bafflement that sets in in the course of DeLillo's novel is similar to the result of *The Ice Cream Man's* use of cinema to highlight its narrative significance and simultaneously to obscure those implicit meanings.

Similar to the filmic parallels evoked in *Point Omega*, in Lipson's novel the characters residing on the filmic level merge with the ones inhabiting the primary narrative level, that is, the reality of the storyworld. In this case too the desire to become the "filmic Other" comes to regulate the behaviour of the characters and the progression

of the unfolding narrative. Since the conclusion of Lipson's novel remains open and thus resonates with the unsolved mysteries of *Point Omega*, a tendency to adopt filmic identities in both novels steers the narrative comprehension of the textual whole and turns out to be a decisive factor in the reader's interpretation of the work's essential meanings. To sum up, in all the analysed novels the way in which films are told, re-told, and re-presented as part of the narrative whole accentuates the importance of recounting films in creating unique acts of "transmission and reception" (Brooks 1994:51) within and beyond the textual level. Furthermore, the reader is encouraged to recognise the significance of the narrated films themselves with regard to the literary whole.

Besides serving a crucial function in terms of transmission, the narrative role of cinema is also seen in the way these novels are structured. For example, in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* the reader soon learns that the narrated films create a certain pace and rhythm for the narrative progression. The narrative revolves around filmic stories, and the films recounted and discussed in Puig's novel provide a feasible site for conversation between two very different persons: Molina is a highly emotional, seemingly simple, and politically passive character who endeavours to "live for the moment" (KSW: 27),<sup>6</sup> whereas serious-minded and sceptical Valentín strives for rationality in all his actions by having dedicated his life "to political struggle, or, you know, political action" (KSW: 27)<sup>7</sup> and by refraining himself from "sensual gratification" (KSW: 28).<sup>8</sup> Despite the dissimilarities between the inmates, it is the films that bring them closer to one another as the discussions initially based on narrated films turn out to touch upon more personal issues.

In the course of the filmic stories the reader is also able to grasp the implicit motives for the narrating films. The first film to be narrated in the novel, *Cat People* (1942) by Jacques Tourneur, provides a basis for the reader's knowledge of the characters. In retrospect, we understand that it serves as Molina's first attempt to arouse sympathy in Valentín. The second film, called "Destino",<sup>9</sup> is an emulation of Nazi German propaganda films of the late 1930s and early 1940s. It deepens Molina's essential characteristics, especially his love for beauty and happy endings as well as his tendency to escapism and his apolitical attitude. Furthermore, telling the story of "Destino" results in the inmates' first disagreement, as Valentín resents the film and,

<sup>6</sup>"-[...] ¡[V]iví el momento!" (BMA: 33).

<sup>7</sup>"-[...] [U]na lucha política, o bueno, actividad política" (BMA: 33).

<sup>8</sup>"-[...] [L]os placeres de los sentidos" (BMA: 33).

<sup>9</sup>In discussing fictive films presented in the novels, I use quotation marks to separate the fictive films from the real films.

offended, Molina is reluctant to go on telling it.

After the quarrel and as an act of self-consolation, Molina decides to narrate a film by himself, “ ‘one you wouldn’t like, totally romantic’ ” (KSW: 98),<sup>10</sup> namely *The Enchanted Cottage* (1945) by John Cromwell. This romantic melodrama emphasises Molina’s hope for and belief in a better future, although his spirits become low in the course of his filmic monologue: “ ‘I think I’m becoming horribly depressed’ ” (KSW: 103).<sup>11</sup> To entertain Valentín, who suffers from terrible stomach aches, Molina decides to recount “Le Mans”, which is “ ‘one of those films men usually go for, that’s why I picked it... for you, since you don’t feel so well’ ” (KSW: 114).<sup>12</sup> Perhaps in more or less conscious revenge for Valentín’s previous resentful reaction to “Destino”, Molina daringly touches upon Valentín’s bourgeois background and other sore spots in the life of the young leftist activist in his telling of “Le Mans”. Subsequently, Valentín uses elements of the narrated film by engaging in reflections of himself in the form of an inner monologue. Simultaneously, he confirms indirect assumptions which Molina made about his background in recounting “Le Mans”.

In the course of Molina’s re-telling of *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), another film directed by Jacques Tourneur, Valentín begins to long for the true object of his affection, a bourgeois girl named Martha. Later, the inmates end up sharing a bed. The last film narrated by Molina, “The Mexican Movie”, which imitates syrupy old melodramas, is a hard one for him to pass on, as both men know he will be set free the next day. Thus, the sad love story corresponds to their coming separation and the eventual tragic events that will occur at the novel’s end.

To conclude, I have shown here that the narrative role of the films in Puig’s novel is closely connected with the narrative composition, which renders the films and the diegetic events “simultaneous activities” (Perelmuter 2007: 51). It will become clear that this conformity between narrative structuring and film representations which create a unique “transferential space” (Brooks 1994: 51) between tellers and listeners pertains to all the novels discussed in the following chapters.

As for the dialogic interaction between agents examined from another perspective, I argue that this interaction can easily be juxtaposed with the concept of *performativity*. To borrow Bal’s understanding of performativity in art, narrating films amounts to a performance as an act of “framing”, an intentional “activity”, which is “performed by an agent who is responsible, accountable, for his or her acts” (2002:

<sup>10</sup>“-[...] [A]lguna que a vos no te guste, una bien romántica” (BMA: 103).

<sup>11</sup>“- Me está viniendo una depresión bárbara” (BMA: 108).

<sup>12</sup>“- Es de esas películas que les gustan a los hombres, por eso te la cuento, que estás enfermo” (BMA: 118).

135).<sup>13</sup> By verbalising the films he has seen, Molina highlights his subjectivity as a storyteller, a position that makes him the centre of attention, and also makes his personal penchant for storytelling in a certain way inevitable. At the same time, Molina's renditions of the films emphasise the act of watching. By re-telling the films, he creates a sense of here-and-now, an impression of an audiovisual immediacy in which both Valentín and the reader are invited to engage, an effect that is further heightened by the use of the present tense.

Indeed, Bal has called attention to the social function of looking as such, a look that *acts* (Bal 2015), ranging from the images perceived in the storyworld and represented in the narrative to the extra-textual level of the reader. By means of a direct confrontation with the narrated filmic imagery, the audiences residing on both textual and extra-textual levels become viewers who are watching the film and a reproduction of the past in which the films have been seen in the reality of the storyworld. As Bal states, “[t]he viewer is the agent of performance” (2002: 186): he or she is “struck” by the “performative power” of the verbal enactment of a film, which compels him or her to participate in that performance, “to perform through and with the performers” (ibid.: 208). In this fashion, narrating films emphasises the subjectivity of the *reader* who perceives the literary renditions of cinema.

In *The Book of Illusions*, the notion of selfhood provoked by films and their recountings turns out to be crucial. In analysing Auster's fiction in general, Michelle Banks maintains that “the world's very meaning is located in the relationships, proximities, and correspondences among things, events, and persons” (2011: 149). In *The Book of Illusions* the lost self is propelled into the world and is located in that world by means of cinema and especially by the narrating of particular films. In other words, the act of looking at moving pictures both constitutes the self and equals looking at the world, as connections to the self, identity, and other people are reconstructed with the help of cinema.

As for the potential entailed in the aesthetic illusions generated by cinema, I agree with Mark Brown, who in *Paul Auster* (2007) contends that in Auster's prose writings “[t]he power of fable, magic, imagination and storytelling” functions “as one way of locating the self and creating a coherent and stable sense of identity” (ibid.: 6). This pertains equally to *The Book of Illusions*, as “storytelling and illusion, particularly in the fictional films that inhabit the text, are a way of making sense

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<sup>13</sup>Unsurprisingly, “frames” and “framing” are also “travelling concepts”: for the sociologist Erving Goffman (1976: 10–11), “framing” was associated with the ways in which experience is organised in the mind of the subject.

of a series of seemingly random experiences and places, and shaping them into an identity” (Brown 2011: 221–222). As I previously argued, literary renditions of films both establish a space for self-rumination and set in motion sensations of subjectivity on both textual and extra-textual levels, sensations that come to exemplify the main themes of Auster’s novel.

Then again, we also have to take into account aspects that epitomise less amicable motivations behind the storytelling. According to Marie Maclean, “[n]arrative performance [...] involves an intimate relationship which, like all such relationships, is at once a co-operation and a contest, an exercise in harmony and a mutual display of power” (1988: xii–xiii). Maclean repeats the well-known fact that stories and narrating are never innocent (see Chambers 1984: 7). To a certain degree, all the novels studied in this thesis remind the reader of the power of “narrative seduction” (ibid.: 52) and “intelligent storytelling” (Jahn 2003: 204), which epitomise “the teller’s ability to adapt the story to the pragmatic requirement of the narrative situation” (ibid.).

In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Molina, well aware of the magic of movie tricks, or *la trucos del cine*, more or less consciously tries to seduce his singular audience by recounting films that conform to present needs (see Bacarisse 1988: 103). With respect to Valentín, who is unfamiliar with the films related in the novel, Molina occupies an authorial position as a storyteller (see Perelmuter 2007: 42–43). The asymmetrical situation exposes an epistemological aspect of storytelling: Molina possesses information Valentín does not have. Thus, Puig’s novel testifies to Brian McHale’s observation that filmic references in postmodern fiction serve as a “master-trope for control” (1987: 130). Furthermore, the unfolding “narrative seduction” taking place in prison transcends the textual level, as the reader is also positioned as a listener who is expected to be “captivated” by the filmic stories. There is one more aspect which complicates the novel’s general scheme: it remains unclear whether Molina has fabricated films that have no referent in the actual world (i.e. “Destino”, “Le Mans”, and “The Mexican Movie”) solely for the present communicative act in order to reach his goal.<sup>14</sup> Put differently, movie stories problematise referentiality and veracity and hence compel the reader once again to recall the larger communicative framework of the novel.

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<sup>14</sup>To my knowledge, the hypothesis that Molina invents the fictional films has been brought up by only a few scholars, such as Pamela Bacarisse (1988). However, not even she analyses the narrative consequences of this possibility.

In the four novels of this study we find that representations of films epitomise epistemological (and referential) questions in various ways. Furthermore, the problematisation of knowledge in the novels often entails voyeuristic undertones. In other words, by narrating films, the novels illustrate that the desire to *see* is closely related to the desire to *know*. Puig's work epitomises the interaction between the two mediums by making Molina admit that he occasionally "‘embroider[s] a little’" (KSW: 18)<sup>15</sup> and justifies these enhancements by perspective alignment: "‘No, I’m not inventing, I swear, but some things, to round them out for you, so you can see them *the way I’m seeing them*’" (KSW: 18; emphasis mine).<sup>16</sup> Thus, Molina endows the (re-)presented films with such communicative force and significance that the act of narrating films overtakes the meaning of the original referents.

In the case of *Point Omega*, the dualism between knowing and seeing produces distressing undertones, as the reader may be unwilling to enter into the "contractual relationship" (Maclean 1988: 72) established and offered by the narrative. In chapter four I demonstrate that epistemological and simultaneously voyeuristic complexities derive their most powerful impetus from the representation of the haunting *24 Hour Psycho*, as the reader is forced to watch the disturbing visual imagery from the view point of a potential killer.

As regards questions related to epistemology and seeing in more abstract terms, we have to bear in mind that (filmic) storytelling entails and underscores what is left *unsaid* on a discourse level. I shall demonstrate that in the analysed novels the "unspoken" is closely associated with the representations of films and provides a significant justification for their literary usage. As for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Ricardo Piglia has aptly remarked in his analysis that "*Kiss of the Spider Woman* is developed through the opposition between 'tell me all' and 'don't tell me anything'" (2007: 22). Indeed, filmic stories provide an accessible site for secretly conveying and changing ideas and truths about the self that otherwise are difficult to utter. This is especially clear in the way Molina distorts the original movie stories in his verbal renditions, and how these versions engender noticeable affinities between himself and the main female characters of the re-narrated films. For example, the reader familiar with *Cat People* cannot help but notice striking incongruities between Tourneur's classic horror film and Molina's reformulation.

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<sup>15</sup>In the original, Molina talks about "explaining": "– [...] de algún modo te las tengo que explicar" (BMA: 25).

<sup>16</sup>– "No, yo no invento, te lo juro, pero hay cosas que para redondeártelas, que las veas como las estoy *viendo yo*" (BMA: 25; emphasis mine).

Specifically, Molina endeavours to make the main female character, Irena, more sympathetic in Valentín's eyes and hide the less charming portrayal of her as the vengeful *femme fatale* of the original film. As the reader learns in the course of the novel that Molina has been incarcerated because of his homosexuality, it is not difficult to discern an affinity between him and Irena, as they share the tragic scourge of persecution, which prevents them from acting freely in their lives. With the help of a re-constructed Irena, Molina spells out his resentment at being perceived as different: like him, Irena is stigmatised by a curse and feels unfit for the surrounding reality which is unable to tolerate her. Seen in this way, Molina, by moulding the story of *Cat People* and its curse-stricken Irena in particular, indirectly relates his own feelings about sexuality and the problems it has created for him in an Argentina led by a right-wing junta.

The example of *Cat People* shows that, on the level of the storyworld characters, the films are used to speak about the self to another person. The films in Puig's novel serve as an implicit communication system, a "repository of the unspeakable, [a] vehicle for what would otherwise remain unsaid" (Merrim 1987: 279). As for the reader, by interpreting films that are part of a literary narrative, he or she is able to apprehend what is left unsaid, yet underlies the narrative development. What remains unspoken in the narrative is often implied by the related films, which encourages the reader to seek clarification from these insertions. Besides serving as an alternative medium for transmitting ineffable thoughts, ideas, and desires to the listeners, narrated films also serve as a reflective basis on which self-rumination can be established, a factor I previously pointed out in the case of *The Book of Illusions*. In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, this is apparent in the inner monologues related to films, such as Valentín's vague speech, which is loosely based on "Le Mans", and Molina's self-narration of Cromwell's *The Enchanted Cottage*.

As for the novels studied in the following chapters, *The Book of Illusions*, *Point Omega*, and *The Ice Cream Man* in particular epitomise the unspoken through filmic representations. In Auster's novel, the recounted movies denote the ineffable, which emanates from tragedies experienced by both David as the character-narrator and Hector as the artist whose presence in the novel is felt chiefly via the movies directed by him or in which he acts. For David, the narrated films serve as the channel through which the unspeakable can be processed and conveyed to his audience. Thus, by means of verbally "showing" films instead of the more direct mode of telling, David is able "to display the imaginary and the unspeakable" (Meurer 2011: 178).



As for DeLillo's perplexing novel, spiritual and even sublime aspects of watching the video indicate how visual art expresses the inexpressible in the narrative. Similar to Hector's films narrated by David in *The Book of Illusions*, the verbalisations of *24 Hour Psycho* are entangled with an appalling trauma that is about to take place on the primary narrative level. DeLillo has frequently made use of art in his prose writings to convey the indescribable (see Hugonnier 2011: 276). In the case of *Point Omega*, unnarrativity and the disintegration of emplotment, which characterise Gordon's conceptual art video, encourage the reader to regard the video as an artistic replica of the "unfathomable" that prevails in the reality of the storyworld.

Compared to the other novels, *The Ice Cream Man* conspicuously revolves around the unspoken traumas of the past. Here too the secondary narrative level of film provides a significant semantic dimension through which the reader can better decipher the obscure reality of the storyworld. Like the eerie imagery of *24 Hour Psycho* in *Point Omega*, the filmic level in Lipson's *The Ice Cream Man* foregrounds the aesthetic of the narrative construction and its comprehension.

I have demonstrated in various ways how the analysed novels employ films as part of their narration. We have seen that rhetorical motivations for making use of cinema within fiction vary and that the consequences are diverse, both in terms of films proper as well as in narrative situations and the characters affected by them. I have shown that, due to their status as intra- and intertextual material, literary representations of films have to accede to underpinnings that regulate literary creation and its communicative goals.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the narrated films make explicit use of the complexity of the "channels of communication" found in their novels and the framework in which the represented films have distinctive functions for receivers residing on different levels: the storyworld inhabited by the characters, the discourse level and its various narrators, and subsequently the level of the reader who interprets the literary whole.

Besides evincing various ramifications of the literary appropriation of the filmic medium, the cultural stock of cinema in general, as well as particular films, I have shown how films influence the reality of the storyworld and the characters in particular. We have seen that, apart from providing a crucial inferential guide for the reader, films also serve as hermeneutic tools within the storyworld for the fictional persons themselves. The literary examples given above testify to the narrative power of films and cinematic storytelling "to change human situations" (Chambers 1984: 7). Despite the efficacy of the films in the novels analysed here, the responses to and

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<sup>17</sup>On rhetorical aspects of re-framing visual material in fiction, see Yacobi (2000: 720; 1995: 640).

outcomes of filmic representation often delineate the significance of the narrative situation itself and its potential consequences in the storyworld at the expense of what is told.

Earlier, Maclean underlined the importance of “the *saying*” at the cost of “[w]hat is said” (1988: 7; emphasis original), which characterises narrative transactions that stage “an interaction which [...], involves purpose, energy, and effect as well as the ‘message’ conveyed” (ibid.). As for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Ross Chambers pointed out that it serves as an example of “the contrast between storytelling that is worthless in its content and the situation that endows it with vital human significance” (1984: 7). By the end of the novel, the lives of both inmates have changed. Valentín as the listener is more inclined to share his life with Molina the storyteller who, for his part, has learned from his cell mate to be conscious of the value of life outside his immediate surroundings. Thus, the significance of the narrated stories which have stimulated discussions between the two men is seen in the way they “verify and validate the reception of the narrative” and “mark the difference that narrative makes” (Brooks 1994: 87). Now we also see that the communicative functions of the filmic insertions blur the line between narration and description. The novels’ representations of films confirm a view in which the context itself determines the nature of the utterance as either a description or a narration (see Herman 2009: 91; Sternberg 1982), and hence reveals the instability and irrelevance of the opposition produced in discourse (see Mitchell 1994: 204).

In the present section I have observed how the films inserted into novels affect both the narration and the subsequent narrative comprehension. Next, I turn my attention to the structuring of the novels that employ cinema, as I focus on the narrative frameworks created by the authors. Besides introducing frame theory, I explore how the narrated films turn out to serve as mirror texts, that is, *mises en abyme*, reflecting the reality of the storyworld and ultimately the novelistic whole. I take a closer look at the interaction between film as an *embedded* entity with regard to the embedding level by investigating the nature of the relationship between the two.

### **Embedded Films Mirroring the Literary Whole**

As discussed in the previous section, the first lines of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* anticipate the layered structure of the narrative by plunging the reader into the midst of a movie story that is being recounted by a character on a diegetic level. We saw that the beginning of the novel heightened the reader’s attention to filmic storytelling by re-

contextualising another medium as part of a (new) narrative situation. By “fram[ing] one act of communication within another” (Yacobi 2000: 719), Puig’s novel underlines a hierarchical subordination of narrative levels, the structure in which the novel is composed. Thus, besides elucidating the communicative system of the novel at the outset, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* simultaneously draws the reader’s attention to the borders that mark the difference between the embedded films and the reality of the storyworld, the fictional world in which the act of embedding, or framing, is enacted.

In this section my focus is on the relationship between the “framing” text and the “framed” text or the embedding level and the embedded, hypodiegetic level of the films. I investigate the function of the narrative framework in the four novels, all of which are comprised of a secondary narrative level of inserted films and a primary level in which the films are made, perceived, (re-)told, and recalled. Firstly, I explore this interaction between narrative levels by studying literary frames; subsequently, I continue my analysis with the help of the concept of *mise en abyme*, a term I use to scrutinise the level of filmic embeddings proper.

As for the concept of “framing” and “frames”, I treat them primarily as concrete and formal structures that are discernible in the text, as “physical codings of frames that occur in more or less prominent places” (Wolf 2006c: 296). With its roots in linguistics, social psychology, and cognitive theory (Bateson 1973; Goffmann 1976), frame theory is predicated on the idea that “all mental activity is ruled by cognitive *frames* [...], which in turn govern individual concepts and thus help us navigate through our experiential and communicative universe” (Wolf 2010: 60–61; emphasis original). Akin to the abstract (cognitive) frames we use in everyday situations, textual frames “have an interpretive, guiding and controlling function” (Wolf 2006a: 6) that provide the reader “instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame” (Bateson 1973: 161). Thus, apart from the most conspicuous examples of framings, such as openings and closings, textual frames encompass various instances in which something is made prominent in a literary text (see Caws 1985).

For example, the beginning of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* establishes a salient framework and simultaneously appears to lack an actual “opening frame”: as the novel begins *in medias res* devoid of clues that might illuminate the narrative situation, the reader is not prepared for the act of narrating a film.<sup>18</sup> In his introduction to *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media* (2006), Werner Wolf remarks that literary frame theory has not been very actively used or developed in recent decades

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<sup>18</sup>On the opening frame, see Wolf (2006b: 188); see also Wolf (2006c: 316) on postponed framing.

(2006a: 1; see also Wolf 1999). Here I contribute to the study of textual frames, especially in chapter four, in which I analyse the prominent structural framework established in *Point Omega*. On the whole, frame theory is a fruitful way to analyse the nature and the functions of film representations in fiction, as it provides a conceptual grid with which to investigate various narrative, ontological, and hermeneutical aspects of the narrative phenomenon.

It is worth noting here that textual framing exceeds the restricted conceptions of embedded tales or cyclically connected tales, also known as “frame tales” (see Wolf 1999: 100; Frow 1982). Wolf describes frame tales proper as

distinct parts [...] of fictitious (written) verbal stories, namely intradiegetic (fragments of) narratives that embed, by means of one or several secondary narrator(s) or narrator-character(s), one or more hypodiegetic text(s).

(2006b: 181)

By contrast, textual framing encompasses framings that do not necessitate narrative embeddings in strictly narratological terms. Thus, it is evident that the verbal representations of films discussed in the present study do not conform to the rigid definition of frame tales. As for Puig’s novel, there is no “shift in narrator and narrative level” (Nelles 1997: 132) into a filmic story. Conversely, there are “shiftings of levels of reality [and] existence” (ibid.: 134) that occur in narrating the films.<sup>19</sup>

Instead of pertaining to the category of frame tales, the act of embedding films in the novels amounts to what Wolf calls “intratextual framing” (2006a: 21). At the same time, inserted films also signify “heteromedial framing” (ibid.: 18): they mark a different, audiovisual mode of representation within a literary narrative and hence create “pictorial frames” (Wandhoff 2006: 222) in the text. Notwithstanding the lack of hierarchical subordination of narrators, representations of films in the analysed novels entail a crucial feature of frame tales, namely transposition to an ontologically lower level. In the following chapters I demonstrate the pivotal role of both the divide and the symbiosis between the “movie reality” and the storyworld reality, which characterises all the novels chosen for this study. Besides accentuating the framework that demarcates the division between the fictional reality and the imaginary realm of cinema, different kinds of frame-breakings breach both ontological and narrative levels in these novels. Indeed, many literary scholars have noted

<sup>19</sup>This has not discouraged Heffernan (2015: 6) from analysing the narrative structure of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* in terms of frame tales.

the inherent instability of and mediation between narrative frames (e.g. Frow 1982: 28; Wolf 2006a: 30–31). Similarly, in this study I show that the novels' proclivity for establishing prominent frameworks intriguingly and paradoxically gives rise to the rupture of those very frames (cf. Newman 1986: 154). This is seen in the way Puig uses film stories in his novel to highlight both the escapism that symbolises Molina's recounting of fantastic film plots in the gloomy cell and filmic infiltrations into the reality of the storyworld.

Here we come to the primary narrative incentives for the literary framing of films in fiction. Besides serving as a complementary and supportive entity, the filmic level may also be negating, controversial, and ambiguous with regard to the primary narrative level. In the latter cases, a literary narrative often endeavours to obscure the boundary between the storyworld reality and the movie reality. I demonstrate that the relation between the two narrative levels greatly varies among the four novels. In *The Book of Illusions*, the filmic plane principally functions as an iconic reference that generates both thematic similarities and more concrete parallels between discrete narrative levels. For example, the narrated films exemplify life's enigmas by juxtaposing the illusory nature of cinema with the human proclivity for misapprehensions. Recountings of films also reflect the tragic lives of the characters on the diegetic level. As in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, film serves as the imaginary Other who acts as a mirror of the self; then again, cinema also calls into question the nature of that self in the first place.

In *The Understudy*, I previously showed that the interaction between narrative levels chiefly hinges on the contrast between the two levels. In *The Ice Cream Man*, the relationship between narrative levels is more complex and difficult to decipher fully. Here the interrelation is indexical rather than iconic, as the films appear to involve traces of the storyworld reality, which the narrative portrays in a disconcertingly ambiguous fashion. Similarly, *Point Omega* sets out a narrative strategy in which a referential link between the recounted video and the diegetic level remains obscure. In both cases, however, iconicity also plays a role: in Lipson's novel certain characters are confident that their stories are told in a film that is being shot and subsequently represented in the novel. DeLillo, in turn, contrasts the diegetic characters with the filmic ones. Furthermore, in *Point Omega* the experience of the extreme aesthetics of the video installation determines the spatio-temporal sensations of the external reality felt by the diegetic characters.

The relationship between the narrative levels can also be considered in terms of metonymy. I argue that the representations of films in these novels ought to be

regarded as metonymic entities that reflect the true objects of desire behind the narrative acts. For example, in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* the melodramatic movies serve as “[c]oncrete representation[s]” of Molina’s actual yearnings and hence “[allow] for only a partial realization, a displacement or condensation of the object” (Maclean 1988: 141). As the filmic storyteller, Molina substitutes his true desire, a yearning for a “real man”, for the filmic stories in which women end up in violent affairs with the highly masculine men Molina adores. For him, films stand in for an imaginary alternative to the needed Other, “an Other which can be attained only in the partial form of the representative object, the image made concrete” (ibid.). As for *Point Omega* and *The Ice Cream Man*, in the following chapters I show that by representing an “unachievable whole” (ibid.: 142) with the help of cinematic metonymies, the centre of desire turns out to be empty, as the genuine motivations for these novels remain unconfirmed.

The examples above remind us that textual framing is closely associated with cognitive processes of including, excluding, bordering, centering, and focusing (see Caws 1985: 3) — activities that pertain both to textual and to extra-textual levels. Furthermore, framing entails visual and mental operations such as perception, conceptualisation, and interpretation. This is highly relevant in the case of representations of cinema in fiction: as I mentioned in the previous section, the novels frequently position the reader as a viewer of audiovisual “performances” and hence encourage him or her to interpret the unfolding narrative through the act of seeing. In this fashion, filmic verbalisations often engender “Peeping Toms” both within the text and without. Thus, the analysed novels frequently encourage the reader to discover a multiplicity of frames within the narrative and eventually *see through* them into something else, into a space in which narrative truth most likely resides.

On the whole, my study shows that the interaction between cinema and the primary narrative level encompasses multiple variations, ranging from striking resemblance to the most startling contrasts. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the relationship between the narrative levels in the novels is seen in terms of themes, form, and content, as well as aesthetics. Besides making use of the concepts of frames and framing, I also employ the term *mise en abyme* in discussing the filmic entity embedded (framed) in the narrative. I find *mise en abyme* applicable, as it exemplifies the narrative function of filmic insertions and their various manifestations in all the novels. In *The Mirror in the Text* (1989), Lucien Dällenbach defines *mise en abyme* as a “structural device” (ibid.: 8) analogous to (or contrasting with) the narrative on which it is constituted. In the case of filmic *mises en abyme*, the embedded level of

cinema reflects the higher narrative level in some way(s).

For example, we have seen thus far that the narrated films in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* grant the reader important access to the minds of the characters by throwing light on their features and thoughts, as well as their conceptions of themselves and each other. In the course of the novel Molina expresses his essential characteristics by narrating films, through which he reveals his homosexuality (his identification with female protagonists, his interest in aesthetic details), his fondness for romantic and escapist narratives (*The Enchanted Cottage*), and his willingness to sacrifice himself for his loved ones (“Destino”, “The Mexican Movie”). Valentín’s filmic monologues, for their part, touch on the unspoken taboos in his life, such as his wealthy background and his repressed desire for bourgeois living, and his vanity, initially discernible in his reformulation of “Le Mans”. Thus, the embedded level of films reflects the characters’ inner worlds and intentions and simultaneously provides the reader with new information on the diegetic level. In this way, films as *mises en abymes* “eschew mere translation”; rather, they provide the reader the chance at “double reading[s]” (ibid.: 46), as they conceal other, latent, and implicit meanings that the reader is required to grasp.

Besides serving as a dramatic catalyst for the discussions between the inmates and thereby illuminating their personalities, desires, hopes, and fears, cinema sheds light on the situation in which Molina and Valentín find themselves and how their unlikely friendship, and eventually their brief affair evolve. As we have seen, the narrated films reproduce the significant features of the main story “on another scale”, and subsequently increase the reader’s hermeneutic ability to “take it in” (ibid.: 56): the film plots reflect the main themes of the novel — (self-) deception, seduction, power play, and (dis)loyalty — and are in tune with the progression of the narrative itself.

The congruity between narrative levels is rather concrete, as the narrated films are to some degree actualised or otherwise reflected upon in the reality of the storyworld. To put it another way, the recurring themes of the narrated movies imbued with treason and subordination and in which defenceless yet vigorous women are destined for tragic fates duplicate the reality of the storyworld. This is conspicuous in the case of the melodramatic films *Cat People*, “Destino” and “The Mexican Movie”: forebodings sensed by the female protagonists anticipate the tragic outcome that is about to occur on the diegetic level of the storyworld, as Molina confronts his “cinematic death” and Valentín is tortured at the novel’s end. As films both illuminate and shape the narrative progression, they function as “miniature model[s]” (ibid.: 207 nt

10) for the novelistic whole in terms of themes, form, and content.

Dällenbach classified the various manifestations of *mises en abyme* into three categories. Owing to the great variation in my selected novels in the relationships between the embedded level of cinema and the embedding primary narrative level, it is not surprising that the filmic *mises en abyme* encompass all three categories. However, in chapter four I contend that Dällenbach's rigid classification does not entirely hold in these novels. On the one hand, the films used in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* can be seen as *mises en abyme* of the utterance, also called "fictional" *mises en abyme* by Dällenbach. This category of embeddings "summarizes or quotes the content of a story" (ibid.: 55) and "reflect[s] the result of an act of production" (ibid.: 75; emphasis original). Thus, the filmic level "generates the means to reflect back on the fiction and consequently gives rise to internal repetition" (ibid.: 55). This is manifest in the way the films narrated in the novel develop into internal mirrors for both the diegetic level and the characters themselves. These filmic *mises en abyme* thus operate on two levels, "that of the narrative, where it continues to signify like any other utterance, and that of the reflexion, where it intervenes as an element of metasignification, enabling the narrative to take itself as its theme" (ibid.: 44).

Similarly, in *The Book of Illusions* the detailed descriptions of films function as internal repetitions of the main themes and events on the primary level, namely the pivotal need for the Other, the tragic consequences of losing both the self and the other, and the subsequent endeavour to repair those relations. As I have previously remarked, the films also serve as a reflecting mirror for the characters in their comprehension and construction of the self. By generating analogies and echoes within the fictional world, Auster composes embedded structures "which fit inside each other like Chinese boxes" (Brown 2011: 234). As Auster's novel is overtly explicit in its employment of mirroring, which reflects independent parts of the narrative, the movies recounted by David serve as a showcase for Dällenbach's definition of "fictional" *mises en abyme*, as they "give the work a strong structure" and "provide a kind of internal dialogue and a means whereby the work can interpret itself" (1989: 55).

On the other hand, the films narrated in Puig's novel pertain to *mises en abyme* of the enunciation, as they "bring into focus the agent and the process of production itself" (ibid.: 75), that is, the act of narrating films and "the textual strategies of the speaking and organizing subject" (Maclean 1988: 83). According to Dällenbach, this category of *mise en abyme* provides an inferential model for the reader to decipher the novelistic whole in terms of creating and responding to the embedded level. In



the four novels analysed here, the ways of telling and reacting to the films in the reality of the storyworld serve as a blueprint for the poetics of the textual whole. In this study we encounter several “producer[s]” (Dällenbach 1989: 81) of movies and movie stories who are either involved in making a film or engaged in acts of viewing, verbalising, and reacting to films and film stories seen and/or heard.

Various encounters with cinema expose an interaction between “life” and “art” (see *ibid.*) that characterises all the novels. For example, the gloom with which Valentín anticipates the tragic end of *Cat People* recounted by Molina resonates with pessimistic expectations for their own lives: “ ‘I’d like it to last a little longer. And the worst thing’s that it’s going to end sadly, Molina’ ” (*KSW*: 37).<sup>20</sup> In chapter four, I will demonstrate that both the artistic creation of Gordon’s video in *Point Omega* and the characters’ responses to this installation reverberate with an obscure synergy established between the fictional reality and the embedded level of the film.

If we take a closer look at the narrative communicative structure as a whole in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, we see that the filmic embeddings belong to the third category of Dällenbach’s typology, namely *mise en abyme* of the whole code, or, a “metatextual” *mise en abyme* that mirrors the story itself and the way in which it is told (see Dällenbach 1989: 94). Throughout Puig’s novel, the films function as metatextual reflections operating as “ ‘instructions’ ” for “the reader to perform his/her task more easily” (*ibid.*: 99–100). This is manifest in the way the prison cell stands for the primary stage for the events that take place in the novel. The intimacy of the cell resembles that of chamber dramas and other types of plays that take place in a restricted space and with a limited number of characters. The narrative construction, then, compels the reader to interpret the narration through a framework of an intimate and/or melodramatic drama: the movie stories on a hypodiegetic level and the actual events taking place in the reality of the storyworld.

Interestingly, cinema as a metatextual *mise en abyme* delivers its most conspicuous manifestations in the most challenging novels investigated here, namely *Point Omega* and *The Ice Cream Man*. As pointed out earlier, both evade simple and straightforward interpretations. In the case of Lipson’s novel, the narrative construction imbued with gaps of meaning and irresolution amounts to such an irrevocable contradiction in the fictional world that it remains unclear what truly takes place in the storyworld reality or whether there even is such a reality. However, in both novels cinema serves as part of a meta-plot or an “isomorphic” model with which the reader can approach

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<sup>20</sup>“-[...] [Q]uerría que siguiese un poco más. Y lo peor es que va a terminar mal, Molina” (*BMA*: 43).

the profound significance of the narrative whole and simultaneously accept the difficulties in narrative meaning-making.

In *Point Omega*, the crude aesthetics of *24 Hour Psycho* repeats spatio-temporal conceptions and perceptions held and experienced by the characters. Similar to the video's slowed-down progression, which disrupts the narrativity and causality of the original horror film, the diegetic level of the narrative is disturbingly inconsistent, as it remains unclear what happens to one of the characters and whether the anonymous man watching the video installation is somehow responsible for the events. Thus, the deformed version of *Psycho* develops into an aesthetic and formal embodiment of the novel's narrative strategy, and hence grants the reader a directory with which to interpret discrete sections of the novel with the help of the embedded video.

In *The Ice Cream Man*, a structural homonymy between the narrative levels is created by the similarity between the titles of the novel and the film being made, "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín" — most likely, the film described in the novel around which everything mysteriously revolves in the reality of the storyworld. Furthermore, akin to *Point Omega*, the instability and inconsistency engendered in the course of Lipson's novel are closely linked to the structure and content of the films that are recounted. In both cases, then, the cinematic level is aligned with the unintelligibility and open-endedness of the novelistic whole. Paradoxically, by endorsing the general perplexity of the diegetic level, the embedded films give coherence to the narrative. Naturally, this kind of coherence does not enable the reader to resolve the novels' enigmas, but it does lend integrity and consistency without which the works would remain even more indecipherable.

The examples above confirm the broad range of filmic embeddings in fiction used to mirror the primary narrative level and subsequently the textual whole. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that one and the same filmic representation potentially has numerous functions as part of a literary text. Thus, I argue that, in my case studies, the categories coined by Dällenbach turn out to be as mercurial as the relationship between the embedded films and the embedding level.

Furthermore, the filmic *mises en abyme* discussed here reveal two distinct, yet interwoven aspects that characterise the phenomenon of relating films in fiction in general. Firstly, the presence of cinema within a literary text brings to light two frameworks, namely the *textual* frames I have discussed in this section and the *ontological* frames that separate the storyworld reality from the movie reality on a lower embedded level. Secondly, and as a consequence, the prominence of the frameworks implies that these are more or less subject to vacillation, in some cases even to explicit

violation between the narrative levels that represent discrete ontological entities.

In *The Book of Illusions*, the title of the novel initially casts doubt on the veracity of the narrated events. At the very outset, Auster's work reflects and refers to its own processes of narrative meaning-making.<sup>21</sup> Auster gives further prominence to the fictionality and self-referentiality of the literary text by utilising metaleptic narrative techniques that breach realistic lines between the minds and voices of the characters residing on discrete narrative levels. By subverting a clear and safe boundary between the "framing" diegetic level and the "framed" films, the act of narrating movies formally embodies one of the main questions considered throughout the narration: how can one know what is "real" and what is merely a figment of the imagination?

Whereas the porous nature of the relationship between the embedding and the embedded levels remains mostly metaphorical in *The Book of Illusions*, in *Point Omega* the interaction between the video installation and the storyworld reality turns out to be disconcertingly apparent, as *24 Hour Psycho* enters into and controls the world in which it is created, perceived, and discussed. Thus, the permeability of the movie screen unrealistically reverses the hierarchical subordination of the framing and the framed. This paradoxical situation compels the reader to ask what is actually being foregrounded in the novel: the video reflecting the events in the storyworld reality or the reality of the storyworld, which conforms to the imaginary realm of the video?

The example of *Point Omega* verifies a conviction held by William Nelles, namely that prominent frames often turn out to be "reversible or multivalent" (1997: 142; see also *ibid.*: 149). Furthermore, the metaleptic trespassing of the video validates Beth Newman's (1986: 159) argument that a frame is a sign of both safety and danger: although the reader remains unscathed by the horrors taking place within the narrative frames, he or she cannot help but experience the distress that results from the diffusive nature of the literary frameworks.

*The Understudy* and *The Ice Cream Man* in their respective ways play in a jesting manner with the volatile border that separates the narrative levels. Despite the salient disparities between the two novels, both build on the self-referential and self-reflexive functions of framing itself (see Wolf 2006a). Whereas Nicholls primarily concentrates on delineating the contrast between the fictional reality and the embedded "dream world" of cinema, Lipson problematises the distinction between the framing text and the framed film, and subsequently the ontological difference between them. This is evident in the indecision surrounding the "reality status" of chapter two in *The Ice Cream Man*: does it make a shift into a lower narrative level of

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<sup>21</sup>On fiction that dramatises its own operations, see Dällenbach (1989: 145).

the film, or does it portray instead actual past events in the reality of the storyworld?

We have seen that, by means of these literary “framings” of films that more or less stick out from the unfolding narrative, the novels create “different expectations and different effects” (Caws 1985: xi). As previously demonstrated in discussing the reflecting function of films in fiction as *mises en abyme*, the elements enclosed in the framed passage frequently “refer out” (ibid.: 3) to a larger unit or a whole text, and even contain “the essence of the work” (ibid.: xi). However, the filmic embeddings in the novels do not act merely as substitute and analogous entities to the primary narrative, but also are incorporated into the heart of the action taking place in the storyworld. Thus, as we have seen, the border between the storyworld and the films reflecting that world in which the films themselves are somehow present is blurred and even subverted.

For example, in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* Molina and Valentín as diegetic characters have a tendency to make themselves hypodiegetic characters within cinematic narratives. Furthermore, we have seen that the images of the self are not simply integrated and fused with the filmic representations. More important, these reformulated movie versions become active in the events taking place in the reality of the storyworld, as the tragic film stories are repeated and “commingle” (Perelmuter’s verb, in 2007: 43) with the actual lives of Molina and Valentín. In this respect, I find it difficult to agree fully with Caws, who holds that the relationship between framing narrative units and a framed tale ought to be seen as metonymic and that metonymic parts “force our deeper understanding of the unity and the ultimate meaning of what we are led to contemplate and reflect upon” (1985: 8). By contrast, through the examples taken from Puig’s novel, we see that Caws’s claim does not sufficiently describe the function of films as part of a literary narrative as something that potentially “contaminates” the reality of the storyworld.

Therefore, I claim that instead of a clear-cut metonymic rapport between the embedding primary narrative level within which framed/embedded parts are inserted, the relation is best defined as something that has a proclivity for undermining the stability of that unity. Owing to the disruption in a secured framework that demarcates an ontological border between the fictional reality and the imaginary level of cinema, we can discern several narrative and hermeneutic outcomes. First of all, a porosity and even aggressive violation of borders denoting distinct narrative spheres invoke the concept of metalepsis, that is, logically impossible crossings between different narrative levels (Genette 1980: 234–235). Genette’s definition has been expanded to encompass ontologically distinct levels in fiction. According to Wolf, metalepsis is

“a usually nonaccidental and paradoxical transgression of the border between levels or (sub)worlds that are ontologically (in particular concerning the opposition reality vs. fiction) or logically differentiated ([...], e.g. temporal or spatial differences)” (2009: 50). In fact, according to Nelles, *all* embedded narratives elicit, to some degree, metaleptic effects (1997: 157).

In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, metaleptic transgressions are not explicit; they require active textual processing on the part of the reader so that he or she fully grasps the characters’ mental trespass into the imaginary realm of cinema and the realisation of filmic characters and events in the storyworld. Then again, the way in which the films overstep the threshold separating the fictional reality and the embedded-level cinema in certain novels analysed in this thesis validates the significance of metalepsis as an inevitable result of filmic representations in literary fiction. For example, in *Point Omega* the hypodiegetic characters inhabiting the embedded level of *24 Hour Psycho* disturbingly duplicate the roles and human relations the reader perceives on the narrative’s primary level. As for *The Ice Cream Man*, I have pointed out that the novel constantly blurs the line between the storyworld reality and the embedded-level cinema to such an extent that the play between what is real and what is imagined develops into a dominant theme of the textual whole.

In this section I have shown that the proclivity of represented films for protruding from their textual and ontological frames pertains more or less to all four novels. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that these filmic intertexts irrevocably suggest metafictional aspects of fiction, as the literary representation of cinema amounts to “external information” which increases “the porosity” (Pavel 1986: 102) of a textual whole. This “interchange between the macrocosm and the microcosm that gives the text its internal vacillation” (Dällenbach 1989: 145) is also closely related to the fact that all the novels belong to the tradition of postmodern fiction. In discussing framing in postmodernist narratives, Wolf holds that they “tend to foreground the framed quality of discourse and at the same time undermine the difference of text and framing boundaries by multiplying or playing with framing” (2006a: 33). Indeed, by metaleptically surfacing from the lower narrative level onto the primary diegetic level, the inserted films evolve into self-referential and transgressive acts that impel the reader to keep in mind the artificial status of the literary whole, a subject frequently endorsed in postmodernism.

Thus, I find it nonsensical to discuss representations of films in fiction as embedded entities that “interrupt” the narration and merely reflect the primary narrative (cf. Nelles 1997: 138–139) without further narrative and inferential purposes and

outcomes. On the contrary, thus far we have seen that the films represented in the novels selected here greatly affect the narrative whole by steering its progression and the reader's comprehension. Next, I take a closer look at the repercussions that occur due to the violation of an ontological differentiation between the reality of fiction and the imaginary level of cinema.

### **Beyond the Fictional “Real”/the Filmic “Unreal” Divide**

In the previous section I demonstrated how all four novels accentuate both construction and a subsequent disruption of the textual and ontological frameworks that distinguish between the fictive reality and the imaginary realm of cinema. We saw that filmic embeddings reflecting the essence of the literary whole often create a situation in which cinema is incorporated into the fictional reality in a way that undermines its stability and coherence. In this section I focus on the consequences of these frame-breakings which problematise a clear-cut distinction between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema. In other words, I investigate the effects of constant “osmotic change” (Dällenbach 1989: 70) on the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema in terms of the reality of the storyworld and the reader's conception of that world. How does the continual presence of filmic representations affect the elementary properties of the fictional reality? And what impact does this have on the reader's understanding of the fictional reality in the chosen novels? My initial hypothesis is that, because the distinction between discrete ontological entities is set in motion in the novels, should we infer that it has an effect on the sense of the fictional reality experienced by both the characters and the reader?

What is more, I am inclined to argue that my case studies exemplify the shortcomings of such concepts as “actuality”, “veracity”, and “truthfulness”, and hence impinge on conventional and ubiquitous conceptions of a categorical divide between what is typically conceived as “reality” and its alleged opposite, the “imaginary”. We will see that the novels studied here contest common-sense realism, which supposes that “there is a real world of actual existing things that are then represented, more or less adequately, in various mediated forms” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 49). Specifically, the novels call into question the common-sense theory of language and truth according to which “[t]he world consists of objects and living beings that have certain properties and, at any given time, stand in certain relations to one another”; it follows that “[t]here is only one way the world is” and, as for language, it “consists of words expressing ideas that literally fit the world” and “communicate[s] such basic

truths about the world” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 119). By the same token, all the novels challenge the traditional notion of truth tantamount to “correctness, correspondence, fidelity and verification” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 59) that has long dominated Western philosophy and science, and still does.

Therefore, my aim here is to prove that the novels do not merely question such widely accepted dichotomies as real/unreal, factual/fictional, and truth/false — dichotomies intrinsic to the prevalent metaphysical tradition. What they also do is to efface these paradigms and render them invalid and insufficient, first with regard to attempts at defining what truly constitutes reality from the perspective of a subject whose interaction with the external world is irrevocably mind-dependent, and second from the perspective of a communal understanding of reality, that is, the shared sense of reality in which films are perceived, manufactured, and interpreted. I demonstrate that (narrative) truth and signification are frequently hidden between the lines or, more specifically, on the imaginary level of cinema in the analysed novels, as they force us to take into account illusory elements of reality that construct, define, and explain that reality. The novels and *The Book of Illusions* in particular remind us of “the role of human beings in producing the notion of truth” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 510); in other words, truth cannot exist apart from human minds to conceptualise situations or without a language to express those conceptualisations (see *ibid.*).

In *The Kiss of the Spider Woman*, an intricate interplay between the fictional reality and the imaginary realm of cinema can be discerned. By relating the film plots to Valentín, Molina simultaneously “lives” the films. By frequently occupying his mind with films he has seen, he is able to alleviate his miserable circumstances. As mentioned earlier, the opening lines of the novel also draw the reader’s attention to the difficulty of distinguishing the difference between the actual (what truly takes place in the fictional storyworld) and the fictional (fictive components regarded as such in the storyworld).

As for the more contemporary novels to be analysed below, I find it worthwhile to point out the dynamics between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema in *The Understudy*. Initially, the symbiotic interaction between the two levels in Nicholls’s novel is seen in the way the narration emulates modes of representation that are characteristically cinematic. Firstly, the reality of the storyworld is represented throughout by means of filmic metaphors. Secondly, the reader familiar with older cinema readily associates the narrative events and progression with certain genres of film comedies, especially those made in Hollywood in the 1930s and the

early 1940s. Although there is a constant risk that cinema will overrun and deteriorate the reality of the storyworld, I hold that fundamentally the novel endeavours to exhibit the artificiality of the line between “real” and “imaginary”. Thus, although *The Understudy* actively vouches for the thematic importance of what holds “true” and “actual” within the reality of the storyworld, the concept(ion)s themselves turn out to be utterly inconclusive and prone to ambiguity.

*The Understudy*'s protagonist, Stephen, reinforces this intimation by exploiting his cinematic knowledge in real-life situations. Thus, Stephen serves as a literary example of how cultural competence related to films is put to use in everyday thinking and action. In his frequent appropriation of filmic schemata in his life, Stephen embodies an interaction between reality and the media representations which human beings are inescapably involved with in present-day society. Like Molina, Stephen's proclivity for “filmic” behaviour underscores the role of the imaginary in constituting the subjective experience of reality.

As in Nicholls's novel, in *The Ice Cream Man* the reader witnesses a discernible interaction between the fictional reality and cinema. However, the way the filmic medium co-operates with the storyworld reality differs dramatically. Besides explicit representations of a film and a screenplay in Lipson's novel, the narrative engenders a reciprocal movement between the fictional reality and the imaginary level of cinema as the represented films are allegedly inspired by “true stories”. Thus, unlike *The Understudy*, which generated filmic emulations within the fictional reality, the narrative of *The Ice Cream Man* underlines how film is capable of emulating the storyworld reality.

Furthermore, as in the other novels, the filmic lens and the movie screen function as perspectives through which and on which the characters often see themselves. Apart from reflecting on one's life against the background of the filmic imagery, the characters create new life stories and transformed identities by dint of cinema. However, the interconnections made between “factual” and “fictional” in Lipson's novel are not that simple. I have previously pointed out that the narrative continually impairs the integrity of the fictional reality and makes it impossible for the reader to discern the line between the actual events and the imagined ones, a situation that amounts to a total disfiguration of the contrast between the fictional reality and the imaginary level of cinema.

Thus, in the novels studied here the fictional reality is often *re-mediated* through audiovisual media, which further complicates our understanding of what constitutes reality. As for the novelists, this holds true especially for DeLillo. Throughout his



literary career DeLillo has ruminated on how “environment-as-electronic-medium radically constitutes contemporary consciousness” (Lentricchia 1998: 415), as more direct and authentic experiences are replaced by electronically-mediated sensations which appear truly real (see Osteen 1998: xiii; see also Frow 1991; Duvall 1998), or perhaps even more real than the reality they represent. Ever since the publication of his first novel, *Americana* (1971), his works have revolved around the decline of the more immediate link with the surrounding world, as the plenitude of cultural signs results in highly mediated experiences felt by the characters. Besides propagating a “televsual immediacy” (Coward 2002a: 98) through which individuals experience reality and which creates “a society-wide condition of uniform distancelessness” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 147), DeLillo also demonstrates how “[r]eal moments and TV moments interpenetrate each other” (Frow 1991: 183), obscuring the line between the actual (fictional) world and its remediations.

This two-fold movement of media-bound experientiality characteristic of many of DeLillo’s novels is in line with the ideas expressed by John Ellis in *Seeing Things: Television in the Age of Uncertainty* (2002). Ellis argues that television has altered how we perceive the world by involving us in a process of “witnessing” (ibid.: 1). According to him, television confronts the audience with the realities of everyday life in a dual fashion of both distancing and involving the viewer (ibid.: 11). This is conspicuously manifest in DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1984), which satirically portrays the Western and more specifically the American consumer culture, saturated with endless chains of representations and the “hyper-real” of televisual simulacra that efface “the contradiction between the real and the imaginary” (Baudrillard 1983: 142).

In this storyworld we come across an exaggerated emblem of “the media’s unobtrusive environment-defining nature” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 156), which displaces “the conceptual affect” (ibid.: 157) with the effect of a technologically-produced form that represents the world (see ibid.: 156–157). As a consequence, the notion of reality shared by the characters in the novel is dramatically determined by various technology-facilitated operations, television in particular. In this fashion DeLillo reminds us that media ought not be considered merely as communicative channels “relat[ing] information about entites that are already ‘out there’ ” (ibid.: 168–169). Rather, as David Gunkel and Paul Taylor put it in *Heidegger and the Media*, “they are direct and active participants in revealing the being of those things that we subsequently think they merely represent” (ibid.: 169).

Characteristic of DeLillo’s fiction, the amplified and distancing mediatisation in *White Noise* is closely linked to the characters’ need to absorb images of death, catas-

trophes, and other calamitous events transmitted into our homes via television and other media. In his analysis of the novel, John Duvall holds that “[a]s disaster becomes aestheticized, another boundary blurs, that between television news’ representation of violence and violence in film, creating a homogenous imagistic space available for consumption” (1998: 437). Similarly, while exploring postmodernism’s relation to death, Michael Hardin argues that “American popular culture uses simulated death as a means to efface it” (2002: 26). He maintains that

[d]eath has become something to see, but not as death; it is viewed because it affirms, via the media, the worth of the individual and/or the moment. Replication and broadcasting give an event or person an immortality, a life in/on technology.

(ibid.: 37)

Although Hardin asserts that “simulated or replicated death” (ibid.: 43) does not cause viewers dismay, I contend that in *White Noise* and in DeLillo’s *oeuvre* in general the constant omnipresence of mediated death and chaos in the lives of the characters increases their fear of uncontrollable violence and a brutal demise.

Death and violence making “raids on human consciousness” (DeLillo 1991: 41) by means of electronic apparatuses also have a substantial role in *Point Omega*, which makes it a new variation on DeLillo’s recurring theme of the presence and repercussions of the media in human life and thought. Here too the reader is confronted with a character who is captivated by the imagery of horror and death. In this case the video portraying famous violent movie deaths known from Hitchcock’s horror classic have been artistically altered to such an extent that the sutured images of the video multifariously replicate, distance, and, in a way, efface, the death itself. Despite the fact that *24 Hour Psycho* stands for a visual simulacrum of a death deprived of distinct traces of actuality, the novel implies that this “screened violence” inexplicably spills outside the screen into the fictional reality. Thus, whereas violent visual material often projects a sensation of potential violence in DeLillo’s fiction (see Goodheart 1991: 120), in the case of *Point Omega* violence does not remain latent within the artistic frames; instead, it is actualised in the reality of the storyworld.

Here we come to the aspect of involvement proffered by Ellis, which comprises the other half of the interaction taking place between the viewer and the television (and other forms of audiovisual media). Almost two decades ago DeLillo regarded this kind of televisual engagement in conspicuously submissive terms. In his essay entitled “The Power of History” (DeLillo 1997b), the novelist analysed the numbing

effects of the “visual junk” which separates the viewer from reality (see also Cowart 2002b: 52–53). DeLillo’s previous remarks on the passivity and uninvolvedness of the viewer turn out to be invalid in *Point Omega*, as the author manifests in a grim fashion how mediated (and violated) images infiltrate the fictional reality in a way that radically diminishes their difference.

By portraying Gordon’s video art as the catalyst which triggers viewers in the fictional reality to react in various ways, the audiovisual media no longer provide a solacing “solution” to the questions related to death “by turning people into non-participating spectators of destruction” (Goodheart 1991: 124; cf. Cowart 2002b: 52–53), as has often been the case (seemingly, at least) in earlier novels by DeLillo. Besides offering potentially powerful and horrific tools for the characters to act with in the storyworld, the video compels the reader “to see ways by which television violence is simultaneously real and not real”, and invites him or her “to observe the dynamic interplay between audience and screen” (Naydan 2015: 97).

The dormant capacity of cinema notwithstanding, all the novels analysed here remind both the characters and the reader of the inherently illusory nature of films, an essential aspect on which the novels are able to ruminate, highlight, and problematise their own status as artefacts. We have seen thus far that the novels first emphasise and then denounce the difference between the fictional reality and the aesthetic illusion of cinema. It is noteworthy that the novels employ fictional films instead of, say, documentary films or footage from TV news. As an audiovisual form of fiction, cinema poses a paradox by intrinsically being a product of the imagination, yet normally verisimilitude is seen as a virtue in cinema. In other words, the novels frequently make use of the fact that films are deceptively realistic and are, to a great extent, able to correspond to our conceptions of external reality.

As a result, the novels employ the aesthetic illusion of cinema as part of the narrative construction to illustrate the difficulties in making a distinction between what is, or what appears to be, “real” and what is not. Thus, in all the novels illusions of some kind, either aesthetic ones or the kind that trigger false perceptions about the external reality<sup>22</sup> turn out to be pivotal in terms of both emplotment and narrative comprehension. Since illusions are both created and ultimately shattered, they are followed by other themes crucial to the novels: (self-) deception, acting, and faking. Naturally, the manifestations of these themes vary from novel to novel. As for *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Molina and Valentín join in a fluctuating movement between the reality of the storyworld and the illusory level of cinema by positioning themselves as

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<sup>22</sup>On cognitive illusions, see Schaeffer (*LHN*, Paragraph 8).

part of imaginary film plots. As mentioned, narrating films turns out to be a feasible way for the inmates (and simultaneously, for the reader) to become momentarily oblivious to the gruesome present circumstances of the fictional reality. This pertains especially to Molina, who wants to “ ‘escape from reality once in a while, because why should I let myself get more depressed than I am?’ ” (KSW: 78).<sup>23</sup>

Cinema is often defined as an art form that is distinctly escapist, as something in which the viewer is easily immersed. Immersion into aesthetic illusion, in turn, “appears to cater well to a fundamental human need for imaginary experience” (Wolf, *LHN*, Paragraph 30). However, it is no surprise that the filmic illusions created by Molina through his storytelling are disrupted as easily as they are produced. The fragility of Molina’s filmic illusions and at the same time their imaginative potential are initially seen in the ease with which his “filmic spell” is broken by Valentín’s interruptions: “ ‘it makes me angry the way you brought all this up, because until you brought it up I was feeling fabulous, I’d forgotten all about this filthy cell, and all the rest, just telling you about the film’ ” (KSW: 17).<sup>24</sup>

Cinema’s capacity to mislead the characters and make them temporarily forget the difference between reality (that is, the actual state of events) and the imaginary also has repercussions on the extra-textual level. This is seen, for example, in the case of the uncertain ontological status of three non-actual films recounted by Molina in the course of the novel: do they exist in the reality of the storyworld or are they designed precisely for the occasion? I hold that by virtue of inherently referential and epistemological issues, Puig’s novel accentuates the dichotomies and at the same time questions the legitimacy of the dichotomy between real/unreal. In the case of the fictional films recounted by Molina, the reader will never know their true nature with respect to the reality of the storyworld. However, he or she is aware of the potentially operative aspect underlying the act of narrating the films, namely that aesthetic illusions can have a tremendous, and hence *a real*, impact on actual circumstances.

Similar to the referential dilemmas set out in Puig’s novel, *The Ice Cream Man* creates ambiguity in terms of what is, in fact, represented in the narrative. Unlike *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, in which the narrative simply and implicitly questions the reality status of the films narrated by Molina, in Lipson’s novel referential uncertainty is all-encompassing: it remains unclear whether the narrated events truly take place

<sup>23</sup>“-[...] [M]e escape de la realidad, ¿para qué me voy a desesperar más todavía?” (*BMA*: 85).

<sup>24</sup>“-[...] [M]e da rabia que te salgas con eso porque hasta que saliste con eso yo me sentía fenómeno, me había olvidado de esta mugre de celda, de todo, contándote la película” (*BMA*: 23).

in the fictional reality. Thus, the reader finds it impossible to construct a coherent understanding of the storyworld as a whole. What happens as a result is that the “illusionist access” (Wolf, *LHN*, Paragraph 11) to the fictional reality is constantly obstructed, meaning that the reader has difficulty in maintaining the aesthetic illusion of the represented world. It is important to note here that similar to Puig’s novel, referential predicaments in *The Ice Cream Man* are often closely linked to cinema. Furthermore, the difficulty of discerning the narrative’s point of reference is frequently associated with themes of acting, faking, and artifice. By making use of different modes of acting and false identities and thus constantly calling into question the veracity of the depicted events, Lipson’s novel too is engaged in generating and disrupting illusions of different kinds, on both textual and extra-textual levels.

Themes related to acting and fakery appear to some extent in all four novels. What is more, in some of them close relation of film to other forms of drama is especially noticeable. For example, similar to Lipson, in *The Understudy* David Nicholls both points out and blurs the border between what is conceived as “real” and true and what is not by flooding the storyworld with actors. We recall that Stephen, the novel’s protagonist, is dreaming about his (unlikely) breakthrough in the West End and into the film industry. He is thus by profession acquainted with the world of acting and actors, people who, according to him, are “pretentious, precious and pompous, sentimental and shallow” (*U*: 27). By portraying the actors as characters who perform a certain role in their private lives, Nicholls extends the scope of acting beyond theatre stages and film sets, and thereby creates a fictional reality imbued with flamboyant behaviour and sheer duplicity. Thus, whereas Eugene Goodheart has characterised the movie screen as “[t]he most potent mirror” of the culture “from which we learn to transform ourselves, to play a variety of roles at will” (1991: 118–119), in *The Understudy* we note that the characters have adopted these roles to such a degree that the original (artistic) manifestations of those parts appear more genuine and authentic than those carried out in the real world.

Since the reality of the storyworld in both *The Understudy* and *The Ice Cream Man* stands for a “stage” of a certain kind in which the characters are able to adopt and carry out different roles, these (story)worlds come to symbolise *theatrum mundi*, “theatre of the world”. Thus, while relentlessly epitomising the gap between genuine and false behaviour, the novels also constantly focus the reader’s attention on the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut line between genuine and false on the practical level of the fictional realities. Ultimately, all the novels encourage the reader to perceive reality as something that is irrevocably saturated with fabrications, distortions,

and falsehood.

By invoking the metaphor of “theatre of the world” and utilising cinema that is conventionally seen as copying reality, the novels implicitly point out diverse forms of *imitation* and *mimesis*, especially with regard to the way these texts emphasise the role of imitation in the characters’ lives. Thus, although all the novels compel the reader to be aware of some abstract distinction between “real” and “unreal” which we seem to hold in our conceptual thinking, they simultaneously renounce the binary opposition itself by reminding that “[t]he fact that something is not ‘real’ (verifiable, rational [...]) does not prevent us from *living* it with real bodies in real time. We live the illusion: *mimesis* has a social life, and our social lives are mimetic” (Jenson 2001: 10; emphasis original). In a study of the production of social meanings in society, Deborah Jenson calls attention to the way the world and reality are *constructed* by means of mimetic acts. Consequently, she regards *mimesis* as “*conditio humana*” (ibid.: 11; emphasis original), something that is related to “likeness” as much as to “imitation”.

The mimetic aspect of living, thinking, and acting in the world holds true in the case of Molina in particular: he craves the imaginary realm of cinema in order to feel “alive” and to find meaning for his life. As Dierdra Reber aptly puts it in her analysis of Puig’s novel,

[t]he plane of film serves in the novel as a habitable alternate reality where, if only through a residence of the imagination, life itself is possible, in stark contrast to the certain death that awaits both prisoners in their desert of the real.

(2010: 66)

Thus, although Suzanne Jill Levine characterises the novelist in her biography, *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions* (2001), as someone “who wrote to grapple with actuality” and who “wanted the novel to portray and analyze life, while a film was a dream, condensed, allegorical” (ibid.: 290), she neglects the fact that Puig employed the imaginary realm of cinema in his literary works precisely in order to portray the nature of life itself.

In *Kiss of the Spider Woman* Puig goads the reader to acknowledge that the binary oppositions which human beings generally produce to distinguish true from false, real from unreal, and authentic from artificial are not only insufficient, but also distorting in terms of how we actually interact within and construe the world. By exemplifying the fertile power of cinematic storytelling and emphasising the life-giving

forces of the imaginary, which is set in motion in the reality of the storyworld, Puig reiterates Jenson's notion of the importance of producing and receiving imitations as "a dramatic form of (social) experience" (2001: 23). Besides pointing out the importance of mimesis as an effective part of human actions, Jenson's remarks concerning the illusory aspects of living resonate with the way *The Book of Illusions* reminds the reader of the nature of human imagination and experience as "real" in terms of mind-dependent subjectivity, namely the perspective from which we encounter the external world. With the help of films, Auster constantly admonishes his reader of the potential unreliability of an individual perceiving and making assumptions about the world, a risk that may result in rendering the fictional reality itself a cognitive illusion experienced by the character-narrator. However, Auster also calls the reader's attention to the human mind as an intrinsic basis for our understanding of "reality" *per se*, a factor that further accentuates the impossibility of claiming the existence of absolute and objective truths.<sup>25</sup>

Yet some questions worth asking are these: do the novels chosen for this study attempt to reflect the changes which have taken place in the world due to the upsurge in audiovisual media, virtual reality, and other forms of telecommunications that mark the leaps made in technological development during the past decades? Does their repudiation of discrete ontological entities demarcating the difference between hierarchical levels illustrate the situation we live in in the contemporary world, a world replete with manifold mediated representations, Reality TV, "alternative facts", and so forth? Do these novels proclaim that we are no longer capable of making a distinct separation between what is deemed to be real and what is not?

My answer to all of these is a reserved "yes". If we bear in mind that all the novels were written during an era that can be defined as "postmodern", we note that by virtue of their explicit need to highlight and complicate existential and ontological matters in their narrations, they seek to reflect current changes in human experience concerning our increased engagement with virtual, immaterial, and intangible elements that actively mould our understanding of the world and our acts in that world: social media, YouTube videos, and the like. This has a dramatic impact on our conception of the constituent elements of reality. In this study I demonstrate that all the novels utilise cinema as a catalyst for the disruptions and uncertainties that define present-day society. Furthermore, they all share a proclivity for problematising and contesting conventional modes of representation, reference, linear temporality, and

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<sup>25</sup>On criticism of the common-sense theory of meaning and truth, see Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 509–510).

fixed spatial relations — features that are usually regarded as literary responses to the radical ramifications of the contemporary world.

However, even though the novels echo the radical transformations that have occurred in the course of the last decades, the fact that none of the texts concern this development as such impels me to regard the novels in more universal terms, especially by virtue of ontology, epistemology, representation, and referentiality. In other words, by discrediting culturally-established binary oppositions such as real/unreal, factual/fictional, and true/false, the novels oblige the reader to contemplate more universal problems related to human experience and knowledge, representative modes and levels, and points of reference, to name a few. These topics illustrate the contemporary world administered by complex information technology; more importantly, they show that conceptions of the world as made of “things consist[ing] of matter organized by form” and of reality “organized in a hierarchy of categories, with the category of everything that exists at the top” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 389) are ill-founded. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson remark in *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), this kind of “form/matter model is only one possible way of understanding things, and a mostly distorting way at that” (ibid.: 389). This study demonstrates that the selected novels here challenge this “metaphysical impulse [...] deeply embedded in our shared cultural understandings” (ibid.), as well as the assumption “that the world really, objectively is as we experience it and conceptualize it to be” (ibid.: 509–510), which persistently characterises a common-sense conception of the world.

In this chapter I have briefly explored ontological, epistemological, and referential topics and dilemmas displayed in the selected novels. In the following section, which completes the theoretical introduction, I investigate more profoundly how filmic insertions in fiction re-negotiate modes of representation in literature, a process that ultimately leads us to consider such insertions not as mere illustrations, but rather as dynamic operations that have close connections with experientiality, imagination, and performativity.

### **Films Embodying the Problematics of Representation**

Thus far in this chapter, I have demonstrated how cinema in fiction is used to draw the reader’s attention to narrative modes that determine the way the literary texts have been constructed and how the narrative modes are problematised. As is customary in postmodern texts, the novels analysed here accentuate their representative



nature. This is seen especially in the way the narratives encourage the reader to become aware of the interplay between words and moving images. Because of the integration and use of another medium or media in producing meaning, all four novels exhibit an intertextual multiplicity and “discursive complexity” (Doležel 1998: 200). This points up a self-conscious objective to reveal the literary operations by which the novels were composed and prompt the reader to become more aware of the reading process itself and the inferential prerequisites posed by the texts.

Thus, besides acknowledging that the literary representations of films break away from their frames as embedded entities, we have to recognise that the novels themselves do not seem to accept their own “frames” of representation.<sup>26</sup> As I demonstrate in this final section, the fashion in which the novels eagerly re-negotiate their relation to the distinction between fact and fiction, referentiality, and modes of representation reverberates more generally with our experience of the surrounding reality.

If we briefly contemplate the ontological, epistemological, and referential ambiguity stimulated by the literary representations of films, it remains unclear what exactly we are dealing with. Are we confronted with the represented audiovisual work of art as such, the act of seeing and experiencing the artwork itself? Or are we dealing with the outcome of that experience materialised in the novel as an act of narrating the seen and the remembered *objet d’art*? (Cheeke 2008: 175–176.) Besides identifying the difficulties in defining the *object* of our reading, we ought to ask to which aspect the reader reacts while reading: is it the literary representation of the audiovisual referent, the original referent itself, or is it the scene represented in fiction? (*ibid.*: 3, 176). In effect, by integrating cinema into literary texts, the authors of these novels are able to denote various issues that problematise the relation between the representation and the represented.

In *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, I demonstrated how the novel endeavours to absorb and appropriate multiple channels of information within the literary discourse, such as film plots, footnotes, and police reports. At first glance, the narrative form bears a resemblance to the psychological realism of a “non-fictional” novel, and hence propagates a sense of “objectivity” in its modes of representation. The initial impression is, of course, false: the lack of omniscient narration and the representation of the subjective voices of the characters repudiate the possibility of “objectivity” (see Oubiña 2007: 123–124).

Previously, I observed that referential and epistemological ambiguities produced in *The Ice Cream Man* are exceptionally deceiving. Akin to the narrative strategy

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<sup>26</sup>I thank Mieke Bal for pointing this out.

employed by Puig, Lipson emphasises the discursive multiplicity, referential predicaments, and epistemic defects by virtue of filmic intertexts. Although a heightened preoccupation with utilising and emulating diverse channels of information runs the risk of producing misleading and incorrect representations, the fictitious medium of cinema serves as the primary means through which the reader is able to grasp the novel's suppressed meanings. Thus, *The Ice Cream Man* exhibits its epistemic power implicitly on the embedded level of films, as if in the narrative crevices.

While deeply involved in problematising its own narration, Lipson's postmodern historical novel engages its reader in contemplating different levels of writing evoked in the course of the narrative — autobiographical, historiographical, metafictional — and their links to the past as represented in the novel. Here history is embedded especially at the filmic level, a procedure that makes “separating out historical narrative, literary fiction, and philosophical reflexion” (Derrida 1992: 35) difficult. By and large, the essence of postmodern fiction as defined by Linda Hutcheon, namely its “selfconsciously linguistic, narrative and historical nature” (1988: 182), is fully embodied in the narrative construction and comprehension of *The Ice Cream Man*. However, we will see that all the novels participate in reflecting on the nature of (postmodern) fiction and its close interaction with our notion of “reality”, especially with the help of filmic representations.

By highlighting the relationship between fiction and history, *The Ice Cream Man* also encourages readers to ponder their relationships to their own pasts via fictive texts and narratives in general. According to Hutcheon, “the overt intertextuality” of historiographic metafiction — a term coined by her that refers to postmodern historical novels — exemplifies postmodernism's argument that “we can only ‘know’ (as opposed to ‘experience’) the world through our narratives (past and present) of it” (ibid.: 128). By the same token, Michael Riffaterre (1984: 142) has defined intertextuality in terms of how texts refer to other texts instead of directly indicating the empirical world. Thus, Lipson's novel stresses the importance of “language as *discourse*” (Hutcheon 1988: 168; emphasis original) instead of language in itself, a tendency that defines postmodernism's relation to linguistic processes that produce humans' understanding of the world. In this way, *The Ice Cream Man* reminds us of the textualisation of history, the fact that we become familiar with history by virtue of its narrativised forms (see Hutcheon 1988: 143; see also White 1984). These narratives encompass cinematic ones: in the case of Lipson's novel, the filmic medium functions as the domain in and through which history can be translated and interpreted.

Besides calling the reader's attention to the multiplicity of discourses and intertexts governing the narrative, as well as epistemological and referential questions that follow these discursive intricacies, *The Ice Cream Man* along with the other novels chosen for this study exhibit problems related to *intermediality* and the representative capacity of language. As for the relationship between intermediality and narrative as communication, it is important to bear in mind that "media function not only as a material basis for transmission purposes", that is, "not merely a neutral means of communication but, indeed, [as] part of the message itself" (Wolf 2008: 23; see also Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 127, 136). If we consider the prominence of cinema in these novels, readers will most likely find themselves mulling over the communicative and intermedial situation in which words endeavour to portray the (audio)visual. However, this kind of "ekphrastic hope" (Mitchell 1994: 152) that defines the literary desire to convert images into words is naturally doomed to failure, as a verbal medium is unable to re-present the full semantic richness of visual signs, let alone complex audiovisual entities such as films that amount to spatio-temporal progressions and are self-sufficient narratives in their own right.

Indeed, all the novels analysed here tackle the relationship between words and moving images. Subsequently, they acknowledge the shortcomings of verbal representations in portraying audiovisual material. In this fashion, the novels exhibit Marina Grishakova's concept of a *metaverbal text*, which refers to a literary narrative that "reflects on the incomplete nature of [a] verbal medium by probing the limits of verbal representation and appealing to the visual forms" (2010: 315). By "evok[ing] visual representation to compensate for the lack or inadequacy of verbal information" (ibid.: 314), metaverbal texts manifest the pre-formulated and arbitrary nature of language standing "in the way of a more authentic and immediate mode of perception" (Schneck 1999: 58) and an all-encompassing form of representation free of lexical, syntactical, and discursive restrictions.

In a similar vein, Jay David Bolter argues that competition with visual media has forced literature "to 'speak the language' of these media — that is, to turn back to picture writing or to pure imagery" (1996: 265). Similar to Grishakova's metaverbal narratives, Bolter holds that contemporary fiction aspires to attain "the natural sign in the realm of the visual rather than through heightened verbal expression" (ibid.). For Bolter, this shift is paradigmatic: whereas images were formerly seen as subordinate to words which aspired to explain them, now "images are given the task [...] of explaining words, rather than the reverse" (ibid.: 264). In Bolter's interpretation, this means a crisis of rhetoric in fiction.

In order to examine whether the novels selected here demonstrate Grishakova's conception of a metaverbal text and/or the notion of the rhetorical crisis of literature proclaimed by Bolter, I take a look at a previous analysis of DeLillo's fiction. David Banash, in his article on the use of *Psycho* in *Point Omega* by DeLillo and *What You See in the Dark* (2011) by the Mexican-American novelist Manuel Muñoz, stresses the metaverbal aspect of the two novels by claiming that they "evok[e] the film's powerful immersion in cinematic prose styles" and "seek to vampirize the ability of Hitchcock's film to create rapt fascination as well as emotional and physical responses" (2015: 4). For Banash, in *Point Omega* "*Psycho* functions as the ultimate fantasy scene of representation" (ibid.: 13), as the film offers the "danger" of "the naked power of the cinema image" (ibid.: 6). Thus, besides serving as a metaverbal text, DeLillo's novel exemplifies the reversed interaction between literature and visual signs described by Bolter, as the mutilated imagery of the horror movie classic brings about and visually illustrates sensations difficult to put into words.

In this fashion, the literary employment of conceptual video art within its narrative construction in *Point Omega* amounts to another useful concept coined by Grishakova, namely that of a *metarepresentational narrative* that "illustrate[s] the process of hypothesis formation in the situations of indeterminacy, limited access to knowledge, or limited possibility of capturing and verbalizing the observable" (Grishakova 2010: 328). Characteristic of DeLillo's fiction in general, *Point Omega* sets out a "nonverbal 'mystery'" (Tabbi 1995: 209) that epitomises the impossibility of adequately portraying reality in words. For Joseph Tabbi, who has explored the manifestations of technology and the sublime in postmodern fiction, this kind of fictional conundrum that is "lost to syntax and other arrangement" (DeLillo 1988: 181) "points to the primacy of sound and the visual image" (Tabbi 1995: 209) in the real world. Thus, DeLillo along with the other novelists examined in this study attempts to surpass the barrier that separates language (and fiction) from the external world with the help of audiovisual material.

These ideas expressed by Bolter, Grishakova, Banash, and Tabbi echo a significant feature which illustrates the relationship between fiction and cinema and which I have not thus far touched upon, namely the ancient contest between word and image. Although the differences between the representative power of the verbal and the visual were discussed as far back as antiquity, it was Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) whose writings turned the two different sign systems into a competition, with each seeking to convey a certain view of the world (see Mitchell 1986: 47). Ever since the Renaissance, a scholarly propensity for staging an oppositional relationship

between the so-called sister arts has been remarkably common and persistent. This line of thinking has also been dominant in ekphrastic and interart studies in general, and hence in the study of film/cinematic ekphrasis. For example, Heffernan belongs among those who consider the literary representation of images to be a constant battle between word and image. For him, ekphrasis is a contest in which “alluring” and at once “threatening” images are subjected to the authorial language (1993: 1).

As regards Banash’s analysis of the ramifications of *Psycho* used in a literary text, he takes this traditional opposition as his conceptual (and hence ideological) guideline. Banash’s predilection is seen in the way he argues “that Hitchcock’s *Psycho* has become a cultural fantasy about the overwhelming powers of cinema” (2015: 4). He further contends that “[t]o overcome the power of these images, both authors insist on the power of the word to ultimately betray the cinematic image” (ibid.: 7). According to him, the two novels and their novelists are “balancing the power of visual seduction with the critical distance of the word” (ibid.: 16). Banash, then, recapitulates the almost canonic conception of power relations between the “seductive” imagery and the words, a conception in which ekphrasis is “a cunning attempt to transform and master the image by inscribing it” (Scott 1991: 302; see also Heffernan 1993: 7; Mandelker 1991: 1; Gysin 1989: 160; cf. Mitchell 1994: 156–157). At the same time, his analysis of the novels exemplifies yet another concept coined by Grishakova, namely *intermedial metarepresentation* which refers to representations that combine discrete representative modes in order to “highlight[...] the incapacity of a separate medium to capture the multimodal nature of perception” (2010: 314). While this is objectively true, I find it baffling how scholars who explore texts that integrate visual and other sign systems in a narrative structure tend to dramatise and anthropomorphise the relation between independent media.

Thus far, we have seen that novels incorporating other media emphasise the interrelations between language and non-verbal sign systems (or systems of signification that are comprised of both verbal and non-verbal signs, such as film). In this way they inevitably comment on and serve as a reaction to the tension between literature and visual media. In this section I have pointed out the scholarly tendency to regard this interconnection in terms of rivalry, power, and deception. The same goes for Mitchell, who in *Picture Theory* defines ekphrasis as a social activity in which power, knowledge, and desire are often interconnected and actively set into operation (1994: 180). As for my study, I also touch upon the way literary language itself is deeply involved in the question of knowledge and hence power (see Hutcheon 1988: 186). However, we should bear in mind that the processes embodying interart rela-

tions are taking place within a *textual* sphere. Instead of actually “competing” with visual modes of representation, language reflects its own properties and capacity to enact the world in linguistic terms.

Therefore, instead of excessively accentuating the alleged competition between literature and visual media, I find it much more intriguing to explore the kinds of attitudes and dispositions we can find *in* literary texts that are engaged in incorporating and making use of visual systems of communication. In other words, my focus in this study is on the use of the language that serves as the concrete tool of meaning-making in fiction and a channel through which individuals connect with and comprehend the external world. As I have previously implied, in all the novels analysed here we can find a more or less explicit post-structural and postmodern attitude to language and linguistic representation, as the narratives denote not only how language reflects our way of seeing and understanding the world, but also and most important, how we produce our notion of that world through language in the first place. Thus, rather than producing a supposed contest between words and images — visual signs that have representative shortcomings of their own — the novels pinpoint an insurmountable gap that resides between language and the objective world, a world that always and irrevocably remains beyond our reach, by making use of audiovisual media within their narration.

The novels thus share a postmodern and constructivist predilection for regarding language as a substitute for, or a producer of, reality. This is seen especially in more experimental and challenging novels, such as *Point Omega* and *The Ice Cream Man*; yet a similar tendency is also evident in *The Book of Illusions*. In her analysis of the notion of “quest” in Auster’s fiction, Ilana Shiloh remarks that his prose writings have often been described as an effort to “exploit the inadequacy of language and logic and the failure of fiction as a means of apprehending reality” (2002: 201). Despite Shiloh’s somewhat pessimistic view, we have to keep in mind that by doing this, Auster shows his persistent concern in “the language and the world’s interconnectedness” (Hugonnier 2011: 259). By the same token, in her article on the role of beatific women in Auster’s works, Stefania Ciocia acknowledges the novelist’s literary aspiration to explore “how the individual’s relationship with language and with storytelling affects his (or, much less frequently, her) sense of self and of their place in the world” (Ciocia 2011: 97). Thus, apart from reminding us of the unreliability of linguistic practices, Auster pays attention to the prominent role of language as the dominant conveyor of meanings in life.

Furthermore, Auster intriguingly demonstrates how the borders of both language

and the self can be transgressed in fiction by means of verbal acts. In his article on the role of the unspeakable in Auster's fiction, François Hugonnier holds that the novelist "works with the invisible and the incommunicable in order to exceed the limits of our modes of communication" (2011: 273). In this respect, David's recountings of films in *The Book of Illusions* function as an example of Auster's fascination with exploring "the limits of human experience" (ibid.: 281): the narrated films compel the reader to identify and rethink the nature of the experiential borders that demarcate distinctions between individuals. As previously mentioned, by stimulating the reader to become aware of both highly individual and intersubjective sensations related to cinematic experiences, the act of narrating films turns out to function as an intermedial and transgressive communicative model by means of which the reader is able to comprehend the narrative itself better, and also his or her own individual way of interacting with the world.

As regards the essence and the outcome of literary utterances, *The Book of Illusions* brings up two pivotal issues. Firstly, it testifies to the wide range of cognitive and perceptual factors that are involved and stimulated in the reader during the verbal recountings of films. In his article "Ekphrasis Revisited: The Mental Underpinnings of Literary Pictorialism" (2010), Nayef Ali Al-Joulani points this out by contending that, rather than being a translation of visual elements, a verbal description of a visual representation encompasses "all related visible and invisible, sensual, cognitive, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the pictorialized" (ibid.: 49). Mitchell has similarly stressed the capacity of ekphrasis to represent a vast spectrum of sensory experiences (1994: 154 nt 9). Throughout the present study I demonstrate that the four selected novels substantiate Al-Joulani and Mitchell's line of reasoning.

In a similar vein, I find Wolfgang Hallet's conception of the function of multimodal novels relevant; he holds that

[n]arrative meaning can [...] no longer be regarded as a result of language-in-writing but of the combination and integration of different modes and media that contribute to and participate in the process of narration as a whole.

(2009: 140)

Although Hallet speaks of novels that include non-verbal material, I argue that his contention can be applied to traditional novels, that is, written novels that verbally represent moving images. I also agree with Kamilla Elliott, who in her *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate* (2003) proffers a model that "yokes the pictorial and the verbal in

cognition without erasing all differences between them and opens a space between form and content that nevertheless maintains their bond” (ibid.: 185). In this respect, it would seem inadequate to consider language only through a postmodern lens which puts emphasis on the deficiencies of linguistic representation. Indeed, culture ought to be seen, as the semiotician Peeter Torop explains in his article “Intersemiosis and Intersemiotic Translation” (2003), as “the process of intersemiotic translation” (ibid.: 271). In this process,

[i]ntertextuality, interdiscursivity and intermediality as the environment of text generation and reception impel us to regard the signs of different texts as intersemiotic [sic], being comprehended simultaneously within the frameworks of different sign systems.

(ibid.)

Thus, the intertwinings between, say, verbal and visual, lessen the border between them that has been established over the centuries.

Secondly, since the scholars mentioned above vouch for the aptitude of language to prompt the reader to discern overlappings of textual and visual discourse, I find it relevant to consider briefly the concept of “representation” *per se*. As Barbara Bolt aptly remarks in her book *Art Beyond Representation* (2004), the term itself consistently remains undefined in academic research, its meaning taken for granted (ibid.: 12). Notwithstanding the representative foundation of literature, I feel compelled to question its importance with regard to more recent fiction, especially the kind that has reacted to radical changes in the media environment by incorporating culturally affective forms of media — those with which humans routinely interact — into its textual sphere.

In her review of ekphrastic representation in contemporary fiction and the present state of ekphrastic studies, Susan Harrow remarks that both the praxis and the interpretation of ekphrasis have surpassed the traditional topics of “mimetic translation” and oppositional juxtapositions between word and image to address the more “tentative, speculative, [and] creative responses” (2010: 257–258). For Harrow, this change indicates a response to the vast range of modes by which literary texts today are able to “engage with visual culture” (ibid.: 257). The novels analysed are examples of Harrow’s conception of the innovativeness with which fiction has reacted to the increase in visual stimuli in the contemporary world.

Similarly, the upsurge in audiovisual media permeating all aspects of modern life encourages me to explore the novels from more “tentative” perspectives than



simply mimetic representation. These perspectives focus more on the dynamic and performative capacity of fiction. As for performativity, I previously pointed out Bal's conception of art as a performance in which the viewer actively participates (see Bal 2002: 135, 207–208). In a similar vein, Bolt argues that instead of a conventional predilection for regarding artistic representation as an illustration of *something else*, art ought to be seen in terms of performance.

Thus, similar to Bal for whom “[t]he viewer is the agent of performance” (ibid.: 186), Bolt contends that “through creative practice, a dynamic material exchange can occur between objects, bodies and images. In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images [...]. This performative potential constitutes the power of imaging” (2004: 8). I consider the inclusions of films in fiction as being performative *par excellence*, as they engage the reader in intricate mental processes that necessitate his or her individual capacity for making use of previous multimodal and multisensory experiences with audiovisual media. As a consequence, art of this kind, which comprises both literature and the evocations of cinema incorporated into the text, reverberate with van Alphen's conception of art that “‘thinks’ ” (2005: xiv) in and through us, and hence manifests the ways art is capable of moulding *our* ways of thinking and comprehending the external world. By accentuating the interactive and symbiotic relationship between art (fiction) and its receiver, art is seen as an “agency” (ibid.: xiv) that exceeds far beyond notions of static representations. This kind of dynamism characterises the novels studied here as well as readers, who are invited to participate in their literary performance.

By placing emphasis on the performativity of textual renderings of cinema and its repercussions in the reader's engagement, I stress the importance of *experiential* and *imaginative* perspectives of filmic insertions into fiction. Indeed, if we take a closer look at the novels, we find that in many of them *imagination* has replaced a more typical mode of representation as a symbol of something existent. Here we come to the profound meaning of fiction as a provider of possible realisations of human existence. In the following chapters I demonstrate the power of narrating films in fiction. The narration of films produces and stimulates experiences of being a subject in the world, both the extra-textual world and the fictional storyworlds in which we become immersed through reading.



## Chapter 3

# Filmic Illusions of the Self and the Other in Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*

Similarly to *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Book of Illusions* written by the American novelist Paul Auster (b. 1947) demonstrates that the films represented therein are able both to reflect the primary level of the narrative and simultaneously question the solidity of the borderline that separates the storyworld reality, and the movies, which are shot, perceived and related in that reality. In Puig's novel this was seen in the way the films determine the narrative progression by mirroring the social dynamics taking place in a prison cell; ultimately, it was also apparent in the author's making Molina and Valentín characters in their own filmic stories. In *The Book of Illusions*, in turn, filmic recountings convey the novel's significant themes, namely those that illuminate the pivotal relationship between the self and the Other. However, as the title of the novel suggests, the narrative subtly calls into question the validity of perceptions of the external world, as these are inevitably subjective and thus prone to fallacy. The novel reminds us that regardless of an individual's intersubjective connection with others, a subjective view of the world inevitably makes a person an autonomous and separate subject.

In his tenth novel, Auster illustrates these existential and epistemological questions with the help of filmic stories. The films represented there embody the most profound questions repeatedly taken up in the narrative: how can we trust our subjective perspective to know that something actually exists? Consequently, are the self *and* the Other based on mere illusion? *The Book of Illusions* is a portrayal of a man who takes a dramatic path, first by losing other people and subsequently the self,

then gradually bringing himself back to life with the therapeutic use of films and later with the help of people behind those films. The novel concludes with new and tragic losses: after recovering, the man again loses both the people and the films that had revived and rescued him from a sense of emptiness and self-destructive mourning in the first place. What characterises all these stages in the life of the protagonist is that the narrative accentuates the self, which, despite its proclivity for seclusion and instability, is in need of the Other and is also actively processed and defined through others. Despite these intersubjective relations connecting the self with the Other, the representations of films accentuate the way in which the narrative constantly questions the veracity of subjective conceptions of the external world. Thus, filmic recountings also highlight the possibility of making deceptive misinterpretations of the surrounding reality.

Throughout his literary career, Auster has explored the theme of the self and the Other in various ways (see Kuzma 2009: 177). In *The Book of Illusions*, the author draws attention to how interpersonal communication between the self and the Other is a substantial component of human life and identity. Put differently, Auster's novel exemplifies "how we, as individuals, live collectively" (Brown 2007: 1). In this chapter I analyse the social dynamics between the self and the Other by using the ("travelling") concept of "intersubjectivity". In the field of psychology, intersubjectivity refers to the way in which "the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects" (Benjamin 1988: 19–20). Thus, intersubjectivity is an essential human capacity that manifests how in the self "the individual and the social world intersect" (Elliott 2008: 30). According to the psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, the intersubjective view

observes that the other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right. It assumes that we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experience. Thus the idea of intersubjectivity reorients the conception of the psychic world from a subject's relation to its object toward a subject meeting another subject.

(1988: 20)

As for *The Book of Illusions*, intersubjectivity as a "representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings" (ibid.: 20) underscores all the main topics explored in the novel, namely the nature of human existence, which involves both a crucial need to interact with one another and an irreversible separateness from the external world.

Auster illustrates the crucial preconditions of human life from the novel's very beginning. At the outset, the reader is introduced to the first-person narrator called David Zimmer, an American professor of literature, who has lost his family in an airplane crash more than a decade earlier. For David, the death of his wife, Helen, and their two sons entails losing "most of" (BI: 6) the self along with his loved ones, and it simultaneously marks the starting point for the story told in *The Book of Illusions*. The novel deals with events that ensue after this personal tragedy, as David "lived in a blur of alcoholic grief and self-pity, rarely stirring from the house" (BI: 7). Thus, for David to lose others is to lose himself as well as his will to live and his desire to be in touch with the outer world.

The peripeteia for the grief-stricken and embittered widower is a simple but abrupt emotional response, namely a burst of laughter while watching a television excerpt from a silent film comedy starring an actor-director called Hector Mann. The sudden, positive reaction to the short film serves as confirmation for David that there is still something human left in him despite the seriously unhappy circumstances, that he "hadn't hit bottom yet" (BI: 9). After being guaranteed the existence of the self, albeit a shattered self, he decides to watch all the films featuring Mann.

The opening of the novel thus introduces the role of cinema, both in the life of the protagonist and in the story's narrative development. Furthermore, since David's gradual rehabilitation results from his chance encounter with a film clip, which marks the start of his effort to revive crucial links between himself and the world, the filmic plane helps to epitomise the intersubjective dimension of human beings. More specifically, the gradual reconstruction of the disintegrated self and its connection with the external world is initially launched by an imaginary, "filmic Other", personified in the enigmatic character of Hector Mann.

Although David has the chance to encounter Hector only once, indubitably he is another main figure along with David, the character-narrator. By giving Hector and his films a prominent role, *The Book of Illusions* can be seen as a *Künstlerroman*, which emphasises the life-giving force of art: after seeing all the existing films by Hector, David decides to write a book about them, an odyssey that gradually leads him back to real (and living) people. Thus, by writing about the illusory realm of cinema, David finds a therapeutic medium in which to mourn and prepare himself to re-enter the external world. Whereas the imaginary level of films grants him access to reality, the ending reminds the reader of the novel's constant tendency to return to epistemological and ontological questions about the veracity of the self. In this fashion, *The Book of Illusions* once more affirms the importance of its title by

making the reader consider whether the events represented in the narrative have truly taken place in the reality of the storyworld or whether everything is as illusory as the flickering images of Hector on the screen.

In the following sections, I investigate the ways in which various aspects of intersubjectivity are elucidated both on the diegetic level and the embedded level of film. First, I take a closer look at how intersubjectivity is manifest on a story level and examine how Hector's silent films echo intersubjective relations between the self and the Other as well as the volatility of the self, features that characterise both main male characters in *The Book of Illusions*. Then I turn my attention to the only sound film recounted in the novel, namely "The Inner Life of Martin Frost". As a quasi-fantastic love story, this film largely deals with epistemological and empirical questions that involve an individual's subjective and hence potentially misleading perspective on the world. Thus, the final film narrated in the novel reminds the reader of the power of illusions. Furthermore, the film recapitulates the idea that, in spite of our intrinsic need to be in contact with others, we are eventually confined to our individual and to some degree fallible ways of perceiving the outer world.

After analysing the content of the narrated films, I explore various techniques employed in their recountings that contribute to the illustration of the dual nature of the self. I begin by analysing the ambiguous intermixing of voices residing on either the same or on different narrative levels and show how this highlights intermental thinking, which connects the self and the Other, as well as the instability of the borders that separate discrete narrative levels. Thereafter, I focus on the "we" and "you" narration, both of which underscore the main themes of the novelistic whole by compelling the reader to alternate between acts of alignment and distancing from what is represented. Thus, the reader becomes aware of a vacillating position as an individual, on the one hand, and as part of a communal act of "watching" the represented films on the other. In this fashion, the renderings of films engage the reader in experiencing various aspects of intersubjectivity. I conclude the chapter by considering the role of memory, (filmic) storytelling, and language in the novel, including how spoken words are juxtaposed with moving images, and I consider as well how the filmic level gives rise to these topics.

### **Reflections of the Self and the Other in Silent Films**

Besides being a *Künstlerroman*, *The Book of the Illusions* is essentially a trauma narrative, which revolves around harrowing experiences, self-nullification, and recovery

from loss. In *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (2002), Laurie Vickroy argues that “trauma narratives raise questions about how we define subjectivity as they explore the limits of the Western myth of the highly individuated subject and our ability to deal with loss and fragmentation in our lives” (ibid.: 2). The realisation of loss itself characterises the intersubjective relations between human beings, as mourning “opens a necessary space between self and other” (Hirsch 1997: 177; see also Santner 1990). The impetus for David’s self-narration, which accounts for most of the narrative, emerges from a great loss he has experienced and its devastating aftermath in terms of the integrity of subjectivity. Furthermore, the novel is also a survival story of a disintegrated self which is eventually revived with the help of others — and cinema. As I suggested earlier, the therapeutic power of films is evident in the way David copes with loss and expresses his grief over an unspeakable trauma by writing about Hector’s films. Subsequently, David’s therapeutic writing continues in the form of a narrative that the reader is about to read.

Despite the restoration of the self and its connection with others, the possibility of the perceptual and mental misconceptions intrinsic to human life prevails throughout the novel. All these aspects which define intersubjective relationships between individuals have a powerful and illustrative counterpart on the secondary narrative level of filmic representations. Thus, the narrated films also metaphorically convey “the illusionary essence of being and a person’s always endangered presence in his own life” in its “equally shadowy and flickering nature of projected images on the screen” (Meurer 2011: 177). In the course of the novel, David narrates several silent films, specifically one-reel comedies, such as “The Teller’s Tale” and “The Prop Man”, and a silent movie called “Mr. Nobody”, which is noticeably more melancholy. The only representative of Hector’s later works is the sound film “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”.<sup>1</sup> All the recounted films are directed by Hector and, apart from the more recent sound film, also feature him.

According to numerous researchers, the “Austerian” self is often characterised as fluid, invisible, and/or fragmented (see Shiloh 2002: 10). Furthermore, Auster has frequently used the motif of losing oneself in his works, such as in *City of Glass* (1985) and *The Music of Chance* (1990; see Shiloh 2002: 10). In *The Book of Illusions*, not only David, but also Hector, whose films serve as the initial catalyst for the story-

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<sup>1</sup>Initially, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” was written as a screenplay for a short television film for a German producer. When the project was cancelled, Auster used the story in *The Book of Illusions*. (González 2009b: 41.) Thereafter, Auster did make a movie based on “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” (2006), bearing the same title as the literary version. The film begins with the events represented in *The Book of Illusions* and continues from the point at which “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” ends in the novel.

telling, follow an excruciating path, first by losing themselves and the constitutive connection with others, then subsequently re-establishing those connections.<sup>2</sup>

For both men, losing others amounts to losing the self. Traumatic events in their personal lives have caused guilt and make them want to disappear and escape, not only from others, but also from themselves. As for the guilt that torments both, David blames himself for the death of his family. Hector, for his part, mysteriously disappeared from Hollywood in the 1920s over the guilt of being indirectly involved in the death of his ex-girlfriend. David opts for isolation, which entails disconnection with the self. Hector punishes himself by resolutely effacing his personal history (the self), adopting a new identity, and, most important, abstaining from doing what he loves most: making films.

On the embedded level of the silent films, almost all the movie protagonists exemplify the self as fluctuating and fragile, at risk of being abolished, yet in constant need of the Other.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the filmic level mirrors the volatility of the self, the need of the self for connection with the Other, and the tragic consequences when that bond is disrupted. The silent film called “Mr. Nobody” is the most emblematic of these scenarios. The film is about a man who is deceived by his business partner. By making the unfortunate filmic “Hector” invisible with the help of a potion, “[t]he villain of the story” (*BI*: 39), one Lester C. Chase, takes possession of “Hector’s” enterprise.

According to David, the film was “a response to [his] mounting frustration” (*BI*: 39) caused by financial problems the real Hector was having with his business associates. Thus, the role of the unfortunate and deceived character is a parable for the actual situation in Hector’s life. This is repeatedly manifest in David’s recountings of Hector’s filmography: his cinematic apparitions have striking similarities to Hector’s true life story, which is disclosed in the course of the novel. As the film’s narrator, David further reinforces the link between the reality of the storyworld and the silent film by referring to the character played by Hector as “Hector”, as in the following passage: “Chase is the most malevolent character in any of Hector’s films. He is out to destroy Hector and rob him of his identity” (*BI*: 39). This kind of referential confusion — a phenomenon we will also encounter in Lipson’s novel in the final chapter of this study — blurs the line between the filmic and non-filmic Hector. In this way the narrative accentuates the notion that it is impossible for the reader always to keep the imaginary characters on the film’s embedded level neatly separate from the

<sup>2</sup>On similarities between the characters, see Gerrard (2002) and Brown (2007: 122).

<sup>3</sup>In his book on Auster, Mark Brown (2007: 125) explores the similarities between the films made by Hector and the novelist himself.



characters on the diegetic level, namely the reality of the storyworld.

Besides resonating with the difficulties Hector faced in the film industry, “Mr. Nobody” the silent film anticipates his gloomy future as a “Mr. Nobody” by illustrating his eventual disconnection and reconnection with himself and with others. As soon as Hector becomes invisible in the film, he loses contact with the external world. After sorrowful and aimless wandering, “Hector” comes up with a plan to take revenge by setting up Chase for a crime. The next day, “Hector” again becomes visible. The film ends with an image of him smiling — tellingly in a mirror, which stands for concrete, visual proof of his recovery.

For David, “Hector’s” smile

suggests something more than a simple rediscovery of himself. He is no longer looking at the old Hector. He is someone else now, and however much he might resemble the person he used to be, he has been reinvented, turned inside out, and spat forth as a new man.

(BI: 52)

In its powerful and hopeful ending, which alludes not so much to recovery as to a re-birth of the self, “Mr. Nobody” reflects the dramatic transformations that are about to take place in Hector on the diegetic level after he has become acquainted with Frieda Spelling, his future wife. Thus, the happy conclusion predates the end of a gruesome period in Hector’s life after his flight from Hollywood, an era during which he was mentally invisible to himself as well as to others.

More important, David not only sees the affinities between Hector and the character he plays in the film, but also adds himself into the equation as a man who has become invisible to the world after the loss of his family, a man who “has simply been erased” (BI: 40), yet who is eventually transformed into a new man. The implied equivalence between the unlucky protagonist in “Mr. Nobody” and David is especially clear in the scene in which the forlorn “Hector” wanders inside his house in the middle of the night and is unable to make contact with his family because he is invisible: “In that one small gesture—the hand hovering in the air, the open palm no more than an inch from the girl’s head—we understand that Hector has been reduced to nothing” (BI: 50). The film scene reminds the reader of the beginning of the novel in which David reminisces how, during the first months after his family’s accident, he wandered around his empty house and tried to retain the memory of the dead boys by miming their daily chores as if “temporarily inhabiting them again” (BI: 7–8). For David, the invisible ones are the dead ones; in both cases the connection with the

self and the Other is lost. In this way, “Mr. Nobody” serves as a double mirror which reflects the lived past of both men on the diegetic level of the narrative.

The example of “Mr. Nobody” demonstrates a strong connection between the lives and fates of David and Hector who do not, at this point, know each other personally. Above, I pointed out that the narrative accentuates the link between the men from the very beginning of the novel, as Hector’s silent films provide David a needed shelter from the painful thoughts stemming from his miserable circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Although David’s book project on Hector’s films does “provide a refuge from his loneliness” (Brown 2011: 229), his extreme isolation from any social sphere results in destructive behaviour that underlines the novel’s pivotal message: a human being deprived of vital connections with others ends up being a disintegrated subjectivity. Then again, the situation is not so simple. By establishing imaginary and intangible connections with the cinematic figures played by Hector in his silent films, David will become involved in the life of the actual Hector behind those films and, most important, will return to the world.

As for the other silent films narrated in the novel, they too resonate with and reflect the fragile and erratic self that defines the male characters on the primary narrative level. This pertains to Hector in particular, as his movie roles function as filmic alter-egos that mirror his true self as volatile, fragile, lost, and finally reinvigorated. In “Mr. Nobody” his identity turns out to be highly fragile after the corporeal loss of the self and the subsequent disconnection with the outer world. In contrast to the happily married family man in “Mr. Nobody”, Hector plays the role of a dandy in comedies called “The Prop Man” and “The Teller’s Tale”, an adept “Hollywood Latin Lover” (*BI*: 80), who is fortunate both in business and in love. On one hand, Hector’s filmic life on a movie screen is an irregular and erratic collection of a variety of selves, an assortment that brings to mind various and contradictory versions regarding Hector’s origin he gives to the press during his Hollywood years. On the other hand, by immersing himself in diverse filmic roles, Hector illustrates a crucial aspect of the relationship between the self and the Other, namely an ability to play a role as the “Other”.

As for Hector’s cinematic presence in general, David interprets it to be problematic in terms of empathy and identification. For him, “Hector’s character is too complexly delineated for us to feel altogether comfortable in his presence” (*BI*: 35). By remarking on the mental and emotional distance between the viewer and Hector in

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<sup>4</sup>The therapeutic nature of viewing films is evident in Auster’s more recent novel, *The Man in the Dark* (2008; see Hugonnier 2011: 275).

his films, David illustrates an insurmountable gap between the self and the (filmic) Other. What is more, David underlines Hector's ambivalent attitude towards the external world, which is both connected to and simultaneously detached from it: "He seems to live in a state of ironical bemusement, at once engaged in the world and observing it from a great distance" (*BI*: 35). David's analysis of Hector's vacillating nature in films serves as an extra layer in his already enigmatic and ever-changing character. Furthermore, it contributes to the creation of an intricate thematic web in the novel, which underscores both the unique subjectivity of the self and the intersubjective connection with the self and the Other, each trying to understand the other.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the ambiguous collection of potentially feeble identities played by Hector in his films, he also incarnates an all-embracing personality who most likely evokes compassion, or in other words, a certain form of intersubjectivity. For example, while describing a movie character impersonated by Hector, David refers to the universal human capacity for mutual recognition and understanding with a classical metaphor for a reflection: "in that stillness one sees oneself as if in a mirror, for it is during those moments that Hector is most fully and convincingly human, a reflection of what we all are when we're alone inside ourselves" (*BI*: 30). Intriguingly, the passage underlines the human ability to "imitate others, to vividly imagine being another person, doing what that person does, experiencing what that person experiences" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 565), which characterises primary intersubjective tendencies that people share. And, by eliciting an image of the self in its most solitary moments, David also emphasises a heightened awareness of the self as an independent person. Thus, the cinematic versions of Hector manifest, on the one hand, an irrevocable volatility of the self, and, on the other hand, a catalyst for intersubjective empathy and self-recognition. Thus, the "filmic Other" mirrors the self, at least in a vague and remote fashion.

However, I previously observed that self-identification evoked by filmic impersonations does not suffice for David to let go of his painful past. After having completed his book on Hector's films, David continues to feel at a loss: "I didn't know who I was" (*BI*: 56). At this juncture, David decides to sell his house, which is haunted by the absence of Helen and the boys, and buys a shabby cottage in a town nearby, as if "to inhabit those blank, depersonalized interiors was to understand that the world was an illusion that had to be reinvented every day" (*BI*: 57). Furthermore, he actualises the idea of "reality" as an imaginary space by quickly immersing himself in another

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<sup>5</sup>I thank Professor Heta Pyrhönen for pointing out this aspect.

book project. He is thus able to maintain an illusory distance between himself and an external world he is unable to confront.

Even though David continues his solitary mode of living, the publication of his book launches the restoration of an intersubjective connection between the self and the Other and simultaneously initiates David's actual healing process. This comes in the form of a contact made by Hector's wife, Frieda Spelling, who claims that Hector Mann, now using the name "Hector Spelling", is still alive, but seriously ill and wants to meet David before it is too late in order to tell his story to someone who is an expert on his films. Frieda reveals that Hector has made several films after leaving Hollywood. Moreover, all of them will be destroyed after his death; as told by Frieda: "*[h]is will instructs me to destroy the films and the negatives of those films within twenty-four hours of his death, and I don't know how much longer he will last*" (BI: 78; emphasis original). A sceptical David demands evidence that Hector is alive. After a few weeks of silence, David receives concrete proof of Hector's existence, as a close friend of the Spellings, Alma Grund, appears outside his door in Vermont and implores him to travel with her to New Mexico, where the old Spelling couple is living on a remote ranch.

David's resistance to re-entering the real world is evident in the vehemence with which he refuses to grant Alma's plea. Even David himself is perplexed by his abrupt outburst of anger: "I wasn't afraid of Alma Grund, but my own anger frightened me, and I had no idea what was in me anymore [...]. The only person I knew how to be with now was myself—but I wasn't really anyone, and I wasn't really alive" (BI: 102). Besides questioning the stability of his own subjectivity, David calls into question the physical contours of his body, which distinguish him from the surrounding world, as Alma suddenly threatens him with a gun to make him accept her urgent demand:

I was half a step in front of the real, an inch or two beyond the confines of my own body [...]. I wasn't occupying space anymore so much as melting into it. What was around me was also inside me, and I had only to look into myself in order to see the world.

(BI: 108)

By detaching from himself and simultaneously transfusing himself with the outer reality, David's experience resonates with his characterisations of the filmic Hector as eccentric and inconsistent.

The final dramatic turn of events nearly ends David's life, as he points at himself with Alma's gun and is on the verge of committing suicide in front of the shocked

woman. Only by dangerously wavering on the borderline between the otherworld and reality, “life had become a different life” (*BI*: 112) for David. Thus, the near-death experience is a physical embodiment of the fact that David has to let go of his former self in order to be restored to life. Right after this fierce rejuvenation of the self, David decides to leave with Alma to meet Hector, who is dying. The man who was recently brought back to life is now ready to confront a man who, in turn, is on his deathbed.

David’s decision marks “the beginning of the story I am trying to tell now” (*BI*: 113). Thus, the beginning of the regained, or even a new, self also serves as the starting point for the narration. More important, the decision signals the beginning of David’s healing process. Instead of “distant others” with whom David has recently spent most of his time, namely cinematic figures featuring Hector and the historically remote François-René de Chateaubriand (1768–1848), whose memoirs David is now translating, David has been in need of the Other who exists in the real world. The necessary Other has now materialised in the character of Alma, and her nourishing<sup>6</sup> presence embodies the vital necessity of relations between the self and the Other without which an individual can not be whole or function in an efficient and gratifying manner.

The way in which the Other has a reinvigorating effect on the life of the self is immediately clear in the change in David’s mindset: he and Alma become intimate during their first night together, both physically and mentally. They quickly sense a strong psychological connection and mutual likeness, which Alma remarks on during their drive to New Mexico the next day:

‘You’re not going to let me down. And I’m not going to let you down. We both know that.’

‘What else do we know?’

‘Nothing. That’s why we’re sitting together in this car now. Because we’re the same, and because we don’t know a damn thing other than that.’

(*BI*: 122–123)<sup>7</sup>

I define this kind of mental uniformity and reciprocal capacity to sense the thoughts and feelings of one another as an extreme realisation of “intermental thinking”, a

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<sup>6</sup>“Alma” means “soul” in Spanish, which makes Alma a literal embodiment of care and affection. In turn, her surname means “ground” in German and hence refers metaphorically to her role in the novel as a stable terrain in which David can establish his new life, even if only temporarily.

<sup>7</sup>Auster does not use quotation marks in the novel, but for the sake of clarity I have used them here. Elsewhere in this chapter I do not add quotation marks within quotation marks, as they are not used in the book.

subcategory for intersubjectivity, which refers to the human capacity to sense what others feel and think.<sup>8</sup> We have previously encountered intermental thinking, for example, in the evocation of David's empathy with the filmic Hector. However, in the case of David and Alma, intermental thinking is mutual, and it physically takes place on one (diegetic) level. Simultaneously, it heightens the thematic importance in the novel of the strong interconnectedness between the self and the Other.

Besides the mental reciprocity between David and Alma, it turns out that Hector's films have connected them for several years: during their trip south, Alma discloses that it was she who sent Hector's lost movies to the film archives some years ago, with Hector's consent. Thus, Alma has unknowingly enabled David's recovery, and now those films have brought them together physically: "I sent out those films blind, and you were the one who found them" (*BI*: 215). Everything emanates from Hector, and during their long trip to New Mexico, Alma, who is finishing her biography on him, lets David in on the story of this mysterious man.

Previously, I pointed out that it is not hard to discern a correspondence between Hector's unhappy life story and David's recent misfortune. However, unlike David, who isolates himself from the external world after the tragic loss of his family, the young Hector, who blamed himself for the deadly accident of his former girlfriend, continues living among people, but assumes fake identities "to get rid of himself for others, but to remember who he was for himself" (*BI*: 144). To a certain extent, Hector resumes his filmic career by impersonating "the Other" in his real life.

Besides Hector's voluntary and remorseful abolition of the former self, Hector's genealogy epitomises the volatile quality of human nature, which is at the core of *The Book of Illusions*. Alma tells David Hector's true life story, which is complicated and imbued with fluctuating versions of names and identities. For example, Alma reveals that Hector's original name was Chaim Mandelbaum, and he has not only European, but also Jewish roots. The multifariousness and the disintegration of the self are thus powerfully highlighted in the act of naming, an act which usually connotes coherence and a stable self identity.

This is emphasised in David's contemplation as he is listening to Alma's recounting of different phases in Hector's life: "Chaim Mandelbaum becomes Hector Mann, Hector Mann becomes Herman Loesser, and then what? Who does Herman Loesser become? Did he even know who he was anymore?" (*BI*: 202). In German, *der Mann* means "the man". Thus, while illustrating humanness in general, Hector's surname also dismantles the notion of subjectivity as something that is lasting and uniform. By

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<sup>8</sup>On intermental thought, see Palmer (2004, 2010).

the same token, in his article on the nature of representation in *The Book of Illusions*, James Peacock holds that “Hector ‘Mann’ represents the plurality, and the consequent unknowability, of ‘man’ himself”, from which it follows that “Mann stands for the bedevilment of our efforts to locate the self’s essence” (2006: 63). By transforming Hector Mann into a certain kind of “Everyman”, the novel delineates an inescapable diversity of epistemological problems related to the (in)stability of human identity. As an enigmatic man who is “always framed by others” (ibid.: 64) in the narrative, Hector reminds the reader of the possibility of distorted perceptions and deceptive illusions encountered by human beings when they interact with, or more precisely, within, the world.

On the whole, Hector and David embody a recurring conception of the self in Auster’s fiction whereby human existence is comprised of several life stories and identities within one self.<sup>9</sup> The motto that opens the novel, taken from Chateaubriand, paves the way for this discovery: “*Man has not one and the same life. He has many lives, placed end to end, and that is the cause of his misery*” (emphasis original). According to Mark Brown,

the central characters in *Illusions* find a number of selves out in the world, each influenced by the material conditions of place. These characters journey in search of a ‘harmony’ between their inner terrain and the external terrain, constantly searching for an inner peace.

(2007: 99)

Thus, both David and Hector lead several lives within one life and never attain the ultimate stability of the self (ibid.: 219). Although in the course of the novel the understanding of the self remains unattainable by the characters, this ought be treated, as Brown rightly argues, “not as a loss, but as a necessarily unresolved or unharmonious part of identity” (ibid.: 112). Furthermore, as regards intersubjective interconnectedness between the self and the Other, the endless search pertains not only to the self, but also crucially involves and is affected by the outer world inhabited by “other selves”.

Whereas David and Chateaubriand are characterised as erratic selves who vacillate between several identities, the most extreme instability of subjectivity is manifest

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<sup>9</sup>The notion of multiple lives stacked inside one life is seen, for example, in Auster’s more recent novel *The Brooklyn Follies* (2006), whose protagonist Nathan Glass argues that “[a]ll men contain several men inside them, and most of us bounce from one self to another without ever knowing who we are” (Auster 2006: 122–123; see also Peacock 2011: 91).

in Hector. In his article on the role of silent films in Auster's novel, Alan Bilton maintains that "[t]his constant swapping of personas, a radical mutability (and mobility) of identity [...], suggests in turn Hector's constant shifting of name, role and appearance in the novel, but also suggests a more troubling sense of vacuity" (2011: 245). David observes this too, as he worryingly remarks on the eradicating effects of Hector's constant role play:

Put these contradictions together, and you wind up with nothing, the portrait of a man with so many personalities and family histories that he is reduced to a pile of fragments, a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces no longer connect.

(BI: 83)

While Bilton analyses Hector's subjective void in terms of characterisation, I find it advantageous to examine his existential voids also in terms of illusions, especially cognitive ones, a theme to which I will turn my attention in the following section.

Although David's brief encounter with Hector serves as confirmation for him that the enigmatic figure behind the silent films is, after all, "tangible" and hence not "an imaginary being" (BI: 222) who exists only in David's mind, various phenomenal and epistemological questions persist. By making Hector a relentlessly incongruent and ambiguous character with whom an immediate and stable connection is impossible and whose life story is related through others, the veracity of the narrative whole comes under suspicion and remains there.

Equivocal implications notwithstanding, both Hector and David attain a certain kind of spiritual equilibrium with the help of a loved one. For both men, the discovery of an unconsciously desired "Other" marks a turning point in their lives by launching a rehabilitation of the severely withered self. The similarities between the beginning of the two love stories are explicitly manifest in the narrative, as Alma warns David of how their evolving liaison may develop: "They fell hard for each other, she said. If we don't watch out, the same thing is going to happen to us" (BI: 200). As for Hector and Frieda, Alma believes that for Hector the marital union signified a restoration of the self: "After [Hector and Frieda] were married, Hector became Hector again" (BI: 202). Yet to reclaim the former self, Hector has to face death once more: he is on the brink of being killed during a bank robbery while trying to save Frieda, who — unknown to him at the time — is held captive by criminals.

In this way too the extraordinary life of Hector bears a resemblance to David's, who also has to step onto the threshold of death before a final rejuvenation of the



self. Similar to Hector, who is revived after having simultaneously confronted his own death and the Other, for David his nearly fatal encounter with Alma functions as the catalyst for re-entering the world, as he says to himself at the end of the novel: “I felt stronger than I had felt at any time in the past three years. Almost whole, I said to myself, almost ready to become real again” (*BI*: 296). The narrative which the reader is on the point of finishing signifies that David has indeed survived his painful losses and is able to re-connect with the world (see Brown 2007: 123).

Next, I move on to analyse the only sound film narrated in the novel, namely “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”. Its fantastic story illustrates cinematically various existential and epistemological questions that involve distinguishing the real from the (cognitive) illusion and contemplating the relationship between a subject and the external world. By recounting “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”, the narrative highlights the question of how we know that something truly exists. Thus, the final film narrated in the novel serves as the utmost actualisation of the recurring connotations of potential illusions that pertain both to the self and to the surrounding world.

### **Illusions of the Self and the Other in “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”**

David’s brief stay at the remote ranch where Hector and Frieda have lived for decades epitomises a shift into a new space, which is also imbued with illusions and escapism. Similar to David’s solitary residence in which he does not have to face the outer world, Hector has built a house with Frieda in the middle of the desert and decided to live a reclusive life disconnected from the outside world. Auster underlines the delusional and escapist quality of their habitation by naming the town in which the ranch is located *Tierra del Sueño*, meaning “Land of Dreams”. Furthermore, the name of the ranch itself, Blue Stone Ranch, originates from a false impression — or rather a cognitive illusion: right after meeting Frieda decades earlier, Hector mistakes a glowing spit for a moonstone. Thus, as David says in the narrative, “the life they were about to build for themselves was founded on an illusion” (*BI*: 287). Ultimately, their romantic fantasy of a safe haven is dramatically disrupted after a few years of idyllic family life, when their three-year-old son Taddy dies from a bee sting. After the accidental death of their only child, Hector resorts to his passion of making films and thereby produce *aesthetic* illusions, although on condition that the outcomes will never be shown in public. Now, Hector breaks his vow, allowing David to see his later works.

David's reminiscences about their arrival at the ranch eleven years before have illusory and beguiling overtones. His narration of the nocturnal event revolves around an epistemic meditation:

What if, instead of putting my arm around Alma's shoulder and walking straight toward the house, I had stopped for a moment, looked at the other half of the sky, and discovered a large round moon shining down on us? Would it still be true to say that there was no moon in the sky that night? If I didn't take the trouble to turn around and look behind me, then yes, it would still be true. If I never saw the moon, then the moon was never there.

(*BI*: 221)

David draws attention to the essence of the self as essentially restricted to one's subjective perceptual and cognitive perspective in constructing an understanding of the external world, which manifests itself to a subject. The passage indicates that what we understand by "reality" inevitably emerges in connection with a subject and that reality ought to be regarded and defined in terms of a subjective experience. In addition, it suggests that, although the impressions of the world may be, and often are, imprecise with regard to what actually, or objectively, constitutes the outer world, in this case, the moon in the sky, the somewhat "incorrect" understanding of the world nevertheless amounts to a true and meaningful experience for the subject himself or herself. In this case, for David the truthful memory of that night did not involve the moon, as his interest lay elsewhere: in Alma, in the future encounter with Hector, and in Hector's films.

By reminding us that our perceptions and assumptions about the surrounding world are bound to our embodied mind and hence are potentially misleading albeit simultaneously "real" for us, David voices one of the novel's main themes. More important, by asking himself — and simultaneously the reader — such a philosophical question about the experiential and existential nature of the self as a world-producing agent who is also fallible, David anticipates two significant issues with regard to the narrative whole and its ending. Firstly, his epistemic contemplation prepares the reader for the minute description of "The Inner Life of Martin Frost", the only film David has the chance to see at the ranch right after Hector's death before Frieda begins to carry out her late husband's wish. Secondly, the pensive film that opens the possibility of creating fallacies when we perceive the world and (the) Other(s) functions as an internal mirror for the evolving affair between David and Alma, its

sudden and tragic conclusion disclosed in the end of the novel, and the novel as a whole.

The tragic *denouement* has to do with events that follow not long after David's departure from the ranch: Alma commits suicide over her guilt for accidentally pushing Frieda out of her way and thereby causing the death of an old and frail woman. The reason for Alma's sudden, angry outburst is that Frieda has decided to erase *all* evidence of Hector's life after his death, including Alma's 600-page manuscript on Hector. Thus, besides predating the heartbreaking end of the bittersweet illusions in which David has been happily immersed for the past few days, the fanciful, passionate, and brief love story between the main characters in "The Inner Life of Martin Frost" intimates that perhaps the narrated films are not the only things that can be described as "products of illusion" in the storyworld. Rather, the film forces the reader to become aware of the question repeatedly implied in the narrative over the course of the novel: what if everything turns out to be an illusion, and nothing corresponds to the actual events?

"The Inner Life of Martin Frost" is about a writer called Martin Frost who attempts to write a short story at a house owned by friends while they are away. One morning, Martin wakes up and finds a woman in his bed. The woman introduces herself as Claire Martin and claims to be a friend of the couple. After a somewhat quarrelsome beginning Martin and Claire end up having an affair, which duplicates the surprising relationship that quickly developed between David and Alma on the diegetic level. However, Claire soon turns out to be a mystery. David discovers that Claire is not who she claims to be, and she refuses to disclose her true identity. One day, Claire falls ill. The more Martin progresses with his short story, the worse Claire's condition becomes.

As soon as Martin has finished his story, he finds Claire cold and short of breath in her room. To save Claire, Martin throws the manuscript into the dying fire. Before long, Claire is revived, to her own horror. By now it has become clear to Martin, who was in need of inspiration for his short story, that Claire has been his muse. The film concludes with Claire's anxious reaction to their violation of the rules of artistic inspiration: "Tell me Martin, what on earth are we going to do?" (*BI*: 268). As he starts recounting the film, David argues that the movie setting is "the inside of a man's head" (*BI*: 243). His disclosure anticipates the unfolding film and the fact that regardless of its "deadpan realism" (*BI*: 242), the viewer is presented with what Lubomír Doležel has called a "story of the mind" (1998: 96). In this way the narrative explicitly draws the reader's attention to the juxtapositions established

between cognition, realism, and aesthetic and cognitive illusions.

Apart from exemplifying a faltering human capacity for perceiving and comprehending both the external world (the Other) and ourselves, which the narrative intermittently accentuates, we have seen that “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” gives rise to noteworthy similarities between the couple in the film and David and Alma on the primary narrative level. Besides duplicating the love affair as such, the comparison underlines the untrustworthiness of humans’ subjective disposition with regard to the external world. On a diegetic level, both David and Alma express their respective fears of having crucial misapprehensions. After having become fond of each other, they become concerned about the accuracy of their subjective perspectives on the actuality of each other. Alma is afraid that she has merely imagined David: “What I think, she answered slowly, is that if I opened my eyes now, you might not be there” (*BI*: 290). Likewise, after having left the ranch for his solitary lodgings in Vermont, David thinks, “I sometimes felt that I had only imagined her” (*BI*: 315). Whereas in the reality of the storyworld the possibility of miscalculating an actual state of events is only hypothesised, in the film Martin truly mistakes the illusory Claire for flesh and blood that is “real” and “true”, a human being.

“The Inner Life of Martin Frost” also highlights the intersubjective relations in the novel. Thus, the strong interconnection construed between David and Alma as well as between Martin and Claire represents the crucial importance of the Other in the life of every human being. The film further exemplifies interconnection and interdependence between the self and the Other by having the characters share the same name: when asked, Claire announces that her surname is Martin (see *BI*: 248; see also Kuzma 2009: 190 nt 3). Thus, even at the risk of falling for misconceptions, both David and Martin are ready to plunge into a passionate rapport with a near-stranger. In both cases, the risk is worth taking, as they overcome their respective hindrances in life with the help of the Other — David his deep sorrow (“In eight short days, she had brought me back from the dead”, *BI*: 316), Martin his writer’s block.

It is unsurprising that several scholars have noted the striking resemblance between the two couples who reside on different narrative levels. Regarded as healers for their male counterparts, the women burst into the lives of the men: Alma literally at the front door of David’s cabin, and Claire both as a result and as a by-product of Martin’s authorial frustration. Besides the vital need of a masculine self for a feminine Other, Stefania Ciocia (2011) identifies similarities between the motivational significance — and subsequently the deaths — of the two women. Ciocia implies that Claire’s main function is to maintain Martin’s artistic productivity. Similarly, Alma is

needed to help David overcome the worst phase in his life after which she can be discarded. (Ciocia 2011: 110, 116, 123–124 nt 16.)

Ciocia's arguments partly emanate from her notion that Auster's later novel, *Oracle Night* (2003), "seem[s] to suggest that the perfect woman is the dead woman" (Ciocia 2011: 113), especially with regard to its central male character called Trause, an anagram of the novelist's surname. As for Alma, Ciocia infers that she is as "patently a [male] construction" as is her filmic correspondent Claire, and hence "overtly unreal" (ibid.: 116; see also González 2009b: 41), as Alma's life quickly comes to an end after she has led David literally to the "Land of Dreams".<sup>10</sup> Unlike Ciocia's interpretation of Alma's role, in my view her characteristics only underscore the novel's profound thesis that it is impossible to be certain of the absolute and objective veracity of our recognition of the external world, as we have no "mind-independent" access to the world. Whereas Ciocia claims that Alma's transparently loaded name denotes the way in which Auster seeks to guide the reader to understand her as a sign, "i.e. projections and embodiments of his intention [...], rather than as realistic descriptions of real human beings" (Ciocia 2011: 100), I argue that by making Alma slightly intangible and ephemeral, Auster makes sure that the reader will keep in mind the potentially deceptive nature of our individual perceptions without explicitly substantiating that Alma is *de facto* a figment of David's imagination. Thus, instead of relegating Alma to the realm of fantasy equal to the ontological quality of the narrated films, the narrative's subtle suggestions that Alma *could* be David's mental fabrication conform to an eternal human unawareness emphasised throughout the novel as to whether our perceptions of the world correspond to the actual existence of that world.

Through Claire, the reader is also introduced to major philosophers of the the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who are closely related to the empirical questions taken up in the novel, namely George Berkeley, John Locke, David Hume, and ultimately Immanuel Kant. The film thus raises various epistemological, existential, and metaphysical topics with the help of explicit references to philosophy. At the film's beginning, Claire declares that she is a philosophy student and is preparing for her exams. By starting her assignment with *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) written by Berkeley (1685–1753), the founder of immaterialism and subjective idealism who also influenced Kant's thinking, Claire draws attention

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<sup>10</sup>Similarly, Brown (2007: 127) holds that the narrative structure of *The Book of Illusions* is an intricate and multifariously embedded construction in which Martin creates Claire, Alma is the creation of David, and finally David (and the whole of the novel, of course) is the creation of Paul Auster.

to the inevitable subjectivity of human experience by quoting from the *Treatise*: “the various sensations or ideas [...] cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them” (BI: 250; emphasis original).

Besides quoting the passage which holds that the mind is a precondition for perceptions and subsequently for the existence of the external world in the first place, Claire reads aloud a passage in which Berkeley argues for the similarity between the real and the imagined, “betwixt real fire and the idea of fire, between dreaming or imagining oneself burnt, and actually being so” (BI: 250–251; emphasis original). Indeed, for Berkeley, the material world as such did not exist; instead, perceived objects are only ideas in the subject’s mind. Notwithstanding the radical nature of the immaterial doctrine, the excerpt resonates with David’s contemplations on the impossibility of making a valid distinction between the (material) real and the purely imaginary on a diegetic level, a discrepancy that turns out to be crucial on the embedded level of the film as soon as the true nature of Claire is disclosed. Thus, the abstract notions of epistemic questions are transformed into more concrete ones on a filmic level as the relationship between Martin and Claire develops.

After a while, Claire replaces Berkeley with Hume (1711–1776), a rigid empiricist for whom all knowledge was based on perceptions and experience. As an advocate for epistemological scepticism, Hume further surmised that we are unable to prove anything about the world with certainty.<sup>11</sup> By introducing Hume, the film continues to draw the reader’s attention to the potentially deceptive nature of human cognition, which is prone to error. This is particularly clear in a montage that shows daily domestic scenes, such as steam puffing from a tea kettle and wind blowing the curtains, denoting “an idyll, a moment of sustained and perfect happiness” (BI: 255). By representing ephemeral and intangible substances, the narrative subtly connotes visual delusion: “the camera is telling us not to trust in the surfaces of things, to doubt the evidence of our own eyes” (BI: 255). Similar to the picturesque scenario at the beginning of “Mr. Nobody” narrated above, the misleading setting of “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” serves as a forewarning of the future turn of events.

The deceptive imagery also brings out the deficiencies of visual epistemes. Although on a discourse level “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” prompts empiricist notions of epistemology and hence denotes sight as the principal sense with which human beings experience the world and generate ideas (see Cheeke 2008: 25), the potential deceptiveness of visual information is pivotal on both levels of the narra-

<sup>11</sup>This drastic conclusion is developed in *A Treatise of Human Nature* published in parts during the years 1738–40.

tive. Interestingly, the film questions not only the notion of “seeing as knowing”, but also the inadequacy of language, as when Claire, whose name paradoxically alludes to clarity and conspicuousness, gradually turns “into an enigma” and “the more she says, the less we are able to follow her” (*BI*: 257).

The potential ambiguity of language is also emphasised in the fact that Martin is a writer. Thus, unlike the suggestions made by Brown (2007, 2011) and Jesús A. González (2011), “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” does not set up a clear-cut contest between word and image in favour of the former. Rather, I argue that throughout the narrative the reliability of both visual stimuli and language as conveyors of meaning is represented as equally untrustworthy (see Hugonnier 2011: 283 nt 7). Having said that, I hasten to add that this line of thinking involves the notion that language has great *potential* in the search for truth.

As radical conceptions of perception and knowledge have turned out to be somewhat incomplete, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” introduces still one more philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant plays a crucial role in providing a final interpretation of the essence of subjectivity and especially of the subject’s relation to the external world — an intersubjective relation between the self and the Other. After falling ill, Claire is shown in bed, reading Kant and quoting aloud from his magnum opus, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781):

*...things which we see are not by themselves what we see... so that, if we drop our subject or the subjective form of our senses, all qualities, all relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish.*

(*BI*: 264; emphasis original)

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant inquired whether the objects of which we can have knowledge ought to conform to our subjective ways of knowing. Kant argued that, since we have no idea whether or not objects have spatial properties independent of our perception of them, our knowledge of objects partly depends on our own ways of knowing them. Acquiring such knowledge necessitates mental integrity. In this way Kant approached the notion of transcendental idealism: what we consider as part of the natural world is a reflection of our own internal standards, which are necessary for cognition. (Kant 1998: 216–218; Allison 2004: 3, 36–38.) Thus, contrary to the subjective idealism propounded by empiricists, who argued for the existence of things through our perceptions, Kant holds that the world beyond our perceptions exists, yet we cannot know that world in itself (see Allison 2004: 38–39).

Kant's remarks on a pre-constructed and inherently fallible mind (see Kant 1998: 294–295), which is bound to perceive only appearances of objects instead of “things-in-themselves”, have an important thematic role not only in “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”, but also in the novel as a whole. Besides epitomising the crucially subjective essence of human experience, I hold that transcendental idealism exemplifies intersubjective relations between subjects. Mark Johnson took up this notion in *The Body in the Mind* (1987), arguing that Kant's transcendental idealism implies “a ‘transcendental’ unity of consciousness” (ibid.: 151), which forms an objective basis for our experiences. Johnson believes that human experience is always subject to the unity of individual consciousness which forms the basis for objectivity in a person's experience. As there is an objective structure to consciousness, subjects can have public and shared experiences. (Ibid.) Thus, *The Book of Illusions* alludes to our intersubjective and intermental capacities with the help of Kantian philosophy.

This kind of philosophical contemplation which incorporates subjective and transcendental idealism is also manifest on a diegetic level and with reference to cinema, as Alma reflects on the existential quality of Hector's later film works that are seen by no one:

Hector had read a lot of books by then, he knew all the tricks and arguments of the philosophers. If someone makes a movie and no one sees it, does the movie exist or not? That's how he justified what he did. He would make movies that would never be shown to audiences, make movies for the pure pleasure of making movies.

(BI: 207)

According to the subjective idealism, the reality of the films never takes place without a perceiving subject. In the line of thinking proffered by Kant, the doubly imaginary film reels — a clever homophone with the word “real” — exist in the storyworld, but do not exist for the characters, as they stay beyond the perceptual and experiential reach of potential cinema audiences. Later, David remarks that, for Hector as the filmmaker, the only thing “that would have given his work meaning” is “the pleasure of sharing it with others” (BI: 278). David's cerebration emphasises a vital interconnection between the self and the Other — the films become attainable and meaningful objects only if they are encountered and experienced by the social community.

By the same token, the subjectivity mandatory for “world-making” and propounded by immaterial idealists, such as Berkeley and Hume, and later by Kant, generates



significant inquiries regarding the title of Auster's novel: how do the concepts of "illusion" and "truth" conform to the epistemological and phenomenological discourse which takes place on both levels of the narrative? Since the novel as a whole and "The Inner Life of Martin Frost" in particular circle around the questions of what is "illusion" and how we ought to define "truth", I find it reasonable to take a brief look at the ways the aforementioned philosophers conceptualised these terms and contrast their assumptions with the novel as a whole and, in particular, with the surprising end of the final film represented in the narrative.

In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), which followed the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant aptly formulated the difference between his philosophy and "genuine idealists", naming Berkeley, for whom "[a]ll cognition through the senses and experience is nothing but sheer illusion, and only, in the ideas of the pure understanding and reason there is truth" (2001: 74). To argue against this premise, Kant recapitulated his idea manifest in transcendental idealism, namely that "[a]ll cognition of things merely from pure understanding or pure reason is nothing but sheer illusion, and only in experience is there truth" (ibid.: 74–75). In short, truth can be found in experience, not in ideas that are products of pure reasoning.

Although both strains of philosophy postulate that reality emerges in the subject, the "genuine" idealism supported by Hume and Berkeley would regard Martin's perception of the world, a filmic reality in which his muse is revived and returns to life, as pure "illusion". In contrast, Kant's more widely approved assumption appears more feasible: truth is involved in our experiential encounters with the external world. However, since it is impossible to exceed the confines of subjective perceptual and cognitive capacity to become certain of the veracity of one's judgement of the world, one has to concede the possibility that the impression of that world is false. This assumption is easily adapted to Auster's novel and to the way it has approached epistemological questions, as the indecisiveness of the discourse compels the reader to consent to a definite unknowability with regard to the veracity of the storyworld as represented by David.

For example, we recall from the beginning of this subsection how David was aware of the inaccuracy of his recollection of his arriving at the ranch. Although David realises that his reminiscing is inevitably based on inaccurate mental images of past events, his memories appear meaningful and hence "real" to him. By highlighting the subjectivity of all experiences, regardless of their actuality in objective terms, the novel combines subjective idealism's conception of the mind-dependent reality that emerges in and is created by an individual with the relativity and as-

ceptual conditions that characterise Kant's understanding of how we perceive and apprehend the world. Thus, while Kant reminds us that "reality" as it appears to us is determined by our restricted point of view (see Givón 1989: 19) and hence is far from objective, *The Book of Illusions* creates epistemological and ontological dilemmas by undermining the distinction between what we typically regard as "real" and "true" from what is "unreal" and/or "illusion", and therefore subverts an unequivocal interpretation of those concepts.

That having been said, Kant's conception of "truth" as formulated in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is somewhat problematic, specifically, his definition of truth as "the agreement of cognition with its object" (1998: 197). Also known as the correspondence theory of truth, this notion of truth as the closeness of the correspondence between the representation and the thing represented is widely acknowledged and intuitively correct. However, I will show — especially in chapter five on Nicholls's *The Understudy* — that this assumption is inadequate and can even be misleading. Thus, we will see that "truth" is not found so much in perceived correspondences and correctness of representation as in provisional attempts to grasp it with the help of and within language, a process that, I argue, is set in motion in the novels studied here.

In order to analyse the problematic concept of "truth" with regard to the difference between "things-in-themselves" and objects and with reference to the correspondence theory, I introduce a philosopher who is not mentioned in "The Inner Life of Martin Frost", but whose first name (perhaps not by accident) is the same as that of the film's male protagonist: Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. Heidegger's hermeneutic, phenomenological, and existential ideas are pertinent to the philosophical topics prevalent in Auster's novel.

Similar to the unchanging fact that we are inevitably restricted to our subjective perspective with reference to the external world, for Heidegger "*truth* is not something that is 'out there' to be discovered in things but is essentially a relative concept" (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 69; emphasis original). The relativity inherent in such a fundamental concept as truth is, in turn, related to the correspondence theory of truth, as well as to the distinction made between "things-in-themselves" and objects as the way things appear to us. In discussing the distinction between "things-in-themselves" and objects, Heidegger states that "what stands over against is the object for the subject" (2012: 37; quoted in Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 113). As a consequence, things *become* objects only "by being situated opposite a subject or

in opposition to a subject” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 113). Explaining Heidegger’s understanding of truth, which contradicts the correspondence theory of truth, David Gunkel and Paul Taylor write:

‘things’ are not simply given or immediately available in some kind of raw or naked state. What they are and how we understand what they are is something that is always and already unconcealed through a *logical* process by which they come to show themselves as such [...].

(2014: 88; emphasis original)

Heidegger’s line of thinking bears a resemblance to a more contemporary conception of the human mind as “embodied”, “shap[ing] our reasoning and the structure of understanding that forms the basis for what we take to be true” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 98). In both formulations, then, “real” is “relative to an understanding” (ibid.: 110). As we have seen, this is precisely the *credo* manifested and elucidated in *The Book of Illusions*: subjectivity and subject position create their own, and hence relative, understandings of what appears to be true and real — as well as “false” and/or illusion — for the subject.

When it comes to Heidegger’s interpretation of truth, his essay “On the Essence of Truth” (“Vom Wesen der Wahrheit”, 1943) builds on the ancient Greek word for truth, ἀλήθεια (*aletheia*). By translating ἀλήθεια as “unconcealing”, “uncovering”, or “unhiddenness” instead of “truth”, Heidegger attempts to show that “it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings” (1993: 125; see also Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 83). I find Heidegger’s conception of the original meaning of truth useful in understanding the epistemological dilemmas set forth in Auster’s novel, and, to some extent, in other novels too. This is because Heidegger connects his conception of truth as “unconcealment” with λογος (*logos*), another ancient Greek term that refers, among other things, to “word”, “speech”, and “language”.

Like Socrates, who in Plato’s *Phaedo* investigates “the truth of things” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 86) in λογος by saying that “I must have recourse to conceptions”, namely λογος,<sup>12</sup> and “examine in them the truth of realities [i.e. things; my addition]” (Plato 1914: 99e, cf. Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 86), “Heidegger encourages us to think of language as ‘the house of Being’, that is, the means by which Being is uncovered and disclosed to us” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 84). As a work whose

<sup>12</sup>In English translations, λογος is often translated as “conceptions” or “ideas”.

story portrays a deep engagement in the act of writing, specifically verbal and literary communication, *The Book of Illusion* exemplifies how “[w]hatever is ‘out there’ comes into being in and by being spoken (about)” (ibid.). We will return to the notion of *λογος* entailing the truth in the final section of this chapter.

If we return to “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” and its cryptic ending in particular, we find that the characters question the fixed conceptions of the nature of ontology and existentiality in the novel. At the outset, Claire is an imaginary and metaleptic character who, without David or the reader initially knowing it, illogically inhabits a movie reality. In the film’s dramatic end, she is not only revived, but also simultaneously transformed into a flesh-and-blood character equal to Martin. By virtue of Claire’s dual transgression, the narrative impels the reader to become aware of the complex ontological structure of the fictional world. Furthermore, by underscoring the difference between (a cognitive) illusion and the reality as represented in the film, the narrative paradoxically undermines the stability of the movie reality and hence makes “ontological barriers [...] fluid” (Shiloh 2002: 202) on the filmic level. What follows is that the outlandish termination of the film corroborates the significance of its title: instead of providing the viewer with a phenomenal representation of events that have actually taken place in the represented storyworld, the film perhaps affords us a glance into the *inner* life of Martin. Besides illuminating the way in which “the distinctions between the inner and the outer become blurred” (ibid.: 201) on the filmic level, Claire’s baffling trespass into the movie reality highlights the volatile nature of the self.

Indeed, Peacock (2006: 67) has argued that “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” illustrates the novel’s general claim that there is no satisfying or established new self, but rather an ongoing process with past selves and the new self. Furthermore, by observing that the outcome of the film shows that there is no separate “reality” into which Martin and Claire can step after the dramatic turns of events (ibid.), Peacock makes us mindful of our subjective, mind-dependent aspect with reference to the world “out there”, the assumed objective world to which we can never have access.

As the final narrated film, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” mirrors the novel’s principal topics and issues, namely various ontological, existential, and epistemological questions that attempt to define subjectivity and intersubjective relation between the self and the other/external world. In the following section, I turn my attention to the narrative styles used in the recountings of films that revolve around similar topics. I show that, similar to the ontological breaches which take place in the movie reality of the narrated sound film, David’s renditions of films as such make constant use

of transgressive narrative techniques that violate the ontological separation between filmic characters, the diegetic level of the storyworld, and ultimately the extra-textual level of the reader. These less common narrative tools illustrate in a powerful way the main themes of the novel: the nature of the self in itself and with regard to the Other. Thus, akin to the unnatural elements in “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”, the “unnatural” narrative features used in the filmic recountings highlight what is essential in the novelistic whole.

### **Filmic Evocations of Intermental Thinking, Distancing, and Alignment**

For a novel that ostensibly has one first-person narrator responsible for the reported events, *The Book of Illusions* is surprisingly polyphonic and heterogeneous. The narrative is comprised of intermingled voices that are impossible to separate from one another. In an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory in 1989, Auster touched on the mix of narrative perspectives in his works by attesting that “there’s a vast range within [the first- and third-person narration], and it’s possible to bring the boundaries of first person and third person so close to each other that they touch, even overlap” (McCaffery and Gregory 2013: 33).

Auster’s remark is emblematic of the narrative style of *The Book of Illusions*. The novel’s tendency to multi-vocality which problematises the origin of the heard voice(s) is seen most clearly in the long passage in the middle of the novel that recounts Hector’s life story (*BI*: 127–198). In the course of the narration it often remains unclear whose thoughts are being articulated and who is responsible for the articulation, as in the following excerpt, which apparently represents Hector’s inner thoughts: “[Hector] wasn’t intending to be heroic, and he certainly wasn’t intending to get himself killed, but whatever else he might have been feeling at that moment, he wasn’t afraid” (*BI*: 195). Here the narrative intermingles the voices and minds of David as the principal narrator; of Alma, who tells Hector’s story during their drive to the ranch; and finally of Hector himself, on whose diaries Alma bases her recounting of Hector’s story.

In *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction* (2006), Brian Richardson holds that in contemporary fiction one narration has a tendency to collapse “into another, and one consciousness bleeds into a second one” (*ibid.*: 12). The long passage on Hector mentioned above illustrates Richardson’s claim. The seemingly neutral yet essentially multivocal nature of the passage subtly under-

scores the Bakhtinian heteroglossia, which occasionally dominates and hence makes the narrative an intersection of dialogic voices that interact with and permeate one another, ultimately filtered through David's unifying voice (see Bakhtin 1981; also Brooks 1994: 78). What ensues from this kind of "penetration of another's words into one's own" (Stefanescu 2006: 337) is that the reader's initial conception of the narrating and experiencing subject becomes immersed in the multiplied frames of narration and hence merged with other selves and identities.

For Peacock (2006: 64), the vocal layering of the novel's middle section diminishes the narration's reliability. While admitting that Peacock is right in asserting that the long passage on Hector brings out the question of veracity, I claim that it does not so much elicit real suspicion of the section's truthfulness as pave the way for the reader to discern the power of language as a communicative means of representing experience, creating reality, and becoming aware of the possibility of delusions that trouble human beings in general (see Simonetti 2011: 16). I argue further that, by fusing minds and voices in the long passage, the narrative emphasises the social dimension of language as something that is shared between the self and the Other. Thus, the polyphony detected in the passage illustrates that individual voices originate from "the collective 'voice' and words of others" (Brown 2007: 16). In this way the multi-vocal characteristics contribute to the epistemological, ontological, and existential topics and questions that are central to the novelistic whole.

A number of studies show that violations of realistic cognitive and perceptual parameters as well as collisions between narrative levels do not necessarily undermine the mimetic illusion of a narrative (e.g. Pier 2009: 192–193; Wolf 2013: 115–116; Polvinen 2012: 94–96; Heinze 2008; Shen 2001). The effortless fashion in which the reader accepts the infusion of various voices and minds in the long passage underlines the reader's capacity to naturalise cognitively impossible narration, which, regardless of its unnaturalness, is part of literary convention. In fact, the neutrality with which the reader presumably reacts to the "threshold crossing[s]" (Richardson 2006: 100) that repeatedly occur in *The Book of Illusions* emphasises the human capability for intersubjective and mutual recognition that dominates the novel. Thus, our ability to immerse ourselves in the narrative regardless of its illogical forms is also a token of our proclivity for intermental thinking and mind-reading.

Similar to the dialogic interaction between voices and minds in the long passage on Hector, the representations of films serve as pragmatic examples of the human ability and eagerness to interpret the minds of others. This is evident in the way David's voice more or less discernibly merges with the voices on the lower level of

the films, as in the following passages: “[w]hat in the world has happened?” (*BI*: 46); “[w]hat to do?” (*BI*: 36). Similar fusions of voices and fictional minds residing on discrete narrative planes take place, especially in the narrating of the silent films. Owing to the technical characteristics of the silent films, the dialogue and thoughts of the movie characters are expressed in and limited to the few intertitles in-between the narrated shots. David does not explicitly pinpoint the special features of the films. Thus, it remains undetermined whether the utterances ought to be regarded as an outcome of mind-reading, which David has engaged in in order to decipher thoughts and verbalisations of movie characters, or whether they are truthful representations of the filmic content: “[m]aybe there’s something wrong with the mirror” (*BI*: 43); “[i]s he really there?” (*BI*: 52).

Besides connoting the active process of intermental thinking, the frequent use of free indirect speech in filmic representations often blurs the line between David’s inferential mind-reading and the actual segments of dialogue taking place in the film. Thus, instead of definitely locating the origin of the represented minds and voices, the reader is left with a network of voices impossible to separate from one another. Therefore, the heteroglossia that dominates filmic recountings results in obliterating the borders that demarcate the difference between fictional minds on discrete narrative levels (on heteroglossia, see Bakhtin 1981).

The passages quoted above most likely go unnoticed by the reader (on familiarisation, see Nielsen 2013: 71; Grishakova 2009). However, occasionally David expresses his mind-reading of the film characters with such certainty that it generates disturbing meta- and paraleptic situations. This is especially apparent in the way he frequently represents inner states and thoughts that clearly belong to the filmic characters and are beyond his knowledge. Especially in the case of “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”, David appears to be unnaturally aware of Martin’s thoughts. For example, the inner life of the male protagonist is represented in an overtly determined fashion in a scene during which Claire seeks to break the ice: “It is a moment of sublimely achieved wit, and from that moment on, Martin knows that he has met his match” (*BI*: 253).

The question arises: how is it possible that David, as the intradiegetic character-narrator on the diegetic level, knows what Martin at the lower narrative level of the film thinks when nothing indicates that the expressed thoughts are verbalised in the film, for example in the form of Martin’s voice-over? David’s meta- and paraleptic narration defies the differentiation between the primary narrative level and the secondary level of the represented films. Thus, filmic representations breach both

ontological and epistemological boundaries that demarcate the difference between the narrative levels as well as between minds that reside on these discrete narrative levels.

Unlike previous examples of recounting silent films, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” probably makes it more difficult for the reader to accept “the breaks in the code” (Phelan 2013: 169); hence, he or she becomes more aware of the limits that define the human capacity to read the mind of the Other — the very limits David frequently violates during his filmic recountings. David’s meta- and paralectic narration testifies to Nelles’s contention in *Frameworks: Narrative Levels and Embedded Narrative* (1997), namely that there is “an intensified hermeneutic demand for a more complex model of reading” (ibid.: 155) involved in deciphering the function of metaleptic narrative acts. Besides making readers mindful of the limits of knowledge in terms of narrative levels, the novel compels them to become more conscious of their own restrictions, both as readers and as simulated film viewers. By trespassing on the borders between fictional minds, the filmic representations make apparent the irrevocable gaps between the self and the Other.

To sum up, David’s more or less disturbing proclivity for mixing his voice and thoughts with the minds of the movie characters draws attention to significant topics in *The Book of Illusions*. David’s polyphonic and meta/paralectic narration prompts the reader to think of two concepts which are crucial in the novel: firstly, intermental thinking, which is related to intersubjectivity, and secondly, the restricted sphere of cognition within which David, and ultimately the reader, are held captive. Furthermore, the collapse of the borderlines that demarcate the narrative levels exemplifies a subject’s potential fallibility in accurately perceiving the external world and representing it through language.

There are still two other narrative devices used in recounting films that also deviate from the traditional first-person narration and subsequently contribute to the manifestation of various aspects of human life, namely “we” and “you” narration. I begin by analysing the “we” narration or the first-person plural, since it is utilised almost constantly in the majority of the filmic representations. David makes use of “we” narration especially in showing a response to and comprehension of an unfolding film. For example, in “The Prop Man” he describes in the first-person plural the audience’s reaction to a scene in which Hector has stolen props for a theatre show: “We recoil from his tactics, but at the same time we pray for him to pull off the theft” (*BI*: 37). Although the “we” narration is a common rhetorical tool in film criticism, its repeated use in *The Book of Illusions* evokes indeterminacy with regard to the point



of reference. Put differently, how should we interpret the target group “we”? Who takes part in it? Whose voice is the reader hearing?

If we concentrate first on the reader’s reaction to the first-person plural, we have to draw on two concepts that define the reader’s position, namely “the narrative audience” and “the narratee”, both of which were briefly mentioned above in the theoretical section. “Narrative audience” refers to “the observer role within the world of the fiction” (Phelan 1996: 218) which the reader adopts. In other words, the narrative audience is the group for whom the narrator writes and the story is told, and hence it “occupies some part of the actual reader’s consciousness” (ibid.: 143), as he or she endeavours to make sense of and experience the represented elements of the fictional world. The narratee, in turn, is “the audience directly addressed by the narrator”(ibid.: 218). According to Phelan, these two audiences may overlap, depending on to what extent the narratee is characterised (ibid.: 146); in other words, the more specifically defined the narratee, the greater is the distance between the two audiences.

In *The Book of Illusions* and its represented films, the reader puts him- or herself in “the observer position” (ibid.: 145) of the narrative audience and “believes” in the represented reality of the storyworld in which these films have been made and seen. Furthermore, by repeatedly exploiting the compelling first-person plural to represent cognitive responses to a film (“we sense that”, *BI*: 250; “we finally get it”, *BI*: 266), the narrative encourages the reader to take part in the group addressed as “we”, namely the narratee. Thus, the reader is invited to occupy the dual position of an observer within the world of fiction and the narratee whom David addresses directly and who actively participates in the collective act of film viewing.

By using the present tense, the narrative reinforces the persuasiveness of “we” as a group with whom the reader can identify. The immediacy of present-tense narration in fiction creates a sense of being a witness, as noted by Richard Walsh:

by foregrounding the narration’s contemporaneity to diegetic events, [present-tense narration] pulls towards a sense of the narratorial perspective as that of a witness, who would therefore be part of the *diegèse*.

(2010: 40; see also Genette 1988: 80)

Moreover, since David invites the reader to listen to his movie recounting and hence creates a simulated act of oral storytelling, “[s]uch narratorial illusion permits the recipient to imagine him- or herself being present in a storytelling (or storyreading) situation” (Wolf 2006b: 189). Thus, the narrative creates an imaginary situation in

which the reader is included as a member of the film audience which is experiencing the film at this moment.

However, since in the course of filmic recountings the narratee turns out to have distinctive traits, readers occasionally distance themselves from the position of the addressed “we”; in other words, the “we” narration readily creates a contradictory and distancing response in the reader, who may have rejected detailed reactions to a certain movie scene. A dissonance between the response of the narratee and the response of the reader probably takes place during the narration of “Mr. Nobody”. For example, the reader is provided with pre-fabricated judgements and anticipations of Hector’s criminal deeds: “We don’t feel the least bit sorry for the victim, but we’re dumbfounded by how blithely Hector has taken the law into his own hands” (BI: 46).

By the same token, in the beginning of “Mr. Nobody” the first-person plural not only anticipates future events in the film, but also determines the reactions of the addressed “we”:

the narrative purpose of the scene is to present us with a picture of happiness. We are being set up for the losses that are about to occur, and without this glimpse of Hector’s private life (perfect marriage, perfect kids, domestic harmony in its most rhapsodic form), the evil business that lies ahead would not have the same impact. As it is, we are devastated by what happens to Hector.

(BI: 40)

In both cases the reader is prohibited from reacting to his or her liking of the ongoing filmic narrative, let alone from freely judging and evaluating the actions of the film’s characters.

Here the “we” turns out to be a highly fluctuating and even contradictory concept in *The Book of Illusions*, as “the reference group” addressed by the first-person plural “may shift in identity, scope, size, and temporal location in the course of the narration” (Margolin 2001: 245).<sup>13</sup> According to Richardson, “the very ambiguity and fluctuations of the precise identity of the ‘we’ ” (2006: 56) require the reader to conclude “how literally and how figuratively to take each such expression of shared mental events” (ibid.: 57). Thus, the first-person plural poses a challenge “to establish the relative objectivity or subjectivity of the ‘we’ ” (ibid.: 58). The reader’s response to the “we” narration demonstrates the challenges in defining a subject’s position with regard to the external world and to others. By creating a diverse and

<sup>13</sup>On the instability of “we” narration, see Richardson (2006: 14); Veselá (2012).

unstable “we” in the novel, the first-person plural contributes to the illumination of intersubjective relations between human beings, on the one hand, and to the more subjective and unique experiences of an individual, on the other.

This means that the “we” narration calls the reader’s attention to the higher level of narrative communication, namely the implied author, and the reader’s participation in the “authorial audience” “for whom the author constructs the text” (Phelan 1996: 215). By creating a narratee that is too minutely outlined, yet difficult to identify, the narrative goads the reader into grasping the authorial intention of illustrating the novel’s main themes.

By compelling the reader to take part in the addressed “we”, the narrative also obscures an ontological boundary between textual and extra-textual audiences; in other words, since the dual address of the “we” narration is prone to undermine the distinction between the textual “we” and the extra-textual “we”, the first-person plural causes, or at least threatens to cause, transgressions by disintegrating “the boundary between the first and the third persons” (Richardson 2006: 48).<sup>14</sup> The constant play with the exact location and essence of the addressee makes the reader more conscious of the various ways in which the novel frequently endeavours to obliterate ontological categories that demarcate the line between reality and illusion, both on the textual and the extra-textual levels. Thus, the use of “we” narration also elicits awareness of potential illusions which are constantly present, implied, and explicit in this “book of illusions”.

Besides exploring the reader’s reception of the “we” narration and its function as a catalyst for the novel’s main themes, we also need to analyse the first-person plural from David’s perspective. I find it reasonable to interpret David, as the protagonist and the homodiegetic narrator, as belonging to the addressed group of “we”. However, as we have seen, the narrative situation is complex. The way the filmic recountings combine the first-person narration with the first-person plural creates a “suggestive interplay between ‘we’ narration and more conventional first and third person forms” (Richardson 2006: 58). Moreover, the first-person plural itself “straddles the line between first and third person fiction”, which makes it “simultaneously first *and* third person discourse[...]” (ibid.: 60; emphasis original). Thus, similar to the heteroglossia discernible in the long passage on Hector’s past, which was related in third person, the first-person plural also engenders a web of fictional voices and thoughts impossible to distinguish from one another.

It is possible to regard the recurring use of “we” in film recountings as the marker

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<sup>14</sup>On the textual and extra-textual “you” in second-person narration, see Phelan (1996: 137).

of all “past I’s”, entailing all the screenings David has seen of Hector’s films. In other words, the first-person plural comprises all the past selves that make up David’s prior life, his memories, and his narratorial status in the discourse-now. In this fashion, the “we” narration emphasises a theme that is closely related to human existence and that defines both male characters in the novel, namely the way in which subjectivity consists of multiple selves that intermingle with one another.

Another way to interpret the narrative and thematic effects of the “we” narration with regard to David emphasises the significance of the relationship between the self and the Other in the novel as a whole. Here Uri Margolin’s definition of “we” narration as “an intermediate position between the sender role (I) and those of the second and third persons (not-I)” (1996: 117) is of great use. Margolin’s interpretation implies that the self and the Other — “I” and “not-I” in his terminology — are in constant motion in the narration. This pertains to David’s status as a fictitious person and the narrative style utilised for his verbal renderings of the films. Akin to the reader’s fluctuation between distancing from and aligning with the communal perspective of “we” during the movie recountings, the constant shifts between various styles make David’s narration alternate between a highly personal and a more neutral voice.

This wavering between an individual and a detached role is especially discernible in the verbalisation of “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”. David begins his narration of the last film by emphasising his personal thoughts about its setting:

The immediacy of the landscape disconcerted me, and for the first couple of minutes I had to struggle against the impression that I was watching some kind of elaborate, highly skilled home movie.

(BI: 243)

Here David establishes an active position as a unique film viewer who is endowed with an individual and distinctive voice. However, he quickly returns to the first-person plural familiar from the previous filmic representations: “*The house was empty, an offscreen voice tells us*” (BI: 244; emphasis original). Since David perpetually distances himself from his subject position on the diegetic level and simultaneously aligns himself with the larger and impersonal group designated as “we” on the discourse level, his personal voice and individuality are severely diminished.<sup>15</sup> By

<sup>15</sup>On “we” impairing the integrity of subjectivity, see Lanser (1992: 241). On distancing and aligning, see Mildorf (2006: 57); see also Heinen (2009: 197–198).

representing David as both immersing himself in a shared and hence intersubjective perspective because of which he loses his personal voice, and subsequently re-establishing his subjectivity and the narratorial perspective, the author shows us once again how the narrative elucidates the recurring permutations that characterise the relationship between the self and the Other.

Similar to the effects of “we” narration — intersubjectivity, individuality, as well as ontological and epistemological breaches that endeavour to subvert the distinctions between the filmic, diegetic, and even extra-textual levels — the way David uses an ambiguous address for “you” in his filmic recountings helps to illustrate the novel’s main themes in an evocative fashion. It is true that the majority of second-person singular uses do not cause disconcerting uncertainty in the reader with regard to the person the narrator is addressing. In these cases, we are dealing with an impersonal “you”.<sup>16</sup>

A more neutral usage of this kind of “you” is generally manifest in the form of either a rhetorical imperative (“Think of Arbuckle’s juvenile rotundity, his simpering shyness and painted, feminized lips”, *BI*: 32) or a you-passive that designates the narratee: “The scale of [Hector’s] work was modest, but there was an intimacy to it that held your attention and forced you to respond to him” (*BI*: 20). In addition to these more conventional instances of a “generalized you” (cf. Nielsen 2013: 91), which imply that the narratee is “an intrinsic, textual ‘you’ ” (Phelan 1996: 136), David’s interminable descriptions of the responses to the films make readers uncertain whether they are included in the addressed “you” — a scenario that would extend to the target group of “you” beyond the literary frames.<sup>17</sup>

For example, the following passage which describes the viewer’s evolving inferential process during Hector’s silent film comedy “Double or Nothing”, may well elicit reader uncertainty regarding inclusion in the designated “you”: “Watch him flicking specks of imaginary dust from his jacket [...], and you’re no longer watching a demonstration of self-love: you’re witnessing the torments of self-consciousness” (*BI*: 31–32). Similar to the instability and vacillation generated by the first-person plural, the “you” narration blurs apprehension of clear points of reference and forces the reader to alternate between aligning and identifying with the addressed target group of “you” or, as happens later, to distance from that “you”. The reader is com-

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<sup>16</sup>The “you” narration I am dealing with here ought not to be confused with the second-person narration proper, in which “you” designates the protagonist. On second-person narration proper, see Reitan (2011). In fact, there are some examples of this standard second-person narration in the novel (see e.g. *BI*: 171), but these are beyond the scope of my study.

<sup>17</sup>On the extrinsic, extra-textual “you”, see Phelan (1996: 137).

pelled to merge temporarily with the perspective of the narrator and the narratee, which makes the reader a participant in an intermental and intersubjective act of fictional film viewing. Since the reader most likely accepts occasional fusions between the narrator and himself or herself, the “you” narration provides the “possibility of a genuine recognition of otherness, a non-egotistic awareness of our tendency to incorporate the worlds and experiences of others into our own” (Waugh 1992: 57). “You” narration is thus a powerful indicator of a dialogic interaction between fictional and actual minds.

Then again, the latter case of distancing is almost simultaneous with the act of alignment, as the designated “you” remains indeterminate in the narrative. What also affects the reader’s proclivity for frequent distancing from the addressed “you” is that, analogous to the first-person plural, the narrative employs “you” in order to describe the audience response to the films in a disturbingly detailed fashion. Thus, the reader presumably occasionally rejects the pre-formed sensations that are given, as in the following passage in which David depicts Hector’s early film characters: “to watch him go about his business with the sure-handed competence of one who trusts in his own abilities, you understand that he’s a person destined for success” (*BI*: 34). This “continuous dialectic of identification and distancing” (Richardson 2006: 21) set out in Auster’s novel makes the designated “you” “inherently unstable” (*ibid.*; see also Phelan 1996: 137). The “you” narration illuminates the main themes related to the self and the Other, encouraging the reader to be constantly aware of the nature of the self both as an individual, on the one hand, and as a potential member of a more communal and intersubjective perspective shared by human beings, on the other.

Here I have shown that “you” narration contributes to the manifestation of existential and epistemological questions which dominate the novel as a whole. Along with David and Martin, the reader is compelled to ask what can we positively know about the self and the Other and how can we define the borders of the self that separate us from the external world and other minds. Furthermore, the narrative’s ontological volatility affects the reader, as it obliges him or her to position the designated addressee both within and outside the textual frames, an operation that makes the “you” “a form of address that exceeds the frame of the fiction itself” (Herman 2002: 342; see also Richardson 2006: 20, 32–33; Phelan 1996: 137). Put differently, as the distinction between the textual and extra-textual levels is constantly at risk of collapsing due to the less conventional narrative techniques, the novel calls into question the stability of the borderlines that demarcate the real world and the fictional one(s).

As for David the character-narrator, the “you” narration emphasises his personality as volatile and unstable.<sup>18</sup> The definitions of second-person narration as such link the narrative category with fluctuation. Whereas the first-person plural strangely occupied the poles of “I” and “we” simultaneously, most second-person narration wavers between these two poles and causes a noticeable degree of indeterminacy (see Richardson 2006: 60). According to Richardson,

second person narration is situated between but irreducible to the standard dyads of either first and third person or hetero- and homodiegetic narration, but rather oscillates irregularly from one pole to the other.

(ibid.: 28)

David’s voicing of “you” is incontrovertibly ambiguous in terms of a fixed identity. Yet, as we have seen, “you” narration formally illustrates the dialogic connection between the self and the Other. As Richardson maintains, “at a more philosophical level, [‘you’ narration] is admirably suited to express the unstable nature and intersubjective constitution of the self” (ibid.: 36). By “revealing a mind in flux” (ibid.: 35), “you” narration provides an intriguing narrative tool for manifesting the complex nature of the self in the novel.

In this section, I have analysed the less common narrative techniques in the filmic recounting that violate the borders between the reader and the narrative, along with the narrative levels of the reality of the storyworld and the films, the self and the Other, and, ultimately, the real world and the fictional storyworld. In terms of David as the intradiegetic narrator, both “we” and “you” narration make him an active participant in the act of ontological transgression between narrative levels, and also between the textual and extra-textual levels. Thus, apart from delineating the complexity of human life as both unique and intersubjective, all the narrative forms analysed here which deviate from the conventional first-person render David “a dis-framed narrator”, who not only metaleptically trespasses on the threshold that separates the diegetic and filmic levels, but who also makes contact with the reader who is residing on the extra-textual level.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>On the whole, David’s inconsistency is corroborated by the fact that he also has a role in other novels written by Auster, *Moon Palace* (1989), and, more recently, in *Travels in the Scriptorium* (2007). On intertextuality between the works of Auster, see Banks (2011).

<sup>19</sup>On “Dis-framed Narrators”, see Richardson (2006: 105).

## The Power of Storytelling and Imagination

Throughout the present chapter I have scrutinised the ways in which the recountings of films in *The Book of Illusions* contribute to the manifestation of the pivotal relationship between the self and the Other, as well as various epistemological, ontological, and existential problems associated with that relationship. In this final section I explore how Auster creates crucial links between different poles which are central to the novel — the self and the world, tellers and listeners, the past and the present — both throughout the narrative and during the narrated films in particular. Furthermore, I focus on the way these links illustrate the role of memory, language, and storytelling, as Auster delves into the nature of identity and its construction, especially by having his characters reminisce, write, and interact with others and the external world. Thus, *The Book of Illusions* is consistent with other literary works by Auster in which, according to Ilana Shiloh, “the central activity in the fictional world mirrors the interpretive process” (2002: 201) of the narrative.

In the previous section we saw that the narrative’s para- and metaleptical features repeatedly showed the main aspects of human existence as being both highly individual and dependent on others. I demonstrated that various narrative anomalies are in line with the overall narrative strategy. Now I argue that a similar conformity between form and content can be discerned in how David’s verbalisations about the films call the reader’s attention to spatio-temporal issues. Previously, I mentioned that most of the film recountings — “The Prop Man”, “Mr. Nobody”, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost”, and more general depictions of Hector’s filmic appearances — are given in present tense, whereas narration is otherwise chiefly related in past tense. The use of present tense gives rise to interesting effects in terms of time and space: there is a shift in time to previous acts of watching the films, and yet these previous acts bear a resemblance to the time of discourse-now in which David the character-narrator recounts the film. The past self is thus imperceptibly merged with the present self who is recounting the film.

Here the narration produces a situation called a “dual focalisation”, whereby “the experiencing I” on the story level and “the narrating I” on the discourse level overlap (see Phelan 2005: 118–119). Since Auster’s novel blurs the line between the character “telling now” and his “remembering then” (ibid.: 168) by emphasising their similarity, the reader is compelled to perceive elements that have an effect on understanding not only of David’s development in the course of the novel (see ibid.: 121), but also of such themes as the importance of memory and the need to remember in



the life of an individual.

We also have to bear in mind that David, as the character-narrator of the discourse-now, narrates “the remembered I”, not the former “experiencing I”. Since the so-called metacognitive remarks that define the act of reminiscing emphasise that “the past I” is utterly beyond our grasp, the outcome of David’s cinematic recollections is potentially in stark contrast to his actual experiences, which took place in the fictive past. For the reader, this set of circumstances produces an awareness of the possibility of inaccurate and hence deceptive memories, which then calls into question the integrity of the narrated experience and hence manifests our fallible nature as human beings. If we also take into account that some of the narrated films are lost for good in the storyworld reality, it makes the gap between the novel’s past and the present even more perceptible and significant.

Although the novel’s temporal shifts into filmic recountings create an illusion of a single viewing experience, in reality discrete temporal levels are adjacent to each other, as all except one of the filmic representations are based on multiple viewing times. In Genette’s terminology, these film recountings are based on a “synthetic” use of “iterative” narrative in which “a single narrative utterance takes upon itself several occurrences together of the same event” (1980: 116). This kind of “*synthesizing iteration*” (ibid.: 119; emphasis original) engenders anachronistic narration, as, besides describing how David experienced the film at the time, the narrative also condenses all the viewing times into one compact representation (see ibid.: 157). In this way, the temporal ambiguity privileges memory and existentiality at the expense of time *per se* (see ibid.: 160; see also Caws 1985: 229). *The Book of Illusions* amplifies further this “fuzzy temporality” (Herman 2002: 212) by making most of the filmic verbalisations “non-contextualised”; for example, “The Prop Man” and “Mr Nobody” are related in an atemporal and non-spatial “vacuum” without any indication of a certain spatio-temporal occurrence.

Besides giving rise to pivotal mnemonic and existential topics in the novel, the dual act of both emphasising and obscuring temporal issues with the help of filmic representations is, I argue, closely related to the traumatic events that underlie the narrative.<sup>20</sup> Vickroy has described that because deeply traumatised persons

live in durational rather than chronological time, they continue to experience the horrors of the past through internal shifts back in time and space rather than experiencing the past as differentiated from the present.

(2002: 5; see also Langer 1991: 14–15)

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<sup>20</sup>On “unnatural” temporality, see Heinze (2013).

If we compare the blurred temporality of the film verbalisations with the traumatised David at the novel's beginning, we see that filmic recountings mirror the synchronic conception of time, both in the novel and in David's shattered mind, which uncannily unites the past with the present.

The representation of the disintegrated self also turns out to be prominent here, as “[t]he complex internal conflicts, the ‘bi-focal visions’ and movements from avoidance to fear to helplessness that characterize trauma also suggest a multiple view of self in reaction to extraordinary circumstances” (Vickroy 2002: 28). Parallel to the reader's uncertainty about the point of reference in the cases of “we” and “you” narration explored in the previous section, the narrative, by triggering incoherent temporal markers during the filmic representations, places the reader “in the similarly disoriented positions of the narrators and characters through shifts in time, memory, affect, and consciousness” (ibid.). In this way too verbalisations of the films contribute to the novel's illumination of subjectivity as fragile.

*The Book of Illusions* also produces blurred and layered temporality in an intricate manner, which can be seen as a communicative action drawing the reader's attention to “the art and artifice of narration” (Coste 1989: 169). Indeed, by frequently underscoring its fictional status, Auster's novel engages in a self-reflective play, which, as will be seen in the following chapters, pertains in some degree to all the novels chosen for this study. The ending further increases the metafictional aspect, as it turns out that *The Book of Illusions* is a novel about writing the book that the reader is about to finish. I am referring to David's explanation for telling the story in the first place: everyone else familiar with Hector's mystery is dead, and now, a decade after the events related in the novel have taken place, David has had several heart attacks and has realised that it is high time to reveal Hector's story before it is too late.

In the introduction to the present chapter I pointed out that *The Book of Illusions* can be regarded as a *Künstlerroman*, and specifically as a book about artists, as well as a volume about the therapeutic potential which is intrinsic to art. In the course of this chapter I have demonstrated that, for both David and Hector, the life-giving force of art enables each man to reclaim his “authentic” self and simultaneously connect with the external world. As for the relationship between the self and the Other, we have seen that both Hector as a movie actor and David as a writer have to immerse themselves in the roles of other people. I have also shown that both men express and process their identity through and by virtue of art and are able to survive serious life difficulties with the help of art. At this point, we can discern a link to the novelist

himself, as he too is involved in exploring how artistry and art are connected with reality. Those familiar with Auster's *oeuvre* know that he is inclined to employ and insert his own life into his fictive works (see e.g. Varvogli 2001; Banks 2011; Meurer 2011). Like David and Hector, the novelist processes and makes use of his identity while creating and confronting art — a topic that permeates *The Book of Illusions* as a whole.

As for the interconnections between identity and art-making in terms of writing, it is worth pointing out that Auster's prose writings have often been described as an exploration of the self through language (e.g. Brown 2007: 28; Varvogli 2001: 2–3). In *The Book of Illusions*, the forcefulness with which the novel highlights the act of storytelling has an important role with regard to its main themes, specifically, in the way the narrative emphasises storytelling with respect to the link between the self and the Other/the world. According to Brown, in Auster's works “characters who are able to deploy storytelling as an urban strategy come to find some sort of stability in their lives” (2007: 3). Brown holds that *The Book of Illusions* constantly represents life in the form of deception and stories (2011: 234–235). Thus, storytelling implies a postmodern and/or constitutionalist conception of language as the producer of the self and the world. This, in turn, entails the possibility of ontological, epistemological, and existential violations — possibilities that, as we have seen, appear throughout the novel.

These verbal (re-)constructions also make room for illusory visions of the world and the self that inhabits that world. This possibility has a strong connection with the recountings of the films in the narrative. As Brown contends, the formation of filmic illusions in particular provides significant glimpses of the (literal) construction and nature of the self, as these “are a way of making sense of a series of seemingly random experiences and places, and shaping them into an identity — a process that can only be completed or concluded at the end of the manuscript” (2011: 221–222). Then again, storytelling and writing usually involve some kind of sacrifice in Auster's fiction (see Bilton 2011: 239). In *The Book of Illusions*, David's grief provides him the impetus to begin the book project on Hector's movies. With regard to David's story, which in effect amounts to the novelistic whole, it is conveyed in part through the new loss David experiences, namely Alma's sudden and unexpected death.

As Hector's biographer, Alma is also affected by the fatal consequences of writing, as David aptly remarks: “Alma had died because of a book” (*BI*: 313). However, as I implied above in discussing the creation of the self and the world through language, writing and storytelling are not represented simply as calamitous actions (see Bilton

2011: 251). Instead, for both David and Alma, the motivation for writing stems from the need to preserve the histories of others. Katarzyna Kuzma (2009: 187–188) has observed that, by writing about Hector and Alma, David honours not only their memory, but also their creative outcomes: Hector as a filmmaker and Alma as a biographer, whose book is doomed to perish along with Hector’s cinematic legacy.

Thus, prerequisites and repercussions of writing in *The Book of Illusions* encompass the binary poles of life and death, as well as those of love and sorrow. Similar to the act of writing carried out in Auster’s *The Locked Room* (1986) in which “love is also the condition for the telling of this tale” (Ciocia 2011: 107), in *The Book of Illusions* the cherished memories connecting the writing self with the lost other are preserved through words. As a consequence, reminiscing about the past serves as a way to discover one’s true self. As a whole, *The Book of Illusions* stands for David’s literary testament, which verbally processes and manifests the re-established connections between himself, others, and the world.

Ultimately, the outcome of storytelling is intended for others, for the world. In the present chapter I have demonstrated that Auster positions his reader in an engaging and affectionate relationship with the narrator (and the implied author) and hence creates an imaginary yet affectionate and communicative link between the textual and extra-textual levels.<sup>21</sup> At the outset of *The Book of Illusions*, David sets up a relationship between him and his imaginary and his actual audiences. Thus, in the novel the solitude of the writer is not regarded as categorically negative. On the contrary, writing denotes an act that is projected against and towards the world and hence creates a connection with that world from the “sanctuary” of “[t]he writer’s room” (Brown 2011: 228, see also Brown 2007: 4).<sup>22</sup> These connections between tellers and listeners established throughout the narrative strongly connote and exemplify the dynamics of intersubjective relations between human beings. Put differently, through literary communication the novel elucidates how life continues and becomes meaningful in interactions with others. The dialogic relationship construed between David and his audiences on discrete ontological levels epitomises the need both for relating one’s story and for listening to that story.

Besides eliciting the reader’s awareness of complex and intimate interactions between communicative levels, Auster subtly hints at his experience in the film industry through his elaborate use of cinema in the novel. Auster has worked in cinema in

<sup>21</sup>In an interview Auster reflected on the mutual presence of the reader and the writer in the pages of the novel and the intimacy of their encounter (Capen 2013: 103).

<sup>22</sup>For Auster’s ideas about writing as being in contact with the world, see Mallia (2013: 7); McCaffery and Gregory (2013: 32–33); Auster (2005: 138–139).

various ways throughout his adulthood, ranging from his early silent film screenplays (see Auster 1997: 32), his dreams of becoming a film director (González 2009a: 19, Auster 1997: 33), and the fulfilment of that dream at the beginning of the 1990s. In the course of almost three decades he has written several screenplays and has directed and co-directed a number of films, including the acclaimed *Smoke* (1995) and its sequel, *Blue in the Face* (1995), not to mention his less successful film projects: *Lulu on the Bridge* (1998) and the aforementioned *The Inner Life of Martin Frost* (2007). Thus far, *The Book of Illusions* is his only literary attempt to represent full length films, although there are extensive references to films in his later works, such as in *The Man in the Dark* (2008).

According to Brown, “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” recounted in the novel points out Auster’s frustration with the cinema and the victory of the word over the image (2007: 127, see also Brown 2011; González 2011). This is partly true. We have seen that *The Book of Illusions* continues the novelist’s attempt to manifest “an enquiry into the world and an exploration of the nature of the self as it appears in language” (Varvogli 2001: 2) and in representation (see also Brown 2007: 158). The pivotal link between the self and language is manifest in the fact that David is a professor of literature and therefore an expert in written words. Tellingly, at the beginning of the novel David maintains that he prefers words over images, as in films “[t]oo much was given, I felt, not enough was left to the viewer’s imagination” (*BI*: 14). It is thus ironic to observe that the disturbingly detailed fashion in which he narrates the films in the novel leaves little space for the reader’s imagination. In any case, language is not merely a crucial organiser of (filmic) experiences; the written word constructs memories of films seen, makes it possible for David “to reestablish contact with the film” (*BI*: 271), and even preserves films that have been physically lost.

However, I have demonstrated that *The Book of Illusions* depicts human nature as fallible and hence untrustworthy in verbally rendering a person’s perceptions and cognitive functioning. François Hugonnier has acknowledged the apparent instability of the linguistic “referential system” (2011: 283 nt 7) in Auster’s novels, including in *The Book of Illusions*. Linguistic usage turns out to be inadequate “as an epistemological tool” (Ciocia 2011: 101). Recall that in “The Inner Life of Martin Frost” Martin (and the reader) are faced with serious communicative difficulties, as “the more [Claire] says, the less we are able to follow her” (*BI*: 257). Thus, I am inclined to argue against Brown’s claim of the primacy of words and contend that language and visual sign systems turn out to be similarly deficient and fallacious in conveying meaning and information in the novel.

Then again, we have seen that the narrated films manifest the main themes of the novel by eliciting mental imagery from the reader. For example, the essential features of the silent films reflect the main characters on the diegetic level, all of them dead by the time of reading. Bilton rightfully claims that “the deathly nature of silent film is [...] central to Auster’s novel, its spectral figures always glimpsed at the very moment of disappearing, paradoxically preserved at the point of vanishing forever” (2011: 239). Thus, the novel’s deployment of visual imagery — its literary rendering notwithstanding — demonstrates the semantic and epistemic potency of images. This is emphasised already at the beginning of the novel, as David contemplates on the almost universal and thus intersubjective and intermental “language” of silent films, as by virtue of this “code of images” (*BI*: 30) the viewer is able to grasp “human will expressing itself through the human body, and therefore it was for all time” (*BI*: 15). Silent film thus serves as an indicator of both the affinities between human minds and the potential force of the moving images as a communicative medium.

The way Auster accentuates the epistemic force of filmic images involves the archaic notion of “seeing as knowing”. In his early memoir, entitled *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), the novelist wrote that “[t]he story of memory is the story of seeing” (Auster 2005: 132). Like philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and the aforesaid David Hume, who regarded sight as the primary human sense through which ideas are largely derived (see Cheeke 2008: 25), Auster implies that mental images are untrustworthy. Contrary to the beliefs held by these empiricists, however, Auster’s remark denotes the attitude that defines human existence and is effectively demonstrated throughout *The Book of Illusions*. Specifically, the act of “seeing”, either sensory or mental, is always subjective and thus prone to error. Be that as it may, Auster’s novel illustrates that through visual epistemes the world can be investigated, contemplated, and expressed to others.

Along with the contest between perception and mental imagery evoked in Auster’s novel with the use of films, we saw that films also make it possible “to display the imaginary and the unspeakable” (Meurer 2011: 178). As for displaying the illusory, *The Book of Illusions* highlights its need to draw the reader’s attention to the capacity of imagination, which is pivotal to human life but may also produce false impressions of the “real” world. More important, I have shown that cinema provides a channel through which a deeply-wounded David is able to explore and deal with his losses and through which he can ultimately convey his story to the reader. This further corroborates the power of visual storytelling, which takes place throughout the novel, and makes it commensurate with more conventional and direct modes of

verbal representation in the narrative.

Previously, I mentioned that the way we come to experience “things” is preordained by various factors: our position as a subject vis-à-vis the object in question, conceptual and linguistic parameters, and so forth — in other words, aspects that are prominently on display in Auster’s novel. Earlier, we saw that the understanding of subjectivity and human experience in Auster’s novel as something that is constituted and communicated in logos, that is, in language, has a precedent in Heidegger’s development of Kant’s notion of unreachable “things-in-themselves” as opposed to the appearance of objects. I suggested that, in Heidegger’s vein, “‘truth’ can no longer be conceptualized as a matter of measuring the correspondence between things and the representations of things” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 55). Instead, “truth will need to be reconfigured as a matter of the revealing of what is” (ibid.: 56). This is accomplished in and through language, which, according to Terry Eagleton, is “the place where reality ‘un-conceals’ itself, gives itself up to our contemplation” (2003: 55).

By the same token, we have seen in this chapter that *The Book of Illusions* requires the reader to think of the creative aspect of language, the way in which “[i]n the word, in language, things first come to be and are” (Heidegger 2000: 15). This kind of constructivist or constitutionalist notion in which the external reality that we assume to be “out there”, that “is always and already brought forth, structured and an effect of language”, gives rise to yet another epistemological question which we will take up in later chapters, namely whether “things exist outside our mediated experience of them” (Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 49). Without providing explicit answers, the novels studied here address this question in various ways, especially by producing complex interconnections between the narrative and ontological levels, between the fictive reality and the embedded movie reality, which are represented in, and generated by, language.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the narrated films convey and reflect the principal themes of the novelistic whole in various ways. The reader grasps the meaning of some of these techniques unconsciously — especially the stylistic ones, such as the “we” narration —, while the filmic imagery stimulates more or less undefined impressions. The narrated films thus affect the reader’s “visual unconscious” by steering his or her understanding of the narrative whole. In the next chapter, I explore how the disturbing video images represented in DeLillo’s novel *Point Omega* activate the reader’s visual unconscious in a much more disconcerting and intense fashion.





## Chapter 4

# The Novel Engulfed by the Video: Framing in Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*

In the previous chapter I maintained that by representing films, the narrative and the narrator are able to deal with and express the inexpressible. By the same token, the sixteenth novel by the award-winning and acclaimed American novelist and playwright Don DeLillo (b. 1936), *Point Omega*, appropriates moving images to approach and highlight elements which the narrative is unable to articulate. Similar to *The Book of Illusions*, in which a traumatic loss compels the narrator to reveal what cannot be spoken through films, here too we find that the embedded level of the video is somehow connected with the private misfortune of losing a loved one, a tragic event that takes place on a diegetic level. Both novels endorse a narrative strategy that can be defined as what Grishakova calls “metaverbal” (2010: 315): dealing with events that are impossible to represent fully in words, these narratives underline “the limits of verbal representation” and do so by “appealing to the visual forms” (ibid.) of representation by verbalising audiovisual material.

However, whereas in Auster's novel Hector's films subtly reflect and illustrate both the mental landscape of a grieving man and the principal themes of the narrative whole, in *Point Omega* the narrative role of the described video installation, namely *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) by Douglas Gordon, is more complex. This video, based on Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), appears to hold a hermeneutic key to unravelling the mysterious turn of events that occurs in the middle portion of DeLillo's tripartite novel. More disconcertingly, in the course of the narrative the dominant features of the video turn out to determine and even control the reality of the storyworld. This leads to a paradoxical situation in which an artwork absorbs the fictitious reality within which it is inserted.

The opening and concluding parts of *Point Omega* take place in a gallery. During the brief prologue and epilogue narrated in third person, the reader is introduced to an anonymous man who is watching *24 Hour Psycho*, a video in which the original horror film is slowed down to two frames per second so as to last twenty-four hours. The middle part of the novel takes place in the middle of a desert and is narrated by a homodiegetic and intradiegetic character called Jim Finley, a New York filmmaker in his mid-thirties. Finley is interested in making a one-shot documentary on Richard Elster, a retired scholar and former secret consultant for the U.S. government on war-related issues. Finley has gone to visit Elster, who lives in solitude in a desert, to persuade the old man to be interviewed for his documentary. Later, Elster's daughter Jessie, who has unexpectedly arrived to visit her father, mysteriously disappears: "two full days, no word, no sign" (*PO*: 81). After several days a search patrol finds a knife in the desert. Not long after this discovery Elster and Finley leave for New York. The middle narrative is followed by an epilogue, which again presents the anonymous man in the gallery. The events that ensue in the gallery eerily suggest that the man may be involved in Jessie's disappearance.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Gordon's video installation is involved in the narrative construction and steers the reader's comprehension of the novel as a whole. Besides making the video reflect the reality of the storyworld, especially by ominous suggestions of what may have taken place on a diegetic level, I argue that the video not only dominates, but also ultimately devours the higher narrative level in which it is represented. In order to study these phenomena and hermeneutic processes I use the concepts of "frames", "framing", and ultimately, *mise en abyme*.

I find these (partly "travelling") terms highly applicable to the analysis of DeLillo's novel. At the outset the novel draws the reader's attention to *textual* frames, specifically physical and formal frames, which are more or less discernible. This is because the novel's clear-cut triptych structure obliges the reader to become aware of the textual borders that demarcate separate narrative sections. Werner Wolf has described this kind of text-based framing as "easily identifiable markers [...] that exist in the immediate context or within a work of fiction *previous* to the reader's framing activity" (1999: 103; emphasis original). Thus, although the link between narrative parts in *Point Omega* is initially unclear, textual frames serve as "interpretive signals" (Wolf 2006a: 16) guiding the reader to find hidden significance in the narrative structure.

Throughout the present chapter, I refer to the sections that open and close the novel as the "outer frames" of the narrative whole, with the prologue being the opening outer frame and the epilogue the terminating outer frame. The outer frames

build a contextual framework through and against which the reader receives and (re)interprets both the main, middle section and ultimately the narrative whole *per se*. As the outer frames also mark and serve as borders for the middle section, I refer to the middle part as a “framed narrative”.

As an embedded artefact, the video itself is “framed” within the opening and closing parts of the novel.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to traditional notions of embedded stories as “completely subservient to the main text and devoid of any independent value” (Wolf 2006a: 29), in *Point Omega* the embedded video functions as a crucial and revelatory element that gives additional meanings to the middle part and ultimately to the novelistic whole, meanings that the reader is unable to grasp otherwise. In this way, *24 Hour Psycho* serves as a “unifying” *mise en abyme* (Dällenbach 1989: 71) as a (twice) inserted work of art that endows the other parts of the novel with narrative significance. Besides these textual frames, the movie screen itself produces a physical frame within the reality of the storyworld.

In the course of the narrative, the reader finds that the video disconcertingly permeates the storyworld reality. Thus, the magnitude with which *24 Hour Psycho* reflects the main middle narrative underlines not only its role as an intermediary between the seemingly independent narrative parts, but also its role as a transgressive work of art, as it disturbingly interacts with the fictional reality. The textual frames of the novel and the *ontological* frames within the fictional world that separate the represented reality from the movie reality are thus accentuated and ultimately disrupted, in both cases, with the help of the video on display. I hold that this dual act of breaching the novel’s textual and ontological borders validates using the notion of “frames” and “framing” in my analysis. The video’s narrative function also pertains to various forms of *mises en abyme* classified by Dällenbach in his *Mirror in the Text* (1989). Although Dällenbach made strict categorisations of distinct *mises en abyme*, I show that embedded narratives may carry out different reflecting roles simultaneously.

In the following sections, I investigate more thoroughly what it means to say that

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of clarity, I refer to the “intratextual” (Wolf 1999: 107) framing of the video as an “embedded narrative”, as it is a hypodiegetic story which is inserted and is ontologically distinct from the diegetic level. Thus, I reserve the expression “framed narrative” for the middle narrative section, which is not embedded, as it occurs on a narrative level similar to the narrative sections that surround it. On “frame tales” proper in which subsequent narrators enunciate their own stories below the primary level of narration and create narrative hierarchy between narrative levels, see e.g. Coste (1989: 168). In defiance of a traditional conception of narrative subordination between framed tales, William Nelles has taken into account embeddings “in which texts at the same diegetic level, but narrated by different narrators, follow one another” (1997: 132) and has called this “horizontal embedding”.

“*Psycho* literally frames this story” (Banash 2015: 12). I begin by demonstrating that the obtrusiveness of textual framing impels the reader to decipher conundrums that underlie the narrative structure. Thereafter, I show that textual frames amplify the reader’s desire to know what takes place in the storyworld reality and that the reader’s epistemological need is closely linked to the act of seeing. Then I turn my attention to the narrative meaning of various similarities created between the embedded level of *24 Hour Psycho* and the diegetic level. Here I make use of the concept *mise en abyme*. I regard the parallels engendered in the narrative as both a reflexive, but also a violating process that underlines the meaning of the video as an embedded story that unrealistically engulfs the narrative into which it is inserted. After studying these metaleptic framebreakings, I conclude the chapter by analysing how the novel ultimately actualises the meaning of its title, “the omega point”, which refers to an evolving complexity of the consciousness of the universe.

### Multiple Frameworks: Structure of the Novel

From the very beginning it is clear that both *Point Omega* and the reader’s processing are profoundly shaped by textual frames and framing. Besides the formal and concrete frames that shape the narrative, there are “paratexts”, such as dates and titles, which accompany actual textual framing and serve as thresholds for the text itself.<sup>2</sup> Wolf regards this kind of “introductory, explanatory etc. material” (2006a: 20) as “paratextual framing”, as it defines the border and thereby guides and controls the reader’s evolving comprehension of the narrative. In *Point Omega*, an initial paratext is a temporal marker of “2006 LATE SUMMER / EARLY FALL”, a time span the reader likely assumes will be pertinent to the novel as a whole. On the next page, the prologue begins with yet another and now more accurate temporal indicator, “September 3” (*PO*: 3; emphasis original).

Perhaps even more important, the prologue is entitled “Anonymity”, a title that resonates with the anonymity of its main character. The heterodiegetic narration amplifies the vagueness of this unnamed man:

There was a man standing against the north wall, barely visible. People entered in twos and threes and they stood in the dark and looked at the screen and then they left. Sometimes they hardly moved past the doorway, larger groups wandering in, tourists in a daze, and they looked and shifted their weight and then they left.

(*PO*: 3)

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<sup>2</sup>On paratexts, see Genette (1997); cf. Wolf (2006a: 19–20, 24; 2006b: 181–182).

The narration positions the man as the main focal point whose inner thoughts are disclosed and through whom the narrative displays the immediate surroundings of the “cold” (PO: 3), dimly-lit gallery and the video projected on the screen.

Somewhat similar to the subtle yet ambiguous connotations of the Bakhtinian heteroglossia and intermentality found in *The Book of Illusions*, DeLillo’s novel occasionally obscures the distinction between the mind and voice of the anonymous man and those of the extra-diegetic narrator. Frequent use of free indirect speech especially contributes to this vagueness, as we see in the following passage, which describes the man watching *24 Hour Psycho*:

The original movie had been slowed down to a running time of twenty-four hours. What he was watching seemed pure film, pure time. The broad horror of the old gothic movie was subsumed in time. How long would he have to stand here, how many weeks or months, before the film’s time scheme absorbed his own, or had this already begun to happen?

(PO: 6)

The way the omniscient narrator’s speech overlaps with the mind and voice of the anonymous man emphasises the importance of the “anonymity” indicated in the title. I want to make a point of this because intermixing voices and minds amounts to the novel’s overall narrative strategy, namely an intention to disrupt borders demarcating subjects and other discrete entities. I also argue that the quotation subtly implies the narrative’s ultimate purpose breaching ontological difference between movie reality and fictional reality, a narrative anomaly that turns out to be pivotal with respect to the narrative whole.

With regard to *24 Hour Psycho* and its link to anonymity, there is no mention of the name of the art video or of the original film for that matter, in the opening outer frame. However, as the quotation above suggests, the narrative provides the reader a sufficient amount of information on the nature of the video installation. What is more, several allusions to the film’s main characters, especially Norman Bates as the psychotic killer, who is played by Anthony Perkins, provide necessary clues for readers who are ignorant of Gordon’s video work, but are familiar with its famous progenitor: “He watched Anthony Perkins reaching for a car door, using the right hand” (PO: 4). Subsequently, *24 Hour Psycho* and *Psycho* as its intertext are mentioned twice in the middle section of the novel: in chapter two, Finley and Jessie briefly discuss the video, while later Finley reminisces about Elster’s rebuff of the

video (see *PO*: 46–47, 60–61).<sup>3</sup> I previously remarked that while, in the course of the narrative, the reader is gradually compelled to consider more closely the textual frames and boundaries that structure the novel, he or she becomes aware of the importance of the embedded video vis-à-vis the novel as a whole. The reader is also required to draw attention to how the ontological framing separating the film reality from the storyworld reality does not entirely hold up. Therefore, besides examining textual framing, we have to consider the peculiar presence of the video within the storyworld reality.

In general, the prologue provides short glimpses of film scenes that unfold at a slow pace on the screen: “The slightest camera movement was a profound shift in space and time but the camera was not moving now. Anthony Perkins is turning his head” (*PO*: 5). Although readers have only limited access to the video, their previous knowledge of Hitchcock’s film and the radical spatio-temporal form of the installation make them aware of the physical presence of *24 Hour Psycho* in the gallery. What further accentuates the video’s extraordinary temporal and spatial dimensions is that there is no sound in Gordon’s version. Moreover, the muteness amplifies the conception of the video as devoid of determined meanings. In the course of the present chapter we will see that the video’s semantic ambiguity reflects the gaps in meaning that characterise the textual dynamics of the narrative whole.

The narrative augments the prominence of the video by showing the reactions of the anonymous man as well as those of other visitors to the gallery: “No one entering seemed to know what to expect and surely no one expected this” (*PO*: 6). The manic repetitiveness with which the anonymous man has been watching the video for the past few days heightens its impact upon the viewers: “He’d been standing for more than three hours, looking. This was the fifth straight day he’d come here and it was the next-to-last day before the installation shut down” (*PO*: 6).<sup>4</sup> The narrative accentuates the video’s unsettling atmosphere and subsequently the gallery surroundings

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<sup>3</sup>The final explicit reference to Gordon’s video installation — and simultaneously a retrospective and closing paratext for the narrative whole — appears in the author’s acknowledgement at the novel’s end. Gordon, recipient of the coveted Turner Prize, has often utilised existing film footage in his art, and *24 Hour Psycho*, originally exhibited in Glasgow in 1993, is perhaps his most notorious work. For Gordon, “*24 Hour Psycho* [...] is not simply a work of appropriation. It is more like an act of affiliation [...]. I wanted to maintain the authorship of Hitchcock so that when an audience would see my *24 Hour Psycho* they would think much more about Hitchcock and much less, or not at all, about me” (*The Guardian* 2009).

<sup>4</sup>The author himself has said in an interview that he returned to watch *24 Hour Psycho* for several consecutive days when it was shown in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2006 (see DePietro 2010). Besides rendering the gloomy and bare surroundings of the video’s real-life screening in *Point Omega*, DeLillo has said that seeing *24 Hour Psycho* served as the initial impetus for writing the novel in the first place (*ibid.*).

in general by portraying the anonymous man's behaviour as monotonous and rigorously systematic: "He knew he would stay until the museum closed, two and a half hours from now, then come back in the morning" (PO: 7). In effect, the video and the anonymous man respectively are saturated with an equally bizarre aura.

As the main focal point of the prologue, the anonymous man observes occasional visitors to the gallery:

He watched two men enter, the older man using a cane and wearing a suit that looked traveled in, his long white hair braided at the nape, professor emeritus perhaps, film scholar perhaps, and the younger man in a casual shirt, jeans and running shoes, the assistant professor, lean, a little nervous.

(PO: 7–8)

The most salient remarks, however, involve a peculiar stream of thought that takes place in the man's mind while he is whole-heartedly immersed in the video's aesthetic sphere: "if the run was extended and he kept coming, five, six, seven hours a day, week after week, would it be possible for him to live in the world? Did he want to? Where was it, the world?" (PO: 13). The way in which free indirect speech suddenly shifts into the character's direct speech brings him closer to the reader — an unexpected proximity that may feel disconcerting.

Despite the man's proclivity for solitary viewing, at the end of the prologue he realises that all this time he has been waiting for something, or, more specifically, "for a woman to arrive, a woman alone, someone he might talk to, here at the wall, in whispers, sparingly of course, or later, somewhere, trading ideas and impressions" (PO: 14). Instantly, he feels stupid for having secretly longed for company: "Jerk" (PO: 14). All the same, the revelation implies that, regardless of his willingness to concede the stagnated mode of perceiving the video, he is not prepared to endorse fully its radical and inhuman conception of time and space. Like David in *The Book of Illusions*, the anonymous man realises in watching the video that he is not ready to isolate himself from others or at least to abandon an essential human desire to establish social connections.

It is noteworthy that the articulated need of the self for the Other, which we encountered earlier in Auster's novel, is now left hanging in the murkiness of the gallery, as the narration shifts into the middle section, the part I refer to as the framed narrative. In contrast to the paratextual information given at the beginning of the prologue, there are neither titles nor temporal indicators that might anchor the new

section to a specific space and time. Only a preliminary paratext with the number “1” at the beginning of the first section anticipates a longer narrative portion. As previously mentioned, neither the content nor the conclusion of the prologue prepares the reader in any explicit way for this narratorial and spatio-temporal change.

However, the first lines of the framed narrative generate a vague thematic correlation between it and the opening outer frame:

The true life is not reducible to words spoken or written, not by anyone, ever. The true life takes place when we're alone, thinking, feeling, lost in memory, dreamingly self-aware, the submicroscopic moments. He said this more than once, Elster did, in more than one way. His life happened, he said, when he sat staring at a blank wall, thinking about dinner.

(PO: 17)

Here Richard Elster's contemplation of existential issues bears similarities to the sensations experienced by the anonymous man in the prologue, no matter how imprecise and abstract these inklings are. The fact that there is *no* shift in terms of narrative levels implies a certain intimacy between the sections. The narrative reinforces this interconnection by producing iconic and thematic relations between the two sections — relations that, as will be seen, the reader may find hard to accept.

In spite of the weak link generated between the narrative sections, the reader's attention is most likely drawn to the radical shift in register and spatial co-ordinates: the enclosed gallery space is a huge contrast to the vastness of the desert, which serves as the locale for the next four chapters. Similar to Hector Mann in *The Book of Illusions*, a retired Elster has found much-needed peace of mind in the unyielding and primitive surroundings of a savage land.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the narrative accentuates the radical shift from the urbane gallery to untamed nature with the help of physically prominent textual borders that separate the opening outer frame from the framed narrative. The change from extra- and heterodiegetic narration to intra- and homodiegetic narration makes the text suddenly more intimate — a detail that is curiously at odds with the inhumane enormity of the wild space that surrounds the characters.

The first chapter of the middle section shows the new situation: Finley is visiting Elster in his shabby cabin to persuade the man to perform in his documentary film about Elster's “time in government, in the blat and stammer of Iraq” (PO: 21).

<sup>5</sup>Many researchers have remarked on DeLillo's proclivity for depicting characters who desire to withdraw from society (see e.g. Oriard 1978: 5; Osteen 2000: 31; Cowart 2012: 44). Similar to *Point Omega*, the recluse often takes refuge in the ascetic solitariness of the desert, as in *End Zone* (1972), *The Names* (1982), *Mao II* (1991), and *Underworld* (1997a).



Concrete negotiations about the film project do not progress, as Elster is more prone to indulge in highly abstract monologues on the world and life in general. In the ensuing chapters, Elster loses his charm in Finley's eyes. As if reverberating with the character of Elstir, the artist in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* about whom the narrator originally shows great enthusiasm, Elster turns out to be similarly disappointing to DeLillo's character-narrator.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, "[t]he reason for being here had begun to fade" (*PO*: 71). It seems that Finley's idea of a film will remain unactualised.

The first solid clue that connects the events in the prologue with the framed narrative occurs halfway through the second chapter. At the beginning of chapter two the unexpected arrival of Elster's daughter, Jessie, has upset the harmonious balance between the men. At this juncture, discussions between the characters reveal that before leaving New York, Finley and Elster visited MoMA to see *24 Hour Psycho* (see *PO*: 46–47). The alert reader might remember that the anonymous man had observed two men who briefly visited the gallery (see *PO*: 7–8). What is more, the reader is told that Jessie went to see the video on her father's recommendation: "He told me it was like watching the universe die over a period of about seven billion years" (*PO*: 47). Later, Finley, and the reader will hear the fundamental reason for Jessie's visit, which turns out to be crucial in terms of the narrative whole: Elster's disclosure to Finley that Jessie's sudden sojourn "was her mother's idea. There's a man Jessie sees [...]. And her mother has certain ideas concerning his designs or just his general manner or his appearance or something" (*PO*: 57). Elster reveals that the domineering mother has ordered Jessie to distance herself from the man, "as a test of her attachment" (*PO*: 57).

Jessie disappears in the middle of the third chapter while Finley and Elster are driving to a nearby market; as told by Finley: "When we got back to the house she was gone" (*PO*: 75). The fourth and last chapter deals with the days and weeks after the shocking turn of events in the desert, and concludes with the men's departure for New York. During their drive to the airport Finley receives a phone call from a "BLOCKED CALLER" (*PO*: 99; emphasis original). The caller's anonymity echoes odd telephone calls that Jessie's mother received after her daughter became acquainted with the man. The mother has told Finley about these calls via telephone right after Jessie's disappearance, as she is convinced that the caller was none other than Jessie's

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<sup>6</sup>I thank Sanna Nyqvist for pointing out this connection. Another intertext for Richard's surname may be from another famous film directed by Hitchcock, *Vertigo* (1958), in which a retired police detective (played by James Stewart) is hired by an acquaintance called Gavin Elster to tail his wife (played by Kim Novak), who behaves in a peculiar way.

peculiar male friend (see *PO*: 84–85).

Tellingly, the mother finds it hard to recall the name of this young man (see *PO*: 84), but later remembers that it was “‘Dennis, for sure’” (*PO*: 88). The difficulty in bringing to mind the name of Jessie’s friend ominously reverberates with both the hidden identity of the “blocked caller” and the anonymity of the unnamed man in the prologue, a feature the titles of the outer frames emphasise. The reader is thus provided with hints that point both within the framed narrative and outside its borders to the anonymous man.

As in the anonymous phone calls to Jessie’s mother, the “blocked caller” does not answer Finley’s repeated “Hellos” and finally hangs up. Instead of becoming worried, Finley is determined to ignore the potential significance of the call and begins to think about the future that awaits them, “nonstop” New York City and his empty apartment in Queens, which would seem distant “even when I walked in the door” (*PO*: 100). The fourth chapter and the framed middle narrative conclude with Finley imagining “the telephone ringing as I entered” (*PO*: 100) his apartment.

At this point, the narration shifts back to the surroundings depicted in the opening section of the novel: we are back in the gallery in which the anonymous man is still, or again, watching *24 Hour Psycho*. The narrative accentuates further the palpable congruity with the prologue via paratextual markers: the title of the closing section, “Anonymity 2”, and a temporal indicator of “*September 4*” (*PO*: 101; emphasis original) create a strong spatio-temporal continuity between the outer frames. Akin to the subtle reciprocity between the end of the prologue and the beginning of the framed narrative, a switch from the desert back to the gallery and the omniscient narration not only establishes a prominent border, but also produces a perplexing continuity between the framed narrative and the epilogue.

In this case the narrative change probably unsettles the reader. Recall that the connection between the prologue and the middle section was found in loose notions about existential “truths” articulated by the anonymous man and Elster. In contrast to metaphysical ponderings, the narrative now suggests an impossible temporal and metaleptic continuity between Finley’s meandering thoughts about a telephone ringing in his apartment and the embedded *24 Hour Psycho*, as the epilogue begins in the following way:

Norman Bates, scary bland, is putting down the phone.

The man stood at the wall thinking ahead. He’d started doing this, jumping scenes, speeding through scenes mentally, visually, with closing time not too far off. He didn’t want to check his watch. He tried to contain his impatience, to direct every energy toward the screen, see what is happen-

ing now.

(PO: 101)

By plunging directly into the reality of the video, the beginning of the epilogue generates a disconcerting connection between the events taking place on the diegetic level and the hypodiegetic level of *24 Hour Psycho*.

Apart from interpreting the narrative situation as metaleptic, we need to pay attention to what follows the first line of the epilogue. It remains uncertain whether the scene is taking place on a movie screen or in the mind of the anonymous man who is “jumping scenes”. Consequently, the reader is compelled to consider the man’s potential role in the mystery that occurred in the framed narrative. The reader is now encouraged to find the answer to Jessie’s disappearance outside the framed narrative: the gallery in the novel’s outer frames.

The narrative further amplifies and validates the reader’s evolving hypothesis, as the man ends up in a conversation with a young woman, to his surprise and confusion. As if echoing Jessie’s disappearance in the desert and her ethereal features, the unidentified woman arrives “[o]ut of nowhere [...], stands next to him at the wall, talks to him in the dark” (PO: 106). Tellingly, the woman enters the room right in the middle of a stabbing scene (“hand and knife in midframe”, PO: 106), which alludes both to the knife found in the desert and to the possibility that Jessie has died in a violent manner.<sup>7</sup>

Up to now, the reader has most likely assumed that the woman is Jessie. There is one more detail that confirms her identity: in the middle section Elster has told Finley about Jessie’s skill in lip-reading as a child (see PO: 48); in the epilogue the woman mentions the same curious ability (see PO: 113). The brief encounter between the man and the woman in the gallery also suggests that the anonymous man is mentally unstable and hence prompts the reader to consider the man’s probable role in Jessie’s disappearance.

The anonymous man’s abnormality is seen in his reactions to the woman’s/Jessie’s imaginary refusal to his proposal to have a bite to eat somewhere nearby:

He imagined turning and pinning her to the wall with the room emptied out except for the guard who is looking straight ahead, nowhere, motionless, the film still running, the woman pinned, also motionless, watching

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<sup>7</sup>DeLillo has often used a narrative scenario of a chance encounter between a woman and a man in an art exhibition in his fiction, such as in *The Names* and more recently in his short story “Baader-Meinhof” (2002). On “artistic” encounters between a stalker and a woman in DeLillo’s fiction, see Herren (2015); see also Kauffman (2008).

the film over his shoulder. Museum guards should wear sidearms, he thought. There is priceless art to protect and a man with a gun would clarify the act of seeing for the benefit of everyone in the room.

(PO: 112)

Unaware of his manifestly violent thoughts, the woman/Jessie gives him her telephone number when asked, an action that implies that a future encounter will take place.

After the woman/Jessie has gone, the man returns to watch the video. Violent thoughts come to his mind, as “[h]e imagines the guard removing the sidearm from his holster and shooting himself in the head” (PO: 116). Besides his fearsome visions, the man wants “complete immersion” (PO: 115) in the video and prepares to “dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates” (PO: 116). In other words, the man attempts to break the border that separates the reality of the storyworld from the reality of the video. Thus, unlike DeLillo’s earlier novels in which violent death was often “confined to the safety of the screen” (Goodheart 1991: 123), *Point Omega* implies in various ways that the potential violence barely perceptible in the video breaks out of its frames and enters the reality of fiction (see Banash 2015: 12, cf. Goodheart 1991: 120).

Apart from representing the man’s peculiar desire to break into and enter the filmic frame, the end of the novel subtly violates the ontological levels of the narrative. In the work’s final frame, the epilogue concludes with a horrifying *tableau* of a frenzied Norman Bates in his house with the corpse of his mother; we recall that in *Psycho*, Bates has an anomalous relation to his deceased mother:

Sometimes he sits by her bed and says something and then looks at her and waits for an answer.

Sometimes he just looks at her.

Sometimes a wind comes before the rain and sends birds sailing past the window, spirit birds that ride the night, stranger than dreams.

(PO: 117)

Throughout the outer frames the narrative implies that, like Bates, the anonymous man had an exceptionally close relationship with his mother who has “passed on” (PO: 8). The closing lines eerily combine the characters on discrete narrative levels.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>On affinities between the anonymous man and Norman Bates, see Herren (2015: 153). In a review of *Point Omega*, Michael Wood (2010: 40) remarks that the last lines of the novel also evoke another horror film by Hitchcock, namely *The Birds*, released in 1963 (see also Cowart 2012: 34).

This line of thinking is further corroborated should the reader realise that the novel's ending does not represent a specific scene from the horror film. On the other hand, these iterations might take place in the reality of the movie and simultaneously in the mind of the anonymous man in the reality of the storyworld. However, while the concluding lines highlight the movie reality, the ending suggests that the narrative terminates in the embedded level of *24 Hour Psycho*. Therefore, the novel's structural framing explored here obtains its final unexpected and crucial turn: the movement from the enclosed gallery space to the immensity of the desert and back again to the "cold intimacy" of the gallery now reaches its ultimate point, as both the anonymous man and the reader are as if permanently incarcerated in the embedded level of *24 Hour Psycho*. Put another way, as the narrative does not resurface from the embedded level of the video to the level of fictional reality, the reader is imprisoned within the appalling confines of the filmic reality with a potential killer.

The novel's enigmatic ending also makes the extraordinary structure of the whole more apparent. Throughout the narrative the conspicuous framing that has demarcated the borders between narrative sections has affected the reader's horizons of expectation. Above all, the decidedly pronounced framework has created anticipation with regard to the hermeneutic importance of the act of framing. At this point it becomes clear that after completing the novel, the reader must make adjustments to what has been read, as he or she has now become fully aware of both the symmetrical triptych structure of the novel and the decisive narrative role of the embedded *24 Hour Psycho*. Thus, besides the fact that watching the video in the prologue anticipates what is about to be told and hence affects the inferential process of the framed narrative, the events in the epilogue are intended to give meaning to what has already taken place (see Dällenbach 1989: 60–62).

Usually, this kind of formal symmetry implies unity and closure (see Smith 1968: 154–155). In the case of *Point Omega*, coherence pertains only to the formal level, not the semantic level, as the enigmas set forth in the narrative are not resolved in the end. In other words, the paradox between the novel's clear-cut framework and the reader's difficulties in decoding the meaning of those frameworks lies at the heart of the dual mystery presented to the reader: What happened to Jessie in the framed narrative? Is the anonymous man who appears in the outer frames somehow involved in her disappearance? Such a hypothesis would produce a gratifying and permanent resolution to the disquieting conflict between the discrete narrative sections.

Regardless of the seeming completeness of its structural framework, *Point Omega*

remains incomplete insofar as there is no absolute terminal framing in an *ontological* sense: as I suggested earlier, the last lines of the novel imply that the embedded video continues and hence rejects the formal closure of textual frames.<sup>9</sup> In addition, we have seen that the incompleteness of the textual frames in the novel implies not only their porosity, but also that the porosity takes place in the storyworld. Previously, I pointed out how thematic continuity between narrative sections develops into a metaleptic diffusion between the movie reality and the storyworld reality. By forcing the reader to pay attention to textual framing, the narrative encourages an acknowledgement of the permeability of the ontological borders within the storyworld.

As regards *Point Omega* as a whole, the novel highlights the narrative schemes behind its elaborately composed structure, as it simultaneously withholds an incentive for the narrative enterprise. In other words, by compelling the reader to ask *why* he or she has been told these stories, both filmic and literary, the novel accentuates and questions the initial motive for the framing — framing as telling and transmitting tales.

The extraordinary narrative structure also illustrates a quest for truth on the part of both the characters and the readers. Next, I explore the epistemic desires constructed within the narrative, which are subsequently prompted in the reader. I argue that the emphasis on the need to know is created primarily through various frameworks in the narrative. I maintain that this epistemic desire is deeply connected with the act of seeing. I also suggest that, by evoking complex frameworks, the novel encourages the characters and the reader to see *through* into something else. This notion is important, as besides illustrating the porosity of the borders separating discrete entities, it also indicates mirroring and self-reflexivity, which turn out to be vital in the course of the narrative.

### The Desire to See and the Desire to Know

In the previous chapter we saw that *The Book of Illusions* created an intricate communicative network in which stories were mediated by a variety of narrators to different audiences. In *Point Omega* the narrative “game” in which the reader is invited to participate turns out to be much more complex and inconclusive than in Auster’s novel. At the outset an enigma is presented to the reader and is reinforced by concrete textual frames.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>On complete and incomplete framing, see Wolf (2006b: 187–188).

<sup>10</sup>On enigmas established through frames, see Newman (1986: 144).

I argue that the prominent textual framework of DeLillo's novel illustrates how transmission of knowledge and an "unresolved desire for meaning" (Brooks 1993: 214) are dramatised and suppressed throughout the narrative. To put it differently, the novel's structure both highlights and problematises a quest for knowledge, as the reader is required to alternate between the outer frames and the framed narrative in a search for truth. Coincidentally, the novel as a whole, saturated with semantic gaps and compulsive displays of horrific film imagery, reflects secret desires that reside within the reality of the storyworld.

In the previous section I demonstrated that the novel's fixed framework, with distinct opening and closing sections, leads the reader to believe that the narrative puzzles will eventually be solved. Given that the true state of events is withheld throughout and the novel's cryptic termination affirms its evident open-endedness, Peter Brooks's "narratives of approach" appears to be a promising analytical concept for understanding *Point Omega*. In narratives of approach, "knowing and having are so frustrated that all the drama is invested in approaches, overtures, voyeurism, and display" (Brooks 1994: 33).<sup>11</sup> I find Brooks's method relevant to DeLillo's novel, where the problematisation of knowledge and truth are closely connected with *seeing* and *framing*. In the present section I will demonstrate that the quest for knowledge initiated in the novel is interconnected with both epistemic and voyeuristic desires.<sup>12</sup> We shall also see that the "scopophilic" and "epistemophilic" (ibid.) aspects of *Point Omega* are manifest in a distinct and pronounced structural framework, which prompts the reader to see other kinds of frames, namely ontological ones, and discover their disconcerting porosity within the reality of the storyworld.

From the beginning, *24 Hour Psycho* conspicuously exhibits strong interrelations between knowledge, seeing, and framing. The novel begins with a description of a movie screen "placed in the middle of the room" (*PO*: 3) at which people are looking. As for the anonymous man, the narrative characterises him first by virtue of his perceptibility, as he is "barely visible" (*PO*: 3) in the dark room. By concentrating on the anonymous man who is viewing Gordon's video installation, the prologue establishes a voyeuristic desire that pervades the narrative whole and is closely associated with a thirst for knowledge and truth.

The prologue epitomises the reciprocity of epistemic and voyeuristic desires, as the reader's attention is drawn to the intensity with which the anonymous man de-

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<sup>11</sup>Brooks has analysed novels such as Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Barbey d'Aureville's *Le Bonheur dans le crime* with this concept; see Brooks (1993, 1994).

<sup>12</sup>On voyeurism and "the male gaze", see also Mulvey (1989).

sires to fathom the essence of *24 Hour Psycho*:

The film's merciless pacing had no meaning without a corresponding watchfulness, the individual whose absolute alertness did not betray what was demanded. He stood and looked. In the time it took for Anthony Perkins to turn his head, there seemed to flow an array of ideas involving science and philosophy and nameless other things, or maybe he was seeing too much. But it was impossible to see too much. The less there was to see, the harder he looked, the more he saw.

(PO: 5)

By emphasising seeing as an act that grants access to information, the narrative connotes that seeing amounts to another mode of “seeing”, namely that of comprehension.

With regard to framing and frames, Gordon's video establishes a crucial point of intersection. In the course of the novel, the act of seeing *24 Hour Psycho* unites the outer frames with the framed narrative, as all the main characters have been exposed to the distressing screening of the video. Likewise, the reader is invited to participate in the act of watching the video. Somewhat similar to *The Book of Illusions*, the reader is now positioned as a hidden spectator in the dimly-lit gallery. Later, in the epilogue he or she becomes an eavesdropper who secretly — and perhaps against his or her will — witnesses the dialogue between the anonymous man and the woman/Jessie.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, *24 Hour Psycho* creates a framework through which the reader is encouraged to look in order to grasp the meanings of the narrative whole. Thus, the video elicits frames and spurs the reader to seek the truth by seeing “through” and into *something else*.

Interestingly, moving images are also impregnated with potential meaning in the framed narrative. Rather like the anonymous man in the outer frames, Finley endeavours to find the truth by means of cinema: he envisions his one-shot documentary film as “‘the barricade’ ” (PO: 45) to veracity, as a barrier “‘where somebody stands and tells the truth’ ” (PO: 45). Here too, filmic knowledge is inherently related to the act of framing, as Finley mentally visualises Elster within the cinematic framework as the “‘[m]an at the wall’ ”, a figure “‘[u]p against the wall’ ” who is “‘free to say whatever he wants, unsaid things, confidential things’ ” (PO: 45) about his years in the Pentagon.

Regardless of Finley's aspirations, the narrative implies throughout that cinematic framing amounts to a noticeable exclusion and modification of meanings and hence

<sup>13</sup>On the reader as an eavesdropper, see Maclean (1988: 134).



a perceptual distortion. Finley himself exemplifies this by planning to omit all irrelevant elements from the filmic framework: “‘No plush armchair with warm lighting and books on a shelf in the background. Just a man and a wall,’ I told him” (*PO*: 21). Similar to the way in which Finley and Elster discuss Iraq by disregarding the harsh realism of war, Finley’s vision of his documentary film develops into a radical reorganisation of signs, semantics, and perception. I argue that here the narrative connotes how acts of framing are always at risk of eliminating and neglecting information — a suggestion that the enigmatic narration itself is about to actualise.

The outer frames demonstrate that cinematic framing amounts to a remarkable detachment of signification and to resulting difficulties in meaning-making in the case of *24 Hour Psycho* as well. Like Finley, the anonymous man, who is also tellingly described as “[t]he man at the wall” (*PO*: 4), regards black-and-white film as “the only true medium for film as an idea, film in the mind” (*PO*: 10, cf. *PO*: 25). In defiance of his conceptions of cinema as immaterial, which, curiously, resonate with ideas in *The Book of Illusions*, and his eagerness to understand the video, the anonymous man fails to form tactile or permanent meanings of what he is experiencing, as “[h]e kept feeling things whose meaning escaped him” (*PO*: 11).

DeLillo has often taken advantage of abstract *objets d’art* in his prose writings to demonstrate how artistic experiences amount to misunderstanding. For example, Linda Kauffman holds that by representing abstract, yet photorealistic paintings by the German artist Gerhard Richter in the short story “Baader-Meinhof” (2002), DeLillo shows how art prompts “myriad forms of misrecognition and unknowing: ignorance, amnesia, blindness, denial, disavowal” (Kauffman 2008: 359). Similarly, *Point Omega* demonstrates that in Gordon’s video we may see “the actual still images that underlie cinematic illusion” (Banash 2015: 13), but this kind of semantic “dissection” or deconstruction grants the viewer neither new nor intelligible information. *24 Hour Psycho* thus embodies an annihilation of signification that potentially results from artistic re-framing.

*24 Hour Psycho* and other forms of abstract and conceptual art exploited by DeLillo in his fiction exemplify how art produces novel modes of seeing and comprehending. Somewhat similar to Elster’s attempt to provide “‘new ways of thinking and seeing’” (*PO*: 29) for the war strategists in the Pentagon, Gordon’s video installation necessitates a radical change of conventional perceptual procedures. Finley’s previous and his only film thus far similarly participates in distorting, suturing, and disintegrating temporal and spatial relations and their recognition. His film is comprised of footage from television shows of the 1950s featuring the American come-

dian Jerry Lewis. For Finley, the compilation resembles “some deviant technological life-form struggling out of the irradiated dust of the atomic age”, which places Lewis “outside the moment, in some larger surround, ahistorical” (PO: 26). Thus, Finley’s film also epitomises how art is able to affect and even manipulate the observer’s perception (cf. Herren 2015: 152).

Paradoxically, *Point Omega* demonstrates that manipulation of pre-existing material and its employment as building blocks for (new) art encourages us to notice something we usually fail to perceive.<sup>14</sup> In an interview with Thomas DePietro, DeLillo described *24 Hour Psycho* as indicative of “how we see, what we miss seeing under normal circumstances” (DePietro 2010). By the same token, in the epilogue the anonymous man equates the “pure time” (PO: 6) of the video with “the speed at which we perceive reality, at which the brain processes images” (PO: 103). In addition, the temporal progression of *Psycho*, which is radically altered and “broken into components” (PO: 8) in Gordon’s version emphasises the relationship between epistemic and voyeuristic desires that prevail beyond artistic reception, namely, in the desert and the mystery it contains.

By continually implying that “entities” are “beyond the agreed-upon limits of recognition or interpretation” (PO: 28), DeLillo underlines the role of the sublime in the novel, which lies beyond human comprehension. Both the video and the desert create extraordinary visual stages for their observers, as these spaces are nearly emptied of intelligible signifiers. Not long after the tragic turn of events in the framed narrative, Finley is driving alone in the desert and finds himself staring at the never-ending wilderness around him: “the longer I stood and looked the more certain I was that we would never have an answer” (PO: 93).

Whatever the outcome, Jessie’s disappearance is a tangible absence, due paradoxically to its imperceptibility. Regardless of the semantic and perceptual shortcomings, how the characters as well as the readers acquire an impression of a lack of significance testifies to the *latency* of meanings, not to their absolute absence. Like the female character Lianne in DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007), who feels that Giorgio Morandi’s minimalist, almost abstract still life paintings of “bottles, jugs, biscuit tins [...] held a mystery she could not name” (DeLillo 2007: 12), both the video and the desert have connotations that the observer *senses* rather than evaluates more consciously and rationally.

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<sup>14</sup>In this light, Elster’s aphoristic definition of human perception as “‘a saga of created reality’” (PO: 28) is important, including when contrasted with the epistemological and ontological conceptions we encountered in *The Book of Illusions*.

The anonymous man, however, does not concede the video's intrinsic and underlying meanings. On the contrary, he fills the artwork's apparent semantic void with exterior and more personal significations (see Herren 2015: 148). In other words, *24 Hour Psycho* compels the anonymous man along with the reader to see and understand something that deviates from what is actually represented in the filmic framework. In the previous section we saw that, by immersing himself in the vacuity of *24 Hour Psycho*, by "thinking into the film, into himself" (PO: 109), the anonymous man begins to comprehend his own suppressed desires, which lie beneath the act of watching the video. Thus, a "flipped image" (PO: 4) of the video provides a needed frame or self-reflective mirror for silent introspection.<sup>15</sup>

At this point, it may seem that it is the viewer who manipulates the artwork into satisfying and conforming to his or her needs (see Herren 2015: 138). In an article on art stalkers in DeLillo's fiction, Graley Herren draws attention to this by holding that

throughout DeLillo's *oeuvre* art functions less as object than as transaction, a mutually transformative process whereby the spectator enters into dialectical engagement with a piece, projecting his or her own experiences, desires, anxieties, and fantasies onto the canvas or screen, metamorphosing the artwork into what he or she needs it to be.

(2015: 142)

In *Point Omega*, this results in a situation in which the movie screen is no longer seen clearly, in itself, as the transmitter of audiovisual representation (see *ibid.*: 164).

Then again, Herren argues further that *24 Hour Psycho* "reprogram[s] the spectator", as the identity of the anonymous man is "steadily reinscribed by the images on screen" (*ibid.*: 152). This is manifest in the novel, as the narrative repeatedly makes explicit juxtapositions between him and Anthony Perkins/Norman Bates. Throughout the outer frames the anonymous man reflects and projects himself vis-à-vis the "filmic Other", a process that underlines the novel's emphasis on the need to know by seeing into and through something else. As we have seen, this reflexive process, in turn, amounts to, or changes into, total absorption.

The parallels between the characters (and the historical figure) produce a perplexing porosity between ontological frames, as they often suggest an unnatural communicative link between the diegetic character and the filmic antagonist. From the very

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<sup>15</sup>On *24 Hour Psycho* as a replication of the Lacanian mirror stage of ego formation, see Herren (2015: 152).

beginning, the narrative subtly hints that there is a reciprocal and hence metaleptic gaze between the two males: “He watched the actor’s eyes in slow transit across his bony sockets. Did he imagine himself seeing with the actor’s eyes? Or did the actor’s eyes seem to be searching him out?” (PO: 7). In the epilogue, the narrative re-establishes the mutual glare, as “Anthony Perkins [is] wrapped in a blanket, the eyes of Norman Bates, the face coming closer, the sick smile, the long implicating look, the complicit look at the person out there in the dark, watching” (PO: 107). Unlike the previous quotation, here the narrative makes it clear that the look no longer belongs to Perkins the real-life actor, but to Bates the fictional psychotic killer.

First and foremost, the gaze is compassionate and personally aimed at the anonymous man who is “out there in the dark, watching”. Thus, the epilogue implies that the look is directed to a soul mate and future accomplice in acts of evil. Ultimately, the novel’s close completes the implied total diffusion between the characters: the anonymous man seeks to minimise the distance between himself and possibly the most famous psychopath in movie history, as he “waits to be assimilated, pore by pore, to dissolve into the figure of Norman Bates” (PO: 116).

Besides suggesting an unrealistic interaction between viewers who reside on distinct narrative levels, the metaleptic implications underline both different ways of seeing, and the dichotomy of seeing and being *seen* by others. The complexity of seeing is apparent in a passage in which the anonymous man reflects on his own image both from his perspective and in the eyes of others:

He had no idea what he looked like to others. He wasn’t sure what he looked like to himself. He looked like what his mother saw when she looked at him. But his mother had passed on. This raised a question for advanced students. What was left of him for others to see?

(PO: 8)

As seen in the previous chapter, human beings primarily derive an understanding of themselves from their interaction with others. From a visual perspective, to be aware of the gaze of others provides information to the subject who is looked at. Thus, the self is mirrored through images of others. This turns seeing into a form of knowing in terms of intersubjective relationships.

However, the quotation from *Point Omega* implies that this pertains to the case of the anonymous man only with regard to his late mother. While the mother was still alive, the son was able to regard himself as a whole only through her gaze. After

her death his ability to recognise and know himself breaks apart. This kind of mentally unsound dependence on the mother reinforces a correspondence between the anonymous man and Norman Bates in *Psycho*. Similar to the killer who turns out to impersonate his deceased mother in the film, the narrative implies that the relationship between the anonymous man and his mother has been very close and probably oedipal. As the loss of the mother has resulted in an impaired understanding of the self, I suggest that the anonymous man has not grown beyond the infantile stage during which boys identify with their mothers (see Benjamin 1988: 75). This has resulted in his identity remaining closely connected to his mother's — an unhealthy situation necessary to the narrative understanding of *Point Omega*. In effect, the outer frames illustrate how the anonymous man has replaced the lost maternal gaze with the (self) image of Norman Bates, a movie killer who had an equally symbiotic relationship with his dead mother (see also Herren 2015: 152).

Thus, *24 Hour Psycho* serves as a perversely consoling surface against which the anonymous man is able to reflect himself and his lack of unconditional maternal love. We have also seen that the video turns out to signify his suppressed longing. If we return to Brooks's concept of narratives of approach, these texts are able to “fetishize the objects of desire that they represent, and thus tell the story of epistemological complexities that are also frustrations of desire” (1994: 32). By the same token, the video installation signals a frustration with the anonymous man's concealed yearning, namely a secretive plea for “a woman to arrive” (*PO*: 14). Thus, the scopophilic craving to watch the video functions as a substitute for the man's primary craving, which is for female company. This sudden realisation denotes a “key to forbidden knowledge” (Brooks 1993: 215), namely unconscious desires that may threaten his relationship with the dead mother.

The anonymous man confronts his previously suppressed yearning in the epilogue, as the woman/Jessie makes contact with him in the gallery. While being asked the question “[w]hat am I looking at?” (*PO*: 105) during the stabbing scene, the anonymous man has the chance to adopt an active role as a filmic storyteller — and simultaneously relate his own story. With the help of the death scene in the movie the narrative suggests that the anonymous man has also become a spokesman for Jessie's dark future. She is both his audience and his imminent victim; she sees her fate on the screen, which the reader has already witnessed in the framed narrative.

The violent thoughts that enter the anonymous man's mind after being rejected makes us ask what, fundamentally, constitutes his object of desire. I argue that cold-blooded visions of the anonymous man confirm the unbreakable maternal bond that

determines and equates all his relations to females with his mother. According to Jessica Benjamin (1988: 77), the repressed side of the male self is the objectified mother, which is seen in and channelled through the objectification of women. By the same token, Jessie is merely an “incarnation” (see *ibid.*: 163) of the man’s mother with whom he truly wants to be reunited (cf. Maclean 1988: 152). By being both a secondary object of desire and simultaneously a threat to the mother, Jessie does not stand for a true “individual” in the man’s eyes. And, due to her “forbidden” status, she is doubly dispensable. At the same time we see how an “erotic drive” changes into a “death drive” in the gallery (Brooks 1993: 209).<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the dichotomy between erotic and death drives is subtly manifest in the framed narrative. As in the outer frames, the object of desire is Jessie. Notably, voyeurism implies this sexual desire in the middle section, as Finley looks at Jessie frequently: “I stood up [...], watching her” (*PO*: 68). Unlike the exclusively objectifying gaze of the anonymous man, Finley craves, and often receives, a reply: “I think I wanted her to turn and see me standing there” (*PO*: 68; see also *PO*: 74). As opposed to the epilogue, where there is an absence of explicit erotic overtones, here Finley fantasises about having sex with Jessie (see *PO*: 55, 95). Intriguingly, he feels remorse about his scopophilic desires after Jessie’s disappearance: “I was the man who’d stood in the dark watching while she lay in bed” (*PO*: 88). The deadly power of the male gaze was already evident in the prologue where the famous shower scene from *Psycho* is evoked through a variety of voyeuristic acts: “Everybody was watching something. He was watching the two men, they were watching the screen, Anthony Perkins at his peephole was watching Janet Leigh undress” (*PO*: 8; see Cowart 2012: 43). By emphasising the film’s characterisation of Norman Bates as a peeping Tom ogling his future victim, the passage underlines how female deaths in the novel are deeply rooted in sexual and voyeuristic desires.

In general, *24 Hour Psycho* compels its viewers on the diegetic level to ponder death. For example, after briefly watching the stabbing scene, Jessie remarks to her nameless companion: “I want to die after a long traditional illness. What about you?” (*PO*: 106). Jessie’s comment exemplifies the way that all the characters are engaged in understanding life and its termination, death. Put another way, the search for truth leads to death, which awaits us at the end of our lives. In the outer frames the anonymous man tries to fathom the meaning of life (and death) in the violent images of Gordon’s video. In the framed narrative Elster repeatedly touches on the human awareness of mortality, “wondering idly when we’ll die” (*PO*: 17). His lengthy

<sup>16</sup>On art that merges death and sex in DeLillo’s “Baader-Meinhof”, see Herren (2015: 149–150).

philosophical cogitations regarding time, space, extinction and evolution involve the notion of death, the fact that humans “will not live forever” (*PO*: 63).

However, Jessie’s disappearance serves as a test case for Finley and Elster in their approach to death. The search for truth unites as well as separates the two men. As for Elster, Jessie’s disappearance makes him nearly catatonic: “shaky, stubbled, caution in his eyes” (*PO*: 87). According to Finley, he rejects the truth, as it most likely signifies death: “He wanted pure mystery. Maybe it was easier for him, something beyond the damp reach of human motive” (*PO*: 83). Elster’s reaction echoes his tendency to opt for an abstract register of discourse with Finley in order to keep his distance from the deadly truth of the war in Iraq — and simultaneously alleviate his complicity in the violence and destruction carried out by the American troops (see e.g. *PO*: 28). Thus, similar to Elster’s previous reluctance to confront the appalling reality of war, he keeps Jessie’s fate at bay, as “shapeless, an elusive meaning that might spare him whatever explicit details would otherwise come to mind” (*PO*: 83). For Elster, Jessie’s likely death remains “unreal” precisely because of its extreme “realness”.

Elster’s refusal to accept the events reverberates with his aversion to *24 Hour Psycho*, as recalled by Finley:

We stood in the dark and watched. I sensed nearly at once that Elster was resisting. Something was being subverted here, his traditional language of response. Stillborn images, collapsing time, an idea so open to theory and argument that it left him no clear context to dominate, just crisp rejection.

(*PO*: 61)

Analogous to Elster’s elusive attitude to violence in general (see *PO*: 50) and to the war in Iraq in particular, which estranges him from the horrors of the battlefield, Gordon’s video disfigures the original meanings of Hitchcock’s horror movie. DeLillo reveals his interest in how technology and mediated death are intertwined in contemporary society: whereas the war strategists “think they’re sending an army into a place on a map” (*PO*: 28), Gordon’s conceptual artwork displays classic movie deaths in such a mediated fashion that their immediacy is severely diminished.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike Elster, Finley does not entirely harness his imagination to Jessie’s fate. Instead, he entertains possible scenarios, as “imagination was itself a natural force,

<sup>17</sup>On the relationship between mediated death and technology in DeLillo’s prose, see e.g. Osteen (2000); Hardin (2002).

unmanageable” (PO: 81). Ultimately, however, Finley’s response to the anonymous call received during their drive to the airport reveals that he is unable to confront the distressing truth:

I kept my eyes on the road. I didn’t want to look at him, didn’t want to hear any questions or speculations. I was thinking six things at once. The mother. She remembered his name in her sleep. I was thinking someone’s returning my call. That’s all it was, all it could be, someone I knew returning my call of last evening or earlier this morning, friend, colleague, landlord, weak signal, failed transmission.

(PO: 100)

While Finley endorses the deceptive and comforting solace of oblivion, he also leaves the reader alone with his or her assumptions about the “weak signal”, a “failed transmission” that nevertheless aspires to connect the framed narrative with its outer frames.

Whereas Elster and Finley are incapable of facing a truth that most likely means death, the reader’s epistemic desire for finding narrative truth persists. By providing clues that suggest violent death, the narrative transforms the reader’s desire to know into a more specific desire for a tragic end. Here I find it worthwhile to turn to Walter Benjamin’s claim that the reader wants to find death at the end of every narrative. In his analysis of Benjamin’s essay “The Storyteller” (“Der Erzähler”), Brooks summarises Benjamin’s idea in the following way:

It is the “meaning of life” that is at the center of any true novel. And since the meaning of a life is only revealed at the moment of death, one reads a novel in order to know death, that death we will never know in our own lives, that which, through the figuration of a fictive life, gives us an image of what might constitute meaning.

(1994: 84; see Benjamin 1992: 97–100)

Similar to DeLillo’s *White Noise* in which Jack Gladney remarks on how “[a]ll plots tend to move deathward” (DeLillo 1986: 26), the textual dynamics of *Point Omega* reflect the significance of death and the “primordial role assigned to death” (Brooks 1994: 84) that epitomise the meaning of life in narratives in general.

However, after completing the novel, the reader has to concede that the anticipated promise of death is not fulfilled within the story’s concrete framework. The enigmatic ending serves as a final dramatisation of the complexities of narrative



transmission, namely the problems related to knowing and seeking for/seeing the truth (see Brooks 1993: 96, 214). It has become clear that communication, presentation, and interpretation are produced formally in the narrative structure. In other words, solid narrative frames reflect the organic process of reading, as the textual framework functions as an explicit model for a hermeneutic processing of the novel itself. The novel's conclusion also compels us to regard *24 Hour Psycho* as a mirror of the narrative whole. Specifically, the video turns out to be a *mise en abyme*, which not only duplicates the other parts of the novel, but also steers the reader to "see" the narrative whole according to the aesthetics of the embedded artwork.

### **The Video Reflecting the Narrative: *24 Hour Psycho* as *Mise en abyme***

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the role of the embedded *24 Hour Psycho* is crucial on both textual and extra-textual levels. As regards the diegetic characters who are confronted with its disturbing power, the video elicits emotions and responses that have larger-scale significance in the narrative. The video stands both for an object and a subject: besides engendering various reactions in its viewers, the video has the capacity to provoke actions in the storyworld — actions the narrative merely implies. As for the reader, he or she is encouraged to search for an explanation of the mysteries withheld from the gallery where the video installation is on view, and from the semantic void of the artwork itself. We have seen that the video's decisive role in the narrative whole is noticeable in its prominent position: by commencing the narration with a representation of *24 Hour Psycho*, the novel establishes the video as an embedded entity that provides a "leitmotiv" for the story and serves as "an indicator of the plot" (Dällenbach 1989: 70; emphasis original).

With further development of our investigation into the narrative functioning of *24 Hour Psycho* in *Point Omega* we find that the video representation frequently produces various textual parallels and reflections on other parts of the narrative. In this fashion, the embedded video is a *mise en abyme*, "a structural device" that refers to "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (ibid.: 8; emphasis original). In order to study the embedded video as a textual reflection, I make use of Dällenbach's terminology and his categorisation of different kinds (or species) of *mises en abyme*. In the present section I show that as a *mise en abyme*, *24 Hour Psycho* belongs simultaneously to several categories coined by Dällenbach, as the video's reflecting function operates on various levels and in various

ways.<sup>18</sup>

In the previous section I illustrated how the video and especially the character of Norman Bates serve as an identifying mirror for the anonymous man. By evoking similarities between narrative levels, the video “generates the means to reflect back on the fiction and consequently gives rise to internal repetition” (ibid.: 55). In Dällenbach’s terminology, this kind of reflection is a *mise en abyme* of the utterance, a “fictional” *mise en abyme* that has “the capacity to give the work a strong structure, to underpin its meaning, to provide a kind of internal dialogue and a means whereby the work can interpret itself” (ibid.). In this section I consider the most conspicuous textual repetitions such as motifs and homonymic characters that create loose yet apparent structural parallels between the embedded level and the storyworld reality.

Besides mirroring other parts of the narrative, in particular the events that take place on the diegetic level, the video pertains to yet another category coined by Dällenbach, namely the *mise en abyme* of the enunciation. Whereas the *mise en abyme* of the utterance engenders an iconicity that reflects “the result of an act of production” (ibid.: 75; emphasis original), the *mise en abyme* of the enunciation reveals “the production or reception [of the reflecting entity] *per se*” (ibid.; emphasis original). In the case of *Point Omega*, we are primarily dealing with a process of *receiving* and *responding to* the artwork, as the characters’ differing responses to the video are explicitly represented in the course of the novel. I have shown that these individual responses are elementary with regard to the narrative progress and the reader’s meaning-making of the narrative events. Whereas in the previous section I examined the reverberations resulting from seeing *24 Hour Psycho*, I will touch on the way responses to the video echo the diegetic level in more general terms. The aesthetic principles of Gordon’s video and perceptual modifications it requires reflect and even determine the way in which the diegetic characters perceive and comprehend the surrounding reality. Consequently, the video’s radical alteration of temporal and spatial dimensions develops into instructions for the reader in how to read and interpret the novel. Dällenbach defines this kind of referential and hence non-literal reflection as the *mise en abyme* of the whole code, namely a metatextual reflection that both mirrors the story itself and *how* it is told or how its meaning is organised (see ibid.: 94). What is more, the narrative illustrates and manifests the importance of the artistic process of making the video with regard to the narrative as a whole and its comprehension. Therefore, the *mise en abyme* of the whole code

<sup>18</sup>By contrast, Dällenbach (1989: 221 nt 1) mentions only a coalescence of multiple *mises en abyme* taking place in the same text.

is closely linked to the *mise en abyme* of the enunciation, a connection that reveals apparent vacillation between Dällenbach's rigid classifications.

Apart from revealing the diffusion between Dällenbach's terminological categories, this demonstrates a perplexing oscillation between the narrative levels in DeLillo's novel: the video is not only a reproduction of the primary narrative, but also has an impact on the storyworld in which it is received. By making the embedded *24 Hour Psycho* both a reflection of the storyworld and a dramatic catalyst in the storyworld which it "copies", the narrative suggests an unrealistic situation in which the embedded artwork appears to devour the reality of the storyworld within which it is represented.

Previously, I have drawn attention to the way metaleptic characteristics of the novel undermine both the stability of the narrative framework, that is, the hierarchical subordination of narrative levels, and the discrete ontological levels that separate the movie reality from the storyworld reality. Here I demonstrate that, by means of continuously creating noticeable interactions between the embedded video and the storyworld reality in terms of mirroring, the narrative and ontological frames merge altogether. Therefore, I shall conclude my analysis of the various manifestations of *mises en abyme* in *Point Omega* by suggesting that this impossible convergence pertains to Dällenbach's category of a "generalizing" (ibid.: 59) *mise en abyme* of the utterance. Dällenbach uses this phrase to refer to a paradoxical situation in which reflecting entities "superimpose themselves" on the primary narrative that contains them, "overflow it", and ultimately result in "engulfing it, in a way, within themselves" (ibid.). Put another way, by "spilling" its form and content into the reality of the storyworld in various ways, the video ends up swallowing the narrative whole within which it is embedded.

Before analysing in more detail these various expressions of Gordon's video as a *mise en abyme* in DeLillo's novel, I want to point out that multiple reflections are closely associated with frames and the act of framing discussed earlier. The relationship is fundamentally hermeneutic: the novel forces the reader to decipher the framed narrative with the help of the outer frames in which the video is embedded. Furthermore, the reader is encouraged to interpret the narrative whole through the inserted video. Thus, the video reflects the narrative whole from two separate, yet interrelated perspectives: as itself and as part of the outer frames. In both cases, the narrative aspires to grant a dominant role to the embedded video with reference to the totality in which it is displayed. Through this dual purpose, the narrative reinforces further the function of *24 Hour Psycho* as a *mise en abyme* in *Point Omega* and

its fundamental role in narrative comprehension.

As regards the *mise en abyme* of the utterance and its connection with the novel's distinctive framework, I begin by examining parallels between *24 Hour Psycho* as displayed in the outer frames and the framed narrative. According to Dällenbach, these kinds of textual repetitions serve as “expressions relating to the primary narrative within the reflexive passage” (ibid.: 47). In *Point Omega*, these analogies are essentially ominous and may evoke distress in the reader, as they contaminate the diegetic level of the narrative with a dread that emanates from the embedded video.

One of the most noticeable internal repetitions is the shower curtain. In the prologue, the anonymous man recalls the famous shower scene in *Psycho* that he has seen “some days earlier, all broken motion, without suspense or dread or urgent pulsing screech-owl sound” (PO: 9). He is able to bring to mind

the rings on the shower curtain spinning on the rod when the curtain is torn loose, a moment lost at normal speed, four rings spinning slowly over the fallen figure of Janet Leigh, a stray poem above the hellish death, and then the bloody water curling and cresting at the shower drain, minute by minute, and eventually swirling down.

(PO: 9)

Later, in the prologue, the motif of curtain rings is repeated and simultaneously associated with yet another motif — a knife: “He counted six rings. The rings spinning on the curtain rod when she pulls the curtain down with her. The knife, the silence, the spinning rings” (PO: 13). After Jessie's disappearance in the framed narrative, Finley frantically looks for signs of her in the bathroom and decides to check the shower: “I threw back the shower curtain, making more noise than I'd intended” (PO: 76). The clamorous manner in which Finley nearly repeats Norman Bates's actions in the shower scene emphasises the muteness of the scene in *24 Hour Psycho*, which, in addition, contrasts with the silence in Elster's house, a sign of Jessie's disappearance.<sup>19</sup>

There is still another crucial motif that develops into an essential link between the video in the outer frames and the framed narrative in the course of the novel, namely a “man on/at the wall”. Unlike the textual parallels in the video, the man at the wall takes place on the diegetic level of the outer frames. Recall that from the beginning of the prologue, the anonymous man is represented as “[t]he man at the wall” (PO: 4). In the previous section I mentioned how Finley visualises Elster in his

<sup>19</sup>Other internal repetitions connecting the video (and the outer frame) and the framed narrative include a staircase (see PO: 11, 32, 116) and the aforementioned knife (see PO: 13, 91, 98, 106).

documentary as a man who is “ ‘against the wall’ ” (PO: 45). The polysemy of the terminology related to filmmaking used by Finley (“ ‘A simple head shot [...], I keep shooting’ ”, PO: 21), in turn, arouses a disconcerting equivalence among violence, cinema, and the figures framed against the wall.

The narrative further elaborates on the interconnection between the sinister male characters, as Finley’s idea of a documentary is actualised in the outer frames. Finley underlines this relation in the framed narrative after the tragic events, when he suddenly remembers the initial reason for his visit to the desert:

Here it is again, man and wall, face and eyes, but not another talking head. On film the face is the soul. The man is a soul in distress, as in Dreyer or Bergman, a flawed character in a chamber drama, justifying his war and condemning the men who made it. It would never happen now, not a single frame.

(PO: 99)

Finley now acknowledges that his film will never be made, that “[t]he story was here, not in Iraq or in Washington, and we were leaving it behind and taking it with us, both” (PO: 99). Although Finley’s thoughts imply that another story took place instead of the intended one, the reader knows that Finley’s visions of the man on the wall are taking place in the outer frames. Thus, Finley’s sketch for a documentary film that conveys the truth of the man’s soul prompts other stories that unfold in the novel, namely those of Norman Bates and the anonymous man.

In addition to the more or less abstract parallels touched on thus far, the narrative generates “homonymy between the characters” (Dällenbach 1989: 46), who reside on discrete narrative levels. I have already analysed the most significant parallel, that made between Anthony Perkins/Norman Bates and the anonymous man/Dennis. Suffice it to say here that the narrative further emphasises the analogy by showing how the anonymous man moves behind the movie screen, which is tellingly “translucent” (PO: 3), and subsequently mimics the movements of Anthony Perkins: “the man standing alone moved a hand toward his face, repeating, ever so slowly, the action of a figure on the screen” (PO: 3). Here the impersonation prompts internal repetition within the narrative.

There is another notable manifestation of the resemblance between the male characters, which I want to mention here as it concomitantly magnifies an oscillation between Dällenbach’s categories of *mises en abyme*. I am referring to the novel’s ending, which accentuates how dead mothers unite Bates and the anonymous man.

Here, the anonymous man first recalls a scene in which Norman Bates is carrying his mother, and subsequently begins to

think of his own mother, how could it not, before she passed on, two of them contained in a small flat being consumed by rising towers, and here is the shadow of Norman Bates as he stands outside the door of the old house, the shadow seen from inside, and then the door begins to open.

(PO: 116)

The narrative highlights a conspicuous likeness between the male characters by showing the anonymous man's response to the video. In other words, the *mise en abyme* of the utterance is generated via an active processing of the video, that is, through the *mise en abyme* of the enunciation. We also have to bear in mind that instead of actual movie images unfolding on the screen, we are now dealing with mnemonic imagery of the anonymous man. Although this creates a correspondence between the characters, the passage quoted above cunningly obscures the distinction between mental and physical, between "real" and filmic shadows, between the inside and the outside. In this fashion, the narrative once more calls the reader's attention to the porosity of the ontological framework that separates movie reality from the storyworld reality.

Apart from evoking parallels between Norman Bates the killer and the anonymous man/Dennis as Jessie's hypothetical killer, the narrative generates affinities between their victims as well. At the beginning, the novel comments on the blandness and shallowness of the role reserved for the unlucky character of Marion Crane, played by Janet Leigh:

Everybody remembers the killer's name, Norman Bates, but nobody remembers the victim's name. Anthony Perkins is Norman Bates, Janet Leigh is Janet Leigh. The victim is required to share the name of the actress who plays her. It is Janet Leigh who enters the remote motel owned by Norman Bates.

(PO: 6)

In Hitchcock's film, Marion Crane is characterised in perfunctory fashion: a beautiful woman, but without noticeable psychological substance, and hence she is quickly forgotten as well as expendable in the movie's dramaturgy.

As for Jessie, she is described as ethereal and aloof. Elster characterises his daughter as "otherworldly" (PO: 36), who as a child felt "imaginary to herself" (PO: 71).

Finley regards her as a “sylphlike” (*PO*: 49) creature who is “fixed tightly within” (*PO*: 60) her inner world. He finds that because of her “limp hand, blank face” (*PO*: 70), Jessie is often unresponsive to outer stimuli. The two women share certain similarities which result in their disposability in both narratives. As regards Marion Crane, her primary purpose in the film is to die. Likewise, after Jessie’s disappearance, Finley portrays her as a young woman whose sole function appeared to be “[p]assing into air, it seemed this is what she was meant to do, what she was made for” (*PO*: 81).

The final noteworthy resemblance created between the diegetic and movie characters is that between Finley and detective Arbogast, both intense and sympathetic figures trying to resolve the mysteries of women who have disappeared. In this case, the parallel is generated especially by the contiguity which intersects the narrative framework. More specifically, the scene in which Arbogast is stabbed is shown twice in the outer frames, first in the prologue and later in the beginning of the epilogue. Thus, it conspicuously resonates with the ending of the framed narrative in which the anonymous caller intimidates Finley.

Despite the fact that the narrative engenders similarities between the characters residing in the reality of the storyworld and the ones inhabiting the filmic reality, it is important to realise that these analogies do not create a clear-cut or distinct parallel structure between the narrative levels. Instead, the fact that implied correspondences are produced in a subtle and indefinite fashion makes them conform to the more general ambiguity that characterises the novel as a whole and the processes of narrative meaning-making.

In the course of the present chapter I have considered the drastic fashion in which Gordon’s video modifies the original movie in terms of temporal and spatial progression. We have seen that the narrative underlines perceptual process and the requirements imposed by the video on its viewers through the focal point of the anonymous man:

He understood completely why the film was projected without sound. It had to be silent. It had to engage the individual at a depth beyond the usual assumptions, the things he supposes and presumes and takes for granted.

(*PO*: 7)

Thus, the narrative emphasises both the video’s unique spatio-temporal dimensions and a subsequent heightened experience in perceiving those aspects.

Here I look at the semantic equivalence between the embedded video and the diegetic level. I show that the narrative foregrounds the primacy of the video's extreme aesthetics, as it reverberates with the perception of time and space shown in the framed narrative (see Banash 2015: 13). In this respect, the video also turns out to be a *mise en abyme* of the (whole) code, namely an embedded artwork that both mirrors the primary narrative and operates "as 'instructions' to enable the reader to perform his/her task more easily [...]; reading the work in the way it wants to be read" (Dällenbach 1989: 99–100). In other words, this kind of metatextual reflection makes "explicit its mode of operation" (ibid.: 218 nt 9) by virtue of its own signs, although this does not amount to an absolute and unequivocal understanding of the textual whole.

Let us now investigate further how the representation of *24 Hour Psycho* mirrors other parts of the novel and the narrative as a whole. Like the video, spatio-temporal perceptions have an extraordinary quality in the framed narrative. At the very outset Finley focuses on the way the desert necessitates a striking alteration in the perception of time and space: "This was desert, out beyond cities and scattered towns [...]. There was the house and then nothing but distances, not vistas or sweeping sight-lines but only distances" (PO: 18). The immensity of the desert is in sharp contrast to "the nausea of News and Traffic" (PO: 18), which characterises the hectic city of New York, its urban and " 'mortal time' " (PO: 44) from which Elster and now Finley have decided to escape.

In the framed narrative, Finley characterises the desert as "both saturating and remote" (PO: 20). He also highlights its capacity to subvert ordinary notions of time, space, and living in general. Finley ends up spending several weeks with Elster: "Not a long visit, he'd said. Today was day ten" (PO: 20). As the days go by, he finds it difficult to use electronic gadgets which connect him with the modern world, as they "began to seem feeble, whatever their speed and reach, devices overwhelmed by landscape" (PO: 65). In the course of his prolonged visit, time becomes " 'blind' " (PO: 23): "There were no mornings or afternoons. It was one seamless day, every day" (PO: 36). Finley's sensations resonate with those of the anonymous man for whom days spent in the gallery have become intermingled "seamlessly in memory" (PO: 101). Thus, akin to the video's never-ending loop "in which whatever was happening took forever to happen" (PO: 4), the non-eventuality of the desert erases noticeable changes in time for its observers.

Elster, for his part, detests modern and "corrupt" ways of measuring time. As paraphrased by Finley: "It's all about time, dimwit time, inferior time, people check-



ing watches and other devices, other reminders” (PO: 45). Instead of a more conventional understanding of temporal progression, Elster prefers “the force of geologic time” (PO: 19): he conceives temporality in terms of enormously elongated stretches, especially with regard to evolution and extinction of flora and fauna. For this reason Finley finds that Elster is “alive to the protoworld [...], the seas and reefs of ten million years ago” (PO: 20). Like her father, Jessie prefers “the idea of slowness in general. So many things go so fast, she said. We need time to lose interest in things” (PO: 107). Contrary to Jessie’s personal predilection, however, Elster endeavours to remodel time as something that is purely impersonal and beyond the reach of human conception.

It is not difficult to see a similarity between “the nonhuman vastness” (Vermeulen 2015: 70) of Elster’s geologic time and the distorted temporality of the video. Recall that the anonymous man considers the temporal progression of *24 Hour Psycho* as “pure time” (PO: 6). The notion of pure time in the film is also realised in the framed narrative: Finley seeks a similar kind of synchronicity between the time of narration and the time of the story in his one-shot documentary film. What is more, Finley compares his film project with Alexander Sokurov’s one-shot historical drama film *Russian Ark* (2002).<sup>20</sup> As for the anonymous man, towards the end of the prologue he feels that the ruptured time of the video is “paradoxically real [...], the way all the things in the physical world that we don’t understand are said to be real” (PO: 14). Pieter Vermeulen has remarked that the radical slowing down of *Psycho* “to exactly 24 hours synchronizes human life with the cosmic rhythms of night and day — a shift beyond human categories that the novel’s main narrative [...] will repeat” (2015: 73–74). We have seen that both the desert as “an alien being” (PO: 20) and the video elicit deep immersion in and, simultaneously, detachment from standard parameters of space and time. Whereas the anonymous man ultimately attempts to immerse himself “pore by pore” (PO: 116) in the figure of Norman Bates, Elster “seemed to absorb through his pores” (PO: 19) the “‘enormous’ ” (PO: 44) time and the immensity of the arid desert. Thus, whereas the anonymous man initially tries to conform to “the film’s time scheme” (PO: 6) and eventually begins to dream about a *reality*, or, more precisely, a mode of perception and cognition determined by the harrowing aesthetics of the video, a similar temporal and spatial adjustment has already taken place in the desert.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Having said that, I have to point out that despite its uninterrupted temporal progression, Sokurov’s film encompasses three centuries of Russian history and hence amounts to a radical compression of time.

<sup>21</sup>On perceptual similarities between the video and the desert, see Banash (2015: 15–16).

The video and the desert also serve as surfaces against which the male characters are impelled and able to project their abstract thoughts. Akin to the movie screen, which stimulates an “array of ideas involving science and philosophy and nameless other things” (*PO*: 5), the remoteness of the vast desert “inspired themes. Spaciousness and claustrophobia. This would become a theme” (*PO*: 20). It is important to note also that spatio-temporal sensations in both the outer frames and the framed narrative bring out an indefinable anxiety. The hefty and “dense” (*PO*: 36) silence in Elster’s house and in the desert compels Finley to regard both time and space as “dead still [...], everywhere out there” (*PO*: 31; see also *PO*: 36). The profound silence and the stopped time of the desert echo a still life, *nature morte*, which characterises the suspended and compressed spatio-temporality of *24 Hour Psycho*.

The silence of the desert, which implies death, resonates with the absence of violence which underlies the distorted movie images (see Naydan 2015: 98). By the same token, Elster’s contemplations on time often involve ominous overtones that disconcertingly resonate with the outer frames. In other words, although criticising the contemporary world and its conception of time, Elster equates this “inferior time” (*PO*: 45) with an intimidating notion of death: “This is time draining out of our lives [...]. There’s an endless counting down, he said. When you strip away all the surfaces, when you see into it, what’s left is terror” (*PO*: 45). Elster’s ideas reverberate with the implications of the video’s dreadful imagery and its ominous repercussions in the mind of the anonymous man. In effect, by constantly showing temporality as disrupted, sutured, and/or suspended, the narrative makes it conspicuously threatening.

Ultimately, the novel demonstrates that the abstractness of both the desert and the video does not unleash characters from the human temporal and experiential scale, which is fundamentally bound to actual places,<sup>22</sup> and, more important, is bound to our embodied mind which perceives and experiences the world according to our subjective parameters. I therefore agree with Vermeulen (2015) that “[c]rucially, this different mode of temporality is *not* described as an escape from human time into a timeless realm that successfully transcends it — instead it is an experience that locates a rupture *within* human life” (ibid.: 74; emphases original). For Finley, this is seen in the way the pressing silence of the desert creates “the sense of self-entrapment” (*PO*: 36) in him and simultaneously makes him distressingly conscious of the problems that await outside the seemingly atemporal space of the desert.

Jessie’s disappearance makes Elster aware of an appalling temporality that ulti-

<sup>22</sup>On the primacy of the place over time, see Martucci (2007: 112).

mately binds us all, namely a mortality that leaves him nothing but “lost times and places, the true life, over and over” (PO: 88) and paralysing dread. The unexpected turn of events also marks a change in spatial perception, especially in terms of the desert:

The desert was clairvoyant, this is what he'd always believed, that the landscape unravels and reveals, it knows future as well as past. But now it made him feel enclosed and I understood this, hemmed in, pressed tight. We stood outside and felt the desert bearing in.

(PO: 87)

Thus, “the heartbreaking beauty” and “the indifference” (PO: 93) of the desert now begin to signify a menace that restrains the characters.

By amplifying a sensation and perception of spatial conditions in the desert after the dramatic turn of events, the narrative generates striking parallels between *24 Hour Psycho*, the outer frames, and the framed narrative. At this point, the wilderness of the desert turns out to be an unactualised foreboding that resonates with the silent and disfigured images of *24 Hour Psycho*, images that hauntingly imply horrifying violence without actually representing it. In the epilogue, the novel intensifies spatial similitude by accentuating geographical affinities between the video and the framed narrative, as *Psycho* was filmed in the same area in which the middle section of the novel takes place.

The anonymous man makes this connection clear by remarking to Jessie that “[t]he movie starts in Phoenix, Arizona” (PO: 108). Immediately after saying this, he begins to mull over the reason for naming “both city and state” by wondering: “Was the state necessary?” (PO: 108). I hold that this question is addressed to the reader: it serves as an inferential sign that reinforces the links between the outer frames and the framed narrative as well as between the video and the storyworld reality. In addition, the metaleptic contact made with the reader by the anonymous man elucidates further the video’s disconcerting and unrealistic access to and effects on the embedding and primary narrative level.

Furthermore, the man’s question turns out to be metafictional: it comments on the way in which the narrative is structured and hence pertains to Dällenbach’s idea of the *mise en abyme* of the (whole) code as a metatextual reflection. By drawing attention to the reasonability of his own remark, the anonymous man articulates the need to make and see connections between the video and the storyworld reality. The video itself calls the reader’s attention to the fictionality of the novelistic whole.

According to Dällenbach (1989), the *mise en abyme* serves as “a secondary sign” that accentuates “the signifying intention of [...] the narrative that contains it” (ibid.: 57). Here Dällenbach reminds us that the primary story, too, is merely a “sign”, an artistic fabrication which the embedded narrative intensifies.

With regard to the constructed nature of literature, the open-endedness of the narrative which disconcertingly maintains unresolved mysteries also highlights the novel’s status as a fictional composition. After having finished *Point Omega*, the reader senses the indeterminacy and impaired narrativity that define the novel’s construction. If we bear in mind that in Gordon’s version of *Psycho* “cause and effect [are] drastically drawn apart” (*PO*: 14), we understand that, like the disrupted plot movement of the horror movie, the narrative whole also subverts causal relations between the represented — and implied — events. Put differently, similar to the way in which the aesthetics of the video has ceased to follow the original plot of Hitchcock’s film and hence dismantled all efforts to discern signification in the moving images, the narrative whole itself is deprived of fixed and distinct meanings. This congruence reinforces further the function of the video as an ultimate and explicit artistic model through which the novelistic whole, and especially its incoherence and semantic deficits, ought to be interpreted.

Ultimately, we have to consider further the consequences of structural conformity between the narrative levels and the fact that the video affects the storyworld in which it is perceived. In the course of this chapter I have pointed out diverse ways in which *Point Omega* often creates unrealistic proximities between the discrete narrative levels and how these acts of immersion and diffusion potentially violate the ontological border separating the video from the reality of the storyworld. DeLillo himself has remarked on the affinities between the novel and *24 Hour Psycho* in an interview, observing that parallelism generates vacillation: “The idea I had in mind was to allow the novel and video to share certain elements. The two forms tend to spill into each other at times” (DePietro 2010). His comment corroborates my argument that the mediation between narrative levels results in effacing the difference between the (embedding) primary narrative level and the secondary level that mirrors the primary one (see Dällenbach 1989: 99). As the video turns out to be part of “the story’s framing ‘reality’ ” (Wolf 2006c: 321), the reader is compelled to ask, does the video actually dominate the narrative whole?

In the final section of this chapter I will focus on the ways in which this fundamental act of breaching and subverting ontological frames is related to the novel’s title. Specifically, I examine how both the original concept of the “omega point” and

Elster's rendering of it resonate with the textual dynamics of DeLillo's novel, especially with regard to sublime unintelligibility, mystic spirituality, and the collectivity that eradicates borders between entities of various kinds.

### **Breaking the Frames: From Metalepsis to the Omega Point**

Although the idea of the omega point is not specifically manifest in the course of DeLillo's novel, the concept itself and its founder, the French Jesuit priest and philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), embody and exemplify multiple topics that underlie the narrative construction of *Point Omega*. By drawing on the ideas of this mystic Catholic who was also a paleontologist and a geologist, DeLillo is able to mingle such seemingly disconnected topics as religion, technology, evolution, and death in his novel. Teilhard himself merged these subjects in his philosophy, as he aspired to combine scientific thinking with Christianity. This is seen in the way he sought to discover man's place in the cosmic constellation while taking into account essential notions of the Christian faith.

Highly interested in evolutionary theory and the evolution of human race, Teilhard regarded the omega point as the highest form of human consciousness and existence towards which humankind is evolving. In his widely read collection of essays, entitled *L'avenir de l'homme* (1959), translated into English as *The Future of Man* (1964), Teilhard held that the world develops from primal entropy towards "the sphere of high complexity" (Teilhard 2004: 103). In this gradual progression, the evolving human being comes "to form around its earthly matrix a single, major organic unity, enclosed upon itself" (ibid.: 108), which causes a "planetary totalization of human consciousness" (ibid.: 109). In his vision, "the Omega point" is a "divine center of convergence" (ibid.: 115) in which man, after having reached "a critical level of maturity" (ibid.: 116), is able to join. Thus, in Teilhard's philosophy the omega point marks the ultimate stage of human evolution, a terminus to which human consciousness has developed into a collective, organic unity transcending all material constraints.

As for explicit references in the novel, Elster mentions the Jesuit and his concept to Finley in the course of their discussions. Elster reveals to Finley that he read Teilhard as a young student and describes his ideas as follows: " 'He said that human thought is alive, it circulates. And the sphere of collective human thought, this is approaching the final term, the last flare' " (*PO*: 51). Here DeLillo creates a decided resemblance between himself and Elster: having studied at Fordham College, a well-

known Jesuit institution, the author draws on his Catholic upbringing as groundwork for the novel.

Indeed, DeLillo once mentioned in an interview that, while working on *Point Omega*, it occurred to him that “some of Richard Elster’s developing thoughts on certain subjects might be related to Teilhard’s visions of transcendence” (DePietro 2010). Yet, whereas for Teilhard the omega point signalled a positive leap in human evolution which we have not yet achieved, for Elster collective consciousness has already taken place, as the “‘blur of technology’ ” has made us “‘think in groups’ ” (*PO*: 52).<sup>23</sup> Elster regards this passive collective thinking as a self-destructive action which ultimately turns the mankind into “‘inorganic matter [...] stones in a field’ ” (*PO*: 53). In his modification of Teilhard’s theory, a regression from human to inhuman marks the transcendental metamorphosis of the omega point.

Besides deviating from Teilhard’s notions of the nature of the omega point, Elster’s thinking is influenced by other theories. In his analysis of DeLillo’s novel, David Cowart (2012: 47–48) has pointed out that Elster’s philosophy is closer to Sigmund Freud’s notion of the death drive than Teilhard’s omega point.<sup>24</sup> Despite the discrepancy between Elster and Teilhard, both acknowledge potential threats inherent in scientific and technological advancement in the modern world. In his *Le phénomène humain* (1955; translated as *The Phenomenon of Man*, 1959), Teilhard defined this threat as fear felt by modern man: endowed with new and hence unknown powers, *homo sapiens* is acutely aware of the possibility of disastrous outcomes of exerting those powers. As for Elster, he points out concrete manifestations of manmade technology, such as the nuclear bomb, which forebode calamitous repercussions for humankind (see *PO*: 50).

Because of these references to the fear which prevails in the contemporary world, Cowart (2012: 32) contends that the omega point in DeLillo’s novel serves as a metaphor for the decline of American imperialism. My interpretation diverges from Cowart’s political approach: I find that Teilhard’s concept and its relation to fear ought to be studied primarily from the perspective of the characters and their experience of *losing control*. I see the novel as illustrating a loss of the ability to perceive and interpret the surrounding world adequately: the video distorts our conventional modes of perception, Jessie’s fate presents a conundrum that no one can puzzle out, and life itself is an eternal mystery. In other words, DeLillo places his characters in

<sup>23</sup>On similar “technological transcendence” (Tabbi 1995: 220) which promises to free human beings from their corporeal essence and individual thinking, see Joseph Tabbi’s (ibid.: 194–207) analysis of DeLillo’s *Mao II* (1991).

<sup>24</sup>On the undercurrents of the Freudian *thanatos* in *Point Omega*, see e.g. *PO*: 50.

situations in which the complexity of the world remains beyond human comprehension.

This “confrontation with the limits of the human imagination” (Vermeulen 2015: 71) amounts to an experience of the *sublime*. This is not uncommon in DeLillo’s works. In *Postmodern Sublime* (1995), Joseph Tabbi explores the way in which media and technology have replaced “the natural world as a sublime object of contemplation” (ibid.: 173) in DeLillo’s earlier fiction. Similarly, in *Point Omega* the role of sublimity and its interaction with spirituality and technology turn out to be pivotal. Firstly, the concepts of spirituality and technology are closely linked with the historical figure of Teilhard whose concept gives the novel its title: as both a mystic Catholic and a scientist, he combined in his philosophy the spiritual sublime with contemplations of the complexity of modern society.

Secondly, if we bear in mind DeLillo’s Catholic background, we can see that the way the narrative obscures meanings resonates with the function of religious mysticism. Amy Hungerford (2006) has analysed this aspect of DeLillo’s fiction and argues that his prose often reverberates with the mysticism of the Mass, the Roman Catholic liturgical service which traditionally was celebrated in Latin. Hungerford argues that, to mystify literary representation, DeLillo makes use of certain characteristics of the Catholic Mass, which, when celebrated in Latin, lacks transparent meaning for much of the audience (ibid.: 357).

Liliana Naydan (2015) has adopted Hungerford’s contention in her own analysis of *Point Omega*. Naydan contends that by indicating that there is no resolution to the mystery presented in the narrative, the “religious mystery” (Hungerford 2006: 364) characteristic of the Latin Mass echoes the “literary mystery” established in the novel (see Naydan 2015: 95). With regard to my perspective on *Point Omega*, it is interesting that Naydan points out how DeLillo uses Catholic attributes and theology in the novel to “represent violence as screened”, namely through technological mediation that “saturates” (ibid.: 95) violent acts. Thus, Naydan’s line of thinking corroborates my argument regarding the interaction between religious spirituality, the unintelligible sublime, and the potentially devastating power of industrial apparatuses that devour human lives — and even the fictitious reality — in DeLillo’s novel.

Although *Point Omega* does not precisely touch on religious topics, the narrative does juxtapose the novel’s two main settings in terms of religion and spirituality, namely in its portrayal of both the gallery and the desert as spiritual and even sacred spaces that inspire and require devout silence. In the prologue, the anonymous man plays “with the idea that the gallery was like a preserved site, a dead poet’s cottage

or hushed tomb, a medieval chapel” (*PO*: 12; cf. DeLillo 2002; Herren 2015: 149). With corresponding rigid asceticism and reticence, Elster, who expresses his ideas in tones of “liturgical gloom” (*PO*: 30), regards his stay in the middle of the desert as “‘a spiritual retreat’ ” (*PO*: 23).

The holy silence demanded by the two spaces is closely related to an act of seeing and perceiving the surrounding space. Whereas for the anonymous man watching the video triggers an idea of nearly divine practice, the desert requires “the kind of silent spell that’s hard to break” (*PO*: 36). This enchantment is seen especially after Jessie’s disappearance, as the men’s concern for her fate propels them to keep watch on the deck of the house: “We did this well into the night. It became a ritual, a religious observance, and often, when both of us were out there, completely wordless” (*PO*: 87). These near-religious experiences also have sublime connotations, as in both cases human cognition cannot unravel the incomprehensibility of what is perceived.

With regard to the desert, Vermeulen aptly remarks that its “vast anonymity has overwhelmed the bare outlines of a human plot, and come to assert itself as a blockage on the human scale it encompasses” (2015: 78). As for the disintegrated images of *24 Hour Psycho*, the anonymous man acknowledges that they require “pious effort, to see what you are looking at” (*PO*: 13). However, we have seen that despite his willingness to make that effort, the video’s intrinsic meanings remain outside his comprehension. In both cases the human inability to truly grasp what is perceived bears similarities to Elster’s conception of the omega point as something that resides beyond human language and “‘struggl[es] toward some idea outside our experience’ ” (*PO*: 72; cf. Naydan 2015: 104).

If we return to Teilhard’s original concept of the omega point, we recall that it entails a notion of collective consciousness and harmonious communion, which erases the separateness of human beings. At times, *Point Omega* endeavours to create this kind of integrity, which transcends individual cognition, especially in the case of the anonymous man in the gallery. While watching the video with the two unknown men — who later turn out to be Finley and Elster — the anonymous man feels that “they shared something, we three, that’s what he felt” (*PO*: 9). Herren (2015) has investigated how art in DeLillo’s fiction often elicits strong sensations in his characters. According to Herren, “[a]rt offers the allure of total communion, lasting catharsis, complete integration, and perfect harmony — in short, all that the cruel and broken outer world fails to provide” (ibid.: 163). If we consider further Herren’s description of artistic experiences, it is not difficult to see that these encounters correspond to sensations that religious ceremonies potentially arouse in human beings. Indeed,



in *Point Omega* the silent act of watching the video suggests that art has replaced religion in the reality of the storyworld.<sup>25</sup>

However, Herren argues further that impressions stimulated by art are deceiving: “DeLillo dispels this idyllic fantasy in these stories, uncovering the confusion, duplicity, and menace lurking within the supposed sanctuary” (ibid.). As we have seen in *Point Omega*, the characters are unable to invalidate the sublime residue of meaning evoked by the video. The anonymous man is also seeking “complete immersion” in the video and desires it “to move even more slowly, requiring deeper involvement of eye and mind [...] into dense sensation, sharing consciousness with him” (PO: 115). I contend that the corporeal and cognitive distinction between human beings à la Teilhard does not take place in the fictional world. Instead, *Point Omega* illustrates how art threatens to eradicate the distinction between a subjective consciousness and the objects in the external world which are encountered by the subject.<sup>26</sup> In both cases, human existence as we know it has ceased. Since the narrative (and Elster) remodel Teilhard’s original notion of an accumulated consciousness into a process in which “‘the mind transcends all direction inward’ ” (PO: 72), the characters are at risk of becoming completely non-existent.

Owing to the immersive power of both the video and the desert, the mirroring process in general and the frequent metaleptic framebreakings in particular lead to an evaporation of the characters into the material world. By repudiating a demarcating border between the characters and the world they inhabit, the narrative increasingly diminishes the bodily and mental integrity of these fictional persons. Thus, besides implying that human dematerialisation takes place in the gallery and is vocalised through Elster in his transcendental ideas about an “‘exhausted’ ” (PO: 53) consciousness, the novel’s narrative framework and the reflecting role of *24 Hour Psycho* as a *mise en abyme* formally epitomise this annihilation of subjectivity.

Similar to Elster’s remark on future human consciousness which “‘begins to reflect upon itself’ ” (PO: 72), I argue that the narrative creates reflections between narrative levels to such an extent that the distinction between the reflecting and the reflected is in jeopardy. This, I think, has at least two distinct consequences for how the reader perceives and feels the fictional reality. Firstly, since the narrative constantly draws the reader’s attention to the act of mirroring and its capacity to produce a disturbing vacillation between the storyworld reality and the movie real-

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<sup>25</sup>I thank Professor Heta Pyrhönen for pointing this out. In an interview with Alexandra Alter (2010), DeLillo commented on “the sense of religion as almost, at times, a kind of art”.

<sup>26</sup>On the fusion between a subject and the material world in DeLillo’s fiction, see Kielland-Lund (2011: 86).

ity, the diegetic characters are deprived of their original meaning as fictional persons. As a result, by investing in accentuating its status as a fabricated work of art which generates “multiple, infinite reflexions” (Dällenbach 1989: 59) between the narrative levels and parts, the characters turn into mere “ciphers” (ibid.) whose true function is to embody the novel’s manifestly metaleptic and hence metafictional narrative formation.

The novel amplifies this kind of abstraction and defamiliarisation of the characters towards the end, as the narrative increasingly throws up indefinite and generic nouns in reference to the characters (see e.g. *PO*: 39, 55, 71, 96). This is especially clear in the case of Jessie. In the epilogue, various linguistic choices make her a character whose individuality is barely noticeable. The free indirect discourse consistently refers to her with impersonal expressions: “[t]hen somebody said something” (*PO*: 105); “[t]he one next to him [...] a shadow unfolding from the wall” (*PO*: 111). The anonymous man also accentuates the fact that he and Jessie remain nameless to each other and to the reader: “Did he ask her name? He didn’t ask her name.” (*PO*: 114). By withholding declarative nouns throughout the final part of the novel, the narrative once more epitomises its gradual aspiration to annul subjectivity. *Point Omega* thus explicitly illustrates this narrative desire for total abstractness, such as “the end of human consciousness” (*PO*: 98), which characterises Elster’s understanding of the title of the novel *per se*.

Ultimately, the impossibility of separating the reflecting from the reflected renders the fictional universe as a whole into an ontologically one-dimensional sphere. In this new formation, different entities — fictitious persons, artefacts, and so forth — have no distinctive or distinguishing properties that would indicate certain ontologically and phenomenologically qualitative differences between them. This affects the way we experience them with regard to the narrative world-making. Thus, resonating with the compressed time and space of the desert, the ontologically diverse components of which the fictional world is typically comprised have here been condensed in a fashion that they become homogeneous, an agglomeration of objects whose only fathomable purpose for the reader appears to be that they indeed have been subjected to this ontological transformation.

In the introduction to the present chapter I pointed out that in DeLillo’s novel the narrative meanings are and remain inarticulate and indefinable. Most likely, the reader never truly grasps the final purpose of the narrative whole. Instead, he or she is forced to conjure up some kind of understanding of the amorphous text with the help of indirect acts of narrative comprehension, namely through reflections

and seesaw movements between the narrative levels, between both the ontological and textual frames that separate the fictional reality from the movie reality. This hermeneutic act gives the haunting imagery of the video a central role in the novel.

In the course of this chapter we have seen that ultimately the embedded video gradually absorbs the narrative whole, as it trespasses the borders that demarcate both the narrative framework and the ontological realities within the storyworld. Whereas the filmic level pervades the diegetic level in *Point Omega*, an interaction between cinema and the storyworld reality is noticeably more conventional and comically motivated in Nicholls's *The Understudy* to which I turn next.



## Chapter 5

# Film Entering the “Real”: Acting, Faking, and Possible Worlds in David Nicholls’s *The Understudy*

- That’s not real life, lad. That’s just pretending.
- But ‘real life’ is how well you pretend, isn’t it? You. Me. Everybody in the world...

Jack Rosenthal  
*Ready When You Are, Mr McGill*  
(U: 1; emphasis original)

At first glance, the romantic comedy *The Understudy* by British best-selling novelist and screenwriter David Nicholls (b. 1966) appears to have nothing in common with the distressing perplexity of *Point Omega* encountered in the previous chapter. Yet apart from the visible discrepancies, on closer look darker tones and narrative complexity can be discerned in this romantic and tragicomic novel. As in *Point Omega*, these characteristics are mostly due to the powerful presence of cinema throughout the narration, as film gives rise to the complicated relationship between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema. In *The Understudy*, the narrative problematises the notion of the “real” as such by means films and motifs related to acting, which take place both on the movie screen and on stage.

Perhaps best known for his romantic novel *One Day* (2009), later adapted for a screenplay by the novelist himself, here Nicholls tells the story of an ill-fated actor called Stephen C. McQueen, the letter C to distinguish him from the late American Hollywood star and close namesake Steve McQueen. Stephen is in his mid-thirties

and is desperately attempting to make his breakthrough in the competitive world of London theatre.<sup>1</sup> Analogous to Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Stephen is an enthusiastic cinephile, who, as a result of “[a]ll the years spent gazing at movies on telly [...] or in the front row of the local flea-pit cinema” (*U*: 26), constantly reflects on and models the surrounding reality through the illusory and evidently distorting filter of cinema. Thus, akin to the anonymous man in *Point Omega* who is “thinking into the film, into himself” (*PO*: 109), Nicholls’s manic moviegoer attempts to perceive the external world according to “filmic parameters”. While for Stephen films are more real than fictional reality, the narrative encourages the reader to rethink commonly held beliefs about the concepts of truth, reality, and authenticity — not only in the fictional world of the narrative, but also in the actual world.

The title of the novel refers to Stephen’s assignment as an understudy for a famous and extremely handsome Josh Harper in a hit-play on the West End. As a *Kirkus* review puts it, “Josh is everything Stephen isn’t”: “[g]orgeous, charismatic, and spectacularly uncomplicated” (*Kirkus Reviews* 2005). Besides creating a salient contrast between the two male characters, Stephen becomes infatuated with Josh Harper’s American wife, Nora, who “is as real as Josh is superficial” (*ibid.*). With the help of the discourse related to cinema and acting in general, Nicholls composes a tragicomic dramatic triangle in which lying, pretence, and duplicity dominate the narrative progression, and in fact make up the novel’s main themes.

Owing to the continual allusions to films, film genres, and other performing arts closely associated with acting and the creation of aesthetic illusions, it is undeniable that the filmically-saturated narration has an impact on the narrative world-making and the reader’s processing. In this chapter I use terminology coined within possible worlds semantics in literary theory to investigate the construction of the fictional world of *The Understudy* with the help of filmic discourse, which is anchored both to the protagonist and to the omniscient narrator. Possible worlds in literary theory, which is based on modal logic and especially on theoretical concepts coined by Marie-Laure Ryan and Lubomír Doležel, provides a fruitful basis for analysing *The Understudy* with reference to modal paradigms of the possible/impossible and in particular, the actual/non-actual.

The contradictions between the storyworld reality and the movie realities through which the narrative constantly represents the primary narrative level encourage the

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen’s character bears certain similarities to the novelist’s own background: in an article written for *The Guardian*, Nicholls revealed that in his youth he dreamed of an acting career, although he realised his lack of talent sooner than his novel character Stephen does (Nicholls 2015).

reader to evaluate what is possible (or impossible) and actual (non-actual) in the fictional reality. Thus, the creation of narrative meanings is carried out by “distinguishing the factual and physical from the possible and virtual [mental]” (Ryan 2006: 651). Put another way, the mental modelling of what serves as fact in the domain of the fictional world is crucial in investigating the narrative and the reader’s construction of the fictional world (see *ibid.*).

As a whole, the fictional world of *The Understudy* is comprised of a modal system with all its possibilities. At the centre of this “textual universe” (Ryan 1991: 24) lies the reality of the storyworld, that is, the “textual actual world” (*ibid.*). According to possible worlds theory, this centre is surrounded by possible, non-actual worlds. However, in the case of *The Understudy* non-actual possible worlds often turn out to be improbable and even contradictory as opposed to the textual actual world. The discrepancy is chiefly due to Stephen’s eager adaptations of non-actual worlds of films to real-life situations, without achieving the desired result, namely success in show business and in love. Thus, these initially possible, filmic non-actual worlds are ultimately actualised only in the active mind of the protagonist.

By functioning as the reflector of the crude reality in which Stephen lives and by simultaneously providing him with the idealistically perverted notion of a world in which everything is potentially possible, the imaginary realm of cinema creates its distinct modal domain within the fictional world. Doležel calls this kind of dualistic structure a dyadic world “in which contrary modal conditions reign” (1998: 128). Like Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* in which Don Alonso revels in the fantasy of chivalric romances to the point that the fictional worlds determine the way the protagonist perceives the surrounding reality, the fantastic reality of the movies often supersedes the actual fictional world in Stephen’s private universe. His behaviour shows that the more “realistic” parameters of acting in a world restricted by plausibilities of what is probable give way to his inner filmic modal world in which almost nothing seems to be impossible.

Doležel (*ibid.*: 128–129) gives an example of the dyadic structure of fiction by discussing mythological worlds in which supernatural creatures operate in ways that are distinct from the more realistic agents of the story. Similarly, the filmic characters projected on Stephen’s “mental cinema screen” (*U*: 45) do not have access to the actual fictional world. Here we find that the ontological framework which marked the difference between movie reality and fictional reality in DeLillo’s novel is also prominent in *The Understudy*, although the narrative incentives differ to some extent.

Then again, the filmic domain greatly affects the progression of events in the re-

ality of the storyworld, as Stephen endeavours to adopt scenes from movies he has seen in true life. The playful use of principally filmic discourse which dominates the narrative world-making results in an ambiguous situation vis-à-vis the paradigm of the actual/non-actual: the more or less realistic textual actual world is determined and is ultimately nearly overrun by something that is, in essence, imaginary and hence regarded as non-actual and “unreal”. Thus, similar to DeLillo’s novel, the permeability of the borderline separating the (audio)visual “sur-reality” and the fictional reality ultimately holds true also in *The Understudy*. As a consequence, as if reverberating with the topics considered in *The Book of Illusions*, Nicholls reminds the reader of the fictionality of the novel, and thereby compels him or her to re-think the alleged difference between the fictional “real” and the doubly imaginary (sub)world of cinema.

In the following sections, I explore more thoroughly the filmically-suffused narrative world-making of *The Understudy* and its repercussions in terms of the narrative progression, the novel’s themes, and the reader’s immersion. I begin by focusing on the private universe of Stephen through which the reader primarily construes an understanding of the fictional world. Thereafter I turn my attention to the omniscient narration, which represents the textual universe through Stephen, the focal point, and also through filmic discourse. I demonstrate that this technique results in problematising and even undermining the reader’s sensation of fictional realism. A similar kind of outcome is seen in the following section, as I investigate narrative passages in which the line between fictional reality and the embedded level of films fluctuates conspicuously. After manifesting the way in which the narrative intertwines the fictional “real” with the “unreal” associated with the level of cinema, I conclude the chapter by considering whether the surprisingly unsentimental and un-idealistic end of the novel restores realism to the fictional world.

### **“Romantic-Comedy Behaviour”: Constructing the Fictional “Real”**

Unsurprisingly, the most significant private universe in *The Understudy* Stephen’s, as the narrative chiefly focuses on its unlucky anti-hero. Throughout the novel, the extra-diegetic narrator actively depicts Stephen’s inner life, which differs markedly from the reality in which he lives. Since the reader obtains a remarkable part of information about the textual actual world through the focal point of Stephen, he or she navigates through Stephen’s private universe for an understanding of the textual universe as a whole. Put differently, since the inner life and behaviour of the hapless



protagonist are saturated with cinema, the reader's narrative comprehension of the textual actual world and the textual universe as a whole is driven by filmic discourse.

Thus, besides illuminating the personality of the protagonist himself, the representation of Stephen's private universe reflects, and is contrasted with, the true state of affairs in the textual actual world. As for Stephen's private universe through which he operates in the fictional actual world and which exhibits his beliefs, wishes, goals, and knowledge of the external world, the reader quickly observes that his universe is heavily imbued with the medium of cinema. In this section, I examine the narrative and hermeneutic consequences of the persistent co-presence of cinema in Stephen's private universe and the textual actual world.

The narrative portrays Stephen's inner mind and physical actions through filmic discourse. For example, the narrative depicts Stephen "squinting in the light, like the Donald Pleasence character in *The Great Escape*" (*U*: 265), and his feelings about his upsetting fate as a weekend dad to his daughter Sophie are described with the help of allusions to cinematic storytelling: "Watching her grow was like a jerky stop-motion film: with every week that passed something small but significant had changed, something had been lost" (*U*: 128). To a large extent, filmic connotations constitute the reader's conception of Stephen's private universe.

Similar to the novels already analysed in this study, the imaginary dimension of cinema intercommunicates with and affects the lived reality in Stephen's case. This intercommunication between cinema and the storyworld reality is evident in the way Stephen attempts to cope with the surrounding world with the help of the knowledge of films and the conventions of cinematic storytelling he has acquired. Thus, the non-actual events of films penetrate the actual events taking place in the textual actual world. In particular, Stephen seeks to imitate the male charisma of movie stars in Hollywood classics. For example, he attempts to emulate the suave behaviour of Cary Grant and James Stewart in real-life circumstances: "make a move, say what you feel, like Jimmy Stewart in *The Philadelphia Story*" (*U*: 271). The ludicrous effect justifiable in a comic novel comes from the huge gap between Stephen's "cinematically" inclined and thus illusory perception of the world and the harshness of that reality in which his filmic behaviour is doomed to failure.

The contradiction between the textual actual world and Stephen's private universe, which is "centered around its own epistemic world" (Ryan 2006: 649), reflects the novel's narrative dynamics. In terms of possible worlds semantics, "[t]he modal system of knowledge, ignorance, and belief imposes epistemic order on the fictional world" (Doležel 1998: 126). Indeed, at the beginning of the novel, Stephen's knowl-

edge of and beliefs about the world and himself are impaired. Thus, the lack of knowledge — or, more precisely, the kind of knowledge necessary to real life — initiates the narrative progression by anticipating conflicts between Stephen and the surrounding reality inhabited by other characters, each of whom inhabits their own private universe.

If we take a closer look at the structure of these private universes, we find that they are comprised of knowledge, obligation, and wish worlds (Ryan 1991: 114–118). As I have already implied, the reader quickly observes that Stephen’s private worlds, consisting of such elements as his beliefs, desires, goals, plans, and moral restrictions, are principally determined by the dramaturgical laws of cinema. As regards Stephen’s wish and intention worlds, these are closely related to films and acting in general, evident in his predilection for occasionally imagining himself on stage,

playing the old familiar scene again, on the screen in his head.  
... *the roar of the audience in his ears as they rise as one.*

(U: 206; emphasis original)

His epistemic and belief worlds, for their part, are also manifestly tarnished by his knowledge of films, evident in his occasionally far too romantic and idealistic demeanour towards his prospects in both his professional and his love life. As late as the end of the narrative, Stephen’s epistemic world begins to conform better to the probabilities underlying the textual actual world.

But before realising the impossibility of his childhood wish, Stephen literally lives his dream: the way he evaluates and acts in the world is, to a remarkable extent, attuned to elements related to famous films, film genres, movie actors, and acting in general. For Stephen, “[i]n all the most intense and intimate experiences of his life, he couldn’t help comparing them with how actors had simulated similar moments” (U: 169). Perhaps this is why he often has recourse to acting terminology in making sense of his present circumstances. For example, Stephen evaluates the behaviour of Nora, Josh’s wife, in terms of typecasting: “She made him feel well cast, and in a central role too, rather than the understudy of some phantom other self” (U: 170). Stephen also occasionally considers actual objects as props, such as a “heavy crystal goblet” (U: 251), into which he pours wine at his ex-wife Alison’s home.

As for explicitly filmic discourse related to Stephen’s imagination, the narrative frequently represents his mental activity with cinematic storytelling. His inner visions

are often described as an on-going filmic reel: “He pictured himself in prison uniform, a long period in remand, a distressing visit from his ex-wife, being sucked into the seedy world of smack” (*U*: 102). On occasion, the narrative portrays Stephen’s tendency to play out scenarios in his mind with the help of movie scenes in the form of a screenplay. These passages are typed in a monospace, customarily used for film and theatre scripts.<sup>2</sup> In the following passage, Stephen begins to imagine a most unlikely turn of events:

Stock movie images played in his head –  
 - pan across to find a handwritten note on the mantelpiece, extreme  
 close up of an empty bottle of pills rolling from a hand onto the  
 floor...

(*U*: 325)

By and large, the narrative makes use of clichéd cinematic (and theatrical) conventions to elucidate Stephen’s occasionally far-too-vivid imagination.

The above quotation is also an example of the fantasy worlds or universes anchored to Stephen. By fantasy world or universe, I am referring to the complete world of a dream, a hallucination, or other figments of the imagination which temporarily occupy the place of the textual actual world as the centre of the textual universe, although in reality this dream world “exist[s] only at the periphery of the textual universe” (Ryan 1991: 42, see also *ibid.*: 119). According to Ryan, fantasy worlds not only “offer escapes from [the textual actual world]”, but they may also “fulfill metaphorically the function of [knowledge worlds] or [wish worlds] with respect to the primary narrative system” (*ibid.*: 119). Thus, besides briefly erasing all realistic parameters dominating the textual actual world, Stephen’s filmically-saturated fantasies also serve as models of the world in which he would like to live. The problem is, of course, that while the reader recognises the contradictions between the actual world of the dream momentarily enacted by Stephen and the textual actual world, Stephen is unwilling to keep these two modal systems apart.

The narrative develops the conflict between the reality of the storyworld and Stephen’s private universe, especially with the help of his cinematically impregnated wish, intention, and fantasy worlds. This is illustrated, for example, in the following passages, which first disclose his cherished dreams of a future life, then subsequently renounce their likelihood:

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<sup>2</sup>These passages also echo Nicholls’s experience with screenwriting.

As a teenager, falling in love with old British movies of the fifties and sixties on telly, Stephen had always been fascinated by the notion of ‘the bed-sit’. He liked to imagine himself, in black-and-white, as an Albert Finney type, living in shabby-romantic furnished rooms overlooking the railway lines at 2/6 a week [...], whilst Julie Christie padded around wearing one of his old shirts.

(U: 39)

The reader is told that at some point Stephen has begun to suspect that “this was the only one of his fantasies that was destined to come true” (U: 39).

Eventually, the reality turns out to be somewhat less than ideal: after having separated from Alison, Stephen ends up living in a gloomy “studio” that “was situated in a drab, nameless area between Battersea and Wandsworth” (U: 39) and that “was not really designed for large-scale entertaining; it was designed for solitary drinking, consuming fast food and weeping” (U: 42). Here, a conspicuously comic and allegorical use of cinema in the novel has a significant narrative function, both as a factor in forming the textual universe and as a contrastive element illuminating the gap between the fictional reality and Stephen’s idealistic inner world.

What also becomes clear is that, unlike the other novels analysed here, *The Understudy* is primarily a funny book, a narrative that endeavours to make its readers laugh. Indeed, the role of humour is pivotal in the reading experience. As shown in the quotations above, the novel’s comic aspects are closely linked to the use of cinema, such as the amusing filmic symbols that repeatedly occur and expose the disparity between the private world of the protagonist, including his future “avatars of self” saturated with filmic associations, and the surrounding fictional reality.

Above, I remarked that Stephen has a tendency to react to real-life situations in a fashion commensurate with the films he has seen. Apart from the comical outcomes that result from the inconsistencies between the storyworld reality and the filmic ideas Stephen puts into action, he often draws on common norms related to different kinds of romantic genres. Despite his predilection for evaluating and responding to certain circumstances in an unrealistically filmic fashion, Stephen is to some degree aware of the painstaking difference between the dramatic power of romantic films and the more questionable consequences in his own life:

In romantic comedies, he had seen a thousand last-minute declarations of love at airports, or train stations, usually in the rain or snow, declarations that had proved rather more persuasive than his own real-life attempts.

(U: 168–169)

However, these occasional realisations do not discourage him from frequently regarding a certain atmosphere as ideal for romantic actions, which stem from the cinema screen. This pertains especially to Nora Harper, Josh’s American wife, for whom Stephen has strong feelings. In the course of their evolving friendship, Stephen begins to regard their meetings as filmic “sequences”: he experiences

a sudden anxiety that Nora might be one of those kooky, free-spirit types, the kind of irreverent life-force who, in the imaginary romantic comedy currently playing in his head, turns the hero’s narrow life upside down, etc., etc.

(U: 170–171)

The novel’s chapter titles — “Romantic-Comedy Behaviour” and “Kitchen-Sink Drama” — reinforce Stephen’s propensity for gauging many situations in his life as potentially romantic. Thus, whereas Stephen’s persistent fondness for “Romantic-Comedy Behaviour” propels the action of the romantic comedy itself, the secondary titles function as hermeneutic paratexts providing the reader an inferential framework against which to judge the narrative situations.

Stephen’s innately romantic mindset, which is influenced by the romantic films he has gradually mastered over the years, affects not only the narrative emplotment. On the extra-textual level of the novel, the reader is compelled to employ his or her knowledge of cinema to decipher the unfolding narrative. Thus, somewhat similar to the evocation of the joint consciousness of the film audience who, in *The Book of Illusions*, is supposed to have a mutual understanding of the universal language of films, or the implicit enactment of the original *Psycho* in *Point Omega*, *The Understudy* encourages the reader to make use of both more specific knowledge related to the films mentioned in the narrative, as well as to more abstract scripts associated with films in general. By “scripts” I am referring to “a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that defines a well-known situation” (Schank and Abelson 1977: 41), including roles and individual scenes related to the classic situation. In the case of *The Understudy*, these pre-established cognitive film models are first put to use by Stephen on the diegetic level, and then represented by the extra-diegetic narrator. Ultimately, the reader uses these filmic prototypes as a set of instructions to obtain a satisfactory understanding of the represented events.

Stephen's constant refuge in the mental movie screen and his utilisation of filmic scripts in his everyday life illuminate the significant role of cinema in shaping his experiences, both in the external and the internal world. We could say that Stephen construes his understanding of the world through filmic *mediatisation*, that is, "the ways which media play an active part in processes of worldmaking" (Neumann and Zierold 2010: 116). Instead of cinema being represented by means of artefacts produced by the film industry, in *The Understudy* the audiovisual medium has a decisive role as an "agent of worldmaking" (ibid.). As I have previously suggested, this tendency to cinematic mediatisation of the textual universe pertains not only to the protagonist and the extra-diegetic narrator of the novel, but also affects the extra-textual level of the reader. In other words, as the narrative constantly manifests the way Stephen has adopted cinema as the primary model with which he structures the surrounding world and processes the actions taking place in his life, the reader is likewise compelled to construe his or her understanding of the textual universe by means of "filmic worldmaking". Whereas Stephen is inclined to rely on his cinematic impressions of the world at the expense of a more realistic approach, the reader is urged to adopt similar tools, albeit with dissimilar consequences.

For the reader, the imperative "cinematisation" of narrative comprehension has two elementary consequences: the way in which the concept of "truth" is underlined and simultaneously undermined in the course of *The Understudy*. This is because, although the gap between the filmic schemata intrinsic to Stephen's thinking and the reality of the storyworld is revealed throughout the narrative, the reader indirectly derives the principal information about the textual actual world from the representation of Stephen's private universe. Since the textual actual world is projected mainly through Stephen, for whom "[l]ife seemed to be at its best, its truest and most intense when it most resembled life as simulated on screen: full of jump cuts and slow motion, snappy exit lines and gentle fades to black" (*U*: 169), the storyworld reality is constantly at risk of turning into an emulation of a film or into what Baudrillard (1984) has called a simulation, that is, an overlapping of "the real" with its representations to the point that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the reality and its representations. Thus, Stephen's straightforward use of filmic scripts in real life not only accentuates the discrepancy between his private world and the textual actual world, but also decreases the reader's conception of the centre of the modal system as "authentic" and "real".

The novel reinforces the reader's diminished notion of the genuineness of the fictional reality by representing and construing the storyworld reality chiefly with the

help of modalities that state non-existent, improbable, and even impossible scenarios taking place only in Stephen's wish world. I call the representations of Stephen's private subworlds "contrafactuals", as they designate something that does not take place in the textual actual world. As this kind of contrafactual thinking related to the protagonist reflects the true circumstances of the textual actual world through contrast and negation, the reality of the storyworld *per se* remains to some degree vacuous and devoid of real meaning. In other words, since the reader has to make a "detour" through the contrafactuals that represent Stephen's cinematically-influenced private universe to grasp the true circumstances of the textual actual world, the construction of that world is often determined by non-existence — both aesthetic and cognitive illusions, hypothetical ruminations, and other forms of contrafactual thinking associated with cinema and with acting in general.

One of the most pronounced illustrations of contrafactual thinking in *The Understudy* occurs in the third chapter, where the reader finds Stephen's alternative life in the form of "the Nearly CV" or "the good-luck version of his life" (*U*: 15). With contrafactuals that manifest "almost-but-not-quite winning huge praise" (*U*: 15) of Stephen, as well as the "hypothetical reviews that he would probably have received for his might-have-been" (*U*: 15) role, the narrative underlines how "all these great triumphs had taken place in other, imaginary worlds" (*U*: 15–16) as opposed to happening in the storyworld reality. As Ryan points out, "[t]he pragmatic purpose of counterfactuals is not to create alternate possible worlds for their own sake, but to make a point about" (1991: 48) the true state of events, the actual world itself. As for *The Understudy*, the narrative draws attention to the questions of what ought to be regarded as true, (im)possible, and evidently false in the textual actual world by frequently adopting contrafactual thinking, especially to represent Stephen's filmically-inclined wish world.

However, I argue that the incessant usage of (filmic) contrafactuals in the narrative world-making impairs the assumed veracity and authenticity of the fictional reality. Similar to the ambiguous personality of Hector Mann in *The Book of Illusions* in which his existence is defined by a perplexing vacuity rather than human solidity, or the way *Point Omega* ultimately compresses the fictional universe into a one-dimensional and amorphous entity in which no qualitative difference between actual and non-actual exists, the portrayal of the storyworld reality in *The Understudy* is alarmingly devoid of narrative elements that might evoke the reader's sense of the represented storyworld as genuine in terms of fictive realism. Similar to Stephen's gradual realisation of the facts of life, aesthetic illusions are broken on the extra-

textual level, as the reader is constantly reminded of the fabricated nature of the fictional reality.

To conclude, since *The Understudy* compels the reader to construct a modal system of the text that strongly conforms to another fictional, yet non-literary medium, there is the risk that the textual universe as such and the textual actual world as its centre will gradually turn out to be less credible, realistic, and immersive than what is usually expected from standard fiction. However, the situation is not that simple. As I have previously implied, Stephen is not the only agent whose “filmic” way of perceiving and projecting fictional reality engenders a subtle disbelief with regard to the represented textual actual world. As the following section will show, the reader obtains information about the textual actual world through other, alternate subworlds represented by the narrator, worlds that are also coupled with the conventions of cinematic storytelling. In the next section I explore the satirical and filmically-saturated omniscient narration and its contribution to this alienating and implicitly self-reflexive fashion of filmic storytelling, which paradoxically demonstrates the veracity and authenticity that lies in what we typically accept as “false” and “unreal”.

### **Filmic Schemata and the Narratorial Actual World**

In the previous section we saw that Stephen’s tendency to judge and evaluate the world around him through the medium of cinema plays a significant role in the reader’s construction of the textual actual world. We must keep in mind, though, that the private world of the protagonist amounts to only part of the textual universe. Ultimately, the narrative agent responsible for the creation of the fictional world as a whole, including Stephen’s private world, which is subjected to the represented textual actual world, is the extra-diegetic narrator.

In this section, I focus on the narrator’s constitution of “the factual domain” (Doležel 1998: 150) of the fictional world by means of similar kinds of filmic discourse, which I previously addressed in the case of the protagonist’s discourse constructing the primary “virtual domain of the fictional world” (*ibid.*). I demonstrate that the narrator draws attention to both the artificial behaviour of the characters and the artificial quality of the storyworld itself by means of filmic mental prototypes, terminology, and so forth in order to represent the reality of the storyworld. I claim that, on the one hand, primarily by limiting the narrative world-making to techniques that emphasise artifice at the expense of authenticity, the shamness of the diegetic level



pervades the narrative as a whole. On the other hand, I raise the question of whether we should reconsider our understanding of the term “authenticity” itself.

Because of the conspicuous similarities between the factual and the virtual domains, the voices and perspectives of the extra-diegetic narrator and the protagonist do not greatly differ from each other. This is seen, for example, in the way in which the narrator makes use of cinematic conventions in describing an uncomfortable situation experienced by Stephen, as he enters Josh’s dressing room and finds him and his co-actor Maxine in the middle of sexual intercourse:

In classic farce, there are two standard comic responses to coming into a room and seeing something you shouldn’t — the double take, and the long dead-pan stare. Stephen opted for the latter.

(U: 174)

Despite the aspectual and stylistic amalgamation of the narrator and the protagonist, what distinguishes Stephen’s private universe from the narrator’s representation of the textual actual world is that, contrary to Stephen’s hopelessly idealistic and romantic mindset which tends to ignore the hard, cold facts of life, the mildly sarcastic tone of the narrator provides a more distanced, if not exactly realistic perspective on the reality of the storyworld, and at the same time on the protagonist himself. The distance created between the storyworld reality and Stephen’s hopelessly far-too-optimistic mindset is isomorphic with the mildly ironic distance kept by the narrator from his protagonist. In the novel, the narrator portrays Stephen as a born loser: he is unable to sustain his marriage or fulfil his dreams, let alone realise that it is high time to changed his career plans, complaints also voiced by his ex-wife Allison:

‘You are *never* going to play the lead role, Stephen. These sudden, amazing reversals of fortune, they *never* happen. Most people learn this stuff just from living — why is it taking you so long?’

(U: 114; emphasis original)

The narrator does not portray Stephen as a tragic person full of potential, but someone whom no one truly understands. He does not resemble the heroes of the great dramas to which the narration occasionally alludes. On the contrary, the pervasive filmic storytelling accentuates the gap between Stephen’s unrealised — and never to be actualised — dreams and the more practical and probable ways of making a living. The narrator is not openly mean, but its slightly mocking tone contains grains of truth and the realism essential to the narrative whole and its comprehension.

If we take a closer look at how the narrator represents the textual actual world and its inhabitants with the help of filmically-charged discourse and conventions, we quickly observe that, whereas Stephen primarily (and hopelessly) struggles to assimilate cinematic conditions into the “real” world, the narrator represents the storyworld reality by creating similarities between the film and the represented textual actual world. This is especially evident in situations where the narrator describes circumstances related to the protagonist, as in the following passage illustrating, by means of a filmic simile, Stephen’s enthusiasm about doing physical exercises:

In order to rid his body of the slightly beanbag quality it had recently taken on, [Stephen] performed endless sets of press-ups and sit-ups, chin-ups and crunches, until life started to resemble the montage training sequence from *Rocky*.

(U: 232)

Thus, incentives for a filmically-inclined mindset and a propensity to resort to cinematic discourse differ, based on the perspectives of the protagonist and the narrator.

The narrator makes use of classic features and scenes common to mainstream films to illuminate the nature of the present narrative situation:

There’s a standard moment in any film featuring a prostitute as a central character: the awkward-and-degrading-handing-over-of-the-money scene.  
‘... there you go, my friend — one hundred squid-ders exactement.’

(U: 136)

Similar to Stephen’s predisposition for discerning conventional characteristics of movie scenes in real-life situations, the narrator is prone to reflect the reality of the storyworld through the semantics and morphology of cinema. In the previous quotation we also see that, apart from representing the novel’s protagonist through this “doubly fictive” and distinctly artificial fashion, the narrator portrays other characters with similar techniques. Thus, Stephen’s private world is not the only cinematized entity in the textual universe; films pervade the representation of the fictional world in its entirety.

Thus far, we have seen that the reader’s understanding of the storyworld is strongly based on and determined by his or her semantic knowledge of films. With regard to possible worlds theory, the novel’s “textual reference world” (Ryan 1991: vii) to

which the text refers is to a large extent based on artificial elements, such as filmic scripts, which I mentioned in the previous section. Since the reader forms a comprehension of the textual actual world through the textual reference world projected in the text, the fact that these references are frequently and inherently associated with the medium of cinema makes the construed “reality” of the storyworld digress from the more realistic conventions of literary world-making.

As for realism, in addition to the novel’s unmistakable adherence to romantic comedy — the emphasis placed on the word “comedy” and less on “romance” — *The Understudy* ought to be considered as a modern comedy of manners. Firstly, the characters are depicted as either successful or as avidly craving success. Secondly, the narrative’s constant use of the stock of clichés and embarrassing situations confronted by the ill-fated protagonist is closely related to its essential themes, namely the gap between, and the simultaneous volatility of, what is conceived as the “real” and the “fake”. This is seen in the way in which almost all the actions in the novel boil down to acting, faking, and feigning — “acting” understood as an act related to a profession and artistry, the other two actions being insincere behaviour. What is especially noteworthy is that, owing to the stereotypical and pre-established forms of films and other performative arts put into play throughout the narrative, the skilled reader quickly recognises the patterns on which the novel is constructed. Thus, the genres of the comedy of manners and the romantic comedy effectively guide the reader’s horizons of expectation. The narrative amplifies the spuriousness of the fictional world by means of these two comic genres: everything represented in the novel is susceptible to satirical treatment, and more often than not, this results in decreasing the “realness” of the fictional actual world.

Besides the novel’s relation to literary (and dramatic) genres that do not primarily rely on realistic conventions, the literary use of film in *The Understudy* reinforces the reader’s impression that the narrative is fundamentally composed in conformance with “non-realism”. Previously, I argued that the cinematic mediatisation of the textual universe results in a situation in which an expected truthfulness regarding the reality of the storyworld is severed. As for the narrator’s contribution to this process, we can infer that, by making the characters speak “in a sit-com intonation” (*U*: 241) and respond to real-life situations by emulating acting methods, the narrator’s constant employment of scripts related to cinema and acting makes the fictional world as a whole effectively subject to a textual “cinematisation”. Put differently, the narrative is about to be regarded principally through the illusory parameters of another fictional medium.

This has consequences for the reader's processing of the fictional world and the reality of that world as its centre. I have previously suggested that, as the narrative frequently represents the textual actual world by means of filmic clues that make the narrative explicitly state its nature as a work of artistic creation, the reader is forced to reflect on the represented fictional reality via a medium that, to some degree, negates its fictional authenticity. For example, since the narrative often compares the places visited by Stephen by means of filmic correlations, such as a certain lounge in a bar that "[i]n design, [...] was a fairly good approximation of the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange*, and with a similarly convivial, easy-going atmosphere" (U: 191), the described fictional spaces turn out to be less "real" in terms of fictional world-making.

Thus, somewhat similar to Stephen's sardonic "anti"-roles as a corpse in television crime series, "each of them carefully thought through and subtly delineated, each of them skillfully conveying the pathos of being other than alive" (U: 7), the narration renders the nature of the textual universe doubly false, as it itself becomes a simulation of movie realities. In a sense, this kind of representation of the fictional reality resembles an effect often prompted by Reality TV in viewers: in the attempt to be hyper-correct and specific in its representation, it paradoxically hides the "truth" it tries to disclose, and lacks any realistic substance (see Gunkel and Taylor 2014: 62). This, in turn, implicitly draws the reader's attention to its artificiality on every level.

Apart from engendering in the reader an increased notion of inauthenticity through the cinematically-loaded signifiers, the subtly sardonic voice of the narrator, which accentuates the superficiality of several characters as well as of the textual actual world in general, gives rise to metafictional contemplation. The novel's structure also contributes to the reader's impressions of the self-reflexive features of the narrative as a whole: somewhat similar to the script-like dialogue we encountered in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *The Understudy* proclaims its fabricated nature in its division into five "acts". Consequently, the textual actual world as the fixed centre of the modal system of the fictional world is once again made less credible and less authentic. In this fashion, Nicholls's novel challenges the clear-cut model of fiction's modal system claimed by Ryan.

Analogous to the novels previously analysed here, *The Understudy* also demonstrates porosity between the imaginary dimension of cinema and the reality of the storyworld. I have already pointed out that, in terms of possible worlds semantics, the narrative underscores the modalities of possible, impossible, and necessary through which the story is told. Since in Nicholls's novel the narrative constantly calls

into question our usual definitions of, say, veracity and delusion, possible worlds theory provides a useful approach for exploring “questions of reference, ontology and representation” (Ronen 1994: 5). Whereas in *Point Omega* the art video gradually appeared to efface the distinctiveness and substantiality of the diegetic characters, *The Understudy* does not dramatically or permanently violate the stability and coherence of the textual actual world and its characters. However, the wavering between the more realistic and the more cinematically-inclined construction of the storyworld reality challenges the established comprehension of what, after all, is meant by “real” in fiction.

It is interesting to observe that the way in which the narrative represents the fictional world by means of filmic juxtapositions that highlight the falsity of the storyworld resonates with the hypocrisy and mendacity the reader most likely confronts in real life. While encouraging the reader to construe the fictional world through filmic clues, the narrative paradoxically draws attention to the deceptive nature of the actual world. By emphasising less “truthful” elements in human activities, the narrative compels the reader to re-consider our culturally established paradigms of real and unreal, as well as those of true and untrue. Thus, despite its seemingly buoyant treatment of such concepts as insincerity and (self-) delusion, *The Understudy* reverberates with the more abstract question of truth by being deeply engaged in evaluating the degrees of true and false in our lives.

While the narrator replaces a more realistic representation of the textual actual world with semantic clues associated with films and acting in general, the narrative points up a potential gap between the textual actual world and the narrator’s version of that world, namely the “narratorial actual world” (Ryan 1991: 113). Thus, what follows from the “cinematisation” carried out by the narrator is that it encourages the reader to consider the reality of the storyworld from a dual perspective. Interestingly, discrepancies of this kind are usually related only to unreliable homodiegetic narration in which the first-person narrator’s version of the textual actual world diverges from the facts that comprise that world.

This is not, of course, the case in *The Understudy*, as the extra-diegetic narrator does not actually speak against the fictional truth, but rather serves as the sole source for narrative information and “yields directly what is to be taken as the [textual] actual world” (ibid.). Thus, instead of implying the deceptiveness of the narrator, the text compels the reader to regard the represented storyworld as false in more allegorical terms. In this fashion, the filmic storytelling forces the reader to discover the deception *within* the storyworld itself.

The characterisation in the novel accentuates these deceitful elements, which dominate the formation of the textual actual world. The narrative frequently highlights the pretentious and dishonest behaviour of certain characters, actions I have previously designated faking and feigning. This kind of duplicity is conspicuous among actors who inhabit the fictional world of *The Understudy*. Already at the beginning of the novel, acting is specifically correlated with feigning, as the narrator tells how, as a teenager, “Stephen had pictures of people who pretended” (*U*: 26). Thus, the narrative associates the actors’ pretence with the notion of acting itself.

The dual meaning of pretence is discernible, for example, in the depiction of Maxine, who is the co-star with Josh in the play, and, as shown in a previous quotation, someone with whom Josh has an affair. The narrator makes Maxine’s false behaviour highly noticeable by using schemata closely related to (an exaggerated mode of) acting in the description of her response to Stephen’s accusations of her complicity in adultery: “She sat on the edge of the dressing table, gathering the dressing gown over her thighs, slowly organising her features into an expression entitled Compassionate Remorse” (*U*: 183). By utilising pre-established models of stereotypical situations related to melodramatic acting and construing the narrative situation as a *mise-en-scène* that accentuates the profound falsity of Maxine’s reaction, the narrator draws our attention to the dissimulation taking place on the level of the textual actual world. Simultaneously, the narrator self-reflexively reveals its own role in emphasising the artificial quality of the fictional reality, as dramatic and professional acting is always at risk of infiltrating the storyworld reality.

Along with revealing the untruthful side of the actors by making references to films and other expressive arts in the actors’ character portrayals, the novel creates associative links between feigning, superficiality, and narcissism. These features are evident in the actor characters and are depicted with the help of acting-related schemata. Their self-indulgence and shallowness is seen, for example, in the way the narrator describes the guest actors at a party hosted by Josh in a style derived from celebrity gossip columns: “the Cute, Feisty Girl who is Britain’s Biggest Hollywood Hope, a couple of sharply dressed violent-but-lovable Brit-Flick Gansters, the Unconventional Campaigning Lawyer with the Complicated Love Life” (*U*: 62). By describing the characters with the help of less humane and inauthentic attributes which emulate the sensational headlines of British tabloids, the narrator once more decreases the reader’s sense of authenticity with reference to the storyworld reality. Paradoxically, the artificiality of the textual actual world reverberates with and comments on the potential pretentiousness of the actual world in which the narrative is

received. The reader, then, often regards the inauthentic components of the fictional world as genuine, as they echo the artificiality encountered in real life.

Vanity, self-indulgence, and, in certain respects, dishonesty are embodied in their extreme forms in the character of Josh Harper, Stephen's "rival" in both professional life and love life. In the novel, Josh is described as a strikingly handsome and simple-minded narcissist who, according to his wife, Nora, needs to be told " 'how amazing he is every twenty-five minutes' " (U: 143). Josh himself reveals his frivolous egotism and clumsily hidden superficiality, as in the following conversation with Stephen: " 'My teeth — d'you think I need them done? Be honest now...' and, like a horse-trader, he pulled his lips out of the way with two index fingers. It was a toothpaste commercial" (U: 134). In line with the filmically-imbued style of the narrator, the text stresses the phoniness of Josh's appearance in his movie parts. For example, his leading role as Otto Dax in a sci-fi blockbuster called "TomorrowCrime" is described in stereotypical terms, which makes his "portrayal of [...] a Wise-Cracking Rookie Cop With Principles At War With The Corrupt Authorities In Megapolis 4" (U: 158) reflect the hollowness of his true self. Here once again the narrative, with the help of cinematic discourse, underscores the obscure line between what we usually understand as real and its opposite.

In contrast to Josh's trivial roles in Hollywood films, the narrative accentuates his perfunctory characteristics by having him speak about his movie appearances in a way that amusingly elevates them. Analysing his part in a sci-fi adventure film, "Mercury Rain", in an interview which Stephen comes across in the novel, Josh compares the story of the film to *Beowulf*, " 'but set in deep space' " (U: 12). Thus, while seeking to render something that is intrinsically shallow and fraudulent as unrealistically genuine and intellectual, the narrative points up the superficiality of the textual actual world in which truth and sincerity are constantly juxtaposed and also merged with hypocrisy and dishonesty.

Besides the conspicuous inauthenticity which can be discerned in the storyworld, the narrator also implies that the apparent authenticity experienced in that world is potentially false. This kind of illusory and hence deceptive line of thinking is found in the otherwise analytical and sharp Nora in connection with her husband. In the middle of the novel, the narrator remarks that Nora acknowledges the possibility that, beneath his lovable image, Josh may be unreliable: "And yet the charm, the attentiveness, didn't seem like an act, or if it was an act, it was so accomplished and convincing that she was perfectly happy to accept it as the *real* thing" (U: 160; emphasis mine). Here is an explicit manifestation of the difference between "correct"

and “true” and, subsequently, the erroneous fashion in which extreme correctness is seen as synonymous with what is “real” or “true”. This, in turn, means that because of its impressiveness, its correctness in the sense that it is entirely believable and “convincing”, the truth can be discarded and replaced with the extreme correctness of representation.

Here the deceptive (cognitive) illusions are operating not only in Stephen’s private world. While continuing to problematise the ambiguous relationship between true and false — and exemplifying the difference between correct and true — the narrator demonstrates that misleading delusions also apply to other characters who dwell in their own private universes. However, after learning of Josh’s constant untruthfulness, Nora decides to break up with him. Thus, like Stephen, who begins to admit in the course of the novel that his vision of the world has been unrealistic and false, Nora has to face the painful truth of her husband’s treacherous side and face the grim facts of (the fictional) reality. Whereas for Stephen, the “silly, frivolous”, and “fantastical world” (*U*: 27) of acting and actors turns out to be less glamorous and, consequently, more realistic as the narrative unfolds, Nora has to renounce her illusory idea of Josh as a faithful husband.

By constantly highlighting the versatile forms of emulation, cognitive illusions, and (self-) deception taking place in the storyworld reality, the narrator attempts to undermine the experience of the textual actual world as authentic and “real”, which is, for example, superseded by extreme correctness while simulating “the real thing”. Thus, the constant use of filmic scripts in the construction of the narratorial actual world recalibrates the notion of “real” with reference to “true” and “correct”. Similarly, frequent references to the characters’ false demeanour prompt reassessment in terms of how “real” and “true” are conceptualised on the diegetic level.

I have also demonstrated that the line between “true” and “false” is pragmatically slippery. Regardless of, or rather due to, the characters’ artificiality, which the narrative stresses by utilising discourses related to cinema and other performative arts, “false” in itself appears credible and authentic in terms of real-life experiences, and hence “genuine” and “true” in a certain sense. Thus, the narrator’s self-reflexive predilection for regarding almost everything as “phony” paradoxically indicates something that is actually real and valid in the fictional world — and in the real world. Therefore, I hold that ultimately *The Understudy* ought not to be considered as a novel that seeks to estrange its readers: as opposed to postmodern distancing, the metafictional and comical features in Nicholls’s novel do not breach the fictional illusion altogether; instead, they encourage the reader to re-think the



conceptions related to “true” and “false”.<sup>3</sup>

Next, I explore more thoroughly the passages that either explicitly transgress the border separating the reality of the storyworld from the embedded level of cinema or otherwise obscure the line between the two. More specifically, I investigate various frictions and overlappings between the textual actual world and the filmically-saturated private and fantasy universes in the fictional world. I show how these transgressions contribute to the permeability of the imaginary level of cinema into (the construction and our apprehension of) the fictional reality. Up to now, I have analysed the relationship between the storyworld reality and the filmic discourse mainly in terms of difference and conflict, stressing the gap between the harsh reality of the storyworld and the illusory realm of cinema. In the following section I turn my attention to narrative passages in which an oscillation between the fictional reality and the filmic imaginary is much more explicit. I demonstrate that, in this way, the narrative calls into question the stability of the textual actual world as the centre of the fictional world. Likewise, the novel also further problematises the straightforward dichotomies normally positioned between real/unreal and true/false.

### **The Filmic “Reel” Intersecting the Textual Actual World**

In a review of the audiobook version of *The Understudy*, *Publisher’s Weekly* (2005) wrote that the novel (and its audio version) provides “powerful realizations about life, love and the stark difference between reality and movie reality”. However, in the course of this chapter we have seen that, although the narrative emphasises the distinction between Stephen’s (filmically) idealised conception of reality and *de facto* reality of the storyworld, these two “realities” overlap and merge in various ways. In the previous sections I demonstrated that both Stephen and the narrator draw on the medium of cinema. We saw that the fictional world is permeated by components and attributes typically associated with the filmic imaginary, such as artificiality, intangibility, and romantic idealism. In this way, the narrator obscures the line demarcating the difference between the actual fictional world and the filmic imaginary.

In this section, I examine the ways in which cinema, either temporarily or permanently, supersedes or transgresses the textual actual world. Firstly, I focus on filmic overlappings in the private worlds of the characters, especially in the case of Stephen. Thereafter, I explore how similar frictions and mergings occur on a textual

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<sup>3</sup>On the interrelation between illusion, emotions, and seriousness, see Wolf (*LHN*, Paragraph 18).

level, untethered to any specific character. I refer to passages that briefly make the reader uncertain of exactly what is represented in the narrative: an event that either actually does occur in the storyworld or is filmic and hence illusory.<sup>4</sup> It is not only Stephen who mistakes the filmic imaginary for the fictional reality or vice versa, but misconceptions are also taking place on the extra-textual level. This, in turn, further problematises the novel's complex relationship between the fictional reality and the imaginary level of cinema.

Similar to previous examples that elucidated the construction of the narratorial actual world by means of cinema, these frictions and overlappings also fluctuate between the two narrative domains — the reality of the storyworld and the alternate, filmic subworlds. Yet unlike the illustrations above of the filmically-oriented version of the textual actual world, these filmic transgressions and overlappings (analysed below) often create increasing uncertainty in the reader, similar to the disturbing perplexity invoked in *Point Omega*.

In the first section of the present chapter we saw how films “entered” into the textual actual world through Stephen's cinematically-suffused behaviour. We noted that, as Stephen reacts to real-life situations according to the filmic schemata and scripts he adopts, his inner mental filmic world transgresses on the reality of the storyworld, affecting the events and actions that occur in that fictional reality. Besides Stephen, other characters also help to elucidate the filmic impact on the textual actual world and its inhabitants. For example, Nora describes Josh with an anecdote related to film experiences: “I've seen him weep, actually *weep* like a baby, when Han Solo gets carbon-frozen in *Empire Strikes Back*” (*U*: 269; emphasis original). In this way, the novel illustrates the power of films in the characters' lives.

Along with emotional effects, films can make a serious impact on the characters' private worlds, as we have already seen in the case of the protagonist. The narrative emphasis on cinema is also evident in a passage in which the reader is told how Nora reminds Stephen of movie characters: “once again Stephen thought of an old film, something starring Carole Lombard or the young Shirley MacLaine maybe, an effect heightened by the dress [Nora] wore” (*U*: 74). As Stephen's mind is constantly generating filmic equivalents, the pervasive influence of the movie stars he imagines diminishes the actuality and significance of the real features found in the storyworld characters. Regardless of the fact that the decrease in actuality at the expense of

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<sup>4</sup>I acknowledge that films as artefacts and products of the creative process are existing objects and hence “real”. However, my goal here is to focus on the *events* taking place in the imaginary reality of cinema.

the filmic imaginary takes place only in Stephen's private world, the frequency with which films override the fictional reality for Stephen paves the way for a more imperative interaction between the (fictional) "real" and the (filmic) imaginary in the narrative. Because of the dominance of cinema in the fictional world, the reader probably takes for granted such narrative passages towards the end of the novel that assert "[c]ertain environments [...] tend to inspire kooky, free-spirited movie behaviour" (U: 247). By systematically appropriating films in constructing the fictional world, the narrative makes the unnatural diffusion of cinema into the workings of the textual actual world seem natural.

Films overlap and merge with the fictional reality in other ways. For example, in order to assure his ex-wife Alison and his young daughter Sophie of his future professional success, Stephen fabricates a story about a Hollywood film project in which he may play the leading role. In describing the plot of this entirely imaginary film, Stephen alludes to his romantic feelings for Nora:

‘You know, the usual. Transatlantic, culture-clash thing. It’s about this English guy who falls in love with a feisty American woman.’ He was warming to his subject now, growing into the lie, casting the female role in his head, even visualising individual scenes, the cute meet, the first kiss, but Alison still looked sceptical.

(U: 116)

Similar to Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Stephen unconsciously expresses something more private through filmic discourse. At the same time, cinematic clichés enter the textual narrative through an interweaving of the real with the imaginary.

Later, Stephen continues to describe the film to Sophie by creating a plotline that resonates with the conventions of romantic comedies:

‘[...] [A] story where one person’s unhappy, and then they meet and fall in love with another unhappy person, but they can’t get together and be happy because of the obstacles—’

‘What obstacles?’

‘I don’t know — she’s married to some big film star or something.’

(U: 123)

Here, with the help of filmic illusions, Stephen creates an ameliorated *mise en abyme* of the novel's story, an improved version of the circumstances in his own life. Similar

to Molina's use of filmic storytelling in Puig's novel, Stephen draws on the power of cinema to mirror his inner world.

The constant interweaving of films and the textual actual world also appears in conversations in which Stephen misunderstands the point of reference and hence the ontological level in question. After being told about the imaginary film project, Sophie inquires about her father's true private life, a question Stephen erroneously interprets to be related to cinema:

'Do you have a girlfriend?'  
 'Please, let's forget about the film, eh, Sophie?'  
 'Not in the film. In real life.'

(U: 123)

These transient and subtle misconceptions gain allegorical power in the course of the narrative, as they reflect its general proclivity for fusing filmic discourse with the fictional reality.

At the outset of *The Understudy*, the novel endeavours to interfuse and problematise the line between fictional reality and emulations of that reality. This is evident in the chapter titles mentioned earlier. The title of the first chapter, "Sunset Boulevard", which refers to Billy Wilder's film about lost stardom, the need for fame, and illusions related to both, draws attention to the novel's setting in the world of acting. Similarly, other chapter titles also serve as paratextual clues for the reader, as they are often related to films ("A Star is Born"), cinema history ("Errol Flynn on Antibiotics"), theatre ("The Phantom of the Opera"), or acting in general, such as "Performance Anxiety" and "The Big Break". Some of the titles can easily be imagined as film titles ("My Dinner With Sophie", "The Invisible Man"), which further amplifies how the novel "cinematizes" narrated events and thereby blurs the ontological distinction between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema.

The beginning of the novel as such presents just such a play of provoking and disrupting illusions. At the same time, the narrative forces the reader to contemplate the nature of those illusions. The book opens with an excerpt from a television series ("Summers and Snow ep. 3 draft 4", U: 3) in which Stephen plays the part of a corpse. The monospace font used for the excerpt serves as a cue that the reader should interpret the passage as something that does not precisely represent actual events taking place in the reality of the storyworld:

CHIEF INSPECTOR GARRETT (CONT.)  
 ... or I'll have you back directing traffic faster than you can

say disciplinary action.

INSPECTOR SUMMERS

But he's just toying with us, sir, like a cat with a-

CHIEF INSPECTOR GARRETT

I repeat - Don't. Make. It. Personal.

(U: 3)

The relationship between the events described in the television play and the textual actual world becomes clear after a few pages, as an irritated voice interrupts the dialogue:

THOMPSON

Some old dear out walking the dog. Nice lady, 82 years old. I think it's safe to assume you should be looking elsewhere for your serial ki-

'Hang on a second... Nope — nope, sorry, everyone, we're going to have to stop.'

'Why, what's up?' snapped Detective Inspector Summers.

'We've got flaring.'

(U: 5)

At this point, the reader realises that the suspended passage mimicking the conventional style of screenwriting with all its characterisations and instructions does indeed portray events that occurred in the fictional reality, although only in the context of live acting:

BOB 'BONES' THOMPSON, the forensic pathologist [...], stands over the semi-naked body of a YOUNG MAN [...].

(U: 3–4)

The mediation of the storyworld reality by means of acting and retrospectively disclosing what was genuinely represented reveals that, at the very beginning, the narrative focuses on producing what can be described as amalgamations of cognitive and aesthetic illusions. I am referring to how these narrative passages intentionally create misleading assumptions about the fictional reality (a cognitive illusion within an aesthetic illusion), and at the same time metafictionally emphasise the nature of the narrative whole as (a catalyst for) the aesthetic illusion. The beginning of the novel also suggests that, similar to Stephen's delusional use of filmic scripts in real-life

situations, the embedded screenplay segments do not stay firmly within their artistic framework. Instead, by commenting on and intermixing with the fictional reality, they infiltrate the workings of the textual actual world.

What follows from these sudden changes in register and interruptions in the narrative flux is that the passages temporarily affect the reader's immersion in the fictional world, an act Ryan calls "re-centering". According to her, while reading fiction, the reader carries out an "imaginative recentering [...] into the actual world of the fictional system of reality" (2006: 646; see also 1991: 26). Thus, he or she "pretend[s] to believe that fiction describes a world which is both real and actual" (2006: 646). If we investigate the consequences of narrative self-reflexivity in *The Understudy* using Ryan's conception of re-centering, we observe that re-centering as such does not suffice to describe the dynamics between the text and the reader. In other words, the narrative encourages the reader to construe the fictional world and its essential meanings precisely with the help of frequent suspensions and disruptions of the aesthetic illusion — interruptions that are caused by the use of filmic scripts, screenplay-like segments, and other forms of cinematic discourse. For example, the inferential obstacles confronted by the reader at the novel's beginning illuminate the vacillating limits of what is conceived as "true" and "false" and their importance for the narrative whole. Thus, the intricacy with which the novel elucidates the relationship between true and false can be grasped only by repeatedly blocking the reader's act of re-centering. In this way, the textual dynamics of Nicholls's novel testifies to the reader's need to be constantly aware of the extra-textual world — a need that undermines a clear-cut notion of re-centering and hence questions the validity of Ryan's model.

If we return to the screenplay-like passages in *The Understudy*, we recall that the narrative adopts a similar format and stylistic markers to represent Stephen's day-dreaming, illuminating his longing for success both on stage and in love. Unlike the previous example, which mixed the imaginary with representation of the fictive reality by making the former take place in the latter, the difference between imaginary and actual events is often made very clear in depicting Stephen's fantasy worlds: these scripts do not take place in the textual actual world, but only in the private universe of the protagonist, and the shifts between the embedded fantasy universe and the fictional reality demarcate the crucial difference between the two.

Also in these cases the notion of re-centering turns out to be important in terms of narrative comprehension, as the fantasy world temporarily replaces the actual world of the fictional universe (see Ryan 1991: 42). However, here too the narrative poten-

tially and transitorily blurs the nature and the degree of fictionality, which, in turn, hinders the act of re-centering. Although parts of Stephen's fantasy universes are explicitly portrayed as virtual, the narrator occasionally leaves out discernible traits with regard to their point of reference. Omissions of this kind create brief uncertainty about who is responsible for the represented script. In this fashion, the act of (re-)re-centering appears to be temporarily inconclusive. For example, a chapter entitled "The Phantom of the Opera" begins with screenplay instructions

INT.THEATRE.NIGHT C/U An upright piano is suspended from a rope, swaying, the rope dangerously frayed, chafing against a metal bar  
or

(U: 178)

interrupted by a correctional comment:

No, hang on. Start again...  
the rope is being cut with a large knife, by an UNSEEN ASSAILANT wearing a black cloak and sinister white mask. [...]  
A twisted, leather-gloved hand reaches up to the white mask, which he now removes, revealing the disfigured, hate-twisted features of  
'Mr McQueen!' hissed the voice from the stage-left Tannoy.

(U: 178–179)

As in the beginning of the novel, the narrative fluctuates between "actual" and "false" by means of the screenplay format. By drawing attention to the constant blocking of fictive immersion, the narrative jests with deceitful fantasies which are fabricated on both diegetic and extra-diegetic levels.

As for the previous quotation, paratextual and typographical information enables the reader ultimately to locate the represented ontological level within the textual universe. However, aside from the novel's beginning, which was given in a screenwriting format, there is another screenplay passage which a reader is likely to interpret, at least initially, as being anchored in Stephen's mind, but it eventually turns out to belong to the narrator. Thus, besides blurring the line between (fictional) actual and virtual, the screenplay sections also obfuscate the distinction between voices and minds. The reader is required to enact a new re-centering in the fictional universe without being certain of the centre's precise location in that universe in the first place.

The novel's final script-like passage takes place at the beginning of the last chapter. It represents a stereotypically romanticised version of an actual encounter between Stephen and Nora at a train station from which they were to travel to Paris to escape their chaotic situation. The passage begins with some details ("Dawn. Snow falls on the empty platform"), and then shows "STEPHEN stand[ing], looking anxious, glancing at his watch" (U: 399), waiting for Nora who is late. The situation employs all the clichés characteristic of romantic comedies that end with uncertain meetings at train stations: immediately after Stephen is assured that "[s]he's not coming" (U: 399), Nora in fact appears, which is followed by the couple's passionate embrace and a syrupy end:

The friendly TRAIN GUARD laughs, their fellow passengers, peering from train windows, start to whoop and cheer. Snow falls in thick white flakes. Music up, Louis Armstrong singing 'What a Wonderful World' as the camera swoops into the air and...

(U: 400–401)

As if mimicking the "[s]tock movie images" (U: 325) continuously revolving in Stephen's mind, the narrator adopts the screenplay format for the last time, concluding the novel with the help of elements that are patently artificial.

Unsurprisingly, the narrator interrupts the screenplay-like segment and thus verifies that the previous section is false, a product of counterfactual thinking: "Except that isn't quite what happened. What actually happened was this" (U: 401). Although the narrator's anticipated interruption once again reminds the reader of the huge gap between the fictional reality and the (romantic) imaginary, it simultaneously emphasises the interdependence between the two domains. By compelling the reader to make the final shift into the fantasy world of films and back into the textual actual world, the novel further stresses the blunt realism of the following, actual, and hence *real* ending of the novel.

In this section we have seen that different kinds of "filmic pervasions" have a great impact on the reader's experience of fictive immersion, and hence upon his or her understanding of the nature of the fictional universe and the novel's principal themes. The frequency with which the narrative suspends the aesthetic illusion by means of filmically-charged interruptions leads me to ask whether the reader's impression of the veracity of the fictional world's centre is diminished as a result. Or alternatively, do they heighten the reader's notion of what ought to be conceived as "actual" and "true" in the represented fictional storyworld? This line of thinking, in turn, gives rise



to the question broached in the previous chapters: to what extent is the imaginary also actual? In order to provide answers to these questions, at least tentative ones, I finish the present chapter by analysing the representation and meaning of the novel's actual ending in terms of what is judged to be true, actual, and real in the represented fictional universe, especially with reference to fictional realism.

## **Back to the Disillusioned and Unsentimental Reality**

After demonstrating the false adaptation of the final turn of events in the form of a screenplay, the narrator discloses how Stephen and Nora's story truly ends — or, more precisely, how it begins. Reflected against the exaggerated romanticism of the scripted version, with its impeccable and excessive correctness, the actual course of events is much more realistic and credible, and more prone to disclose the truth that underlies our awkward day-to-day living. Thus, even though Stephen and Nora do travel to Paris, the start of their trip is far from the happy sentimentalism of a romantic movie scene, as Nora is mourning her recent break-up with Josh.

Consequently, the atmosphere in the backseat of the taxi heading for Waterloo Station is gloomy: “They drove the rest of the way in silence, Nora pressing herself up against the car door, head resting against the window, biting her nails, Stephen too anxious to talk” (*U*: 404–405). At this point, Stephen realises that “the plan that last night had seemed so perfect and apt and romantic, in daylight now seemed ridiculous, and impractical and fragile” (*U*: 405). In spite of Stephen's growing fear and his awareness that his far-too-idealistic vision of their visit to the city of lovers will not actualise, the real starting point for their journey together is imbued with such emotional authenticity that it will serve as a solid and safe beginning point for their adventure. Thus, unlike Stephen's plan, let alone the preceding screenplay variant of their departure, which is permeated by unconvincing and unimaginable melodrama more characteristic of romantic films than real life, the novel's conclusion is charged with strong emotional truthfulness.

This emotive credibility is further elaborated on in the narrative's final lines, which take place on the train. Notwithstanding the melancholy undercurrents, the situation develops in a subtly optimistic fashion:

She lifted her head, looked at him from under heavy eyelids, then leant up and kissed him.  
Perhaps this is it, he thought, my first good luck.  
‘Let's just... wait and see what happens, shall we?’ she murmured, with her eyes closed again.

‘OK,’ said Stephen. ‘Let’s wait and see,’ and he closed his eyes too, and did his best to try to sleep.

(U: 406)

Thus, *The Understudy* concludes enigmatically, albeit in a distinctly realistic way: it remains unclear whether anything will ensue between them, but for the first time in the novel, the goal set by Stephen for himself does not seem entirely out of reach. Here the novel’s previous modal emphasis on impossibility has finally shifted to a scale of more likely possibilities.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the novel metaphorically turns away from the premediated form of film acting and re-calibrates towards live (theatre) acting with its possibilities for improvisation.

As mentioned, the novel’s ambiguous ending, neither entirely sad nor truly happy, restores a more realistic way of representing the textual actual world. Furthermore, towards the end of the narrative there are no further signs of the proclivity for filmic discourse: the mindsets of both the narrator and the protagonist are now constrained to referring to and perceiving the storyworld in a way that better corresponds to the actual state of events. Thus, the sudden increase in authenticity invalidates the pervasive code that has dominated the construction of the fictional world, namely the norms and conventions of mainstream films, romantic comedies, and the comedy of manners, which, in their excessive correctness, render these fictive narratives less realistic. Put another way, by concluding the novel in a way that is unconventional in fictive forms, which tend to idealise and romanticise the actual world, *The Understudy* reinstates its connection with the norms of realistic storytelling and narrative world-making.

By annulling the preceding stylistic system in which the narrative has been constructed up until now, the text indicates that Stephen can no longer simultaneously live within what Thomas Pavel has called “two parallel sets of worlds” (1986: 61): in fact, the ending suggests that the dyadic form which has reflected the structure of Stephen’s private universe in the course of the narrative is now about to fade. At this juncture, I find it intriguing to compare Pavel’s analysis of the modal system created in Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* with the system in Nicholls’s novel. In the introduction to the present chapter I pointed out the similarities between the protagonists in the two novels: like Don Alonso, whose “second set of worlds is existentially creative” as “it blends the world actual in the novel and the worlds given as actual in the romances

<sup>5</sup>Then again, the fact that Stephen is about to fall asleep at the end can be seen as a final indication of the dreamworld into which the protagonist has been repeatedly escaping throughout the narrative.

devoutly believed by Quixote” (ibid.), Stephen also hesitates “between two frames of reference” (ibid.: 62), namely the filmic — imaginary and illusory — and the actual one.

The conclusion of *The Understudy* thus indicates that Stephen has become less keen on applying his filmic “frame of interpretation” (ibid.: 63) on the surrounding reality and is ready to consent permanently to a more mundane and unsentimental life. Therefore, the “[j]uggling with ontological structures” (ibid.), which has characterised the construction of the fictional world, is repudiated towards the novel’s end. Whereas the enigmatic conclusion of *Point Omega* left the reader within the filmic framework in a disturbing fashion, the down-to-earth ending of *The Understudy* releases both Stephen and the reader from the filmic dimension.

One may rightfully ask what explains the noticeable change in the novel. To answer that question we have to take a closer look at the gradual evolution of the private worlds of both the characters and their mutual social dynamics. We have seen that, in the course of the narrative, Stephen, Nora, and Josh acquire more knowledge and hence become less ignorant of the actual circumstances in the world and more proficient in coping in an efficient and satisfactory manner. As Stephen is ultimately convinced that he is not, after all, suited to acting, and Nora has to tolerate the consequences of Josh’s unfaithfulness, both characters are compelled to “‘start all over again, completely from scratch’ ” (*U*: 397). As for Josh, he learns of Stephen’s true feelings towards both him and his wife. Thus, obtaining new information not only affects the characters’ belief and knowledge worlds, but also alters the interpersonal links between them: Josh ends up in conflict with both Stephen and Nora, which, in turn, has an impact on the subtly optimistic denouement.

*The Understudy* does not set up a linear process in which the knowledge possessed by the characters steadily accumulates. Rather, it is a process in which Stephen in particular, by frequently stumbling around in life, is about to learn that his belief and knowledge worlds do not conform to the (fictional) reality. Instead of stressing the increase in self-knowledge, though, the narrative paradoxically and explicitly negates this growth. This is shown in a passage which accentuates how Stephen, after being sacked from his job as an understudy and planning a short trip to Paris with Nora, in fact, knows nothing. Stephen’s lack of insight is underlined in a conversation with a cab driver:

‘She’s a very nice lady,’ he said.

‘Yes, she is.’

‘Your girlfriend?’

‘I don’t know yet,’ seemed to be the only honest reply.

The taxi driver nodded sagely, then after a while: ‘So — what do you do for a living?’

‘I don’t know that either,’ replied Stephen.

‘You do not know very much do you?’ said the driver.

‘No. No, I don’t.’

(U: 403)

There is, however, a certain pivotal event after which Stephen has to dramatically recalibrate his understanding of himself and the world, and subsequently, this leads to a gradual increase in realism towards the novel’s end. This crucial realisation takes place when Stephen finally has the opportunity to seduce his stage audience and make his dream come true. This is because Josh, after having been informed that Stephen has leaked undesirable information to the yellow press about Josh’s extra-marital affairs, has hurt himself badly in a fight with his competitor. As a result, the understudy has to replace the injured star in the play. The actual circumstances, however, deviate from the expected and imagined ones: because of Josh’s cancellation and a heavy snow storm, the auditorium is practically empty.

After the performance Stephen realises that, instead of having finally achieved his professional “Big Break”, his triumph that night has been more of the spiritual sort: “Giving up, surrendering, stopping, that was the Big Break. The world of show business would just have to struggle on without him, that’s all” (U: 390). In his review of the novel, Jan Blodgett correctly writes that Stephen “gets only one night, but that is enough to allow him to redefine himself and his dreams” (2005). Indeed, after becoming aware of the impossibility of his aspirations and deciding that “[h]e would forget about his imaginary life, the chances he’d never had, what might-have-been, and concentrate instead on making the real thing better” (U: 390), Stephen is compelled to modify his belief and knowledge worlds to conform better to the parameters governing and characterising the storyworld reality. In this way Stephen learns that, to accomplish something concrete and true in life, he has to let go of his impossible dreams and accept life with all its mundane characteristics.

Having re-established his understanding of himself and the world around him, Stephen is able to admit that he has committed questionable acts. For example, he has made a deal with Josh to play the leading role on two nights on condition that Stephen does not disclose Josh’s adultery with Maxine to Nora. Most important, Stephen is now ready to admit that he is desperately in love with Nora. In this new mode of sincerity, Stephen can no longer turn to cinema as a means of escape, as Nora reminds him at the end of the novel:

‘We can’t just stay at home and watch old movies, Stephen.’  
 ‘I know.’  
 ‘At some point, we’ll have to go out and face the real world.’

(U: 344)

Here the escapist realm of cinema is tangible, as Nora suggests that it is time for them to abandon the comforting solace of watching films and re-enter reality.

As I remarked above in discussing the novel’s ending, there is remarkable growth in emotional authenticity along with the increase in realistic behaviour and a parallel decrease in the use of filmic discourse. This is evident, for example, in the decisiveness with which Stephen negates filmic associations in disclosing to Nora his strong infatuation with her:

‘[...] [W]herever we are, whoever we’re with, I always know that you’re the best person in the room [...]. Nobody else comes anywhere near.’  
 She narrowed her eyes slightly. ‘And is that from a movie or something?’  
 ‘No, that’s how I feel. In real life.’

(U: 396)

By adamantly trying to mark the crucial difference between true feelings and filmic ones, Stephen emphasises his shift from constantly resorting to emulated emotions as seen on the cinema screen to his freshly acquired proclivity for emotional veracity, which derives its power solely from real-life experiences.

It is interesting to observe that, whereas the deceptive illusions previously cherished by the characters are shattered at the end of the novel, the reader, in turn, is now able to re-establish his or her imaginary experience of the textual actual world as “real” in terms of fiction. In other words, by re-establishing its connection with conventions of realistic storytelling and making the centre of the represented fictional world more credible and less vulnerable to imaginary interventions, the novel’s ending encourages the reader to re-enact a more durable fictive immersion uninterrupted by metafictional comments.

Although Nicholls’s novel frequently calls into question the aesthetic illusion of fiction through self-reflexivity and “witty one-liners” (Stover 2006), ultimately there is something painfully true in the awkward scenes Stephen experiences. Joanne Wilkinson in her review refers to this mixture of wry tone and emotional accuracy by mentioning that “Nicholls always seeds his polished banter with deeper emotional

issues” (2005). Despite the fact that the novel occasionally disputes the authenticity of the represented reality, the realism of *The Understudy* lies principally on a deeper, emotional level. This testifies to the complexity of fictive immersion: we saw in chapter three on *The Book of Illusions* that metafictional (and metaleptic) elements do not automatically breach the aesthetic illusion. As for *The Understudy*, exaggerated artifice as well as comic elements potentially give rise to authenticity instead of diminishing it.

In the course of the present chapter we have seen that regardless of the novel’s seemingly light genre, *The Understudy* touches on profound questions related to the complex relationship between such dichotomies as real/imaginary, and true/false. I have demonstrated that the primary narrative technique for elucidating these problems in the novel is the pervasive use of filmic discourse in the narrative world-making. I have also argued that the constant employment of cinema in the narrative occasionally raises doubts about the realism of the storyworld. I have shown that, due to its cinematically-saturated narrative world-making, *The Understudy* sporadically invalidates the veracity of the storyworld reality and hence reminds the reader of its essentially fabricated nature as a literary artefact — an aspect that does not, however, entirely disrupt the aesthetic illusion, that is, the reader’s conception of the textual actual world as “real”. Thus, it is intriguing to see that, while this romantic comedy does not even remotely resemble postmodern fiction, which often deliberately erodes fictional truth with the help of metafictional commentary — something that we will come across in the following and final chapter on Katri Lipson’s *The Ice Cream Man* — *The Understudy* too has an impact on the intensity of the fictive immersion experienced by the reader.

Then again, the ease with which we construe the represented fictional world by means of filmic schemata implies that there is, after all, a certain “contingency of worlds” (Doležel 1998: 17) connecting the actual reality and the fictive one. These similarities are especially mental: like Stephen, the reader finds that he or she has an equal capacity for imagining, reflecting, and analysing the represented fictional world through a filmic filter. Not unlike *The Book of Illusions*, then, Nicholls’s novel stresses an interwoven relationship between and persistent amalgamations of the real and the filmic imaginary and imagery. Both novelists illuminate how reality is intrinsically connected with what we often conceive as “unreal” — non-actual elements that enter the “real” in the form of thoughts, dreams, and wishes of the individuals inhabiting that very reality.

Thus, along with constantly problematising the concepts and our conceptions of

“real” and its purported opposites — “imaginary”, “unreal”, “false”, to name a few — on the level of the storyworld, *The Understudy* reflects the extra-textual world in which it is processed. In other words, the novel forces us to conceive of the presence of artificial elements that constitute a considerable part of the world as we experience it. This is why my analysis has greatly benefitted from the use of literary possible worlds theory, which is essentially interested in “the problem of truth in fiction and in the relations between semantic domains [meanings projected in the text] and reality” (Ryan 1991: 3). Indeed, by drawing attention to the genuine side of elements that are initially considered as inauthentic in the fictional world, *The Understudy* urges the reader to discover the *true* nature of “untrue” and “false” that operates in reality. Thus, we become more sensitive to the “artificial” constituents implanted within our experience of the actual world.

In the present chapter I have explored the modalities in which Nicholls’s novel primarily operates. We have seen that the narrative develops the interpersonal links of the fictional world or its “agential constellation” (Doležel 1998: 75), especially by contrasting the filmic impossible with the necessities and possibilities of the textual actual world. Furthermore, I have pointed out that the narrative stresses the ontological layeredness of the fictional world. Besides the distinction made between Stephen’s cinematically-saturated private universe and the reality of the fictional world, the way in which the filmic discourse in particular governs the construction of the fictional universe as a whole occasionally blurs the line between the fictional reality and the filmic imaginary, and hence reminds the reader of the narrative’s layered and constructed nature. In this way, the modalities of possible and impossible which characterise the narrative construction of *The Understudy* interact with ontological issues that arise throughout the narration.

The interdependence of the paradigm of the possible/impossible and the novel’s ontological structure, in turn, function as the starting point for the narrative treatment of various epistemological issues. *The Understudy* implicitly explores the essence and meaning of such concepts as knowledge, beliefs, and truth with the help of filmic discourse. A similar play between modal, ontological, and epistemological questions takes place in *The Ice Cream Man*. In the following chapter I demonstrate that, by construing the fictional world with the help of cinema, Lipson’s novel too is deeply involved in examining the limits of the possible, of life, and of truth.





## Chapter 6

# Filmic Indexes for a Traumatic Past in Katri Lipson's *The Ice Cream Man*

I began this study by analysing Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions* as a story of survival and a quest for the essence of the self. David Zimmer, the novel's protagonist, was able to recover from the traumatic loss of his family by immersing himself in the comforting realm of cinema. The silent films seen by David, in turn, entailed another story of surviving traumatic events, as the reader was introduced to Hector Mann, the man behind the movies. Like Auster's novel, *The Ice Cream Man*, written by the Finnish novelist and physician Katri Lipson (b. 1965), is fundamentally a portrayal of survival(s) from traumatic experiences and the difficulties in defining the self. Akin to the emphasis Auster placed on memory and re-creating the past in the present act of telling, Lipson depicts the painful past as something which is frequently and somewhat compulsively encountered, something with which an individual potentially comes to terms. What further connects these two novels is that they adhere to "metaverbal" (Grishakova 2010: 315) representation: access to the (memory of the) past events is made possible through film. With the help of this circuitous approach to history, memory, and trauma, cinema functions in both novels as an "indexical" trace for past experiences — the very experiences that are a fundamental reason for storytelling in the first place.

In this final analytical chapter we will see that throughout Lipson's postmodern historical novel the narrative models both personal traumas and collective memory, principally by means of indexes that indicate the information beneath the level of the narrative. In other words, past events impinge on the present lives of the characters and the storyworld in general to such a degree that the painful past is imprinted in the narrative sections without being explicitly discussed or represented. Van Alphen

has called this kind of indirect representation “an indexical language” (1997: 13) of art, which approaches undefinable events by describing “what is contiguous to it, what touches it” (ibid.: 127).<sup>1</sup> As for Lipson’s novel, it is constructed precisely according to the “strategic maneuver of indexicality” (ibid.: 13), as the reader is able to trace unspoken individual and collective traumas with the help of temporal, spatial, or causal contiguities and continuities created between the represented sign and the object it stands for (see ibid.: 126). What interests me most is that the narrative strategy of indexicality set out in *The Ice Cream Man* is closely related to films: in this chapter we will see that cinema stands for a trace, an absent object, with the help of which the reader gains provisional insight into “the unspoken” elements governing the narration. Below, I show that by means of “filmic indexicality” Lipson’s challenging novel exemplifies a general defiance of decisive meanings and ontological integrity.

Whereas in *The Book of Illusions* the trauma that underlies the narration emanated from a private loss, *The Ice Cream Man* initially reflects a personal trauma through collective memory. Both the private and the communal consciousness have their roots in the horrific historical events of the twentieth century, namely those painful historical moments inscribed in the memory of Western culture. At the outset of *The Ice Cream Man*, cinema is intimately entwined with memory and with a re-enactment of the past in the present. Simultaneously, the beginning paves the way for the reader to grasp the narrative significance of cinema which permeates the novel.

The first chapter takes place in Czechoslovakia in the year 1947, in the midst of a film-making project. The film about to be shot is set in 1942, that is, during the German occupation in the middle of the Second World War. The setting evokes associations with war’s atrocities, and thus the film’s historical context functions as an indexical trace for the gruesome recent history of Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> The film project thus embodies a personal, collective, and artistic need to re-address and reconcile with the past.

The traces of the past evident in the film are already apparent in the title, “The Ice

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<sup>1</sup>Van Alphen makes use of American art historian Rosalind Krauss’s seminal two-part article “Notes on Index” (1985) on the role of index in contemporary art. Krauss, for her part, employs Roland Barthes’s notion of the indexical quality of photographs in *Camera Lucida* (1983). As van Alphen also analyses literature, specifically the poetry of the Dutch writer and visual artist Armando, I find his interest in the indexicality found in both visual art and literature especially relevant for my approach in this study. Having said that, I also acknowledge the difference between my approach and van Alphen’s, which is nearer to the Peircean conception of an indexical sign.

<sup>2</sup>Lipson explored the recent past of Eastern Europe in her debut novel *Kosmonautti* (2008; “Cosmonaut”), set in Murmansk during the Soviet era. As for *The Ice Cream Man*, it won the European Union Prize for Literature in 2013.

Cream Man of Terezín”. Terezín is crucial here, as it serves as a sign of the ghastliest aspects of the Second World War, namely the Holocaust. Terezín is a fortress town located in an area which today is part of the Czech Republic. During the war, Terezín was called Theresienstadt by the German occupiers and was turned into a ghetto for Jewish families destined for the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Despite the suggestive title, the film makes no direct references to the annihilation of the Jews. The story is set in the Moravian countryside where a man and a woman living under false pretences as the married “Vorszda” couple, “Tomáš” and “Esther”, are on the run from something, most likely the Nazis.<sup>3</sup> Because they cannot continue their perilous journey, they decide to ask for temporary shelter in the house of an elderly widow, Mrs. Němcová.

Although “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” is devoid of specific references to the notorious concentration camp, for readers who are well-versed in the history of the Second World War, the film is tainted by its evocative title. Not until halfway through does the film narrative finally link the story with its cryptic title: the reader is told that “Tomáš” has worked as an ice-cream vendor, which makes him “the ice cream man” of the title. Personal traumas begin to emerge with the help of dispersed indexical signs that allude to past experiences which remain unvoiced in the film. The incongruous title in the construction of narrative meaning-making illustrates both the indexical strategy of Lipson’s novel and its imminent relation to trauma.

In *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000) Michael Rothberg argues that “the traumatic index points to a necessary absence” (ibid.: 104).<sup>4</sup> By contending that traumatic indexicality does not create a causal link to its sign and hence does not make “the referent present” (ibid.), Rothberg asserts that his conception of traumatic indexes diverges from van Alphen’s use of indexicality.<sup>5</sup> However, I find that ultimately Rothberg’s line of thinking does not deviate appreciably from van Alphen’s understanding of the principal mechanisms related to indexical representation in art. This is because both scholars regard the traumatic event itself as something that eludes immediate representation, but whose “continually deferred presence” (LaCapra 1994: 223) marks the present.

As for *The Ice Cream Man* and the events depicted in the film, the absence of ex-

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<sup>3</sup>In order to separate “Esther” in the film from other characters called Esther on the diegetic level, I refer to these two film characters as “Esther” and “Tomáš”.

<sup>4</sup>See also Hirsch (1997: 1–15) on index and its relation to trauma. As for other influential works dealing with the ramifications of portraying the Holocaust, see *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992) edited by Saul Friedlander.

<sup>5</sup>However, Rothberg (2000: 277–278 nt 13) also acknowledges the similarities between his approach and van Alphen’s on the use of the index.

PLICIT portrayals of the war's horrific events reinforces the awareness of their presence-in-absence. This is especially evident in the deadening fear and anxiety experienced by "Esther" and "Tomáš" throughout the film. Their indefinable dread and almost audible silence serve as signs for what cannot be said and, subsequently, for what can be said and in what manner. Simultaneously, the film foregrounds the aesthetic of indexicality with the structure of the narrative whole by means of absence, weak indications, and losses that mark both the more serious traumas of the past as well as minor ones, and on both the collective and the private levels.

The film's sinister title makes an impact on the reader's horizons of expectation and subsequent comprehension of the filmic level. And since the title duplicates and extends the title of the novel, the filmic level also serves as a metonymic *mise en abyme* of the textual whole. In the course of the novel, the film turns out to be a site of self-recognition through which various characters reflect their past. Thus, despite the lack of straightforward links between the embedded film and the storyworld reality, various interconnections between the two narrative levels compel the reader to interpret their meanings in relation to each other.

The connection is initially seen in chapter three, where the film director is being interrogated and tailed by a secret policeman who is interested in the origins of the director's idea for the project. At this point, the narrative subtly implies that the film is somehow related to the director's personal experiences during the war. This hypothesis provides an important element in describing the role of the film with respect to the narrative whole: besides being an artistic re-telling of historical events, the film ought to be seen as evidence of the director's survival of the war's atrocities.

Apart from invoking a semantic reciprocity between the character of "Tomáš" and the film's director on the primary level, the narrative shows that "Esther" triggers sensations of identification on a diegetic level. In chapter three, the director becomes acquainted with a woman who is allegedly obsessed with the film and claims that it relates her experiences, "her story".<sup>6</sup> At this juncture, instead of continuing to track the director's life, the narration shifts focus by beginning a portrayal of several generations after the war. Cinema links these disconcertingly overlapping and unstable characters with the help of either "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín" or the filmic mode in general. In chapter four, the reader is introduced to Jan Vorszda, a serious and solitary university student, who witnessed Prague Spring in 1968 and its dramatic aftermath. Curiously, Jan's mother bears striking similarities to the would-be "Esther" encountered in the previous chapter: Jan's mother, too, has been captivated by the

<sup>6</sup>I call this diegetic character "the would-be 'Esther' " to distinguish her from "Esther" in the film.

film during Jan's early adolescence, and is married to a one-legged invalid.

For Jan, "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín" stands for a childhood memory, about which he reminisces seeing several times with his mother. As a member of the post-war generation, Jan sees the film as an index of an era he did not personally experience. Yet the past as portrayed in the film affects the reality in which he lives currently. Along with the more general traces of the past apparent in the life of "post-memorial" generations, the film encompasses more personal signs of Jan's origin. There are indications of a family secret: Jan's biological father is not his mother's husband, but someone who resembles the movie character "Tomáš". The narrative thus makes the connection between two discrete narrative levels not only more conspicuous but also, paradoxically, more complex.

Besides experiencing how the repercussions of the war are affecting the present, Jan witnesses an alarmingly tense political situation after Prague Spring — events that will shape the collective memory of the Czechoslovakians and Europeans on a broad scale. For Jan, the oppressive presence of Soviet troops in Prague and the self-immolations in protest against the occupation result in his dramatic decision to flee the country. Twenty years later, Jan's half-Swedish daughter, Gunilla, lives in an entirely different world in the comforting tranquillity of *folkhemmet*, the Swedish welfare state. Gunilla closes the circle of the faltering family chronicle — and the novel itself — by attempting to find her paternal roots in 1990 in the recently democratised Czechoslovakia. Thus, the interaction between past and present is re-enacted in the form of a new, post-post-war generation, which has no experiential or mnemonic connection to the onerous periods during and after the Second World War.

During her stay in her father's hometown, Olomouc, Gunilla engages in a perplexing role play by impersonating a tenant who previously inhabited her apartment, a Czech girl called Milena, whose boyfriend still sends love letters to her old address.<sup>7</sup> Instead of resorting to filmic indexes to evoke the absent and unattainable past, Gunilla attempts to get in touch with the past by enacting a mimetic play, which transforms her into someone who might have lived during her father's adolescence. Instead of becoming acquainted with the actual past, Gunilla actualises the past unknown to her in the form of corporeal imitation, which enables her to live within the imagined — imaginary — past.

Although Gunilla is seemingly free of the film's constraints that haunted previous generations, towards the end of the novel her peculiar impersonation of Milena is

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<sup>7</sup>Kafka's letters to Milena Jesenská written from 1920 to 1923 and published in 1953 under the title *Briefe an Milena* are the obvious intertexts here.

transformed into a movie scene. At this point, the film director re-emerges. Gunilla's visit to Olomouc has prompted gossip amongst the locals, and the director is now working on a film script based on an urban legend about this "foreign girl". Gunilla's introduction into the embedded level of cinema is the final vacillation that takes place between the filmic and diegetic levels. However, the ultimate meaning of the novel's last chapters resides in the director's re-appearance. I argue that the narrative turn at the end requires the reader to reconsider the nature of the novel as a whole and regard it as a representation of a traumatised mind that belongs to the director himself. Similar to the reader's rising perplexity towards the conclusion of *The Book of Illusions*, *The Ice Cream Man* compels us to ask whether the novel ought to be, after all, interpreted as a figment of the imagination, what Doležel has described as a "story of the mind" (1998: 96).

In the following pages I examine more thoroughly the function of indexicality as a narrative strategy in *The Ice Cream Man* by exploring the meanings that indexical signs acquire in the text. Throughout the chapter I focus on the narrative role of cinema in this indexical mode of representation and observe how cinema helps both to model and to signal a traumatic consciousness residing below the novel's textual level. Along with indexicality, which serves as the main concept in this chapter and refers especially to objects in the storyworld reality, I analyse another form of indirect representation, namely referential ambiguity, by means of which the narrative constantly problematises clear points of reference in the text and creates perplexing contingency between the diegetic and filmic levels.

In the next section I analyse the metafictional play between historical and fictive narration, between "fact and fiction", set out in the novel's opening chapter. Here I first make use of Linda Hutcheon's (1988) concept of historiographic metafiction introduced in chapter two. Thereafter, I focus how chapter two in the novel makes the film being made in the first chapter an eminent site of trauma, as its indexes of the Holocaust are essential for the reader to interpret the film's narrative role in the novel as a whole. Then I continue to explore how the film as an artefact functions as an index for the painful past in the reality of the storyworld. In the final sections I investigate the gradual decline in linguistic communication in the storyworld, a decline that amounts to more corporeal and visual ways of interacting and interpreting that world and ultimately serves as a return to a filmic mode in the novel's final chapters.

## Slipping in and out of Roles: History versus Fiction Problematised

From the very beginning of the narrative, Lipson's novel problematises the dichotomy between historical veracity and the imaginative enterprise of fiction. Initially, this is done in the form of a motto, which opens the first chapter. The motto is a slightly altered quotation from Leni Riefenstahl's memoir published in 1987: "*I did not see one dead person in Poland, not one soldier, not one civilian*" (ICM: 7; emphasis original).<sup>8</sup> Riefenstahl's statement is structured around negation: there have been no casualties. However, from our present perspective in which we have more information about the atrocities carried out by German troops in Poland, Riefenstahl's historic remark serves as a "negative index" for what actually took place.<sup>9</sup> By opening the narrative with a quotation that is both historical *and* false, Lipson's novel reminds us of how "[t]he postmodernists fictionalize history, but by doing so they imply that history itself may be a form of fiction" (McHale 1987: 96). Simultaneously, this comment by an influential woman who worked as a war correspondent in Poland during the German invasion and, ironically, was later known primarily as a documentarist and photographer, underlines the potential risk of distorting actual circumstances with the help of discursive practices.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, through this intertextual reference, which connotes and at the same time contests the legitimacy of (certain) historical documents, the motto sets out a postmodern strategy that renders everything in the narrative uncertain: referentiality, epistemes of the past, and ultimately, even the integrity of the subject positions.

Riefenstahl's quotation also evokes temporal awareness, a change in time, and especially the intersections between past, present, and future through which we experience the world and give it meaning. The emphasis placed on the interrelations between discrete temporalities in *The Ice Cream Man* is evident in the predominant use of present tense. This entails a number of significant associations with regard to the narrative whole. Firstly, present tense makes the narrative utterances immediate, as if they are taking place here and now. The novel's diegetic level reinforces this impression, as the first chapter, tellingly entitled "The Depiction of Life",<sup>11</sup> depicts film rehearsals that connote physical and experiential immediacy. Furthermore, a

<sup>8</sup>"Puolassa en nähnyt ainoatakaan ruumista, en siviilin enkä sotilaan" (J: 5). Cf. Riefenstahl (1992: 653).

<sup>9</sup>On indexicality as negative references, see van Alphen (1997: 137).

<sup>10</sup>On evidence confirming that Riefenstahl did indeed witness mass executions of Jews in Poland, see Bach (2007); cf. Riefenstahl (1992: 257–261).

<sup>11</sup>"Elämän kuvaaminen" in the original version. The author remarked in an interview with the Finnish broadcasting company YLE that she indeed sought to depict life in her novel (see Lipson 2012b).

sense of improvisation dominates the atmosphere of the filming: the director does not share the manuscript with the actors, and the scenes are shot “in chronological order” (*ICM*: 12).<sup>12</sup> Thus, the actors have to comply with the sparse details given about the scenes and go along with the daily rehearsals and shootings.

In *The Book of Illusions*, David’s verbal renderings of films engendered a sensation of spatio-temporal immediacy. This is no surprise, as present tense is the principal temporal mode of the film. The fact that Lipson’s novel is structured according to a filmic mode of telling is not, of course, accidental: by using the present tense, the narrative interweaves its meanings more closely to the filmic level. At the beginning of the novel, Eva Zachovalová,<sup>13</sup> the character-narrator of chapter one and an actress who plays the leading female role of “Esther Vorszda” summarises the film’s first scene:

Esther and Tomáš Vorszda escape. I am Esther. Martin is Tomáš. There is another man with us, too, but his only function is to drive the car in which we are making our escape. We’re driving between the fields in the middle of the afternoon; it’s baking hot.

(*ICM*: 11)<sup>14</sup>

Apart from evoking immediacy, the present tense also connects the past and the present. This becomes apparent right away, due to the temporal distance between the present time of reading and the events depicted, which took place in 1947. The present tense can thus be seen as a shift from past tense to “historical present”, a mode which foregrounds a significant past moment through the present act of telling.<sup>15</sup> On the textual level, the temporal gap is established and bridged between the present time of the film shootings and the film *per se*, which is set in the recent past. In this way Lipson’s novel reminds us that access to history is possible only through the narrativisation that takes place at the time of “now”.

This line of thinking has a direct link to yet another mode that combines the present act of telling with historical issues and is noteworthy in a discussion of *The*

<sup>12</sup> “[K]ronologisessa järjestyksessä” (*J*: 12).

<sup>13</sup> The novel’s postmodern intertextual richness is seen in the names of the characters. For an older Finnish readership, the surname “Zachovalová” may have associations with Lieko Zachovalová (1927–2017), a Finnish-born correspondent for YLE, through whom the Finnish audience received information about Prague Spring and its suppression in the late 1960s. This is an example of the narrative bouncing between different eras and making them intersect in a circular and postmodern fashion.

<sup>14</sup> “Esther ja Tomáš Vorszda pakenevat. Minä olen Esther. Martin on Tomáš. Autossa on toinenkin mies mutta vailla muuta merkitystä kuin että ajaa autoa jolla pakenemme. Ajamme peltojen halki keskellä päivää, on hirveän kuuma” (*J*: 11).

<sup>15</sup> On historical present, see Jahn (2003: 210).



*Ice Cream Man*, and that is testimony. A testimonial act is generally seen as a historical mode, a form of historical telling that also links the past with the present and necessitates factual accuracy. According to van Alphen, testimonial stances are often used in fiction as “historical modes” to reinforce “the testimonial and factual authority of the fiction” (1997: 21). Indeed, in Lipson’s novel, subject positions are established by virtue of the testimonial immediacy of the present act of telling. As for the integrity of these subject positions, they remain or become alarmingly ambiguous in the course of the narrative. This, in turn, impedes their trustworthiness as witnesses and calls the reader’s attention to the way the novel problematises the relationship between historiographic and fictive discourses.

In the novel’s first two chapters, the narrative contests the dichotomy between fictiveness and (historical) veracity in a fashion that is characteristic of Hutcheon’s concept of historiographic metafiction. In Hutcheon’s view, historiographic metafiction is a genre that combines postmodernism with the historical novel by first establishing a clear-cut line between history and fiction, then subsequently blurring that distinction (Hutcheon 1988: 113). In this dialogue which is placed between “the historiographic and the metafictional” (ibid.: 110), a definitive distinction between “authentic representation” and “inauthentic copy” is no longer possible. In *The Ice Cream Man*, we observe that the narrative questions the line between history and fiction from the very beginning by playfully obscuring the difference between authentic and false representation. In the opening chapters this is carried out especially through film and live acting and their connections to the historical events that serve as the narrative context.

In *The Understudy* we saw that the motifs of acting and faking were often represented in a metafictional and mildly ironic fashion: they explicitly delineated, and at the same time challenged, an unequivocal understanding of the difference between true and false, and thereby reminded the reader of the fictional status of the narrative whole. Similarly, *The Ice Cream Man* adopts the context of film acting to underline the contrast between authentic and false behaviour and, subsequently, to disrupt fictive immersion. In Lipson’s case, however, the narrative gives rise to this distinction not in order to emphasise the difference between the two, but instead to insist on the *impossibility* of keeping them apart. Furthermore, whereas the thematic incentive for a metafictional play in Nicholls’s romantic comedy pointed to more general notions of “the meanings of life”, we are about to see that similar narrative techniques in Lipson’s novel involve far deeper and more serious connotations of historical understanding, memory, and experience.

The narrative highlights the obscure line between veracity and falsity on the content level of the film. “Esther” and “Tomáš” are not authentic characters in the movie reality; they have adopted these false identities in order to survive a threat that remains undefined. For “Esther” and “Tomáš”, to immerse themselves in these new roles probably signifies the only possible way to survive. Thus, as if resonating with the implications of the chapter title — that life is a dramatisation — the film establishes at the outset the endeavour portrayed in the novel to problematise a categorical distinction between fact and fiction. Reflected against this innate artifice, which takes place on the filmic level in the form of adopted roles and identities, the story-world reality further complicates and diminishes the distinctiveness associated with the dichotomy of fact and fiction.

According to Hutcheon, postmodern fiction often entails a paradox, namely the simultaneous requirement for both detachment and involvement (1980: 147). In *The Ice Cream Man*, the film rehearsals in particular illustrate multiple layers of falsehoods that create vacillation and co-presence between fictive immersion and estrangement. We find this, for example, in the way Eva and Martin Jelínek, who plays “Tomáš”, the leading male role, act out scenes in which these false characters rehearse their fabricated identities. To make things more complicated, “Tomáš” adopts still another role as an imaginary interrogator who grills “Esther”:

‘Name.’  
 ‘Esther Vorszda.’  
 ‘Date of birth.’  
 ‘May 1, 1922.’  
 ‘Place of birth.’  
 ‘Olomouc.’

(*ICM*: 9)<sup>16</sup>

Along with layered fictionality of this kind, which magnifies the complexity of the performance, there are situations in which abrupt changes in register produce more obvious vacillation between estrangement and fictive immersion. I am referring to

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‘Nimi.’  
 ‘Esther Vorszda.’  
 ‘Syntymäaika.’  
 ‘Ensimmäinen toukokuuta tuhatyhdeksänsataakaksikymmentäkaksi.’  
 ‘Syntymäpaikka.’  
 ‘Olomouc.’ (*J*: 8–9)

the way in which the fictive illusion is broken during film rehearsals: while rehearsing a scene with the director, Eva unexpectedly slips out of her role, although Martin attempts to stick to his double (or triple) role as a movie character who pretends to be someone else pretending to be someone else.<sup>17</sup> During these abrupt shifts, the imaginary level of cinema and the reality of the storyworld briefly coalesce, as the lines regarded as false in the movie reality are intermingled with the events taking place on the diegetic level. Thus, similar to the porosity of the border that separated the reality of the storyworld from the embedded level of the video installation in *Point Omega*, Lipson's novel exemplifies a reciprocal permeability between the imaginary and the fictive reality.

Besides temporarily obscuring the actual point of reference, there are instances in which referential obstacles are permanent and hence more disconcerting than in the previous example. The reader cannot always indisputably deduce to which narrative level the text is referring or whether the reference points both to the diegetic *and* the filmic plane. This is seen, for example, in Eva's ambiguous description of Martin's portrayal of "Tomáš", "a man running for his life" (*ICM*: 21),<sup>18</sup> when she remarks that "[i]t's not all that far from the truth" (*ICM*: 21).<sup>19</sup> Here, Eva's enigmatic statement signifies not only the character in the film, but also potentially Martin himself in the reality of the storyworld. Elsewhere in the first chapter, Eva seems to be suspicious of Martin's past, evident in her interest in knowing where Martin was "during the war" (*ICM*: 27).<sup>20</sup> Eva's doubt intersects with "Esther's" uncertainty in the film, and the narrative deliberately interweaves these experiences.

Because the novel problematises referentiality by allowing the imaginary level of the film and the fictional reality to intersect, I argue that these instances disrupting fictive immersion exemplify how the narrative represents the storyworld in an *indirect* fashion. In the introduction to this chapter, I claimed that the novel is structured primarily by means of two indirect representative modes, namely indexical and referential ambiguity. Here the narrative generates an ambiguous contingency between the embedded level of cinema and the reality of the storyworld with the help of precisely these techniques, which also amounts to their co-presence and interdependence throughout the narration.

This interaction is seen at the conclusion of chapter one, as Eva's misgivings about Martin perplexingly commingle with "Esther's" desire to get to know "Tomáš's" true

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<sup>17</sup>See *ICM*: 10, *J*: 10.

<sup>18</sup>"[M]iestä joka pakenee henkensä edestä" (*J*: 25).

<sup>19</sup>"Se ei ole kaukaa haettua ollenkaan" (*J*: 25).

<sup>20</sup>"[...] Missä sinä olit sodan aikana?" (*J*: 31).

identity:

Eventually, Esther's eyes open slightly. 'Who are you?'

This is the right question, because she knows neither of them: neither her nocturnal interrogator nor Tomáš himself, who is supposed to be her husband. She might have known Martin, but knowing him is impossible.

(*ICM*: 29)<sup>21</sup>

By openly indicating "Esther's" experience in the film, the narrative indirectly refers to Eva's thoughts on a diegetic level. Perhaps Eva is unable to articulate her true feelings about her co-actor, and this is why the film serves as an indexical substitute for illustrating the actual state of affairs in the storyworld reality.

Although the narrative repeatedly refuses to make straightforward and unequivocal references and hence calls the reader's attention to its constructed nature, the novel's first chapter establishes a scheme that subsequent chapters will reinforce. Instead of a nonsensical metafictional play, the novel's incentive to create vagueness and maintain a critical distance from the depicted storyworld implies a need to highlight the *factual* discourse underlying the narrative, or more precisely, the collectively shared understanding of past events. As the coherence and trustworthiness of the textual whole are constantly in jeopardy, the reader is compelled to become more conscious of the historical circumstances that serve as the context for the storyworld and provide its structure.

### The Filmic Level Indicating an Inarticulated Site of Trauma

Although nothing in the narrative explicitly indicates that chapter two represents the film that was being made in chapter one, the chapter's title, "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín", serves as an instructive paratext for its interpretation as a film while simultaneously referring to the novelistic whole. Eva's voice as the character-narrator in the previous chapter is now replaced by an impersonal third-person narration, and the chapter begins by duplicating the first scene, which previously had been related by Eva:

A black car drives along the bottom of the valley. The road rises and falls beneath the tires as if the ground were breathing. The car windows are

<sup>21</sup>The translation differs to some degree from the original Finnish:

"Lopulta Estherin silmät avautuvat puoliksi: 'Kuka te olette?'"

Se on oikea kysymys, koska hän ei tunne kumpaakaan miestä: yön keskeltä ilmestyvää kuulustelijaa eikä Tomášia, joka on muka hänen aviomiehensä. Martinin hän voisi tuntea, mutta häneen on mahdotonta tutustua [but it's impossible to get to know him]" (*J*: 33).

open; there is a woman sitting in the backseat, her forehead itching with sweat-caked powder.

(*ICM*: 30)<sup>22</sup>

I find it significant that the beginning of chapter two is devoid of any traces of filmic status, and thus, this seemingly transparent and unmediated mode of representation creates an impression of something that van Alphen called “[d]ocumentary realism” (1997: 20), namely a sense that the narrative represents the “real” past of the storyworld.

In fact, it remains unclear whether chapter two depicts the embedded film *or* the events of the storyworld, which inspired the director to make the film in the first place. Because of this referential ambiguity, I argue that the film ought to be located in an intermediate space between the past of the fictional reality and its artistic rendition. By obscuring the line between the filmic plane and the diegetic level, the narrative once again illustrates the complex relationship between the literary and the historical, the fictive and the actual.

From the very beginning of the chapter, the fictive imaginary and historical veracity are entwined, as the narrative interconnects undetermined historical events of the recent past with the present circumstances of the narrative situation: “The events preceding this car journey have been significant and historic. The more historic the events, the harder it has become to avoid them” (*ICM*: 31).<sup>23</sup> Although the text points out the significance of historical circumstances with regard to what is represented on the narrative level, these remarks adhere to the strategy of indexicality. More precisely, by using a passive and elusive mode, the narrative refrains from specifying the “historic events”, let alone anchor them to the characters represented in the text. With the help of deferrals of this kind the narrative elucidates its compulsive, yet vague references to the horrors associated with the time of the narration, resulting in a persistent avoidance of decisive connotations of the on-going war on the discourse level.

Despite this evasiveness in terms of discourse, in the movie reality there is no escape from the dramatic repercussions of the historic events. This is evident in the “opening scene” of chapter two: the characters have been compelled to adopt new identities and flee the immediate consequences of those events. At the outset,

<sup>22</sup>“Musta auto ajaa laakson pohjalla. Tie kumpuilee pyörien alla kuin maa hengittäisi. Auton ikkunat ovat auki, takapenkillä istuu nainen jonka otsalla kihelmöi puuterin sitomaa hikeä” (*J*: 37).

<sup>23</sup>“Automatkaa edeltäneet tapahtumat ovat olleet suuria ja historiallisia. Mitä historiallisemmiksi tapahtumat ovat kehkeytyneet, sitä vaikeammaksi niiden väistäminen on tullut” (*J*: 38).

their actions are marked and conditioned by past events, which nevertheless remain largely undefined. What follows is that the unavoidable and overwhelming war that haunts and overshadows the characters who are “witnessing these events” (*ICM*: 31)<sup>24</sup> is contingent on and inscribed in everything that the discourse level explicitly portrays.

The reader senses the seriousness of the situation in the undefinable fear felt by “Esther” and “Tomáš”, as “[t]hey set off walking along the dusty gravel road” (*ICM*: 36)<sup>25</sup> toward their destination, namely Mrs. Němcová’s house, and a car passes them: “Neither of them turns to look, but their footsteps become strangely stiff [...]. The sound of the engine resonates with their fear and begins to clatter like a truck full of soldiers” (*ICM*: 36).<sup>26</sup> The metaphorical expression “a truck full of soldiers” becomes a metonymic figure, as the narrative indirectly and indexically associates their unidentified dread with war. Thus, anxiety, suspicion, lingering fear, and, at times, even the paranoid horror experienced by the characters function as crucial signals of what cannot be explicitly articulated in the narrative.

At this juncture, the narrative closely links the motifs of pretence and performativity familiar from chapter one with the historical circumstances. The exceptional situation requires the false couple to perform an elaborate charade at Mrs. Němcová’s, “a maneuver that must be done in its own time, a grasp that cannot be loosened for even a moment” (*ICM*: 40).<sup>27</sup> Although their landlady does not express noticeable suspicion of the couple, her “piercing” (*ICM*: 60)<sup>28</sup> gaze convinces “Esther” that she doubts the veracity of their marital status. In this way, the pretence required by “the historic events” is closely related to the characters’ irrational suspicions and unexplained dread, in other words, indexes for unspeakable fear.

Interestingly, the narrative often amalgamates paranoid fear and suspicion with subtle metafictional elements that potentially and briefly reduce the reader’s impression of fictive illusion. For example, after settling down their room at Mrs. Němcová’s, “Tomáš” experiences a powerful fear of being “exposed”:

They both look at the heavy wardrobe. It occurs to the man that he does not know what sort of wood it is made of. Suddenly it feels dangerous, as if it were unlikely or even impossible that Mrs. Němcová could have a wardrobe made of this type of wood in this era, in this country—and

<sup>24</sup> “[T]odistamiensa tapahtumien” (*J*: 38).

<sup>25</sup> “He lähtevät kävelemään pitkin pölyistä hiekkatietä” (*J*: 43).

<sup>26</sup> “[K]umpikaan ei käänny katsomaan mutta askeleet muuttuvat oudon jäykiksi [...]. Auton moottori oli resonoinut heidän pelkonsa kanssa ja alkanut rämistä kuin kuorma-auto täynnä sotilaita” (*J*: 43–44).

<sup>27</sup> “[L]iike joka tulee tehdä ajallaan, ote joka ei voi herpaantua hetkeksikään” (*J*: 49).

<sup>28</sup> “[T]eräviltä” (*J*: 73).

that would also be the man's fault and would betray him, rather than the owner of the wardrobe.

(*ICM*: 40)<sup>29</sup>

It is possible to interpret the passage merely as an exaggerated manifestation of the deep dismay which "Tomáš" is experiencing in the situation. However, since the reader is aware of the filmic nature of the narrated events, he or she is now reminded of the reality of the storyworld in which the film was shot. Thus, the narrative suggests that the setting in the house has been constructed in an unconvincing manner on a diegetic level. In this way, the narrative continues to engender ambiguity by means of unclear points of reference.

Metafictive connotations which imply a fearful silence are coupled with referential and indexical ambiguities also at points where an implicit link is made between the film's title and "Tomáš". In spite of — or more precisely, due to — their mutual dislike and frequent disagreements, "Esther" becomes fiercely interested in the past of her taciturn "spouse". Although "Tomáš" does not let "Esther" or the reader in fully on his life story, he does disclose to the inquisitive "wife" that he has worked as an ice cream vendor. This revelation — a confession? — is important in many ways. Firstly, it justifies the film's title, "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín", and retrospectively strengthens "Tomáš's" significance in the film story by re-locating him at its centre. Secondly, in terms of metafictional and intertextual play, Terezín is grotesquely associated with the recurring themes of pretence, fakery, and acting in Lipson's novel. During the Second World War, Terezín served as a "model camp" for the German army and was shown to foreign state visitors and members of the media to convince the world that the camps were tolerable — an appalling deed that resonates ominously with Leni Riefenstahl's claim discussed earlier. "Terezín" thus serves as an outlandish intertext for the pretence and performance that took place in the real past.

"Tomáš's" perfunctory remark generates meanings that are pivotal with regard to both the embedded level of the film and the storyworld *per se*. When "Tomáš" casually refers to his past occupation, he executes an indexical strategy whereby the narrative whole is also constructed: instead of directly expressing the real, the narrative produces meanings by "*point[ing] to the real*" (Rothberg 2000: 104; emphasis

<sup>29</sup>"Samaan aikaan he katsovat raskasta vaatekaappia. Mies tulee ajatelleeksi ettei tiedä mistä puusta kaappi on tehty. Yhtäkkiä sekin tuntuu vaaralliselta, aivan kuin rouva Nėmcovalla voisi olla sellaisesta puusta tehty kaappi ettei se ylipäätään ole todennėkėinen tai edes mahdollinen nėinė aikoina, tėssė maassa, ja sekin olisi miehen syy ja paljastaisi hėnet eikė kaapin omistajaa" (*J*: 48–49).

original). The reader has to construe an understanding of the novel's hidden meanings by means of these referentially and semantically incomplete indications of the actual site of "narrative truths". More often than not, extreme experiences that remain unspoken on a narrative level are concealed in mundane events represented in the novel. For example, "Tomáš" indirectly elicits the sinister spectre of Terezín by murmuring to "Esther" while cutting her hair that he has "'seen more than enough shorn heads'" (*ICM*: 83).<sup>30</sup> This brief remark further corroborates the hypothesis that he was indeed an inhabitant of the Jewish ghetto, and is painfully familiar with the ghastly circumstances of concentration camps. By throwing out veiled associations to his past which defy immediate representation and articulation, "Tomáš" participates in creating the novel's "metonymic narrative structure" (Rothberg 2000: 153) through which the gap and the interplay between the everyday and the extreme are expressed on a discourse level.

The reason for this kind of narrative design, which evades definite and unambiguous representation, lies in the essentially traumatic nature of the historic events lurking beneath the narrative plane. If we stop briefly to consider the nature of a traumatic event and the structure of a traumatised mind, the trauma we confronted in chapter two in *The Book of Illusions* can be useful. To follow Rothberg's line of thinking, the way David's unexpected loss of his wife and children in a plane crash caused him serious trauma was a result of a "missed encounter of the real" (Rothberg 2000: 138). In a similar vein, I argue that the traumatic kernel of both narrative levels of *The Ice Cream Man* is initially located in the unprecedented annihilation of the Jews during the Second World War, a traumatic event which in the course of the novel will be followed by more recent atrocities.

On the embedded level of the film, "Tomáš" is both an eye witness and a survivor of the concentration camp. Cathy Caruth (1996: 7) has described this kind of position as a dual experience of confronting death and surviving it. It is probable that "Tomáš" did not fully comprehend the appalling events at the time of their occurrence. Since the traumatising conditions have been largely prevented from being adequately conceptualised, it is impossible for him to integrate the events into his "narrative memory" (Rothberg 2000: 136). Because of "the impact of [the] very incomprehensibility" (Caruth 1996: 6) of those experiences, it is challenging, although not impossible, to narrativise them in a satisfactory and comprehensive way. Furthermore, life itself becomes a "crisis" (*ibid.*: 7) for the survivor. Given all those who lost their lives in the camps, personal survival may appear "unbearable" (*ibid.*).

<sup>30</sup>– Olen nähnyt aivan tarpeeksi kynittyjä päitä" (*J*: 98).



This reinforces the difficulty in relating one's painful past to others, the difficulty we encountered in Auster's novel, which was dispersed with indexes to the main characters' Jewish roots.<sup>31</sup>

The Holocaust probably explains "Tomáš's" reticence and his oblique statements about his past. Although he resists explicitly and coherently revealing his experiences, his past marks the present, a past to which the reader has access only through "Tomáš's" imprecise and fleeting remarks. It is in his restrained behaviour and silence that the reader, along with "Esther", "hears" what remains unsaid.

Besides accounting for "Tomáš's" private and existential trauma, I previously remarked that the narrative whole operates according to the aesthetic of indexicality, that is, a contiguous and/or causal mode of representation encompassing what remains beyond explicit manifestation. As we have now examined "Tomáš's" situation and the likely reasons for his conduct, it is reasonable to consider the striking similarities between the workings of traumatic consciousness described above and the narrative strategy put into play throughout the novel. We will see that the purpose for using indexicality in the novel is closely linked to the trauma itself as the emblematic catalyst for the narrative whole.

In her book *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (2001), Amy Elias investigates similar narrative techniques in the postmodern historical novel, a genre she calls "metahistorical romance". She argues that postmodern historical fiction models itself according to post-traumatic consciousness, which cannot deal with the realities of the twentieth century (ibid.: xii). Instead of re-representing past events, these novels attempt to portray the impossibility of the actions themselves and point out the impossibility of writing and knowing "history" in a rational and concise sense (see ibid.: 5–6, 29).

Clearly, the Holocaust embodies one of the most unfathomable events in recent history. It is constantly being explored and re-thought in societies and art, both collectively and individually. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992b: xviii) have argued that the paradoxical nature of the Holocaust has led not only to a crisis of witnessing, but also to a crisis of history, reflected further as a crisis in literature. Although their argument may seem excessive, I find that Lipson's novel exemplifies predicaments of empirically-grounded writing about historical events that defy existing conceptual frameworks and modes of representation. While private trauma begins to emanate from imprecise remarks and symptomatic silence, at the same time it establishes the

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<sup>31</sup>These include Hector Mann's allegedly Jewish family history and the more implicit allusions to the possibly Jewish background of David Zimmer.

narrative framework for the novelistic whole and suggests that the true site of narrative meanings is found on the filmic level, inhabited by the wounded mind.

By portraying the mind of “Tomáš” with the help of obscure indexes and references, *The Ice Cream Man* illustrates “traumatic realism”, a concept coined by Rothberg to mean “a form of documentation beyond direct reference and coherent narrative [that] do[es] not fully abandon the possibility for some kind of reference and some kind of narrative” (2000: 101). Rothberg holds that, although “the traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual” defines the limits of representation, “the claims of reference live on” (ibid.: 106). Thus, traumatic realists “undermine the conventions of storytelling without entirely forgoing narrative or its ability to document history” (ibid.: 227).

Likewise, *The Ice Cream Man* explores tensions between history, experience, and representation. Instead of claiming that there is no access to history and to traumatic history in particular, the novel promotes the view that history is “no longer based on simple models of experience and reference” (Caruth 1996: 11). By setting in motion “[t]he indirect referentiality of history” (ibid.: 18), Lipson’s novel reflects human inability to subject the Holocaust to rational scrutiny. At the same time it also exemplifies the need to confront those events in order to “glimpse the limits of history’s narrativity” (Elias 2001: 60), to “project a new Western relation to history” (ibid.: 3) in literature, to examine how we relate to our past, and, ultimately, how we preserve our humanity.

Similarly to the way in which historical events and their impact on both personal and collective levels are indirectly represented in the narrative, the novel’s historical allusions produce illusory escapism and deliberate refusal on the part of the characters to accept the true state of affairs. For example, Mrs. Němcová refuses to acknowledge the ongoing war and adopts a foolish stance characterised by purported ignorance: she has “built her house so high up that historical events flow past her, like a river flooding the bottom of a valley” (*ICM*: 61).<sup>32</sup> In her active indifference, living “in her very own little Switzerland” (*ICM*: 61),<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Němcová is incapable of and unwilling to confront the painful reality that nevertheless marks her everyday practices. Yet to remain silent about the present circumstances is only to revolve around the unspoken.

<sup>32</sup>“Hän on rakentanut talonsa niin korkealle että historialliset tapahtumat virtaavat hänen ohitseensa kuin laakson pohjalla tulviva joki” (*J*: 73).

<sup>33</sup>“[O]massa pikku Sveitsissään” (*J*: 73).

Similarly, “Tomáš” shows his ineptitude for facing the tumultuous reality outside: although the obstacles which have impeded their journey have vanished after a few weeks’ stay at Mrs. Němcová’s, “Tomáš” opts for remaining a while longer. His decision probably reflects his reluctance to confront the continuing terror and his unconscious endeavour to create an imaginary nest in the house: he takes care of the “manly” household chores and immerses himself in improving the old house. What is more, as Eva surmises in chapter one, “Tomáš” and “Esther” become, if only mildly, attached to each other during their prolonged stay at Mrs. Němcová’s. This turn of events is enigmatically implied through the character of “Esther”: “She is on the side of the ice cream men. Children love them. And so does Esther” (*ICM*: 84).<sup>34</sup> Thus, even signs of true affection are camouflaged according to the aesthetics of indexicality.

A far more unexpected turn of events occurs later, towards the end of chapter two, when “Tomáš” vanishes. This leaves “Esther” in an uncomfortable situation with the landlady. The chapter reaches its conclusion with the introduction of a new male character, when Mrs. Němcová accepts a patient from a nearby hospital. The patient, “a pilot who’s lost a leg” (*ICM*: 92),<sup>35</sup> makes “Esther” think that “now everything is starting over again from the beginning” (*ICM*: 92).<sup>36</sup> “Esther’s” thoughts indicate that she submissively accepts the future, the anticipated relationship with the new man who “is fully prepared for what awaits him” (*ICM*: 92).<sup>37</sup> “Esther’s” final contemplations at the chapter’s end pave the way for temporal circularity: they prepare the reader for how the novel’s fictional world is gradually imbued with disconcertingly similar characters whose predestined lives are difficult to distinguish from each other. Nor can their interrelations be adequately understood. A blurred sense of time will be conspicuous in the novel’s ensuing chapters.

Meanwhile, the difficulties in representing traumatising historical events are now replaced by a more conscious, anticipated, and thus describable burden of historical circumstances which the characters are condemned to bear. Then again, the last scene of chapter two also signals loss, absence, and mourning, something we noted in the somber character of “Tomáš”. The recurring concepts are closely associated with the innate structure of trauma; recall that trauma is often seen as a “missed encounter with reality” (Felman 1992b: 167). Moreover, they interweave personal and collective memories of the traumatic past. Ultimately, these sensations will connect

<sup>34</sup>“Hän on jäätelökauppiaiden puolella. Lapset rakastavat heitä. Estherkin rakastaa” (*J*: 99).

<sup>35</sup>“[L]entäjä, joka on menettänyt toisen jalkansa” (*J*: 108).

<sup>36</sup>“Esther ajattelee: Kaikki alkaa taas alusta” (*J*: 109).

<sup>37</sup>“Mies on valmistautunut” (*J*: 109).

all the novel's chapters.

In this section I have shown that the novel indirectly represents the movie reality by means of indexical traces pointing both to the unspoken past and to the present circumstances. These indexes signalling traumatic experiences enable the reader to develop an understanding of the difficult situation confronted by the characters whose lives — both present and future — are tainted and determined by past events. We have also seen that the metafictional play enacted in chapter one continues throughout the film. This time, it is precisely the present (historical) situation that necessitates an intricate role-play on the part of the characters. Consequently, this continuous performance further complicates their fabricated appearances as “Esther” and “Tomáš”. These aspects recur in the following chapters, as the narrative returns to represent the storyworld reality, and specifically the decades in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War. At this point, the film itself becomes an “analeptic” index (van Alphen 1997: 139) that refers to the past — a past that strongly marks the present life of its characters.

### The Movie Pointing to Ambiguous Pasts

As discussed above, *The Ice Cream Man's* narrative highlighted the pivotal role of historical context with reference to the film already in chapter one, where Eva points out the challenging circumstances of film-making in the year 1947: “Worry about forthcoming societal changes means we should discuss our art in mournful tones” (*ICM*: 22).<sup>38</sup> The anxiety about the future of a society in turmoil is actualised in chapter three, as the film director is interrogated and surveilled by the secret service. Whereas in the opening chapters the characters often experienced an irrational fear of something that remained indefinable, now the threat to the individual is concrete and embodied in the authorities.

In chapter two the metafictional evocations of artifice stressed the characters' need to hide behind adopted roles and fake identities to escape from and/or suppress the truth. By continuously interweaving historical veracity with the fictive narrative in a fashion that challenges a categorical distinction between what ought to be regarded as “real” and what is regarded as “false”, the metafictional elements allegorise the essence of life and historical circumstances. Similarly, the following chapters make use of motifs of impersonation and ambiguous identities in order to stress the performative side of life under pressure in society. From this moment on, however,

<sup>38</sup>“Tulevan yhteiskuntajärjestelmän uumoilu pakottaa maalaamaan murretuin sävyin” (*J*: 26).

the allegorical function of the metafictional techniques becomes more substantial and subversive, as the narrative gradually and irrevocably disrupts the ontological coherence of the storyworld and the semantic unity of the characters. From chapter three onwards, the discrepancies within the storyworld result in the subversion of the integrity of subject positions, temporal linearity, and accountability of the narrative in general.

These factors, which render everything uncertain and endorse ideological plurality, are characteristic of postmodern fiction and postmodern thinking. What is noteworthy here is that this break between the more coherent, yet enigmatic and more discordant narration takes place after “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” has been released, that is, a few years after the conclusion of the Second World War. This temporal detail encourages me to call attention to symbolic connotations associated with that war, the Holocaust, and the post-war era. In postmodern thinking, the Second World War and the mass extermination of the Jews have often been seen as a watershed between modernity and postmodernity. These catastrophic events have “not fit any conventional framework” (van Alphen 1997: 53) and shattered the collective belief in conformity, truth, and harmonious integrity; the war thus marks a disruption between the pre-war and the post-war eras. By radically deviating from the more traditional modes of representation, the following chapters in *The Ice Cream Man* illustrate the insurmountable gap between reality and language, the fragmentation of language itself, and the repudiation of the so-called “master narratives” that used to be collectively shared (see Lyotard 1984).

The disruptive break between the Second World War and the post-war eras also marks the end of harmonious and coherently narrativised family histories. I argue that *The Ice Cream Man* elucidates this kind of postmodern approach in its following chapters, as disruptions and continuities between different eras and generations are manifested in and voiced through the curious lineage of the Vorszda family and their link to the film, a connection that is insinuated several times, yet is not made clear. Although the narrative establishes visible subject positions, uses the testimonial immediacy of the present tense, and produces a chronology for the Vorszda family line, it also questions, divides, and even denies some of these subject positions and their interrelations. Therefore, I contend that the family saga of the Vorszdas ought to be regarded as an allegory for history, collective memory, and intergenerational progress instead of an “actual” family chronicle.

Besides establishing a symbol of history and its influence on the present, the narrative simulates a traumatised mind, which generates overlapping and contradictory

narratives in order to come to terms with the past. Differently put, the incoherent chronicle of the Vorszdas reflects and models the director's traumatised consciousness, which resists coherent narrativisation and explicit representation. By dislocating these competing and contradictory versions from the physical reality of the storyworld and placing them in the traumatised mind of the director, the ontological and epistemological inconsistencies of the novel reinforce both the role of the film director and that of cinema with regard to the novelistic whole.

Disruptions manifest in the storyworld also resonate with the *failure* of disruption inherent in trauma: as the traumatic event in the past was not understood at the time it took place, it is impossible to achieve the necessary distance from it. Dominick LaCapra has remarked that, as regards the nature of trauma,

the notions of simple continuity or discontinuity are deceptive, for “continuity” involves not pure identity over time but some mode of repetition, and change is not a totally discrete process even in the extreme forms of trauma.

(1994: 174)

This observation pertains to Lipson's novel, not only in terms of trauma, but also in terms of history. According to van Alphen, “the ‘reality’ of history” (1997: 35) is essentially characterised by discontinuities. However, to follow LaCapra's line of thinking, those disruptions also entail a continuum of some kind. As we will see, the film serves as the binding link that connects and creates continuity, albeit in an erratic fashion, between the (traumatic) past and the present as well as between generations. This emerges in the way chapters three and four open with similar situations connecting them to previous chapters and to the film itself through repetition. It will be recalled that at the beginning of the novel Eva and Martin rehearsed an interrogation, which was later imagined by “Esther” in the film. Whereas in chapter one the investigative situation was literally an act, a conscious rehearsal in preparation for potential “real-life” situations, chapters three and four begin by actualising the oppressive act of interrogation. Here the narrative evokes a temporal distance, as these two narrative events are almost two decades apart. More important, they link the male characters, namely the movie director and Jan Vorszda, a member of the Vorszda family, with the film in an undefined and uncanny fashion. By perceptively, yet unequivocally connecting the characters via the film, “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” continues to serve as the indexical sign for meanings that are not, and cannot be, articulated in the narrative.

The analeptic indexicality of the film, which points to the past, is evident at the outset of chapter three, entitled “The Woman in the Cinema Stalls”,<sup>39</sup> as the secret police interrogate the director about the film. Initially, the police want to know about the director’s connection with a woman who has seen all the film’s screenings in the town of Olomouc: “Do you know this woman? [...] Look closely. We have reason to suspect she’s been looking for you” (*ICM*: 93).<sup>40</sup> By implying that perhaps the woman is “wrestling with the same question as we are” (*ICM*: 95),<sup>41</sup> the secret police reveal that in reality they are interested in the origin of the screenplay, a question to which the director responds by pointing to his head: “From in here” (*ICM*: 96).<sup>42</sup> Here the interrogation duplicates the nature of the narrative whole by impeding the reader’s immediate understanding of what is actually sought and being referred to. Besides evoking referential ambiguity, the questioning reinforces and further problematises the referential link between the film and the characters who inhabit the storyworld by suggesting several versions that might explain the connection between the two narrative levels.

Post-war Czechoslovakia is depicted in dark tones: all the social relations represented in chapter three signal threat and suppressed fear, and are characterised by surveillance and suspicion. The secret police show distrust of the director, perhaps not least because of his Jewish background and his implied experiences during the war, a matter which comes up during the interrogation:

‘You were in Terezín.’  
‘That’s correct.’

(*ICM*: 96)<sup>43</sup>

Similar to the casual fashion in which “Tomáš” referred to his appalling past in the previous chapter, this perfunctorily posed question and the curt answer function as a pivotal index for the reader to unravel the true identity of the mysterious ice cream man of Terezín, and hence the ultimate meanings of the narrative whole.<sup>44</sup> Thus,

<sup>39</sup>“Nainen katsomossa” in the original.

<sup>40</sup>“– Tunneteko tämän naisen? [...] Katsokaa nyt tarkemmin. Meillä on syytä epäillä että hän on hakeutunut teidän seuraanne” (*J*: 113).

<sup>41</sup>“–[...] [H]äntä vaivaa sama kysymys kuin meitä” (*J*: 115).

<sup>42</sup>“– Täältä” (*J*: 116).

<sup>43</sup>

– Te olitte Terezínissä.

– Pitää paikkansa. (*J*: 116)

<sup>44</sup>Already in the first chapter the narrative has referred ambiguously to the ethnic identity of

by frequently evoking epistemological questions related to the origin of the film, the narrative draws our attention to the ontological complexity of the novel.

Besides envisaging possible connections between the life of the director and the film, “the woman in the cinema stalls” also contributes to complicating the interrelations between the narrative levels. This would-be “Esther” problematises connections between diegetic characters inhabiting the storyworld, as the following chapters suggest that she is somehow related to the Vorszda family. As a woman who is tailed by the police because of her compulsive interest in “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín”, the would-be “Esther” also embodies the narrative role of the film. At the beginning of chapter three, the reader is told that the release of “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” has caused a frenzied upsurge among women who have strongly identified with “Esther’s” story. These women felt that the director has told their story, that is, their lived past, and all have claimed to be “the real Esther”, whose experiences have been transformed and remediated into a film.

The would-be “Esther” belongs among the film’s ardent enthusiasts. The strong identification felt by her and other women brings out interesting temporal issues and effects that remind us of the complex relations between past and present. On the level of the storyworld, “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” is an artistic and retrospective documentation of the past. At the same time, the film is part of the past world for which it stands as an index (see van Alphen 1997). Thus, the film serves as a site of intersection in which both collective and private memories of past events coincide. Owing to strong self-recognition, these women have not so much seen, as *re-lived* their past on a movie screen. As they re-experienced their past in the present, the immediate connection with their history makes the past merge with the present and thereby erases the temporal distance between the two.

Then again, to see the movie also means to comprehend the irrevocable loss of the past, which can be re-enacted only in a (technologically) mediated fashion. The obsessive way in which the female audience receives “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” transforms the film into a fetishised object, as the actual traces of the traumatic events on which the film is based have been erased and denied. Subsequently, the primary experiences of the actual past are replaced by the filmic artefact. In this way, the movie does not, after all, unite past and present, but only urges the viewer to feel

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“Tomáš”: “They don’t use the rabbit. Instead, they serve pork at Tomáš’s birthday party. Tomáš now has only two options: to eat the pork as if it were rabbit, or not to eat the pork at all. He has to choose between being a Jew and being a non-Jew” (*ICM*: 16). “Kania ei käytetä. Tomášin syntymäpäivillä syödäänkin sianlihaa. Tomášille ei jää nyt kuin kaksi vaihtoehtoa: syödä sianlihaa niin kuin kaninlihaa tai sitten Tomášin ei pitäisi syödä sianlihaa ollenkaan. Hän voi olla enää vain juutalainen tai ei-juutalainen” (*J*: 19).



the loss of the past in the time of “now” — a sense of unspoken loss which is shared by the novel’s main characters. This melancholy notion of an irretrievable absence of the past dominates the reception and discussion of the film in the novel; furthermore, it makes the movie an essential site of mourning and longing.

As if resonating with the structure of trauma as a failed encounter with reality and a subsequent lack of understanding, the film elicits awareness of the absence of indisputably assigned meanings in the novel. Thus, the discernible aura of unspokenness that characterised the filmic plane now echoes the way in which truth is suppressed and even rejected on the diegetic level. After hearing about the would-be “Esther” from the police, the director characterises her as a type who “ ‘comes here demanding answers about why she’s been left in the dark and asking what happens next’ ” (*ICM*: 94).<sup>45</sup> Significantly, this does not lead to genuine eagerness to know: on the contrary, “ ‘[h]er pain is so immense that she doesn’t believe in coincidence. She doesn’t demand evidence; in fact, she’s terrified of it. A lack of evidence is her only hope’ ” (*ICM*: 94).<sup>46</sup> By acknowledging the absence of verified epistemes of the past, the director highlights causal relationships between events. However, at the same time his comment underlines the way in which both the narrative and the characters refuse to locate and accurately construe meanings.

This is closely related to the way the would-be “Esther” embodies the continuation of the novel’s perplexing role play, the potential false appearances, as well as the pervasive narrative strategy of indexicality and referential ambiguity. During the first encounter between the director and would-be “Esther”, the dialogue conspicuously and deliberately obscures the characters’ true identities. Recall that the woman claims to be “Esther”, though not by name, of course:

‘No, it’s not my name—but it wasn’t her real name either.’

‘Whose?’

‘The woman in the film. Esther Vorszda was her assumed name; she was really someone else.’

‘Who then? Do you mean you?’

(*ICM*: 98)<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup>“-[...] Hän tulee tänne vaatimaan vastauksia siitä mikä on jäänyt hänelle hämäräksi ja kysymään mitä seuraavaksi tapahtuu” (*J*: 114).

<sup>46</sup>“-[...] Hänen kipunsa on niin suunnaton ettei hän usko sattumaan. Hän ei vaadi todisteita, hän jopa kammoaa niitä, todisteiden puute on hänen ainoa toivonsa” (*J*: 115).

<sup>47</sup>

– Ei, ei se ole minun nimeni... Mutta eihän se ollut hänenkään oikea nimensä.

– Kenen?

– Elokuvan naisen, Esther Vorszda oli hänen valenimensä, hänhän oli oikeasti joku muu.

– Kuka muu? Te vai? (*J*: 119–120)

The narrative further increases the difficulty in defining who the would-be “Esther” actually is when the director begins to suspect that she works for the secret police. Although she has previously claimed to have been threatened by “them”, meaning the authorities who want to know the whereabouts of her one-legged husband, the director quickly senses the artifice in her behaviour.<sup>48</sup>

Despite having realised her fraudulence, the director insists on seeing the woman the next day, as he wants to drive her into the countryside outside Olomouc. Their car trip marks a momentous return to the Moravian landscape, which the reader first encountered in the opening scene of the film and which binds narrative levels and sections. The spatial repetition of the familiar rural scenery is a site of memory that implies the significance of the past in the present, yet does not accurately define that significance. In the chapters that follow, this provincial setting evolves into a topographical nexus around which the narrative and the characters’ life histories revolve. By creating geographical intersections and convergences, this rustic locale is also a trajectory of temporality in which time and “history” itself are spatialised in the narrative; in effect, the novel shows a gradual inclination to refute linearity and replace it with circular, iterative, and intermittent movements in (narrative) space and time.

Notwithstanding the implied meaningfulness of the topographical connotations, the car trip is a true anti-climax: they drive in silence, and ultimately the anxious woman wants to return to Olomouc to her small son and crippled husband. The director, after returning to his hometown Prague, soon realises that the intelligence service is no longer bothering him, presumably because the police have confirmed that he does not pose a threat to the state. The chapter’s conclusion paves the way for a similarly oppressive and suspicious atmosphere in the next chapter.

### **Continuity between Generations Created through Film**

As mentioned above, the narration now takes a leap of two decades and concentrates on Jan Vorszda, a young university student in Prague and a character-narrator in chapter four. The chapter title, “Torch Number Zero”,<sup>49</sup> alludes to the historical context, namely the ghastly aftermath of the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia in 1968 known as Prague Spring. The title specifically refers to a university student called Jan Palach (1948–1969), who immolated himself in protest against

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<sup>48</sup>See *ICM*: 111, *J*: 134.

<sup>49</sup>“Soihtu numero Nolla” in the original.

the country's military occupation by Warsaw Pact troops; Palach referred to himself as "Torch No 1" in a public letter written before his act.<sup>50</sup> The beginning of the chapter invokes powerful associations with recent events, as Jan Vorszda is about to buy a canister from a department store, but ends up being questioned by the security staff, who want to know the reason for his purchase.

The narrative provides no explanation for its deviation from the director's story. This decisive break between chapters is symbolic not only in terms of temporal and narrative progression, but also in terms of the elementary trauma that lies beneath the discourse level. I argue that by deviating from its portrait of the director, the narrative continues to be structured according to a traumatised consciousness, that is, through acts of circumvention as well as through irrational and erratic modes of representation.

As for temporal disruptions related to chapter four, historical events in the years 1968–69 mark a dramatic break between the gradual emergence of liberalisation in the late 1960s and its unexpected interruption by the military invasion. Chapter four depicts a nation which has recently and collectively witnessed traumatic events, including acts of martyrdom and an unprecedented loss of hope for a better future. The recurring motifs of loss and mourning continue to mark the characters' lives. These melancholy feelings are closely associated with "The Ice Cream Man of Terežín", as Jan's personal history is illustrated via the film. Thus, the movie as an artefact creating continuity between mentally and experientially distant generations simultaneously provides a temporal continuum between the past, the present, and even the future.

Even though the narrative is more explicit than the film in its representation of the post-war generation to which Jan belongs, and though it describes this young generation as far more stable than the volatile war generation, which evaded precise meanings and stable identities, the narrative strategy of indexicality continues to define the somewhat restricted way in which the storyworld is portrayed. Similar

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<sup>50</sup>I find it worth mentioning that the chapter begins with a quotation from a Czechoslovakian film *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Loves of a Blonde* in English) directed by Miloš Forman and released in 1965. In the film the line "I do not have a girlfriend in Prague", is spoken by a male pianist to a young woman who is at the heart of the story. The woman works in a small-town factory. One evening she attends a local ball, which is full of soldiers. After having spent a night with the pianist whom she met at the dance, she decides to visit him in his hometown of Prague, which leads to a tragicomic outcome. The brief synopsis of Forman's film, which is widely regarded as one of the most important examples of the Czech New Wave film movement, involves elements found in Lipson's novel: boy (man) meets girl (woman), soldiers, the geographical axis between Prague and smaller towns, and so forth. In Lipson's novel, the quotation is manipulated so that the lines form a torch, creating a strong link to the chapter's story.

to the silence and secrecy that surrounded “Tomáš” in the film, Jan’s solemnity and reticence convey meanings for what remains unspoken on the narrative level. Furthermore, undeterred by the fact that Jan is an eye witness to the historical events taking place in Prague, the politically distressing situation requires him to discuss these periphrastically or via an indexical language. The reader also recognises indexicality in how “everyday items” (*ICM*: 120)<sup>51</sup> such as canisters have lost their “neutral” status and become indexes for potentially dangerous actions feared by the authorities.

In the course of Jan’s interrogation, the reader is given significant details about his background, which oddly connects him both with the mysterious would-be “Esther” and the “Esther” in the film: Jan is a university student whose parents — a mother who is a teacher fluent in five languages, and a father who lives on an invalid’s pension — live in Olomouc. At this point, the semantic integrity of the fictional world begins to falter radically due to the disconcerting similarities between the characters, both within and across narrative levels. Thus, unlike *The Understudy* in which the boundary demarcating the difference between the storyworld reality and the movie reality was exposed, yet never genuinely threatened, or *Point Omega*, which obscured, even though it did not explicitly violate, the contours of the storyworld reality and the reality of the embedded video, *The Ice Cream Man* disconcertingly and irrevocably erases the border between these two narrative domains.

The familial link between Jan and would-be “Esther” becomes even more evident if the reader recalls that in the previous chapter the woman mentioned her small son to the director. Although discussing the threats made by the authorities to her and her husband, who, according to her, is their real target of interest, the woman remarked,

‘Do you know what they told me?’ the woman continues. ‘If my son tries to leave the country when he comes of age, there won’t be a single barrier at the border he can’t pass through. There is a notice on the wall of every border hut that reads: Jan Vorszda has a permit to travel abroad.’

(*ICM*: 104)<sup>52</sup>

Thus, the foretelling becomes retrospectively a “proleptic” index (van Alphen 1997: 139), which presages Jan’s future — the Jan whose semantic connection to “Jan

<sup>51</sup> “[T]avallisia käyttöesineitä” (*J*: 145).

<sup>52</sup> “– Tiedättekö mitä he sanoivat minulle? nainen jatkaa. – Jos minun poikani yrittää lähteä maasta kun tulee täysi-ikäiseksi, ei rajalla ole yhtäkään tullipuomia joka ei nousisi hänen tieltään. Jokaisen kopin seinällä lukee: Jan Vorszdalla on matkustuslupa ulkomaille” (*J*: 126).

Vorszda” mentioned in the previous chapter seems rationally impossible.

Besides obscuring the coherence of the storyworld in retrospect, would-be “Es-ther’s” premonition complicates temporal and spatial issues in the narrative. Similar to postmodern historical fiction in general, *The Ice Cream Man* “spatialises” history by making it appear paratactic and simultaneous (see Elias 2001: 29). By virtue of this act of spatialisation, narratives of this kind manifest the impossibility of reconstructing past events and attaining objective accounts of history through “totalizing narrative structures” (Hutcheon 1988: 166). History is not seen as something fixed, stable, and effortlessly describable in words; instead, history emerges through human existence, experience, and thoughts.

In Jan’s story, his embittered and unloving mother embodies the increasingly metafictional nature of the storyworld. As if resonating with the characterisation in *The Understudy*, Jan describes his mother in tones that are somber and sarcastic: she is a woman who “walks across the room the way women walk in films from the ’50s” (*ICM*: 123).<sup>53</sup> Besides more subtle connotations of film acting, Jan sees his mother’s overall demeanour as utterly pretentious and performative, as “[a]ll images relating to my mother are somehow linked to performing” (*ICM*: 148).<sup>54</sup> The artifice that defines the mother’s essential characteristics in Jan’s eyes subsequently determines the reader’s understanding of her.

Apart from underlining the disruption of the ontologically congruent and intelligible storyworld, Jan’s mother exemplifies deficiencies that characterise the storyworld in general, namely incompleteness, lack, and an absence of the “real”. These factors determine the social dynamics between Jan and his mother, as “she doesn’t dare to love me as much as she ought to” (*ICM*: 134).<sup>55</sup> Her inability to show affection results in a secret sorrow shared by mother and son alike.

The reason for this inability appears to be somehow related to the private drama depicted in “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín”. Jan reminisces that, as a child, “[t]here was one film we went to see as many times as there were screenings” (*ICM*: 138).<sup>56</sup> The scenes “imprinted” (*ICM*: 139)<sup>57</sup> on Jan’s mind are identical to those presented in chapter two, as readers may have deduced for themselves.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the infant Jan’s inability to comprehend the film echoes and duplicates the reader’s confusion

<sup>53</sup>“Äiti kävelee huoneen poikki, naiset kävelevät niin viisikymmentäluvun elokuvissa” (*J*: 148).

<sup>54</sup>“Kaikki äitiin liittyvät mielikuvat liittyvät jotenkin esittämiseen” (*J*: 177).

<sup>55</sup>“[H]än [ei] uskalla rakastaa minua niin paljon kuin pitäisi” (*J*: 160).

<sup>56</sup>“Yhtä elokuvaa menimme katsomaan niin monta kertaa kuin siitä riitti näytäntöjä” (*J*: 164).

<sup>57</sup>“[T]atuoi” (*J*: 165).

<sup>58</sup>See *ICM*: 138, *J*: 165.

in reading the chapter.<sup>59</sup> Jan's puzzlement over the "coincidence and overlap" (*ICM*: 139)<sup>60</sup> of the male characters and the drama of the film that has "no resolution" (*ICM*: 140)<sup>61</sup> mirrors the postmodern structure of the novel and the indeterminacy the reader encounters in reading it.

Although Jan sarcastically mocks his mother's strong identification with the film story,<sup>62</sup> he subtly embeds her in the film: "The first [man] carries suitcases with my mother [...], and stands there in the background in the final scene, when the second man appears in the frame" (*ICM*: 140).<sup>63</sup> In this way the reader learns about the termination of the film. The significance of the triangular set up in the final scene is later stressed in the narrative, as Jan relates the quarrels he has overheard between his mother and his crippled father, who, according to her, is not Jan's real father.<sup>64</sup> By implying that Jan has been a product of the war in a way that resonates with the ending of "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín", the film turns out to be an indexical fragment pointing to and serving as a trace of Jan's personal history.

In terms of intergenerational progression, the film stands for the painful experiences of the war, which affected not only the generation that went through the horror, but also the following generations whose lives are marked by that same past. Thus, the film conveys the memory of the war generation to the next, "postmemorial" generation, the cohort born after the war. According to Marianne Hirsch, postmemory is "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (1997: 22). This calls for distinctive temporal and spatial consequences, as postmemorial documents "affirm the past's existence", and simultaneously "signal its unbridgeable distance" (*ibid.*: 23) with regard to the present. Although Lipson's novel stresses in various ways not only the gap between the survivor generation and their progeny, but also the irrevocable loss of the past, the film connotes the presence of the past in present life for both generations. By linking otherwise distant generations, the film engenders cohesive continuity of some sort.

Thus far, I have claimed that, for Jan, "The Ice Cream Man of Terezín" embodies

<sup>59</sup>See *ICM*: 138, *J*: 165.

<sup>60</sup>"[S]amanaikaisuutta ja päällekkäisyyttä" (*J*: 166).

<sup>61</sup>"Mitään ratkaisua ei ole" (*J*: 167).

<sup>62</sup>See *ICM*: 139, *J*: 166.

<sup>63</sup>Contrary to the present tense of the translation, the original used past tense: "Ensimmäinen [mies] kantoi äidin kanssa matkalaukkuja [...] ja seisoo pelkkänä statistina loppukohtauksessa kun toinen mies on ilmestynyt kuvaan mukaan" (*J*: 166). [The first [man] had carried the suitcases with mother and is standing in the background in the final scene when the other man has entered the frame.]

<sup>64</sup>See *ICM*: 152, *J*: 181.

an artistic relic of the past through which he is able to reconstruct and understand his own past and that of his parents. Unsurprisingly, this is not explicitly demonstrated in the novel. Instead, Jan's process of identification is implied, between the lines, in the narrative's relentless refusal to assign definite meanings. Akin to the silence that indicated unspoken truths on the embedded level of the film, Jan's gloomy childhood is imbued with noticeable quietude, suppressed arguments, and partially declared secrets that revolve around the hidden meanings of the family genealogy.

Ultimately, the bitter silence is inscribed and materialised in the form of a house on the hill, a house which Jan's mother has not visited for twenty years and where she now wants to travel with her son. The significance of the house resurfaces again when the mother attempts to encounter a physical "site of memory" (Rothberg 2000: 197) from her past, only to acknowledge that all material evidence of that past is irretrievably gone. Jan, for his part, has not seen the house before, although he has "heard about it through walls, late at night, at the end of nasty arguments" (*ICM*: 150).<sup>65</sup> Up to now, the house has symbolised a "great silence" (*ICM*: 150),<sup>66</sup> which has "implacably" (*ICM*: 150)<sup>67</sup> concluded nocturnal disputes between the parents. At this point, the house evolves into a phenomenal and concrete "space of [...] post-memory" (Hirsch 1997: 226), which fleshes out the obscure past, even if that past remains distant and unknown.

Besides these modes of silence, which emanate from personal anguish on the diegetic level and the level of the film, the narrative also reflects silence in terms of collective witnessing. This takes place at Jan Palach's funeral, a historical event that, in a sense, brought the nation together and symbolised the silent, yet visible dissent of shocked citizens concerned about their future. Tellingly, the introverted Jan decides not to attend the funeral. Despite Jan's apathy on this historic day, it still marks, as he puts it, "the day I finally broke away from everything" (*ICM*: 145).<sup>68</sup> Jan's quizzical remark is explained at the chapter's conclusion, as Jan's note to his mother reveals that he has fled the country. By abandoning Czechoslovakia, Jan fulfills the prophecy foretold by would-be "Esther" in the previous chapter.

Previously, I remarked that the proleptic index, which presaged the future life of an infant, created perplexity in terms of the relations between characters. While it compromises the integrity of individual characters, the prophecy emphasises the idea of history and temporality as circular. At this point, the actualised foreboding

<sup>65</sup>"[O]len kuullut siitä seinien läpi, myöhään iltaisin, lihavienväriksi" (*J*: 178–179).

<sup>66</sup>"[S]uureen hiljaisuuteen" (*J*: 179).

<sup>67</sup>"[V]astaansanomattomalla tavalla" (*J*: 179).

<sup>68</sup>"Sinä päivänä minä sanouduin lopullisesti irti kaikesta" (*J*: 173).

engenders connotations of the suppression imposed by the controlling nation. In talking with the director, the would-be “Esther” has mentioned that the intelligence service “has written up a complete report on him; they’re just waiting for a date” (*ICM*: 104).<sup>69</sup> By prophesying a future event in Jan’s life and suggesting that his fate has been preordained by the state, the narrative illustrates the power of totalitarian regimes to regulate the lives of their citizens by enforcing silence.

In the case of Lipson’s novel, this kind of restricting activity is closely associated with the nation’s attempt to create a fictitious reality in order to deny the recent atrocities that stain the present. The implied need to repudiate historical events is also closely linked to the novel’s narrative strategy of having the characters relate their lives by means of indirect indexes, vaguely pointing to what remains unstated. The implications of the state’s repressive role also explains the postmodern overlappings between the characters: the fluctuating subject positions produced in the narrative allegorise the existential conditions of people living in that era, as the incompleteness of the characters illustrates the impossibility of living a full life free of both institutional restraints and the horrors of the collective past.

The symbolic deficiency is literally embodied in the lack of a limb, a feature shared by several of the novel’s male characters. This physical defect symbolises the losses that took place during the war. As an index marking the past and determining life’s future prospects, the corporeal imperfection reflects mental and existential deficiencies experienced in the present — deficiencies that develop into a desire to fill that lack and shown in the following chapters. Then again, the fragmentariness of the characters and their depiction also symbolises life itself: contrary to the wholeness and continuity that typically characterise human experience from the individual’s perspective, we perceive other people only in fragments and in passing (see Kantokorpi 2012).

Apart from eliciting allegorical and symbolic indications of loss and lack, which represent historical circumstances and are essential to human existence, Jan’s farewell letter to his mother primarily manifests private and physical loss, and, in particular, a permanent absence that marks the Vorszda family, which is separated for good. Intriguingly, we also find a crucial manifestation of indexicality in the letter: Jan remarks that his mother ought to “*hope never to hear from me again*” (*ICM*: 156; emphasis original),<sup>70</sup> as silence confirms that nothing “*bad has happened*” (*ICM*: 156;

<sup>69</sup>“[...] [O]n kirjoittanut pojasta valmiiksi lausunnon, se odottaa vain päivämäärää” (*J*: 127).

<sup>70</sup>“[E]t saa toivoa että kuulet minusta enää ollenkaan” (*J*: 187).



emphasis original).<sup>71</sup> Thus, reticence signals an ongoing existence abroad, and paradoxically becomes a positive symbol. Due to this reciprocal loss, the fear experienced by the mother — and simultaneously the fear in general that has prevailed throughout the first four chapters of the novel — “has finally turned to sorrow” (*ICM*: 156).<sup>72</sup> This resonates with the emotive turn that takes place in the novel. From this point on, the characters do not have to fear for their lives. The fear emanating from historical events is replaced by an undefined and unspoken melancholy, a somber ambience dominating the novel’s final parts.

At the same time, the role of “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” diminishes on the narrative level. However, the cinema as such turns out to be increasingly crucial in the concluding chapters, for several reasons. In the next section, I concentrate on the primary reason for the eventual augmentation of the filmic mode, and specifically the way the referential nature of language, which connects experiencing subject positions and the world, is radically problematised. We will see that the decline in linguistic communication and comprehension leads the characters to more corporeal endeavours to relate to their surroundings as well as to their past.

## **Towards a Corporeal Encounter with the Past**

Jan’s audacious attempt to cross the border marks a decisive shift not only in his life, but also in terms of narration, as the novel underscores the breach between his past in Czechoslovakia and his present (and future) life as a migrant by introducing a multivocal narrative voice in chapter five. The collective voice belongs to a group of Swedish female students Jan encounters on a car ferry heading for Sweden: “The first thing we notice is how pale he is [...]. He’s not from around here. You can tell from the way he’s looking over the rail” (*ICM*: 157).<sup>73</sup> The new narrative mode reinforces Jan’s sense of alienation, and his objectification is similarly attuned to the narrative shift. The female and exterior perspective on a new phase in Jan’s life emphasises his position as a foreigner who appears highly exotic to Western girls. Along with being deprived of his individual voice, Jan loses his human individuality in general at the hands of the narrators: the girls decide “to take him to Kerstin” (*ICM*: 157),<sup>74</sup> their temperamental and strong-willed friend who has been “frothing at the mouth

<sup>71</sup> “[Mitään] *pahaa* [ei ole] *sattunut*” (*J*: 187).

<sup>72</sup> “[P]elkoon joka on viimein vaihtunut suruksi” (*J*: 187).

<sup>73</sup> “Me huomataan ensiksi miten kalpea se on [...]. Se ei ole täältäpäin. Sen näkee siitä miten se katsoo laidan yli” (*J*: 191).

<sup>74</sup> “[V]iedään se Kerstinille” (*J*: 191).

about Prague since last August”(ICM: 160)<sup>75</sup> and who will, to her surprise, soon find “Prague” “in her bed” (ICM: 160).<sup>76</sup> Thus, Jan is objectified and transformed into a carnal metonymy or an index of his home country and its political tensions, which fascinate the girls.

At this point the narrative draws the reader’s attention to the relationship between history, experience, and language in new ways. Up until now, the novel has emphasised the failure of language chiefly in terms of referentiality and narrativity. As regards referentiality, Lipson’s novel has accentuated that, owing to its essentially indirect and mediated nature, linguistic representation is always impaired as opposed to the experiential richness of the event *per se*. With regard to narrativity, thus far the narrative has revealed difficulties in articulating and relating the painful past or present. In the subsequent chapters the gap between language and experience is identified as a lack of linguistic fluency. This is seen at the beginning of chapter five in the form of communication problems between Jan and the Swedish girls, as they have mutual difficulty understanding each other: “He doesn’t understand anything. We speak Swedish, English, German, and French, but he speaks only his own language” (ICM: 158).<sup>77</sup> Linguistic shortcomings are further elaborated in the following chapters, as Jan’s daughter Gunilla regrets not having learnt Czech, her father’s mother tongue. Owing to the lack of a shared language among the characters, understanding and communication are now radically problematised in the storyworld.

Besides communication failures, the representational capacity of language highlights both ideological and psychological aspects of linguistic use and “abuse” (Hutcheon 1988: 20). The polyphonic narration in chapter five underlines ideological dimensions of linguistic usage, as it emphasises the performative power and richness of language to produce, fabricate, alter, contest, and even renounce subject positions and their lived past. Previously, we saw implications of an inclination to modify past events in present acts of telling, as in the case of Riefenstahl’s quotation which opens the novel, or the report on would-be “Esther’s” son. By displacing Jan from his narrative position, the story reminds us that representing and understanding subject positions and history are always conditioned by prevailing discursive practices (see Hutcheon 1988: 157).

The reader also finds these themes in chapter five, as the shift in narrative draws

<sup>75</sup>“Se on vaahdonnut viime elokuusta saakka Prahasta” (J: 194).

<sup>76</sup>“[Y]htäkkiä Praha löytyy sen sängystä” (J: 194).

<sup>77</sup>“Se ei ymmärrä mitään. Me puhutaan ruotsia, englantia, saksaa ja ranskaa mutta se puhuu vain omaansa” (J: 192).

attention to Jan's temporary loss of the ability to be heard and understood, to be a sovereign subject in his own right, whose position is constituted in the narrative through speech. Even after having learnt the language, Jan remains a foreigner whose actual past is ignored and replaced by versions that illuminate the historical perspective of others. Therefore, besides asking how subjective experiences can be expressed through language, the ensuing chapters emphasise the question of *whose* story is told and how.

In the next three chapters, the narrative role of cinema diminishes conspicuously. However, the problematisation of language implicitly gives rise to the significance of visual epistemes. In the course of these chapters, verbal communication and meaning-making through language are replaced by visible and even tactile forms of understanding, such as corporeal encounters between characters. These optical and material forms of interaction and communication pave the way for the return to moving images in the novel's final chapters.

As in the previous chapter — and like other male characters depicted earlier — Jan is portrayed throughout chapter five in terms of absence, silence, and reticence. His passivity is physical, linguistic, and mental, as he “sits motionless so as not to violate anyone's airspace” (*ICM*: 169).<sup>78</sup> Although he tries to become almost invisible, the narrative revolves around him, as the girls attempt to get to know him and to familiarise him with his new home country. Naturally, Jan has to learn the language. While visiting a supermarket with Kerstin, Jan is told that the Swedish word for “ice cream”, *zmrzlina* in Czech, is *glass*.<sup>79</sup> The intratextual clue that reverberates throughout the entire novel is reinforced when the word recurs in chapter seven, where the narrative focuses on Gunilla's visit to Olomouc: “the first Czech word Gunilla learns is *zmrzlina*. Ice cream” (*ICM*: 200; emphasis original).<sup>80</sup> With the help of vocabulary, the narrative creates associative links to other parts of the novel.

Along with interconnecting the discrete narrative sections through linguistic motifs, language itself represents a trace of the past life and identity which Jan has left behind. However, this “leaving behind” has been more physical than mental. Jan's silence and persistent melancholy signify his inability to reconcile his losses: “he always has the same sorrowful expression” (*ICM*: 161).<sup>81</sup> His present life is tarnished by the lost past, seen, for example, in his sullen reaction to the girls' decision to paint his car in exuberant colours. The girls do not understand that the car is in fact

<sup>78</sup>“Jan istuu tuolillaan liikahtamatta ettei loukkaisi kenenkään ilmatilaa” (*J*: 204).

<sup>79</sup>See *ICM*: 168, *J*: 203.

<sup>80</sup>“[E]nsimmäinen tšekinkielinen sana jonka Gunilla oppii on *zrmrzlina* [sic]. Jäätelöä” (*J*: 244).

<sup>81</sup>“[S]e on aina vaan yhtä surullisen näköinen” (*J*: 195).

“*[m]ammas bil*” (*ICM*: 161; emphasis original),<sup>82</sup> that is, “*Mom’s car*” (*ICM*: 161; emphasis original),<sup>83</sup> which functions as an index for the mother herself. In chapter three, in discussing her son’s future, the would-be “Esther” remarks that, because the nation does not seem to need her son, “‘[i]t’s the sort of country the boy just wants to forget’” (*ICM*: 105).<sup>84</sup> This may be true, but active forgetting is impossible. Paradoxically, awareness of forgetting amounts to the *impossibility* of forgetting.

As for the accuracy of would-be “Esther’s” prophecy in chapter three, Jan’s life in Sweden fulfills it to an astonishing degree. In terms of love affairs, for example, the forecast comes painfully true:

‘And then, right there, completely the wrong kind of girl, one of those overwhelming sorts, will fall in love with him for completely the wrong reasons. The sort of girl who believes in the power of paradoxes, like the two of them having a unique connection simply because they can’t understand a word of each other’s language.’

(*ICM*: 105)<sup>85</sup>

The stubborn and moody Kerstin is precisely the “wrong kind of girl”, certain that she has a special connection with Jan, a belief mockingly questioned by the other girls: “‘Hey, Kerstin, how d’you know he’s so clever and wise when he doesn’t know how to say anything?’” (*ICM*: 164).<sup>86</sup> Before long, as foretold by the would-be “Esther”, Jan “‘learns the girl’s language’” (*ICM*: 105).<sup>87</sup> This, however, does not take their relationship to a new plane. Instead, the reader is told that they will eventually break up after having a child together.

The narrative implies that as soon as the unique connection beyond linguistic constraints has been broken and Jan has constructed a new and firmer identity through language, he ceases to be an unfathomable embodiment of Prague and its political turmoil. Ironically, the novel thereby suggests that communicative amelioration and mutual understanding result in the couple’s divorce. In this respect too language fails. The narrative reinforces the symbolic significance of Jan’s command of

<sup>82</sup>“– *Mammas bil*” (*J*: 196).

<sup>83</sup>“–[...] [*Ä*]idin auto”(*J*: 196).

<sup>84</sup>“–[...] Sellaisen maan poika haluaa vain unohtaa” (*J*: 128).

<sup>85</sup>“– Ja juuri siksi siellä jossain aivan vääränlainen tyttö, sellainen ylivoimainen, rakastuu häneen aivan vääristä syistä. Sellainen tyttö joka uskoo paradoksien voimaan niin kuin esimerkiksi siihen, että he saavat toisiinsa ainutlaatuisen yhteyden juuri siksi etteivät ymmärrä sanaakaan toistensa kieltä” (*J*: 127–128).

<sup>86</sup>“– Hei Kerstin, mistä sinä tiedät että se on niin viisas ja fiksu kun se ei osaa puhua mitään?” (*J*: 199).

<sup>87</sup>“–[...] [*O*]ppii tytön kielen” (*J*: 128).

Swedish by making him the narrator of chapter six, which restores his position as an autonomous and sovereign character-narrator. Here the narrative takes a leap of two decades and presents a new generation of the Vorszda family, as Jan and Kerstin's daughter Gunilla brings the separated parents together.

At the beginning of chapter six, Jan contacts Kerstin to share his suspicion that Gunilla has secretly travelled to Olomouc, Jan's hometown. Gunilla is supposed to be travelling by train across Europe with a friend, but a peculiar telephone conversation with her has made Jan certain that instead of going to Italy, she has gone to Czechoslovakia, where the communist regime has recently collapsed. By placing Gunilla in democratised Czechoslovakia, the narrative brings out issues related to breaches and continuities between the past and the present, as well as between generations. Gunilla's trip to her father's home country comes at a crucial moment in the history of the nation. It also gives rise to similarities between discrete eras, as the new generations have now obtained the liberty taken away from the post-war generation in the late 1960s.

Jan himself confirms his reluctance to confront the past. While talking over the phone, Gunilla attempts to trigger her father's memories of savory treats by asking: "Dad, do you remember what Czech beer tastes like?" (*ICM*: 196).<sup>88</sup> Jan, however, rejects nostalgic evocations of the past by referring to the break between generations: "That's something you can't understand" (*ICM*: 197).<sup>89</sup> Besides his avoidance of the past, Jan also avoids revealing his present life in Sweden. Instead, his narration is charged with unconfirmed possibilities and ideas of what other people might think about his life, as in the following passage in which Kerstin visits his new apartment for the first time: "Kerstin looks for something to drink. She finds nothing. She has always despised men who start drinking once they are on their own, so at least I do not appear to be one of them" (*ICM*: 193).<sup>90</sup> By accentuating the multiplicity of perspectives and truths, the narrative continues to employ the referential ambiguity familiar from previous chapters.

Awkward reminiscences about the past are distinctly apparent in a get-together hosted by Eva, an ex-wife of Kerstin's new husband, Stefan. During the party, which has been arranged for the divorced couples, Stefan's banal commiserations with Jan illustrate the disparity between the two men and their relation to the recent past:

<sup>88</sup> "[...] Isä, muistatko miltä tšekkiläinen olut maistuu?" (*J*: 237).

<sup>89</sup> "Tyttö pieni, sinä et voi ymmärtää" (*J*: 237).

<sup>90</sup> "Kerstin etsii juotavaa. Mitään ei löydy. Hän on aina halveksinut miehiä jotka alkavat juoda jäätyään yksin, ainakaan minä en näytä kuuluvan heihin" (*J*: 233).

“We were absolutely caught up in the spirit of things here in ’68...” (ICM: 181).<sup>91</sup> The distance between “the space of experience” of the two men is further accentuated, when Stefan cannot remember Jan Palach’s name: “‘Remind me what his name was...’” (ICM: 181).<sup>92</sup> The casual tone in which Stefan discusses historical figures irritates Jan:

I don’t know what it is that starts to repulse me: the fact that a stockbroker is searching for his name with positive stress caressing him right to the tip of his tongue, or the fact that his name has been forgotten, like that of some exotic black-winged butterfly.

(ICM: 182)<sup>93</sup>

While blithely chattering on historical events that are, for him, experientially and emotionally distant, Stefan unintentionally repudiates their meaning as a crucial constituent of Jan’s identity. By displacing actual historical events to the discursive context of small talk, Stefan defines the restrictive limits within which the past is allowed to be discussed (cf. Hutcheon 1988: 120–121).

Kerstin, for her part, illustrates the power of language by manufacturing alternative versions of her ex-husband’s past, giving ambiguous accounts of Jan’s encounter with his namesake: “‘Jan saw Jan—Palach, that is,’ Kerstin clarifies. ‘Once. *Maybe*’” (ICM: 182; emphasis original).<sup>94</sup> The way the malevolent Kerstin mockingly portrays Jan’s past accentuates that Jan himself remains silent about the past and does not assert his subjectivity himself. In Kerstin’s acerbic parlance, Jan’s previous experiences are radically contested, condensed, and mutilated into a disfigured anecdote: “‘So Jan became Torch Number Zero. Vorszda, that is. End of story’” (ICM: 184).<sup>95</sup> In a similar fashion, Kerstin later discloses her sexual fantasies about Jan and hence transforms him into an object of various and contradictory adaptations: “‘In one version, Jan is already cold and pale and his lips have turned blue’” (ICM: 189).<sup>96</sup> Kerstin’s carnal fantasies also explain the chapter title, “Necrophilia”.<sup>97</sup> A more allegorical consideration of the title and Kerstin’s reveries suggests that this morbid desire is associated with a general longing for the past, which dominates the narrative. The

<sup>91</sup>“–[...] Me olimme täällä kovasti hengessä mukana silloin kuusikymmentäkahdeksan...” (J: 220).

<sup>92</sup>“–[...] [S]ano nyt mikä sen nimi oli...” (J: 221).

<sup>93</sup>“En tiedä mikä minua alkaa etoa, sekö että pörssimeklari etsii hänen nimeään positiivisen stressin hellimän kielensä päähän vai se että hänen nimensä on unohtettu kuin jonkin eksoottisen mustasiipisen perhosen” (J: 221).

<sup>94</sup>“–[...] Jan näki Janin, siis Palachin, Kerstin tarkentaa. – Kerran. *Ehkä*” (J: 222).

<sup>95</sup>“–[...] Niin Janista tuli soihtu numero Nolla. Siis Vorszdasta. Sen pituinen se” (J: 223).

<sup>96</sup>“– Yhdessä versiossa Jan on jo kylmä ja kalpea ja huulet sinertyneet”(J: 229).

<sup>97</sup>“Nekrofilia” in the original.

yearning for something lost is also evident in Stefan's comment about how Kerstin misses the Slavic accent Jan used to have, " 'the melody from the early days' " (*ICM*: 180).<sup>98</sup> Thus, Jan's phonetic development signifies a process of his gradual abrogation of traces of the past, and simultaneously widens the abyss between their marital life and their present circumstances.

As we have seen, however, the past and the present are not entirely disconnected. Gunilla's unexpected expedition to Czechoslovakia compels Jan to enter into memories of the Soviet-led invasion:

Suddenly I have no difficulty at all imagining what sort of photos Gunilla might have taken in Olomouc. They would look as dull and poor as if she had just pointed her camera around at random, shooting into the air. Perhaps I remember only too well how the Russians used to shoot into the air. They would aim carefully over our heads as a warning.

(*ICM*: 176–177)<sup>99</sup>

The triggered recollections stand for an experiential chasm that separates the father who lived through the post-war era and the daughter who had no immediate involvement with the historical events. Nevertheless, both are haunted by "postmemorial" traces of the life of predecessors, which creates continuity between the generations. Whereas Jan inherited the bitter silence that indexically pointed to the war experiences of his parents, Gunilla is haunted by a semantic void that marks the past of a father who adamantly keeps his distance from it.

Thus far, various characters in Lipson's novel have tried to escape from or hide their past selves, either physically by travelling to other places and/or mentally by means of adopted identities. When in chapter seven the narration shifts its focus to Gunilla and her stay in Olomouc, she appears to implement similar processes to explore her paternal roots and the unknown elements of her identity. In the course of this chapter, Gunilla sets out in search of a lost past through impersonation, as she immerses herself in the life of a female tenant who previously inhabited the room she is now renting. The room itself is pivotal in many ways. The novel highlights its semantic significance with the help of the chapter's title, "The Room in Olomouc",<sup>100</sup> and an enigmatic motto: "*Once you've stepped inside, you'll never get out again*" (*ICM*:

<sup>98</sup>"[...] [S]itä alkuaikojen nuottia" (*J*: 219).

<sup>99</sup>"Minun ei ole yhtäkkinä ollenkaan vaikea kuvitella millaisia kuvia Gunilla ottaisi Olomoucista. Ne näyttäisivät juuri niin tylsiltä ja huonoilta kuin tyttö olisi kuvannut aivan summamutikassa, niin kuin ammuttaisiin ilmaan. Ehkä muistan vain liian hyvin miten venäläiset ampuivat ilmaan. He ampuivat tarkkaan päiden yläpuolelle ja siksi ne olivat varoituksia" (*J*: 215).

<sup>100</sup>"Huone Olomoucissa" in the original.

199; emphasis original).<sup>101</sup> The enclosed space of the room serves as a new topographical locus in which past and present — both imagined and truly lived — intersect, as Gunilla attempts to redefine the relationship between past and present through her curious role play.

The town of Olomouc itself creates repetitive circularity, as Gunilla's arrival in the hometown of her ancestors signifies that the narrative has come full circle. Simultaneously, the return is both a mental and a physical return to history and memories of the past. Throughout the chapter the reader is reminded of previous generations, the lost and unknown histories of those predecessors who converge on the present indirectly and unconsciously. For Gunilla, Olomouc appears to be a place that is noticeably out-of-date, a semi-urban milieu which dates back at least two decades. The experience of spatial anachronism takes Gunilla back in time, almost to an era when her father was as young as she is now. Drawn to her father's past, Gunilla "re-enacts" the past in imaginative mimicry by role-playing Milena, a simple-minded "country girl" (*ICM*: 202).<sup>102</sup>

Significantly, Gunilla's initial encounter with Milena's story takes place through letters, that is, through written language. Gunilla's landlady complains that one of the soldiers, "some poor beggar by the name of Petr" (*ICM*: 202),<sup>103</sup> who visited Milena while she was living in the apartment, "sends [her] a letter nearly every day" (*ICM*: 202).<sup>104</sup> Judging from the continuous flow of letters and the fact that Milena has not inquired whether she has received letters from Petr, the girl appears rather indifferent to the poor fellow. In my reading, Gunilla's interest in Milena and Petr's sad love story emanates from lack and longing. The craving and absence inscribed in the mailed and unopened letters signify the crucial interaction between language, loss, and mourning that recurs throughout the narrative.

Gunilla's futile attempts to interpret the content of the letters reveal her personal ineptitude in the Czech language and, subsequently, in the clandestine family history. In the previous chapter, Gunilla berated her father for not teaching her Czech: "It's your fault. It's because of you I don't understand anything" (*ICM*: 197).<sup>105</sup> As Gunilla begins to open Petr's letters addressed to Milena, "it begins to hurt, the incomprehensibility of the language, because it contains everything Gunilla thinks she has been left without; above all, her father's mistake, which was made for purely

<sup>101</sup>"Kun olet astunut sisään, et pääse enää ulos" (*J*: 241).

<sup>102</sup>"[M]aalaistyttö" (*J*: 247).

<sup>103</sup>"[J]oku Petr-niminen rassu" (*J*: 246).

<sup>104</sup>"[L]ähettää kirjeitä Milenalle melkein joka päivä" (*J*: 246–247).

<sup>105</sup>"– Se on sinun syysi. Sinun takiasi minä en ymmärrä mitään" (*J*: 237).



emotional reasons.” (*ICM*: 206)<sup>106</sup> Through her mail theft, Gunilla is able to process her private sorrows by concentrating on and emulating the suffering of others.

I claim that Gunilla’s decision to immerse herself in the story of Milena and Petr manifests her attempt to fill the mental abyss between herself and her father with an act of displacement. Since Gunilla is not able to bridge that gap directly and thereby gain access to obscure details about her past, she substitutes her private genealogical venture in the pursuit of re-establishing another link between two individuals who have lost each other. In the course of the chapter, Gunilla begins to find potential candidates for Petr amongst the soldiers swarming through the streets of Olomouc. In her eyes, only the lonely and silent ones could possibly be the heartbroken Petr. As if resonating with the melancholy secrecy of “Tomáš” and her own father, which involved traces of the importance of what is left unsaid, the soldier “who is silent and motionless stands out from the rest precisely because of his motionlessness, as if to affirm his existence” (*ICM*: 205).<sup>107</sup> Silence and absence continue to signal indexically what is lost, craved, and hence meaningful both in the storyworld and on a narrative level.

Besides the aesthetics of indexicality familiar from previous parts of the novel, Gunilla’s behaviour duplicates the practice of adopting new identities and complex role play, which readers encounter especially in the first chapters. This is seen clearly in a passage in which Gunilla visits a canteen: the place itself is an intratextual and topographical echo of previous depictions of Jan’s university years in Prague. Gunilla’s action is characterised by delusional pretence, as she wants to believe that a certain gloomy-looking soldier is Petr. Even more perplexingly, she engages in a multiplied artifice: she tries to believe that she herself is Milena and convince herself that others will believe that too, despite her linguistic inability and ethnic difference from the local girls.

As she begins to emulate the lost and longed-for Milena, Gunilla’s project is transformed into a more profound and corporeal experiment: “Milena’s dresses are difficult to imitate because they were made out of old curtains due to her lack of money” (*ICM*: 213).<sup>108</sup> Gunilla’s search for her origins has been converted into a bodily act, as she seems to interact corporeally with the imagined past. For her, Milena is

<sup>106</sup> “[J]uuri se alkaakin tehdä kipeää, kielen käsittämättömyys, koska siihen sisältyy kaikkea mistä Gunilla ajattelee jääneensä paitsi ja ennen kaikkea isän virhe, joka on tehty puhtaasti tunneperäisistä syistä” (*J*: 251).

<sup>107</sup> “[S]e joka on hiljaa ja liikkumatta, erottuu muiden joukosta juuri liikkumattomuutensa vuoksi, kuin olemassaolonsa vahvistaneena” (*J*: 250).

<sup>108</sup> “Milenan mekkoja on hankala jäljitellä, koska ne on rahapulan takia ommeltu vanhoista verhoista” (*J*: 259).

the absent Other, an abject that correlates with the disconnection from her ancestry. Along with the mimetic performance, a simulation that replaces the real origin of her grief, Gunilla's attempts to approach the past through self-estrangement and impersonation can also be seen as a form of indexicality: by mimicking a girl who stands for the past that Gunilla seeks, she creates an invented contingency that not only points to the desired past, but also seems to give her physical and direct access to that unknown time.

At this point, the coherence of Gunilla as a character begins to disintegrate for good. Furthermore, Gunilla's perplexing and fanatical role playing embodies the decline in linguistic communication which has taken place towards the end of the novel. It is true that linguistic barriers between Gunilla and the local people are symbolically breached at the end of the chapter, as the landlady reveals to Gunilla in a lengthy manner that she has talked with Milena on the telephone. However, owing to the lack of a mutual language in which to have an elaborate conversation, the final discourse is unrealistic and dreamlike, and hence parallel to the gradual increase in the uncanny atmosphere that dominates the novel's final chapters. Whereas the narrative situation is converted into an illusion at the end of chapter seven, an evocation of an illusory *mise-en-scène* turns out to be essential in the novel's concluding chapters, as the narrative re-enacts cinematic imagery and thereby returns to the moving images that dominated the first parts of the novel.

### The Final Scene as the "Primal Scene"

In chapter seven we saw that, instead of exploring traces of her unknown past in historical documents, Gunilla established a material and physical connection with her past through a bodily performance. In this way, it appeared that the narrative transcended not only the time and place of the present, but ultimately transcended even the linguistic barriers between human beings. Chapter eight, entitled "The Foreign Girl",<sup>109</sup> recasts Gunilla's story from a new perspective by making it into an urban legend, which circulates amongst the locals in Olomouc: "That summer, people in the city started talking about a foreign girl who wouldn't say no to anyone who claimed his name was Petr and was wearing a uniform" (*ICM*: 230).<sup>110</sup> By representing Gunilla from an angle based on local gossip, the novel once again reminds the reader of the competing narratives that abound in the work's discursive practices

<sup>109</sup>"Ulkomaalainen tyttö" in the original.

<sup>110</sup>"Sinä kesänä kaupungissa alettiin puhua ulkomaalaisesta tytöstä joka ei kieltänyt yhdeltäkään joka sanoi nimekseen Petr ja jolla oli univormu päällä" (*J*: 281).

with the help of which human beings not only shape the past, but also influence and predetermine how the past can be understood in the first place.

The linguistic breach is also surmounted in chapter eight, which opens with a fluent conversation between a girl, that is, “the foreign girl”, and a soldier, after they have spent the night together. The characters and roles familiar from the previous chapter are now remodelled, as the next morning the soldier is standing guard before the barracks and tries to catch the girl’s attention as she passes by: “What’s your name?” ” (*ICM*: 224).<sup>111</sup> In the course of the chapter, these anonymous characters come across each other several times. The chapter can be seen as both a continuation and an adaptation of Gunilla’s pretence to be someone else, as the events narrated in chapter seven are now displaced to a new context. Moreover, the girl’s systematic, yet irrational behaviour illustrates the novel’s aspiration to problematise referentiality and existentiality. In other words, the role playing, not only by the girl, but also by the libidinous soldiers, both illuminates and repudiates the question of who is the original and who is the copy, a question often brought up in the course of the narrative and which, according to the author, is at the novel’s core (see Lipson 2012b).

By the same token, the chapter operates according to self-referential metafictionality, as it reuses names familiar from earlier chapters. At one point, the girl receives three soldiers who claim to be Petr, Jan, and Martin. The third, Martin, a salient namesake of the male actor who played “Tomáš” in “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín”, pays another visit to the girl, this time alone. These two begin to spend time together in her rented room. Metafiction is also evident here on a discourse level, as the girl refers to illusory gimmicks of cinematography: “‘If this were being shot for a film, the film would be quite dark when people watched it afterward. [...] Because this is a night scene that’s being shot during the day’ ” (*ICM*: 237).<sup>112</sup> The girl’s remark underscores the multiplied fictiveness of the narrative itself.

The narrative further complicates complex fictiveness and discursive multiplicity towards the end of the chapter by re-introducing the movie director familiar from the opening chapters. Now, he “is sitting on a bench looking at a house on the opposite side of the river” (*ICM*: 238)<sup>113</sup> in Olomouc. He is planning a film about the foreign girl, and he envisions the film shootings as taking place “next summer”

<sup>111</sup>– “Mikä sinun nimesi on?” (*J*: 275).

<sup>112</sup>– “Jos tämä nyt kuvattaisiin filmille, niin siinä filmissä olisi melkein pimeää kun sitä katsotaan jälkeensä. [...] Koska tämä on yökohtaus joka on kuvattu päivällä” (*J*: 289).

<sup>113</sup>– “Ohjaaja istuu penkillä ja katselee taloa joen vastapäisellä rannalla” (*J*: 290).

(*ICM*: 238).<sup>114</sup> Since the director’s musings conclude the chapter, I interpret the previous story about “the foreign girl” as the product of *his* filmic imagining. Gunilla has become an inspiration for the film project, a dream that was envisioned by the would-be “Esther”. By fulfilling the dream of a person who could be her grandmother, Gunilla’s materialisation as a movie character reinforces the network and continuity between the characters and the obscure lineage of generations.

Besides generating familial relations with the help of the film, the narrative now compels the reader to reconsider the ontological status of the represented storyworld, which has been increasingly equivocal and irrational. Whereas the chapter ending subtly implies that the events just narrated have in fact taken place in the director’s mind, I argue that this suggestion pertains to the novel as a whole. Throughout the present chapter I have pointed out that the narrative characteristics of *The Ice Cream Man* — the fragmentary and contradictory storyworld, the overlapping and obscure characters, and other manifestations of uncertainty produced in the course of the novel — imply that the narrative models the traumatised inner world of the film director. By relocating the ontological nexus of the narrative on a mental level instead of in a physical storyworld, the reader is able to obtain a more satisfactory explanation for the perplexing uncertainties the novel poses.

Hints of the novels’ link between cinema, the director, and other parts of the storyworld appear on the cover of the original Finnish version designed by Markko Taina: it shows a classic film auditorium furnished with red velvet seats and a movie screen on which the title of the novel (and the film) is written in bold letters. The cover suggests that either the novel ought to be interpreted as a film or that the embedded film somehow reflects the reality of the storyworld. However, I hold that the visual clue encourages the reader to search for narrative meanings in the realm of cinema, which then leads him or her to the film’s originator, the mind of the director.

My interpretation that the novelistic whole is a mental representation is corroborated at the end of chapter eight, as the narrative underscores the mental workings of the director: “Everything is in [his] head” (*ICM*: 238).<sup>115</sup> In contrast to the circumstances in making “The Ice Cream Man of Terezín” when the director had no physical script to work with, “this time he does write” everything down, since “after all, no one knows how much time is left” (*ICM*: 238).<sup>116</sup> It appears that the ageing director is aware of his temporal limitations, and, “having understood [...] his own

<sup>114</sup> “[E]nsi kesänä” (*J*: 290).

<sup>115</sup> “Kaikki on jo ohjaajan päässä” (*J*: 290).

<sup>116</sup> “[T]ällä kertaa hän kyllä kirjoittaa [kaiken muistiin], eihän kukaan tiedä miten paljon aikaa on jäljellä” (*J*: 291).

urgency, [he] starts from the last scene” (*ICM*: 238).<sup>117</sup> His decision to reverse the order of the writing process exemplifies the manner in which the novel steadfastly attempts to subvert the conventional linear progression of temporality. Along with the temporal transposition carried out on the level of screenplay writing, the director’s undertaking underscores the praxis of writing in general, an act that is about to commence on the diegetic level, yet whose outcome the reader is close to finishing.

The hypothesis of a traumatised mind as the origin of and model for the narrative is also seen in the director’s decision “to start looking for the girl immediately” (*ICM*: 239),<sup>118</sup> by which he means an actress who bears a resemblance to the foreign girl. As has been done several times by various characters in the course of the novel, the director here engages in an exploration of “the Other” as a substitute for something or someone lost. The director’s pursuit of the right girl for the part symbolises the ongoing search for truth and the self through creative and artistic processes and through the creation of comparisons and correspondences of various kinds. Yet, as we have seen, the characters, let alone the reader, never attain the (narrative) truth. Similar to Gunilla’s imaginative impersonation of Milena or Jan’s recollections of a film that might include hints of his true origin, the director’s approach to his traumatic past proceeds through acts of replacement, chiefly via filmic imagery, enigmatically woven into a fantastic fabrication of a bizarre family chronicle. Put another way, instead of explicitly and straightforwardly narrating his trauma, the director opts for an indexical strategy, voicing the painful memories of his past through screenplays, moving images, and the personal traumas of others. These are the means with which he approaches and reveals the truth available to him.

The digressive and indicative style of the narrative whole, which I have called “indexical” throughout the present chapter, reaches its culmination in the novel’s last pages. The section is entitled “The Final Scene”,<sup>119</sup> which implies that it represents an outcome of screenplay writing whose commencement the reader has previously witnessed.<sup>120</sup> The screenplay format and the action descriptions familiar from *The Understudy* repeat the settings and characters of the preceding chapters: “*The room in Olomouc. Morning. The boy wakes up to a racket [...], sees the girl standing in front of the cooker*” (*ICM*: 240; emphasis original).<sup>121</sup> Similar to previous interactions with

<sup>117</sup> “[O]man kiireensä ymmärrettyään, [hän aloittaa] viimeisestä kohtauksesta” (*J*: 291).

<sup>118</sup> “Tytön etsiminen täytyy aloittaa heti” (*J*: 291).

<sup>119</sup> “Viimeinen kohtaus” in the original.

<sup>120</sup> Somewhat perplexingly, in the original the final pages are part of chapter eight, whereas in the English translation the screenplay is given its own chapter.

<sup>121</sup> The opening description is not italicised in the original: “Huone Olomoucissa. Aamu. Poika herää kolinaan [...], näkee tytön seisovan hellan edessä” (*J*: 292).

the girl and the soldier, linguistic issues and dream logic take over here: Milena, the female character in the scene, tells Petr, the male character, her dream in which she understood everything Petr said to her. Milena's disclosure baffles Petr:

Petr: Why wouldn't you have understood?  
 Milena: Because you were speaking Czech.  
 Petr: That makes no sense.  
 Milena: No, not at all.

(*ICM*: 240)<sup>122</sup>

The film ends dramatically and unexpectedly, as the gas stove is mistakenly on for a long period, and then Milena lights a match. The words relate the appalling outcome: "*Fire, everywhere*" (*ICM*: 241; emphasis original).<sup>123</sup> The scene and the novel itself conclude with a decisive word, *Konec*, meaning "The End" in Czech, which in conventional fashion appears on the screen after the film has ended.

The narrative strategy of indexicality is apparent in how the film's shocking termination involves important indexes for traumatic historical events, the very same events implied by the narrative throughout the novel. Firstly, the leaking gas that causes the deadly explosion readily brings to mind the gas chambers used in extermination camps during the Second World War. By indexically referring to other traumas, both private and collective, which took place in the actual world, the gas serves as a "Holocaust effect", a term coined by van Alphen (1997), to refer to works of art that portray the Holocaust in an oblique fashion. According to van Alphen, in these cases "[t]he Holocaust is not evoked [...] by direct reference, but by a reenactment of certain defining principles of that horrific event" (*ibid.*: 173). Although the disastrous consummation of the film itself does not perhaps amount to a Holocaust effect as defined by van Alphen, I claim that in conjunction with other parts of the narrative, the last scene grants extraordinary access to the atrocities of the past. As the last scene reflects the trauma that has been avoided throughout the narrative and becomes the primal scene of a fresh trauma, the "performative effect" (*ibid.*: 10) of the film's termination makes the unspeakable past more intelligible in a present act of narration.

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<sup>122</sup>

Petr: Miksi et olisi ymmärtänyt?  
 Milena: Koska sinä puhuit tšekkiä.  
 Petr: Tuossa ei ole mitään järkeä.  
 Milena: Ei olekaan. (*J*: 292)

<sup>123</sup>In the original the sentence is not in italics: "Tuli, kaikkialla" (*J*: 293).

Secondly, the flames that result from the gas explosion serve as a token of the self-immolations of several desperate young men after the violent seizure of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In effect, the gas and the fire in the screenplay are metonyms for the victims of both the Holocaust and those of the post-war era, specifically in Soviet-led Czechoslovakia. These historical events represent the historical traumas of the twentieth century, which have implicitly served as the incentive for the storytelling in Lipson's novel in the first place. On the narrative level, the motifs of gas and fire connect with the fates of the characters, including that of the film director. In his case, the flames prompt yet another association, namely film as inflammable and hence something easily lost or destroyed.

If we take into account the previous and unexpected narrative turn that compelled readers to re-evaluate the role of the director with regard to the narrative whole, the ending of the screenplay supports my hypothesis of *The Ice Cream Man* as a mental representation of the traumatised director. Previously, I pointed out that the ambiguous and overlapping characters who are related more or less directly to the Vorszda line embody the impossibility of satisfactorily comprehending and fully articulating the past. Now I elaborate on this argument by contending that the novel's permutating constellation of characters allegorically stands for the director's futile attempts to make sense of his traumatic past. In the course of this chapter we have seen that difficulties in comprehending, processing, and narrating personal trauma do not mean the total absence or unintelligibility of the past. Instead, the erratic storyworld and the characterisation illustrate the director's attempts to put the ill-fitting pieces of his mental puzzle together. He tries various approaches to a past that has been impossible to integrate fully into his present self, but nor can he disentangle himself from it.

Similarly, the director also works through his trauma on an audiovisual plane, namely cinema. In the case of the screenplay, the director indexically re-enacts the Holocaust and the ensuing traumas that affected him personally and Czechoslovakia collectively. This emphasis on the communal aspect, rather than on the director's personal trauma, reminds the reader that personal trauma is often "tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth 1996: 8) or others. By fabricating a love story that results in a tragic outcome, the director subtly reflects his trauma through another unprecedented, albeit fictitious, catastrophe. Thus, the movie screenplay continues the deferring, revolving, and substituting style that has dominated the narration from the outset. This exemplifies the fashion in which trauma becomes "fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (ibid.: 17). When it comes

to temporal, spatial, and narrative transpositions in *The Ice Cream Man*, the director relocates the original site of his trauma to a new context, that of cinema.

Because of this increase in the significance of the filmic mode and the evocation of filmic imagination towards the novel's end, I argue that cinema demonstrates an extraordinary form of testimony within the narrative. Shoshana Felman contends that testimony is used in contemporary artworks "both as the subject of their drama and as the medium of their literal transmission" (1992a: 5). In the case of *The Ice Cream Man*, the narrative as a whole ought to be seen as an oblique and artistic testimony by the director, mediated both through testimonies of others, such as the several Esthers and Jan, and the filmic channel. As the traumatic memories are conveyed with the help of cinematic imagery, the narrative accentuates its own ineptitude in representing trauma through direct verbalisation, namely its "metaverbal" (Grishakova 2010: 315) nature. In the course of this chapter we have seen that Lipson's novel is modelled on a widely accepted notion of the Holocaust as a traumatic event which is "in excess of our frames of reference" (Felman 1992a: 5). Thus, the unintelligibility and complexity of the narrative have exemplified linguistic defects in thinking, articulating, and processing the Holocaust and its impact in an explicit, rational, and coherent manner.

Apart from manifesting difficulties in structuring traumatic and overwhelming experiences through words, I have also pointed out that *The Ice Cream Man* highlights the decline of the "narrativist mode of history" (Elias 2001: 52) characteristic of postmodern historical fiction. While linguistic referentiality fails in every respect in the novel and hence represents the desire of postmodernist texts "to interrogate the nature of language" and that "of representation" (Hutcheon 1988: 54), visual epistemes take the lead in conveying meanings, both on a diegetic and an extra-textual level. The novel's final chapters on Gunilla demonstrate that linguistic intercommunication between characters is replaced by a more experiential, visceral, and corporeal action. On the reader's level, the novel's meanings are grasped beyond the direct verbal representations. This is closely associated with the novel's gradual return to moving images. Throughout this work cinema has granted the reader significations unobtainable from other, strictly "verbal" parts of the narrative.

In discussing Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah* (1985), which includes several interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust, Felman (1992c) remarks that the visuality of the filmic plane is an alternative to verbal testimony, "a medium that can visually *inscribe*—and cinematically bear witness to—the *very impossibility of writing*" (ibid.: 248; emphasis original). *The Ice Cream Man* likewise



draws on the immediacy of audiovisual representation to designate the decline of language in creating and transmitting knowledge, despite the fact that a verbal representation of film amounts to a highly mediated form of communication.

Ultimately, the heightened role of filmic imagery requires further consideration of the relationship between the storyworld and cinema in terms of a traumatic past. The novel indicates that the indexically represented trauma lies in-between, or at the intersection of, the narrative levels. The film itself serves as an intermediary agent or area between the ambiguously represented past and the present time of the storyworld. However, cinema not only unites, but also separates the discrete temporalities: while creating a conspicuous dialogue between the two, the interaction between the narrative levels results in an insoluble aporia in which the narrative refuses to assign precise meanings.

Against this notion, the dramatic close of the screenplay, and simultaneously the novel itself, is somewhat unexpected and in stark contrast to the previous parts of the narrative. Whereas the representation of the storyworld as contradictory and incoherent signalled the futility of totalised and unifying narratives, the conclusive and explicit termination of the last scene followed by the abrupt *Konec* (“The End”) make the end of both narrative levels unnaturally absolute and complete. On an allegorical level, does this indicate that the director has finally achieved a satisfactory reconciliation with his past?

Even though the novel’s termination potentially suggests that a certain kind of settlement between the past and the present has been achieved on a diegetic level — or, more precisely, on a mental level — the narrative as such remains enigmatic for readers. Similar to other parts of the narrative, the final scene continues to be baffling. Curiously, the ending also marks the first and only occasion when the narrative explicitly portrays an unexpected and calamitous event at the moment of its occurrence. Similar to the eerie imagery of *24 Hour Psycho* which completes *Point Omega*, the very immediacy of the concluding filmic *mise-en-scène* makes Lipson’s ending haunting — an unprecedented event that continues to trouble the reader long after completing the novel.



# Chapter 7

## Conclusions

In this study I have analysed representations of films in contemporary fiction. Fittingly, one of the novels I have analysed here, namely Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, with which I started my study, has been adapted and made into a film. Let us take a brief look at this Hollywood movie directed by Héctor Babenco and released in 1985, a film that is an audiovisual rendition of a novel that, in turn, is about movies.

From the very first scene, the viewer is confronted with a multiplicity of narrative layers and levels difficult to distinguish from one another — an aspect we have encountered in the case studies in this dissertation. The film opens with a panning shot that, little by little, reveals both the space in which the film primarily takes place and the main characters, namely Molina and Valentín, who share a prison cell. As we are shown a grim brick wall over which dark shadows are cast, we hear a male voice offscreen describing a woman: “She’s umm... Well, there’s something a little strange, that’s what you notice, that she’s not a woman like all the others”. For those familiar with Puig’s novel, these lines recall the opening of the book in which Molina characterises Irena, the leading female character in Tourneur’s horror film *Cat People*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, at the very outset Babenco’s film creates an explicit link to a literary text by re-mediating verbatim Molina’s lines from the novel. Besides generating a transmedial transfer from the literary narrative to the filmic narrative, the film simultaneously alludes specifically to the very movie that Molina recounts in the book, the movie he conspicuously modifies.

The link between Babenco’s filmic version, its literary predecessor, and Tourneur’s movie is further intensified, as film-Molina’s later descriptions of the woman repeat

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<sup>1</sup>Compared to the opening lines of Puig’s novel, there are only minor differences: “– Something a little strange, that’s what you notice, that she’s not a woman like all the others” (*KSW*: 3).

and alter only slightly the descriptions in the novel: “She seems all wrapped up in herself — lost in a world she carries deep inside”.<sup>2</sup> What happens next, however, may surprise anyone who is acquainted both with Puig’s novel and the films narrated throughout the novel. As Molina in the film continues his description, it becomes evident that he is not describing Irena, after all, but someone else: “but [she is] surrounded by a world of luxury”. The film viewer is now confronted with another remodelling of the previous actual and fictitious movies, as it turns out that the only film narrated in the course of Babenco’s *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is loosely based on “Destino”, an imitation of Nazi propaganda films related — and perhaps invented — by Molina in the novel. Within the film’s first few minutes Babenco puts into play complex dynamics between various levels: between the fictional storyworld and visual arts it represents, between the film itself and its literary progenitor, which was also fundamentally engaged in appropriation and telling (filmic) stories, and between the represented reality of fiction and the viewer who strives to comprehend the incentive for having “filmic storytelling” taking place in the storyworld in the first place.

Similar to Babenco’s film, my case studies demonstrate that the interrelations between contemporary literature and cinema can be highly complex, and the representation of films can be motivated by the narrative in various ways and for several purposes. Each case study with its specific properties has illustrated certain aspects of novelistic renditions of cinema and particular functions and outcomes in terms of narration and hermeneutics. As a whole, my study provides a comprehensive understanding of the narrative phenomenon and lays the groundwork for future outlining of a poetics of representations of films in fiction.

Furthermore, the case studies have effectively illustrated that, analogous to the character of Molina in both Puig’s novel and Babenco’s film, cinema provides the novelistic characters a place to reflect the self more or less consciously and at the same time juxtapose the self vis-à-vis the “Other”. I have shown that in the novels analysed here the characters and (character-)narrators are able to locate themselves in the fictional reality and voice their stories, especially through the medium of cinema. Films, then, not only reflect life and provide readers with clues for understanding the story, but also are actively reflected upon by the characters in the storyworld. What is more, while the characters identify themselves by virtue of films, the fictional reality as a whole is also frequently modelled through cinema, both by the character(-narrator)s and by the reader. Thus, whereas cinema often provides the characters a way to

<sup>2</sup>In the novel: “[...] [I]t’s as if she’s in some other world, all wrapped up in herself” (KSW: 4).

mirror and define themselves and their experiences of external reality, the reader is entangled in similar “filmic thinking” while interpreting the narratives.

In this fashion the novels’ representations of films evoke notions of identity and subjectivity. This personal quest is explicitly manifest in *The Book of Illusions* and *The Ice Cream Man*, as both novels deal with the pivotal question “Who am I?” with the help of the filmic imaginary. Regarded in this existential fashion, films as parts of literary texts offer new possibilities for creating meanings and give us the tools necessary for identifying the mindset of (post)postmodern human beings, both in fiction and in real life. While these narratives powerfully exemplify amalgamations of life and art, they also reflect a present society permeated with complex forms of (re-)mediation.

However, the novels also repeatedly call the reader’s attention to an inconsistent relationship between life and art. Thus, even though the movie screen in the novels has prompted readers’ identification with the novelistic characters and filmic characters with whom the novelistic characters also identify, these filmic mirrors often turn out to be sketchy and imprecise, even distorting. This may entail a metafictional aspect that draws the reader’s attention to the construction of the narrative whole, although this does not automatically amount to a disruption of the fictive illusion. The technological essence of cinema further amplifies the discrepancy between life and art. By subjecting art to different kinds of replications, duplications, replacements, and re-enactments of life, the representations of films in the novels either implicitly or explicitly comment on the fundamental difference between life as organic and human as opposed to the Benjaminian mechanical reproducibility intrinsic to moving images. Thus, while being powerful exponents of our experiences in life, films simultaneously insist on their fabricated nature. In this study I have demonstrated that the novels point out this tension, which characterises the dynamics between life and art.

At this point, we can categorise the use of cinema in the novels with reference to the degree of their presence in the narratives. We have seen that the extent to which films appear in and make up part of literary narrative and the represented (reality of the) storyworld varies from novel to novel. In *The Book of Illusions*, (imaginary) films are represented in a minutely detailed fashion that takes into account medium-specific properties related to audiovisual media: altering shot types, a continuum of scenes edited together, and so forth. Furthermore, the character-narrator of the novel gives lengthy descriptions of films that exemplify cinema both as a medium and as an artefact. In Auster’s novel, then, films appear as a form of art and of communication, which in various ways is distinct from the literary form. In addition, cinema appears

in the form of specific objects, as products of that communicative vehicle.

Although the films narrated in *The Book of Illusions* are fictitious, their verbal representation also pertains to the term “cinematic ekphrasis”, that is, a verbal representation of a visual representation. In DeLillo’s *Point Omega*, we encountered another type of cinematic ekphrasis, as the third-person narrator represented Gordon’s video installation based on Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. Thus, the source “text”, or, “texts”, has actual counterparts in the real, extra-textual world, seen in the relationship among the reader, the literary representation, and the actual object(s) of that representation. Along with highlighting the actual artefacts that serve as a basis for the literary representation, the novel draws our attention to the medium of cinema (and video art). This is evident in the way certain elements characterising Gordon’s slowed-down art video are adapted in the construction of DeLillo’s novel and the fashion in which the storyworld is represented. This means that the elements that structure the video’s extreme aesthetics are transmedially rendered in the constructing principles of the literary narrative — a formal principle I defined as *mise en abyme* of the (whole) code in chapter four.

As for *The Understudy* by Nicholls, we noted that it makes use of diverse properties of the filmic medium in general. This is accomplished, for instance, by including film scripts as part of the narrative. In addition, the novel makes use of allusions to and citations from iconic film scenes and characters. Narrative strategies of this kind vividly evoke filmic schemata in the reader’s mind. Here too film is present both as a medium and an artefact. A similar tendency was seen in Lipson’s *The Ice Cream Man*. The novel’s first chapter stresses the medium of cinema itself by describing film rehearsals accompanied by a dialogue between film actors. Chapter two continues to underline the medium, although it remains uncertain whether we are being told about the finished film or the actual events of the fictional reality on which the film is based. The referential confusion is thus related to the medium *and* the specific object of representation. Later in the novel, the film in question has emotional valence in the lives of the characters, which intensifies the presence of cinema in the novel as an artefact.

In sum, the varying degree to which films appear in the novels has an effect on the motivation for using films in fiction. Rather than classifying the various ways in which films can be part of a literary narrative merely for the sake of categorisation, the classification ought to be done simultaneously with the study of the narrative *function* of these filmic insertions with regard to the literary whole. Indeed, in this study I have analysed first and foremost how cinema serves as a thematic counterpart

to the main themes of the literary whole, as a leitmotif for narrative construction and comprehension. We have seen that the represented films produce analogies between themselves and the framing narrative. In addition to this kind of iconicity, which defines the relationship between two narrative levels, the relation can also be based on contrast, as meaningful contradiction underscores certain disparities between the reality of the storyworld and the imaginary realm of cinema. This pertains especially to *The Understudy* in which constant deviations to filmic discourse draw the reader's attention to the insurmountable gap between the harsh fictional reality and the more idealistic movie realities. As for *The Ice Cream Man*, I demonstrated that the film stands for an indexical sign, a trace of the past that remains unspoken, yet determines the construction and comprehension of the narrative. All these relationships positioned between the representations of films and the fictional world are, in turn, related to the notion of a symbol: being part of the literary narrative, they become signs that indicate some idea, belief, or relationship that is significant with regard to the novel as a whole.

The prominence of the narrative role of cinema in the novels analysed here has encouraged me to scrutinise the relationship between the fictional reality and the embedded level of films. I have done this by making use of the (travelling) concepts of intersubjectivity, framing, *mise en abyme*, possible worlds semantics, and indexicality. In the case of *The Book of Illusions*, I showed that the verbal renderings of the films exemplified the dual conception of the human condition as intersubjective and subjective, as transcending one's physical boundaries and at the same time restricted to one's perspective. Besides ontological metalepses, we saw that the representations of films amounted to epistemological (paraleptic) crossings between narrative levels. As for *Point Omega*, I illustrated the disconcerting interaction between the narrative levels or between "life and art", by virtue of frame theory and the concept of *mise en abyme*. Possible worlds semantics, in turn, enabled me to investigate the construction of alternate filmic subworlds in *The Understudy* and analyse their relation to the reality of the storyworld. In the final chapter, I explored the impossibility of keeping track of the difference between the fictional reality and the embedded level of cinema in *The Ice Cream Man* by using the concept of indexicality.

Besides elucidating the narrative and hermeneutic functions of representations of films in the novels, the "travelling concepts" used here have helped demonstrate that cinema within fiction generates a variety of mergings and intersections of the narrative levels. I contend that all these novels — perhaps with the exception of *The Ice Cream Man* — share an impulse first to establish and then subsequently to

question, either implicitly or explicitly, an ontological hierarchy between the fictional reality and the embedded imaginary level of cinema.<sup>3</sup> This has striking repercussions in how these novels discuss and formulate their conceptions of such terms as “real”, “actual”, and “truth”, especially vis-à-vis their typical opposites: “illusion”, “imaginary”, and “false”. The ontological instability and confusion in the novels thus amount to fundamental questions and problems which are closely linked to ontology, epistemology, existentiality, referentiality, and representation.

In *The Book of Illusions* this appears in the way aesthetic as well as cognitive illusions created and experienced in the narrative embody a grain of truth and serve as the plane for subjective reality, a reality which is generated by and *within* an individual. As previously mentioned, cinema also engenders metaleptic and paraleptic transgressions, as boundaries between ontological levels and characters residing on discrete narrative levels do not hold. DeLillo’s *Point Omega* also ends up violating physical and realistic contours of the fictional world, as video art not only reflects, but also infiltrates the fictional reality in which it is made, displayed, and perceived. By drawing our attention to the questions of what is actually represented in the narrative, and the relationship between “the representing” and “the represented”, the novel reverses the hierarchy we generally assume comprises “the objective world”. The reversal can also be interpreted as a denial of any qualitative difference between the represented ontological levels. As the spatio-temporal distance between the fictional reality and the reality represented in the video installation is annihilated, the fictional universe is compressed and condensed into one uniform space. In this fashion, the video installation’s initial role as a mere *reflection* of the fictional reality turns out to be a transformative *absorption* that aggressively reduces the distinction between the two ontological entities.

To some extent, *The Understudy* follows similar principles, as many forms of drama, along with artificiality, appear to dominate the representation of the fictional reality. What happens, then, is that the hyper-correct representations familiar from the ideal world of cinema tend to transform the storyworld into a *simulation* à la Baudrillard, a world in which extremely correct representations of reality have replaced more authentic and hence truthful behaviours and presence. At the same time, Nicholls’s novel calls into question the nature of authenticity by asking how to draw the line between what we deem to be “real” as opposed to “inauthentic”. A similar question is posed in *The Ice Cream Man*, as the “so-called” life depicted in the novel is often comprised of phony behaviours and even adopted identities potentially

<sup>3</sup>As seen in the previous chapter, Lipson’s novel deliberately blurred the levels from the outset.



inspired by art. In short, the novels compel us to delve into the following questions: What can we know about, or, more specifically, *how* can we know, the true essence of the “real” world, and how are we supposed to distinguish the “true” constituents of that world from the “imaginary excess” overflowing into the reality (of fiction)? What, after all, comprises our notion and experience of “reality”?

I have argued in this study that, by rendering unstable the ontological levels separating the fictional reality from the represented medium of cinema, the novels call into question various dichotomies that bear “family resemblances” to this ontological hierarchy: factual versus fictional, true versus false, and so forth. These binary oppositions are of great significance, as our common-sense notion of realism is founded on these interconnected paradigms. Thus, the novels endeavour to establish unanticipated intertwinings and overlappings between dichotomies that we deem to be indisputable in our culture and everyday thinking, namely conceptions and paradigms with the help of which we construct our understanding of the fundamental elements of what we call “reality”. As a consequence, the novels show that our presuppositions regarding reality as a physical entity comprised of various hierarchical relations, which can be objectively analysed and exhaustively expressed in language and from which we can derive absolute truths about the actual and true state of things, is incommensurate with and inaccurate as regards the way our sense of “reality” comes into being in our embodied mind, which is subsequently disclosed in language. Put simply, by using cinema the chosen novels contest folk theories of objective reality and affiliated assumptions.

In chapter three on *The Book of Illusions* and chapter five on *The Understudy* we noted how the narratives refute the usual approach in which truth is subordinated to correctness. In the case of Auster’s novel I briefly mentioned that this inadequate conception is replaced by a disclosure of truth in language, in logos. In general, all the novels studied here have more or less explicitly opted to discover the truth in language as opposed to seeking truth in correspondences and the correctness of representation, including when the capacity of language to articulate and express is put to the test, as is the case in *The Ice Cream Man*. The novels have thus reminded us that in language we construct our notion of the external world as we experience it, that the world is fleshed out and comes into being in the praxis of language.

In addition to challenging the metaphysical tradition as well as erroneous assumptions inherent in realism and the correspondence theory, the novels vouch for a more dynamic and broader understanding of literary world-making and its reception and for the way the reader is compelled to be an active agent in the unfolding

performance taking place in art — a conception I touched on in chapter two in discussing the notion of “performativity”. My analyses have demonstrated that recent fiction imbued with a vast range of audiovisual material calls for re-consideration of what takes place during reading, as readers are encouraged to infer literary worlds with the help of other and more recent art forms and media. I contend that, by activating our schemata related to films, these filmic stimuli in literature propagate diverse acts of witnessing and distancing, and draw attention to the embodied, non-verbal, multimodal, and multisensory aspects that characterise our engagement with contemporary fiction.

This is seen, for example, in the way *The Book of Illusions* invites the reader to experience the narrated films as a member of an imaginary film audience, and thereby grasp more effectively the novel’s main themes, namely subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In *Point Omega*, in turn, the artistic version of Hitchcock’s horror classic intensifies the mystery and open-endedness of the narrative whole; at the same time it generates in the reader a disconcerting notion of the physically and logically impossible overlappings between narrative and ontological levels. I find it worth noting that, although in both novels the reader is compelled to interpret the narrated events and the meanings of the literary whole with the help of moving images, the audiovisual material functions as an evocation of corporeal *experience* rather than as objects whose symbolic meaning the reader is supposed to deduce. In this way, the use of cinema in fiction are seen here primarily as signs that are beyond an explicit, textual level of storytelling and testify to the complexity of narrative construction and comprehension in fiction, which utilises various forms of visual media and our embodied knowledge of them.

In the beginning of my study I promised to outline a rough framework for a poetics of representations of films in fiction. I recapitulate that future theorisation ought to be loose and flexible enough — with reference to terminology and methodology — to be applicable to versatile specimens of the narrative phenomenon in question. In the course of this study we have seen that various “travelling” concepts have shed light on the workings of filmic representations in literature and elucidated the multifacetedness of the narrative enterprise. The theoretical concepts I have used here have enabled me to delve into the narrative phenomenon without methodological or theoretical constraints.

As for more concrete practices, there are various steps with which we can and should analyse literary representations of films. Firstly, the formal properties of the representations of film(s) ought to be analysed from various perspectives. Are we

dealing with media representations in which film as artefact (either as a whole or part[s] of it) is verbally rendered as part of literary narrative? Alternatively, do intermedial transfers touch upon certain methods and structures that are specific to cinema as a medium? Secondly, we have to classify more specifically the nature of the literary representation of film: is it cinematic ekphrasis (media representation), shorter description, emulation of film scripts or other properties of cinema, reference/allusion, citation, and so forth? Here we also touch on the referential aspect of filmic representations in fiction, namely what is the (ontological nature of the) point of reference and can we locate it? Moreover, this has to do with intermediality: does the novel endeavour to make use of differences and/or similarities between two mediums? If so, what issues are then brought up, and in what way does this relate to the narrative whole?

As a consequence, and thirdly, we have to study the interaction of the represented films with other parts of the literary whole. In particular, how are the embedded level of the film and the embedding level of the primary narrative connected, and what kind of relationship is established between the levels? Is there an analogue of some kind between the diegetic level and the hypodiegetic level of cinema, and for what narrative purpose? What is also worth exploring is the way in which characters and narrators interact with cinema. By the same token, what potential do films embody in terms of writing and reading fiction? In the future, we have to consider the narrative motivation of the representations of films. We have to analyse in what ways the represented films contribute to the narrative whole, and whether they have a metaphorical function as part of fiction. Here it would also be interesting to determine whether the presence of film within fiction amounts to ontological instability between the narrative levels — a narrative phenomenon we have repeatedly encountered in the course of the present study.

There are thus numerous future research questions with which to proceed in various disciplines, such as interart studies, reader response literary theory, and cognitive narratology. In the course of this study I drew attention to the interplay between the cognitive and aesthetic illusions set forth in some of the novels studied here. The quality of fictive immersion generated by literature comprising representations of films is a worthwhile topic for future study. More specifically, how do filmic representations within literary narratives affect the construction, the nature, and the continuation of aesthetic illusion? Does cinema in fiction have an impact on the magnitude of our fictive immersion, and if so, in what way? Subsequently, we might ask whether aesthetic illusion functions differently in novels that make use of vari-

ous media. Put differently, does the imaginary experience generated by these novels differ greatly from novels that do not noticeably employ other media in their narration? By delving into these questions, we would gain more knowledge about the nature of fictive immersion, its relation to the specific properties of the different media in question, and the consequences of filmic insertions in fiction in terms of literary world-making.

Yet another interesting topic is related to a narratological term I used here only sporadically, but one that serves as an intermedial link between cinema and literary narrative, namely “focalisation”. Embracing such notions as *visuality*, *point of view*, and the relationship established between “the vision”, the agent who sees, and the seen object, focalisation provides intriguing ground for future analysis on the interactions among art forms. More generally, there are various ways in which the intermedial connections between cinema and literature can be approached in future studies.

As for actual readers, it would be interesting to investigate empirically how audiovisual material in fiction affects the reading experience. Specifically, it would be interesting to study within neurophysiology how our brains and bodies react to literary representations of films in fiction and in what ways these reactions differ from actual film experiences. Does substantial use of cinema change the literary medium as such and the way literature is experienced by the reader? Does fiction begin to function in a more “technological” manner, similar to the procedural principles and experiential operations pertinent to audiovisual media? Furthermore, does awareness that a represented film is based either on an actual or an imaginary artefact have an impact on a reader’s neurological and physical reactions? More generally speaking, as filmic — and other audiovisual — schemata have become part of the literary experience, how has the entire concept of “reading” changed and how will it change in the future? Do filmic insertions in fiction impinge on the reader’s way of identifying with and/or being estranged from the stories? Do these insertions have an influence to the reader’s spatio-temporal experiences, as well as on the apprehension of the differences between linguistic and visual signs?

As for the authors, in this study I did not explicitly touch on the question of authorial intention with regard to the use of film in fiction, although I hold that the novelists analysed here do have a certain motivation for making use of cinema in their narrative designs. A logical question following my study would be to determine the extent to which the literary representations of cinema are premediated by the authors. How consciously do they employ visual arts in their art-making? Yet another

line of research would be to analyse the ways in which literary representations of films compel us to re-consider the relationship and intertwinings between originality and adaptation, and also between so-called high and low culture.

Even though popular forms of cinema are often deemed to efface distinct traces of originality and artistic authority of older forms of art, the incorporation of films into fiction invites us to re-evaluate our understanding of the imaginary worlds, their plasticity in terms of point of origin, and our eagerness to indulge in those worlds, which intermediate between life and art and merge the two spheres, just like Molina with his filmic stories.



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