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Monograph Series 5.



RÉKA M. CRISTIAN  
and  
ZOLTÁN DRAGON

Encounters  
of the Filmic Kind:  
Guidebook  
to Film Theories

*JATE*press  
Szeged 2008

SZEGEDI  
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KIADÓ





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# PREFACE

*Papers in English and American Studies* is published by the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. This series of occasional publications was established in 1980 and has since then reached its fourteenth volume. Originally, the main purpose was to provide a medium for work written by members of the Institute (actually, then, the Department of English); however, since the mid-1990s, a more purposeful editorial policy has resulted in well-focused thematic collections. We have also started the Monograph Series into which the present volume fits.

The monographs published so far cover wide areas of English Studies, such as literary, cultural, and historical investigations into various geographical areas of the Anglophone world from Britain to the United States. This book by Réka Cristian and Zoltán Dragon is groundbreaking in more than one respect. First of all, they explore a field as yet untouched in the series, although one that is increasingly important and growing in currency: Film Studies. Secondly, while the book shows the unmistakable characteristics of original research and offers valuable points to scholars of film theory, the authors have managed to shape their material in such an easily digestible form that the book can also serve as a university textbook. They very modestly claim that this is really a BA-level textbook, but I would suggest that the complexity of the ideas discussed also makes it useful on the graduate level.

There has been great demand for a study of this kind. Since the mid-1980s, English Studies all over the world has been experiencing a widening in its geographical scope (Irish, Canadian, post-colonial studies) and a diversification in its subject fields (history, sociology, gender studies, sociolinguistics, Cultural Studies) – Film Studies having become prominent among them. This prominence has come partly because cinema has developed as the dominant form of cultural representation in the twentieth century and partly because the filmic representation has generated ever more intriguing cultural and psychological theories. Today, film courses are hugely popular among English majors, and many of these students are writing BA/MA theses on movies, film adaptations of literary works, or other aspects of the cinematic arts.

We firmly hope that *Encounters of the Filmic Kind...* will be of great help to these students, providing them with clear explanations about the basics of Film Studies as well as about the more “esoteric” theories of the moving image.

The first of the eight chapters deals with the historical and scientific origins of film. Further chapters treat the topics of filmic language, the psychoanalytical aspects of cinema, the major film genres, the development of authorship films and the theories behind them, gender issues “on both sides of the camera”, and the Hollywood and the non-Hollywood films. Last but not least, the authors attempt to contextualize film among the other rising new media of the twenty-first century.

As senior editor for the *Papers in English and American Studies*, I am proud to introduce this valuable, useful, and highly readable book and make it accessible to students and colleagues of English Studies, be they experts, novices, or just movie fans.

January, 2008

György E. Szónyi



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Special thanks to Etelka Szőnyi, a great editor, who has made it a real pleasure to publish with JATEPress; to Livia Szélpál for her thoughtful responses and detailed criticism on early drafts of the manuscript; to Nóra Borthaiser, who read the text with the eyes of our target audience; and to Annamária Barnóczki, a great, true friend, who intellectually sustained chunks of the project. But far and outmost, our deepest gratitude goes to our families for their invaluable and unconditioned support throughout the entire book project.

*To our students*

# Introduction

New modes of theorizing are necessary. We must start again.  
(Noël Carroll)

The idea for *Encounters of the Filmic Kind* was born of teaching experience. It was apparent from the onset of this book project that there was a real need for an easily comprehensible guidebook for students covering the most influential theoretical grids in the history of film studies. We agreed to write this book in order to make it an authentic guide for those who want to be more than just superficially initiated into the terrain of film theories. What we did not want: yet another dense text that would give a hard time for BA students. We had to remember how we read theoretical texts back in our early student years and decided to draft our chapters accordingly, in order to put together a manual that would not ultimately find its place in one of the corners of a (perhaps, dorm's) room having been ripped of pages containing information served in an irritating manner. Similarly to the combined use of computer technology and music in the communication with aliens in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), we assembled sometimes difficult texts with a number of interpretations in order to make them easily understandable. Most of all, this guidebook is intended to drive people back to consciously watch (more) movies and not to take away the pleasure of watching, talking, and, especially, writing about films.

This text is meant primarily for BA students majoring in English and American Studies with interest in film issues, and intended also to all of those intrigued by the ways in which films can make sense. The subjects and the material of this guide were chosen on the basis of personal experience – seminars and lectures – with BA students struggling to understand classical and contemporary theoretical texts about cinema.

*Encounters of the Filmic Kind* is conceived as a text contextualizing and enhancing further thought. It is not intended to shape a new theory of film or to build a unifying theory of the cinema; it is rather a summary of theories about film with mostly English and American examples and relevance. The result of a practical encounter with the celluloid world, this work is intended to function as an introductory, pragmatic guide to cinema.

To paraphrase Andrew Sarris's statement on auteur theory, this book reflects an attitude towards movies rather than a rigorous method of studying the wider discipline of film studies.

Therefore, the content of this work is less essentialist and more context-based. We follow an interdisciplinary mode of discussion; there is no dominant, overarching theory but plural, sometimes transgressive modes of seeing films, channeled into a book divided into eight chapters.

The first chapter, "Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film," outlines the most significant historical and scientific origins of film and contextualizes these in the realm of appropriate film theories. It focuses on the difference between the cinema and film, analyses a few proto-cinematic forms, and follows special episodes in the development of film; discusses the realistic and the formative approaches to movies, sketches the historical and economic backgrounds that contributed to the appearance of movie-theaters, and shows some technological innovations that stand at the origin of certain genres; talks about theoretical concepts behind the myth of total cinema and the essence of cinema, goes into relevant details concerning color and sound in film, and deals with the beginnings of film theory in the English-speaking world. At the end of the chapter readers can find a selected list of recommended online glossaries for film/cinema terms.

The second chapter, "Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation," looks at the ways film has been defined as language, and examines the implications of such a claim in various contexts, from the issue of narrativity to that of adaptation. The issue of film language is discussed through the concepts of film narratology (narrative, the types of narrator, focalizer, grand imagier, and diegesis) and investigated through the special case of textual transformation known as adaptation.

The chapter "Dream On: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema," provides an overview of different orientations in psychoanalytically informed film theories. The issues of identification, the Oedipal trajectory, castration, fetishism, cinematic subjectivity, the difference between the gaze and the look, and the procedure of suture are discussed in detail. As psychoanalytic film theory largely relies on Lacanian ideas and theoretical concepts, the chapter focuses on concepts that have been rethought by recent new Lacanian theorists in order to show the relevance of psychoanalytic thought in film theory and criticism after the heyday of the approach in the 1970s.

Chapter four, "Cowboys, Deadly Women and Co.: Genres of the Cinema," discusses the significance and theoretical potentials of tackling film genre. Taking its cue from literary genre theory, the chapter focuses on the way film theory frames the issues of genre in categories of production and reception, providing descriptions of and background to particular film genres such as western, screwball comedy, and film noir. While genre theory in film is fused with problems, it still points at new directions in its strive to put history and criticism into dialogue.

Chapter five entitled “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star” considers the development of authorship in film and treats the most important features of the auteur theory; outlines the development of the Hollywood studio system and discusses its social, economical, and political characteristics; presents the activity of the Production Code Administration together with other censoring and rating institutions, and examines the most important features of the star system.

The sixth chapter, “Gender and Cinema: All Sides of the Camera” is an incursion into gender arrangements in and outside films. This part of the book is concerned with the appearance and proliferation of feminist and gender theories in film. The chapter presents the origins of feminist filmmaking and criticism, discusses a number of women directors and focuses on the woman’s film; surveys the topic of counter-cinema and the theoretical grounds of feminist filmmaking; analyzes some non-visual cinematic tools subversively representing women and discusses the question of gendered and racial spectatorship, together with key issues regarding gay, lesbian and queer film criticism. The chapter concludes with selected lists of recommended films about women, feminist issues, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) topics.

Chapter seven, “Third Cinema Encounters,” goes beyond the frontiers of the mainstream, Western cinema and encounters the world of the Third Cinema. Since this is a vast area of study that would need volumes for discussion, this chapter surveys, without the claim to totality, the main ideas that generated this cinema. It focuses on issues of the Third Cinema and on the difference between the Third Cinema and the Third World Cinema; goes through the concept of hungry cinema and aesthetics of hunger, as well as that of the imperfect cinema, guerrilla cinema, cinema nôvo, and the Tropicalist movies; scrutinizes small slices of Latin American, Indian, African, and some Asian cinemas, discusses the issues of postcolonialism and postcommunism with regard to the Third Cinema; analyzes transculturation, the concept of the middle-worlder, and the realms of transnational cinema.

Chapter eight, “Ultimately Onscreen: The Futures of the Cinema in the Age of the New Media,” looks at film in the wider context of contemporary forms of media. The chapter gives an overview on how the concept of the cinema has been transformed due to fast technical development by the new millennium; focuses on issues of the different types of screens, interfaces, and the theoretical implications of digitalization; discusses digital and online forms of life, virtuality, and their relation to reality; presents theories of the subject, the hypertext, and the age of Hollywood 2.0. The chapter concludes with a call for new modes of theorizing in a new age in which the cinema is part of the new media, as opposed to being the new medium.

The objective of the above-mentioned chapters is to initiate students into the practice of critical understanding of films. The guidebook provides an easy-going connective tissue between theory and practice in film studies, and endows students with a discipline-specific language needed for further explorations; that is why at the end of each chapter pertinent key concepts provide instant feedback for the reader, while works cited function also further readings in the topic. In a methodological sense, the book is an attempt to translate sometimes impassable theoretical texts and concepts into a user-friendly way of understanding.

Marie Claire Kolbenschlag claimed that “a film like any cultural expression or gesture is a bundle of [...] complex energies intersecting at a given point in time. It is an event, rather than an art object, and as such commands a systematic and comprehensive critique.” The authors subscribe to this critical position and offer an equivalent world view for introspection in the following pages.



## Chapter

# 1

## Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film

Réka M. Cristian

The secret to film is that it's an illusion.  
(George Lucas)

Of all of our inventions for mass communication, pictures still speak the most universally understood language.  
(Walt Disney)

Photography is truth. The cinema is truth twenty-four times per second.  
(Jean-Luc Godard)

Film, one of today's major arts, has made a long way to its present form. Its origins are obscure but fortunately there is a significant number of landmarks indicating the most important stages of filmic development. These provide possible interpretive frames for film studies within the areas of technological, aesthetic, social-economic, industrial, authorial, and cultural-historical approaches.

*Film and cinema* are related but not always interchangeable terms. Film is concerned with the aspects of moving pictures in connection with the surrounding world, while cinema denotes the aesthetics and the structure of this art (Monaco 195). However, cinema is the most general term. It also shows the material base, the celluloid strip or the sheet of plastic on which narrative fiction is recorded and in addition it refers to the work of art represented by the world of recorded pictures in motion. The double meaning of the word "film" can be exemplified with the following anecdote. The actor and director Mel Brooks was once asked what the most difficult part of filmmaking was, to which he replied without hesitation: "The holes, man, the holes in the filmstrip. Punching all the holes was sure the most difficult."

The English speaking world has another term, "movies," and this reflects the basic aspect of film: moving images. Movies are economic commodities because they are produced to be "consumed," while cinema reflects an aesthetic profile of an art. "Cinema" means a group of movies (American cinema, French cinema, African cinema, Women's cinema, Political cinema, Third cinema, Black cinema, Alfred Hitchcock's cinema, etc.), and is also a term representing the movie industry in general, and also the place itself where movies are presented (the silver screen, the big screen, the Movie Theater, the movie palace, the movie house, the screening room, the drive-in).

André Bazin perceived film to be a total and complete representation of reality ("The Myth" 201), a threefold reconstruction of an accurate illusion of the real world in sound and

color. According to Siegfried Kracauer, film as a medium has two main properties (“Basic Concepts” 172). The first, basic property, is connected to the characteristics of photography, a reproductive medium that “catches” a moment in time and records physical reality; as opposed to photography which catches one moment, film is also reproductive “canning” events that are transposed to paper in order to make the mimesis (the imitative representation of reality) ready. The second is related to film’s technical properties, which enables the recorded sequence of pictures to be assembled through the process of editing. The basic and technical properties of the film medium differ substantially from each other (173). Film’s basic attributes include a great number of special effects inherited from the art of photography and photomontage: the close-up, the soft-focus, double-, triple-, and multiple exposure or “sandwiching,” overlapping, the use of negatives, combination prints, cutting and assembly methods, retouching, the use of joins, multiple printing, enlargement, detailing, and many more (Cf. *Selected List of Glossaries of Film and Cinema Terms* at the end of the chapter). These are then combined with the help of special techniques that work with motion effects that include the high-, low-, straight-, and oblique angles of the camera, the close-up and extreme close-up, the medium take and the long take, the establishing shot, cross cutting, the master shot, techniques of dissolve and wipe, split screen, the point of view shot, the jump cut, shot-reverse shot, flashbacks, flashforwards, inserts, montage methods, elements of sound that incorporate dubbing or looping, automated dialogue replacement or post-synch, the voice over, and other sound and technical effects (Cf. *Selected List of Glossaries of Film and Cinema Terms* at the end of the chapter) only to mention a few.

The origins of film were placed around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the pre-sound film era. However, the birth of cinema can be traced back much earlier. Some researchers perceive it as having misty beginnings or not being so far created. For Jean-Louis Baudry there is no specific origin of the cinema; he holds the opinion that “there was never any first invention of cinema” (Baudry 767), while André Bazin goes as far as to state that, in technological terms, “cinema has not yet been invented” (Bazin “The Myth” 202). Andrea Gronemayer draws the history-line of moving images back to the primordial pictures of the animals and humans painted on and carved in cave and sees them as pictures of motion (8–9). Indeed, the sequences of repetitive pictures suggest the idea of a narrative strip, a story that unfolds with the progression of images. The best examples are provided by antique friezes and series of relief that depict phases of movement in different contexts: warriors in war, priest during ceremonial rites, hunting events, etc. The narrative visual art of Indian temples with the ornamental, pictorial chronicles of legends, the chains of classical dancers in historic Hindu architecture, the narrative murals of Egyptian pyramids and the movements frozen in stone from the walls of pre-Columbian temples, the terracotta, sculptural relief representing events from Assyrian and Babylonian building walls, the Greek and Roman friezes and bas-reliefs depicting movements within rituals and celebrations, medieval Chinese panoramic paintings,

the scenic narrative of *The Bayeux Tapestry* (1064–1066), are some of many examples that can be encountered among the proto-cinematic (or pre-cinematic) forms. A more particular early “version” of film is the Asian shadow theater (shadow plays or shades). The audience witnesses animated shadow plays, with cut-out, artistically painted figures, which are illuminated in order to show moving shadows in color (Gronemayer 9). On a background of traditional music, puppeteers move two-dimensional figures in an acting space situated between an oil lamp and a screen made of paper or silk. The image projected unto these surfaces offers the illusion of a fictive, almost mystic world, which even today some consider the world of ancestral spirits.

A starting point in talking about moving images might be the development of technical evolution with special emphasis on photography and photographic art. The earliest known record of a proto-cinematic event in this regard is Plato’s allegory of the cave from Book VII of the *Republic*. The description of this cinematic space dates back as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Plato’s text presents the complex basis of proto-cinematic devices, identifies its audience, and outlines the conditions of illusion-production.

There is a dystopian audience that dwells in a subterranean cave (Plato 514); its members are bound to their places having their “legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads” (514b). Behind these passive spectator there is

light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets. (514b)

In the meantime silent and speaking marionette players are carrying past the wall different figures reminding of human images, shapes of animals, plants and different objects, all kept above the wall. The audience of the cave consists of persons that have never seen the world outside the cave. For them reality appears as the shadows of the artificial objects projected on the wall (515c). In other words, these prisoner-like humans perceive the illusionary world created by puppeteers as reality. If these people were liberated from their confined seats and taken outside to experience the real world, they could finally discern “cheat and illusion” from “more real things” (515d). Plato’s allegory presents a primordial *cinematic apparatus* which poses further questions about reality, illusion, ideology, and spectatorship, issues still in vogue among film critics. According to Jean-Louis Baudry, the cinematic apparatus contains “the ensemble of the equipment and operations necessary to the production of a film and its projection” (Baudry 763), in other words, the totality of technical device necessary for film-making and film screening.

The technology of motion pictures owes a great debt to the workings of *camera obscura* [dark chamber]. This is a small or even a room-size dark box in which the real, upside-down

image of an object is produced as a result of incoming rays of light through a small opening. These rays are then focused onto a facing surface where the object's image in color is ready to be projected. The function of the dark chamber is known from antiquity (Mo-Ti, Aristotle). Researched from the dawn of medieval times (Ibn Al-Haytham), the camera obscura was used for scientific purposes from the fifteen century (Leonardo da Vinci) through the sixteen century (Giovanni Battista Della Porta), and became a frequently used tool by scientists (Johannes Kepler) and painters. Johannes Vermeer and Giovanni Antonio Canaletto were the first among many artists who used the dark chamber in their works of visual art (Monaco 54). In *Secret Knowledge. Rediscovering the Techniques of the Old Masters* (2001) the British pop artist David Hockney shed light on the use and abuse of this tool. Hockney's recent optical experiments on painting with the help of the dark chamber aimed to show that Jan van Eyck, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, and Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velasquez were presumably applying camera obscura when creating their works of art. Along with various lens and mirrors, the dark chamber was an optical device frequently exploited by an impressive number of painters and portraitists. Optical aids enhanced photographic images with the effect of striking realism in traditional painting while saving a considerable amount of time for the artist, who could therefore paint a great number of pictures in a relatively short period of time.

Other sources of cinema's development range back to the *phantasmagoria* shows and the *laterna magica* [magic lantern] performances practiced in the early 1790s and early 1800s. These were forms of entertainment in which reality was mystified by using back projection to keep people unaware of lanterns but aware of the projected eerie figures (Crary 132). The *kaleidoscope*, conceived by David Brewster in 1815, was among the popular optical devices of the period. This was a tube-shaped optical device which permitted the vision of (innumerable) patterns generated by the motion of gems (or pieces of colored glass) inhabiting the three-sided mirror interior of the tube. The visual displays of *dioramas* [panoramic paintings], which implied motion on the part of the observer (112) also attracted a great number of fans; diorama was shaped in its final form by Louis J. M. Daguerre in the early 1820s. The *stereoscope*, designed by Charles Wheatstone and David Brewster, imitated the physiology of the eyes. This assembly enabled binocular vision (or stereoscopic imagery), a vivid, two-dimensional visual effect through which two distinct images appeared as one (120). Throughout the nineteenth century visual phenomena induced by the motion of objects and optical toys interested especially laymen, and only to a lesser extent scientists. Bazin defined these laypersons as "monomaniacs." These were not real inventors but rather doctors, physicists, do-it-yourself people, "ingenious industrialists" ("The Myth" 200), who came across cinematic inventions while working on completely different issues in physics, physiology, or other areas.

One of the early recordings of motion was registered in 1825 by Peter Mark Roget, who wrote his down observations of train wheels he saw through the vertical bars of a fence (Crary

106). Roget drew the attention to the fact that a screen with several openings placed before a moving object could produce, for an attentive observer, special effects of motion. It was in the same year that the *thaumatrope* [wonder-turn] was made public by John Paris. This optical gadget had a small circular disc with different drawings on both sides and strings attached so that it could be twirled with a spin of the hand; when spun, the bird figure on one half of the disc and a cage on the other half produced the appearance of the bird in cage (105). This visual illusion was due to what Joseph Plateau coined as the “persistence of vision” (107). Plateau continued the scientific investigations of Isaac Newton, Johan Wolfgang Goethe, and Jan Purkinje and found that at the basis of human perception of vision lies the condition of positive and negative perception, that is, presence and absence, or blindness and sight. Plateau observed that while an optical device goes on a “blind” movement, the image previously seen image persists in the mind of the observer and, despite the blind movements, connects with the next picture. This phenomenon, is called the retinal afterimage (97). If objects differing in form and position appear one after the other within very brief intervals of time, the retinal after image they produce in the human brain blends them together and “one will believe that a single object is gradually changing form and position” (107–109).

During the 1830s, following the pragmatic achievements of Michael Faraday’s magneto-optic effects (1831), Plateau created the *phenakitoscope* [deceiving the viewer]. This visual tool consisted of a disc which was divided into eight or sixteen segments, all with narrow window-like holes and a sequence of figures each in a given position of movement painted above the slit openings (Crary 109). The mechanism produced the illusion of movement when the viewer, who faced a mirror, turned the disc. During the same decade, Simon von Stampfer used a similar construction to that of the phenakitoscope, which he called the *stroboscope* [whirling]. The stroboscope had the effect of slowing down motion by interrupting the viewing process at regularly spaced intervals. The stroboscopic effect – discovered by Faraday – interrupted the stream of flowing pictures and created the illusion of movement. This trick was also accomplished with another utensil used in the production of visual motion effects and this was William G. Horner’s *zootrope* or *zoetrope* [wheel of life], which was patented in 1834. The zootrope consisted of a turning cylinder that simulated action (110) similar in its working scheme with that of the phenakitoscope. By the end of the 1830s the zootrope became a popular way of entertainment; it was, in fact, a leisure-time commodity bought and enjoyed mostly by the growing urban middle class (112).

Eadweard Muybridge, the English-born American motion picture pioneer was interested in biomechanics and ended up inventing the machinery which was the closest precursor of moving pictures. During the 1880s Muybridge did substantial studies on the movement of humans and animals, and by the 1890s he produced the first moving image depicting a galloping horse entitled *The Horse in Motion*. He recorded this movement and fixed it with the help of wet collodion on a glass plate (Bazin, “The Myth” 200). The collodion is a sticky, gluey

substance employed as an adhesive material to fix photographic images. Muybridge's machine was coined *zoopraxiscope* (1881), and projected images from rotating glass disks, and realistically reproduced not only animal movements (galloping horses and buffalos), but also the motion of men and women (walking, running, kicking, and jumping). The *praxinoscope* was created by Charles-Émile Reynaud in 1877. He placed interior circles into the zoetrope in order to make a more accurate illusion of motion, and used the instrument mostly for animated cartoons. In 1888 Reynaud patented the praxinoscope under the name of "optical theater."

The characteristics of pictures, paintings and those of the photographic medium, closely accompanied film throughout its rapid development. Among these, the photographic art is considered film's most important precursor. Despite the fact that photography was not *par excellence* creative form of art but rather a "closed circuit" in the artistic sense (Deren 218), it supplied film with its elementary constituent: the picture.

In 1727 the German physician Johann Heinrich Schulze, discovered the useful properties of silver salts while trying to work out a tool for sending secret written messages. He realized that silver salts exposed to sunlight darkened, while the unexposed areas remained untainted (Kittel 127). He was the first to experiment the phenomenon of the photonegatives and the first to "write" with light. However, it was Sir John Herschel (1839) who applied the word "photography" to this type of "light writing" (Leggat 2000). In 1827 Joseph Nicéphore Niépce exploited the knowledge he had about lithography (1796) and heliographs (his early experiments with pictures exposed to the sun that left dark and light areas) and produced the first image, *the photograph*. Later, Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre developed Niépce's technical heritage. While investigating on Niépce's bitumen and asphalt techniques, he made the accidentally discovery of the latent photographic image. Daguerre left a silver spoon on a light-sensitive silver iodide plate; the sunrays drew the shape of the image of the object. After that, Daguerre left an underexposed plate in his chemical cupboard and a couple of days later found that a latent image developed on this plate due to the presence of mercury vapors from an open cup left nearby (Kittel 135–136 and Leggat 2000). The end-product was the famous *daguerreotype* (1837), which was a positive image "frozen" on a metal support. However, these images needed further work these had to be finalized by lithographers or engraving artists, who made the final prints.

While trying to achieve a more convenient print, William Henry Talbot invented the *calotype*, which was based on the positive-negative properties of image writing (Kittel 139). The calotype made possible the transference of images on paper. The collodion process followed Talbot's pragmatic discovery was followed by the invention of the collodion process that facilitated sharper images with a reduced exposure time. Talbot used of glass plates but in 1871 Richard Maddox replaced glass with a gelatin basis, and developed the dry plate easy-to-handle process of fixing images. It was not long after the introduction of celluloid-based

flexible film by George Eastman in 1884 that photography became a popular and convenient mechanical way of producing pictures available not only to professionals but also to enthusiastic amateurs.

Pioneer photographers made extensive use of this new visual mode and soon photography intruded in all areas of life: it visualized faces, crowds, and landscapes, caught scenes of urban, rural, private and public life; it became eye-witness to instances of war and turned into an organic element of the mass-media. Susan Sontag in her book *On Photography* (1971) put to test the morality and aesthetics which lie at the basis of photography as a popular medium. Photographs, Sontag claimed, enabled a new mode of seeing the world and brought moments and miniatures of reality accessible for almost everybody. Bazin, too, commented on the social and artistic implication of photography's mimetic qualities in the hands of masses and focused on the time-canning properties of the medium.

Photography affects us like a phenomenon in nature, like a flower or a snowflake whose vegetable or earthly origins are inseparable part of their beauty. This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction. [...] The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it. [...] photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. (Bazin, "The Ontology" 198)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the discovery and use of photography and moving images brought forward a crisis of realism. As Bazin observed, modernist artists, freed from the "resemblance complex" in the arts, abandoned the realist representation to non-artists, which identified realism with photography or paintings related to photography (197, 199). Photographic prints and moving pictures nurtured, in turn, creative processes in other visual arts. One of Muybridge's famous movement studies, *Woman walking downstairs* (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), foreshadowed Marcel Duchamp's famous modernist picture exhibited at the New York's Armory Show in 1913 entitled *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912). The stages of the figure's motion suggest a visual synthesis of human movement, which make *Nude* chronophotographic picture, a cubist projection of mechanic activity. In the first decade of the twentieth century Duchamp's first readymade *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) together with *Nude Descending a Staircase* were artistic studies on motion and kinetic energy, respectively, pre-figuring the idea of kinetic art. Film and kinetic art are, to some extent, related because both art forms deal with movement and effects of motion. Apart from visual artists, the movement of images preoccupied other creative people, too; during the first decade of the twentieth century vorticists (1912–1915) focused on the machine-made products and connected graphic art and

typographical designs with industrial machines by capturing motion in images in an abstract manner.

The technical reproduction at the turn of the century has reached a level that permitted the faithful and mechanical reproduction of works of art. This caused “the most profound change in their impact upon the public” and “captured a place of its own among the artistic processes” (Benjamin 733). Photography and film are the results of technological development in the period Walter Benjamin called “the age of mechanical reproduction,” but they are also works of art. And as works of art, they, accordingly, have *exhibition* and *cult value*. The cult value derives from the uniqueness, the authenticity, and the ritualistic context that defines that art form. The exhibition value becomes more comprehensible with the public and mass presentability of a work of art which results from the possibility of its mechanical reproduction.

[F]rom a photographic negative [...] one can make any number of prints to ask for an “authentic” print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice–politics. (736)

While mechanical reproduction is inherent in film production, photography retains the cult value especially via the presence of the human factor. The cult value emanates from the “aura” (736) of the work and develops according to cultural, social, and political contexts. Film can mobilize masses and influence their modes of reception by making the cult value recede in the background; the result is that photography and film are perceived (by most people) primarily as means of entertainment and not necessarily as art forms.

Not knowing it contributes to a form of entertainment, Étienne-Jules Marey, a physiologist who was inspired by Muybridge’s work, started working with a genuine camera based on glass plates (Bazin 200). He discovered the principle of photo series or the *chronophotographic camera*, which provided the basis for today’s cinematographic technique, the technique of moving photography. Additionally, Ottomar Anschütz invented the slit shutter made for short exposure times, and soon built a viewing machine he called *electrotachyscope*. Between 1888 and 1891 Thomas Alva Edison presented the *kinetograph* [motion-picture camera] and the *kinetoscope* [viewing machine or peep-show machine], which were the products of his collaboration with William Kennedy Laurie Dickson. Not long after, Edison synchronized moving pictures with sound in his *kinetophonograph* [writing of movement and sound], that formed the technological basis of future talking pictures. During his work on the phonograph, Edison was inspired by Marey’s recordings on flexible paper material. Thereafter, he and his assistant W. K. L. Dickson started perforating celluloid tapes in strips on both sides counting four holes per picture with the aim to ensure equal intervals between subsequent picture frames. It was these celluloid tapes on the basis of which Edison later standardized the dimensions of the filmic tape to 35 mm (Gronemayer 20). By the dawn of the twentieth century after a long sequence of



discoveries, inventions and experimentation, it became clear that 24 pictures per second is the optimal speed of recording as opposed to the previous 16 and 20 pictures per second. Projection, too, made progress due to the intensification of the stroboscopic effect: each picture was additionally interrupted (one or two times by the lens) so that the viewer received not 24 but 48 and even 72 picture images per second (27).

Edison invented, patented, and sold the first commercial, miniature movie-theaters, the *automated halls* or “penny arcades,” which were coin-operated, individual looking boxes, that became increasingly popular in the U.S. and in Europe. With these, the American inventor showed sequences of pictures in motion and told sets of events with his pictures. After his technological successes he concentrated on making and “showing” stories in which he combined his technical knowledge about film, the workings of the electronic bulb, and the function of phonograph. Edison’s motion pictures were created in *Black Mary*, the first studio in the history of film (Kittler 174). The name of this studio has a double connotation: it suggests the image of the American police paddy wagons (Gronemayer 20) and it also refers to the magic-making, dusky interior of the camera obscura. *Black Mary* was a dark tin hut with an opening at the roof. It was mobile in the sense that it could rotate around its own axis in order to catch sunlight to produce pictures. Not only did Edison manage to narrate some quite popular stories but by using this studio prototype succeeded in shocking the public and the first film critic, with *The Kiss* (1896), a short narrative film that displayed a kiss in close-up. Soon, the first ever recorded film review coined it “totally disgusting,” to which public response was to break all previous attendance records (Gronemayer 20).

The Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, were fascinated by the idea of capturing reality on film. To pursue their aim, they assembled a light-weight, hand-held motion picture camera, which they named *cinématographe*. First, the *cinématographe* transposed the “caught” reality onto filmstrips, which then projected filmed reality to a large canvas. This launched the method of projecting moving images to large screens that enabled not only small group projections but also mass viewing first across Europe and then throughout the whole world. In 1895 the Lumières presented their first ten short films (for a fee of one franc per person) in a place that was to become later the cornerstone of film history: The Grand Café in Paris.

The early moving pictures of the Lumière brothers were short films with a running time ranging from forty to fifty seconds such as the *Arrival of a Train at the Station* (1895), and *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895). Some of their short films depicted mundane activities of the industrial, modern world or showed visual extracts from average people’s lives (*Baby’s Breakfast*, 1895). For example, *Teasing the Gardener* or *The Waterer gets Watered* (1895) can be considered the forerunner of today’s home videos. This movie enjoyed great success, because unlike other short films of the period, which depicted motion without detectable narration, it contained a short, funny story “told” in moving pictures. *Teasing the Gardener* begins with the image of a diligent gardener who is watering plants. He does not notice that behind his back

he is tricked by a little boy who stops the flow of water in the hose by stepping on it. The gardener realizes that something is wrong and starts looking at the open end of the tube when the child suddenly steps from the hose. As a result, a strong stream of splashing water hits the gardener's face. Seeing this, the boy runs away but after a short chase the rascal gets caught by the angry man and is punished by being spanked.

Because of the topic and narrative structure, this movie can be considered the precursor of chase movies and is also the "germ cell" (Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" 174) of comedies on film. For Alfred Hitchcock, the chase is a fundamental filmic paradigm that denotes "the final expression of the motion picture medium" (qtd. in Kracauer "The Establishment" 294). Kracauer also remarked that cinematic properties (besides the issue of movement) entail recording and revealing functions. Movements and chase, dancing and nascent motions fit into the category of recording functions, while things normally unseen (small objects in close up, enlarged views, transient figures unconventional representations, the refuse, the familiar) fall into the realm of revealing functions (293–303). Kracauer explains the primordial property of the chase in the context of Griffith's movies. The critic notes:

[...] nothing reveals the cinematic significance of the reveling in speed more drastically than D. W. Griffith's determination to transfer, at the end of all his great films, the action from the ideological plane to that of the famous "last minute rescue," which was a chase pure and simple. Or should one say, a race? In any case, the rescuers rush ahead to overwhelm the villains or free their victims at the very last moment, while simultaneously the inner emotion which the dramatic conflict has aroused yields to a state of acute physiological suspense called forth by exuberant physical motion and its immediate implications. Nor is a genuine Western imaginable without a pursuit or a race on horseback. As Flaherty put it, Westerns are popular "because people never get tired of seeing a horse gallop across the plains." (294)

The first narrative film was made by Edwin Porter's and it was 12 minute-long film entitled *The Great Train Robbery*. This movie premiered in 1903 and was the precursor of the western genre. This film popularized basic elements of narratives in moving pictures such as the racing scenes and panoramic shots within the scenes, which created a sense of tension in the viewer while building up the dynamics of narrative's tempo (Gronemayer 42) in order to manipulate the spectator's suspense. The showdown moment (a typical staging, where the protagonist and the antagonist meet face to face in the last fight) was first used by Porter in a dramatic close-up picture with the robber aiming the gun at the frightened audience. The powerful narrative capacity and the emotional potential of the showdown moment made it the classical climactic point of the western genre.

The Lumière brothers produced a total of over 1420 films throughout their entire career. They were great inventors and so they remained. Louis Lumière believed that cinema was an invention without future and did not pursue further the artistic potentials entailed by the breakthrough discovery he and his brother achieved. Despite the fact that their work was of

high quality both in the photographic realism in filmmaking and film screening, the popularity of the Lumières and their products faded quite soon. Due to the lack of interest they had to reduce productions (Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" 174). One of the drawbacks of their filmic activity was that they never thought of moving the camera. Their filming device had always been fixed and movements were filmed from one place. It was only during the first decade of the twentieth century when director David L. Wark Griffith and his cameraman, G. W. "Billy" Blitzer restructured filmmaking by introducing camera movements and special effects.

The Lumières were primarily inventors and manufacturers of cameras and films, their organized screenings were only additional activities. After a while they could not cope with the increasing need of filmic tools and so they sold the patent for cinematograph manufacturing to Charles Pathé. The buyer was a talented entrepreneur who recognized the financial potential behind the filmic devices. Not long after the purchase of the patent, Pathé established the world's first film empire and began to produce cameras, projectors, and films in what was to become one of the most profitable economic sectors of the twentieth-century: the film industry (Gronemayer 30). The Lumière brothers did not realize the entertaining and, thus, economic power of their filmmaking. By showing only the mimetic facet of film they firmly believed that the sole aim of moving images was to realistically present the world as it was (Kracauer 174). Film, however, had more to show.

Maries-Georges-Jean Méliès was another crucial figure in the development of motion picture: he introduced significant changes to filmmaking. He understood that a movie is more than a simple process of mimesis and reality recording; he thought that film is also a matter of visual fiction. Unlike the Lumière brothers for whom film was not more than scientific curiosity (Kracauer, "Basic Concepts" 175), the stage magician and showman Méliès acknowledged other properties movies unnoticed before him. From the first moments he spent watching the films of the Lumière brothers in Grand Café, he recognized the artistic, entertaining potential and imaginative value of films, and this made him the parent of the fantastic film tradition. He thought that the aim of this new technology was to alienate reality from itself and to make the world of magic and fairy tales available for viewers in a place that combined the technical potentials of the new medium with the artistic values of the theater: the film theater (Gronemayer 30).

Theater and cinema are closely related arts. Many critics made claims to accept or refute this kinship. Hugo Münsterberg, for example, refused the idea of "cinematified" theater (Braudy and Cohen 395) and Erwin Panofsky declined that of "theatricalized" (*ibid.*) film. Susan Sontag sees an intimate dialogue of cinema and theater that emerges from cinema's emancipation "from theatrical models" (Sontag 362), while André Bazin understands this interrelation between stage and screen in terms of how these two arts exploit their subject matter.

A theater person, Méliès was one of the most important the pioneers of special effects and trick pictures in film, which he transposed from the unnatural world of theater into films

through artificially arranged scenes. He used the reversal of time, and was the first to shoot the stop trick, the split screen, double and multiple exposure, time-lapse, and the dissolve process (which recalled Leonardo da Vinci's *sfumato*, smoky, misty technique). The reversal of time, however, was first employed by the Lumière brothers in *Charcuterie mécanique* [*The Mechanical Butcher*], a one-minute-long film made in 1896 but Méliès filmed a similar event. He pictured the killing of a pig and then manipulated time by placing the sequences in reversed order: the last scenes were assembled as first and the first were placed last. The normal order of things became paradoxical the reversed time made impossible things visible: the dead flesh and all prepared sausages gradually transformed into a living animal (Kittler 178). The stop trick's discovery was, as many things in the history of cinema, accidental. While he was filming a funeral, Méliès ran out of celluloid. He replaced the tape and continued filming the procession which was – as if drawn by an invisible hand – in completely different place in contrast with its last filmed position. After he assembled the film with the two positions placed one after the other viewers did not realize the lapse in time, only the shift in location. Méliès later used this trick in *Disappearance of a Lady* in 1896, in which he filmed a woman vanish from the stage that he replaced with a skeleton (178–179). The stop trick and the time-lapse were techniques that brought the profession of cutters (179) into film industry.

Méliès's early experiments, entitled *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *Impossible Voyage* (1904), were the precursors of science fiction and fantasy films. *The Bewitched Inn*, also known as *The Haunted Castle* (1896), is considered the prototype of thriller and horror films. The 14-minute-long *A Trip to the Moon* was inspired by Jules Verne's novel *From Earth to the Moon* (1865) and H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). This visual storytelling has some peculiar animated sequences, which make *A Trip to the Moon* the first movie in film history to employ animation. The film is about a group of "astronomers" who plan a trip to the moon in a bullet-shaped space capsule. The preparation takes place while some attractive Folies-Bergères girls entertain the viewer. The astronomers are catapulted and manage to reach the surface of the Moon where they discover a world of tranquil beauties and girl-faced stars, all in a dreamland of huge mushrooms. The humans proceed to discover and conquer this unknown land but the idyllic picture of possible space imperialism is shattered by the appearance of the aliens, named after Wells's creatures from *The First Men in the Moon*, Selenites. Soon an armed conflict erupts between the invading humans and the lunar aliens and after a series of brief fights the humans escape and succeed in leaving behind the adversary Moon. They finally land on Earth and are safely rescued by a ship.

Despite his ingenuity and artistic inventiveness, Méliès conceived the film viewer as theater spectator, and movies as filmed theater, accordingly. He produced a great number of *féeries*, a type of melodrama that combined music and acrobatics with the thrills of magic shows and fairy tales, and filmed theatrical performances. Despite his active involvement in the early

cinema business he went bankrupt and left the field of filmmaking and marketing to Charles Pathé (Kracauer 177).

Siegfried Kracauer put the films of the Lumière brothers into the category of *the realistic tendency* in cinema, while the Méliès's movies were identified as examples of *the formative tendency* in film. The first tendency designates a mimetic mode of representing reality; the films of the Lumières brothers are formative and, in this context, the prototypes of documentaries and newsreels. They convey an impression of reality which makes the viewer feel that she or he is watching real events ("Basic Concepts" 177–178). The formative tendency emphasizes the artistic, creative approaches to filmmaking and focuses on the potential of illusion in film. However, films cannot be strictly filed into any of the previously mentioned categories because the two tendencies clash and intermingle even within a single movie. Kracauer claims that the two tendencies are balanced if the formative approach does not try to overwhelm the realistic one but rather tries to follow it (181); a good balance, therefore, needs artistic vision properly combined with technological equipment and knowledge.

The technology behind early talking machines relies on Wolfgang von Kempelen's innovative work, and was materialized by Alexander Graham Bell's harmonic telegraph, and by Thomas Alva Edison's *phonograph* (1877). The phonograph was a machine that recorded and reproduced sounds and speech: it recorded sound as a series of undulations in a wavy groove produced in wax and tinfoil which wrapped the outside surface of metal cylinders (Lastra 24, 31). The use of the needle on the rotating cylinder reconverted engraved sound signs into sound waves. The "visible speech" (Kittler 172), that is, the visual representation of language and sound, was pioneered even before Edison by Edouard-Leon Scott, who used a *phonauto-graph* to transcribe sound into visible medium. The transcription of sounds was successful and as a result, in 1887 Emile Berliner patented disc and matrix recording, however the revolution in sound was about to enter film industry only a few decades later.

Early films started the adoption of sound in animated movies where it was easy to synchronize it with the image. Walt Disney's *Steamboat Willie* (1928) featuring Mickey Mouse was the first sound cartoon in the history of film (Gronemayer 73). The first sound film was *The Jazz Singer* (1927, dir. Alan Crosland), considered a "singing" film rather than a "talking" one (Cook 26–27). Later, Disney's *Fantasia* (1940, dir. James Algar, S. Armstrong, et alii) employed a more complex sound: the first stereo sound system. By 1957, high-fidelity amplification, complex speaker systems, LPs and stereophonic reproduction of sound (two separate channels of sound information into one groove) were the products that further enriched film technology. In the 1970s, the "second sound revolution" (Stam 212) opened the way to more sophisticated sound recordings. The Dolby Sound, involving dispersed optical stereophonic sounds, was first used in *Star Wars* (1975, dir. George Lucas). Dolby Surround (1980s) with four audio channels (Left, Center, Right and Mono) followed, and today it is the Dolby Pro Logic and Dolby Digital as the top technologies in cinematic sound; *Star Wars: The*

*Phantom Menace* (1999, dir. George Lucas) was the first to apply these sound systems. Similarly to the evolution of the moving pictures, the development of the sound was mainly due to accidental inventions and “relatively unexpected breakthroughs, often brought by technology or personnel suddenly injected into the motion picture milieu” (Ogle qtd. in Cook 27).

The primacy of the image over the sound in film is “historically and technically accidental,” Bazin claims, because the cinema was born from the convergence of the various technical “obsessions” about *the myth of total cinema* (Bazin, “The Myth” 202). These preoccupations with the cinema as total art regard a complete fidelity in representing reality, which can be accomplished especially by continual technological development. Bazin believes that we are still far from an absolute representation of reality in film, which he labels *total cinema*. As Stam points out, the name of pictures, moving pictures, and movies reinforces the primacy of image over sound because it “stresses the inscription of visible phenomena, destined for spectators (not auditors) who go to see (not hear) a film” (Stam 214). In addition, film’s critical language is “better equipped to speak about such things as eyeline matches and point-of-view edition than it is about sound” (ibid.).

Early silent films were not entirely “silent.” They were mostly accompanied by mechanical sound machines or incidental live music (piano, harmonium or, occasionally, an entire orchestra), intertitles, sing-alongs, or early music records. These were unreliable sources for planned performances and, therefore, other, more trustworthy acoustic items had to be employed in order to synchronize the moving pictures with the adequate sound. There was appropriate music for every type of film: hectic melodies for the chase, idyllic and melancholic tunes to love scenes and fateful moments, dramatic sounds for impending danger (Gronemayer 46–47). In the early sound film language, sound, and music were all recorded on a single track (47) which made any other, later mixing of sounds impossible.

Cristian Metz claims that film has five tracks: image, dialogue, noise, music, and written materials (qtd. in Stam 212). Commenting on the importance of sound among the tracks, Michel Chion stresses the “spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time” (qtd. in Stam 215), which he defines as *synchresis* (a combination of “synchronism” and “synthesis”), and which makes the processes of “dubbing, post-synchronization,” and also “sound effects” (ibid.) possible. Chion claims that the aural track has similar properties with that of the image. He declares that sounds are endowed with the quality of *phonogenie* (216), analogous with the attribute of *photogenie*, used to describe images. Jean Epstein understood *photogenie* as “any aspect of things, beings, or souls whose moral character is enhanced by filmic reproduction” (qtd. in Stam 34), a quintessential element of a truly modern art quality that stresses a certain visual force behind moving pictures. *Phonogenie*, accordingly, reflects a natural tendency for an auditory sensation to sound pleasantly authentic.

The use of quality music (for example, classical music) in films led to a conventional view of sound as a supplement to the image (Stam 213), an approach that further stressed the essentially visible side of movies. Among the first films where music was considered less an accompaniment to the image and more as a basic aesthetic element was Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929), René Clair's *Under the Roof's of Paris* (1931), and Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). In the course of film history many directors cooperated with composers and produced complex works of art. For example: Sergei Eisenstein worked with Sergei Prokofiev, Berthold Brecht with Hans Eisler, Basil Wright with Benjamin Britten, Marcel Carné with Maurice Jaubert, Jean Renoir with Joseph Cosma, Federico Fellini with Nino Rota, Peter Greenaway with Michael Nyman, Steven Spielberg with John William, Luchino Visconti employed the music of Gustav Mahler, Jean-Luc Godard furnished his film with Beethoven's music (Gronemayer 48–49).

Color in motion pictures appeared later than the sound, and made cinema a more comprehensive art form with up-to-date technological background that Rudolf Arnheim labeled as "the complete film" (215). Color photography had already been introduced as early as the 1850s and 1860s by James Clerk Maxwell, and provided the basis for color cinematography. First, cinema used the two-color components of Kinemacolor (1911), Kodachrome (1915), and Technicolor (1932). Kinemacolor exploited the properties of red and green filters through which black and white frames were projected; Kodachrome produced colors directly on the film whereas Technicolor applied a superior, three-color format (red, green, blue) that was successfully implemented on the film pellicle without any adverse or damaging reaction when combined with the sound track (Cook 28, Branigan 129). *On with the Show* (1929, dir. Alan Cosland) and *Gold Diggers of Broadway* (1929, dir. Roy Del Ruth) were released as the first "all color, all talking" (Cook 28) movies produced by the Warner Brothers Studios. Technicolor's results were applied in Walt Disney's animated film *Flowers and Trees* (1939, dir. Burt Gillett). Later, Walt Disney and Pioneer Film "acquired exclusive rights for color cartoons" and released an entire series of *Silly Symphonies* (1929–1939, dir. by various directors) that "won critical acclaim, Academy Awards and massive box-office returns" (Cook 28).

Sergei Eisenstein, among other early film theorists, considered the use of color in film as important as music or montage; color was for him an essential element of film's dramaturgy similar to the themes of musical works. He observed that

[...] the theme expressed in color *leit-motifs* can, through its color score and with its own means, unfold an inner drama, weaving its own pattern in the contrapuntal whole, crossing and recrossing the course of action, which formerly music alone could do with full completeness by supplementing what could not be expressed by acting or gesture; it was music alone that could sublimate the inner melody of a scene into thrilling audio-visual atmosphere of a finished audio-visual episode. (qtd. in Nichols 388)

Color provided a surplus value to film, an extra sensory stimulus that black and white motion pictures did not previously have. In other words, color was able to satisfy more realistic visual

needs which early filmic realism lacked (Buscombe 91). Nevertheless, after color became an organic component of film, it has gradually been absorbed into the realm of realist tools. However, in order to satisfy contemporary audience's need for technological and technological wonders, more vivid color images were further developed to fit the wide screen: the 3-D (stereoscopic image with the illusion of depth), the IMAX (Image Maximum, a large format film display), and the IMAX 3-D (currently in only 250 theaters across the world). The latter provides a visible three-dimensional visual feast available in recent film releases such as: *The Polar Express* (2004, dir. Robert Zemeckis), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004, dir. Alfonso Cuarón), *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003, dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski), *Superman Returns* (2006, dir. Bryan Singer), *The Ant Bully* (2006, dir. John A. Davis), *Happy Feet* (2006, dir. George Miller, Warren Coleman and Judy Morris), and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007, dir. David Yates).

Between 1896 and 1912 film became a mass-produced economic art; the glorious silent period of the moving images lasted from the first movie screening until 1927. In a more general context, the beginnings of the widespread cinema coincided with the peak of imperialism, with the emergence of psychoanalysis, the rise of nationalism and consumerism (Stam 19), and the beginning of women's emancipation movements. In the twenties and thirties, film was in a transitional stage of development but on its successful way to partially substitute theater, another popular, performative medium of entertainment. Due to the low price of tickets – compared with those of theater entrance fees – cinema soon became the most widespread, mass-consumed form of art. The universal language of moving pictures contributed vastly to the popularity of movies. As Andrea Gronemayer writes, “[t]he immigrants in New York loved the cinema above all, because they could enjoy the magic of pictures without having to master a foreign tongue and were introduced to customs and habits of the new world” (33). Film was and still is not only a means of entertainment but also an important scientific tool (Monaco 43), in opening up new areas of knowledge and by providing alternative means of communication among people.

In 1910 American cinemas were attracting an audience of 26 million people a week (Cook 4). Tickets for “one-reelers” (10–15 minutes one-act films) cost a nickel and the public spaces that hosted the nickel-priced, 5-cents-shows soon became known as *Nickelodeons*. The first Nickelodeon was opened by the Harris brothers in Pittsburgh and became the prototype of the new movie theater (Gronemayer 34). Due to the economic policy of the Nickelodeons, film became a truly democratic medium because it enabled people of diverse socio-economical backgrounds to equally participate in a group experience while watching film as an entertaining art form. Under the ethos of the above-mentioned democratic values, John Belton envisages the Nickelodeon as a place of “collective experience” (10), a site of valuable cultural encounters that made these movie-houses the nest of a “homogenous, middle-class American culture” (11). The existence and proliferation of middle-class “cinema goers” population



enabled, in return, America's fast development in terms of newer and newer "techniques of cultural distribution" (Kroes 47). The country's democratic calling was the root of its unawareness to the difference between "high" and "low" culture that, was predominant in the rest of the world (48). From the turn of the twentieth century, it was photography (especially documentary photography) and film have that have been the *par excellence* forms of democratic, and also, popular arts.

The thirties and forties signaled the golden age of "dream factories." Hollywood studios, filled with glittering star figures, were the "cathedrals of the motion pictures" (Belton 3). With a successfully operating star system and its classical narrative cinema, Hollywood became the emblem of the American Dream of success. Most studio films (dominant or mainstream films) were created according to commercial standards to produce box-office, star, production, and story value. Studios provided fertile grounds and reliable backgrounds for many film directors. Some were able to work according to the standards and enforced institutional constraints studios had while other directors (Erich von Stroheim, Robert Flaherty, for example), actors, and many different artists who denied the imposed rules. With a production of over six hundred films per year (Hayward 186), and with an increasing number of spectators, Hollywood had, and still has, a considerable cultural influence over American and global audiences. After the World War II, the main Hollywood studios lost their leading role in the film world. During the 1960s, "New Wave" films emerged from France, followed by a great number of "new wavelet" movies from numerous European, Latin American, African, and Asian countries (Monaco 196–197), many of them challenging the supremacy of Hollywood's film industry.

Film theorists had, from the beginning, related film to other artifacts and coined film as the seventh art. Arnheim considers film as an art *par excellence*. The *essence of cinema* lies not only in the photogenic nature of film but also in its synaesthetic nature. This attribute of film describes the art's complex combinatory potential: movies have been named "painting in motion" and "architecture in motion" by Vachel Lindsay in Chapter IX from *The Art of Moving Image* and "sculpture in motion" in Chapter VIII of the same book (Lindsay 2004). Film was also poetically labeled as "music of light" by Abel Gance (Stam 33). In his description of film development, James Monaco stresses its close relation with other arts:

The neutral template of film was laid over the complex systems of the novel, painting, drama, and music to reveal new truths about certain elements of those arts. In fact, if we disregard for the moment the crudity of early recording processes, the majority of the elements of those arts worked very well in film. Indeed, for the last hundred of years the history of the arts is tightly bound up with the challenge of film. (20)

Film, with its special language of moving images, is an artistic instrument that is used to record other arts. The comparison between the cinema and other arts grants the legitimacy of the

medium and suggests that cinema should be “judged in its own terms” and “in relation to its own potentials and aesthetics” (Stam 34).

Film, however, was not accepted easily into the “club” of “high” arts and the dispute, though fading with time, continues even today. William deMille was, in 1911, among the first critics to exclude even the faintest possibility of perceiving film as art. In spite of adverse criticism, vast masses and a growing number of intellectuals vindicated movie-watching and movie-going as a “respectable activity for men of intellect and refinement” (Perkins 401). Film’s status, thus, had to be reconsidered. Vachel Lindsay’s *The Art of the Moving Pictures* written in 1915, was the first theory of film written in English. It championed film as art and draw attention to the cultural potentials of the medium in the context of the other arts, when he coined film as “new weapon of men” that will “go on and on in an immemorial wonder” (Lindsay 2004). Lindsay’s intellectual enterprise was also the first manifesto that addressed educational institutions (departments of English, for example) and stressed the importance of film studies (Perkins 402). Not long after the publication of *The Art of Moving Pictures*, a considerable number of film journals, manifestos, and even institutions legitimized film as art: these constituted viable forums where theories of cinema were born and further developed.

Today the main quest of film studies is still in tandem with the perennial search for the essence of the cinema. Film studies envisage a permanent re-discovery of cinema’s “structural modes,” monitor the development of its “inherent disciplines,” and explore “new, possible realms and dimensions accessible to it,” in order to “enrich our culture artistically” (Deren 227) as science enriched film’s development. Motion pictures, in turn, provide plural grounds for new theorizing modes.

## Keywords

art, photography, film, cinema, movies, Plato’s cave, cinematic apparatus, camera obscura, lanterna magica, phantasmagoria, féeries, kaleidoscope, diorama, stereoscope, thaumatrope, phenakitoskope, stroboscope, zootrope (zoetrope), zoopraxinoscope, daguerreotype, photography, calotype, praxinoscope, chronophotographic camera, kinetograph, kinoscope, kine-tophonograph, Black Mary, penny arcades, Nickelodeon, celluloid tape, phonautograph, phonograph, sound, color, myth of total cinema, total cinema, exhibition and cult value, cinématographe, narrative film, animation, realistic and formative tendency, synchresis, photogenie, phonogenie, essence of cinema

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### Selected List of Recommended Online Glossaries of Film and Cinema Terms

*Cinematic Terms. A Film-Making Glossary.*

Available: <http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms.html>

*Film/Editing Terms.*

Available: [http://www.zerocut.com/tech/film\\_terms.html](http://www.zerocut.com/tech/film_terms.html)

*Glossary of Film and Television Terms.*

Available: <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/education/glossary.html>

*Independent Film Channel's (IFC) Film School Multimedia Glossary.*

Available: <http://www3.ifctv.com/filmschool/students.htm>

*Internet Movies Database Online Film Glossary.*

Available: <http://www.imdb.com/Glossary>

Monaco, James. *The Dictionary of New Media*. New York: Harbor Electronic Publishing [1971] 1999.

Available: <http://www.jamesmonaco.com/DNMbook/DNMBook.pdf>

Schlemowitz, Joel. *A Glossary of Film Terms* (1999)

Available: [http://cepa.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film\\_courses/glossary\\_of\\_film\\_terms/glossary.html](http://cepa.newschool.edu/~schlejoj/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary.html)

## Chapter

# 2

# Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation

Zoltán Dragon

When you get right down to it, the most  
fantastic thing you could film is  
people reading.  
(Jean-Luc Godard)

One of the first things that one can say about language is that it can be spoken, written, learnt, and used for making ourselves understood, delivering or perceiving information. We can think of systems of communication other than ours (the barking of dogs, the dance of bees, etc.) as similar languages even if we cannot really learn or understand them. In the 1960s and 1970s, theorists of the cinema attempted to model a language that governs the system of film and describe what we should mean by the term *film language*.

Film language is a special kind of language, as it cannot be spoken and is an endlessly constructed and reconstructed system of medial communication. As Francesco Casetti argues, the phrase “film language” refers, on the one hand, to the theoretical tradition born before the Second World War that advocated cinema as a means of communication, “a device that allows man to express himself and to interact” (Casetti 54). On the other hand, it also refers to a completely new way of studying film, initiated in the mid-1960s by semiotics, whereby “the study of the *linguistic basis* of films [...] is replaced by the study of the *linguistic features*” (55) that cinema operates with. The difference between the two is that while in the first approach takes the linguistic analogue for granted and natural, the latter approach does away with this essentialist description of film, and investigates “specific components of a broader phenomenon” (ibid.). The analysis of film language, thus, looks at the ways the myriad of components are organized into a film, more precisely, into a filmic narrative.

According to Albert Laffay, the cinema is based on narrative because it is the only way to “make reality legible on the screen” (66). If cinema was to present reality as it is, the spectator would not be able to make sense out of the “vague outlines, confused distances” and the “open and dispersed” his or her universe (ibid). Narrative is the key: it is the tool that weaves separate components of reality together; it is the logic around which a story gets organized; and the frame that provides structure and perspective for the recorded world. In doing so, narrative is able to give meaning to the represented world, provides it with logic and vocabulary, by which it makes film into a language.

The way a film narrative is realized, however, is not without consequences. Once the film has a linguistic focus, and a cultural and artistic frame, it appears to have a “comprehensive design, a pervasive immanent logic,” which is not to be confused with the director’s claim on the “true message” of the film, i. e. what s/he wanted to “say” (67). This focus presupposes an abstract figure that “runs the game:” the *grand imagier*, “namely, the general instance that incarnates the very act by means of which the film allows itself to be seen and understood” (68). The *grand imagier* – which is also referred to as implied author or enunciator in narratology – is by no means the auteur or the narrator: it is a discursive mode that gives birth to both, and to the film narrative as such. While it may bear resemblance to the concept of the auteur-function of auteur-structuralism, the notion of the *grand imagier* pertains to particular films and not to the works of an author.

If we define *narrative* as “a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (Bordwell and Thompson 90), we can see why narrative aspects have become pillars of investigating fiction films. On a formal level, there is a distinction between *fabula* and *syuzhet*. According to Victor Shklovsky, *fabula* (usually translated as “story”) is the “pattern of relationships between characters and the pattern of actions as they unfold in chronological order” (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 71). *Fabula* can either be considered as the “raw material” which the filmmaker turns into the *syuzhet*, or as the imaginary construct of the spectator based on the *syuzhet*. The *syuzhet* (usually translated as “plot”) is the actual presentation of the story: events are not necessarily chronologically organized, “*in medias res* construction, retardation, parallel plots, ellipsis” among others can be used by the filmmaker to refashion the *fabula* “into an aesthetically satisfying form” (ibid.).

One of the central concepts of film narratology is *point of view*, which can either be defined as “the optical perspective of a character whose gaze or look dominates a sequence,” or as “the overall perspective of the narrator toward the characters and events of the fictional world” (83). In the first case, point of view can be discussed in terms of the issue of *focalization* – “the activity of the character from whose perspective events are perceived” (87); in the second, it can be related to the role of the *narrator* – “the agent, inscribed in the text, who relates or recounts the events of the fictional world” (83). While the narrator is the one who “speaks,” the focalizer can be described as the one who “sees.”

The filmic narrative is usually referred to as *diegesis*: a term that originates from Plato, who distinguished between two types of narratives. One is the *mimetic narrative*, which is the representation of a story through imitation, the other is the *diegetic narrative*, which is a “simple narrative,” in which “the poet himself is the speaker” (Bordwell 16) – that is in which there is a narrator who relates the story. In the case of fiction film, the second category applies because these films are considered to be “told” from a specific perspective by a storyteller. A narrator can be either within a narrative or outside. If the narration is performed by a character in the film, it is then a *character-narrator*, or *intradiegetic narrator* (intradiegetic literally means “within

the narrative”). When the narrator appears in the story s/he recounts, we call him/her a *homodiegetic narrator*; when s/he does not appear in the story s/he tells, s/he is a *heterodiegetic narrator*. It is important, though, that in both cases an identifiable character is the agent of narration. However, if the narrator is outside the narrative, it is an *extradiegetic narrator* (extradiegetic literally means “external to the narrative”), and the spectator does not directly see or hear the narration (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 97).

Laffay’s work was not so far from other attempts to define film as a language: the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the so-called “filmolinguist” project, the aim of which was to study film with the help of linguistics and structuralist semiotics. Instead of asking “What is the cinema?,” which would point toward the specificity thesis, the issue of the essence of the cinema, filmolinguists turned to questions of discipline and method. Cristian Metz in *Film Language* developed a new vocabulary for the study of fiction films: a combination of the technical vocabulary of linguistics and narratology. In a sense, it was the continuation or rather building upon some ideas of the Russian Formalists. One of the prominent theorists of Russian Formalism, Boris Eikhenbaum argued, for example, that “cinema is a particular system of figurative language,” (Stam 50) which means that the filmic narrative is made up of a complex syntax consisting of phrases and sentences.

In the final scene of *Stigmata* (1999, dir. Rupert Wainwright) we can see doves flying out of purgatory fire that engulfs a room in which the clerical investigator (Gabriel Byrne) and Frankie (Patricia Arquette) meet. It is clear that a dove could not be able to fly out of any fire without getting burnt; however, the narrative syntax that operates the film makes it obvious how it is still possible in the given context. Doves appear in certain emphatic scenes from the beginning of the film to signify and foreshadow the painful moments of some stigma being inflicted on the body of the unsuspecting Frankie. Images of doves and feathers act, therefore, as figures of speech do in literature: in this case doves are visual metonymies of the appearance of stigmas. In the final scene of *Stigmata*, no one gets upset by the ridiculous suggestion of the scene because the figurative “language” employed from the very beginning of *Stigmata* prepares the spectator for the seemingly impossible event.

Apart from the approach towards film language through narrative, there is a path through the subversion of narrativity, which was initiated by Soviet montage theorists. Interestingly, theory was something Sergei Michailovich Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga-Vertov, among others, did not think to be relevant to filmmaking, and rather opted for experimentation in cinematic style and technique. Eisenstein and most of his colleagues were originally trained in practical fields (engineering, architecture, etc.), so it was no surprise that the emphasis of their cinematic experimentation was on the film technique, on construction, and on experiment.

The emphasis on construction actually paved the way for the introduction of the quintessence of the Soviet cinema as such: *montage*. Montage in the Romance languages means

“assembling,” “editing”, but usually even Anglo-Saxon literature on film keeps this word when referring to the Soviet cinema, as it became its trademark. For the Soviet montage theorists, montage had “become the indisputable axiom on which the worldwide culture of the cinema has been built” (Stam 38). According to them, “the alchemy of montage [...] brought life and luster to the inert base materials of the single shot” (ibid.). It means that well before the import of structuralism into film theory, the Soviet filmmaking school insisted on the idea that the filmic shot, as the basic element of the film, had no “intrinsic meaning prior to its placement within a montage structure” (ibid.). A shot’s meaning arose only in its relation to other shots in the same sequence. According to Kuleshov, what distinguishes the cinema from other arts, therefore, is the capacity of the montage to organize disjointed fragments into meaningful, rhythmical sequence.

To account for this claim, Kuleshov set up an experiment, which is commonly referred to today as the *Kuleshov-effect*. His aim was to show that editing could engender emotions and associations that went far beyond the content of individual shots. Kuleshov’s principle was that if each shot is like a building block and derives its meaning from its context (i.e. the shots placed around it), then, if the context of a shot is changed by placing it in a different sequence, the whole meaning of the shot and the sequence changes. In the experiment Kuleshov juxtaposed several shots taken from different pieces of a film which then he edited into a sequence. He also used one close-up still shot of the actor Ivan Mosjoukine and juxtaposed it to three other, completely different shots (a plate of soup, a dead woman in her coffin and a child playing). The effect of this juxtaposition for the spectator is that the actor’s face changes expression, which in essence is impossible because it is a still shot. Consequently, it was film technique rather than “reality” that generated spectatorial emotion.

Eisenstein’s view of montage was far more radical than Kuleshov’s. While Kuleshov believed in shots making links and thus making up a sequence, Eisenstein believed not in juxtaposing, but in conflict. He was not interested in linear cause-effect plot construction, but rather in a disrupted, disjunctive, fractured diegesis. The Eisensteinian conflict is not only *between* shots, but *within* individual shots as well. In interaction shots must collide, creating a shock for the spectator, which was the basis for the so-called *intellectual montage*. In Eisenstein’s view, the shot is the raw material which filmmakers and the spectators use to construct meaning. He thought that the conflict arising in montage creates a *third meaning* whose relevance bears directly on the revolutionary history and the social reality of the Soviet Union. An example of the process of intellectual montage is provided by Eisenstein himself: the first set of shots depicts a poor woman and her undernourished child seated at a table upon which there is an empty bowl. Then there is a cut to the second set of shots, which depicts an overweight man with a golden watch and chain stretched over his fat belly. He is seated at a table groaning with food. The rapid juxtaposition of these two sets of images through quick editing creates a collision that, in turn, creates a third set of images in the spectator’s mind:



that of the oppression of the poor by the rich, which is further translated into political terms in the oppression of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Eisenstein's principle of editing is then a rapid alternation between sets of shots whose signification occurs at the point of their very collision.

Similarly to Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov refused to work along the logic of the classical Hollywood narratives. He declared in a manifesto-like tone that "the old films, based on the romance, theatrical films and the like, to be leprous" (Vertov qtd. in Stam 44). Instead of the false and dangerous pleasures classical narrative genres could offer, Vertov introduced the idea of the *kino-eye* ("kino glas" in Russian), the cinematic eye, which is an anthropomorphic version of the film camera. Its aim was to explore the world down to its tiniest detail – but with a political edge, of course: the ultimate aim was to "aid each oppressed individual and the proletariat as a whole in their effort to understand the phenomena of life around them" (ibid.). Vertov describes the *kino-eye* as superior to the human eye:

I am kino-eye. I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.  
Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility. I am in constant motion. I draw near, then away, from objects. I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse. I plunge full speed into a crowd. (ibid.)

While Vertov's work is thus highly ideologized, the *kino-eye* employed, for example, in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) set the agenda for documentary filmmaking, entirely devoid of fictional elements. Cinema was, for him, a mechanically perfected look at reality composed of shots as building blocks for the truthful representation of the world.

Against all this theoretical precedent, the aim of the filmolinguist project was to integrate Saussurean linguistics in order to achieve in film what Ferdinand de Saussure achieved in linguistics: to disengage the abstract signifying system of language (*langue*) from the chaotic plurality of speech (*parole*), which means to boil down the uses of language, and the utterances, to the key units and rules of combination in the system of language. According to Metz, the object of film semiotics was "to disengage from the heterogeneity or plurality of meanings of the cinema its basic signifying procedures, its combinatory rules, in order to see to what extent these rules resembled" the system of natural languages (Stam 109).

The pursuit of such an analogy, however, poses serious problems. Metz recounts many of the hindrances that a systematic study of film language entails:

- (1) Shots are infinite in number, contrary to words, but like statements, which can be formulated in verbal language.
- (2) Shots are the creations of the film-maker, unlike words (which pre-exist in lexicons), but similar to statements (which are in principal the invention of the speaker).
- (3) The shot presents the receiver with a quantity of undefined information,

- contrary to the word. From this point of view, the shot is not even equivalent to the sentence. Rather, it is like the complex statement of undefined length (how is one to describe a film shot completely by means of natural language?).
- (4) The shot is an actualized unit, a unit of discourse, an assertion, unlike the word (which is a purely virtual lexical unit), but like statement, which always refers to reality or a reality (even when it is interrogative or jussive). The image of a house does not signify "house," but "Here is a house"; the image contains a sort of index of actualization, by the mere fact that it occurs in a film.
  - (5) Only to a small extent does a shot assume its meaning in paradigmatic contrast to the other shots that might have occurred at the same point along the filmic chain (since the other possible shots are infinite in number), whereas a word is always a part of at least one more or less organized semantic field. The important linguistic phenomenon of the clarification of present units by absent units hardly comes into play in the cinema. (Metz 1974, 115–116)

On the basis of the list of the hindrances above Metz argues that "to 'speak' a language is to use it, but to 'speak' cinematographic language is to a certain extent to invent it" (101). Therefore, cinema is not a language system (*langue*) but a language (*langage*): film texts are not generated by an underlying language system; nonetheless they seem to manifest a language-like system (105). Film produces signifying procedures by organizing itself as narrative. Thus, the object of the semiotic study of film became the diegesis: narration itself, but also the fictional space; the time dimensions implied in and by the narrative; the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect. *Denotation* is, of course, more complicated when talking of film: in photography, denotation is a simple visual transfer that is not codified, and has no inherent organization because human intervention affects only the level of connotation (for example, by lighting, camera angles, and special effects). In film, partial views make up the diegetic denoted object (for example, a house is composed of the successive shots of a staircase, the walls, a window, an establishing shot of the building). Denotation is constructed and thus codified, and this procedure of construction relies on a certain number of dominant habits, without absolute rules (118–19).

To isolate the principal syntagmatic features or spatial-temporal orderings of narrative cinema, Metz set up the *Grand Syntagmatique*. The eight syntagmas that Metz defined are: (1) the *autonomous shot*; (2) the *parallel syntagma* (a contrasting device: two sets of images in contrast, such as "war and peace," "love and hate"); (3) *bracket syntagma* (such as routine-like activity that introduces us into the diegesis); (4) *descriptive syntagma* (a successive display of objects so as to suggest spatial coexistence); (5) *alternating syntagma* (previously known as "narrative cross-cutting:" chaser and chased, for example); (6) *scene* (the depicted event is continuous, while the presentation of it can be fragmented into shots); (7) *episodic sequence* (brings together a series of episodes, optical devices connect and disconnect, for example dissolves, fade-ins and fade-outs, often bridged by music); and finally (8) *ordinary sequence* (one

event is shown in separate parts, in which temporal ellipsis is employed to pass unimportant details and dead time) (124–133).

While the concept and the list that comprised the Grand Syntagmatique was criticized for a couple of reasons (such as its privileging of mainstream narrative cinema), and favors the image over sound while it uses sound in many cases as a support for a category, it undeniably was the first (and probably the last) attempt to frame the creative rules of narrative cinema. The study of diegesis, however, should be extended to include elements of film that are not part of the narrative in the strict sense, yet no narrative could be formed without them. While narration and focalization play crucial roles in the formation of narrative reality, film does not work without also being related to mimesis, according to André Gaudreault's theorisation of *monstration*. *Monstration* works in the realm of mimesis, as opposed to – or as a corollary to – narration, which is characteristically a feature of the diegesis. According to Gaudreault, *monstration* precedes narration, that is, the image comes before editing. As he explains, film operates on two separate, yet interwoven levels: one is the showing of an image (mimesis), which is then refigured through the process of editing (diegesis). It is the editing process that determines, and finally shapes, the point of view of the film's narrator (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 115). Then, film is constructed by the superimposition of two layers, a mimetic and a non-mimetic, that is the "lamination of *monstration* and narration" (ibid.). In other words, Chaplin's figure, for example, captured by the camera precedes the formation of the Chaplin character as a narrative construct. The monstrative part of the character spectators know as Chaplin needs to be infused with narrative functionality to become the iconic figure as we know him through the films he appears in.

The consideration of complex structural components in film sheds light on the relevance of the discussion of *adaptation* because the process of adapting a literary narrative, for example, is far from being a simple transposition. Furthermore, if we accept Gaudreault's thesis according to which *monstration* precedes narration, the issue gets even more complicated: how do we account for this when we learn that before the shots there had been yet another narrative (the novel)? A discussion of film language, thus, sooner or later turns towards the issue of *translatability*: if sentences in a language can be translated to another language, is it possible to translate literature to film? What if we go further and include other forms of artistic expression used as basis for "filmic translations"? The topic we circumscribe this way is adaptation. Virtually everyone feels capable of commenting on a film adaptation he or she has just seen, and the comment is often a simplified value judgment based on the spectator's expectation: the cinema-goer would like to see on the screen exactly what he or she read in the book. Alfred Hitchcock once expressed his opinion on the activity of his critics, who notoriously condemned his adaptations as unfaithful to their sources or violating the message of the original. His answer came in the form of a joke in which two "junkyard goats are chewing on old film canisters: You know, one goat says to the other, the book was better than the picture"

(Leff 2002). Apart from its humor, Hitchcock's anecdote testifies of a vicious and thorough criticism of the century-old method of analyzing film adaptations.

But what are the reasons that brought film adaptation to the forefront of film production quite early? And even if we assume it must have had some role in the establishment of the cinema as a cultural, artistic, and economic institution, why is adaptation still dominant in filmmaking? Why do we still talk about it and why does the film industry still turn to literary materials instead of making their own, absolutely or purely filmic one?

One glance at the history of film reveals that adapting literary works to film is by no means a new invention: even the Lumière brothers did it (their thirteen-scene production of *The Life and Passion of Jesus Christ* – an adaptation based on biblical stories – was presented in 1897). It means that film adaptation as a way of making films is as old as the cinema itself. By the 1910s, film adaptations had become marketing tools which helped to bring to the movie palaces middle classes, since these adaptations of canonized literary works legitimized the cinema as a “venue of taste” (Hayward 3). In other words, the adaptations of “high” literature, partly at least, established the cinema as a culturally respected form of entertainment (entertainment-as-art), at the same time providing it with an economic support. Furthermore, a certain extent of pedagogical value had also been attributed to films, since they were thought to be able to “teach” a nation about its classics, its literary and cultural heritage – in a way, to teach a nation about itself, which immediately takes the institution of the cinema to the forefront, turning it into a means of identity-maker (consider the role of BBC productions of classics in British cultural heritage).

“A literary adaptation creates a new story, it is not the same as the original, it takes on a whole new life, as indeed do the characters” (Hayward 4). This statement by Susan Hayward may seem to be common-sense or trivial, but is immediately overwritten when one is carried away by his or her opinion about a particular adaptation – so it needs to be reinstated from time to time. To illustrate her claim, Hayward offers the example of the reappearance of characters developed in one fictional universe in another one – with the same or somewhat different characteristics – like Austen's Mr. Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*, 1995, dir. Simon Langton) transferred into the twentieth century, as a wealthy, grumpy lawyer in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (played by Colin Firth who, in fact, plays the same role in the BBC rendition of the Austen novel). As Metz remarks in his pioneering work on cinema, *The Imaginary Signifier*, what the reader/viewer “has before him in the actual film is [...] someone else's phantasy” (112). Therefore, it should be regarded as such, and nothing more: an adaptation is a way of reading and seeing a particular text. Furthermore, according to DeWitt Bodeen, “Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking [...] the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood” (McFarlane 7).

While everyone seems to be trained enough to comment on the issue of film adaptation, the critical literature on the topic is surprisingly thin – not in terms of volumes, of course, but in development and scope. The majority of criticism – even today – tends to base its arguments on what is called “fidelity criticism,” the agenda of which is to contrast and compare the “source text” or “original” and the adapted or “copy,” and judge the quality of the latter on the degree of its fidelity to the former in terms of letter-to-letter semblance or essence as a measure or correspondence. The two approaches are often denoted by the terms *fidelity to the letter* and *fidelity to the spirit* and, as the hegemonic discourse surrounding the terms may already reveal, they present a rather biased view, inherently putting forth a verdict before the actual study of the film. Sadly, it is often true for academic approaches: even when an analysis is not directly concerned with a given film’s artistic adequacy or fidelity to a beloved source in any way, the tackling of the material tends to be narrow in range, the rhetoric is “respectful” of the original text and nurtures a set of ideologically loaded binary oppositions like literature versus cinema, high versus mass culture, or original versus copy. While film criticism, as such, is not necessarily part of the academic agenda of film theories, it thus still has resonances, and is therefore worth studying it in a bit more detail.

Usually, there are three categories, which are deployed in classifying film adaptations, according to Dudley Andrew. The first type is *borrowing* which is thought to be the most often utilized approach by filmmakers, whereby an idea or material is employed in a new form “borrowed” from an earlier, usually successful work of art. Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995), for example, is loosely based on Jane Austen’s *Emma*, presenting the life and search for love of Cher Horowitz (Alicia Silverstone) in a twentieth-century West Coast urban setting. The second category is *intersecting*, which respects and “preserves” the “uniqueness” of the original text (whatever that means), in such a way that it is recognizably remains a feature or part of the adaptation. The most often cited example for this is Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* (1954), where the spectator is, in fact, shown the writing process of the diary of the title. Championing this approach, André Bazin claims that it is the prime example for the film (adaptation) being “the novel as seen by the cinema” (Andrew 98–100). “Unquestionably the most frequent and most tiresome discussion of adaptation [...] concerns *fidelity and transformation*,” says Andrew (31), saying that most think that the prime task of a filmmaker is to reproduce in the adaptation something essential about the original text. A long line of faithful BBC adaptations of classical texts by William Shakespeare or Jane Austen, or the James Ivory and Ismail Merchant productions of E. M. Forster’s novels are notable examples of this trend in filmmaking. Without having recourse to the issue of the essence of the cinema, as opposed to the essence of all other art forms, this approach to adaptations favors two possible routes for analysis: examining the adapted work’s fidelity to the letter and fidelity to the spirit of the original.

These three approaches can be spotted in basically all the critical surveys on the nature of adaptation starting with Geoffrey Wagner. He defined the first category as *transposition* (it is analogy in Andrew's list), where the literary work "is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference;" the second as *commentary* (i.e. intersecting in Andrew), "where an original is taken either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect [...] when there has been a different intention on the part of the filmmaker, rather than infidelity or outright violation;" and the third category as *analogy* (i.e. borrowing in Andrew), "which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (McFarlane 9). Both critics, along with Michael Klein and Gillian Parker who have basically the same typology (McFarlane 11), claim the third category to be the creative one, in which a new work of art is produced. What is striking is that even though some authors note that the classification is "tiresome" and that the fidelity approach fails to tackle important issues, they still somehow stick to the ideologically predestined ways of seeing adaptations.

While fidelity criticism aims to disclose the places where an adaptation diverges or departs from the original, or "sacred text" (the highly established, possibly canonized literary predecessor), it may be more useful to look at novel and film simultaneously, using the potential differences between them to open up a space for intertextual dialogue. One consequence of this approach is that it does away with temporal hierarchy, which means that the question of "origin" and its "impure later use" loses its relevance. Instead, the two texts start to reveal thereto hidden aspects of themselves for each other (and for the interpreter): so that not only does the film adaptation point at specific interpretative possibilities in the novel, but vice versa, the novel also "talks about" the film. The theoretical basis for such an unusual claim can be found in Mihail Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* (the idea that each expression is potentially related to all other expressions), and its recent adaptation to the field of film theory by Robert Stam.

According to Stam, "the notion of 'fidelity' is essentialist in relation to both media involved. First, it assumes that a novel 'contains' an extractable 'essence' hidden 'underneath' the surface details of style" (Stam "Beyond Fidelity," 57.) In other words, this approach takes the literary work as a closed entity the task of which is to transmit a concrete and coherent message to the reader. However, it is a theoretical commonplace today that a text is far from being "closed:" it is an open structure, an endless play of signification, and the act of reading is not a "cracking of the shell" to reach the meaningful kernel, but rather a volatile moment of contextualization.

Another question arises here: to what should a film be faithful then? "Is the filmmaker to be faithful to the plot in its every detail?," asks Stam. If so, it can easily lead to "a thirty-hour version of *War and Peace*" (ibid.). Or should the filmmaker conform to the "intentions" of the author? According to Stam, this path would cause further problems, as

[a]uthors often mask their intentions for personal or psychoanalytic reasons or for external or censorious ones. An author's expressed intentions are not necessarily relevant, since literary critics warn us away from the "intentional fallacy," urging us to "trust the tale not the teller." The author, Proust taught us, is not necessarily a purposeful, self-present individual, but rather "un autre moi [another me]." Authors are sometimes not even aware of their own deepest intentions. How, then, can filmmakers be faithful to them? (ibid.)

Instead of the century-old question of fidelity to the source or to the mythical origin of a film adaptation, Stam proposes an alternative model for the analysis of adaptation. He introduces the notion of *intertextual dialogism* into the critical discourse, completely shifting the focus to the texts (literary and filmic) themselves. As he explains, intertext means that "every text forms an intersection of textual surfaces" as "all texts are tissues of anonymous formulae, variations of those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and confections and inversions of other texts" (64). Following Bakhtin, Stam asserts that one should restrain oneself from limiting the concept to solely one medium, as texts in general are products of "the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by the discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the artistic text is situated," and which is subject to the process of dissemination (ibid.). According to Stam, as film adaptations are not only "a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts," but with the same token they are also "caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation, of texts generating other texts in an endless process of recycling, transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (66–67).

It seems that the filmmaking practice is ahead of adaptation theory because some films have already proved the feasibility of the dialogic approach. Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation* (2002) best exemplifies this view providing a case study for the lamination of monstration and narration in an adaptive framework. The film is the adaptation of Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief* (2000), a non-fiction account that grew out of a *New Yorker* article on a self-proclaimed orchid-guru and orchid-poacher living and working in Hollywood, Florida. As Stam explains, the overtly "reflexive film focuses less on the poacher than on the book's adapter struggling to write a screenplay about adapter Charlie Kaufman struggling to write an adaptation" (Raengo and Stam 1). Things get complicated from the beginning: the real life Charlie Kaufman got a contract to write a screenplay from *The Orchid Thief*, but when he saw the difficulties of adapting a text that defies narrativity, he developed a severe case of writer's block. The reflexivity of the film lies in the release of the block: Kaufman decides to adapt the process of adaptation itself; he writes his struggles of adapting the book into the script, which subsequently becomes the movie *Adaptation*.

The greatest problem for the screenwriter in this case is "to translate fact into fiction, find new forms and equivalences" (2), among them the new form of reading, writing, and watching. The solution *Adaptation* offers is the dialogic rewriting of the book: the spectator sees

Charlie reading the Orlean book, through which the writing of *The Orchid Thief* becomes a spectacle, which takes the spectator back to the events that inspired the book, and even further to the historical events that served as the basis for Charles Darwin in writing *The Origin of the Species*. All texts, fictive and non-fictive are then caught up in a visual whirlwind and mixed into an endless intertextual product in the center of which the dialogue of texts gets its place in the figure of the adapter right in the midst of the adaptive process. Chaotic as it might seem, the film successfully renders the fictive mirror-image of Charlie Kaufman as his brother, Donald, and Donald's completely cliché-driven thriller script to work as a storyline for Charlie's extravagant screenplay idea. All the stereotypically Hollywood turns Charlie detests are crammed into the film, while it also retains the subjectivity of the adaptor in one. The source book is completely rewritten and thus cannot be regarded as a source any longer because the temporal boundaries of adaptive hierarchies are annihilated.

The film opens up a dialogic space for written, audio and visual texts on condition that these texts enter the dialogue simultaneously, giving themselves over to the play of intertextual recycling. The question is no longer whether the film is faithful to the original text because the status of "origin" is reinterpreted at the very beginning of the adaptive process. There is no text to be faithful to in the strict sense: the book Charlie could be faithful to is already the recreation of the film, which poses as the origin of the book by presenting the ontogenesis of the Orlean text, reaching well beyond the research part.

Film adaptations continue to flourish because of the financial potentials the merchandizing of books and films together promises. Moreover, an adaptation of a successful novel can also be used as a marketing ploy to lure readers to movie theaters. A look at the list of Academy Awards for Best Picture testifies that a large amount of Oscar-winning films are adaptations, starting with the first winner of 1927, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau's *Sunrise*, adapted from a short story by Hermann Sudermann. While adaptation theory talks a lot about the ways literary narratives influenced the repertoire of expression of films, there is yet only a small bulk of scholarly studies investigating how cinematic forms of narration changed the ways of reading literature. It is also a matter of future interventions for adaptation theory to start analyzing different forms of source materials for films, such as painting, sculpture, or the new media formats including CD-ROMs, computer games, and online adventure games.

## Keywords

film language, fabula, syuzhet, grand imagier, narrative, narration, narrator, character narrator or intradiegetic narrator, homodiegetic narrator, heterodiegetic narrator, extradiegetic narrator, diegesis, mimesis, mimetic narrative, diegetic narrative, point of view, focalizer, focalization, Kuleshov-effect, intellectual montage, kino-eye, denotation, Grand Syntagmatique, monstration, adaptation, translatability, fidelity criticism, fidelity to the letter, fidelity to the spirit, intersection, borrowing, fidelity and transformation, dialogism, intertext



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## Chapter

# 3

## Dream On: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema

Zoltán Dragon

You chose psychoanalysis over real life? Are you learning disabled?  
(Woody Allen)

Cinema and psychoanalysis were born around the same time. In 1895 the Grand Café of Paris hosted the first movie event of history, while at the same time *Studies of Hysteria* by Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud hit the shelves of bookshops in Vienna. It is hardly surprising that the histories of psychoanalysis and cinema ran parallel throughout the last century, despite the fact that the “father” of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, developed a snobbish neglect of the new medium (as he did with most of the new inventions of his age, the radio and the telephone, for instance). Although his home city, Vienna, hosted around eighty cinemas, Freud visited the cinema for the first time in 1909 in New York. As Ernest Jones documents it, Freud was only “dimly amused by ‘one of the primitive films of those days,’ full of ‘wild chasings’” (Heath 25).

Later, in the 1920s, there was an attempt by German filmmaker G. W. Pabst side by side with Freudian disciples Karl Abraham and Hans Sachs to initiate a collaboration to make of a film on psychoanalysis, but Freud turned it down (26). Psychoanalysis, after all, was thought to be rather about the translation of disturbing images into words, not vice versa. It was during his field trip to the famous psychiatric clinic of Charcot, in France, that Freud started to develop the framework of the “talking cure,” which meant that the patient had to translate dream sequences and images into words, thereby tying the potentially harmful effects of these images into manageable verbal forms. While Charcot used photography and image recordings to document and study forms of hysteria, Freud considered this approach to be a dead-end. At that time hysteria – originating from the Greek *hysteria*, i.e. “womb” – was considered to be a neurotical disorder of women, a psychic conflict translated into bodily symptoms, thus it became the most important case for psychoanalysis.

During the history of film, there have been five main psychoanalytical approaches in film criticism and theory. One of them is cultural myth analysis that focused on the study of myths surrounding films (cf.: Hollywood’s star system) and emerging through them (culture-specific myths as main themes of film narratives). This trend is pivotal in investigating, for example, Hollywood cinema, which is, even nowadays, actively shaping the ways of thinking of million spectators. According to Glen O. Gabbard, cultural myths are utilized by producers in win-

ning spectators for their films because these myths – as Claude Levi-Strauss (1975) explains – express conflicts and binary oppositions (basic oppositions that characterize Western thinking, such as good/bad, white/black) that otherwise cannot be explored openly (Gabbard 8). When spectators choose films that present underlying conflicts (for example, good vs. bad), they unconsciously seek ways to project their wish-fulfillment. In an adventure film the protagonist always gets his/her reward and the bad gets punished. This reinforces a basic cultural code in the spectator, his/her wish for the social equilibrium is thus secured. As Gabbard explains, films play part in changing cultural norms, too: Clint Eastwood's acting career exemplifies a trajectory in the representation of masculinity from the traditional notion (described by adjectives like strong, active, determined, leader, fighter, muscular) towards a more elaborated one (described by adjectives that tinge the extremes of binary oppositions).

Another influential approach is the analysis of the filmmaker's biographical relevance in connection with a particular film or a cycle of films. This approach takes the biography and documents pertaining to it as a starting point in investigating films under the name of the filmmaker. Moreover, elements of a film can also be used to trace back unconscious impulses, repressions and childhood traumas from the life of the filmmaker. This kind of study, however, poses serious questions regarding the nature of production of films, as film is a communal product in which it is very difficult to dissect individual contributions.

The third approach is the analysis of characters appearing in films. Characters and their narrative lives, relations to other characters in the film, or even connections of several characters in cycles or series of films (for example in a family saga or a trilogy of films) are analyzed to produce comprehensive case studies that explain the motives and characteristics that govern the plot. According to Gabbard, many criticisms pointed out that the analysis of fictional characters is doomed to failure because these figures are fictional creations – so analyzing the characters should rather be done through the analysis of the filmmaker (13).

In case of classical Hollywood narratives the story usually focuses on the fictional life of the male protagonist. He has to overcome some obstacles, solve some problems to arrive at finding his place in society (it is traditionally marriage or the promise of a new life). This simple storyline, however, stems from the Freudian description of the *Oedipal scenario* that involves complex psychic changes in the case of the male child. Freud evokes the story of Oedipus in order to find a pattern or analogue “to explain a child's acquisition of ‘normal’ adult sexuality” (Hayward 261). In the description “normal” adult sexuality means heterosexuality, and the gender of the child is male because Freud found it problematic to talk about the psycho-sexual development of the female child. The male child is bonded to his mother through the breast, and imagines himself in a unity with her. This unity, however, soon breaks up when the child senses his difference from the mother (descriptions often include a visual scene in which the child is held up in front of a mirror, and then sees his difference not only from his mother but from the outside world, as well). The realization of his difference

prompts the child to desire the lost unity but, as Freud insists, this desire sexualizes the mother, that is, the mother-child relationship attains a sexual aspect. The sexual component is necessary for the child to realize that the only person who “has ‘lawful’ access to the mother” (261) is the father. The child also associates the power to castrate with the father because he sees that the mother “is not like him, she does not have a penis” (*ibid.*). Since the only person having access to her is the father, the child imagines that it was the father who castrated her possibly as a punishment. At this point, the child’s desire for unification becomes problematic for him because if he chooses to identify with her and thus accomplish the lost unity, he becomes like her, he gets castrated, too. If he chooses to unite with her, “he runs the risk of punishment from the castrating father” (*ibid.*). To resolve this castration threat, the child identifies with the father which signals his first step into social acceptance because he succumbs to the primary law of society: the repression of incestuous desire for the mother. Becoming like his father, the child moves toward social stability by adopting heterosexual orientation through redirecting his repressed desire for the mother toward other women in a socially acceptable manner. The Oedipus complex in case of the male child is resolved by the repression of his desire for the mother, which Freud coins primal repression.

From the first half of the 1970s, the role of the spectator became the focus of psychoanalytic considerations. Thus the fourth approach explores the issue of reception: in other words, how the spectator sees and comprehends films. Cristian Metz’s work on the issue of spectators’ identification during watching films opened the way to a comprehensive study of the position of the spectator. Discussions of the film viewers’ identification led to considerations of the role of the camera in setting up the narrative frame of the film through the interaction of the points of view involved in watching a film (those of the characters in the film, the camera, and the spectator). The highly influential essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey (1975), gave another impetus for discussing the issue of reception, and triggered the involvement of feminism in psychoanalytical debates concerning films (Mulvey’s essay is discussed at length in Chapter Six “Gender and Cinema: All Sides of the Camera”).

The fifth approach takes film to be a working model, and analogue for psychoanalysis in many ways. One influential trend within this approach, signaled by the name of Bruce Kawin, among others, thinks of film as a representation similar to the “dream screen,” (Kawin *qtd. in* Gabbard 11) which is an unnoticeable screen onto which all dreams are projected. This view opens the way for investigations that employ methods of decoding dreams discovered by Freud such as condensation (many features or characters condensed into one figure), displacement (one feature or character is replaced by another one on the basis of some associative connection), and other dream mechanisms in the interpretation of films. As Metz noted, “it is in their gaps rather than in their normal functioning that the film state and the dream state tend to converge” (Metz 104). On the basis of Roman Jakobson’s idea adapted by Jacques Lacan

(Lacan 1977, 146–178), the methods of the interpretation of dreams serve as rhetorical figures – such as metaphor and metonymy – and help the interpreter to establish a coherent interpretation of the particular film. Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936), for example, opens with a juxtaposition of “the image of a flock of sheep and that of a crowd pushing and shoving at the entrance to a subway station” (Metz 189), which recalls the figure of metaphor. When the famous harmonica tune is heard in Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) well before the Charles Bronson character appears on the screen, it serves as a metonymy: all the characters know that he is around, that the tune signals his approach as it belongs to him, yet no one can see him.

In close connection to this approach, another view within this analogue model takes the cinema itself as an analogue of dream. The starting point for this type of analysis is that as the dreamer is passively following the images of the dream sequence, the spectator of a film, too, is immersed in the images on the screen. Lastly, a possible approach in this analogue model is “suture,” a concept based on the oscillation of shot and reverse shot that is used in narrative films to “stitch” or “sew” (literally, suture) the spectator in the filmic narrative. A film image can show only 180 degrees of the entire space of the diegesis at any given moment. To complete the sense of a full spatial setup, another shot needs to cover the missing half (again, 180 degrees) of the previous shot. The sequence of shots and reverse shots produces the illusion of a complete and continuous visual field in film.

In film theory psychoanalytic approaches became dominant during the 1970s and 1980s, at the heyday of the poststructuralist movement. Poststructuralism looked beyond the constraints of the text and put into question the notions outside the text, notably those of subjectivity and culture. While still relying on linguistics and structuralist semiotics, the post-structuralist agenda started its own inquiries of visual phenomena such as film and television, visual arts, and everyday aspects of the field of vision. It was Lacan who emphasized the importance of “a meditation on optics” (Lacan 1991, 76), the relevance of which is that according to him “for each given point in real space, there must be one point and one corresponding point only in another space, which is the imaginary space” (ibid.). In other words, in order to study visuality and optical phenomena, it is best to turn to psychoanalysis – and it was and is doubly so when it comes to the cinema.

It may seem to be a common-place, but the following statement is intricate even in its simplicity: cinema is about *absence* and *presence*. Film is an illusion inasmuch as it presents something that is absent. It puts forth a show, which also means that it conceals something: if something is projected, its source is always concealed. Presence on the screen is limited to 180 degrees of visibility. When there is presence, that is, we see something on the screen, there is always something that is outside the frame of the screen. Thus presence evokes absence; if something is onscreen, the point of view is offscreen. When the spectator looks at the image, the pleasure that s/he takes in looking at it is always already marked by a lack: the lack or

absence of what cannot be seen. In this sense, the spectator looks at an image, at the screen, in order to fill in or forget this lack.

To account for the concept of this absence or lack, Metz studied the difference in watching a theatrical play and watching a film. In theater the space of play is the same as that of the audience: “everything the audience sees and hears is actively produced in their presence, by human beings or props which are themselves present” (Metz 1982, 43). According to Metz, the presence is in a “true space” (ibid.) and not in a photographed or projected one. The spectator of a theatrical performance has a sense of his/her own body, “as a member of the audience, being proximate and co-present with the action on the stage” (Rushton 108). The scene the theater-goer finds himself or herself watching is the “same scene” as that of the performers’. By contrast, as Metz argues, cinema presents an “other scene:” the cinematic screen. This space becomes “other” because the spectator of the film is not situated in the same space as that of the diegetic reality. The spectator is consequently absent from that scene. What appears on the screen may – as in the theatre – “be more or less fictional, but the unfolding itself is also fictional: the actor, the décor, the words one hears are all absent” (Metz 1982, 43). Characters, the scenery, the visual environment, and the dialogues, voice-overs and other audial components of film are only replays of a previously recorded performance in another scene/space, and even the process – and sometimes the very space – of recording is largely discontinuous. The unfolding of the story, action or fiction is clearly non-identical with the space where it is viewed, i.e. the space of the auditorium of the actual cinema where the particular film is projected.

The story that unfolds on the theatrical stage is fictional, but the representation is real. The story that unfolds in film is fictional, and its representation is also fictional. What is projected onto the screen are not real objects, but mere shadows, reflections, or recordings of particular objects. Therefore, an imaginary object paves the way for an imaginary scene. The nature of the cinema’s mechanism of representation is doubly imaginary: imaginary in what it represents (the more or less fictional story), and in the way it represents the imaginary object. As Metz defined the notion of the *imaginary signifier*, “[w]hat is characteristic of the cinema is not the imaginary that it may happen to represent, but the imaginary that it is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier” (Metz 1982, 44).

Interestingly, this doubly imaginary nature of the cinematic representation brings us closer to the impression of reality than in the case of any other art-form. In theater the fiction performed is obviously a fiction but through the technique of representation it draws attention to itself as staged, as constructed reality. In case of the cinema what is presented is obviously a fiction, but the imaginary nature of representation does not call attention to itself as staged or filmed. “In this sense, unlike in theatre, in film there is no contradiction between what is represented and the representational process itself” (Rushton, 109). Thus, there is no break, no opportunity to remind ourselves that it is imaginary – it is “psychologically more con-

vincing” (ibid.). There is an imaginary belief involved in the film-viewing situation, and Metz opted for two theoretical paths to better understand this imaginary belief: the notion of fetishism, and Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage.

Metz used a quite narrow reading of Freud and Lacan’s texts when he talked about *fetishism*, nonetheless, the main idea persists in his description of the fetish and its role concerning the relationship of the spectator to the screen. The theory of fetishism in psychoanalysis concerns the co-existence of contrary beliefs. The most illustrative example of this is Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man, who was a Russian patient, born as Sergei Constantinovich Pankeiev (Freud 1918). The Wolf Man simultaneously entertained two contradictory beliefs: 1) all human beings are endowed with a penis (this is what we call a primary belief); and 2) some human beings do not have a penis (what is the evidence of the senses). While it is obvious that not all humans have a penis, under certain conditions (precisely the conditions that give rise to the fetish) those who would normally not have a penis may be endowed with one (the fetishist believes they have one), or at least a substitute that will eradicate the anxiety of the missing organ of the penis. The anxiety concerning the lack of penis is, in turn, referred to as the castration anxiety which is fuelled by the presence – or the belief of the presence – of lack or absence. To put it in a nutshell, the fetishist conceals the lack or absence by substituting something for what is missing, to attain a complete picture.

What the fetishist constructs is a logic of representation similar to that sketched above in terms of the cinema: the fetishized object is a fiction that is covered over by another fiction. In other words, when the fetishist realizes that not all humans have a penis, the primal belief turns out to be what it *is*: a fiction. But in order to live his life on, this fiction needs to be covered by another fictive scenario to arrive at the concluding dictum: “all the same, I continue to believe.” What this fetishistic scenario entails, therefore, is a doubling up of beliefs. It leads us to cinema, in terms of which we might establish the fetishist scenario as follows: “I know very well that *this film is a representation*, but all the same *I shall accept this film as reality*” (Rushton 111). This doubled-up belief in contradictory situations is, albeit in different light, also part of the logic of identification.

In his discussion of cinematic identification, Metz made reference to Lacan’s notion of the *mirror stage*. The mirror stage is the most important description of identification, and on account of its strong visual connotation it legitimizes the study of cinematic identification processes, as well. The description of the mirror stage is a basic description of the process of the forming of the *self*, of the *ego*. Children between 6 and 18 months have a minimal control over his body and movements looks into mirror and identifies with the seemingly full and perfect image, which is his reflection in the mirror (Lacan 1977, 1–2). The lack of perfection that the child experiences on the level of his body is filled in or screened over by a fiction: an *imago*, an ideal image, an illusion of completeness. This way the child misperceives himself in the image as an ideal, complete, and total person based on the image that appears to him or her



in the mirror. The paradox here is that it is precisely this fiction of the *other* (image) perceived as himself that keeps up the child's sense of reality and consistency. His misrecognition is, in fact, the very fantasy or fiction that covers the gap between him and his image (6). Obviously, the process of mirroring and the resulting identification with the image can also be taken less literally, as the child starts to acknowledge himself on the way of identification when he recognizes himself in other members of its species (3). This is the series of joyful moments when the child identifies, for example, a baby as such and, pointing at the baby, shouts "baby!" This recognition, in turn, solidifies his notion of himself.

However, the mirror stage does not belong solely to the Imaginary (the psychic repertoire of images that forms the gist and gives the basis of mirror stage); it is also an issue concerning the Symbolic, which signals the entry of the child into the symbolic network that organizes human life: language and society. Here language comes to mask the body because language is deployed to represent the child for others in the system of communication. The moment the child gains a notion of himself as complete (i.e. when he identifies with his mirror image), he can utter the personal noun "I" referring to his own self as a coherent and representable entity or unity. By using a signifier to signal his presence, the child enters language, which is the domain of social interactions. It is through various interactions in this Symbolic network – a kind of matrix, or the Matrix which Neo escapes when he meets Morpheus in the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (1999) – that the child gains a socially legitimate position, in other words, he becomes a *subject*. Subject grammatically marks the source of utterance or action. In semiotic and psychoanalytic theories the subject is an ever-changing marker of the position of the individual in the symbolic network of social interactions. In other words, subject is "a critical concept related to – but not equivalent with – the individual, and suggests a whole range of determinations (social, political, linguistic, ideological, psychological) that intersect to define it" (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 123).

The mirror stage is about identification and the positioning of the subject. Metz argues that something similar happens in the context of the cinema, making the claim that the screen is like the mirror, too. Obviously, Metz is aware that the analogy is far from perfectly denoting the similarity. He notes that the "film spectator may be looking at the images but he or she does not mistake them for his/her own reflected image" (Rushton 112), and then claims that the spectator is absent from the screen, unlike the appearance of his ideal image in the mirror. However, we should not have the same expectations for the experience of watching a film as we have for the experience of everyday life: "[t]he spectator is absent from the screen: contrary to the child in the mirror, he cannot identify with himself as an object [...] At the cinema it is always the other who is on the screen, and I am there to look at him" (Metz 1982, 48).

If the outcome of the Lacanian mirror stage is that one's self is posed as an other, cumulating in a conflict between the two above-mentioned identificatory positions, in the cinema we can claim that there is no trace of such a conflict, since it is already other on the

screen. This means that unlike in the mirror stage scenario, when one assumes the role of a spectator in the cinema, there is no misrecognition of one's self in a perfect image. In the mirror stage the self is opposed to the other, whereas in the cinema the self disappears: the spectator becomes entirely other because in the context of cinema one loses the coordinates of selfhood of everyday life and takes up the existence of somebody else, a subject position proper: a spectator of the cinema.

Because of the camera position, the spectator is encouraged to forget about his or her physical presence, which results in the curious situation where there is no antagonism between the real existence of the spectator's body and the imaginary existence of his or her mirror image. This way the spectator's body itself becomes an imaginary entity made up of a body that is an eye and an ear: an "all-perceiving" subject, as Metz calls it (1982, 48).

In real life (or in the spectator's subjective reality) the split between the real body and the imaginary image creates an identity for the subject. In the cinema, however, the subject makes up an imaginary body that can take up any shape and value, as in the cinema the Imaginary is not "out there" – it is the world we are involved in during the time of projection. Furthermore, it is precisely at this point that the spectator's identification occurs. Metz introduces two levels of identificatory processes: the *primary cinematic identification*, which is identification with the look of the camera, and *secondary cinematic identification*, which is identification with look of an onscreen character.

What is pivotal in the process of cinematic identification is the issue of looking. It is not too difficult to realize that the look of the camera is by definition imaginary because it is absent. Yet, it insists even more effectively. This is the *gaze* in the film-event, the marker of the lack or absence. In his *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Lacan defines this concept and refers to a situation which he takes from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* in which a voyeur is peeping through the keyhole of a door. It is a moment of visual pleasure, of full immersion in the field of vision. Then suddenly, the voyeur hears footsteps approaching, and starts feeling that he is being looked at, he, the peeping Tom, too, is seen. Finally, the voyeur realizes that although he believed that he is looking at an object, actually his look is preceded or framed by another, absent look that Lacan defines as the gaze.

In Lacan's work the gaze is described as "unapprehensible," as something there-but-not-there. As Sartre argues, "in so far as I am under the gaze [...] I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears. [...] The gaze I encounter ... is, not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other" (Lacan 1998, 84). The Other here is a symbolic construct, "a transcendent or absolute pole of the address, summoned each time that a subject speaks to another subject" (Wright 298). The Other can be conceived as a provider of symbolic context within which social interaction is made possible, and can be seen as designating the laws of society (Hayward 294). It is different from the term "other" in that it represents the laws of society and thus "the danger of castration – in terms of decapitation

(being de-capitalized from O to o)" (ibid.) while the small case other refers to Imaginary relations (with the mirror-image or the mother). The Lacanian gaze seems to be omnipresent while being entirely absent. Lacan's text has more than just mere connotations to film and visual arts in general because he uses the camera as a signifier for the gaze: "What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. [...] the gaze is the instrument through which ... I am *photo-graphed*" (Lacan 1998, 106). The gaze "does not judge, create, or dominate", it is only there to "put us in the picture" (Silverman 1996, 168). The relation between the gaze and the look is that the latter is absorbed in the former. Furthermore, the gaze – now in terms of visual representation in film – cannot be allocated to *anybody*, for that would not be "Other," since that character would be apprehensible. What a diegetic character can assume (or be assumed) to have is the look, which is related to the bodily organ of the eye.

To explain the split or difference between the look and the gaze, Lacan makes reference to Hans Holbein's painting entitled *The Ambassadors* (1533). The painting depicts two figures, equipped with and surrounded by "a series of objects that represent in the painting of the period the symbols of *vanitas*" (Lacan 1998, 88). However, there is something disturbing in the center of vision: something that escapes the spectator's recognition, since it is blurred and strangely deformed figure. When the spectator turns back to cast a final glance at the painting, a strange skull takes shape out of the weird spot and it seems that a skull is "looking" straight at the spectator! This is a technique called *anamorphosis*: and it consists of an image that appears distorted until viewed from a specific point of view (Greek, *ana-* + *morphē*, "to transform"). It is precisely when the "anamorphed" part gains its comprehensible form that the spectator realizes that his or her viewing position is only a fiction because an imaginary, impalpable, and unattainable look has always already been there before the spectator could take a look at the painting. The spectator's look has been preceded by another, imaginary look: his or her vision is made possible by a gaze outside his or her body, outside his or her eyes, or look.

An everyday example of the split between the look and the gaze can be described in the situation when one is sitting in a public space, a library for example, immersed in reading a book. If someone else keeps looking at the reading person continuously, the feeling of being looked at will sooner or later make the reader look up and search for the source of "surveillance." The moment the reader looks up, the source and, indeed, the effect of the gaze disappears. Here, the look of the reader's eyes has been preceded by an unattainable and unlocalizable, therefore imaginary look, which is the gaze.

To sum up, what is important to see is that the look is radically different from the gaze. The look is by definition connected to the viewing organ of the spectator, to his or her eye, whereas the gaze is an impossible look, always on the side of the object in the field of vision. Consequently, the spectator is looking at the screen, whereby s/he adopts the look of a source that is missing and from which the fiction unfolding on the screen becomes visible in the first

place: the camera. As this is a missing look, its nature is imaginary, its source is there but missing at the very same time. Therefore, the look of the camera in the space of fiction becomes the gaze: a lack that is continuously covered by the changing angles and points of view. By adopting the changing vantage points of each and every consecutive frame, the spectator enters into a mechanism film theory calls *suture*.

As many a notion in the film theory of the 1970s, suture or, literally, “sewing” or “stitching” was also taken over from Lacanian psychoanalysis. The discussion of the term always includes sentences like: “Lacan used the term suture to signify the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious which, in turn, he perceived as an uneasy conjunction between what he terms the Imaginary and the Symbolic” (Hayward 378). The term denotes the subject’s entry into discourse, whereby a lack or gap is born at the moment when the subject is inaugurated into language. In other words, when “a given signifier (a pronoun, a personal name) grants the subject access to the symbolic order” (Silverman 1992, 137), it does so at the expense of alienating it from its needs and drives. Thus “the signifier stands in for the absent subject ... whose lack it can never stop signifying” (ibid.). This lack in turn has to be sutured, so that the subject can function in the Symbolic.

Lacan, in fact, uttered the word suture only once, in his seminar on February 24, 1965. It was his disciple Jacques-Alain Miller who used suture as a complex term in his first and seminal article, “Suture (Elements of the Logic of the Signifier).” It was also Miller to define suture as designating “the relationship between the signifying structure and the subject of signification” (Žižek 2001, 31). With reference to Miller, Jean-Pierre Oudart introduced suture into the discourse of film theory in the late 1960s, but it became a pivotal term only in the 1970s. The reason for talking about suture was a stringent need to account for the relationship of the spectator to the film narrative unfolding on the screen.

For Oudart it was the *shot-reverse shot* structure that meant the basic technique of suture in classical narrative film. In the sequence of shots, the spectator first encounters a cinematic image, and he or she feels much the same jubilation as the child looking into the mirror, discovering itself, in Lacan’s description of the mirror stage. As Hayward comments, “[t]his image appears to be complete or unified in the same way that the child’s” mirror image appears to him (Hayward 382). Then the spectator becomes aware of the frame of the image, which immediately implies that there must be a space that is excluded from the pleasurable unity the first image induces in the viewer. In other words, “the image starts to show itself for what it is, an artifact, an illusion and in so doing it threatens to reveal” (383) that the reality the film had so far built up is fake, illusory, and artificially constructed. As presence presupposes an absence, it also reveals a gap and raises the question of point of view: if the shot is a framed spectacle, an illusion of wholeness, an artifact, whose subjective selection is what the spectator sees? The subject of the look is at that crucial moment the *Absent One*. The capitalized formula of the Absent One refers to its symbolic quality and role: it represents an imaginary *monstrateur*

or the Other. What helps the spectator remain in the illusory world of film fiction is the reverse shot that promises a quite similar scenario: first an Imaginary plenitude then disappointment upon the discovery of the frame, and then comes another shot, going on till the end of the film. The second shot, therefore, does not simply follow the first one – it is signified by it. The narrative is thus safely constructed, and is capable of re-inscribing or “stitching” the spectator into the filmic text.

When the spectator casts his/her glance at the screen, his look is always already preceded by another look: an imaginary look, the gaze of the Absent One/Other. It is thus not his look, but the Other’s gaze that structures not only the narrative, but the subject’s comprehension of the narrative as well, in other words, the spectator’s participation in the narrative as an “Invisible Mediator” is secured and at the same time controlled by the gaze of the Absent One. The gaze is thus present in its very absence, it is missing, it is invisible: an outside sutured into the inside of the fiction.

A standard scene from a western film, the duel, usually uses the suture operation to build up the suspense before the shootout. When the protagonist takes up his position in the middle of the street, the first shot presents the empty street with the sun rising far on the horizon. The second shot shows the other 180 degree of the diegetic reality, focusing on the squinting eye of the protagonist: the eyes that presumably saw what the spectator perceived as the visual content of the first shot. The third shot reproduces the first one, perhaps with the inclusion of the opponent arriving at the scene (only to be shot dead after a couple of shot-reverse shot oscillations). This suture procedure is taken up by Daniel Dayan in 1974, who stressed the ideological implication of the shot-reverse shot structure. He argues that if the system of suture renders the signifying operations of the film practically invisible, then the spectator has limited ability in decoding the film and, what is more, the ideological effect of the film is this way easily absorbed unwittingly (Dayan 129).

According to the above description, the operation of the suture seems uncomplicated and all-encompassing, however, there are a couple of problems which need to be addressed in relation with this term. The first problem that arose in filmic critical discourse already in the 1970s was that the proportion of the shot-reverse shot structure in the classical narrative film was only thirty percent. Due to its low rate implication, critics admitted that it could not be regarded as a basic editing formula, or as a structuring device of the perception of the spectator. The other problem was in fact a direct attack on the very idea of the shot-reverse shot structure. According to William Rothman, films feature a tripartite structure instead of the duality of shot and reverse shot. Often, the spectator encounters the eyeline match of a character; then sees what the character is supposed to be looking at, and then the third shot reinforces the subject of the look (Rothman 133). While Rothman’s scenario turns the original, classic setup inside out, it still seems to retain the basic idea of the spectator being stitched into the film text through a variety of cinematic operations.

During the 1980s the notion of suture was extended and reworked from its previous considerations in order to account for a complex spectatorial experience. Kaja Silverman argues that the basic element of editing, the simple “cut” may be seen to guarantee “that both the preceding and the subsequent shots will function as structuring absences to the present shot. These absences make possible a signifying ensemble,” igniting the process of signification (Silverman 1992, 141) and the spectator’s understanding of the film. Along the same lines, Stephen Heath agrees with Silverman’s critical elaboration claiming that “suture – because it is the conjunction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic – is necessarily present at all levels of filmic enunciation and that therefore all texts suture” (Hayward 384).

After the 1980s, the concept of suture rarely used in theory and criticism. However, it made its return recently, with the renewed interest in psychoanalytic film theory. Theorists like Slavoj Žižek and Joan Copjec claim that the phase in the history of film theory labeled as Lacanian film theory lacked, in fact, essentially Lacan. Like Lacan did with Freud, they started to reread Lacan’s works, and re-conceptualize the basic terms in film theory – suture among them. While Žižek agrees with most of the criticism that once shook the foundation of the concept of suture, he warns against discrediting it completely. Instead, he proposes to examine specific examples where suture actually fails. Following the examples of Hitchcock’s procedures of suture in *Birds* (1963), Žižek presents cases where the shot and its reverse shot are rendered in one and the same shot. One of the most prominent examples for the special Hitchcockian suture in *Birds* is the sequence in which the birds attack Bodega Bay: the center of the town is shown from high above, in a “God’s-view shot” (36) that is disturbed by a strange, black blot entering the film frame reshaping as the attacking birds, who thus enter the image shot from their own points of view.

This – however obscure it sounds – is a common technique, and not even considered a special effect: for an early “prototype” of this technique, let us refer to Velazquez’s painting, *Las Meninas*, which is perhaps the prime example of this condensation. In this painting members of the royal court and the painter himself are looking out of the picture, straight at the spectator. However, the mirror on the wall in the background reveals some “proper subjects” whose potentially “productive look” appears to be the point of view from which *Las Meninas* could be created: the royal couple, the queen and the king, whose portrait is just being created on a canvas that is partly visible on the left side of the painting, its back to the spectator. As Oudart notes: the scene what the spectator is faced with is in fact the reverse shot of the painting the painter is completing.

Žižek calls this technique *interface*. An example of the operation of interface can be seen in Steven Spielberg’s *Minority Report* (2002). The film introduces an elaborate transparent screen, which is connected to the brains of “pre-cogs” (originally human beings whose brains are manipulated by special medicines to stimulate their talent of sensing and seeing future events) and renders the imagery in an unorganized sequence of short clips and images. It is the task of

the inspectors to pull images together with the help of a special glove to calculate the future place and time of the crime. A special force is sent to the venue before the crime scene could even take place, and thus the culprit can be arrested before the conception of the deed. In one of the central scenes of *Minority Report*, Jon Anderton (played by Tom Cruise) is standing in front of the transparent screen on which images start to flicker. The camera shows him from behind the screen, so that the shot includes both the eyes of the one who sees (Anderton), and also the object being looked at (the whirl of images on the screen). As the images start to make sense in being grouped into short clips of continuous events, Anderton spots himself committing a future crime he has, of course, never thought of doing. The film emphasizes this moment by superimposing the objective shot of Anderton's face (as seen by the camera) and the subjective shot of his picture on the screen (as seen by Anderton).

The interface performs a double function here: while it threatens to disrupt narrative unity by short-circuiting the standard operation of suture because it merges the shot and its reverse shot into one image, the interface also draws the spectator's attention away from the potential narrative block with the very same gesture. It is as if the film narrative of *Minority Report* halted to contemplate one shot instead of a continuous flow of shots, which runs the risk of disrupting the impression of reality of the diegesis, but the superimposition of the faces of Anderton secures the completeness of the shot-reverse shot formation. As Žižek argues, "the uncanny poetic effect of [such] shots resides in the fact that it appears as if the subject somehow enters his/her own picture – [...] not only is the picture in my eye, but I am also in the picture" (Žižek 2001, 39). Quite visually in case of *Minority Report*, the interface adds a "spectral dimension" (40) to the reverse shot.

As this above scenario proves, the mechanism of suture works even when it is short-circuited, or when – in extreme cases – the narrative setup attempts to circumvent its operation. Thus, while its shot-by-shot relevance cannot be upheld in many cases, its overall structuring principle is still a useful analytic tool for the study of the ways film narratives create diegetic reality. Today, psychoanalytic film theory continues to intrigue theorists and critics alike, but it needs to revise and revitalize its vocabulary often imported from psychoanalysis uncritically and carelessly (suture is probably the most prominent example for such an import). While it seems that the renewed interest in Lacan's writings will benefit psychoanalytically informed studies of the cinema, it is also evident that the arrival of new forms of movie consumption (the DVD, the Internet, and portable devices) challenges central concepts in psychoanalytic theory, such as the issue of identification, the analogy of the dream situation with the film viewing situation, or the Oedipal trajectory of film narratives. The new task for psychoanalytic film theory and criticism is therefore to account for the new ways of representation and the new forms of spectatorial engagement these ways involve.

## Keywords

Oedipal scenario, castration, Symbolic, Imaginary, imaginary signifier, mirror stage, primary and secondary cinematic identification, subject, Other, lack, absence, fetishism, gaze, look, suture, Absent One, shot-reverse shot, interface, anamorphosis

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## Chapter

# 4

## Cowboys, Deadly Women and Co.: Genres of the Cinema

Zoltán Dragon

We discover that the critical theory of genres is stuck precisely where Aristotle left it. The very word “genre” sticks out in an English sentence as the unpronounceable and alien thing it is.  
(Northrop Frye)

We all have to realize we write in a genre, so we must find originality within that genre. Did you know that there hasn't been a new genre since Fellini invented the mockumentary? My genre's thriller, what's yours?  
(Donald Kaufman)

### TAKE ONE. SCENE ONE.

An unshaven man with his hat on, drinks his gin with a gulp, and throws his head back in a jerk. We see him from behind, the morning lights of an empty, dusty street provide the source of light. The man stands up, his boots knocking a slow rhythm on the creaky floorboard. He pushes the flinging doors open, walks to the middle of the street, turns to look towards the end of the road, engraving his place into the sandy road. Another man waits at a considerable distance down the street, fiddling with a toothpick in his mouth. He looks at the opposite man who has just arrived to the scene. The dusty town is silent; shrubs are flying across the road farther down the street. The two men squint in the daybreak sun but do not move. Then, all of a sudden, they pull out their colts and fire their bullets. Silence falls, and the toothpick's movement in the mouth of one of the men suddenly stops, and the man almost immediately falls. The winner of the shooting mounts his horse and disappears beyond the town limits.

### CUT. END OF SCENE.

Without knowing anything about the situation, the characters or the story, this one scene would ensure a spectator (or even a reader) that the scene is a *western* (also spelled Western), and the men are cowboys. Knowing this, a spectator can immediately fill in the omissions in the above description, conjure up the atmosphere, even a typical western scenery. This is the power of *genre*. What one most probably finds out about a film first – apart from its title and the stars featuring in it – is its genre. We can decide, based on our mood or taste, whether we wish to see a horror, a thriller, a melodrama, a western or a science fiction film. Genre is originally a French word that means “type” or “category,” and is not restricted to the

vocabulary of arts. While nowadays it is sometimes very difficult to tell an action packed thriller set in World War II from a war movie, or a thriller with heaps of corpses and pools of blood from a horror film, it is still essential to see why we keep on labeling films according to their genre. Why do we say that, for example, “I like romances and comedies” instead of describing what exactly we like in films?

Considerations of genre have a long history, starting from Aristotle, who differentiated among the types of poetry. Aristotle’s *Poetics* “provides a model for centuries of genre thinkers,” a solid theoretical base with its “apparently incontrovertible simplicity” and “transparent expressions” (Altman 2). However, the rhetorical straightforwardness of Aristotle’s text conceals other possible interpretations and theoretical alternatives, but does not allow for the extension or even the rethinking of categories set up in the treatment of poetics. Building upon Aristotle, Horace already took for granted everything that *Poetics* tackled (3). He did not define what genre was, as genres had been taken to be existing categories, and Horace’s role was to talk about the differences among them. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the approach of Aristotle and that of Horace, which is reflected by the two sides of film genre later: while Aristotle’s text is descriptive, and sometimes he even acts as a critic, Horace’s work is prescriptive, aiming to talk about “appropriate modes of writing poetry” (ibid.). These two orientations can be seen as forerunners of considerations of film genres: being either categories of reception (when a film is labeled on the basis of audience expectations) or those of production (when a film is labeled on the basis of production rules, codes, and protocols, during the time of the Hollywood studio system; Cf.: Chapter Five “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star”).

During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a new genre appeared: the *melodrama*. “At first called the ‘serious genre’, as opposed to the classical genres” and later “baptized simply ‘drama’,” (5) melodrama emerged as the most popular genre through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Melodramas were advocating codes of morality. Their roots reached back to medieval morality plays, and their plots centered on the relationships in family (Hayward 213–14). Influenced by the scientific paradigm shift initiated by Charles Darwin’s work on biology also at the end of the 1800s, genre theory began to view genres as species, and took an evolutionary approach (Altman 6). One of the most notable manifestation of this approach was *L’Evolution des genres* [*The Evolution of Genres*] by French literary historian Ferdinand Brunetière, in which the author provided scientific support for the claim that genres exist in reality similarly to the biological species (ibid.).

One of the most influential views on genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was expressed by René Wellek and Austin Warren in their *Theory of Literature* (1956). Wellek and Warren made a distinction between “inner” and “outer” forms: inner form being the “attitude, tone, purpose” of a literary work, the outer form designated as “specific metre or structure” (Wellek and Warren 231) and encouraged genre critics to analyze their subject matter based on the

relationship of technique and structure. While arguing that literature is a similar institution to the church, the state or the university, Wellek and Warren failed to consider the role and position of the critic (as advocator and creator of generic institutions) itself (Altman 8). It was Northrop Frye who extended Wellek and Warren's notions of inner and outer forms, and he redefined age-old generic categories such as tragedy, comedy, and romance. In the *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye brings the use of these archetypes into focus in literary analysis, which frees genres from being judged and tackled in terms of literary tradition (131–239). Based on his discussion of literary genre theory, Rick Altman lists ten typical problems of genre analysis that should be avoided in future filmic genre theories:

- (1) It is generally taken for granted that genres actually exist, that they have distinct borders, and that they can be firmly identified. Indeed, these facts have seemed so obvious to theoreticians that they have rarely seemed worthy of discussion, let alone of questioning.
- (2) Because genres are taken to be 'out there', existing independently of observers, genre theorists have generally sought to describe and define what they believe to be already existing genres rather than create their own interpretive categories, however applicable or useful.
- (3) Most genre theory has attended either to the process of creating generic texts in imitation of a sanctioned predefined original, or to the internal structures attributed to those texts, in part because the internal functioning of genre texts is considered entirely observable and objectively describable.
- (4) Genre theorists have typically assumed that texts with similar characteristics systematically generate similar readings, similar meanings, and similar uses.
- (5) In the language of theoreticians, proper genre production is regularly allied with decorum, nature, science and other standards produced and defended by the sponsoring society. Few genre theorists have shown interest in analysing their relationship.
- (6) It is regularly assumed that producers, readers and critics all share the same interest in genre, and that genres serve those interests equally.
- (7) Reader expectation and audience reaction have thus received little independent attention. The uses of generic texts have also largely been neglected.
- (8) Genre history holds a shifting and uncertain place in relation to genre theory. Most often simply disregarded by its synchronically oriented partner, genre history nevertheless cries out for increased attention by virtue of its ability to scramble generic codes, to blur established generic tableaux and to muddy accepted generic ideas. At times, genre history has been used creatively in support of specific institutional goals, for example by creating a new canon of works supportive of a revised genre theory.
- (9) Most genre theorists prefer to style themselves as somehow radically separate from the object of their study, thus justifying their use of meliorative terms like 'objective', 'scientific' or 'theoretical', to describe their activity, yet the application of scientific assumptions to generic questions usually obscures as many problems as it solves.
- (10) Genre theoreticians and other practitioners are generally loath to recognize (and build into their theories) the institutional character of their own generic practice. Though regularly touting 'proper' approaches to genre, theorists rarely analyse the cultural stakes involved in identifying certain approaches as 'improper'. Yet genres are never entirely neutral categories.

They – and their critics and theorists – always participate in and further the work of various institutions. (11–12)

Although genre theory in film is not the same as its literary counterpart, it certainly derives largely from the work of literary theorists (12). Discussions of genre were not introduced as a separate trend in film theory and criticism until the middle of the 1960s and early 1970s, while generic forms had been “one of the earliest means used by the industry to organise the production and marketing of films, and by reviewers and the popular audience to guide their viewing” (Cook 58). Genres were first used, on the one hand, to create a standard for mass production in the studio era; on the other, the introduction of generic categories helped film product differentiation (*ibid.*). According to John Belton, genre, in terms of the cinema, designates “various categories of motion picture production” including types of films such as “musicals, comedies, action and adventure films, westerns, crime and detective films, melodramas, science fiction and horror films, gangster films, war films, suspense thrillers, epics and disaster films:” a list that can further be broken down into several subgenres (127). In the film industry, genres are essentially the results of “the proven success of one-of-a-kind films” (128). If a certain type of film achieves financial success, this would facilitate the production flow of similar films. The assumption behind this logic is that if the audience liked a certain type of film, they would gladly repeat the experience and pay for a new film of the previous kind.

Genre films (i.e. films belonging to a specific genre) rely on a prescribed set of motifs, character features, story types, visual style, and thematic context. As Belton argues, it is true that genres function in many ways as brands in because they always promise to deliver the same atmosphere, plot, directors, and stars, but audiences “are also enticed by the prospect of seeing a film that *differs* in a number of respects from films they have seen before” (129). On the one hand, genres serve to identify and propagate types of films; yet on the other hand, they also help to raise audience expectations for subtle changes and new ways of combinations within the given category of filmic repertoire. In other words, when a spectator chooses to watch a western, it is because s/he knows what to expect, but at the same time s/he also expects more: a different combination of characteristics of westerns that makes the particular film worthy of seeing.

The debate around film genre started as a displacement of the debates – in France and in the U. S. especially – around the notion of the auteur (Hayward 166). The shift in focus was signaled by the approach called *auteur-structuralism* that, instead of celebrating the genius of the auteur, the individual artist or filmmaker, “saw the individual author as the orchestrator of trans-individual codes (myth, iconography, locales)” (Stam 123). The relevance and critical legitimacy of the auteur being the “author function” (Foucault) was pointed out in the chapter on auteur theory (Cf. Chapter Five “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star”), but auteur-structuralism went even further: it investigated structural patterns and wider cultural contexts that shaped these patterns. The focus, therefore, shifted from the auteur to the filmic

texts and their structural logic and consistency. Critics started to analyze films under the name of an auteur and soon realized that the authorial name was quite often related to a specific type of film, and this led to an interest in genre analysis.

One of the most famous analyses of this kind was Peter Wollen's study of director John Ford's western films, in which the critic was not primarily looking for stylistic visual elements that could have served as identifying the auteur, but uncovered "fundamental structural patterns and contrasts" in the films under scrutiny, which were based on different binaries of culture/nature: "garden/wilderness; settler/nomad; civilized/savage; married/single" (ibid.). Whereas the concern of auteurism was primarily cinematic, auteur-structuralism broadened the thematic scope and looked at motifs and binary structures "broadly disseminated in culture and the arts" (ibid.). Similar conclusion is drawn in Jim Kitses's structural analysis of western which reflects Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis formulated in 1893 under the title "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." "According to the U. S. Census Report of 1890," Turner said, the frontier, the boundary or frontline of westward expansion on the American continent "no longer existed" (Belton 250). For Turner, the frontier represented the shaping of American character since, as he argues,

The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people – to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. (qtd. in Belton 250)

Turner's concept of the frontier has subsequently been called into question, but it nonetheless nurtured the mythical aspect of the West that provided the basis for western films and literature. The first filmic representations of the West were the scenes from Buffalo Bill Cody's *Wild West Show*, shot by Edison in 1894 with his Kinetoscope. He also filmed two fictional scenes in 1898: *Cripple Creek Bar-Room* and *Poker at Dawson City* (251). Beside the *Wild West Show*, the western film genre heavily relied on dime novels (novels that cost 5 to 25 cents) and stories from popular magazines. As Belton explains, even "Buffalo Bill himself owed his fame and fortune to dime novels" (252). It is also the dime novels of the period that helped James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bampo character of the *Leatherstocking Tales* to world-wide fame. Bampo – whose fictional characterization is said to be based on the real-life Daniel Boone – served as a model for several western films to come, ranging from the "backwoods hunters in *The Big Sky* (1952, [dir. Howard Hawks]) to the alienated antiheroes of *Stagecoach* (1939, [dir. John Ford]), *Shane* (1953, [dir. George Stevens]), and *The Searchers* (1956, [dir. John Ford])" (253), but the list should also include Clint Eastwood's characters both in Sergio Leone's "spaghetti" westerns and in the films he himself directed: *High Plains Drifter* (1972), *Pale Rider* (1985), and *Unforgiven* (1992).

According to Kitses, the western, permeating all aspects of U.S. culture, articulates a national mythology. This myth is informed by a *deep structure* composed of underlying basic binary oppositions that not only nourish the mythical aspect of the western but, later on, also serve as structuring principle for the “latter day western:” *science fiction*. In this – otherwise separate – genre the frontier is the space. The lessening interest in westerns coincided with John F. Kennedy’s proclamation of the “New Frontier” in the 1960s, which paralleled an intensified interest in science fiction films. According to Belton, one cannot miss the obvious link of, for example, Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) to *The Searchers*, the former reworking the same plot – just as George Lucas’s *Star Wars* (1977), which also “borrowed extensively” from the western classic (274). Science fiction, of course, has earlier links historically, starting with films by Méliès discussed in chapter one (cf. Chapter One, “Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film”), but it was during the Cold War period that they attained conspicuous political content. Films such as *Them!* (1954, dir. Gordon Douglas) and *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957, dir. Jack Arnold) envision the irreversible harm done by radiation that is the result of nuclear tests conducted in the U. S., while other movies, *Invaders from Mars* (1953, dir. William Cameron Menzies) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956, dir. Don Siegel) among them, associated invaders and the practice of brainwashing with Communist ideology. Lately, a peculiar fusion of western and science fiction appeared with Barry Sonnenfeld’s *Wild Wild West* (1999), in which western and science fiction clichés are not only utilized but also ridiculed.

Beside western, another typically American genre, with a completely different view on society, is *screwball comedy*, which is a hybrid of various comedy styles. The phrase “screwball” refers to the baseball pitch that takes “funny turns” and spins in unexpected directions (Sikov 54). According to Belton, screwball comedy blended romantic comedy and comedy of manners with *slapstick comedy* (the origin of the phrase “slapstick” is the theatrical prop “battachio” that is a stick used by actors to hit one another without injury, at the same time producing loud smacking noise), which was considered to be a low and cheap genre (186) in which clowns and funny persons were bouncing, falling, and the inevitable cakes were flying into the unexpected faces of bystanders, to name a few typically burlesque turns. This distinct combination of different types of comedies took leading stars of dramatic genres and introduced them into the world of vulgarity and cheap jokes. Established and high profile actors did unconventional and unexpected things: John Barrymore in *Twentieth Century* (1934, dir. Howard Hawks), for example, picked his nose. Screwball comedies often featured references to explicit sexual play: when Katherine Hepburn leaves a fancy nightclub in Howard Hawks’ *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), the back part of her skirt tears open, exposing her backside, which Cary Grant tried to cover with his top hat (*ibid*).

Andrew Sarris described screwball comedies as “sex comedy without the sex” because these films repressed sexuality which, in turn, resulted in the never ending allusion to a sexual sub-

text (8–15). The birth of this genre coincided with the “tightening of restrictions in the Production Code” in 1934 (Belton 186), so scenes of adultery or illicit sex, of passion, obscenity, seduction or rape, and miscegenation were banned from films (Cf. Chapter Five “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star”). Whereas historically almost all screwball comedies were made during the era of the Great Depression, and it would be logical to suppose that social conditions and problems would be present in these films, it is rather on account of censorship that these films made it to the screen (Altman 20). While there certainly is much to be said for the sociological approach that tackle issues of the era in relation with these comedies, films of this genre “operate on a more subversive cultural and psychological plane” (Sikov 55). Screwball comedy was all about undercover sex; on the other hand, it refused to follow the classical Hollywood narrative trajectory of order/disorder/order (56), that is, the pattern in which the beginning of the story presents a narrative world where everything is all right, then this order is shattered by some disturbance (for example, an accident happens), and by the end the problems that arise by the disturbance are resolved. *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (1941, dir. Frank Capra), for example, presents a married couple, whose marriage seems to be about arguments. Once a dispute is resolved, there comes another, until they discover that they are not even married. Screwball comedies were elementarily about conflicts, but the resolution was not necessarily a component: even if *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* are seen in an embrace at the end of Capra’s film, it does not project a “happily ever after” closure that would be the end of a romantic comedy. As Belton explains, “[m]ore often than not, [screwball comedies] began with a couple already constituted, whose harmony was then shattered, disturbed by internal strife or conflict” (Belton 189), but the final consummation was barely a happy end in the traditional sense. At the heyday of the studio system, with the celebration of the classical Hollywood narrative style, screwball comedies offered a subversion of the system that produced them.

Another subversive filmic trend was *film noir*. The phrase means “black film” and was coined by two French critics, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, in an attempt to describe American films that were based on hard-boiled novels of the 1930s, and were presented in France after the end of the Second World War under the Blum-Byrnes accord that reopened the French movie market to American films (Vernet 4, 26; Belton 225–26). The films that were brought to French cinemas in 1946 were something the French critics and audience did not expect. They were astonished to discover “in the post-war American cinema, coming from a nation whose military power and economic well-being were so striking, [...] films with an appearance of poverty in which the optimistic and moral lesson could not always be easily discerned by non-natives” (Vernet 4–5). Films, including *The Maltese Falcon* (1941, dir. John Huston), *Laura* (1944, dir. Otto Preminger), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944, dir. Edward Dmytryk), *Double Indemnity* (1944, dir. Billy Wilder), *Woman in the Window* (1944, dir. Fritz Lang), *The Lady in the Lake* (1946, dir. Robert Montgomery), *Gilda* (1946, dir. Charles Vidor) and *The Big Sleep* (1946, dir. Howard Hawks), presented a dark, disillusioned world of mani-

pulation, “crime, corruption, cruelty, and an apparently unhealthy interest in the erotic” (Belton 226). French critics were quick to notice that these films shared common stylistic elements, narrative and character traits, and the choices of themes. They soon found the roots of these similarities in pre-war American pulp fiction, often referred to as *hard-boiled detective fiction*, of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, and Cornell Woolrich. Indeed, most of the film noirs arriving in France in 1946 were adaptations of hard-boiled fiction, often featuring one of these writers as the adaptors of their own novels.

The main difference between the hard-boiled school of detective fiction and the classical detective genre in literature can be best grabbed by the different methods of the detectives. According to Slavoj Žižek, the difference between the Sherlock Holmes type of detective and the Philip Marlowe kind is that the former is not literally “engaged” with the crime itself: “he maintains an eccentric position throughout; he is excluded from the exchanges that take place among the group of suspects constituted by the corpse” (60) and maintains an exterior position to the whole affair. The hard-boiled detective, on the contrary, finds himself in the drift of events, in chases and fights, “and solves his cases with the personal commitment of somebody fulfilling an ethical mission, although the commitment is often hidden under a mask of cynicism” (ibid.).

The character of the detective, through the physical engagement with the crime, often finds himself opposite of the *femme fatale*, the deadly woman character, who is usually a suspect in the particular criminal cases. The *femme fatale* is a sexually charged, dangerous, seductive character (Cf. Chapter Six “Gender and the Cinema: All Sides of the Camera”), whose role is usually to hinder the solution of the crime by destabilizing the male detective: both emotionally and existentially. The emotional, or rather sexual, challenge is intricately bound up with the existential threat because by seducing the detective, the *femme fatale* also makes him cross the boundary between the binary opposition of ethical good and bad: if the male detective enters a relationship of sexual nature with one of the potential suspects, how will he be able to solve the crime and sustain his professional integrity? The basis of the *femme fatale*’s character can be traced back to two possible sources, the socioeconomic and the psychoanalytic. On the one hand, “the changing status of women during the war and postwar period challenged male dominance” (Belton 240) because women entered the workforce, took over traditionally male roles, working, for example, on assembly lines, making tanks, airplanes, etc., which subverted traditional sexual stereotypes. This change posed a threat to traditional values the basis of which was the institution of the family. This socioeconomic shift was reflected in psychological terms, as well. Women were seen as threat to social stability in a male-centered world, depriving them of their traditional roles not only at the workplaces, but also at home. The active figure of the woman had to be devalued and punished in order to restore the shattered ego of the male: she either had to die, or domesticized in order to restore the setup of the traditional nuclear family.



Beside characterization, the most obvious feature that marked the difference of film noirs from previous genre films was their visual style. The high-key lighting style that was used to create the glamorous atmosphere for stars in the 1930s was left behind for a low-key lighting that created harsh contrast, dark, gloomy atmospheres, and claustrophobic spatial composition (with a harshly lit front detail framed by a very dark background). Arguably the lighting style reached back to *German expressionism*, “a particular filmic style which emerged in Germany during the years 1919–24” (Hayward 171–72) known for presenting taboo topics, such as “madness, and primitive, sexual savagery” (172) in “expressionistic sets and high-contrast chiaroscuro lighting” (173).

Film noir, therefore, seemed to be subversive both in its thematic concern and visual style. Yet, there is no agreement that the group of films under the umbrella term of film noir constitute a circumscribable genre because, while the films visibly share some basic characteristics, they do not conform to set rules of generic production. In other words, even if they are similar, they are just as much different from each other in the way they treat their subjects. Film noir themes and modes of representation, moreover, return cyclically: in the 1980s dark, pessimistic *techno-noirs* (noir films in which technological advancement exists in a dehumanized world) appeared signaled by Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), or later by films such as *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995, dir. Robert Longo), *The Terminator* (1984, dir. James Cameron), *The Matrix* (1999, dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski), *The Detective Story* in *The Animatrix* (2003, dir. Shinichirô Watanabe), and *V for Vendetta* (2005, dir. James McTeigue). As Elizabeth Cowie argues, studios only recognized the “hybridity” of these films (their mixing different, existing generic ideas of fellow genres, like the gangster film, the detective film, and the melodrama), but they did not categorized them into a separate genre in terms of production (131). Cowie offers an alternative way of defining film noir without relegating it to any generic categorization by saying that “what has come to be called film noir, whilst it does not constitute a genre itself, does name a particular set of elements that were used to produce ‘the different’ and the new in a film; hence the term film noir names a set of possibilities for making existing genres ‘different’” (ibid.). In a quest to define what film noir is, Marc Vernet offers a refreshing description:

It is an object of beauty because Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall are to be found there, because it is neatly contained in a perfect decade (1945–55), because it is simultaneously defined by its matter (black and white) and by its content (the crime story), because it is strange (see its relation to German expressionism and to psychoanalysis), [...] because it assures the triumph of European artists even as it presents American actors, because it is a severe criticism of faceless capitalism, because it prolongs the reading of detective novels while feeding comparatism, because there is always an unknown film to be added to the list, because the stories it tells are both shocking and sentimental, because it is a great example of cooperation – the Americans made it and then the French invented it [...] On the whole, film noir is like a Harley-

Davidson: you know right away what it is, the object being only the synecdoche of a continent, a history and a civilization, or more precisely of their representation for non-natives. (Vernet 1)

As the examples of the western, the screwball comedy, and film noir show, in the genre analysis of film, history and criticism are pulled together into a productive dialogue with the aim of establishing or defining generic categories and of uncovering deep structures that power surface manifestations. The notions of literary genre theory have not really entered the vocabulary of the analysis of film genres. Beginning with the work of Ed Buscombe, the division of formal categories was apparent. In his study of the western, Buscombe introduced the interpretive categories of *outer and inner forms* with a special focus on the visual elements of a particular film (outer form) and the way these elements are structured (inner form) to create a meaningful whole. Without direct reference to Welles and Warren's terminology, Buscombe argues that the outer form of a genre is made up of a repertoire of visual elements (wide-brimmed hats, guns, board houses, sandy streets, the saloon, etc. in the case of a western film) (Stam 126). These elements are then combined into a filmic expression by the filmmaker, resulting in a combination structural principles of which are shared by a certain number of productions. Instead of relying on auteur theory and the idea of the *mise-en-scène* as providing "the means of materialising the author's personal vision" (Cook 60), Buscombe focused on the *iconography* of films, by which he meant "recurrent images, including the physical attributes and dress of the actors, the settings, the tools of trade" (*ibid.*), and which made it possible to look at the role of the filmic image with its wider scope of implications for film analysis. It opened the way for a genre analysis that completely detached itself from its literary counterpart.

Thomas Schatz in *Hollywood Genres* introduces a sociologically oriented study of film genres, and discusses genres in their relation to broader social, cultural, and economic contexts. Schatz divides Hollywood genres into two groups in order to define the function of genre that – as a cultural ritual – helps "to integrate a conflictual community through romance or through a character who mediates between rival factions" (Stam 127). The first group consists of genres which present the reestablishment of social order: westerns, gangster and detective movies. In this cluster of films the disorder in the social setup that gives the *apropos* of the narrative is resolved by the end. The other group is made up of genres whose aim is to advocate social integration: the musical, comedy, and melodrama. Here outcasts become equal members of society, and everybody achieves their aims.

In terms of general development, Schatz distinguishes four stages in the cycle of any film genre. The first is an experimental period in which generic rules, schemes and stylistic characteristics are established. The second stage is the "classical" period, which serves to iterate and institutionalize the characteristics of the genre that have been developed in the first period, and audience expectations are consolidated by the recurrence of similar films. The third stage of the development of a cycle is the period of decline in the sense that no new generic inventions

are introduced in the development, and the genre cannot renew itself. The final, fourth period in the development of a genre, according to Schatz, is the self-reflexive stage, in which the classical and typical generic features – the ones that make the particular genre a genre – are called into question (Vasák 8).

According to Steve Neale, genres are systems that consist of specific orientations in terms of the narrative, which raise expectations in the audience (e.g. how a film should end), thus setting the agenda for distribution techniques, and prescribe conventions, modes, and methods for production (how a musical or melodrama should be done) (Stam 127, Hayward 166). Because of the interaction of the three elements – audience, distribution, and production – genres are prone to “rework, extend and transform the norms that codify them,” so it is impossible to “straightjacket” any of them (Neale 58). The prescriptive methods for making genre films are never “innocent,” however, as Robin Wood suggests (478). Ideology is always already present to reinforce, for example, gender distinctions: representations of active men versus passive women in western, independence versus domestic entrapment, family and marriage in melodramas, are only a few that have themes that lie at the basis of generic definitions, yet reflect the ideological preferences of the era in which the particular films of the given genre are made (*ibid.*). The control of these underlying antinomies, often referred to as binary oppositions, by the production offers *preferred readings* of genre films, that is, interpretations that are pre-coded, with the message that images and stories presented by the film “are meant to mean what they say” (Hayward 285). It helps to satisfy audience expectations, on the one hand, and extend production control on the other hand. This view is supported by the routine of studios to define the market for their films: they arranged publicity campaigns according to the audience sector in view, choosing generic categories from a “menu” that included male genres (action adventure, gangster film, war film, and western), female genres (drama, musical, romantic comedy, and weepie), and the rest, called *tertium quid* (Latin, “third thing”), which could not be otherwise categorized along gender lines (fantasy, historical/costume, slapstick comedy, travel adventure) (Altman 128).

According to Altman, this selective system was in use until the 1960s, when new methods were introduced to examine audience demographics (*ibid.*). This model recognized only two factors: age and sex, so “either you were a sexually defined adult (and either male or female) or not (and thus part of the *tertium quid*, which was sometimes broken down into children and older audiences)” (*ibid.*). Instead of ideological criticism, Altman offers a flexible model for genre analysis in his programmatic “A semantic/syntactic approach to film genre.” He distinguishes between the *semantic* approach that concerns the narrative content of film, which he calls “a genre’s building blocks” (219), and the *syntactic* one that focuses on the different structures into which the narrative blocks are arranged. The semantic view is comprised of what would be called in Wellek and Warren’s and later Buscombe’s phrase “outer form:” “a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like” (*ibid.*). The

syntactic view – largely synonymous with “inner form” – is made up of “certain constitutive relationships between undesigned and variable place-holders” (ibid.). Unlike in earlier theories of film genre analyses, the syntactic and semantic approaches are in a complementary relation with each other, which makes possible the analysis of films that are inventive in their blending the syntax of one genre with the semantics of another. Thus, a genre, like musical, can renew itself by incorporating elements of the melodrama, and genre analysis would not be concerned with the violation of genre boundaries, but would be looking at the various ways the incorporation enriches the particular film’s interpretation. With the semantic/syntactic approach Altman avoids the problems present in a unilateral approach: his view does not limit a genre to its historically determined tradition, and does not limit itself to interpretative, universal definitions (such as Schatz’s order versus integration antinomy in the classification of genres). Altman, however, later extended his model by introducing a third component that complements the semantic/syntactic binary: a *pragmatist approach*. This approach guides the focus of analysis towards exactly which particular semantic and syntactic features should be discussed (210). The pragmatic approach tells the analyst what and how to investigate in a complementary semantic/syntactic genre analysis.

Once neglected and underrepresented theoretical trend in the history of film theories, genre theory has become a sophisticated critical terrain – with its own problematic issues. According to Stam, one of the main problems with genre analysis is the question of “extension” (128). This means that some genre definitions are too broad to help interpretation and genre analysis, others are too narrow. Saying that a film is a comedy does not help much, while a category such as psycho-thriller of serial killers unnecessarily limits the number of generic components. As Stam explains, genre analysis should avoid “normativism,” which means that the interpreter should forget about pre-conceived ideas “of what a genre film should do” and instead look at genre “as a trampoline for creativity and innovation” (ibid.). In other words, no two films within the same genre look and do the same; consequently, the critic should not expect them to act against their nature. The third problem is that genre is often thought to be “monolithic,” that is, believed to belong to only one genre. In reality, even genre films from the studio era testify of occasional overlap between genres to a certain extent. Thus a war movie may contain characteristic elements of melodrama, or a spy movie may easily appropriate elements of the thriller films.

Another potential problem arising in discussions of film genres is the view that considers genres to have a “life cycle” – an argument advocated by Schatz’s theory of the development of genres. According to Stam, this view is driven by the plague of “biologism” because, for example, the stylistic features of the last, self-reflexive or decadent phase of the generic cycle can be present at the birth of the particular cycle, too (ibid.). On the contrary, parody and self-reflexive structures are often present in the programmatic films of a genre (129): notable examples include David Wark Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) or Buster Keaton’s *The Three Ages*

(1923). Finally, Stam argues that genres can be “submerged,” that is, on the surface a film may appear as belonging to one genre, yet structurally, in terms of narrative or visual style it belongs to another one (ibid.). While on the surface Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976) or George Lucas’s *Star Wars* have nothing to do with western structurally, narratologically, and in their method of characterization they can easily be analyzed as westerns.

The theory of film genre has gone a long way from its genre theory in literature. Today most film theorists agree that genres “can be identified by” and analyzed based on an investigation of “the iconography and conventions appearing within” them (Hayward 171). As a critical term, genre remains slippery and shifting: its meaning and critical application varies with the changing codes and conventions that operate it. As Christine Gledhill concludes, “[g]enres are fictional worlds, but they do not stay within fictional boundaries: their conventions cross into cultural and critical discourse, where we – as audiences, scholars, students, and critics – make and remake them” (241).

### Keywords

genre, auteur-structuralism, inner and outer forms, deep structure, binary oppositions, preferred reading, iconography, western, melodrama, screwball comedy, film noir, techno-noir, hard-boiled detective fiction, femme fatale, German expressionism, semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approaches

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## Chapter

# 5

## Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star

Réka M. Cristian

For me, cinema is not a slice of life, but a piece of cake.  
(Alfred Hitchcock)

As to the evil which results from a censorship,  
it is impossible to measure it,  
for it is impossible to tell where it ends.  
(Jeremy Bentham)

I think mystery is kind of great. I don't know anything about  
Bette Davis or Katharine Hepburn or Ava Gardner – not really – and  
I like that. I love watching their movies because they're my personal movie stars.  
(Rachel Weisz)

The name of an artist marks the frame of her or his work. The author's name is one of the most relevant tools for mapping specific patterns in a selected list of texts (Foucault 202). Literary texts are generally endowed with a figural assignment called author-function that shapes our understanding of texts. Contemporary theories and especially those relying on gender, postcolonialism and film are recently re-centering on the figure of the one who has produced the work of literature or of art (Nánay 15).

Literary texts contain frequent and powerful signs directly or indirectly alluding to the figure authoring them. These marks are labeled “shifters” (Foucault 205). In the process of film adaptation these shifters transgress the boundaries of literary texts and appear under different forms in film, setting under scrutiny the question of authorship. Film theory imported the notion of the literary author and transformed it into a more complex concept, that of the *auteur*. The filmic author (or the *auteur*) is similar to Michel Foucault's author-function that defines a creator on the basis of his or her works. The *auteur* represents an ideological figure that emerges from the corpus of his or her own films (Hayward 26). Today, the figure of the *auteur* is understood in a wider context; *auteurship* includes, besides the director of the film, other members of the creative crew: producers, cinematographers, stars, screenplay writers, composers, and many more.

At the beginning of the twentieth century film theorists, in their quest to define the author of a movie, became interested in paradigms focusing on the concepts of “writing” and “textuality” (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 190). The issue of writing was the one that revived the question of authorial personality in film studies. One of the earliest attempts to

define the filmic author was the German *Autorenfilm* that emerged in 1913 as a critical response to French art cinema (Hayward 20). This “author’s film” became associated with the figure of the writer producing the movie script, who claimed authority over the entire film. Accordingly, *Autorenfilm* had only omnipotent authors (like books) and not directors in the most obvious sense of the term, and the name of the film type mirrored the state of art’s rights in the given cultural and historical context. In Hollywood’s early years the issue of authorship expressed a problematic matter, especially in terms of copyright laws that were either minimal or absent. Films were generally marked by the logo of their production companies in order to protect the right of the company over the film. In this case, the sole author of a film was the production company (Cook 115).

During the 1920s, the concept of the filmic author was applied only to the filmmaker; the term “auteur” was used for the first time by Jean Epstein in “Le Cinéma et les lettres modernes” [Cinema and modern literature] in 1921. This essay compared the cinematic techniques of D. W. Griffith and Sergei Eisenstein to the literary devices used by Gustave Flaubert and Charles Dickens (Stam 85) and described striking similitudes between literary and cinematic narratives.

“Auteur” in French means creator, producer, discoverer, fabricator, constructor, establisher, author, and writer. In “The Birth of New Avant-Garde: La Caméra Stylo” (1948) published in *Ecran Français*, Alexandre Astruc regarded authorship in film analogous with authorship in other arts. He pointed out corresponding patterns between the brush of a painter and the photographic camera of a photographer, and between the pen of a writer and the camera of a movie director. Astruc saw the filmmaker as the equivalent of the novelist: if the novelist had a pen to write with, the filmmaker’s tool was what he called *le caméra-stylo* or the “camera-pen.” The camera-pen symbolized the act of filmmaking with the director “writing” the filmic narrative. Analogous to literature, which had a metaphorical language to express itself, film, too, had a special mode of expression, and the one who knew how to use this language for telling stories in the visual realm was, at first, the director of the film. Astruc considered the film director as an individual artist who expressed his or (rarely) her thoughts by writing his philosophy of life with a camera (Cook 119). The graphological trope in film studies was later reinvigorated by Cristian Metz, who reflected on the nature of cinematic language and the textual nature of film.

The French *Cahiers du cinéma* [Cinema Notebooks], inaugurated in 1951, started a wider discussion on the issue of the auteur. According to the critics of *Cahier*, the movie director was responsible for the aesthetics and the *mise-en-scène* of the film (Stam 85). *Mise-en-scène*, which generally means “putting [things] into scene,” is a concept that links filmic discourse to theatrical productions. In the context of dramatic performance, *mise-en-scène* is the arrangement of scenery and properties. In filmic discourse the basic use of the concept points to the surrounding conditions arranged for film scenes. In short, if *mise-en-scène* in theatre depicts



the stage setting, in film it reflects the staging of the real world by the camera (Cook 120). The notion of *mise-en-scène*, however, connotes a more innovative approach to film, when it comes to the figure of the director. In this case the concept depicts the artistic know-how of the filmmaker.

The creativity and talent of the filmmakers was questioned by François Truffaut in "Certain Tendency of the French Cinema." The provocative article, which appeared in *Cahiers* in 1954, exposed to critical view the ossified nature of literal adaptations of classic French literary works, and criticized the traditional anti-Americanist attitude of the French theorists. Truffaut interpreted most French films as "elitist putdowns" (Stam 87), which literally and uncritically transposed classical novels into films. These films had then a distinguished status and were labeled as *cinéma de qualité* [quality cinema] by literary intellectuals adhering to the "Tradition of Quality" (Truffaut 225). This was a "stuffy academic, screenwriter's cinema" (Stam 84), which maintained traditional, bookish expectations over the texts they adapted. To emphasize the out-of-fashion status of these films, Truffaut called this archaic moviemaking *cinéma de papa* [Daddy's cinema]. He stressed the need for and the importance of creative *mise-en-scène* that can only be achieved if the person who makes the film has a particular style and personality that emanates in the end-product. The French director-critic depicted the deplorable state of the art in the case of these "scenarists' films," which – similar to the German Autorenfilme – appeared analogous to "ready-mades" and were finished when the scenario landed in the hands of the director who only added pictures to it (Truffaut 233). Truffaut was an enthusiastic supporter and admirer of American directors who, contrary to their European counterparts, developed a recognizable stylistic and thematic personality in their movies despite a great number of restrictions and regulations imposed on them by the Hollywood studio system.

Truffaut was one of the many *Cahiers* critics and directors underlining the creative and responsible role of the director in filmmaking. *La politique des auteurs*, translated as *the auteur theory*, was coined by Truffaut and aimed to clarify the role and the person of the auteur in films. The *Cahiers* critics opposed the idea of films being parasitical visual constructions founded on narrative or dramatic works of literary art, and fought for film's reconsideration as an art endowed with a special language and distinctive mode of expression. This theory stirred the filmic critical world and inspired new ways of filmmaking and canon formation in cinema. The rumors behind the auteur theory

lay not so much in glorifying the director as the equivalent in prestige to the literary author, but rather in exactly *who* was granted this prestige. [...] The novelty of auteur theory was to suggest that studio directors like Hawks and Minnelli were also auteurs. American cinema, which had classically been the diacritical "other" of French film theory, that against which it had defined itself, just as the putative "vulgarity" of American culture had long provided the diacritical counterpoint for French national identity, now became, surprisingly, the model for a new French cinema. (Stam 87)

As opposed to Truffaut, André Bazin perceived cinema mostly as a medium and believed in a certain passivity of the filmmaker, who was not to manipulate reality but had to only record it (Cook 119). Furthermore, Bazin was skeptical about thematic and stylistic motifs that ascribed a name to a body of films; for him auteur theory had not only advantages but also traps. Too much focus on the director could easily make him or her subject to a cult of personality, which could, in turn, detract attention from other technological, historical, and sociological factors (Stam 88) that provided the invisible core of a film. *La politique des auteurs* was an important step in the development of film criticism and had major merits that influenced the fast developing cinematic world. One of the most important ones was that it introduced a hierarchy among films and implanted, after criticizing the works of the *cinéma de papa*, the seeds of canon revision and genuine film canon-formation in film studies. Moreover, it was the *politique des auteurs* that started the process of erasing the boundary between high art and popular cinema by claiming the director as individual creator responsible for the artistic quality of his or her films.

The auteur theory was “adopted” in the United States at the beginning of the 1960s. Based on the European debates on auteurs, Andrew Sarris outlined an Americanized definition of auteurship in “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” which he applied on Hollywood directors. This article was conceived as a critical method on authorship in film. In “Notes,” Sarris created a personal pantheon of mostly American “top directors,” where he practically reduced American film history to the careers of “a few dozen heroic directors” (Schatz 603), exclusively male ones, whom he considered “good.” Sarris built his own selective list of auteurs, which contained the names of Max Ophüls, Jean Renoir, Kenji Mizoguchi, Alfred Hitchcock, Charlie Chaplin, John Ford, Orson Welles, Carl Theodore Dreyer, Roberto Rossellini, F. W. Murnau, D. W. Griffith, Joseph von Sternberg, Sergei Eisenstein, Erich von Stroheim, Louis Buñuel, Robert Breson, Howard Hawks, Fritz Lang, Robert Flaherty, and Jean Vigo. The principles on which the American critic constructed his preferences become later pillars of film-canonization. Sarris explained that “seniority” and “established reputation” were the major criteria of his choice:

In time, some of these auteurs will rise, some will fall, and some will be displaced either by new directors or rediscovered ancients. Again, the exact order is less important than the specific definitions of these and as many as two hundred other potential auteurs. I would hardly expect any other critic in the world fully to endorse this list, especially on faith. Only after thousands of films have been reevaluated, will any personal pantheon have a reasonably objective validity. The task of validating the auteur theory is an enormous one, and the end will never be in sight. Meanwhile, the auteur habit of collecting random films in directorial bundles will serve posterity with at least a tentative classification. (Sarris 1999, 517–518)

A genuine American auteur was, consequently, a film director, who had discernable style and was able to create a personal artistic profile prevailing over the rules of Hollywood's studio system. Sarris followed the guidelines of the *politique des auteurs*, which claimed that "in spite of the industrial nature of film production, the director, like any other artist, was the sole author of the film" (Cook 114). He believed that the director as artist was of primal importance because he unified film text. Accordingly, Sarris envisaged three criteria of value through which an auteur could be recognized.

The first criterion was that of "the outer circle." This implied technical knowledge and the director's professional quality as a *metteur-en-scène* [the one who puts things on scene]. A *metteur-en-scène* is a technically skilled person, who employs a specific, generally recurrent style in his filmic work. The first premise of the American version of auteur theory put emphasis on the "technical competence of a director as a criterion of value," which worked best if combined with an "elementary flair for the cinema" (Sarris 1999, 516).

The second criterion was made up of a "middle circle," containing an explicit personal style or "stylistic consistency," in other words, the artistic aura of the film director. The second premise focused on the indispensable "distinguishable personality of the director" and set it as another criterion of value for an auteur. Sarris believed that an auteur-director must have "certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature" (*ibid.*). In contrast to many other directors whose talent materialized mainly in the treatment of the film's script, American directors succeeded to achieve in the context of the studio system a discernable artistic personality through special visual treatment of filmic material. This, according to Sarris, made them "superior" to foreign directors.

The third premise consisted of the so-called "inner circle" or "interior meaning" that resulted from "the tension between a director's personality and his material" (*ibid.*). Sarris evoked Truffaut's definition of this tension, which was metaphorically defined as "the temperature of the director on the set" (517). The interior meaning is a slippery term, still open for interpretation which, for the American critic, represents the "ultimate glory of the cinema as an art," because it is "extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material" (516). This third hypothesis seems to be central to the construction of the American auteur theory because it involves a complex conglomerate of constituting elements that interact: technical competence, artistic talent, and presence of spirit, as well as the sum of communicative skills and other spontaneous attitudes a director needs to overcome diverse obstacles during the entire process of filmmaking.

The previously mentioned three premises may be visualized as three concentric circles: the outer circle as the technical stage, the middle circle as personal style, and the third, most important circle, as the interior meaning. Sarris's auteur-geometry depicts, in short, the director in a threefold role: as technician, as stylist, and, paradoxically, as auteur, as such (517).

The author of a movie is for David Bordwell an “overriding intelligence organizing a film” (719). Bordwell set the definition of the auteur in the context of art cinema that seemed to lack identifiable stars and familiar genres. In this case the role of the auteur is easily ascribed to the director of the film. Authorship designates a textual force gathering a number of filmic texts. The specific, artistic mode typifies a stylistic signature or peculiar strategy in case of each director-auteur. For example, Truffaut uses freeze frames, Antonioni employs pans, Buñuel is obsessed with issues of anticlericalism, Fellini is keen to depict shows, Bergman focuses on character names (Bordwell 720). In light of these patterns it is no wonder, Bordwell concludes, that the *politique des auteurs* developed in the nest of the art cinema which, in turn, facilitated the development of the American auteur theory.

For Peter Wollen the director of a film is “not simply in command of a performance of a pre-existing text” (530) and is more than a technical executive or a *metteur-en-scène*. A film director creatively uses the texts at his or her hand as source and material from which he or she produces a completely new work of art. This act of filmmaking is, in Wollen’s view, “the production of the director as auteur” (530–531), who has the same thematic preoccupations, similar recurring motifs and incidents, and analogous visual style and tempo (521) in his or her films. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has a similar standpoint; he recognizes an auteur on the basis of “a hard core of basic and often recondite motifs” that confers a particular structure pertaining to the works of a certain creator (qtd. in Wollen 521).

As a result, it becomes obvious that an auteur film is, accordingly, a “network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final ‘coherent’ version,” Wollen writes (532). Auteur analysis, in this regard, does not need to trace down films to their origins, nor to a certain creative source or figure behind the film. Instead, it envisages an empirical search for a stylistic structure (recalling the shifters from Foucault’s notion of the author) which reside at the basis of films, and which can afterwards be assigned to an individual artist, namely, the director. Wollen also observed that the auteur theory did not limit itself to “acclaiming the director as the main author of a film” but revealed authors “where none had been seen before” (Wollen 520) through identifying artistic patterns in films.

In the 1950s the auteur theory credited a number of distinguished film directors as auteurs. Endowed with star-like attributes, the auteur was considered the central figure in filmmaking and, as such, the sole producer of meaning. The director stood as an emblem for her/his films; films were texts functioning under a very subjective logic which had a particular inherent structure of signs and plots. This distinctive quality condensed at the level of the spectator in sentences of the kind of “if you liked X’s film, you’ll like her/his new one.” During the 1960s *auteur structuralism* put under critical scrutiny linguistic, social, institutional structures producing meaning in films, focused on signifying systems, and searched the underlying structures in movies, but ignored the issues of spectatorship and ideology in film studies. Auteur-structuralists were mostly concerned about sets of plot patterns, recurring themes, topics, and

relationships occurring in films, and concentrated on the director as the primary creative source of the filmic text. Some auteur theorists, however, went past structural patterns and emphasized the view of the author as critical construct (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 190–191).

The post-structuralist currents of the 1970s – semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism, deconstruction – recontextualized the critique of the auteur from the point of view of filmic texts, subjects, and interplay of meanings (Hayward 23). Auteur theory has since shifted to a plural meaning. Today the identity of the auteurs is manifold: besides the director of a film, the screenwriter, the producer, the composer, the star, or even a group of artists creating films with unmistakably artistic influence can be regarded as authentic auteurs.

The Americanization of auteur theory was challenged by individual critics and post-structuralist theories alike: they inquired many possible ways of meaning production in the filmic text. Pauline Kael was among the first who questioned the supremacy of the film director and pointed out that the American auteur theory, in its rigid formulation, obscured the collaborative (team-work) nature of filmmaking. Contemporary theories of filmic auteurship continuously de-center the earlier, almost totalitarian position of the director as auteur and replace the gender-biased, monolithic view with the more practical concept of the *auteur-function* (Hayward 26–27, Nánay 18–19). It seems, however, that the concept of the auteur-function opens a more flexible critical space than that of the Americanized auteur. If a literary text has an author and an implied author (an imaginary person different from the real author and also from the narrator, and which can be detected from the context of the literary work), then film (as similar narrative form) should have, besides the auteur or persons endowed with auteur-function, an *implied auteur*, accordingly. Its function “is analogous to that of the implied author” and can be either a real or a fictional person “posited between the ideological figure of the traditional filmic auteur and the actual “voice” of the filmic narrative” (Cristian 89).

Despite his partiality towards Hollywood’s great directors, Sarris himself admitted that auteur theory as a “pattern theory” was in constant flux (Sarris 1999, 517). This variability, however, did not only show the rise and falls of names and directors, but was intended to be a method of canonization. Later Sarris stated that this pattern theory was – and still is – more of “an attitude” (Sarris 1976, 246), that helped establishing a system of “priorities for the film student,” and set the pillars of academic tradition in cinema studies (244). A similar evaluative premise of auteur theory was expressed by Bill Nichols, who wrote that auteur study “stressed the how over the what, the history of film over films in history” (222).

The concept of the auteur still persists in the filmic context despite claims about “the death of the author” (Roland Barthes) or New Criticism’s “intentional fallacy” in literary works. The debates over the auteur theory continue even today, when this theory represents both a strategy and an attitude in film studies. By attributing authorship in classical narrative films to the film director, the American auteur theory succeeded in blurring the boundaries that

segregated films from other, so-called high-art forms. Besides, auteur theory redeemed forgotten or less known films and director names. This led to a more organized reception of films both on the market and in academic discourse (See Database of Great Directors in *Senses of Cinema*). As Sarris argued, this theory performed an “invaluable rescue operation” for a number of neglected films, directors, and genres, and justified the status of cinema studies in the academic field. His supposition

[...] discerned authorial personalities in surprising places – especially in the American makers of B-films like Samuel Fuller and Nicholas Ray. [...] It rescued entire genres – the thriller, the western, the horror film – from literary high-art prejudice. By forcing attention to the films themselves and to the mise-en-scène as the stylistic signature of the director, auteurism clearly made a substantial contribution to film theory and methodology. [...] It facilitated film’s entry into literature departments and played a major role in the academic legitimization of cinema studies. (Stam 92)

The figure of the auteur in the United States was closely related to the existence of the studio system. Film industry was an organic part of the corporate capitalist model because it was situated in a position “between the economic practice of standardization for efficient mass production and the economic practice of product differentiation” (Staiger 1985 147). The economic and legislative practices at the end of the nineteenth-century and beginning of the twentieth-century America facilitated the emergence and fast development of corporate businesses. These consolidated and expanded their influence by moving into vertically integrated structures, which enabled them to directly control the retail and the advertising sectors of their products.

The birth of the studio system dates back to the 1920s. The early French production companies, Gaumont, Pathé, and Éclair functioned on the principles of vertical integration. In a vertically integrated system the studio had control over the modes of production, distribution and exhibition (Hayward 363). The earliest prototype of a similar system in the United States was introduced by Thomas H. Ince. He built Inceville (1919), an artificial world for making films in Hollywood. Movies were produced here according to the policy of the studio system: Ince set himself as director, producer, and manager of his films while simultaneously supervising all the other films made in his studio. As the head of company, he had “the final say on everything from the script to the editing” (ibid.). This production practice signaled the beginning of the full-blown Hollywood studio management style.

The classical Hollywood studio system reached its top development by 1930 and persisted until 1948. With proper technology, management, and a set staff, Hollywood studios were the primary mass producers of movies; they created over six hundred films each year, an amount that placed film studios among the great corporations of the time. The huge number of productions in the film business was the outcome of successful modern technologies of the period (echoing an earlier successful production line, the Ford Company’s T Model auto-

mobiles that were produced between 1908 and 1927). The assembly-line production mode in film industry led to the standardization of the film product that materialized the classical narrative cinema. In the production of a traditional Hollywood movie every studio had a general overseer, its own class of stars, scriptwriters, designers, and directors (Schatz 604). They outlined the profile of the company and were also the hallmarks of a given studio.

In the classical studio system economic reasons had priority over many other issues. This meant that “films had to follow certain criteria to guarantee box-office success” (Hayward 365). Accordingly, all studios had – besides a repertoire of contract stars and proper technology – successful story formulas that were refined and “recycled” according to the needs of the marketplace (Schatz 604). The maize of Hollywood’s plot clichés, summarized by Andrew Sarris, was: “Boy Meets Girl. The Happy Ending. The Noble Sacrifice. The Sanctity of Marriage. The Gangster Gets His Just Deserts. The Cowboy Outdraws the Villain. Girl and Boy Feel a Son Coming On” (Sarris 1976, 239). During the financial depths of Depression Era, it was primarily the market that dictated the economic efficiency of film and, consequently, the marketable clichés of classical narrative films. This was the time when double features came in fashion: the double bill was a survival strategy and a smart promotion on the part of studios because it enabled even the poorest spectators to watch two films – usually a major feature film and a B-movie – for the price of one.

To ensure their efficacy and profitability, vertically integrated studios established an entire list of distribution practices, instituted to ensure the economic supremacy of major film companies. This list contained the practice of *block booking*, *blind bidding*, *runs*, *zones*, and *clearances* which lasted for a short period of time and were finally outlawed by the courts on grounds of illegal monopoly business conduct that obstructed the activity of other, smaller, and especially independent film studios. Block booking meant the rental of films in large quantity; this was usually a studio’s yearly output (Belton 71). In many cases exhibitors contracted the films well before they were produced, and therefore they were “forced to bid for them” (ibid.) without seeing the movies in advance. This procedure was called blind bidding. At the same time, through runs the studios protected their own theaters that “ran” the film for the first time, which had “the lion’s share of box office receipts” (72), and permitted the screening of their new film(s) in other theaters only with a couple of months’ delay. The distribution of films followed the rules of the system of zones which indicated that “only one theater in any particular area was permitted to exhibit a new picture” (ibid.). Smaller “second-run” and “sub-run” theaters had to wait until a “picture had completed its run in the major theaters” (ibid.) before they could run a new movie. This was the process of clearances. As Belton writes,

[...] a film moved through successive runs, clearances between 7 and 30 days were observed, during which time the film was unavailable. This practice reinforced the hierarchical structure of exhibition and protected each tier of

theaters from competition with theaters farther down the scale that charged audiences less for tickets. Delays between the runs were designed to renew demand for the picture. (ibid.)

The vertical integration of studios in Hollywood is mostly associated with the name of Adolph Zukor. He built the Paramount empire in 1917 when he bought the Paramount Film Corporation and aligned it with the Famous Players-Lasky Corporation in order to establish a monopoly on the joint venture of filmmaking and distribution (Hayward 364). Its rivals were Fox Film Corporation, Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, Warner Brothers, and RKO or Radio-Keith-Orpheum Pictures (as the big five), together with Universal Pictures, United Artists, and Columbia (as the minor three).

Paramount Pictures Corporation produced mainly comedy and light entertainment films. Their stars were Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Gloria Swanson, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, Paulette Goddard, the Marx Brothers, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, and many others; Cecil B. de Mille, Erich von Stroheim, D.W. Griffith and Mack Sennett were the early Paramount's most famous directors (367). Fox Film Corporation or 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox – established in 1913 and vertically integrated into the studio system in 1925 – was the studio of popular musicals, realistic crime films, and westerns. Their repertoire of famous actors consisted of Shirley Temple, Will Rodgers, Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, Henry Fonda, Gregory Peck; its directors were Elia Kazan, John Ford, and Joseph Mankiewicz (367). Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1924) was founded at the creative and financial junction of three small studios: Metro, Goldwyn, and Mayer. MGM was the production place of “stars, spectacle and glamour” (369). Among its prominent figures were Greta Garbo, Judy Garland, Jean Harlow, Norma Shearer, Mickey Rooney, Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable. Warner Brothers – founded 1923 and integrated in 1926 – became famous with the first sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927, dir. Alan Crosland). During the harsh financial times of the Great Depression the studio produced mostly gangster films and backstage musicals, which were the top products of the studio. During the Second World War, Warner Bros. made *Casablanca* (1942, dir. Michael Curtiz), a movie that later became the cult marker of this studio. Warner Bros. had a specific employment strategy different from the other film companies: not having a set staff they employed occasional directors (Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh), and stars (Errol Flynn, Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis), who worked for the studio for a limited time or only for a given film (368–369). RKO (1928) was born at the advent of sound in movies when The Radio Corporation of America joined film production in order to promote its own product, the sound system. Among RKO's first films were *King Kong* (1933, dir. Ernest B. Schoedask), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938, dir. Howard Hawks), *Citizen Kane* (1941, dir. Orson Welles), and *Notorious* (1946, dir. Alfred Hitchcock). RKO also made low-budget B-movies, noir films, and horror movies (370).



Universal Pictures (1912) was, at the dawn of Hollywood's unfolding film empire, the "home" of horror films, of war movies, and melodramas but after 1948 thrillers and westerns became the hallmark genres of this studio. *Dracula* (1931, dir. Tod Browning) and *Frankenstein* (1931, dir. James Whale) were the first two successful movies of Universal Pictures. Universal's most famous actors were Rudolph Valentino, Charlton Heston, and Orson Welles (372). United Artists Corporation (1919) was established as an independent, art film studio by D.W. Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks (both left Paramount) and Charlie Chaplin. This studio made some of the most well-know early success movies (372): *The Gold Rush* (1925), *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (1933, dir. Alexander Korda), and *Modern Times* (1936, dir. Charlie Chaplin). Columbia (1920) created primarily B-movies during the 1930s; Frank Capra and Rita Hayworth were its main star names (373).

The big five studios owned theater chains, while the minor three ones did not; they had to distribute their films by "special arrangements" to theaters owned by the big five studios (Belton 70). Major studios issued from 40 to 60 pictures a year which were presented in their "large, first-run houses, situated in the biggest cities" and which "generated over 70 percent of all box-office receipts" (71).

Despite its enormous success, Hollywood's dream factory had its problematic aspects. By exposing sensual images and violent epics, films were primary symbols of decadence during the stock market crash, in the time of Great Depression and the New Deal. In a period of deep economic crisis, the glamour of Hollywood – the virtual world of escape from harsh realities – was frequently interpreted as the hotbed of promiscuity, false illusions, and fake values. The economic hardship of the period caused a faith crisis in the traditional American individualist belief (Neve 5) which ignited, in turn, a wave of heavy social protest by religious groups in the U.S. Their aim was to draw attention to the ethically destructive potential of most films and, by reforming the popular film world, to rescue it from the harmful influence of the immoral context in which movies were produced. During the second half of the thirties two prominent establishments, the Catholic Legion of Decency and the *Production Code Administration* were the censoring institutions of Hollywood's films. Hollywood studios were autonomous, apolitical companies, independent of any state intervention but in a period of increased social pressure they accepted censorship as an essential tool in avoiding any other, higher level political interference (56) with their activity.

The Production Code was also known as the Hays Code, after William Harrison Hays, the leader of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA). In 1945 MPPDA changed its name; it has since been known as the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA). The Production Code Administration (PCA) consisted of an executive branch of censors that controlled a conglomerate of restrictive guidelines governing the production of American movies, with the aim to ban indecent and immoral films. The list of "don'ts" and "be carefuls" included some of the dangerous "items" that needed careful handling:

lustful kissing and scenes of nudity, obscenity, vulgarity, incest, adultery, and illicit sex. The PCA militated against explicit sexual content portrayed as an attractive option; it was against any form of miscegenation, prostitution, seduction, rape, sexual perversions, pornography, homosexuality, and against the visual or verbal description of venereal diseases, and even sex hygiene; the PCA did not allow the exposure of anatomical parts during childbirth, banned the presentation of white slavery, and permitted no cruelty to children and animals. Explicit crime and revenge, as well as all forms of brutality in murders were blacklisted, while the use of drugs and alcohol was made possible only in a limited way, if it was absolutely necessary to the filmic plot (See “The Hays Code”).

The “Purity Seal” of the PCA was obligatory in case of any movie release. The motto of the Code stressed the importance of movies as mass-teaching device: “If motion pictures present stories that will affect lives for the better, they can become the most powerful force for the improvement of mankind” (ibid.). This approach stressed the moral importance of entertainment and set in practice a body of interdictions, which censored virtually every movie made in the American studios. The general principles of the PCA were the following:

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.
2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.
3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.” (ibid.)

In a climate of powerful censorship in movies *art cinema* came to mean, for American audiences, sex films (Hayward 16). Actually, in the given period, art cinema was a euphemistic term for soft core pornography (Palmer 211). Art cinema or *cinema d’art* in Europe was labeled with the artistic epithet in 1908 in order to emphasize the authenticity and legitimacy of film as art form (Hayward 17). In the second decade of the twentieth century, art cinema was identified with avant-garde movies and films containing a strong erotic component, especially, nudity (16). As a result European art films made easily their way to American audiences accustomed to censored films. Despite the atmosphere of PCA’s harsh condemnation, *Bicycle Thief* (dir. Vittorio de Sica, presented in 1949 in the U.S.) enjoyed enormous success in America. The triumph of this movie showed that, despite rules of censorship, there was a real market for art or “adult” films in the United States (Palmer 212).

Following a period of morale boosting that consolidated bourgeois values, Hollywood studios sensed substantial changes in the attitude of movie audiences and turned, after the Second World War, to more adult forms of popular topics. This was conditioned, on the one hand, by the increased production of Europe’s art films that were created in response to classical narrative films and to Hollywood’s “hopelessly compromised culture industry” (Palmer 211). The Breen office, lead by Joseph Breen, the chief censor administering the Pro-

duction Code, “acted as a check on the filmmaker’s efforts to reflect even the surfaces of American society more accurately” (Neve 84), which inevitably led to falling box office returns after 1947.

On the other hand, in the U.S. it was a fortunate period for a change within the world of film: the popular arty plays of Tennessee Williams gained proper critical acclaim on Broadway and were played with success throughout America’s stages. Soon Williams became the most adapted playwright. His plays and his novel, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*, presented “sexual transgression” and “alternative discourses on issues of sexuality and cultural norms” (Cristian 92), and tackled delicate issues containing erotic themes, which made them key sources for a new kind of adult entertainment that was radically different from the over-censored products of Hollywood’s earlier decades (Palmer 210).

The first adult film and Hollywood’s new genre production was Warner Bros.’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) written by Tennessee Williams and directed by Elia Kazan. This film openly treated subjects that were on the forbidden list of the PCA: it portrayed the aggressive sexual appetite of the protagonist, Blanche DuBois; unveiled the homosexuality of her late husband, Allan Grey; the film presented Stanley Kowalski’s sexual encounter with Blanche, and visualized animalistic sexuality (Palmer 215), domestic violence, drinking, smoking and gambling. The implicit “erotic aura” (Leff 30) and the topics depicted made this film the origin of the “commercial American art cinema” (Palmer 217).

Similarly to many other Hollywood movies, *A Streetcar* was to be released only with the seal of approval from the PCA, which – after the success of the *Bicycle Thief* – weakened its influence on film productions. However, Catholic censors of the Legion of Decency rated the film as “C” (Condemned), which intensified PCA’s further pressure on *A Streetcar*. The Legion’s ban meant also the blocking of bookings in major theatres (Leff 30), which could inevitably lead to the failure of the film even before it was released. With selected cuts, the PCA argued, the film’s negative rating “would be exchanged for a more acceptable” (ibid.) rate. Robert Barton Palmer described the PCA’s major objections to this film (218), which had as the first, most rejected item, the issue of homosexuality. Blanche’s husband, Alan Grey, could not be identified as a gay man; the PCA suggested this character be built rather as a “weak” and impotent person that cannot cope with his marital duties, and is economically unfit because is incapable to find suitable work. PCA’s second objection was in connection with the protagonist’s sexual appetite, which had to be “visibly downplayed” so that adults could understand erotic issues that had to appear “less obvious to younger viewers” (ibid.). Therefore, the prominently “nymphomaniac” character of Blanche was substituted with the subtle figure of a neurasthenic, sensitive woman. The third objection targeted the carnal affair of Blanche and Stanley, portrayed in the so-called “rape scene.” The PCA wanted the scene totally removed from the film but Kazan and Williams did not agree. They argued saying that this was the central event of the film’s plot and that its absence would destroy the entire visual narrative (ibid.). After

long debates, the compromise was that the “rape scene” might remain with a condition: the ending of the film had to suggest a “compensating moral value” on the part of Stanley’s cheated wife, Stella; she was to hint in the final shot of the movie that she lost faith in her husband (219) and might even consider leaving him.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* was the first type of new Hollywood films emerging from the restrictive frames of the censorship period when Tennessee Williams, as author and screenplay writer, safeguarded a unique interaction between his dramatic text and Kazan’s filmic discourse. The playwright as screenwriter guaranteed a special dialogue between the two media (Dragon 2004) in the context of repressive politics. As Leonard J. Leff observed, more than fifty years from its release, the censorship of *A Streetcar* remained “excellent publicity” (Leff 30) for the movie. The film’s “increasing frankness and explicitness” (Palmer 219) and the influence of the context in which it was produced lead to the abandonment of the Production Code Administration in the period from 1967 to 1968. This was replaced with the Rating System that lasted until 1978.

The categories of the rating system that targeted different audiences for different films in the period prior to 1968 were: “A” for “morally unobjectionable,” “B” for “objectionable,” and “C” for “condemned” (Valenti 2000). “O” Rating meant that a film was morally offensive. From 1968 through 1970 the applied ratings included “G” for “general audiences,” “M” for “mature viewers,” “R” for “restricted,” and “X” for “no persons under 18 admitted” (ibid.) but which was applied to experimental, alternative, underground, independent films. Contemporary ratings are similar to the previous evaluations: “G” is for “general audiences (all ages admitted),” “PG” is for “parental guidance” (with the subcategory of “PG-13” for “parents strongly cautioned because content is inappropriate for children under 13”), “R” for “restricted under 17, requires accompanying by parent or adult guardian” and “NC-17” for “no persons of 17 or under admitted,” and, finally, “NP” for the “not rated or rating pending” (Valenti 2000).

Among the factors that contributed to the decline of the Hollywood studio system were the financial problems of the studios (the big five studios went bankrupt during the Depression era), the Hollywood Antitrust Case in 1948 (that put an end to the oligopoly of the film trusts by separating motion pictures production, distribution and exhibition, which shook the foundations of the vertically integrated studio system), and the restrictive activity of the anti-communist ideology of the Cold War and the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). During the years of the “red scare,” the McCarthy Committee (led by the controversial Senator Joseph McCarthy) blacklisted a number of great actors, directors, and screenplay writers. By the beginning of the 1950s “[o]ver 200 Hollywood artists were in practice denied employment – until the blacklist tended to crumble at the end of 1950s – by those studios that were members of the Association of Motion Picture Producers” (Neve 171–172). These restrictions hindered considerably the production of films in a period when the U.S. was

“in the grip of something like a national panic over the international and domestic threat of communism” (Neve 171). But Hollywood studios had to face another enemy, and that was the appearance, popularity, and availability of television (Hayward 366). With the studio system weakened, audiences “had to be reconquered” not with new genres or plots but “through the marketing strategies of newer technological innovations” (ibid.).

As Thomas Schatz wrote, classical Hollywood reflected a specific period when

various social, industrial, technological, economic, and aesthetic forces struck a delicate balance. That balance was conflicted and ever shifting but stable enough through four decades to provide a consistent system of production and consumption, a set of formalized creative practices and constraints, and thus, a body of work within a uniform style—a standard way of telling stories, from camera work and cutting to plot structure and thematics. It was the studio system at large that held those various forces in equilibrium; indeed, the “studio era” and the classical Hollywood describe the same industrial and historical phenomenon (605).

This specific period made Hollywood studios the main birthplace of stars. The origin of the *star system* dates back to the period between 1910 and 1919. Before the appearance of the star system films were semi-anonymous productions with anonymous actors. Studios used either no names or mentioned only nicknames for their actor and actresses because they did not want to pay increased salaries in case the performers’ successful work merged with their own names. The absence of actor names was due to the univocal copyright of the studio, which, considering the above-mentioned financial reasons, did not promote the names of the creative crew. Early films exhibited only the name of the studio that produced them. Some actors, however, were more successful than others, and soon studios realized the potential that lurked behind certain performers. Film companies, thus, started to exploit the capital value represented by their most popular actors (Hayward 349). By 1919 the star system was in vogue and actors like Mary Pickford or Charlie Chaplin started making fortunes for their studios and for themselves, as well. New modes of advertising stars appeared: trade photographs, posters, post cards, and fan magazines accompanied the release of movies and advertised new heroes and heroines of the times.

In 1910 the film distribution mogul, Carl Laemmle began the promotion of actress Florence Lawrence, which marked the birth of film stars in the U.S. In order to promote the film entitled *The Broken Oath* (1910, dir. Harry Lewis Solter), made in his Independent Motion Picture of America (IMP) studios, Laemmle issued an infamous publicity act. Because Florence Lawrence was the protagonist of this film, he spread the news – by manipulating contemporary media – that Lawrence (who previously worked for the competing Biograph Company) had suddenly died in an accident. Not long after the news came out, and the name of the actress became publicly known, Laemmle personally dismissed this rumor. He paid for a newspaper advertisement entitled “We Nail a Lie,” which accused Biograph of unfair competition

in undermining with morbid gossip IMP's new film, *The Broken Oath*, starring Florence Lawrence in leading role. As a result of this hoax, Laemmle succeeded to make adequate publicity for his new film (Staiger 1999, 3–5) while simultaneously launching the actress' name on the market.

The appearance of the artist's name in the spotlight of film industry signaled the beginning of the star system. As opposed to the anonymous cast and crew of early films, the presence of names started to signal the character of film as collaborative medium. The practice was inherited from theatrical advertisements and resembled histrionic programs (Cf. *dramatis personae*). These contained information about the characters of the play along with the names of the actors. In the context of films the listed information was converted into the *credit system*, introduced in the film world by Thomas Alva Edison. In 1913, he listed at the beginning of movies the name of the film's characters (the cast) parallel with the name of the actors, all in an intertitle (Staiger 1999, 11). Not long after Edison introduced the credit system, the name of the actor became equally important, or even more significant, than the title of the film or the studio which produced the movie. The acknowledgment of the name of the actress or actor was the first step in the long and complex process of star promotion.

Before the appearance of sound cinema, stars were simplistic and archetypal, Hayward claims, but after the appearance of sound a shift occurred in filmic character patterns and stereotypes, which affected mostly male stars (they had to have voices suitable with their images). During the heyday of classical Hollywood star system female stars generally personified characters with explicit sexual connotation: vamps, virgins, and sex-goddesses while (white) male stars embodied more complex figures (Hayward 349). The conventional construction of gender roles greatly varied from the innocent, girlish Lillian Gish to Bette Davis's vicious, diva image; from Marlene Dietrich's elegantly seductive figure to Greta Garbo's cool, reserved character; from Rock Hudson's "broad-chested, firm-jawed manliness" to the "innocent, unthreatening, barely sexualized bodies and amiable round faces of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland" (Wees 15). In Hollywood's artificially constructed order, many female stars were "shaped" on the fetishistic dichotomy of the woman as domestic-submissive (screwball comedies, westerns) or independent-dangerous (for example, the femme fatale in noir films); racial and ethnic minorities (Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans) were also subject to stereotyping in many Hollywood productions and were usually portrayed as marginalized characters or even villains.

Thomas Harris observed that the process of stereotyping stars was part of "building a public personality" by the motion picture industry, which "has perfected the device of stereotyping its stars" (40). The star system was, thus, "based on the premise that a star is accepted by the public in terms of a certain set of personality traits which permeate all of his or her film roles" (*ibid.*). Although the seemingly "one-dimensional" status of Hollywood stars made them single-faced public figures, stars were more complex than they were advertised and this made

them subject to more “aberrant decoding” (Wees 3). The star’s image, if taken out of its mainstream discourse and especially in avant-garde films, loses its connections with previous cultural-ideological assumptions and becomes available to recycling interpretive processes of alternative reception (3–4). The star image has a life of its own but the ambiguous aura that surrounds it enables further and more sophisticated manipulation of this image.

Stars are polysemic figures; they contain complex images with multiple meanings (Allen 548). Being ideological constructs, they represent specific social phenomena characteristic of a certain time and place. Richard Dyer explains this intricate ideological structure through the figure of Marilyn Monroe:

Her image has to be situated in the flux of ideas about morality and sexuality that characterized the fifties in America and can be here indicated by such instances as the spread of Freudian ideas in postwar America (registered particularly in the Hollywood melodrama), The Kinsey report, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, rebel stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean and Elvis Presley, the relaxation of cinema censorship in the face of competition from television, etc. (In turn, these instances need to be situated in relation to other levels of the social formation, e.g. actual social and sexual relations, the relative economic situations of men and women. Monroe’s combination of sexuality and innocence is part of that flux, but one can also see her ‘charisma’ as being the apparent condensation of all that within her. Thus she seemed to ‘be’ the very tensions that ran through the ideological life of the fifties American. (“Charisma” 58–59)

The concept of *stardom* reflects a duality between the off-screen person of the actor and the filmic person or the filmic character the actor embodied. For the audiences of *Casablanca*, Robert C. Allen writes, “Humphrey Bogart is the character Rick, but he is also the actor Humphrey Bogart *playing* the character of Rick” (547). According to Christine Gledhill, the image of a star has three components. The first is the “real” person (the off-screen individual), the second is the “reel” person (the character on the screen), and the third is the star’s persona, which represents the combination of the “real” and “reel” figures (qtd. in Hayward 352). This third combination shows the star’s extensive nature embodied in the essence of stardom which consists in the combination of the private and public image. During the period of classical star system a star’s profile was made public in the traditional media, where she or he was represented mainly by the printed press (magazines, fanzines, tabloids, gossip columns) and advertisements that promoted their peculiar image. The public image of a star lasted sometimes longer than the life of the real person that embodied it. In post-classical Hollywood this strategy proves very profitable still. For some time now these promotion tactics have been complemented by contemporary multimedia means that support and maintain the image of a star through internet sites and personal pages, TV news and shows, blogs, chat talks, and even webcam cameo appearances in chat rooms, etc.

The star image is a fictional figure, an artificial subject, the result of a complex process of promotion, publicity, films, criticism, and commentary (Allen 550). The stars of the classical star system were considered a “powerless elite” (Allen 549), which meant that their political and social power was almost non-existent. Today the concept of the star as “powerless elite” has become partly inadequate. Some stars have become politicians and many are involved in influential economic structures. They make extensive use of their “charisma,” and highly profit over being “the objects of tremendous public fascination” (549). Their success depends “on the degree to which stars are accepted as truly being what they appear to be” (Dyer, “A Star Is Born” 132).

The Hollywood star system was the indirect outcome of the complex American success myth. The film star owed its achievements to the prosperity of the studio which “made” her or him. The classical Hollywood star system flourished only until the 1950s, when it diminished simultaneously (Hayward 350) with the collapse of the Hollywood studio system.

### Keywords

le camera stylo, auteur, tradition of quality, cinéma de Papa, Autorenmfilm, mise-en-scène, metteur-en-scène, la politique des auteurs, Cahiers du Cinéma, canonization, Americanization of auteur theory, auteur-function, implied auteur, auteur-structuralism, Hollywood, genre, ideology, art cinema, blind bidding, block boosting, runs, zones and clearances, studio system, star, star system, stardom, credit system, censorship, Production Code (PCA), Hays Code, MPPDA, MPAA, rating system

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Chapter

6

Gender and Cinema:  
All Sides of the Camera  
Réka M. Cristian

You know, when I first went into the movies  
Lionel Barrymore played my grandfather.  
Later he played my father and finally he played my husband.  
If he had lived I'm sure I would have played his mother.  
That's the way it is in Hollywood.  
The men get younger and the women get older.  
(Lillian Gish)

Cinema is the culmination of the obsessive,  
mechanistic male drive in western culture.  
The movie projector is an Apollonian straightshooter,  
demonstrating the link between aggression and art.  
Every pictorial framing is a ritual limitation, a barred precinct.  
(Camille Paglia)

The very force that made the movies a species of major entertainment,  
a vulgar orgy of the emotions, has compelled whatever was subtle and offbeat,  
strange and secret, to resort to the most devious strategies to preserve  
and, at last, openly express itself. In this respect, what today we rather facetiously call  
the Sexual Revolution can be located centrally in the movies.  
(Parker Tyler)

Influenced by the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, the feminist approach in film studies was first "heralded by the emergence of woman's film festivals" (Stam 171) in 1972 in New York and Edinburgh. During the seventies, popular books on women's issues in films, like Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies and The American Dream* (1973), Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1973) and Joan Mellon's *Women and Sexuality in the New Film* (1974) appeared as the first works in Hollywood's criticism of gender representation (Stam 171). These writers called the attention to the sexist and predominantly negative representations of women in classical narrative cinema, and raised the issue of women's problematic images in Hollywood films. The main problem of this representation was generated by the ideological, patriarchal background in which these movies were made.

Ideology is a belief system, a set of doctrines considered proper, expected from and shared by the members of society that reflect the needs of a certain group, and which forms the basis of a political, economic or other type of system. As Susan Hayward explains, ideology is an

organized collection of ideas that explain and makes sense of a society (192) in which individuals “recognize and identify themselves as subjects of ideology” (193). However, ideology is a fluid concept. *Feminism and gender studies* challenged and successfully subverted the dominant or hegemonic standards providing alternative readings to traditional issues of gender. Feminism and gender critique in film studies were, at first, overwhelmingly represented by American, British, and North European (173) theorists and filmmakers, and only later became a global critical practice.

The concept of *gender* is different from that of *sexuality*. While sexuality denotes a biological category that distinguishes a woman or a man on the basis of sex, gender is a social and cultural category comprising a number of learned social roles and behavior that a person has. *Gender identity* shows a person’s identification with the male or female sex: according to Encyclopaedia Britannica, gender identity means much more than a simple identification, it is “an individual’s self-conception as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex.” Most societies have rules that expect, or dictate its members to confirm to dominant or hegemonic standards of identity (in case of gender, this is normative heterosexuality or heteronormativity) through which a dominant culture (for example, patriarchy) can maintain its power position.

During the sixties and seventies feminists questioned existing power structures in society and were firmly committed to change it. In the “Womanifesto,” issued in 1975 at the New York Conference of Feminists in the Media Ruby Rich writes – they proposed essential reforms in “the content and structure” of women’s images and in the ways women relate to each other in their work and in ways in which they communicate with their audience (qtd. in Stam 172). In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist and women’s movements (that fought for the political, economic and social equality for women) in general, and feminist filmmakers and theorists in particular, were strongly affiliated with the gender activism that was militating for gay, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, etc. people’s rights. They campaigned in meetings, demonstrations, conferences, articles, through independent and avant-garde films, and in other more or less conventional forums for a change in women’s consciousness through the revision of cultural norms and practices. This intense activism proved successful because during the 1990s and after, women’s consciousness-raising lead to substantial changes in society. Besides women’s movements, lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals had their voices heard, as well; these events signaled the appearance of *queer studies* in culture and implicitly in film studies.

Hollywood’s gender bias had a direct effect on the canonization process of film directors, too. Despite a considerable presence of *women directors* in the history of American film studios, there was scarcely a woman among the “great” auteurs in the U.S. This led to an inevitable “tendency to deify the personality of the (male) director,” and Andrew Sarris was “one of the worst offenders in this respect” because of his obvious sexism and “[h]is derogatory treatment of women directors in *The American Cinema*” (Johnston 34).

Though seldom mentioned, there is an impressive number of outstanding women directors and auteurs in the film world: Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber, Anita Loos, Aziza Amir, Maria Landeta, Gilda de Abreu, Carmen Santos, Germaine Dulac, Agnes Varda (Stam 172, See *List of Women Directors and Producers*) and scores of others. Alice Guy-Blaché is the first female director in the film industry, credited to have developed narrative filmmaking. Lois Weber directed films in the early silent film period; her trademark was the narrative of provocative topics. Among Weber's most important films are *Where are My Children* (1916), a movie exploring the issue of abortion and birth control, and *White Heat* (1934), which tackles the topic of miscegenation and racial-sexual conflict. According to Anthony Slide,

[N]ot only was she a woman who was certainly the most important female director the American film industry has known, but unlike many of her colleagues up to the present, her work was regarded in its day as equal to, if not a little better than that of most male directors. She was a committed filmmaker in an era when commitment was virtually unknown, a filmmaker who was not afraid to make features with subject matter in which she devoutly believed [...] (Slide 2007).

Laura Hollósi adds more names to the list of influential female auteurs: Leni Riefenstahl, Ida Lupino, Dorothy Arzner, and Márta Mészáros (Hollósi 75). Riefenstahl, one of the great innovative minds of the film industry, was involved in controversial German propaganda films during the Second World War. Apart from her political agenda, *The Blue Light* (1931) can be considered one of the early, proto-feminist films. Ida Lupino's melodramas use the woman's "subjective viewpoint" (Johnston 38) to tell stories; among her most important films one can list *Not Wanted* (1949), *Outrage* (1950), *The Hitch-Hiker* (1953). *Not Wanted* (oddly not credited to Lupino despite the fact that she directed the movie) depicts an unwed girl's love and unhappy pregnancy, *Outrage* raises the issue of rape, and *The Hitch-Hiker* is the first film noir directed by a woman. Dorothy Arzner's *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940) is a film presenting an "internal criticism" (ibid.) of Hollywood vamp and straight-girl stereotypes represented by the characters of Bubbles and Judy, both dancers. The film interrogates Hollywood's mainstream storytelling and is a cornerstone of feminist filmmaking because it exposes a special world view and presents dance as an alternative mode of women's self-expression in movies. As Theresa L. Geller observed,

[t]his film starring Maureen O'Hara and Lucille Ball foregrounds dance as women's avenue to self-expression and economic independence. In doing so, it also highlights another consistent theme of Arzner's films, the contrast of social paths for women, usually embodied in two central but opposed characters, and the class distinctions that underlie this opposition. In *Dance, Girl, Dance*, Judy is a struggling ballet student trying to make it into the world of professional dance; Bubbles is also a dancer but makes a success of it in the world of burlesque, performing vamp routines as "Tiger Lily White". Both simultaneously pursue romantic and work lives that will hopefully allow them some mobility of social class. Yet, even though the spectator is meant to identify with Judy's

refusal to sacrifice artistic expression for economic gain, the film nevertheless refuses to vilify Bubbles for doing so. (Geller 2003)

Dorothy Arzner and Lois Weber can be considered the pioneers of *women's cinema* (representing films made by women) because they were “virtually the only women working in Hollywood during the 1920s and 1930s who managed to build up a body of work in the cinema” (Johnston 38).

Maya Deren (Eleonora Derenkowsky) was an avant-garde filmmaker and also film critic, who challenged the structure of Hollywood's classical narratives. She is known for her experimental film, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), co-directed with Alexander Hammid, which was produced

... in an environment of wartime volatility and this is reflected symbolically throughout its mise-en-scène. The title card suggesting that the film was ‘made in Hollywood’ is ironic, Deren sets her film within an LA setting, but it is the nightmare element of the dream factory that interests her most. The film establishes an atmosphere saturated in paranoia and distrust with lovers turning into killers and with the presence of a mysterious but fascinating hooded figure. As European émigrés, Deren and Hammid invest their film with an acute sense of restlessness and alienation. *Meshes of the Afternoon* reflects this uncanny estrangement in the doubling, tripling and quadrupling of its central character (played by Deren) and in its cyclic narrative, a structure that seems condemned to repetition. The hooded figure with the reflective face adds yet another dimension, reflecting back the identity of those who look into her eyes. (Haslem 2002)

The film's technical layout, its circular narrative, and the use of intensive symbolism makes this movie the precursor of *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), directed by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. Deren was a revolutionary spirit, who foresaw the outlines of new cinematic forms that were later employed in feminist films. She struggled for the development of a specific “vocabulary of filmic images” that did not originate in the narrative rules inherited from the literary world but rather one that functioned against the causal logic of narrative plots (Deren 227). She believed that through non-narrative filmmaking cinema can create a “total experience” by generating a practice of watching films, which is not an “infinitely passive” but an “independently active” (216) process. This view went far ahead the practice and criticism of her time, especially with regard to women's representation in films, a quite problematic issue. Despite their major role in filmmaking and especially in Hollywood's movie industry, the work of all the above-mentioned women (with Arzner as exception) is even now still unexplored or minimally treated by mainstream film criticism.

Movies are “complex structures of linguistic and visual codes” organized to “produce specific meanings” (Thornham 12) for the spectators and as such, are ideological constructs. Accordingly, what appears in movies as universal, real, and natural is, in fact, the outcome of the ideology that exists outside the moving pictures. Film is, thus an ideologically endowed

cultural practice that “represents myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity” (Smelik 1999). It was these “myths” feminist critics primarily attacked. They criticized women’s representations, addressed the issue of spectatorship from the perspective of gender, and fought for an alternative cinematic practice that would correct the fallacies of classical narrative cinema.

The first critical inquiries on the issue of women’s representation in classical narrative cinema were posed by *the woman’s film*, a routine genre in the 1930s and 1940s (together with the crime melodrama, the western, the musical), appealing predominantly to female audiences. The woman’s film showed images of “the pinched virgin or little-old-lady writer, spilling out her secret longings in wish fulfillment or glorious martyrdom, and transmitting these fantasies to the frustrated housewife” (Haskell 20). This type of film was based on a “conservative aesthetic whereby women spectators are moved, not by pity and fear but by self-pity and tears, to accept rather than reject, their lot” (21). Nicknamed “tearjerker” or “weepie” movie (which, if portrayed men’s problems was simply and euphemistically categorized as “psychological drama”) these movies operated, according to Molly Haskell, as “an opiate,” which suggested that there was a great amount of “real misery” (ibid.) in women’s lives outside of the screen and mirrored through it. The woman’s film depicted specific, women’s issues, and presented their subsequent emotional problems which, for the “Anglo-American critical brotherhood,” were of “minor significance” (20). “Weepies” were developed after the 1950s into “chick flicks”, “gal films” (contemporary woman’s films), and sibling film types with the soap opera and the melodrama, which Annette Kuhn considers women’s or *gynocentric genres* (Kuhn 146).

The category of woman’s film marginalized other, similar films types (especially documentaries), which would have treated women’s problems more openly. However, the woman’s film, as concealing as it was, presented a subversive quality: women (and not men) were placed in central roles and they were “at the center of the universe” revealing “almost by accident real attitudes towards marriage – disillusionment, frustration, and contempt – beneath the sunny side of [...] happy ending” (Haskell 21). Moreover, women in the woman’s film were also subject to considerable changes of “domestication.” The alteration in women’s images was influenced by the shift in the picture women had about themselves: during the forties they were represented in the classical narrative cinema as “more emotional and neurotic” (28) than earlier, when – under the influence of the roaring twenties’ feminism – they were “spunkier and more stoical” (ibid.). Haskell explains this dramatic transformation which, catalyzed by economical and historical factors alongside with the powerful presence of PCA’s censoring laws during the thirties, exiled women back into patriarchal stereotypes:

A growing ambivalence and coyness in films began in the thirties and ran into the forties [...] part of the silliness arose from the fact that sexual passion and desire could not be shown [because of the PCA rules] [...] There was also a

retrenchment from the feminism of the twenties and thirties. Women might have better jobs, largely as a result of the war and a shortage of male personnel, but they would pay more heavily for them in the movies. [...] They were more of a threat. Men were nervous not so much about women taking their jobs [...] but about women leaving the home “untended” as they crept back to work. [...] once women had savored the taste of work and independence, many didn’t want to go back to being “just housewives.” And so in films, working women (who were statistically older than their prewar counterparts) were given a pseudo-toughness, a façade of steel wool that at a man’s touch would turn into cotton candy. (29)

Sharon Smith envisages a more profound change of women’s images in film, which could open up a “new world of film themes” (19) that would, in turn, correct these archetypes by employing a visibility of women outside and inside films. First, an exchange of roles with men would seem applicable, but that would be equally unfair and practically as destabilizing as the traditional gender stereotypes and gender roles, and which would not solve any problems, because it would create a similar situation. The solution, according to Smith, lies in a more intensified presence of women in “every aspect of the film industry” (18).

Mary Ann Doane perceives cinema as “theatre in pictures, a writing in images of the woman but not for her” (Doanne 132). Moreover, most films present woman as “the problem” (ibid.). Accordingly, her images turn out to be fake ones; they are what Joan Riviere called the masks of “womanliness” (Riviere qtd. in Doanne 138). Under this mask of “womanliness” any kind of performance becomes a “masquerade of femininity” (ibid.) manifesting an image of excess that conceals, under visible features, the woman, always enigmatic and ungraspable in terms of patriarchal codes of representation.

Claire Johnston stresses the fact that Hollywood studios operate with a fixed iconography of “primitive stereotyping” (35) that depict woman as femme fatale, vamp, straight girl, Final Girl, scream queen, as ingénue/naïve, virgin, sex kitten, submissive housewife, diligent daughter... The binary poles of female archetypes, where woman is defined by her sexuality, can be best mapped in film noirs: the overtly sexual, liberated noir woman is the “dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress,” in other word, the femme fatale, or, on the contrary, she represents the asexual, innocently angelic, infantile woman portrayed as “the virgin, the mother, the innocent, the redeemer” (Place 35). In spite of this controlled categorization, film noirs are means for women to break out from the confined frames of patriarchal representation. As Janey Place writes, the “crime” of the “liberated,” free woman is the refusal to be defined in relation to men, and “this can be perversely seen” (ibid.) as an attack on men’s existence. Noir is a genre in which women are “active,” “intelligent and powerful” (35) but also destructive, with power deriving directly from their sexuality. Apart from other genres, film noir allows more visual terrain to “deadly but sexy, exciting and strong” (54) women.

The most appropriate strategy to refute the “manipulative” (Johnston 31) film representations of women in classical narrative films is to develop a collective work that produces a



new type of *feminist film*, an oppositional cinema Johnston called as *counter-cinema* (36). This is conceived as both a political tool and a form of entertainment (39), reflecting a revolutionary strategy that challenges traditional representations of women in mainstream cinema. Furthermore, Johnston argues,

it is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected. In this respect, it is instructive to look at films made by women within the Hollywood system which attempted by formal means to bring about a dislocation between sexist ideology and the text of the films; such insights could provide useful guidelines for the emerging women's cinema to draw on. (37)

Similarly, E. Ann Kaplan believes that there is a need to create a viable collaborative work where feminist theorists and filmmakers can and do work together "for the benefit of both groups" (Kaplan 199). Classical narratives of Hollywood are built on a special pattern of narrative structure that "binds the spectator to the screen, mainly through the family romance and recognition/identification mechanism", and keeps the viewer "fixed in the established positions in patriarchal culture" (198), thus, producing entertainment. In order to challenge the mainstream film reception and to undermine *dominant cinema* (represented by leading institutions, generally Hollywood, that produce, distribute, and exhibit movies on global markets), independent and avant-garde feminist films aim to deny the visual gratification commercial cinema provides. These seek to introduce the audience into new habits of watching films by "educating" spectators to "like the pleasure of learning," instead of "the pleasure of recognition/identification" (ibid.).

Feminist theory is plural (Stam 170) and so is feminist film theory; both have had serious achievements in changing the attitude of audiences towards gender representations in society in general and in films in particular. Teresa de Lauretis conceives the feminist film in terms of a new cinematic language and proposes that this "attain a new language of desire" that would "construct the terms of reference of another measure of desire" (de Lauretis 93), and also the conditions of visibility for a women as they are. In other words, women need a new grammar of film tailored to fit their own gender that would supply the lack of proper representation of their own desires. Tania Modleski, following Hélène Cixous's adverse stance on women as castrated beings, claims that "in order to understand woman's experience of loss" one must go beyond the traditional psychoanalytic model based on the male's castration anxiety and his relation to the lost object", which does not lead anywhere because it leaves woman in the position of the hysteric "where film critics and theorists have been eager to place her" (Modleski 547).

Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) is the inaugural text of feminist cine-psychoanalysis (Thornham 53) and also of feminist film criticism. Mulvey addresses the need for a new mode of making and interpreting films, and poses the question of

gender implications of spectatorship in cinema. She claims that while watching movies, the spectator identifies with the masculine point of view, and “follows” the dominant, patriarchal ideology behind classical narrative films. These objectify and dominate women (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 176). Moreover, it is *visual pleasure* or the entertaining gratification through images that conditions the success of dominant cinema. Mulvey uses the psychoanalytical approach in her study of women’s images in the cinema and explores the ways in which “the fascination of film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns” (“Visual Pleasure” 833) established by the patriarchal society, which developed a “particular illusion of reality” representing the outcome of the law that produced it.

In classical narrative cinema the man is “the bearer of the look” (837), while the woman appears as image; in other words, “woman appears as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man” (843). The woman in films, Mulvey writes, is “glamorous, on display” (840), and sexualized, so that she becomes the object of erotic pleasure for male viewers while essentially being a permanent remainder of their “castration threat” (843) (Cf. the Oedipal scenario and castration threat in Chapter Three “Dream on: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema”). The mainstream film (or the classical narrative cinema) presents a world that builds on spectators’ “voyeuristic phantasy” (836); contains an explicit erotic component in the representation of women (835), and presents a world where pleasure in looking has been split between the dominant role of the active/man and the submissive position of the passive/woman (837). This division was practically unchallenged in filmmaking until the rise of feminist film criticism, which claimed that the image of women has actually been abused by the traditional film form.

Mulvey focuses on three different ways in which the images of women are associated with cinema and calls these “looks” (843). “The first look” (ibid.) or the first type of image construction is produced by the camera and reflects conventional recording practices that place the woman as the key figure in the production of visual pleasure. As a result, women become the focus of scopophilic drives. *Scopophilia* means pleasure in looking and is a term coined by Sigmund Freud, who distinguished between active scopophilia (*voyeurism*) and passive enjoyment (*exhibitionism*). Mulvey employs these concepts to explain the position and representation of women in narrative cinema. Women are, according to the feminist critic, exhibitionistic erotic objects on display, providing visual pleasure for the heterosexual, male, voyeuristic spectator. The critic calls the attention to the traditional exhibitionist role of women in which they “coded for strong visual and erotic impact” (837) by patriarchal ideology. This impact is the feature Mulvey calls *to-be-looked-at-ness* (ibid.). This quality of women is strongly connected with the concept of *gaze* and *look*. Mulvey uses these concepts in an interchangeable way; both represent for her an intentional directing of vision towards a displayed body or object. Furthermore, Kaja Silverman also subscribes to this exchangeability but she adds that there is, despite obvious similarities, a substantial difference between them. The gaze, which

is an ideological construct, always exceeds the look but the look can also transcend the gaze (Silverman 130) in terms of erotic investment (Cf. the issue of look and gaze in Chapter Three "Dream On: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema"). Gender becomes intelligible at the meeting point of the gaze and look; it is this intersection where ideology "translates" gender into the social context.

While the gaze is an almost transcendental, ungraspable entity that reflects omniscient surveillance and suggests the presence of unequal power relations between the one who gazes ("the invisible guest") and the one who is gazed at, the look remains endowed with a strong erotic component and entails desire (which is absent from the gaze).

The second "look" or the second type of image construction is associated with the way spectators are conditioned to "watch the final product" (Mulvey "Visual pleasure," 843) and is, thus, the look of the audience. To-be-look-at-ness is present also in a "third look," which involves the way characters look at each other within the screen story. The conventions of narrative film, Mulvey continues, subordinate the first two looks to the third so that the spectator forgets about the presence of the camera and, by imperceptibly identifying with a specific character in the film, becomes more effectively influenced by what the story presents and the way it is pictured.

[T]raditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks of either side of the screen. For instance, the device of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without apparent break in the diegesis [the internal world of film created by the story]. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. (838)

In order to achieve a new image based on sexual balance, feminists envisage a cinema which would blow the "traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers)" and "free the look of the camera," and last but not least, to liberate "the look of the audience" (Mulvey "Visual Pleasure" 844). New camera techniques and revised critical standpoints seem necessary both on the part of filmmakers and on the part of gender-conscious viewers, respectively. By highlighting the means through which film has depended on "voyeuristic active/passive mechanisms" these would destroy "the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the 'invisible guest'" (ibid.). Mulvey says that "the destruction of pleasure is a radical weapon" (834) against the fake image patriarchy has about women. She indicates that it is primarily cinematic operations that need revision, and to achieve this, filmmakers must disengage the voyeuristic gaze in films and implement instead of "alternative cinematic practice" (Stam, Burgoyne, Flitterman-Lewis 175). The representation of women outside patriarchal norms "inherent in the tradition of Western art and aesthetics" (Smelik 1999) is of key importance in the feminist counter-cinema. Anneke Smelik assumes that the origin of women's counter-

cinema lies in the avant-garde cinema and theater, in the montage techniques of Sergei Eisenstein, in Bertold Brecht's notion of "distantiation," and also in the modernist aesthetics of Jean-Luc Godard (ibid.).

After her groundbreaking essay, Mulvey published its sequel, entitled "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure" that maintains many of the previous views exposed in the first essay but revisits the issue of the female spectator who "enjoys the freedom of action and control over the diegetic world" ("Afterthoughts" 123). Terje Steinulfsson Skjerdal acknowledges Mulvey's text as one that paved the way to feminist film criticism but remarks that psychoanalytic theory is insufficient and problematic when used to interpret the representation of women because it assumes a pivotal point of departure resting on biological determinism and, as such, adopts an entrapping, binary view of a masculine/active/normative/powerful/complete versus a feminine/passive/non-normative/submissive/castrated stereotypes. Additionally, Mulvey works with the idea of gendered gaze, which is an unsatisfactory concept, according to Skjerdal, because it disregards the issue of race, class, and age (Skjerdal 1999). Moreover, Mulvey interprets all Hollywood films as oppressing women (a debatable view especially in the case of a number of woman's film and noir movies), and envisions the production of feminist movies outside the mainstream filmmaking. However, even the dominant cinema (understood here as mostly Hollywood productions) can become "a helpful tool" for feminists because "the situation for women intellectuals and artists is already difficult enough without women discouraging their own participation in popular culture" (Skjerdal 1999), and feminist filmmakers should take all opportunities to strike back from within the system of patriarchy instead of producing films outside it.

Following "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen put theory into practice: they directed and produced *Riddles of the Sphinx*, which is among the first British films that implemented feminist criticism into filmmaking (Kaplan 171). This movie can be considered one of the best examples of *feminist film*. The feminist film can be defined as a subversive movie about women that, by employing feminist ideas goes against the traditional filmmaking practice of dominant cinema. The aim of the film is to explore the woman's world from the perspective of the Sphinx, the tricky figure from the story of Oedipus. The Sphinx is problematic for the patriarchal world because she is dangerously witty and poses riddles that threaten members of traditional society and its values. The Sphinx, among many other mythical female figures, had power through knowledge and mastery of language for which she was ultimately punished. Despite punishment, de Lauretis observed that

Medusa, and the Sphinx, like other ancient monsters, have survived inscribed in hero narratives, in someone else's story, not their own; so they are figures or markers of positions [...] through which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning. (83)

To make the markers of these positions visible the filmmakers of *Riddles* went along a similar line that had already been drawn in 1903 by W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of the Black Folk*, who considered blackness as “problem.” DuBois’s polemic starts with the riddle-like question: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (DuBois 897). In *Riddles* the “problem” is gender and its problematic representation.

*Riddles of the Sphinx* has been passed “U” (Universal) by the British Board of Film Classification, which means that the movie is “set within a positive moral framework and should offer reassuring counterbalances to any violence, threat or horror,” and is thus “suitable for all audiences of four and over” (See *The British Board of Film Classification*). The motto of the film foretells its style: it suggests that one should watch this movie as an experimental work that disrupts the order of things, “a narrative of what wishes what is wishes it to be” (Gertrude Stein), a work that places the narrator into an unusual narrative frame achieved by a special filmmaking process. The movie is divided into thirteen sections constructed to reflect a “constant return to woman” (Mulvey and Wollen 1977), that is achieved by the employment of various female voices and viewpoints. To fuse form and content, Mulvey and Wollen used the technique of 360 degree panoramic (or panning) shots (as opposed to the traditional 180 degree shots of traditional narrative cinema) combined with the presence of the filmmaker herself. Besides, the film presents intertitles containing fragmentary sentences and has sequential usage of imagery about women, all in order to subvert the traditional cinematic practice of classical narrative films.

The film starts with Mulvey reading out the story Oedipus and the Sphinx, the mysterious winged lioness that posed questions to men. Right from the beginning, the filmmaker equates the riddle of the Sphinx that encodes the metaphors of human development (infancy, adulthood, old age) with the dilemmas of motherhood for women (which is not only a riddle but a multiple enigma, “riddles,” as the title of the film suggests). The voice-over of the narrator (Mary Kelly) alternates with the voice of the Sphinx (Marry Maddox), a non-authoritative but strong voice. This is “not an answering voice but its opposite, a questioning voice, a voice asking a riddle” (Mulvey and Wollen 1977). Women, Mulvey states in the second section of the film, are seen as “threat” and as “riddle,” thus problematic to understand because the culture “in which they are [...] is not theirs” (ibid.) Moreover, they are – as the Sphinx – representing the unconscious realm of civilization “part bestial, part angelic” and mostly “indecipherable” (ibid.).

In the myth the Sphinx is “outside the city gates” and “challenges the culture of the city with its order of kinship and its order of knowledge, a culture and a political system which has tied women to a subordinate place” (ibid.). In the film, Louise (Dinah Stabb), the main character of *Riddles*, is the prototype of a “contemporary sphinx” challenging the values of her own culture. She is a divorced woman, single mother, who takes care of her daughter, Anna. The movie surveys the most important representations of the mythical Sphinx in history and art,

and analogously follows Louise, too. In the context of the myth Louise's life becomes a riddle in search of a solution. She is gradually presented – recalling the metaphors in the riddle of the Sphinx – as a housewife, a woman, a mother, and a worker. Louise is first shown in the domestic, private realm of her kitchen, where the unity of mother-daughter is all-pervasive, suggested by permanent circular movements of the camera that seem to wrap them into a primordial unity of mother and child. Motherhood here is presented as both “mystery” and “as resistance to patriarchy” (Mulvey and Wollen 1977). The movie shows Louise at work and displays her daily routine, and shows her friendship with Maxine, a colored woman, with whom they discuss the problems of day-care, childcare, and motherhood. The directors of the film successfully replaced gender difference with the technical achievements of “visual difference” (Kaplan 181), but left Maxine's racial difference, and implicitly, the complex issue of black women's representation unattended.

The film declares that women cannot be confined to a submissive position because of their gender nor can they be closed in a domestic environment simply because they are mothers. *Riddles* provides the point of view of a mother, who feels repressed, “relegated to silence, absence, and marginality” (Kaplan 172) but struggles to find her way out. The narrator of the film affirms that “anatomy is never longer destiny” (Mulvey and Wollen 1977), and urges women to overcome the limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal culture. *Riddles* ends with the section about an acrobat woman, who signifies both women's liberation and the freedom of the individual woman. The last section concludes with Mulvey listening to her recording of the Sphinx story (as Krapp in *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett).

This avant-garde film might give a hard time for spectators accustomed with the visual pleasure classical narrative structure of film offers. Its alternative perspective invites one to implement complex ideological readings instead of offering the expected entertainment. In this sense its effect is similar to what Yoko Ono and John Lennon achieved in 1968 with their experimental music album *Unfinished Music No. 1: Two Virgins*, which contained unusual, odd tunes combined with fragments of conversation, shouting, diverse sound effects, and other random sounds originating from different musical instruments assembled and recorded in a repetitive pattern. The album's aim was to liberate performers and listeners alike from the cultural constraints and conventions of the music industry.

*Riddles* talks also about a “forgotten history” when women had the “power of a different language” (Mulvey and Wollen 1977). This language evokes the energy, intensity and force of a symbolic mother figure present under the guise of multiple female voices and the voice-over of mothers in film. While patriarchal culture, according to Luce Irigaray, has a “heavier investment in seeing than in hearing” (qtd. in Stam 218), the feminist film should also exploit the world of voice, sounds, and music, and increase the interest in there, as an innovative form in a more realistic representation of women. Music is “suggestive, open to infinite association,” writes Stam (220). While in classical narrative films music and other sounds “lubricate the

spectator's psyche" and oil "the wheels of narrative continuity" (221), they can also perform oppositional acts. By going against the process of synchresis, music is able to suggest subversive meanings and can undermine the projected images. In the context of a conscious mixture of sounds and images, music does not trick the ear (215), but rather prepares the spectator to critically interpret what the eye sees. The music of *Riddles* might be annoying in some parts, but its role is to remind the audience about the enormous disruptive potential music and sound have in the unconventional description of women by which it can alter the visual pleasure traditional cinema has carefully built through images.

Visual pleasure in the mainstream cinema is organized to "console and flatter the patriarchal ego and its Unconscious" and this reproduces "ideological structures" (Gledhill "Pleasurable Negotiation," 167) that maintain an illusory image about women. This image is achieved mostly by the plot of the movies and the task of feminist critique is to challenge the traditional narrative line. It is also the technology dimension, as Mulvey wrote, and the use of technical advances that can be effective tools in new representations of women. Gaylyn Studlar finds the psychoanalytical approach unsatisfactory in the study of visual pleasure. She remarks that "[M]any of the assumptions adopted by film theorists from Freudian meta-psychology or Jacques Lacan seem inadequate in accounting for visual pleasure" because in order to understand "the structure of looking, visual pleasure must be connected to its earliest manifestations in infancy" (Studlar 616) which exclude a gendered vision on women's image. It seems that "strict Freudian models," Studlar continues, have proven to be "a dead end for feminist-psychoanalytic theory" (605). Accordingly, feminists should rather focus on "pre-Oedipal conflicts" that invite "consideration of responses to film by spectators of both sexes that may conflict with conscious cultural assumptions about sexual difference" (607) and gender identity. Noël Carroll suggests that feminists drop all previous theoretical assumptions with which they formerly argued and start the quest with an entirely new mode of investigation that is not based on patriarchal laws. Carroll acknowledges that

[...] many feminist theorists will say that I mistakenly assume that they accept the presuppositions of contemporary film theory whole cloth, when, in fact, they reject its patriarchal orientation and are attempting to alter it in fundamental ways by, for example, developing a theory of the female subject. [...] However, in doing this they are essentially rebuilding the framework of contemporary film theory from the inside, whereas if I am right one ought not to try to rebuild it. One ought to scrap it entirely. One cannot develop a theory of female subject positioning if the very notion of subject positioning is insupportable. (7-8)

In order to make female subject's positioning acceptable, feminist film critics seek to reinterpret definitions, identities, ossified concepts, and structures that enable them to perform negotiations of given films in order to reveal the contradictions in terms of gender representation. Christine Gledhill observed that there is a considerable source of negotiation

("Pleasurable Negotiations" 176) in most of the contemporary mainstream movies. This negotiation originates in the combination of different modes of representation, which enable film to function on the level of the *illusionary* – symbolic or imaginary – inherent in the fictional production (responsible for producing "visual pleasure") and on a more *realist level* (guided by the imperatives of feminist critiques), which is in tandem with the social, political and economic realities outside the diegetic world of film. The aim of this negotiation is to fuse the visual pleasure of classical narrative cinema with the practice of alternative filmmaking into the *pleasurable negotiation* of an enjoyable counter-cinema. Gledhill emphasizes that the *illusionary* and *realist modes* may and should coexist within the same text, similar to the co-habitat of more genres (and subgenres) within a film, or that of the formative and realistic tendencies in the cinema. According to Gledhill, negotiations can take place on three levels (169): institutional (e.g. studio), textual (e.g. story line), and that of spectatorship (e.g. gender conscious viewer). A successful negotiation creates a special type of feminist film which is the *negotiated cinema*. This takes into consideration the basic elements of traditional visual narratives (that ensures a wide audience and marketability as opposed to the revolutionary but hardly accessible avant-garde films) with conscious representation of women in contemporary culture.

An example of contemporary negotiated cinema is *Frida* (2002, dir. Julie Taymor), a biopic about the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, a politically active, bisexual woman artist. The movie was written (Hayden Herrera), directed (Julie Taymor), and produced (Salma Hayek et alii) by women. The protagonist (played by Salma Hayek) has a "fluid, artistic body" which is (re-)presented in a specter of images: in mirrors, in photos, in Frida Kahlo's self-portraits and in other paintings, in the character interplay of Salma Hayek as Frida, in Taymor's overall vision of this film as a visual "performance of femininity" (Cristian 2004). Negotiation, according to Gledhill, means "the folding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take" ("Pleasurable Negotiations" 169), which is an intersection of production but also of reception processes. In *Frida*, pleasurable negotiation is achieved through the components of illusionary, classical narrative cinema, which embody visual pleasure, and which are there to ensure the causal flow of events. At the same time, these components contain a special, subversive potential that marks a more realist way of gender representation in the film. On the level of classical narrative, the film is the love story of Frida Kahlo and her husband, Diego Rivera (played by Alfredo Molina). The most subversive elements in the film are Kahlo's art works, which represent Frida's body as seen and painted by the artist herself. The use of the protagonist's own works in the film as a self-reflective practice is one of the elements that undermines classical representation: the film's narrative "freezes" in the crucial moments of the artist's life that are, in turn, pictured by Frida's self-portraits. The (moving) pictures become "facsimiles" of Kahlo's paintings and *Frida* becomes the visual realm of a woman telling her own story instead of Hollywood telling her life. The pleasurable negotiation is achieved: there



is a life narrative with a beginning, middle and end, and with the compulsory story patterns combined with an alternative cinematic practice of woman's self-representation.

When interpreting film, as cultural text, one has to observe, besides the issue of gender, that of race and class, too, which, similar to gender, are ideologically coded and produced. Think of the characters, for example, of a black, working-class, lesbian woman or a South-East Asian gay man on film. They can be better understood if one considers the ideological implications of their class and race, not only gender. Stuart Hall distinguishes three different interpretive or decoding processes that are the "active dimensions" in the negotiation of these cultural texts (Gledhill "Recent Developments" 259), which might help the complex interpretation of gender, class and race. The *hegemonic decoding* takes the reading "preferred" by the dominant ideology; the *negotiated decoding* attempts to combine "the preferred reading in tandem with understandings drawn from a class position which is in contradiction [...] to the dominant ideology," while the *oppositional decoding* "transforms the reading offered by the dominant ideology" into an alternative text (qtd. in Gledhill "Recent Developments" 259). On this level, negotiated cinema reconciles hegemonic readings with channels of oppositional readings into films that operate with pleasure but not at the expense of gender misrepresentation. In this sense, the negotiated cinema shows signs of strong political content.

As Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni have outlined, "every film is political and determined by the ideology that produces it" (754). Films, with regards of their capacity "to disrupt or even possibly sever the connection between the cinema and its ideological function" (755) can be classified into the following seven groups:

- a.) "The first and largest category comprises those films which are imbued" with the dominant ideology "in pure and adulterated form, and give no indication that their makers were even aware of the fact" (ibid.): This is the case of the so-called commercial films (e.g. Hollywood movies).
- b.) "A second category is that of films which attack their ideological assimilation" by "direct political action." These films are politically effective only if they break down "the traditional way of depicting reality" (756). These are the resistant or oppositional films. An example of this kind of movie is *Riddles of the Sphinx*.
- c.) The third category is also oppositional and operates against the grain, but its content is "not explicitly political" but becomes so through "the criticism practiced on it" (ibid.). These are the formally subversive films, for example classical Hollywood narratives with explicit heterosexual relationships interpreted by queer theory or melodramas and film noirs in feminist interpretation.
- d.) The fourth category is made up of those movies which have explicit political content but which "do not effectively criticize the ideological system in which they are embedded because they adopt its language and its imagery" (757). Classical narrative films with political content fall into this category.

- e.) The fifth type contains films that “seem at first sight to belong firmly within the ideology and to be completely under its sway, but which turn out to be so only in an ambiguous manner” (ibid.). Many Hollywood productions, for example, “end up partially dismantling” the seemingly well-working ideological system within. Negotiated cinema is the best example in this context.
- f.) The sixth is the category of “live cinema” (or “live cinema A”) that arises out of political and social events and reflections but which “makes no clear differentiation” between them and the nonpolitical cinema” because it does not “challenge cinema’s traditional, ideologically conditioned” (758) methods of representation. These critically depict events but with the tools of dominant cultural values (e.g. documentaries, news).
- g.) The seventh type of films belongs to another category of “live cinema” (or “live cinema B”) with the camera critically depicting events while scrutinizing conventional ways of representation (758), for example, amateur video-documentaries.

Closely bound to the political agenda of films, the representation of women – as shown above – has to take into consideration the issue of race, which is crucial not only for images of colored women in film but also for the spectatorship of color in general. For Manthia Diawara the black audience, similar to the women viewer, is a “resisting spectator” to the “persuasive elements” (845) of Hollywood narratives. A truly resisting spectator, she continues, transforms “the problem of passive identification into active criticism which both informs and interrelates with contemporary oppositional filmmaking” (853). The colored audience, according to Diawara, “resists the racial representations of dominant cinema” (ibid.) and considers counter-cinema as a means to subvert classical narratives.

In a politically charged cinema, gaze is also “political” (hooks 307), bell hooks argues. When she read in history classes that white slave owners punished their black slaves if they gazed at them (or when they simply looked back), hooks realized that the “politics of slavery and racialized power relations” denied the colored people the right to “gaze” (307). This gaze is different from the Lacanian concept and shows the means of protest to racial oppression by gazing back. Gazing back was the *oppositional gaze* for slaves of African descent in American history but this oppositional gaze was also a means of “resistance for colonized black people globally” (308). By gazing back they have learnt how “to look a certain way in order to resist” (ibid.). As a field dealing with the implication of the gaze, American film theory is seen by hooks as a “critical turf,” because it is “influenced by and reflective of white racial domination” (315) while leaving out the black or colored perspective. Even Manthia Diawara’s term of “resisting spectatorship” proves less adequate in case of black women, hooks insists, because colored women “do more” than only “resist” (317) which implies that they become conscious of the racial differences; as spectators, they “contest, resist, revision, interrogate” (ibid.) texts, which means that they are active and critical as audience. Their oppositional gaze consists of

gazing and gazing back, an exchange that brings forth the history of black women as counter-memory (319), reminding of previous, racial and gender double oppression. Stuart Hall claims that identity is constituted “not outside but within representation”, and urges spectators to understand films “not as second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are” (qtd. in hooks 319).

An organic part of the oppositional approaches to dominant cinema, *queer cinema* is an important milestone in the context of gender identity and representation. The term “queer” was initially a derogatory concept signifying deviation from the norms but, following the gay and lesbian activism of the sixties (and especially since the 1980s) it has been used as an umbrella term to denote lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, intersexuals, transgender, intergender people, etc. Today, a widely used term for queer issues is *LGBT*, an abbreviation for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual.” *Camp* is a concept that was also used in relation to gender identity. Camp is “about (as in the original French sense of the word camper: to play one’s role) assuming fully and properly one’s performative role” (Hayward 309–310). As Susan Sontag pointed out, camp is “something of a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques” which favors the “exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms” (Sontag 1964) because it is playful and anti-serious. In this context, Sontag continued, “homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard and the most articulate audience” (ibid.) of camp. What used to be the subcultural camp of the closeted homosexuality in the 1950s, has also become “queer” (Smelik 1999) in contemporary culture.

Practically undefined for a period and lacking a label for a long time, the queer cinema started to be primarily identified with the avant-garde or underground films of Andy Warhol and Kenneth Anger in the sixties (Hayward 307). In 1991 the Toronto Film Festival brought into the spotlight the concept of queer cinema, which then referred to a number of films depicting the image of gays. A cinema of explicit sexual difference, queer cinema became “visible” (Hayward 307) at the beginning of the 1990s with the global publicity of the AIDS epidemic. In film studies today, queer theory is present with “innumerable conferences, film festivals, special issues of journals (e.g. *Jump Cut*), and the publication of a burgeoning number of anthologies and monographs devoted to queer cinema and theory” (Stam 264). After a period of total or partial confinement to art cinemas (especially the early European art cinema), and during the 1980s and 1990s, an impressive number of queer topics have entered mainstream film production (See *Selected List of Recommended LGBT Films*). Today, queer cinema is in a continuous process of renewal. *New Queer Cinema* does more than affirm otherness; it disregards stereotypes and advocates multiple gender positions. Moreover, it differs from simple queer cinema because it is not only concerned with “positive images of queerness, gayness or lesbianism” but also “very assertive about its politics” (ibid.).

However, queer cinema generally represents “a male homosexual cinema” with a special focus “on the construction of male desire” (Hayward 308). Nonetheless, Hayward claims, “queer work can be done by all sexualities” (309). Anyone who is writing, filming, making or performing texts about gayness is “enacting Queer[ly]” and this can “open up texts” that seem “straight” to other, different interpretations that make them intelligible from a “new and different angle” (ibid.). In a queer film “the performance may offer itself up for a queer reading” (ibid.) without the actor or filmmaker being queer. Today it is primarily lesbians and gay men that “identify their oppositional reading strategies as queer” (Smelik 1999). Queer strategies of reading against the grain intensified during the 1970s and 1980s, when a new, more inclusive, gender studies field emerged, which “eased the way for gay and lesbian studies” (Stam 263–264) in virtually all areas of culture.

Looking back at gender representations in a historical perspective, Parker Tyler observed that movies were the visible battlegrounds for gender issues in the context of hypocritical rules of censorship when creating gender images against the ideologically accepted images was an almost impossible mission. Films, Tyler noted

[...] had to fight over again the old civilized fight of élité’s intelligence against official taboo – the taboo of the bourgeois establishment with its hypocritical moral codes. Official, formal censorship of the movies has been simply the cover for unofficial, informal censorship: the instrument of society’s paranoid fear of the true nature of the libido, whose genders are so variable. (xxi)

The representation of gender in Hollywood film industry was subject to gradual change. Similar to early stages of feminist film theory (Molly Haskell and Claire Johnston), early queer film theory (Parker Tyler and Vito Russo) moved from the analysis of stereotypes (gay psychopath, sissy, effeminate man, lesbian butch, lesbian vampire, etc.) and other image distortions “to more theoretical, sophisticated models” (Stam 265). Among the prominent gay critics was Richard Dyer, who, concerned with issue of masculinity and its representations in films, showed that analogous to women’s objectification, “corporalized men too could be the object of the gaze” (267). As opposed to Dyer, Tyler saw movie actors as “sex images rather than sex objects” (348) and emphasized that the works “in which they appear become fantasies of the real world more effectively than they do mirrors of the real world” (ibid.). Other queer critics focused on the “otherness” of film characters through the possible gay subtext of visibly heteronormative (advocating traditional gender roles) movies. They concentrated on

queer spectatorship, on the lesbian appeal of stars like Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo, on the homoerotic appeal of Marlon Brando and Tom Cruise, on the appeal for gay men of “excessive” figures like Carmen Miranda and Judy Garland. [...] Queer theory was also concerned with the representations of masculinity and the male body, the ways in which males, even in heterosexually defined films, could be posited as erotic objects. (Stam 266)

Both feminist film theory and queer film theory, as theories in general, are products “of the needs of particular people within a particular culture at a particular stage of its development, and can only properly be understood within its context” (Wood 652). Films, therefore, can be interpreted according to the spectator’s position in society and within a given ideological system (ibid.). Being based on sexual difference that was insofar theorized mainly by psychoanalysis, queer studies in general had – and still has – its own suspicions about the uses (and abuses) of this theory in film and in other areas of gender study. Queer studies remains skeptical of “theoretical feminism’s affiliation with this approach” (Stam 264) because psychoanalysis branded gays and lesbians deviant (265). Nevertheless, the term “deviant” has quickly lost validity in the context of contemporary gender politics.

### Keywords

feminism, gender, sexuality, gender identity, women’s cinema, dominant cinema, woman’s film, gynocentric genres, feminist film, counter-cinema/oppositional cinema, patriarchy, scopophilia, voyeurism, exhibitionism, to-be-looked-at-ness, illusionary and realist modes, pleasurable negotiations, negotiated cinema, hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional decoding, oppositional gaze, resisting spectator, Queer cinema, camp, GLBT, New Queer Cinema

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### Selected List of Recommended Films about Women and Feminist Issues

*Where Are My Children* (1916, dir. Lois Weber), *Mantrap* (1926, dir. Victor Fleming), *Chicago* (1927, dir. Cecil B DeMille, 1942, dir. William A. Wellman and 2002, dir. Rob Marshall), *The Blue Light* (1931, dir. Leni Riefenstahl), *Queen Christina* (1933, dir. Rouben Mamoulin), *White Heat* (1934, dir. Lois Weber), *Jezebel* (1938, dir. William Wyler), *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940, dir. Dorothy Arzner), *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943, dir. Maya Deren), *Not Wanted* (1949, dir. Ida Lupino), *Beyond the Forest* (1949, dir. King Vidor), *Outrage* (1950, dir. Ida Lupino), *All About Eve* (1950, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), *Natalie Granger* (1972, dir. Marguerite Duras), *Lives of Performers* (1972, dir. Yvonne Rainier), *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974, dir. Yvonne Rainier), *One Way or Another* (1974, dir. Sara Gomez Yara), *The Stepford Wives* (1975, dir. Bryan Forbes), *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977, dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), *Daughter Rite* (1978, dir. Michelle Citron), *Sigmund Freud's Dora: A Case of Mistaken Identity* (1979, dir. Claire Pajaczowska, Anthony McCall, Andrew Tyndall, Jane Weinstock), *Thriller* (1979, dir. Sally Potter), *Alien* (1979, dir. Ridley Scott), *Nine to Five* (1980, dir. Higgins), *Amy!* (1980, dir. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen), *Marianne and Juliane* (1981, dir. Margarethe Von Trotta), *Yentl* (1983, dir. Barbra Streisand), *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985, dir. Susan Seidelman), *The Color Purple* (1985, dir. Steven Spielberg), *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988, dir. Stephen Frears), *Mulan* (1988, dir. Barry Cook), *She Devil* (1989, dir. Susan Seidelman), *Desert Hearts* (1985, dir. Donna Deitch), *Out of Africa* (1985, dir. Sydney Polack), *Babette's Feast* (1988, dir. Gabriel Axel), *Steel Magnolias* (1989, dir. Herbert Ross), *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991, dir. Jon Avnet), *Daughters of the Dust* (1991, dir. Julie Dash), *Thelma and Louise* (1991, dir. Ridley Scott), *Orlando* (1992, dir. Sally Potter), *Basic Instinct* (1992, dir. Paul Verhoeven), *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992, dir. Alfonso Arau), *The Piano* (1993, dir. Jane Campion), *The Horse of the Spirits* (1993, dir. Bille August), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996, dir. Jane Campion), *The First Wives Club* (1996, dir. Hugh Wilson), *G.I. Jane* (1997, dir. Ridley Scott), *Jackie Brown* (1997, dir. Quentin Tarantino), *Elizabeth* (1998, dir. Shekhar Kapur), *All About My Mother* (1999, dir. Pedro Almodóvar), *Chocolat* (2000, dir. Lasse Hallström), *Erin Brockovich* (2000, dir. Steven Soderbergh), *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001, dir. Simon West), *The Hours* (2002,

dir. Stephen Daldry), *Frida* (2002, dir. Julie Taymor), *Monster* (2003, dir. Patty Jenkins), *Mona Lisa Smile* (2003, dir. Mike Newell), *Marie Antoinette* (2006, dir. Sofia Coppola).

### Selected List of Recommended LGBT Films

*Le Sang d'un Poète* (1934, dir. Jean Cocteau), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945, dir. Albert Lewin), *Le Chant d'amour* (1950, dir. Jean Jenet), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951, dir. Elia Kazan), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958, dir. Richard Brooks), *Some Like It Hot* (1959, dir. Billy Wilder), *Suddenly Last Summer* (1959, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz), *Billy Budd* (1962, dir. Peter Ustinov), *Teorema* (1968, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini), *Satyricon* (1969, dir. Federico Fellini), *The Boys in the Band* (1970, dir. William Friedkin), *Myra Breckinridge* (1970, dir. Michael Sarne), *Death in Venice* (1971, dir. Luchino Visconti), *Cabaret* (1972, dir. Bob Fosse), *Sebastiane* (1976, dir. Derek Jarman), *Querelle* (1982, dir. Rainer Werner Fassbinder), *Tootsie* (1982, dir. Sydney Pollack), *Another Country* (1984, dir. Marek Kaniévski), *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985, dir. Hector Babenco), *Caravaggio* (1986, dir. Derek Jarman), *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1986, dir. Steven Frears), *Maurice* (1987, dir. James Ivory), *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987, dir. Patricia Rozema), *Looking for Langston* (1988, dir. Isaac Julien), *Paris Is Burning* (1990, dir. Jennie Livingstone), *My Own Private Idaho* (1991, dir. Gus Van Sant), *Swoon* (1992, dir. Tom Kalin), *The Crying Game* (1992, dir. Neil Jordan), *And the Band Played On* (1993, dir. Roger Spottiswoode), *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993, dir. Chris Columbus), *M. Butterfly* (1993, dir. David Cronenberg), *Philadelphia* (1993, dir. Jonathan Demme), *The Wedding Banquet* (1993, dir. Ang Lee), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994, dir. Steven Elliott), *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newman* (1995, dir. Beeban Kidron), *Total Eclipse* (1995, dir. Agnieszka Holland), *Edward II* (1996, dir. Derek Jarman), *Wilde* (1997, dir. Brian Gilbert), *Boys Don't Cry* (1999, dir. Kimberly Peirce), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, dir. Ang Lee).



## Chapter

# 7

## Third Cinema Encounters

Réka M. Cristian

The objective is to make local cinema.  
If we don't tell our own stories, no one else will.  
(Mira Nair)

Some day Africans must deliver.  
We must redefine an African image that is not Tarzanistic.  
We have not delivered.

African cinema owes the world an answer.  
(Chief Eddie Ugbomah qtd. by Nwachukwu Ukadike).

And my generation in Brazil was influenced by Cinema Novo.  
So we're echoing what's been done way in the past.  
(Walter Salles)

*Third Cinema*, as Stephen Crofts points out, is one of the most “elastic” concepts in the cinematic lexicon (31). It is distinct from First Cinema, represented primarily by Hollywood, and Second Cinema, embodied by the European art cinema and the cinema of auteurs. Despite the fact that they are to a certain degree similar, Third Cinema is substantially different from the *Third World Cinema*. Third World Cinema refers to the filmmaking of countries outside the two dominant spheres that appeared after the Second World War (Hayward 389). The notion of the *Third World* emerged during the early years of the Cold War and was attributed to countries that did not align with either of the two political superpowers: the United States and the Soviet Union (397). Their spheres of influence were divided according to the economic status and political affiliation of the member states: the First World, represented by North American states together with Western and North European countries, denoted the technologically advanced ones; the Second World comprised Central and Eastern European states, Soviet Union, and China that constituted the so-called Communist Bloc; the Third World was represented by former ex-colonies, underdeveloped states, and developing countries from all around the globe. Moreover, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its system of political affiliates, media today treats certain regions, for example those of the “Caucasus, central Asia, and the former Yugoslavia” also in Third World terms (Moore 116). However, the Third World mainly refers to the colonized or de-colonized nations of the world, “whose economic and political structures have been shaped and deformed within the colonial process” (Stam and Spence 635).

More than a cinema of geo-political implications, Third Cinema is primarily intended to denote a “riposte” (Hayward 389) to the dominant, Western filmmaking, aimed to “strike back” and provide a “reverse shot” to dominant cinema, that is characterized by colonialist inheritance present in “innumerable ethnographic, linguistic and even topographical blunders” (Stam and Spence 637). Thus, Third Cinema confronts Western political and classical cinematic systems (Hayward 397), which created an unbalanced representation of race, class and gender predominantly in deceitful stereotypical images of non-Western people. Ana M López presents the example of the classical Hollywood cinema which, according to the author, was “never kind to ethnic or minority groups” (195). López stresses the fact that stereotyping in Hollywood was an everyday practice that circulated “easily and repeatedly from film to film” in which “minorities and ethnics were most noticeable” (*ibid.*) through their absent authentic representations.

Rarely protagonists, ethnics merely provided local color, comic relief, or easily recognizable villains and dramatic foils. When coupled with the pervasiveness of stereotypes, this marginalization or negation completes the usual “pattern” of Hollywood’s ethnic representation and its standard assessment as damaging, insulting, and negative. (*ibid.*)

One of the aims of the Third Cinema was to rectify these images and to render the issue of audience, too. If feminist cinema reinterpreted the traditional status of the spectator in terms of gender, Third Cinema displaced the privileged, Western position of the viewer and paid special attention to its growing audience. The expanding number of diasporic population (a number of people with the same background, who emigrated from their country and live outside their national borders) in the First World, especially in the past two decades, and the development of post-colonial, national cinemas in the past fifty years induced an amplified global interest in Third Cinema.

Indirectly, Third Cinema denotes films made in the countries of the Third World (Hayward 389–390) but not all Third World moving pictures are anti-dominant cinema. Whereas a part of Third Cinema is intensely politicized, some of it is not. India’s Bollywood film industry, for example, does not explicitly show resistance to First or Second Cinemas of the First World and is, in most part, more of an “imitation” (390) or mimicry of Hollywood entertainment industry.

Interestingly, films produced in the Third World were, at the beginning, largely ignored by Western audiences or treated with condescension, as if they were “the subaltern shadows” (Stam 281) or subordinates depending on First and Second Cinemas from North America and Western Europe. Viewed from that perspective, Third World Cinema today seems quite an “anachronistic label” (291). The films produced in the Third World are far from being marginal appendages (*ibid.*) to the First World Cinema; not only are they integral part of world cinema but now, at the beginning of the third millennium, they produce the majority of films

throughout the globe (291), overcoming the production numbers of American and Western studios together.

The major American studios are no longer the puppeteers of “a world system of images, but only one mode of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” (287), writes Robert Stam. The core of the Third World Cinemas is made up of the major film industries of India, Egypt, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Pakistan, China, countries that have a fully developed film industry, as well as “the most recent post-independence or post-revolutionary” film industries of Cuba, Algeria, Senegal, Indonesia (291) together with Latin American, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern emerging national cinemas. These are all organic part of the Third Cinema, which is a term for a complex gathering of national cinemas.

The term *Fourth World* originates from the need to describe the special status of a certain group of people or nations without states, which was not covered by the terms of the First, Second, and Third Worlds. The Fourth World applies, for example, to the Roma in Europe, Native Americans (the First Nations) in the U.S. and Canada, Kurds in Middle East, Tibetans in China (Tibet), aboriginals in Australia, etc. A Fourth Cinema as such does not exist; however, Fourth World issues are mostly represented within the frames of the Third Cinema. It is important to remark that Fourth World people have only recently started to represent themselves with little or no mediation of the First or Second Cinemas. Among the first independent narrative fiction films of this nature written, produced, directed, and acted by Native Americans was *Smoke Signals* in 1998. This movie was

[a]dapted from a book by Sherman Alexie (Spokane) called *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and directed by Chris Eyre (Cheyenne), its coming of age story about the young Coeur d'Alene men often pokes fun at the media. (Stam 284)

This film is an ironic, self-reflexive contemplation of Native Americans reassessing their identity in the light of contemporary cinema and television culture. “If there anything more pathetic than watching Indians on television, “says one of the men in this film, “[i]t’s watching Indians watching television” (qtd. in Stam, 284).

The radical political movements of the 1960s throughout the world induced influential changes in the cultural context also; in terms of film, this signaled the beginning of a new type of cinematic practice that was coined Third Cinema, which sought “direct political engagement with the audience” and rejected the “narrative plot structure and aesthetic visual languages” (Macdonald 35) of previous, more traditional cinematic routines.

The theoretical basis of these new, radical films was formulated in a number of manifestos written in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them founding documents of Third Cinema. The most influential essays were Glauber Rocha’s “An Aesthetics of Hunger” (1965), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino’s “Towards a Third Cinema” (written in 1969 and reconsidered in a sequel entitled “Some Notes on the Concept of a Third Cinema” published in 1984), and

Julio García Espinosa's "For an Imperfect Cinema" (1969). Rocha called for a "hungry cinema" of "sad, ugly films," Solanas and Getino urged filmmakers to produce "militant guerilla documentaries," while Espinosa campaigned for an "imperfect cinema," energized by the "low" forms of popular culture (Shohat and Stam 248). Early Third Cinema and Third-Worldist filmmaking were predicated on nationalism assumed as "unproblematic," which led to the production of films that aspired to project "national imaginaries" (Stam 289). By making national films, the moviemakers of the Third Cinema saw themselves as part of national projects.

Among these national projects was Rocha's *aesthetics of hunger*, which advocated the creation of a *hungry cinema*. These were the metaphors "carved out" of the precarious conditions of film production of the Third World, or as Ismail Xavier claimed, they were "allegories of underdevelopment" (qtd. in Shohat and Stam 256). Rocha affirmed that "our originality is our hunger" (*ibid.*), and suggested that filmmakers make use of the existing situation. He also urged them to employ the revolutionary aesthetics of violence, in order to obtain films containing didactic themes, which depict social tensions and harsh realities that feed that "hunger." In line with Rocha's basic thoughts on hungry cinema, Espinosa suggested that filmmakers should create an *imperfect cinema* to represent an authentic picture of class and racial problems. If the hungry cinema focused more on the content of new films depicting vehement upheavals against capitalist and colonial injustice, the imperfect cinema sought methods with which it could achieve the goals of new, more radical modes of representation. As Espinosa pointed out, this cinema had to show "the process which generates the problems" (Espinosa 2005). Imperfect cinema makes use of "the documentary or the fictional mode, or both;" it operates with "whatever genre, or all genres," and is "a pluralistic art form" or even "a specialized form of expression" (*ibid.*).

The imperfect cinema is represented by a number of extremely low-budget films. These are realistic representations of filmed revolutions that used mostly black-and-white pictures with few takes. The imperfect cinema is naturalist, cheap, and practical: it features non-professional actors, mostly chosen on the criteria of Eisenstein's "typage" that selected performers according to their facial physiognomy (Cf. Stam 40); uses the technique of "bricolage" (meaning that films were made out of whatever materials were available) combined with the updated cine-poetics practices of Soviet montage-theorists (Cf. Kuleshov, Vertov, Pudovkin, Eisenstein in Chapter Two: "Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation"). The style of the imperfect cinema recalls Dziga Vertov's poetic documentary of "kino pravda" [cinema truth] that advocated outside-studio documentary filmmaking, in other words, the shooting of film literally out "in the streets" (Stam 45).

Espinosa stressed the fact that art was not "impartial" or "uncommitted," and continued by saying that the function of arts was to overthrow the elites in the interrelated context of scientific developments, "social presence of the masses, and the revolutionary potential in the contemporary world" (*ibid.*). Similar to feminist films, the imperfect cinema takes into serious

consideration its audience, but in a slightly different way. Espinosa believed that there is always an audience for the imperfect films that are „enjoyable, both for the maker and for its new audience” (ibid.). The latter can, in turn, recognize itself as the main subject of the movies.

Imperfect cinema finds a new audience in those who struggle, and it finds its themes in their problems. For imperfect cinema, “lucid” people are the ones who think and feel and exist in a world which they can change. In spite of all the problems and difficulties, they are convinced that they can transform it in a revolutionary way. Imperfect cinema therefore has no need to struggle to create an “audience.” On the contrary, it can be said that at present a greater audience exists for this kind of cinema than there are filmmakers able to supply that audience. (Espinosa 2005)

Spectators can see their own realities through the imperfect cinema, and this should incite them to fight for changes. The imperfect cinema is militant, revolutionary, and aims to provide answers to the complex social and political issues present in the given society. The imperfect cinema is, above all, “imperfect” not only in terms of topic and methodology but also in the sense that it is not a closed work: it remains an open “question which will discover its own answers in the course of its development” (ibid.).

The idea of the hungry and imperfect films paralleled with Solanas and Getino’s call for a Third Cinema which was issued in response to the cultural imperialism of dominant cinemas. Solanas and Getino understood that there was a need for a “culture of subversion which will carry with it an art, a science, and a cinema of subversion,” (Solanas and Getino 46) in a world where the First Cinema was nothing more than a “movie-life” with reality “conceived by the ruling classes” (51). The precursors of the Third Cinema (the “author’s cinema,” the “expression cinema,” the “nouvelle vague,” among other trends of the Second Cinema that challenged the First Cinema) were progressive steps forward in the politics of cinematic representation demanding “the filmmaker be free to express himself in a non-standard language” by which she or he was able to achieve the “cultural decolonization” of film (ibid.).

The Third Cinema, in Solanas and Getino’s view, was a “cinema of liberation” (52) that recognized, presented, and propagated the “anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third world” and of their equivalents “inside the imperialist countries,” considering this battle as “the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point in a word, the decolonization of culture” (47). The ideological precursors of the Third Cinema in terms of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist class struggle were Dziga Vertov’s *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), György Lukács, Bertold Brecht, and Walter Benjamin. They recognized the ways in which “socio-economic and cultural forces of modernity could brutalise, mystify, and manipulate masses” (Wayne 41). “[P]assionate, angry, often satirical,” but always complex, the Third Cinema comprises a “body of theory and filmmaking practice committed to social and cultural emancipation” (5). This cinema employs “different forms of documentary” and creates

films “across the range of fictional genres,” at the same time challenging “the traditional ways of filmmaking and its mode of consumption” (ibid.).

In the discussion of the *Battle of Algiers* (1965, dir. Gillo Pontecorvo), Mike Wayne identifies four key markers that distinguish Third Cinema from the other two cinemas: the first is its historicity (historical authenticity), the second is the strong political commitment, the third is the rigorous critical stance, and the last is the cultural specificity of these films (Wayne 14). To sum up,

Third cinema is characterized by its intimacy and familiarity with culture – both in the specific sense of cultural production (for example, song, dance, theatre, rituals, cinema, literature) and in the broader sense of the word (the nuances of everyday living). Further, Third Cinema explores how culture is a site of political struggle. History has shown that one of the first things which colonialism and imperialism attempt to control, in parallel with economic resources, is culture, where values and beliefs and identities are forged and re-forged. (22)

Similar to the metaphor of the “camera stylo” in the auteurist cinema (Cf. Chapter Five “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star”), the authors of “Towards a Third Cinema” envisage the camera as a “rifle” in their “guerilla activity” (Solanas and Getino 57) with the moving pictures as the ideological outcome of this symbolic fight. Moreover, in the early 1960s and early 1970s a lot of revolutionary activity, especially in Latin America, was based around armed groups (Wayne 56) and this conditioned the existence of a “belligerent” filmmaking and cinematic practice. The result was, in this context, a *guerilla cinema* (ibid.). Different from Vertov’s “kino-eye” (Cf. Chapter Two: “Do You Speak Film?: Film Language and Adaptation”), which was an all-pervasive camera protruding in areas seen and unseen, the early Third Cinema’s naturalist representations were visual “reflexological shock effects” (Stam 40). These remind viewers of Eisenstein’s technique of the “kino-fist” (ibid.), a term denoting the reaction of surprise and shock at some images or events. This reinforced the revolutionary and militant character of cinema (Solanas and Getino 61) that was made for and about masses, and which sought to explore unknown filmic methods and topics analogous to the path finding activity of a guerrilla fighter.

The existence of a revolutionary cinema is inconceivable without the constant and methodical exercise of practice, search, and experimentation. It even means committing the new filmmaker to take the chances on the unknown, to leap into space at times, exposing himself to failure as does the guerrilla who travels along paths that he himself opens up with machete blows. The possibility of discovering and inventing film forms and structures that serve a more profound vision of our reality resides in the ability to place oneself on the outside limits of the familiar, to make one’s way amid constant dangers. (57)

The team producing a Third Cinema was associated, in turn, with a guerilla unit. The camera was their “inexhaustible expropriator of image-weapons,” and the implementation of

ideology conveyed by this camera was delivered by the projector, which was equated with a “gun that can shoot 24 frames per second” (58). This propaganda “gun” worked regardless of cultural differences. Solanas and Getino believed that a film of the Third Cinema, which is about the Venezuelan guerrillas, or the May events in France, or on student struggle in Berkeley USA, conveyed more information than any explanatory pamphlets (60–61):

The birth of the Third Cinema marked “the most important revolutionary artistic event of our times” (64), claimed Solanas and Getino, who directed *La Hora De Los Hornos: Notas y testimonios sobre el neocolonialismo, la violencia y la liberación* [*Hour of the Furnaces: Notes and testimonies about neocolonialism, violence and liberty*] in 1968. This film was the practical outcome of the directors’ manifesto on the Third Cinema. A few years later, *The Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), a similar, important work of theory and subsequent filmic practice was realized by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen in relation to gender representation (Cf. Chapter Six “All Sides of the Camera”).

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam describe this Argentinean film inaugurating the Third Cinema:

*Hour* is structured as a tripartite political essay. The first section, “Neocolonialism and Violence,” reveals Argentina as an amalgam of European influences: “British Gold, Italian hands, French Books.” A series of “Notes” (“The daily Violence,” “The Oligarchy,” “Dependency”) explores various forms of neocolonial oppression. The second section, “An Act for Liberation,” subdivides into a “Chronicle of Peronism,” covering Perón’s rule from 1945 through his deposition in 1955, and “Chronicle of Resistance,” detailing the opposition struggle during Perón’s exile. The third section, “Violence and Liberation,” consists of an open ended series of interviews, documents, and testimonials. (Shohat and Stam 261)

Before and during the making of this film, the directors discovered another new facet of cinema: people who, until then were considered spectators, started to actually participate in the events generated by the Third Cinema (Solanas and Getino 61). Afterwards it became obvious that each person attending the screenings of *La Horas De Los Hornos* was aware that she or he was “infringing the System’s laws” and exposing her or his “personal security to eventual repression” (ibid.). The militant Third Cinema accurately mirrored spectators’ everyday problems and, as a result, they easily identified with the social consciousness and the political stance of the film’s actors. As Solanas and Getino observed, the persons constituting audience were no longer spectators,

on the contrary, from the moment one decided to attend the showing, from the moment he lined himself up on this side by taking risks and contributing his living experience to the meeting, he became an actor, a more important protagonist than who appeared in the films [...] The spectator made way for the actor, who sought himself in others. (ibid.)

The concept of the Third Cinema was born in Latin America and many of the early Third Cinema films originated there, as well. However, one cannot talk about Latin American cine-

ma as an entity with fixed boundaries (Stock xxii). Despite their counter-dominant approaches, the cinemas of Latin America present a rather complex picture. Early Latin American films were significantly influenced by Hollywood but later film productions in Latin America adopted a syncretic style resulting from the combination of classical narrative cinema and local traditions. By 1930, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil were the only countries which had national film industries. The most popular film genres during the first decades of the twentieth century were “the tanguerra” in Argentina, which represented tango melodramas based – as the name suggests – on Argentina’s indigenous dance, the tango; “the chanchada,” a hybrid form of Hollywood musicals combined with Brazilian samba dance, carnival, and comic theatre traditions in Brazil; and “the ranchada” or cowboy musical together with “the cabareteras” or cabaret melodramas in Mexico (Hayward 428).

Emerging from the hybrid grounds of syncretic film style, *cinema nôvo* (spelled also *Cinema Nôvo*) appeared in Brazil in the early 1950s and, influenced by the Italian neo-realist movement, signaled a special “style and critical aesthetic of non-alignment with other cinemas” (Hayward 55–56). Glauber Rocha founded the theory of the movement in “An Aesthetics of Hunger” and “An Aesthetics of Violence,” both published in 1965, which he later developed into a book entitled *Revolução do Cinema Nôvo [The Revolution of Cinema Novo]* that came out in 1981. In the 1960s, as the result of the social-economical condition in Brazil, where “poverty, starvation and violence were the daily diet” of most people, this type of cinema (mostly documentaries portraying the lives of everyday people) became even “more populist and revolutionary” than before (56). Directors like, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Rui Guerra, Carlos Diegues, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, and Glauber Rocha, only to name a few, “blended history, myth and popular culture” (56) in their films (for more information on these directors see *Senses of Cinema* Great Directors Database). Other cinema nôvo directors made so-called *Tropicalist* style movies that “fused Catholic religion with indigenous mysticism, allegory with legend, and semi-pagan religion cult with African-Latin American ritual producing a more surreal cinema” (Hayward 430) than other similar new films.

Cinema nôvo stood as a model for many “new wave” movements in Western world and provided “an alternative model for the emergent cinemas of Latin America and the Third World as a whole,” grounding the “paths to economic and ideological decolonization” worldwide (“Cinema Nôvo” 1). The achievements of the cinema nôvo had a strong worldwide impact. Werner Herzog, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese were only a handful of directors among many others that “express admiration for Brazil’s new cinema” (Stam 291), which influenced the development of new perspectives in the cinemas across the globe, too.

Cinema Nôvo was contemporary with the French nouvelle vague, the independent cinema of North America, British free cinema, Spanish and Argentine nuevo cine, Cuban revolutionary cinema, the birth of Black African cinema and movements of renewal in countries as different as Japan and Czechoslovakia.



Nevertheless, its true significance can only be appreciated in the context of Brazilian culture. The crisis in the traditional production system created a climate in which the new Brazilian cinema and similar movements could be welcomed and could achieve international success. ("Cinema Nôvo" 2)

Following the Latin American achievements in terms of new cinema, there was a great deal of "cross-fertilization," "migration of talent," and cultural exchange between cinematic cultures of Europe and the Americas: European and American filmmakers came to work in Latin America and Latin Americans filmmakers went to Europe; Cubans contributed to Mexican and Argentinian cinemas while Argentinians went to Brazil and Venezuela to make films (Hayward 429). As Gerald M. Macdonald observed, "the goals and practices of Third Cinema, once articulated in the Latin American contexts quickly spread worldwide, first to other Third World countries, but later to the oppressed regions and peoples of the First World, as well" (Macdonald 37). The heritage of transnational exchanges (that existed before the 1960s) intensified, and multiple co-productions opened the way for new "dynamics of exchange" known as *transculturation* (Hayward 429) in cinema in particular and in culture in general.

During the peak of imperialism cinema was brought to the colonial administrative centers mainly for the entertainment of the European colonizers. The earliest productions in the colonies made by mainly by the colonizers were "limited in number and tended to be ethnographic studies of the colonized" (Macdonald 35). However, following the independence of their countries, ex-colonial filmmakers proceeded to establish subsequent national cinemas (*ibid.*).

Cinema arrived in Africa quite early; screenings took place in 1896 in South Africa and at the beginning of the 1900s in Senegal (Hayward 402). The first films made in Africa were ethnographic films where black Africans and their culture were "exoticized for consumption" in Western societies (*ibid.*). A schematic view of recent African cinemas encompasses the regional filmmaking of the Sub-Sahara and North Africa. *Sub-Saharan cinema* is even today "at a neo-colonialist stage" (401), in the sense that

most countries have not yet reached full democratic status primarily because of the indirect domination by Europe or the United States (in the form of military oligarchies or dictatorships) and/or by the economic hi-jacking of these countries to whom huge loans have been made by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but which no country is in a state to repay. (401–402)

Sub-Saharan cinema started its creative activity in the 1950s with short films (403) and had a low production rate due to the lack of finances and poor planning strategies (405). During the colonial period this part of the world was divided between Great Britain, Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands that produced three distinct linguistic spheres in the culture of the region, which influenced the cinematic practice of the colonies: Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone or Portuguese (401). Among these, African Francophone cinemas enjoyed a more sustained material support than the other two, despite the fact that Ghana and Nigeria

(with its studio named *Nollywood*) inherited the colonial legacy of more sophisticated studios than elsewhere in the region (404). Today, “apart from the Ghanaian Film School in Accra and a few university-base film departments where filmmaking is taught” generally through video-making, “African filmmakers are dependent on film-training abroad” (403) in French schools, in Russia, Italy, etc. Among the directors of Sub-Saharan African cinemas are Souleymane Cissé, Ola Balogun, Djibrik Diop Mambéty, Ousmane Sembène, and Hubert Ogunde, to name only a few.

*North African cinemas* are represented by the Egyptian cinema, the cinema of the Maghreb countries (for example, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania), and the cinema of Eastern Arab states (for example, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, The Sudan, Syria). North African filmmaking begun in the 1920s; the center of North African cinema was in Egypt. Founded in the 1930s, the Egyptian film industry “dominated the Arab film world” (408), and was popular especially with its successful Egyptian musicals. At the time, Egypt exported this cultural product throughout the entire Arab world. These massive film exports influenced most emerging Arab national cinemas in the region, which were founded on the standards and practices of the Egyptian cinema (409). The list of most important Egyptian directors includes Bahiga Hafiz (a woman director in the thirties), Salah Abou Seif (studio dramas), Youssef Chahine (mostly all genres), Toufik Saleh (practitioner of the Third Cinema) (409), and others. The Maghrebine cinema was born after the post-independence period (of the 1950s and the 1960s); its most prolific component is the Algerian cinema. The filmmaking infrastructure in the Eastern Arab states is still developing; these countries “have yet to produce a national cinema” that competes with Egypt’s or Algeria’s film industry (410).

Contemporary studies of African cinema examine the “adequacy of current methodologies for dealing with what cinema has become in Africa” (Mhando 2000). This task was undertaken by Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike, the author of *Black African Cinema* (1994), who expressed the need to eliminate the “outmoded and untenable myths which permeate the interpretation of African history, culture and now cinema, of how Africa is seen as a cinematographic desert” (Ukadike qtd. in Mhando 2000). Martin Mhando sees African filmmaking as a developing cinema reflecting particular and generally poor conditions of production and distribution. He says that “over the last two decades” African cinema witnessed an extremely low production of full feature films, and was also faced with the “regression of the ‘educational’ documentary,” while the number of mostly videotaped docu-dramas increased (Mhando 2000). The future of African cinema, according to black African filmmakers, lies in the unity of all national filmmaking with the aim to represent African identities authentically and, therefore, to undo the fake images of black Africans (Hayward 405) in the local and global dominant cinema.

*Indian cinema* is the largest film industry in the world, creating and releasing around 800 films a year (compared to US production of 400–600 movies a year), which are then “screened for approximately fifteen million people a day,” writes Jyotika Virdi (*The Cinematic Imagi-*

*Nation*, 1). The cinema is “the dominant cultural institution and product in India” because it provides “affordable entertainment,” and “resonates powerfully with the Indian diaspora often becoming their only connection with the homeland” (2). It is also among the main cultural sources of “intergenerational culture diasporic families share” (ibid.) outside India’s borders. As Susan Hayward remarked, Indian cinema is a “big business” when it comes to the topic of stars, which have major influence and often play an active role in politics, too (Hayward 419). Developing from a cinema that produced Hindu mythologicals (films made from Hindu myths), fantasy movies, song-dance-action films, melodramas, and orientalist narratives with tones of criticism of the colonial-nationalist conflicts (421), current Hindi films range from the most popular, earlier styles to the Indian art cinema, best exemplified by the films of Satyajit Ray to the avant-garde forms of quite diverse, Third, counter-cinemas.

Indian cinema is an umbrella term for a myriad of various cinematic hubs that can be distinguished by the region in which they are produced. The core of the Indian cinema is *Bollywood* (Hindi language cinema based in Mumbai/Bombay), a name created by the combination of Bombay and Hollywood. Other major cinemas are *Tollywood*, centered in Hyderabad, is the heart of the Telugu Film Industry, Telugu being the second most spoken language in India; *Bengali Cinema* (in Bengali language) resides in Kolkata (Calcutta); *Kollywood* is the Tamil Cinema with its headquarter in Chennai; the *Malayalam Cinema* of Kerala; the *Kashmiri* and the *Marathi* film industry, the *Kannada* or *Sandalwood* from Karnataka are all organic components of the Indian film industry. Regionally and stylistically close to the great Indian film industry (but not part of it) is Bangladesh’s *Dollywood* (based in Dhaka), and the Urdu, and Punjabi film industry of *Lollywood* from Lahore, Pakistan.

The Indian cinema or, more generally, Hindi films “openly address class conflicts” and “depict avaricious industrialists, middlemen, moneylenders, traders, and landlords as exploiting workers, the landless, and the underprivileged” (Virdi 2003, 14). The Indian society is extremely “conscious of class, caste, and ethnic identity” (15). The cinema, accordingly, submits to these standards by sustaining the “heterosexual romance, which itself is largely a figment of Hindi films’ imagination,” (ibid.) Virdi points out. The topic of gender in Indian movies is presented mostly in a colonial context. Throughout the Indian history and in cinematic representations, the woman is “an embattled one, a site on which colonial and communal conflicts have been fought through the twentieth centuries” (13). Issues of gender have been mobilized “as a sign to unify” India against the Western ideologies, and Hindi movies build on the idea of a unified nation, with the woman as its unique symbol (ibid.). Moreover, the issues of caste and religions that have actually been “constitutionally outlawed” in India, are still present in films as “a subtext buried within class distinctions” (ibid.). Indian films, however, are not centered only on melodramatic genres which describe love, or class and caste struggle within the domestic the realm. The historical narrative is present with landmark events such as the peasant rebellion from the 1950s,

famines, shortages, and the green Revolution in the 1960s, the rise of the workers, women, and ecological movements in the 1970s and 1980s, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, the intensification of caste wars and regional separatist movements in the 1980s and 1990s, economic liberalization in the 1990s, the Indo-Pak Kargil War, and nuclear testing by these two countries at the close of the twentieth century. (16)

Most conflicts in Indian films arise “from social hierarchy” and are “generally located in narratives about the family,” the most important trope through which Hindi films “build the idea of the nation” (11). Furthermore, as Viridi argues, by drawing parallels between the collective unit of the family and the nation itself, typical family conflicts are transposed onto the nation. In this sense, Hindi cinema “constantly reimagines the nation” (xiv) and, therefore, many Indian films become visual documents of social, cultural, and political transformations that take place on the subcontinent.

In the great chain of Indian film directors, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Mira Nair are today among the most widely known. Satyajit Ray (active in the film industry from the 1950s until the 1990s) is perhaps the most celebrated filmmaker of India; his contemporary, Mrinal Sen (producing films from the 1960s through the 1990s) is renowned for his experimental style. In terms of the Third Cinema, one of Sen’s most emblematic films is *The Confined* (1993), which depicts the odd but fruitful relationship between a no-name young Indian woman confined in a flat by an old man, who has bought her (for pleasure when she was a child) and a young, no-name writer struggling to write his new novel. The subtext of the film’s narrative line is provided by Rabindranath Tagore’s short story “Hungry Stones” (published in *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories* in 1916), which describes the situation of a kidnapped Persian girl that lives confined in a pleasure dome. The connection between the two young people is technologically mediated with random telephone calls, through which, by maintaining anonymity, they confide in each other. The young woman’s life changes after these discussions and the writer finds his topic, too. As the result of the talks, Sen’s young woman, as an emblematic image of India, liberates herself from her “slavery” (symbolizing both patriarchy and colonialism) and leaves the city on the same train on which the writer departs. Before getting off the train, she recognizes him by his voice (he does not know who she is because she only looks at him and does not utter a sound) but leaves, cherishing her new freedom.

Mira Nair is an acclaimed Indian-born U.S. based contemporary filmmaker. Her movies with direct Indian relevance are: *Salaam Bombay* (1988), *Mississippi Masala* (1999), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), *Namesake* (2007), and *Shantaram* (2007). Nair has initiated and runs the “Maisha” film lab project (Cf. Homepage of “Maisha Film Labs”) aims to help Third World, especially East African and South Asian, filmmakers to make their own films. As Priya Lal observed, Nair’s works “retain some sort of art-school credibility to leisure-class foreigners in their thoughtful treatment of gritty Bombay street life or glorification of the exotic splendor of

Hindu weddings,” making Nair a “crossover” filmmaker (Lal 2004), and an advocate of transnational cinema.

*Transnational cinema* emerged as an alternative response to the “insufficiencies of existing categories such as National Cinema, Third World Cinema and Third Cinema to correspond with, and respond to, the conditions of the globalized world,” Vijay Devadas claims, adding that transnational cinema “was mobilized as a response to a shift in the economy of exchange from national to global, coupled with increasing economic globalization and the acceleration of technological developments” (Devadas 2006). Today, transnational cinema is a means through which the domestic industry of peripheral cinemas might have a global perspective in filmmaking and film distribution alike.

Apart from the most prolific cinema industry of the continent, *Chinese Cinemas* (comprised of the filmmaking of China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan) began at the end of the nineteenth century with the first film screenings in Shanghai and were followed by filmed Chinese operas that evolved in the first three decades of the twentieth century into visual narratives inspired by popular “Mandarin Duck” and “Butterfly” melodramatic and sentimental stories from Chinese literary tradition (Hayward 415). Due to the political changes that took place in the country, following the earlier populist cinema, films were more and more nationalist-leftist, finally resulting a cinema operated by communist ideology at the beginning of the fifties, when Chinese studios were nationalized and had to comply with the imposed Maoist propaganda (416). In the period between 1949 and 1966, Chinese cinema exposed a quorum of “worker-peasant-soldier” films made in the socialist-realist manner of the Soviet cinema (416). The period between 1966 and 1976 ideologically heralded by the Chinese Cultural Revolution (an oppressive movement led by Mao Zedong, which purged mainly intellectuals and ended in a bloodshed persecution of anyone not considered “compatible” with the system). Then there was almost no filmmaking at all in China, with the exception of ten films advocating the myth of the perfect proletarian class hero and heroine, all made under the “strict rules and filmic guidelines” imposed by the leader’s wife, “Madam Mao” (417). In the next ten years, a number of “scar” or “wound” films depicting the abuses of the former period ruled China’s film market, which started developing in the mid-1980s with the weakening of the state control over the national film industry (ibid.). Today, Chinese film is presented by directors that successfully combined experimentation and popular narration (Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige) but also some which, blacklisted in their country (Zhang Yuan, Ning Dai), exposed their films outside China (419–419).

Hong Kong was a former British crown colony until 1997, when it became one of China’s special administrative regions. The Hong Kong film industry produces, together with the film industries of Taiwan and China, Chinese language films. Hong Kong’s filmmaking proliferated especially in the 1980s and is today in relative stagnation. A hallmark name in contemporary Hong Kong filmmaking is director John Woo, who is also known for making auteur cinema.

The genres of Hong Kong cinema contain romantic melodramas and martial arts action films (“wuxia”), which have been popularized in the West by Bruce Lee and later by Jackie Chan and Stephen Chow, among many others. Roger Garcia pointed out that the “popular mythologies promoted by the martial-arts cinema and the various links these films make with contemporary reality have, however, given it another, more significant dimension” because

almost all postwar martial-arts films that constitute the genre have been produced by and for the Chinese communities outside mainland China. And to this end, they can be read as films of mythic remembrance, an emigrant cinema for an audience seeking not only its identity and links with an often imaginary cultural past, but also its legitimization. (Garcia 2001)

The kung-fu films of Hong Kong have had a strong impact on the works of American directors, especially on the cinema of Quentin Tarantino (Stam 291).

Postcolonial studies, as “the officially authorized enclave for studying the Third/First World dynamics in the academy, privileges the literary text” (Virdi 2003, x) over the filmic one. The application of postcolonial theory in cinema studies facilitates understanding through a non-Western perspective films originating from “*postcolonial/post-colonial* countries” (Hayward 273). The hyphenated term “post-colonial” is a historical concept and refers to the period after decolonization, while “postcolonial” denotes the theoretical and cultural backgrounds that “are influenced by or relate to the post-colonial moment” (267). The prefix “post” connotes the change that reflects the development of interpretational practices following the anti-colonial movements (Vincze et alii. 10). Postcolonial studies of film analyze products made by the West in the West, and in the colonies, both during the colonial and post-colonial stages (Hayward 274). The “post” in postcolonialism and the “post” in post-communism refer to the same moment of liberation from under an oppressive system, therefore, postcolonialism and post-communism share some common traits. As David Chioni Moore argued, “the Soviet Union exercised powerful colonial control” that has now ended, but which “has had manifest effects on the literatures and cultures of the postcolonial-post-Soviet nations, including” what is today the territory of “Russia” (Moore 122–123). Seen from this context; the movies produced in post-communist countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain can be regarded as “post” in a colonial sense, too. Nevertheless, the great majority of films produced today testify of the blurring of the boundaries between colonial/postcolonial, First/Second/Third Cinemas.

First Cinema and Third Cinema often meet within a film, and similar fusions can be detected in the case of Second Cinema and First Cinema. Second Cinema and Third Cinema can also be both present in a given movie. Many Third Cinema movies are art films; moreover, after the gradual loss of its militant audience, the Third Cinema has been seeking out “art cinema’s international distribution-exhibition channels” (*ibid.*), and this further strengthens the ties between the Second Cinema and the Third Cinema. What is more, the products of First and Third Cinemas are “often read as Second Cinema,” and also “the products of First and

Second Cinemas are sometimes used in revolutionary contexts” (Macdonald 29). The First World has always had images from the “Other Worlds,” Viridi notes, but recently popular culture (travel, tourism, literature, film, music videos, and advertisements) uses these worlds “as exotic locales for telling tales of romance and adventure of the western subject” (Viridi 2006). The very “logic of capitalism as an economic system is that it needs constant energizing through the production of new commodities, a constant search for novelty” that at least partially explains “the recent outburst of images” from exotic lands of the former colonies, underdeveloped or developing countries in the Western world (*ibid.*). Sometimes cinematic categories are combined in multi-national co-productions because these are “often the only way in which films can be made” in countries which do not have film industries (Hayward 401). However, not only the categories of cinemas blend in contemporary movies but the ideology and politics of representation of the First, Second, Third, and Fourth worlds, as well.

An example of an interesting First World–Third World–Fourth World cinematic blend is *Terminal* (2004, dir. Steven Spielberg), in which the protagonist, Viktor Navorski (played by Tom Hanks) arrives to the American passport control at the JFK Airport in New York from the so-called Republic of “Krakozhia.” Despite the fact that this movie is allegedly “not based on a real-life story in any way,” there is a man “who has spent an extended amount of time” of his life in an airport (Clinton 2004). The real “Viktor Navorski” (called Merhan Karimi Nessari) is an Iranian displaced who, as Megam Basham writes, was “stuck” in 1988 in the Terminal 1 of Paris’ Charles De Gaulle Airport “for over seven years” before the European governments “made any attempt to resolve his situation” (Basham 2004). In 2004 (the year when *Terminal* was released) Nasserri, sadly, was still residing in the same place (*ibid.*).

Navorski’s name suggests a person of Slavic origin and to reinforce the idea of a post-communist background he is also speaking with a thick Bulgarian accent. His phantom “home,” strongly alluding to a former constituent state of the Soviet Union, does not exist in real life. The Republic of Krakozhia “technically does not exist” (Spielberg 2004) in the story of the film either; it is like *Twilight Zone* (TV series, 1959–1964, by various directors) by the time Navorski reaches the borders of the U.S. The protagonist has to face the consequences of being a citizen without a country. Finally, he finds out from the main American news channel (suggestively named “GHN” after the CNN channel) that a military coup has overthrown his country’s previous government (an almost explicit reference to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the unstable political balance in the region of the Caucasus and Balkans that followed afterwards) that resulted in an anarchic period in which he became an “unacceptable” (Spielberg 2004), citizen of a non-existent country.

The Director of Costumes and Border protection at JFK, Officer Frank Dixon (Stanley Tucci), explains this paradoxical situation by telling Navorski that he “has fallen through a small crack in the system” (Spielberg 2004). Not perceiving the meaning of the words, Navorski replies without hesitation the most fitting response: “I am *crack*.” (*ibid.*, emphasis ad-

ded). This “crack” can be read as the metaphor for someone caught between the worlds, in a no man’s land, where identity is not a matter of administrative category any more. With an invalid passport, Navorski turns out to be a citizen of “nowhere.” He does not belong to the First World or to the Third World, or to the collapsed Second World, and is neither one of the Fourth World individuals. Not having an official status denoting his identity, he cannot enter the U.S. and he cannot travel back; therefore he gets stuck in the symbolic space of the International Transit Lounge of the JFK Airport waiting for his right to pass.

He is *inter-national* in his flee-floating status and local in his attachment to his roots. Navorski is a political nomad, a “Middle-worlder” (Breytenbach 57). This concept denotes a “hybrid” (mixed identity) person with a “vivid consciousness” of being the different, the other, and “proud of it” (*ibid.*), qualities that help him overcome the sometimes impassable rules of First World administration. As a Middle-worlder, Navorski is defined by what he is not, or no longer, and not by what he opposes or even rejects (47); as a Middle-worlder he also practices a “nomadic thinking” (57). As a Middle-worlder, he is endowed with a special social empathy with the help of which he recognizes “affinities with other Middle-worlders” (58). It is these attributes that help Navorski befriend and help an impressive number of Third and Fourth World people from the First World in the multicultural International Transit Lounge (for example, Gupta, the Indian janitor, colored airport officers of both genders, Diego, the Latino runway worker, the staff of fast-food restaurants and other shops, etc.) who, in turn, help him, too. Despite the fact that *Terminal* is considered First Cinema, it has pervasive elements of Third Cinema, which suggests that there is a tendency in the First Cinema to blend its modes of representation with that of the Third Cinema, and vice versa.

Today, when the world is perceived, more than ever, in terms of multicultural, plural issues that interweave local and global concerns it is evident that the field of the Third World Cinemas “will become increasingly better known” (Hayward 398–399) than a few decades before. The popularity of the Third Cinema is also the outcome of the theories that Third World Cinemas have established. Simultaneously with a fast-developing technology, film consumption intensifies, especially through free or paid access to movies on the Internet (Cf. Chapter Eight “Ultimately Onscreen: The Futures of the Cinema in the Age of New Media”), with “more and more images” made available to the “globalized consumers” through which “these ‘unexplored’ cinemas” will also become “steadfastly more available” (Hayward 399). In a globalized world, transnational films and films built on the dynamics of transculturation will further help viewers “understand how ethnic, regional, and national identities reconstitute themselves” (Canclini 256). But the availability and understanding of other cultures through films is not enough. As Robert Stam and Louise Spence write, we should be conscious and aware of “the cultural and ideological assumptions spectators bring to the cinema,” as well as of “the institutionalized expectations,” and “the mental machinery that serves as the subjective support to the film industry,” which leads people to “consume films in a certain way” (647). These are complex aspects that need a more thorough, further investigation.



## Keywords

Third World, Fourth World, Third World Cinema, Third Cinema, aesthetics of hunger/hungry cinema, imperfect cinema, guerrilla movie, cinema nôvo (Cinema Nôvo), Tropicalist movies, transculturation, Indian cinema (Bollywood, Tollywood, Kollywood, Bengali cinema, Kannada/Sandalwood, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi cinemas), Dallywood, Lollywood, Sub-Saharan cinemas, North African cinemas, Chinese cinemas, Nollywood, postcolonial/post-colonial, post-communism, transnational cinema, Middle-worlder

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## Chapter

# 8

## Ultimately Onscreen: The Futures of the Cinema in the Age of New Media Zoltán Dragon

We're gonna stay on until the end of  
the world. And when that day comes  
we'll cover it.  
(Ted Turner, founder of CNN)

Progress has its drawbacks;  
you can't warm your feet on a microwave.  
(Doug Larson)

The suddenness of the leap from hardware to software  
cannot but produce a period of anarchy and collapse,  
especially in the developed countries.  
(Marshall McLuhan)

A look at media at the beginning of the twenty-first century makes one thing certain: nothing is certain in terms of media boundaries and specificities. The cinema, for example, is a composite of elaborate sound and visual systems, enhanced by the use of computer software and digital image manipulation: the line that once demarcated its borders against other media seems to be dissolving. In other words, there are no different media, only multimedia. As Nicholas Mirzoeff reminds us, “[m]odern life takes place onscreen” (1), we watch screens and are watched by cameras whether shopping or enjoying a film, “life is mediated through television and, to a lesser extent, film” (ibid.), and the Internet. If someone is not satisfied with his or her life, s/he can get an alternative life in a digitally created world with personal characteristics s/he could only fantasize about previously. Video camera and VoIP (Voice over the Internet Protocol) are now connected creating a means of communication advocated by science fiction films well before the invention of either the video or the Internet.

According to James Monaco, today “we find ourselves nearly ready to complete a job begun more than five hundred years ago when Johann Gutenberg invented moveable type” (15). That was the moment both art and communication got involved in the world of technology. By now, “the cinema – a popular form of entertainment for almost a century – has been drastically transformed,” says Anne Friedberg (439). She calls attention to the fact that the cinema has become embedded in its several media competitors, such as television and computer, and as a consequence, the boundaries between the different forms of media have dis-

solved. Films are edited on video and the post-production is more and more computer-based. Computer graphics, computer-generated animation, and computer-generated images (CGI) are today a “natural” part of movies. According to Friedberg, the “technologies of reception and display” have also blended into a multimedial format: movies are watched on the Internet, on television, or on DVD, as well (*ibid.*). Robert Stam agrees on this point when he notes that the cinema in its specific medial form “now seems to be disappearing into the larger stream of the audiovisual media, be they photographic, electronic, or cybernetic” (Stam 314). This way, the cinema is today not an antithesis of television as it was from the late 1950s (*cf.* Chapter Five, “Cinema and Its Discontents: Auteur, Studio, Star”), but rather a media partner “with a good deal of cross-fertilization in terms of personnel, financing, and even aesthetics” (315). In other words, the cinema, the film industry at large, is not a separate medium with its unique rules of composition and production, but has gradually become a component in multimedial entertainment.

Whereas Friedberg could still say in 2000 that “[t]he movie screen, the home television screen, and the computer screen retain their separate locations” (439), by the middle of the year 2007 it is clear that the trajectory of the development and potential uses of the screen as a rectangular surface used for displaying images are different. In his study of the genealogy of the screen, Lev Manovich argues that the *classical screen* (three-dimensional perspectival space on a flat surface, also used by the cinema) got replaced by the dynamic screen which presents images in movement, evolving over time (95–6). The introduction of the *dynamic screen* also forged new ways of seeing and watching: while the classical narrative cinema offered a linear structure of narratives, and a pre-manipulated set of emotions (in a melodrama, for example, overflowing emotional music signals the outburst of emotions), the new media invites the user “to forge a more personal temporality and mold a more personal emotion” (Stam 321). The dynamic screen transforms the notion and perception of space and time; while a film has a set running time, it is useless to inquire about the length of an interactive game or a CD-ROM, as it is the user or users involved who decide the exact duration.

The dynamic screen is getting a unifying position in households serving as a surface for displaying television programs, Internet sites, home movie projections, video telephone calls – and the list could continue because of the appearance of new technologies by the day. Even before this unified utilization of the screen images, through digitalization, lost their exclusive connections to the media that originally created them (Friedberg 439). An image, for example, does not need to be on a piece of paper, it can also be inspected on the screen of a computer, even if it was taken by a camera. The latest technological improvements provide high-definition imagery of mixed generic source material, which sometimes makes it impossible to determine the original recording media of the scenes unfolding on the screen.

While Marshall McLuhan’s proclamation, “the medium is the message” (8) – meaning that the medium determines the content it transmits – could be regarded as relevant until the

middle of the 1990s, it should be rethought along the lines that Friedrich Kittler envisaged already in 1986: “[t]he general digitalization of information and channels erases the difference between individual media” (Kittler qtd. in Friedberg 439). In 1995, the title of a *New York Times* front-page story also got an alternative response to McLuhan: “If the medium is the message, the message is the Web,” which indicates that a completely new era is here in terms of media (449). A more complex view is expressed by Nicholas Negroponte in his critical rephrasing of McLuhan’s slogan: “[t]he medium is not the message in the digital world. It is an embodiment of it. A message might have several embodiments automatically derivable from the same data” (Negroponte 71).

The relevance of Negroponte’s claim can be tested on everyday user experience: depending on our technical circumstances we can watch the same movie at the cinema, on DVD, on television, or online via streaming, embedded flash video, or even through evolving P2P (a “peer-to-peer” network uses the bandwidth and computing power of those who participate in it, ideal for file sharing and torrent sites) systems. Video file sharing systems, such as YouTube and others following its trail, transmit home made videos, music clips, advertisements, and even official movie trailers – which makes discussions of medium specific issues futile. Recently an online television broadcast enterprise, Joost, has started negotiations with hardware vendors “about embedding Joost into set-top boxes and televisions will change the market as we know it” (Riley 2007). Online television channels are already offering services on the Internet, but it is only a matter of time when they will conquer set-top devices in our homes as well.

These technological developments and changes in our everyday lives make it necessary to reconsider film theory, as well. According to Friedberg, it is not enough to address the issue of the cinematic screen alone: “[w]e must add computer screens (and digital technologies), television screens (and interactive video formats) to our conceptualization (both historical and theoretical) of the cinema and its screens” (440). In this light, Friedberg calls for a redefinition of old film studies terms such as screen, film, and spectators along new lines. As she writes,

[s]creens are now “display and delivery” formats – variable in versions of projection screen, television screen, computer screen, or headset device. Film is a “storage” medium – variable in versions of video, computer disks, compact disks (CDs), high-density compact video-disc players (DVDs), databanks, on-line servers. Spectators are “users” with an “interface” – variable in versions of remotes, mice, keyboards, touch screens, joysticks, goggles and gloves and body suits. (ibid.)

Along with the redefinition of the above terms, theory needs to turn to the issue of the cinematic image as well, because it is the moving image that, after all, defines the cinema. Gradually, photographic images, once the basis of cinematic representation, have undergone deep rooted changes: from analog production to digital, often computer-enhanced distribution. Whereas in the 1980s generally photos were still developed, printed and shared physi-

cally, in the late 1990s and especially nowadays not only everybody equipped with a digital camera is able to produce and share their photos, but they can also manipulate these images and share them with others in a variety of ways (via email, photo sharing sites, slideshows). The cinema was not left untainted by this shift to digitalization and its consequences in terms of circulation and transmission, which led Friedberg to reconsider the history of film: “it now seems that a singular history of ‘the film’ without [...] the telephone, the radio, the television, the computer” (ibid.) is inadequate, as it does not take into account important technical properties shared by more media.

It is interesting to see that despite the broadening of the scope in the history of the cinema since the appearance of television, apart from some notable exceptions regarding the issue of film sound, most theoretical studies on film seem to focus on solely the issue of visibility. According to Friedberg, one of the most important aspects of the competition between the cinema and television is the issue of screen formats (447): the screen sizes of the cinema were incomparably larger than those of television, even if recently home movie systems try to compensate for this disadvantage. What contemporary theorists do not take into account is the counter-movement that runs parallel to the magnification of projection potentials of both the cinematic and the televisual screens: with the appearance of mobile devices there has been growing interest in “scaling down” images to fit smaller screens. The challenge today is not to produce the biggest screen of all times, but to make visual data rendering possible for all screen sizes in the same quality. The technical side of this problem first appeared when television stations were allowed to air feature films: aspect ratios and optical differences between the cinematic and the televisual image processing became evident immediately. As Friedberg explains, first of all, “[t]he optics of television do not rely on persistence of vision and projection but on scanning and transmission” (ibid.).

The fast-paced technological development did not leave the role of the spectator intact. As Friedberg argues, spectators are no longer passive receptacles of films: they interact with the story in various ways, similarly to the computer users. The computer user “interacts directly with the framed image [...] “using” a device – keyboard, mouse, or, in the case of touch screens, the finger – to manipulate what is contained within the parameter of the screen” (448). This interactive process redefines the role of the place of interaction in turn: the screen cannot be theorized as a blank surface on which a flux of images is projected, but becomes an interface.

In Manovich’s definition, the *interface* “acts as a code that carries cultural messages in a variety of media” (64). Interface is more than the devices used to access information: it comprises of the browser and the operation system as well in the case of computers. The interface is the mode of displaying, receiving, and transmitting information, an electronic surface that allows users interactive engagement with any form of content: the screen, the software and hardware used, and the special logic they entail. However, “far from being a transparent

window into the data inside a computer,” Manovich argues, “the interface brings with it strong messages of its own” (65). It means that the logic with which an interface operates is already coded in the transmission of data. The *human-computer interface* (HCI), is a term that “describes the ways in which the user interacts with a computer” (69) and includes the above mentioned physical devices used in such an interaction together with the metaphors of folders, files, actions of copy and paste, renaming or deleting files, etc. According to Manovich, HCI is the best example of the *cultural interface*, as it has become for a large majority of people the most accessible way to interact with cultural data. Cultural interface is first and foremost a “human-computer-culture interface” (70) that allows the circulation of data among all the three constituents. Apart from HCI, other cultural interfaces are the websites themselves, which store and circulate cultural data, CD-ROMs, DVDs, computer games, and further examples of “new media cultural objects” (*ibid.*).

The cinema, as a cultural interface, has been the most influential and dominant form of representation after the tradition of the printed word (78). There are two main technical aspects that changed the static presentation form of cultural interfaces preceding the cinematic form (books, paintings, and photography included): the invention and use of mobile camera, and the mobility of the rectangular frame. The mobile camera was originally a design for three-dimensional computer graphics used for flight simulation and computer-aided design, to be later adopted by filmmakers (79). Mobility in this case is not the simple replacing or changing angles and positions of the camera, but rather the complete freedom of the camera to cross solid substance – as the digital camera tricks of David Fincher’s 2002 film, *Panic Room* – or to circulate around a particular object or person – the *photo-fahrt* technique developed into the so-called “bullet-time” model employed in the Wachowski brothers’ *The Matrix* trilogy (1999–2003). The rectangular frame had, of course, been previously employed by other kinds of cultural interfaces (such as painting and photography) but it was the cinema that introduces “the mobility of the frame” (81). It is through the new ways of visualizing introduced by the cinema that HCI inherited the mobile framing implemented in the possibility of scrolling: while HCI presents only “a partial view of a document,” the computer user is still able to “scroll through a window’s content” (*ibid.*).

Manovich has recently combined theory, digital culture and software technology in a project called *Soft Cinema*. “What kind of cinema is appropriate for the age of Google and blogging?” asks Manovich along with his fellow contributors to the multimedia project. The response is a combination of theory and art:

Soft Cinema project mines the creative possibilities at the intersection of software culture, cinema, and architecture. Its manifestations include films, dynamic visualizations, computer-driven installations, architectural designs, print catalogs, and DVDs. In parallel, the project investigates how the new representational techniques of soft(ware) cinema can be deployed to address the new

dimensions of our time, such as the rise of mega-cities, the “new” Europe, and the effects of information technologies on subjectivity. (*Soft Cinema*)

The project is not a multiple-way presentation of media art. The DVDs come with special software and a media database that interact in a way that no viewing experience can be repeated: each time the viewer replays the material on the disks, a new sequence is created for him or her by the software, selecting images, sounds, and sequences from the database included. “The software edits movies in real time by choosing the elements from the database using the systems of rules defined by the authors” (*ibid.*). *Soft Cinema* (short for “software cinema”) is a media art-complex that foregrounds the remastering potentials of the new media. This concept of remastering is similar to what is evoked by the recent upsurge of digitally remastered film sequences that, according to Friedberg, “illustrate the compelling urge to reprogram popular memory” (449). The digitally revised and altered original footages in films like *Nixon* (1995, dir. Oliver Stone), *JFK* (1991, dir. Oliver Stone), or most spectacularly *Forrest Gump* (1994, dir. Robert Zemeckis) “continue to reconstitute our sense of historical past” (*ibid.*) via the possibilities of digital technology.

Beside technological advancement and its effect on the spectator of the cinema, theories of spectatorship should start to account for the differences of viewing experience generated by the new venues of watching films as opposed to the traditional cinema (cf.: Chapter One, “Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film”), Stam suggests (317). Today one can watch films in planes, airports, bars, or using portable DVD players or notebooks on the train, bus, or in the car. To make up for this change in the perception of the spectator, the new kind of cinema utilizes the latest sound innovations and digital technologies in creating “a ‘sound and light show’ cinema of sensation” (*ibid.*) in movie theaters. This new cinema is “reminiscent less of classical Hollywood than of video games, music video, and amusement park rides. [...] the spectator is ‘in’ the image rather than confronted by it” (*ibid.*). This means that the main goal of blockbuster, high-budget films today is to excite spectators’ sensation instead of concentrating on narrative. Verisimilitude, or the creation of a feasible impression of reality through narrative consistency, is not the primary task of this kind of cinema. Instead, the spectator must be dragged into the action-packed, fast-paced, and vertiginously spectacular and computer-generated whirl of imagery.

This new type of cinema is often referred to as *Hollywood 2.0*, after James Daly’s article of the same title, published in *Wired* in 1997. The term alludes, on the one hand, to never-ending “upgradings of computer software” (Stam 322) because even the most advanced software become obsolete quickly; on the other hand, however, it refers to “Web 2.0,” representing the shift on the function of the World Wide Web that now focuses on the user and the functionality of websites rather than on the bells and whistles signaled by embedded flash animations and other visual extras that hinder the fast access to actual content. What is important to see in this terminology is not that Hollywood film technology is “upgraded” from



film to film, but rather that technology is no longer the aim: it is the means by which spectacle and sound can be enhanced (Daly 1997). According to Stam, the new technological input impacts both the production and the aesthetics of film:

The introduction of digital media has led to the use of computer animation in *Toy Story* and of CGI special effects in *Jurassic Park*. Morphing [visual transformation of faces, for example] is used to interrogate essentialist racial differences (for example, in Michael Jackson's *Black or White*), in an aesthetic that emphasizes similarities across difference rather than the graphic conflicts of Eisensteinian montage. [...] In mainstream film, computer-generated sequences appeared in *Star Trek II* (1983), while computer-generated chapters appeared in *Terminator II* (1991). (322)

By the utilization of the new media in the cinema, analog images captured long ago, can be combined with synthesized ones to produce so-called "threshold encounters" (323): impossible encounters between the living and the dead. Thus Elton John can meet Louis Armstrong, and Natalie Cole can sing with her father in video clips. The past is no longer solid and static: a seven-minute Swiss film, entitled *Rendezvous à Montreal* (1987), for example, is a computer-generated film which presents a threshold encounter, a date, between Marilyn Monroe and Humphrey Bogart (*ibid.*). The new ways of computer-enhanced, digital film productions require new theoretical approaches that take into consideration the interaction of all layers of a cinematic production, including sound, image, and language in a new media environment.

While trends and theoretical grids in film theory attempt to get grips on the radically changed situation of the cinema, in a cybernetic, "digitized" update of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, Henry Jenkins, in "The Work of Theory in the Age of Digital Transformation" (1999), calls attention to the emerging field of so-called "digital theory.":

Digital Theory may address anything from the role of CGI effects in Hollywood blockbusters to new systems of communication (the Net), new genres of entertainment (the computer game), new styles of music (techno) or new systems of representation (digital photography or virtual reality). (qtd. in Stam, 318)

While Benjamin tackled the issue of the mechanical mass reproduction of works of art and its cultural implications concerning authenticity (cf. Chapter One, "Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film," on this issue), Jenkins shifts to address the role and task of theory in an age where mass production is not mechanic, but digital. Hardware machinery is replaced by software, thus reproduction lost its material basis and it is still open to debate how a digital product is able to retain a specific cult value and "aura." The advent of digital theory as a potential alternative to earlier film theories, and the changes in digital media production, however, do not mean the end of the cinema. On the contrary, according to Stam, the present state of the cinematic medium, especially in terms of representation and aesthetics, closely resembles the early stages of film. "Then, as now, film 'neighbored' with

a wide spectrum of other simulation devices," writes Stam, and "film's pre-eminent position among media arts seemed neither inevitable nor clear" (ibid.). In the history of film, cinematic technology developed alongside scientific experiments, competed with sideshows and other popular forms of entertainment (cf. Chapter One, "Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film"); today, the cinema must compete with "home-shopping, video games, and CD-ROMs" (319) among many other new media formats.

According to Stam, the new media incorporate all previous media, be it printed, aural, or visual (ibid.), whereby the boundaries among them get blurred. The question of the auteur or the issue of auteurism, as the case of individual creation, "becomes even less likely: in a situation where multimedia creative artists depend on an extremely diversified network of media producers and technical experts" (ibid.). It is also true, however, it has never been easier to become an auteur: anyone equipped with a PC that features webcam and has Internet connection is able to produce his or her own films, videos, photos, or netart. Ways of producing digital images even by individuals brought about a crisis in the belief in the visual ("seeing is believing"), as images are no longer connected to solid substances and are susceptible for digital manipulation (Mitchell 57). In the new media environment, in a more and more virtual age, "[t]he image is no longer a copy but rather acquires its own life and dynamism within an interactive circuit, freed of the contingencies of location shooting, weather conditions, and so forth" (Stam 319).

The issue of *virtuality* is by no means new and is not an invention of the twentieth century. Mirzoeff defines virtuality as "an image or space that is not real but appears to be" (91). Virtual spaces are, for example, virtual reality and the cyberspace, but also include the telephone, the television, or earlier, proto-cinematic inventions. The stereoscope, described in Chapter One, for example, offers a passive reception of virtuality: the two images that interact in creating a three-dimensional setting in which the "view did not gradually recede, as in a perspective painting, but seemed set back in layers that resolved into a foreground, middleground and background" (94). Even when it helped the impression of architectural views, the background part often seemed ethereal, not realistic. The most popular stereoscopic show was when the images of sets of cards depicted foreign cities and landscapes. "The stereoscopic tourist" (ibid.) could "travel" anywhere around the globe without changing his or her physical whereabouts: the most often "visited" virtual places were major American and European cities, and famous sites in the Middle East and Africa. The American critic Oliver Wendell Holmes, for example, found himself in "a dream-like exaltation in which we seem to leave the body behind us and sail away into one strange scene after another, like disembodied spirits" (Batchen qtd. in Mirzoeff, 94) similarly to phantasmagoria shows (cf. Chapter One, "Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film"). Holmes' description is basically that of a virtual space; moreover, as Mirzoeff argues, "while remaining aware that he was in fact seated in his chair also seems to anticipate the invention of cinema" (94–5).

This rather passive experience of virtuality remained the only available form of virtual reality until the introduction of computer-generated environments although, as Timothy Leary argued, “[m]ost Americans have been living in Virtual Reality since the proliferation of television. All cyberspace will do is make the experience interactive instead of passive” (Friedberg 1993, 144). The situation is not that simple, however, as Mirzoeff argues, because the move from passive to active involvement in virtual reality transforms the user. This transformation affects the levels of the human body and of the self:

Virtual domains seem to be one example of the perception that the body need not stop at the skin but can be an open and complex structure. Virtual environments can thus be liberating for those with motor disabilities in allowing all users equal freedom of movement. For deaf people, cyberspace is at present one domain where no one can tell if you can hear. The proliferation of close-captioning devices, email, fax and TDD [Telecommunication device for the deaf] machines has allowed many deaf people a far greater degree of interaction with the hearing world than was previously possible. [...] For the writer Temple Gradin, who has autism, the Internet is a metaphor for her mind: “I talk Internet talk because there is nothing out there closer to how I think.” As such experiences multiply, many are wondering what personal identity will come to mean in a virtual society. (111)

The surface of the body was previously considered as a firm boundary between subjective experience and external reality. With the arrival of virtual reality the frontier rather seems to be an ever-changing passageway between the two domains, “a fluid and hybrid borderland between the two” (116). According to Mirzoeff, what virtual reality does is not more than pointing out the “surreal” quality in modern definitions of the body, as there can be “no norms against which people can reliably be measured” (117). This view is echoed in Elizabeth Grosz’s study of the perceptions of the human body across disciplines, according to which no discrepancy can be seen between

the “real,” material body on the one hand and its various cultural and historical representations on the other. [...] These representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such. [...] As an essential internal condition of human bodies, a consequence of perhaps their organic openness to cultural competition, bodies must take the social order as their productive nucleus. Part of their own “nature” is an organic or ontological “incompleteness” or lack of finality, an amenability to social completion, social ordering and organization. (Grosz xi)

According to Grosz’s argument, there is no way one could inhabit a “purely natural body” (Mirzoeff 117) as the notion of the body is always already caught up in the web of cultural and historical definitions. In virtual reality, bodily issues are present to the extent users allow them to be virtualized. Interestingly, however, whereas the earliest virtual community spaces, such as the widely popular Multi-User Domains (MUD), offered the freedom to adopt or create “new forms of sexual and gender identities,” even in the highly progressive MUD, called

“LambdaMOO, most characters present[ed] themselves as stereotypes from heterosexual masculine imagination” (107). While MUDs were originally text-based interfaces, today’s technology makes it possible to form social networks that use real-time video channels, image sharing, and possibilities to create three-dimensional virtual persona. The cinema also takes advantage of the digital technology involved in virtual identity formations – mainly in its visual capacity, in creating fully digital and virtual characters to cast them in films as actors, actresses, or animals.

According to Stam, the appearance and expansion of the new technologies in cinematic production offer new possibilities for realism (discussed at length in Chapter One, “Encounters of the First Kind: Once Upon a Time in Film”) and for what he terms *irrealism*, as well, in stylistic aspects (320). Irrealism, for Stam, is the product of new technologies that “facilitate more dizzyingly persuasive and ‘engulfing’ forms of ‘total cinema’ such as IMAX spectacles” (ibid.). The culmination of this experience is virtual reality, in which users interface with three-dimensional computer-generated environments with the help of special devices, reaching levels of the impression of reality never experienced before. In virtual reality, according to Stam, “the flesh-and-blood body lingers in the real world while computer technology projects” the virtual subject “into a terminal world of simulations” (ibid.).

Barry Levinson’s 1994 film, *Disclosure*, starring Michael Douglas and Demi Moore, depicts this situation and makes it a central topic in the plot. The film tells the story of middle-aged executive Tom Sanders (played by Douglas) at a Seattle software firm, who is engaged in designing a new, visualized data retrieval system utilizing 3D virtual reality, called the “Arcamax drive.” Sanders is rumored to be in line for promotion but due to a management shake-up, he loses the management position to Meredith Johnson (Demi Moore). Meredith sexually assaults Tom in an after-hours office meeting, and the following day claims to have been raped by Tom – only to weaken his position at the firm, and to get rid of her potential rival. However, Tom wins the prosecution of the sexual harassment charge because Meredith chose to make her “attack” at the moment Tom gained access to a friend’s answering machine via his mobile phone. The answering machine recorded the whole encounter, especially Tom’s objections as response to Meredith’s advances. In fact, Meredith’s real plan was from the beginning to out-source the production of the drive assembly project to a Malaysian firm, whose manual assembly of the Arcamax would result in loss of its efficiency. To prove his ability and restore his shaken respectability in front of his colleagues, Tom starts to uncover details of Meredith’s plan, and in the peak moment of the film, he encounters her in the virtual reality environment of the Arcamax. While Meredith busily erases the incriminating files, Tom attempts to retrieve the necessary data from back-up files. The final evidence against Meredith is then a video clip from Malaysian television showing her in the middle of negotiations with her Asian partners. What is interesting in the virtual reality sequence of the film is that the database of the central computer is visualized as an everyday office prop: Tom opens drawers,

hard-copy files, reads texts, flips pages, looks at photos – all simulated, while providing him (and the spectator) with the experience of really having been at the heart of the database leaving the physical body outside the system.

The Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* trilogy can be seen as an extension of this idea: Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) and his followers leave their bodies in the real world, connected to the computer by cables, while fighting agents and "whatnot" in a virtually generated symbolic network called Matrix. The trick of the film – and a negative prophecy for virtual reality – is that virtuality is not really independent of and disconnected from reality: death in the Matrix equals death in reality, as well. When Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss) is shot at the beginning of *Matrix Reloaded*, the second part of the trilogy, the vital signals of her physical body cease to support her virtual existence until Neo (Keanu Reeves) saves her life in the Matrix. Also, when Neo stops the real-life sentinels at the end of *Matrix Reloaded*, his virtual power seems to be injected into physical reality – which almost costs his life.

A similar infusion (or confusion) of virtual and physical reality can be seen in the recent cyber-craze called *Second Life*. *Second Life* is a more advanced version of MUDs, but with a graphical interface. Users are given a "second life," a virtual life, in which they are allowed to "create themselves" and participate in a computer-generated world where they can buy, love, work, or die similarly to reality. Today, all the companies whose potential customer profile consists of the second life generation have already opened virtual retail outlets in *Second Life*; moreover, gigs and various art performances scheduled in this virtual world are also advertised all around the real world (several star bands of the 1980s, Duran Duran among them, plan their "return" via the interface and virtual reality of the *Second Life*).

Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995) foreshadowed a world in which virtual reality enters our lives in disturbing ways. In the film, virtual reality headgears are connected to brain parts to send impulses directly to the brain so that virtual stimulation can result in physical excitation. It is through this excitation that a virtual and imaginary space is created in which pre-recorded scenes are played and replayed endlessly. Manipulation and black-marketing of virtual image sequences, however, exploit the defenselessness of those addicted to this kind of stimulation and ruin their lives. It is only the same trick of image manipulation in the virtual space that the protagonist (Ralph Fiennes) can get his freedom back in the real life, completely quitting the use of virtual reality stimulants thence. While not connected to the brain directly, similar viewing experience is adopted by Justin.tv, called "lifecasting," which means that a person wears a mobile camera twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and broadcasts his or her life via the World Wide Web. While with the virtual reality headgears in *Strange Days* communal experience was out of question, lifecasting makes it possible to form a community of users who can not only watch and follow the everyday routine of the lifecaster, but can also interact with him or her: anyone can send messages, post blog entries – even new user channels can be created to enhance a social network experience.

As Stam argues, “[f]or cyber-enthusiasts, virtual reality expands the reality effect exponentially by switching the viewer from a passive to a more interactive position” (320). This also means the possibility for identity play, in which the real-life identity comprised of specific gender, race, and class can be enhanced or reworked. According to Stam, these types of virtual manipulations of identity transform “us all into what Walter Mitchell calls “morphing cyborgs capable of reconfiguring ourselves by the minute”” (320). However, this sense of freedom remains virtual indeed, as ideologically delimited power positions and even social strata remain intact to a certain extent: for example the *lingua franca* of the Internet, the main space for virtual communities, is English – even code languages such as HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) or XHTML (eXtensible Hypertext Markup Language), PHP (Hypertext Preprocessor), Javascript, and many others, use it as their basis. It means that even the code and the database structure that governs the visible surface is built up of a language, thus the World Wide Web retains the textual interface used in the cultural interface of printed material. Even the *semantic web*, which is an expression that describes the language pool that not only humans but machines are capable of navigating and comprehending, is already infused with the grammar and semantics of a natural language that is not spoken by every user.

It has become commonplace to talk about the impact the new media technology has had on our everyday lives. “[L]ess obvious, however, is the similar impact these technologies have had upon the [...] “sense” we have and make of those temporal and spatial coordinates that radically inform and orient our social, individual, and bodily existences,” writes Vivian Sobchack (67).

At this point in time in the United States, whether or not we go to the movies, watch television or music videos, own a video tape recorder/player, allow our children to play video and computer games, or write our academic papers on personal computers, we are all part of a moving-image culture and we live cinematic and electronic lives. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to claim that none of us can escape daily encounters – both direct and indirect – with the objective phenomena of motion picture, televisual, and computer technologies and networks of communication and texts they produce. Nor is it an extravagance to suggest that, in the most profound, socially pervasive, and yet personal way, these objective encounters transform us as subjects. (ibid.)

That is, the development of the technology of representation has recently changed not only the way we communicate and make sense of our own place in culture and history, but also the way we experience our “presence to the world, to ourselves, and to others” (ibid.). Our contemporary sense of temporality and spatiality has gone through a radical shift as a consequence of the developments in various cultural interfaces. The changes are, however, not completely independent of the cultural and social developments, for as Martin Heidegger reminds us, “[t]he essence of technology is nothing technological” (Heidegger 317). In other words, technological inventions never come to their “particular material specificity and function in a

neutral context for neutral effect” (Sobchack 68). It is only in this light that in “our now dominantly electronic (and only secondarily cinematic) culture” (ibid.), many people describe the working of their minds and bodies “in terms of computer systems and programs (even as they still describe and understand their lives as movies)” (ibid.). As a counterpart, computers, too, are usually described in terms of concepts related to the workings of the human mind and body (for example, a computer or software can be intelligent, and susceptible to viral infection). It is not surprising then that these metaphorical forms of life have made their way into popular cinematic imagination, embodied in the hybrid characters of cybernetic heroes as in, for example, *Robocop* (1987, dir. Paul Verhoeven) or *Terminator II* (1991, dir. James Cameron). In her critical investigation of this phenomenon, Sobchack finds that

representational technologies of photography, the motion picture, video, and computer inform us [...] through the specific material conditions by which they latently engage our senses at the bodily level of what might be called our microperception, and then again through their explicit representational function by which they engage our senses textually at [a cultural, meaning-making] level of what might be called our macroperception. (68–9)

According to Don Ihde, *microperception* is what is commonly thought of as sensorial perception (seeing and hearing); *macroperception* is the cultural dimension, the hermeneutic, meaning-making context in which microperceptions are perceived by the individual (29). A simple example is the sensing of a smell: it is the cultural context that categorizes the particular smell as stink or pleasurable. As Sobchack explains, the interaction of the levels of micro- and macroperceptions brings about change in our everyday lives as users, since the different kinds of cultural interfaces, especially the cinematic and electronic ones, by mediating “our engagement with the world, with others, and with ourselves [...] have transformed us so that we currently see, sense, and make sense of ourselves as quite other than we were before them” (69).

In Žižek’s view, the awareness of mediation leads to “an attitude of external distance” (137), which is evident in the users’ play with false images in a virtual environment, such as MUD: “I know I’m not like that (brave, seductive...), but it’s nice, for time to time, to forget one’s true self and put on a more satisfying mask – this way you can relax, you are delivered of the burden of being what you are, of living with yourself and being fully responsible for it” (ibid.). However, this distanciation can also point at another extreme: by creating a special screen persona the user, perhaps not consciously, may “re-create” himself or herself to be “more himself or herself” than in his or her real life (ibid.). The created virtual identity can reveal aspects of the real identity of the user that he or she would not dare to admit in real life. According to Žižek, the reason for creating an identity in a virtual community like MUD or *Second Life*, which is so different from the real life identity of the user is necessary, as it helps

them outlive fantasies that would otherwise “bring about the disintegration of [the user’s] sense of personal identity” (ibid.).

Thus, the new media introduce new ways of identifications, which culminate in changes in the ways film theories have conceptualized the status and role of the spectator, as well. While the classical cinematic viewing situation involves a dark room full of spectators looking at the direction of the screen, the new media free the user from his or her constraints and offer alternative ways of watching a film or any other audio-visual data (smaller screens, well-lit places, not necessarily indoors). As Stam concludes, “it is no longer a question of Plato’s cave in which the spectator is trapped, but the information superhighway on which the spectator travels, presumably toward freedom” (321). The keyword, with the utilization of the dynamic screen that serves as an interface between user and cultural data, becomes “interactivity” instead of passivity, which described the spectator’s relation to the screen in theories of the cinema.

Manovich, however, finds the term “interactivity” not only too broad to be useful for theoretical discussion, but also tautological, as modern human-computer interfaces are “by definition interactive” and thus calling “computer media “interactive” is meaningless – it simply means stating the most basic fact about computers” (55). Manovich then points out that the issue of interactivity is not simple, and should be studied and understood more thoroughly, as “[a]ll classical, even more so modern, art is “interactive” in a number of ways” (56). Narrative gaps or so-called

[e]llipses in literary narration, missing details of objects in visual art, and other representational “shortcuts” require the user to fill in missing information. Theater and painting also rely on techniques of staging and composition to orchestrate the viewer’s attention over time, requiring her to focus on different parts of the display. With sculpture and architecture, the viewer has to move her whole body to experience the spatial structure. (ibid)

Manovich calls attention to the dangers of interpreting interactivity literally, that is, discussing the concept only in terms of “the physical interaction between a user and a media object (pressing a button, choosing a link, moving the body)” (57). Interactivity has psychological implications, too: filling in missing information or visual details, forming hypotheses during the time of indulging in the pleasures of experiencing art, recalling previously given information at the time of comprehending a story of a film, and also identifying with characters of a film, to mention but a few. Interactivity starts on this psychological level, and is then externalized: the logic and working idea of hyperlinks, for example, is nothing more than the externalization and objectification of “the process of association, often taken to be central to human thinking” (61). The notion of identification as an example of interactivity has further implications for the shift from spectator/viewer to user, as well:



The cultural technologies of an industrial society – cinema and fashion – asked us to identify with someone else’s bodily image. Interactive media ask us to identify with someone else’s mental structure. If the cinema viewer, male and female, lusted after and tried to emulate the body of the movie star, the computer user is asked to follow the mental trajectory of the new media designer. (ibid.)

A radical re-interpretation of the concept of interactivity is provided by Žižek, who offers “to supplement the fashionable notion of ‘interactivity’ with its shadow” and much more negative “notion of ‘interpassivity’” (111). Žižek shares Manovich’s opinion that it is “commonplace to emphasize how, with the new electronic media, the passive consumption of a text or a work of art is over” (ibid.). According to Žižek, the main focus and most often emphasized potential of the new media is the possibility for a large number of users to “break out of the role of the passive observer following the spectacle staged by others, and to participate actively not only in the spectacle itself, but more and more in establishing the very rules of the spectacle” (ibid.). This view, however, hides the more pessimistic side of interactivity, which Žižek calls *interpassivity*: the process that deprives the viewer of his or her passive satisfaction and enjoyment of the “show,” takes away the right of the viewer to do nothing but enjoy himself or herself in watching a film, for example. To illuminate this radical dimension of interpassivity, Žižek recalls that

almost every VCR [fan] who compulsively records hundreds of movies [...] is well aware that the immediate effect of owning a VCR is that one actually watches *fewer* films than in the good old days of a simple TV set without a VCR; one never has time for TV, so instead of losing a precious evening, one simply tapes the film and stores it for a future viewing (for which, of course, there is almost never time...). So although I don not actually watch films, the very awareness that the films I love are stored in my video library gives me a profound satisfaction and, occasionally, enables me simply to relax and indulge in the exquisite art of *far niente* – as if the VCR is in a way *watching them for me, in my place...* (112)

Inevitably, new types and forms of cultural interfaces have overtaken older, static, non-evolving interface techniques not only in terms of technology of representation, but also with regard to structuring and channeling information. According to Stam, the appearance of the hypertext shook the foundation “of the culture of the book” (325). According to the Encyclopedia Britannica Online, the *hypertext* (hyper- is the Greek term for “over” or “beyond”) is “the linking of related pieces of information by electronic connections in order to allow a user easy access between them.” The user can select a word from the text on display and “receive additional information pertaining to that word, such as a definition or related references within the text.” The hypertext offers multiple points of entry into the text, as opposed to the traditional linear texts that allow only one entry for the reader. In Stam’s view, this has positive implications for a decentralized “view of film, one that substitutes the image of infinite

passageways and pathways for the exclusivist logic of the ‘final word’” (ibid.). The hypertext is fundamentally based on “linking,” in a virtual domain where everything is just a click away from everything else. Stam envisions a cinema infused with the new media that “can help make relational connections across space and time: (1) temporal links between diverse periods; (2) spatial links across different regions; (3) disciplinary links between usually” separate fields of study; “and (4) discursive intertextual links between different media and discourses” (ibid.).

The changes in the technologies of new media will probably not leave the field of film theories intact. Newly emerging interdisciplinary studies of visual culture and digital theory incorporate and build upon earlier theories of the cinema, but they do it in a way to make their critical inquiries useful for the shifting and ever-changing terrain of contemporary cultural interfaces. The plurality characteristic of the new media and, consequently, of the new type of cinema is now becoming visible in film studies as well, as film theorists turn toward investigations of media phenomena in which film is just one, yet still important and culturally influential, component. As a result of critical inquiries and the multitude of potential approaches involved in the study of new forms of media,

theory is now less grand, a little more pragmatic, a little less ethnocentric, masculinist, and heterosexist, and a little less inclined toward overarching systems, drawing on a plurality of theoretical paradigms. [...] The question is not one of relativism or mere pluralism, but rather of multiple grids and knowledges, each of which sheds a specific light on the object studied. It is not a question of completely embracing the other theoretical perspective, but rather of acknowledging it, taking it into account, being ready to be challenged by it. (330)

Technically, the cinema has become embedded and encoded into various digital and cultural interfaces such as operation systems and all types of software. The cinematic image and the logic of filmic communication are continuously being redefined by the new media in their incorporating cinematic modes of representation. In turn, the new media is being fed back into new forms of cinematic expression. Filmmaking, participating in a cinematic culture is no longer the privilege of a chosen few or of an industry: as Manovich says, along with culture and cultural theories, it has become “open source” (333). We have perhaps arrived to an age when, to rephrase the title of Dziga Vertov’s film *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), a person can do much in the virtual arena of the new media – even without a movie camera.

## Keywords

new media, cultural interface, human-computer interface (HCI), virtuality, virtual reality, microperception, macroperception, World Wide Web, semantic web, hypertext, screen, classical screen, dynamic screen, interactivity, interpassivity, Hollywood 2.0, user

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**Hyperlinks referred to in the text:**

Joost: <http://www.joost.com>

Justin.tv: <http://www.justin.tv>

Second Life: <http://www.secondlife.com>

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com>



# Epilogue

“Hit any page to continue.”

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"The monographs published so far cover wide areas of English Studies, such as literary, cultural, and historical investigations into various geographical areas of the Anglophone world from Britain to the United States. This book by Réka Cristian and Zoltán Dragon is groundbreaking in more than one respect. First of all, they explore a field as yet untouched in the series, although one that is increasingly important and growing in currency: Film Studies. Secondly, while the book shows the unmistakable characteristics of original research and offers valuable points to scholars of film theory, the authors have managed to shape their material in such an easily digestible form that the book can also serve as a university textbook. They very modestly claim that this is really a BA-level textbook, but I would suggest that the complexity of the ideas discussed also makes it useful on the graduate level.

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Institute of English and American Studies, University of Szeged



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