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# When Viewers Drift Off: A Brief Phenomenology of Cinematic Daydreaming

*Julian Hanich*

## Abstract

Inspired by Jean-Pierre Meunier and expanding some of his original ideas, this article looks at cinematic daydreaming as an act of consciousness viewers are sometimes engaged in over and above the perception of the film. After defining the term 'cinematic daydreaming,' I distinguish three relations the daydream can have to the film. Subsequently, I offer a concrete description of the cinematic daydreaming experience by focusing on five aspects: (1) the degrees of controllability, (2) the declining attentiveness to the perceptual surroundings, (3) the attenuated power of the film, (4) the shift into a more private mode, and (5) the distinction between *intrusive* daydreams that interfere with the film and *extensive* daydreams that enrich it.

**Keywords:** Viewing experience; Jean-Pierre Meunier; mind-wandering; ruminating; experimental film; slow cinema

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Psychologists claim that we spend up to 50% of our waking life daydreaming, and on average we experience 2000 daydream segments per day.<sup>2</sup> Even when we are involved in maximally demanding tasks with high stakes, we reportedly devote a minimum rate of 10% to daydreaming.<sup>3</sup> Although we should be skeptical about such exact quantifications when it comes to our mental life, these astonishingly high numbers might tempt us to assume that daydreaming also occurs when we watch a film. And why not? Imagine you watch Hou-Hsiao Hsien's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003) or Godfrey Reggio's

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*Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) and all of a sudden you realize – and maybe feel a bit surprised, annoyed, guilty, or embarrassed upon discovering it – that you have spent a considerable amount of time in what Freud once called your mind's *private theater*. Involuntarily, the inner magician of your mind has conjured up for you an effortless flow of visual memories and imaginings: your magnificent trip to Taiwan or the US, the place where you want to spend your next holiday, the conference trip that you still need to book, the heated discussion you might have with your friends about the film... Your perception of the film momentarily receded to the background of attention while you were immersed in your own daydream.

Instances like these, which seem to me much more common than usually admitted or even realized, have not yet received the attention they deserve in film studies. Inspired by Jean-Pierre Meunier's *The Structures of the Film Experience* (*Les Structures de l'expérience filmique: L'identification filmique*), I will investigate daydreaming as an act of consciousness that viewers sometimes are engaged in over and above the perception of the film. The article does not provide an exegesis of Meunier's work or an excavation of the origins of his thought, but is meant to showcase how some of Meunier's original ideas can be expanded. As Meunier has shown us, our filmic consciousness is neither always completely bound to the film, nor is it a static affair. What makes his book so valuable is that it points to the protean character of filmic consciousness, where the film may be the center of the viewer's attention in one moment (fiction consciousness) and a mere instigator for memories in another (home-movie consciousness). My discussion of cinematic daydreaming will yield further evidence for how dynamic and ever-changing the viewer's consciousness is: we do not at all remain locked in one mental state while watching a film but often drift off. It speaks to the clear-sightedness of Meunier's little book that this was anything but consensus when it appeared in 1969, a year that marks the onset of a period when the dominant strand within film theory began to describe the film spectator as a dupe essentially dominated by the medium.

Almost 50 years later, the picture has changed: Meunier and other film phenomenologists like Vivian Sobchack have tremendously enriched our understanding of what goes on in our *conscious*, albeit often *pre-reflective* experience of a film. The stream of consciousness – to use an old term by William James again *en vogue* among philosophers of mind – is in a constant flux and is remarkably multilayered. Fiction consciousness, documentary consciousness, and home-movie consciousness can fluctuate; emotions, moods, affects, and various bodily sensations may flow into each other; different forms of time, space, and image consciousness can take turns;

perceiving, imagining, remembering, and – yes – daydreaming might co-occur or alternate... While film phenomenologists admit that many facets of the film experience occur at the margins of consciousness (partly because they are too habituated to attract meta-awareness), they insist that these facets are nevertheless part of our conscious experience. Not only can they be described – only a proper description allows us to gain a fuller picture of the richness of the viewing experience. Not least, a phenomenological description raises awareness of what we rarely reflect on. Daydreaming, I argue, is precisely such a hardly-ever-noticed act of consciousness.

To be sure, the daydream has been a recurring topos in the history of film. Take the Surrealists' 'irrational enlargement' of the film wherein the viewer does not follow the 'rational' demands of comprehension and understanding, but freely follows a spontaneous chain of associations initiated by a seemingly irrelevant detail of a film usually suppressed by the film's demands on sense-making.<sup>4</sup> As Adrian Martin claims, for the Surrealists, the term 'irrational enlargement' is "really just their fancy name for daydreaming."<sup>5</sup>

Theorists have also *compared* film to daydreaming or *drawn an analogy* between the spectator and the daydreamer. In their influential book *Movies: A Psychological Study* from 1950, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, for instance, claimed that films are the common daydreams of a culture.<sup>6</sup> In his *Theory of Film* from 1960, Siegfried Kracauer oscillates between the terms "dream" and "daydream": films supposedly lower the viewer's consciousness and thus invite dreaming, but they also cater to the desires and daydreams of their audiences; they can look like dreams and contain dreamlike elements that send the audience dreaming, but they also make the viewers enter episodes of daydreaming.<sup>7</sup> Last but not least, we may cite Christian Metz who, in *The Imaginary Signifier* (1977), claims that the flux of the fiction film and its diegetic character resemble our daydreams, and some autobiographical or narcissistic films, which derive directly from the daydreams of their authors, are even more like reveries. Moreover, the daydreamer and the viewer, due to the "relative lowering of wakefulness," find themselves in comparable psychic states. And finally, Metz also diagnoses, in the "social life of our age," there is a "functional competition" between the fiction film and the daydream, where the film is often victorious.<sup>8</sup>

Inversely, we also find psychologists who have compared daydreaming to watching a film: the daydreamer is likened to a "devout cinemagoer" and a melodramatic daydream is described as "a prototypical filmic tear-jerker;" the daydreamer is seen as "camera, film, projector, and screen" at

the same time.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, such comparisons and analogies will not occupy me in this essay: I presuppose that watching a film is not *identical* to daydreaming and whether it is *similar* to it is a question of debate.

Instead, I will take a brief but close look at the *viewer's experience* of cinematic daydreaming: those *passive* moments when, in the words of Daniel Yacavone, "our attention and concentration wanes, and we mentally 'wander away' from a film and its demands" or when we *actively* start to 'build castles in the air' by imagining or contemplating a chain of vivid scenes related or unrelated to the film.<sup>10</sup> Note, however, that I do not want to overvalue cinematic daydreaming as a positive act of resistance along the lines of Benjaminian distraction or to postulate it as a preferable mode of film-watching. My account of the cinematic daydream aims at a detailed *description*, not a normative *prescription*. As Meunier puts it: "phenomenology is above all a method aimed at a description of our immediate experience. Renouncing, at least provisionally, the theoretical explanations that reason or scientific intelligence have been able to construct, it represents a return to the lived experience of phenomena [...]" (p. 40).

Naturally, we can expect considerable differences in daydreaming proneness among individual viewers. For instance, age seems to be an important influencing factor: psychologist Eric Klinger reports findings which show that both vividness and frequency reach their peak during the teens and early twenties and then gradually decrease.<sup>11</sup> However, these individual differences are not something I pursue here. My brief phenomenology will focus on cases in which a cinematic daydream actually occurs.

## II. Cinematic Daydreaming Defined

Before answering the question *what is it like* to experience a daydream while watching a film, however, we first need to define the contours of the concept. As late as 2009, Klinger noted that "there has clearly not been a consensual definition."<sup>12</sup> More recently, analytic philosophers like Fabian Dorsch, Zachary Irving, and Evan Thompson have tried to conceptualize daydreaming and mind-wandering more clearly.<sup>13</sup> While I have profited from their conceptual rigor, I have opted for a somewhat wider usage of the term. In what follows, 'cinematic daydreaming' will serve as an umbrella term for a host of related phenomena that can occur while watching a film such as mind-wandering, ruminating, fantasizing, being lost in thought, building castles in the air, drifting off, reverie, and absent-mindedness. The reason for uniting this range of different, if similar, phenomena under the umbrella

term ‘cinematic daydreaming’ derives from the fact that I primarily want to make room for the Meunier-inspired intuition that the film experience is not film-devoted pure and simple. However, it is certainly possible – at a later stage even desirable – that different variants or subtypes of cinematic daydreaming should be distinguished phenomenologically.<sup>14</sup>

As a working definition, I suggest defining cinematic daydreaming as an act of consciousness in which a viewer – voluntarily or involuntarily – enters into a chain of sensory presentifications (*Vergegenwärtigungen*) of something that is either absent or non-existent, and which partly removes attention from the immediate perceptual surroundings of the viewer and thus draws attention, however slightly, away from the film: the imagination-filled perception of the film that philosophers in the wake of Husserl have called “image consciousness” is complemented or even pushed aside by other forms of consciousness like mind-wandering, ruminating, free-floating imagining, etc. Importantly, the chain of sensory presentifications involved in these other acts of consciousness is *unguided* by the film (even if it can certainly be *related* to it) and is thus at one remove from the film’s *perceptual* affordances.

The cinematic daydream may be a brief burst of a few seconds, but it can also occur in an extended fashion. In either case, it either ends *smoothly*, when the daydream has run its course, or *abruptly*, when it is somehow interrupted. It can involve a *pleasurable* form of free-floating imagining, but it can also involve *displeasure* and annoyance when the daydream comes in the form of a worrying rumination or is considered, afterward, as having interrupted the film experience. It can involve the past, the future, hypothetical things, but also the here and now of the viewing environment – for example, when the erotic atmosphere of the cinema inspires a viewer to fantasize.

What is more, the temporal dynamics of cinematic daydreaming implies a chain of imaginings, memories, or thoughts – often (but not necessarily always) moving from one topic to another.<sup>15</sup> Take Eric Rohmer’s *Cahiers du Cinéma* review of Rossellini’s *Voyage to Italy* (1954), in which the future *nouvelle vague* director remembers how his “imagination was wandering about” and how he felt plunged “into very absurd reflections”:

I confess that I have, while I was watching the film, made reflections far removed from the drama itself; in the manner of a spectator who, entering the cinema between two meetings, and more concerned with his business than the show, is surprised to try to read the time on the watch that an actor wears on his wrist.<sup>16</sup>

Moving freely from fiction consciousness to documentary consciousness and beyond, Rohmer recognizes the patterns on George Sanders's jacket, wonders about the actor's age and how much older he has grown since *Rebecca* (1940) and *All About Eve* (1950), reflects on the haircut of Ingrid Bergman, considers the different structures of the skulls in the catacombs, and ponders new methods of archeology.

Note, however, that it is not easy to draw a strict line between daydreaming and imagining.<sup>17</sup> In my broad understanding, *free-floating* imagining should be considered a form of daydreaming, whereas imagining *steered from outside* is not. The latter would be the case when someone tells you to imagine something, when a book guides your imagination, or when a film makes you mentally visualize something. It is easier to distinguish daydreaming from other mental states. Dreams, hypnagogia, fever dreams, hallucinations, deliberate problem-solving thoughts, and memories must not be confused with daydreams (even though memories, for instance, can certainly become part of daydreams).<sup>18</sup>

### III. The Cinematic Daydream and Its Relation to the Film

The exact contents of spectators' daydreams – *what* they daydream about while watching a film – are too varied and idiosyncratic to dwell on here. It seems that, in principle, everything a person may daydream in everyday life can also become the content of a daydream during a film. More relevant for a phenomenology of cinematic daydreaming is the daydream's relation to the film. Here, we can broadly distinguish three types.

First, the daydream is *directly* linked to the film: just like Rohmer in the example above, the viewer daydreams *about* the film – its narrative, its characters, its world, its creators, its actors, its special effects. A viewer may briefly stray away from narrative absorption and daydream about how Max Ophüls and his cameraman Christian Matras filmed the opening sequence shot of *La Ronde* (1950): how must the set have looked to move the camera so elegantly for so long and how did Ophüls and Matras interact with their actors and extras during the shooting of the scene?

A viewer may also engage in a reverie about what it would be like to live in the world depicted in Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni's documentary *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003): what would he do when confronted with – what for him comes across as – the monotonies and hardships of a monadic life in the Mongolian Gobi region?<sup>19</sup> Similarly, when I recently watched *Koyaanisqatsi*, I caught myself wondering about the people whose





Fig. 14: The opening scene of Max Ophüls's *La Ronde* with Anton Walbrook.

intense, quizzical faces Ron Fricke's camera captures in slow-motion on the streets of New York: what has happened to these people in the intermittent 35 years, are they still alive, and what do they look like today? (I also came to realize that Roland Barthes had asked similar questions when looking at André Kertész's photograph of little Ernest from 1931: "Is it possible that Ernest is still alive today: but where? how? What a novel!")<sup>20</sup>

However, as much as these instances of daydreaming are linked to the film, it is important to distinguish them from what I have elsewhere called "bounded imagination" (and what Elaine Scarry dubs "imagination-under-authorial-instruction"): moments when the film seems to invite – or even force – us to imagine something it does not show, but strongly suggests.<sup>21</sup> In this case, the intertwining of the viewer's act of consciousness and the film as *aesthetic object* are differently structured, since the viewer's imagining seems necessary to concretize the film fully and thus to turn it from a work of art into an aesthetic object (in the sense defined by the phenomenological aesthetics of, for instance, Roman Ingarden).<sup>22</sup>

Second, the daydream can be *indirectly* linked to the film: the film somehow *incites* the daydream, but its narrative, characters, world, creators, actors, or special effects do not themselves play a role in it. Think of a viewer watching a sadly moving melodrama that sparks thoughts about the future



Fig. 15: Some passersby in Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*.

death of the viewer's grandmother, father, brother, or daughter: the viewer's thoughts are carried away and he begins to daydream about the funeral, the speech of a close relative, the deep feeling of loss wearing him down and so on. Or think of a young viewer who watches a horror film alone at home while his parents are out for a party: the film turns the dark living room into an unsafe, threatening place that sparks fearful daydreams of burglars outside the window, a looming monster in the creaking wardrobe, and an ensuing fight for survival. Not least, the politics of an *engagé* documentary such as *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) or *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) may all of a sudden remind a viewer that he always wanted to be more active in environmental matters or anti-racist campaigns, and he begins to think about what steps to take the following days.

The third type of relation comprises all those daydreams that are *not at all* linked to the film, when the viewer is carried away into foreign territory entirely unconnected to the movie.<sup>23</sup> Consider this: you start watching the film after a meeting in which you made a stupid mistake, or you had a heated debate with your best friend in which he insulted you in an unusual way. You try to focus on what is happening on the screen, but your thoughts keep drifting off, wandering back to that mistake or insult and the way you *should* have behaved. Or, while watching Andy Warhol's *Haircut* (1963) or *Eat* (1964), your mind begins to wander: from the dinner afterwards ... to the Christmas presents you have to buy ... to the tennis match that you want to watch on Friday to ... alas ... many other things. While we might claim that *Haircut* or *Eat*'s monotony in some sense 'incites' a flight from boredom via fancy (the film would thus be indirectly related to the daydream after

all), it may be better to speak of the film as the *reason* for daydreaming and not its cause. The viewer's daydream occurs in order to escape the film's monotony, but the film does not set it off.

Meunier, for his part, has shown us how the viewer's dependence on the filmic images varies between the filmic modes: while the home movie makes us look *beyond* the screen to existing, previously experienced reality, the non-existing, autonomous reality of the fiction film demands that our attention is focused *on* the screen. Analogously, cinematic daydreaming can be linked directly or indirectly to the film, or not at all.

#### IV. The Experience of the Cinematic Daydream

Let us now move on to a more concrete description of the experience of cinematic daydreaming. I will focus on five aspects: (1) the degrees of controllability, (2) the declining attentiveness to the perceptual surroundings, (3) the attenuated power of the film, (4) the shift into a more private mode, and (5) intrusive daydreams that interfere with the film vs. extensive daydreams that enrich it.

##### 1. Degrees of Controllability: Active vs. Passive Daydreaming

Cinematic daydreaming can be *actively* and *voluntarily* initiated and pursued. Take the example from *La Ronde*: precisely because I am actively following the film, I am seriously interested in finding out how Ophüls and Matras have staged the opening scene. I actively, with a certain effort and multitaskingly, pursue these thoughts and visually presentify to me the potential scenarios in a comparatively vivid way. Hence, my presentifications are not 'gray' inferences or abstract hypotheses, but 'colorful' daydreams that accompany my perception of the film. Not everyone would agree with such an inclusive position, though. Dieter Lohmar, for instance, argues that, while daydreams can be actively *initiated*, we subsequently have to give ourselves over passively to their unfolding.<sup>24</sup> Others, like Elaine Scarry, define daydreams as voluntary: "Indeed it would be hard to see – given its fadedness and other failings – why we would devote ourselves to this ghostly practice if it did not have the virtue of the voluntary."<sup>25</sup>

However, Scarry's position seems too one-sided to me: it flies in the face of the worrying and ruminating daydreams that keep creeping into our ongoing activities involuntarily. Surely, daydreams can also *passively* and

*involuntarily* overcome me. In this case, the mind seems to take over from the self without me realizing it at first. Zachary Irving draws attention to grammatical constructions we use in which the subject is not a human agent: “we would say ‘my mind was wandering’ or ‘Luke’s mind wandered’ rather than ‘I was mind-wandering’ or ‘Luke mind-wandered.’ [...] when our minds wander, we don’t feel responsible for our thoughts; our minds are what wanders, not us.”<sup>26</sup> Here, the daydreams occur effortlessly and unguided, and I glide into them unknowingly: “Frequently we realize that we are engaging in these acts only *after* we have been indulging in them for some time. By a sort of psychic repercussion, we find ourselves caught in their midst – *in medias imagines*, as it were,” Edward Casey writes.<sup>27</sup> Frequently, such moments of ‘waking up’ from the daydream come with an emotional response. We may be *surprised* or *annoyed* by our own reverie when we realize we have missed important parts of the film (as, in contrast to reading a book, we cannot go back, at least when we sit in a cinema where the movie progresses relentlessly). Alternatively, we may feel *guilty* or *embarrassed*, especially when a friend or neighbor nudges us, whispers to us, and points out something on the screen we have overlooked because we were too deeply sunk in our own daydreams.

## 2. Declining Attentiveness to the External Perceptible Surroundings

As Irving notes, daydreaming is a *conscious* experience: “This is intuitive: when a person’s mind wanders, the lights don’t go out. Rather, she experiences a stream of memories, imaginings, inner speech etc.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Gaston Bachelard observes that the “night dream is a dream without a dreamer. On the contrary, the dreamer of reverie remains conscious enough to say: it is I who dream the reverie, happy with this leisure in which I no longer have the task of thinking.”<sup>29</sup> Since the daydream occupies consciousness at least to some degree, the daydreamer becomes less aware of the perceptible surroundings: even though we can certainly watch a film and *concurrently* fall into an episode of daydreaming, daydreaming always backgrounds perception, however minimally.

Here we can distinguish various degrees of visual intensity, of transparency or obliqueness: from the weak and vague daydream that allows you to ‘see through’ it to the strong and concrete type that almost fully ‘blocks’ your perception of the film (to a lesser degree, this is also the case for the *auditory* intensity of the daydream). Hence, the more the daydream dominates consciousness, the more the film is relegated to the fringes of

consciousness, even if one still ‘picks up’ visual (and auditory) information. With regard to filmic imagining, I have elsewhere spoken of episodes of ‘mental superimposition’ or ‘mental double-exposure.’<sup>30</sup> We can also utilize these metaphors for the daydream: the concurrent perception of filmic images and the daydream are, as it were, layered on top of each other. The more the film and the daydream are part of the field of consciousness the more we can say the viewer is engaged in a form of multitasking: watching the film and daydreaming at the same time. What is more, while daydreaming, the viewer is suspended between three different worlds: (a) the *physical* world of the cinema or any other viewing surrounding, (b) the *filmic* world (which may or may not be fictional), and (c) the *mental* world of the daydream. Depending on the strength of the daydream, the locatedness in these three worlds varies.

### 3. The Attenuated Power of the Film

Since daydreaming backgrounds perception, at least minimally, we experience the film as wielding much less power over us than in moments of intensified *absorption* (such as deep fictional *immersion* and awe-inspiring aesthetic *enthralment*).<sup>31</sup> In fact, cinematic daydreaming occurs in moments when the film seems to be bereft of its ‘grip’ over us. This can be for many reasons. First, the film *unintentionally* does not ‘captivate’ us any longer (or has not been ‘gripping’ to begin with) and our attention starts to drift off. Second, we can ‘wrest’ ourselves *actively* from the film by initiating an episode of daydreaming when we think this is more appropriate, or we are ‘torn away’ *passively* from the film by penetrating thoughts that interfere with the film experience. Third, the attenuated power of the film can also *intentionally* derive from its aesthetics, an aesthetics that does not want to ‘chain’ us to its narrative and style but grants us more freedom to drift off into daydreaming. Below, we will see how some experimental films seem to invite episodes of daydreaming, but we could also think of slow cinema. As Eric Rohmer remarks in his review, Rossellini’s film allowed him “absurd reflections [...] of which a more sustained tempo in the plot would not have left me the leisure.”<sup>32</sup>

This attenuated power of the film can be experienced as liberating, but it can also imply constraints and frustration. Not feeling guided and captivated by a film may result in disagreeable boredom; and when we seem to be under the ‘spell’ of our wandering mind, which strays away even though we *actually* would like to follow the film, we may regret the lack of power of the film.

#### 4. A Shift into Privacy

The daydream also implies an abandonment, however minimal, of the outside world and a shift into a more private realm. This aspect of *privacy* has two components. First, watching a film entails perceiving something that is *outside* of me. It is clearly located beyond myself, there on the screen. The daydream, instead, is experienced as much closer to me, almost ‘inside’ of me. As Bachelard puts it: “Truly inhabiting the whole volume of his space, the man of reverie is from anywhere *in* his world, in an *inside* which has no *outside*. It is not without reason that people commonly say that the dreamer is *plunged* in his reverie. The world no longer poses any opposition to him.”<sup>33</sup> To be sure, the talk of an ‘inside’ is not without its problems. What Edward Casey notes about imagining also goes for daydreaming: “Far from inhabiting a concrete setting, imagined possibilities are typically projected into a spatio-temporal limbo that is felt to be neither external *nor* internal to the imaginer.”<sup>34</sup> Still, the daydream is more private because we know that – unlike the perceivable images and sounds of the film – it is not available to others. The daydream constitutes a world decidedly *not* shared by others (hence the well-known feeling of being excluded from someone else’s world who is ‘lost in his thoughts’). There is no shared daydreaming of the same content.

Second, the daydream is also private in the sense that it is a world in some way connected to me and my own identity: it is filled with what *I* personally daydream about. Eric Klinger writes: “Most people view their daydreams as very private affairs that they feel less comfortable describing to other people than when they are describing their real experiences.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, this does not imply that one has fully lost contact with the here and now of one’s viewing surroundings. Unlike in dreaming proper, the film is relegated to the margins of consciousness at best, but it is still somehow ‘gleaming’ or ‘shimmering.’

Still, even in cases of film-related daydreaming, personal elements *from outside* the film itself ‘adhere’ to it, ‘cluster’ around its images, ‘push’ it from the center of consciousness: our *mundane* joys, hopes, concerns, worries or anxieties are invited into – or force themselves upon – our film experience.

#### 5. Intrusion vs. Extension of the Film Experience

Expressions like ‘seeing through’ the daydream, the daydream ‘blocking’ perception, or Casey’s *in medias imagines* hint at the intermediary character of daydreams: their in-betweenness. The daydream can therefore be

experienced – in retrospect – as an *intruder*: It is as if the daydream has pushed itself ‘between’ you and the film and has created a barrier for your smooth perception of the film. Take this not-so-unusual example. While you would like to focus on the film, your mind keeps drifting away to a potential revenge scenario: how can you pay back the massive annoyance of the person sitting behind you in the cinema, who answered your request to stop kicking against your chair with an extremely impertinent remark? You play through various possibilities to get even, from informing the cinema manager to throwing the content of your five-liter cup of popcorn at him. The more the daydream is experienced as intrusive, the more it will be considered as a form of distraction, almost like the annoying neighbor sitting behind you.

But there are two reasons why daydreaming may be experienced as quite the opposite of distraction and intrusion. First, from the viewer’s perspective, daydreaming may be very welcome. Think of drifting back to the extremely positive email you received before starting to watch the film and the pleasurable trains of thought it initiates for you. Hence, any negative definition of daydreaming as “an occurrence of thoughts [...] unrelated to the task being carried out at the moment of their occurrence,” as Stawarczyk et al. put it, must be rejected as too sweeping.<sup>36</sup> Instead, with Irving/Thompson, we can claim that “individuals switch tasks when their minds begin to wander.”<sup>37</sup> For the viewer-turned-daydreamer, the daydream thus becomes the main task carried out at the moment, before the film gains predominance again and the daydreamer transforms back into his role of focused viewer just an instant later. Or consider the case of an utterly boring moment during a film – the umpteenth action sequence in a superhero movie, for instance – wherein daydreaming can come as a momentary exit strategy from boredom’s imprisonment. This is another lesson to be learned from Meunier’s book: Just like the home-movie consciousness that “looks beyond the image, to the person-in-general that it depicts, in order to produce and maintain his existence even during the screening” (p. 88), the daydream consciousness leads the viewer beyond the image into a stream of private thoughts and imaginings. The former evokes the act of remembering, the latter the act of daydreaming.

Second, daydreaming may also be considered an intentional goal of the film – or at least one may feel legitimized and even encouraged to enter daydreaming episodes by the film’s aesthetics. Think of Paul Sharits and his flicker film *N:O:T:H:I:N:G* (1968): for Sharits, it was an explicit goal to let the viewer reach “totally new levels of awareness,” as he put it. He claims to have based the color development of the film on the Tibetan Mandala of

the Five Dhyani Buddhas “which is used in meditation to reach the highest level of inner consciousness”: “I am not at all interested in the mystical symbolism of Buddhism, only in its strong, intuitively developed imagistic power.”<sup>38</sup> While it is not clear what exactly Sharits means by “new levels of awareness,” “highest level of inner consciousness,” and “imagistic power” (the film is certainly close to the drug experiments of the 1960s and the counter-cultural interest in Buddhist meditation), we can assume that he would not have been averse to a daydreaming viewer.

In fact, we can create a whole list of canonical experimental films whose explicit purpose – or at least implicit invitation – seems to involve daydreaming: *Empire* (1964), *The Flicker* (1965), *Wavelength* (1967), *RR* (2007)... Some cases of slow cinema – for instance, films by Tsai Ming-Liang, Albert Serra, or Apichatpong Weerasethakul – equally seem to open themselves up to daydreaming viewers. These films ‘harness’ the viewer’s daydreams: the perception of the film is *extended* and *enriched* by the viewer’s drifting mind.<sup>39</sup> To round off this brief phenomenology of cinematic daydreaming, we could therefore distinguish between *intrusive* and *extensive* daydreams. On the one hand, there are reveries that lead us entirely *away* from the film into the mundane. On the other hand, we find daydreams that *extend* the world of the film – and thus immerse us even deeper in its world.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Weihong Bao, Daniel Fairfax, Christian Ferencz-Flatz, Adrian Martin, and Vivian Sobchack for helpful comments and suggestions.
2. Eric Klinger, “Daydreaming and Fantasizing: Thought Flow and Motivation,” in Keith D. Markman, William M.P. Klein, and Julie A. Suhr (eds.), *Handbook of Imagination and Mental Simulation* (New York: Psychology Press, 2009), pp. 225-239, here p. 228.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
4. The Surrealist Group, “Data Toward the Irrational Enlargement of a Film: *The Shanghai Gesture*,” in Paul Hammond (ed.), *The Shadow and Its Shadows: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema*, Third Edition, Revised and Expanded (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000), p. 121. See also Adam Lowenstein, *Dreaming of Cinema: Spectatorship, Surrealism, and the Age of Digital Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 20-23.
5. Personal conversation with the author.
6. Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites, *Movies: A Psychological Study* (Glencoe: Free Press 1950).
7. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).



8. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 132-136.
9. Quoted from: Hedwig Katzenberger, *Der Tagtraum: Eine phänomenologische und experimentelle Studie* (Munich: Reinhardt Verlag, 1969), pp. 26 and 45; James Morley, "The Private Theater: A Phenomenological Investigation of Daydreaming", *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 29 (1998), pp. 116-134, here p. 132.
10. Daniel Yacavone, *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 240.
11. Klinger, "Daydreaming and Fantasizing," p. 234.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
13. Fabian Dorsch, "Focused Daydreaming and Mind-Wandering," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 6 (2015), pp. 791-813; Zachary C. Irving, "Mind-Wandering Is Unguided Attention: Accounting for the 'Purposeful' Wanderer," *Philosophical Studies*, 173 (2016), pp. 547-571; Zachary C. Irving and Evan Thompson, "The Philosophy of Mind-Wandering," in Kalina Christoff and Kieran C. Fox (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spontaneous Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 87-96.
14. Analogously, we can see how subtypes of what Meunier rather broadly calls "home-movie consciousness" are distinguished and described in the contributions to this volume by Vivian Sobchack and Christian Ferencz-Flatz.
15. Philosophers like Irving and Thompson distinguish mind-wandering from ruminating along the axis instability-stability: mind-wandering implies drifting from topic to topic, whereas ruminating remains fixed on a single topic. But this seems to me a difference of degrees rather than in kind, as surely one does not think of only a single thing when one ruminates, but revolves around different aspects of a topic, even if this occurs within a narrower range than in mind-wandering. See Irving and Irving/Thompson.
16. The review was written under Rohmer's original name. Maurice Schérer, "La Terre du miracle," *Cahiers du Cinéma* 47 (May 1955), pp. 38-41, here p. 40.
17. Opinions are divided on this issue. Katzenberger, for instance, suggests using the German term *Phantasie* as a synonym for *Tagtraum*: "because all daydreams are fantasies, even though [...] not all fantasies are daydreams." Katzenberger, *Der Tagtraum*, p. 35. Klinger, on the other hand, writes that "both daydreaming and fantasizing are poorly defined concepts, and they are by no means the same thing." Klinger, "Daydreaming and Fantasizing," p. 226.
18. For a comparative phenomenology of imagining, hallucinating, remembering, and fantasizing, see Edward S. Casey, "Comparative Phenomenology of Mental Activity: Memory, Hallucination, and Fantasy Contrasted with Imagination," *Research in Phenomenology* 6 (1976), pp. 1-25.
19. I have used the gender-specific terms 'he' and 'his' throughout, but they should be understood as referring to all genders, unless explicitly stated. No offense or sexism is intended.

20. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 83.
21. Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 110; Elaine Scarry, "On Vivacity: The Difference Between Daydreaming and Imagining-Under-Authorial-Instruction," *Representations*, 52 (1995), pp. 1-26.
22. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973).
23. Psychoanalysts might, of course, claim that the daydream implies the fulfillment of an unconscious wish and hence the film may well have to do with the daydream in an unconscious way after all.
24. Dieter Lohmar, *Phänomenologie der schwachen Phantasie: Untersuchungen der Psychologie, Cognitive Sciences, Neurologie und Phänomenologie zur Funktion der Phantasie in der Wahrnehmung* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), p. 158.
25. Scarry, "On Vivacity," p. 18.
26. Irving, "Mind-Wandering," p. 550.
27. Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 69.
28. Irving, "Mind-Wandering," p. 553.
29. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 22.
30. Julian Hanich, "Omission, Suggestion, Completion: Film and the Imagination of the Spectator," *Screening the Past*, 43 (2018), n.p. <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2018/02/omission-suggestion-completion-film-and-the-imagination-of-the-spectator/> (Last accessed on: 28 April 2019).
31. For the difference between immersion and enthrallment, see Hanich (2010), pp. 64-66.
32. Schérer, "La Terre du miracle," p. 40.
33. Bachelard, *Poetics of Reverie*, p. 167.
34. Casey, "Comparative Phenomenology," p. 14.
35. Klinger, "Daydreaming and Fantasizing," p. 225.
36. David Stawarczyk, Steve Majerus, Michalina Maj, Marital van der Linden, and Arnaud D'Argembeau, "Mind-Wandering: Phenomenology and Function Assessed with a Novel Experience Sampling Method," *Acta Psychologica* 136 (2011), pp. 370-381, p. 370.
37. Irving/Thompson, "Philosophy of Mind-Wandering," p. 90.
38. <http://paulsharits.com/about-paul/about-films-by-paul/> (Last accessed: 13 November 2017).
39. This extension and enrichment is by no means restricted to non-narrative experimental works, but can occur in fiction films as well. For an example from the comparable case of a visit to the opera, see Casey, *Imagining*, pp. 140-141.

## About the author

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