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How Fast is Furious The Discourse of Fast Cinema in Question

'who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed'

Allen Ginsberg, 'Howl'

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

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

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

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

Fast and loose

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

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

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

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

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

Slow-motion and spectacular remediation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Figure 2 - Spectacular remediation.

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

Figure 3 - All of it, again and again…

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

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

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

Figure 4 - Apocalyptic and integrated.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 5 - Human-machine interface.

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

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

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

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

Dynamic duration

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

Figure 6 - Slow intensity.

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

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

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

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

Figure 7 – Alright, we get it.

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

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

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

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

Figure 8 - Framing and duration.

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

Arrested action

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

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

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

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

Figure 9 - Fast money?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Irreflexive consumption and aesthetic temporality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Coda

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

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

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

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Abstract

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

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

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