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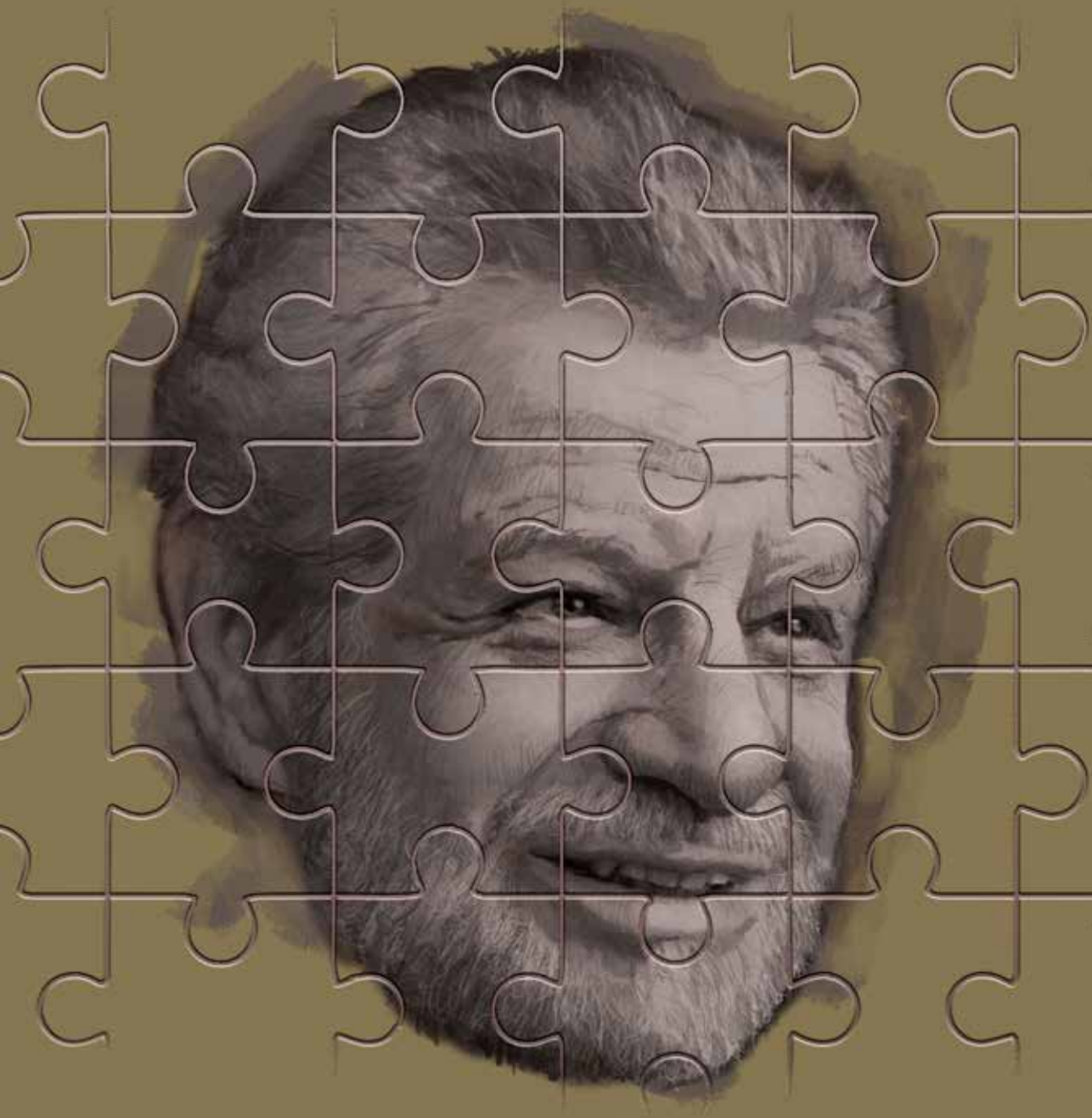

Cinematic Norms and Puzzles

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Cinematic Norms and Puzzles

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Editorial

The idea of this "Panoptikum" issue appeared about a year ago. It originated from our interest in film narration and its transformations, and as a result of a conference track, so typical for academic life. An interest in film narration is an important mark of film studies at the University of Gdańsk, with many books, papers, doctoral dissertations and conferences tackling such issues as classical and not-so-classical forms of narration, both in global and local contexts. Our intention was to contribute to the debate on classical vs. postclassical cinema, but with a certain shift of emphasis. The "classical" part of the volume is rather methodologically-minded. It is devoted not to classical cinema, but to the category of norm, which was crucial in establishing an edifice of "classical Hollywood cinema". The "post-classical" part concerns above all new cinematic forms which developed from the encounter of typical mind-game films with new forms of seriality, such as super-hero franchises, TV serials and cinematic sequels.

Then, in the course of our work on this "Panoptikum" issue some tragic information reached us: Thomas Elsaesser died in China during one of his many lecture tours. Thomas was a friend of ours, he was a visiting professor at the University of Gdańsk during the academic year 2017/2018, and later on he returned many times, on various occasions. We translated and published a very coherent collection of his essays on puzzle films, entitled *Kino – maszyna myślenia. Refleksje nad kinem epoki cyfrowej* (*Cinema – A Thinking Machine. Reflections on Cinema of the Digital Era*). Thomas liked the book and cherished the idea of publishing it in English, with some additional essays. To this end, he also wrote a huge (24 000 words) paper entitled *Mind-game Films as Tipping Points* and sent it to me, asking for comments. It was the way he worked: when he wrote a paper, he often sent them to his friends, asking for comments, which he listened to perceptively. When I saw him for the last time, during the conference "Screen Narratives: Order and Chaos" in Porto, in September 2019, where he was invited as a key-note speaker, we spent a couple of hours on the terrace on the roof of his hotel, discussing this paper. He was so kind to give me permission to use an excerpt from it in an upcoming "Panoptikum" issue. Grateful for this, I could not predict that this would be his post-mortem contribution, referring in a way to numerous remarks on post-mortem states, which can be found in his papers on mind-game films.

This terrace on the roof in Porto played host not only to two, but to four of us, because Agnieszka Piotrowska and Warren Buckland were also there. For some time we hung around together, meeting in various worldly places. These were unforgettable meetings, full of wit and good energy, but also of fresh and inspiring discussions, remarks and comments. This made the news of Thomas's

demise even more shocking. Nobody could believe that. Thomas was so brilliant, so energetic, so full of ideas for the future. He was planning new books and lectures, and, following up on his documentary film on *The Sun Island*, he was working on a screenplay based on his family stories. He led an extremely intense life, too intense perhaps, and he died while on the move. Perhaps it was a gift from God.

The idea to pay homage to Thomas in this issue was pretty obvious, more than natural. We have published many of his papers in our magazine; he was a friend of ours; he was fascinated with the main topic of the issue – puzzle films (which he called mind-game films) – and he furnished film studies with a plethora of ideas and concepts about them. So, the opening part of this issue is a tribute to our dearest friend. It consists of four papers: an English translation of my foreword to *KiNo. Maszyna myślenia*, adapted to new circumstances; an excerpt from his essay *The Mind-Game as Tipping Points*; Warren's paper on Thomas' contribution to mind-game film theory; and Agnieszka's personal recollection of Thomas, centred around his film *The Sun Island*.

The second part of the volume concerns the notion of norm in cinema and consists of two papers. The first one, by **Radomír Kokeš**, provides a comprehensive description of Mukařovský's concept of norm and the way it was applied by Bordwell. **Mirosław Przylipiak** also touches the issue of a Mukařovský-Bordwell relationship – albeit from a different angle and with different conclusions – but his scope is broader, he also ponders such issues as justification of norms and a dialectic of norm/deviation.

The third part of the volume is about something completely different – it is about films which supposedly break the norms of classical cinema (although it is a matter of hot debate), namely, so called puzzle (or mind-game) films. **Małgorzata Jakubowska** focuses on subjectivisations in feature films. She sketches the evolution of forms of subjectivisation from pre-classical through classical and modernist cinema and against this background she presents a development of forms of subjectivisation in mind-game films. **Radomír Kokeš** continues his interest in so called spiral narratives[1] (in which a protagonist stuck in an iterative situation is not only fully aware of their predicament but also tries to deal with it), this time focusing on its application in the low-budget horror movie *Happy Death Day* and its sequel, presumably "the *very first sequel* to a spiral narrative film". **Matthias Bruetsch** also continues his interest in puzzle films[2], this time examining the consequences of this form for television series. To this purpose he undertakes a comparative analysis of one classical feature puzzle film – *Abre los ojos* by Alejandro Amenábar – and two recent TV serials, *Westworld* (2016-) and *Dark* (2017-). **Tomasz Żaglewski** writes about narration in modern super-hero movies, discussing their evolution from supposed plot-lessness to multiverse structure, coupled in *Avengers: Endgame* with a humorous refreshing of such hackneyed puzzle film gimmicks as time travel. Last but not least, **Terez Vincze** provides a description of Hong Sang-soo films, in which the puzzle film form is consequently employed. This paper seems to be a perfect summary of the whole volume, as Vincze analyses these Korean *auteur* films through the prism of two competing perspectives: *the* Bordwellian notion of classical cinema and Buckland/Elsaesser (among others) concepts of post-classical mind-game films. In this a norm/deviation model, analysed in the second part of the volume, is complemented.

Mirosław Przylipiak

[1] See his: *Edge of Time Loop: Notes on "Spiral Narrative" as a Creative Tactic in Cinema and Television*, in: M. Przylipiak (ed). *Cinema and Narration. Fast, Slow and Reverse*. Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming.

[2] See, among others: Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; From Ironic Distance to Unexpected Plot Twists: Unreliable Narration in Literature and Film, in: J. Alber, P.K. Hansen (eds.), *Beyond Classical Narration: Unnatural and Transmedial Narrative and Narratology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, When the Past Lies Ahead and the Future Lags Behind: Backward Narration in Film, Television, and Literature, in: J. Eckel (ed. et al.), *(Dis)Orienting Media and Narrative Mazes*. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Hommage to Thomas Elsaesser

Panoptikum 2019, 22: 10-28.

Mirosław Przylipiak
University of Gdansk

Thomas Elsaesser and Film Studies[1]

"Give chance a chance"

On March 6th, 2008 in Philadelphia, Thomas Elsaesser received the annual award of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (SCMS) for outstanding scholarly achievement (Distinguished Career Achievement Award). His thank you speech for this occasion was a reflection on his professional journey, significantly entitled "Stepping sideways", as this was also the year of his mandatory retirement, when he was "stepping down" from his Chair at the University of Amsterdam. He characterised his academic career as a series not of career-steps or mis-steps, but of sideways steps, often based on misunderstandings, "mostly productive ones, to be sure, but (in true melodramatic and parapractic fashion) out of sync, too soon, too late, the right thing at the wrong place, or vice versa" (Elsaesser, 2009C, p. 121).

Saying this, he did not allude to the misunderstandings related to his origins and nationality, which had puzzled quite a few, with the result that the Dutch took him for an Englishman, the Germans for a Dutchman, and only the Americans let him be from "Europe". Speaking about "productive misunderstandings" (which is intriguingly reminiscent of the "productive pathologies", a term that he coined and promoted), he meant more serious events. He was referring to his breakthrough as a young film scholar and to the importance

[1] This paper is an abbreviated and updated version of a foreword to Thomas Elsaesser's book *Kino – maszyna myślenia. Refleksje nad kinem epoki cyfrowej*, (2018). Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego.

for his career of an essay he wrote on melodrama, published for the first time in an almost unknown magazine called "Monogram", but later reprinted many times and translated into several languages (Elsaesser, 1972). It was supposed to contribute "to the issue of 'authorship' and 'genre' as it was discussed at that time [...], but it returned to me in 1975 as a 'significant' article for feminist film theory. What to do? Disavow it? Not the best solution. When I look back I see that I have made misunderstandings my method of life, or put in other words, I practised a politics and a poetics of bungled actions (parapraxes), not so much in the sense of Freudian slips, but in the sense of a faith in happy accidents and a trust in fortunate mistakes" (2009C, p. 122).

Another such misunderstanding was an invitation to teach at the University of Iowa in 1977. Convinced that the Film Department was inviting him as a recognised expert on Classical and New Hollywood, he found that at least equally important was his nationality (they somehow established it as being "German", even though he had left Germany some 15 years earlier). "You can imagine my punctured ambition" – he wrote – "when I found myself teaching German cinema, including Expressionism (which I knew almost nothing about) and the "New German Cinema" about which I knew only slightly more, mainly because I had translated a few years earlier Rainer Werner Fassbinder's essay on Douglas Sirk" (p. 122).

The misunderstanding, however, turned out to be truly productive because having to get to know German cinema led to the long-range effect of a whole series of extremely important books and articles being produced that changed the image of German cinema for a generation. In his "thank you" speech Elsaesser mentions a few more cases like this, and every time an effect of chance, misunderstanding, or coincidence leads to significant scholarly achievements. "My career", he says, "is probably nothing but one extended parapraxis, following the crab-like logic of a creature moving sideways along the beach, but once in a while being lifted up by a sudden wave, carried a bit further along the shore and then dropped down again". While older people usually advise the young not to repeat the same mistakes, Elsaesser recommends the opposite. "You can do quite well, it seems, by repeating your mistakes, provided you persist with them long enough: the liberating effect of metonymy, as Roland Barthes might have said. Or, to misappropriate a slogan popularised by Yoko Ono and John Lennon during their 'lie-in' peace-session in Amsterdam in March 1969: 'All that I'm saying: give chance a chance'" (p. 122–123).

I am quoting extracts of this speech not only because it is quite funny and a good example of an academic taking ironic distance from his own self-

importance. The more pertinent reason is the unexpected convergence of Elsaesser's look at himself and his vision of cinema. Sensitive to the absurdity of reality, he puts the emphasis on the liberating power of contingency, of internal contradictions, and of "productive pathology" as the constitutive features of contemporary cinema.

In the Service of the Academy

However, it is clearly no accident that Elsaesser was honoured in 2008 by the Society for Film and Media Studies. He belongs undoubtedly among the most outstanding representatives of contemporary film studies. Thoroughly educated (University of Heidelberg, Paris Sorbonne, University of Sussex, where in 1971 he defended his doctorate in comparative literature), he begins writing about movies in the mid-sixties. His first articles, published in student film magazines, such as "Sussex Outlook" and "Brighton Film Review" (which he founded at the University of Sussex), are mainly devoted to profiles of European (Jean-Luc Godard [1965], Luis Buñuel [1966], Jean Renoir [1969A]) and American (King Vidor [1969], Vincente Minnelli [1969B; 1970], Nicholas Ray [1970B]) directors-auteurs. His career in film studies accelerates around the mid-seventies, after the publication of the article mentioned above about melodrama, which is, moreover, the second part of what he calls a "trilogy" of articles (Elsaesser, 1971, 1972, 1975) expressing "faith in Hollywood at a time when it was difficult to hear a good word being said about Hollywood" (Elsaesser, 2009, p. 122). Forty years later his rich and extraordinary varied scholarly output include fifteen monographs, ten edited and co-edited volumes, and about three hundred articles and chapters, published in collective volumes and the most prestigious periodicals around the world. His publications have been translated into nearly twenty languages, including Chinese, Hungarian, Spanish, Turkish and Polish.

One of the leading topics in Elsaesser's academic output is undoubtedly German cinema, already briefly mentioned. Among the numerous publications dedicated to the subject, the ones that stand out the most are:

- his first book, *New German Cinema A History* (1989), devoted to an extremely important current of West German cinema (the book was written when Germany was still divided into East and West), initiated by the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1962, from which emerged such auteurs as Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Werner Herzog, Rainer Fassbinder, Wim Wenders, Margarethe von Trotta, Peter Handke amongst others;

- *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (2000), challenging many commonly held views on perhaps the best-known period in the history of German cinema, including Expressionist film;
- *German Cinema – Terror and Trauma: Cultural Memory Since 1945* (2013), which tracks the impact of the Nazi era and the Holocaust on German cinema after the Second World War.

To these one needs to add the outstanding monograph on Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1996) and the volume on Harun Farocki (2004), as well as several other books and scores of articles about the various epochs, phenomena and aspects of German cinema (e.g. 1999, 2001, 2002).

Another important area of Elsaesser's interest was classical American cinema, and especially the continuities and transformations of Hollywood cinema in recent decades, captured from a broad cultural perspective. His main books devoted to Hollywood are *Studying Contemporary American Film* (co-written with Warren Buckland, 2002B), *Hollywood Heute: Geschichte, Gender und Nation* (2009B) and *The Persistence of Hollywood* (2011).

Elsaesser focuses on contemporary American cinema – sometimes called post-classical cinema – by describing and analysing the changes that set it apart from classical cinema, showing how Hollywood responds to the challenges posed by new technologies (digitisation), by new reception habits (collective and individual viewing, the possibility of multiple viewing, (inter)active forms of participation in film culture), by a new (global) film geography that requires its active presence in numerous competitive markets. The title of the last of these books, *The Persistence of Hollywood*, says much about the author's attitude, emphasising duration and endurance, along with change, showing how Hollywood excels at combining elements of continuity and tradition with continuous innovation: a result of engaging with whatever reality may bring. At the same time Hollywood cinema remains one of the reference points that can illuminate phenomena not belonging to Hollywood cinema itself, and even perceived as oppositional. A good example is his book *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (2005), as well as its follow-up or sequel: *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy: Film as Thought Experiment* (2018).

Thomas Elsaesser was also a consummate theorist of cinema. One manifestation is the book *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (2010) written together with his former student, Malte Hagener. The starting point was a series of lectures delivered by Elsaesser in 2005-2006 at the University of Amsterdam and subsequently at Yale University, so one might expect the posi-

tions taken to be purely utilitarian, an introduction to the history of thought about film, of which there are many. However, the result is quite different, determined by a most original compositional idea, about which the author himself, in a somewhat ironic and self-deprecating tone, said that it was meant to be lectures for young people about something young people are usually not very interested in, namely the theory of cinema. When wondering how to interest the students, it occurred to him to look at the theory of cinema through the prism of the body, because the body is what young people are most interested in. And suddenly, it turned out to be an excellent metaphor, perfectly accommodating much of the history of film theory, and ordering it in a more intuitive way.

Elsaesser and Hagener thus avoid a purely historical argument. Nor do they refer chronologically to the successive stages in the development of film thought (the usual approach for books of this type). Rather, they gave their book a problem to solve, by showing that film theory is a form of reflection on different variants of the relationship between humans and the world: a relationship based on distance (cinema as a window and frame); on reflection (cinema as a mirror), on crossing borders and thresholds (cinema as a door), direct contact (cinema as skin and touch), receiving stimuli (cinema as an eye, cinema as an ear) and internalisation (cinema as a brain and mind).

Although Elsaesser is a conscientious theoretician of cinema, he is not a typical theorist. First of all, in his reflections he rarely focuses merely on cinema. He prefers to perceive films within a broader context, be it of theory, of philosophy, or most recently, as part of what he calls media archaeology. The title of one recently published book is programmatic: *Film History as Media Archaeology* (2016). This is one of several items in his bibliography devoted to media theory, along with, for example, co-edited books, such as *Writing for the Medium: Television in Transition* (2004B) or also *Cinema Futures: Cain, Abel or Cable?* (1998). The intriguing title of this last item suggests a thought that is also evoked in *Film History as Media Archaeology*: that the emergence of cinema may have been an (un)fortunate accident, because in reality the developed world in the 1890s was waiting for media and image technologies based on the telephone and telegraph (television, the mobile phone). Cinema – invented at the beginning of the 20th century with nineteenth-century mechanics and with storytelling techniques also from nineteenth-century literature – may be said to have "delayed" the advent of television by several dozen years. Such counterfactual reasoning is not unusual for Elsaesser, who also in other respects is not a typical theoretician of cinema, because he is guided less

by classical film-theoretical and philosophical considerations, and tends to use the theories and histories of cinema more as tools for answering wider questions concerning, besides philosophy and cultural theory, anthropology and art history. For this reason, the division of Elsaesser's output suggested above into various thematic areas is to some extent illusory, because his writing, not always easy to read due to the huge baggage of erudition, freely combines historical inquiry, interpretative hermeneutics and theoretical speculations, treating the factual base as a starting point for generalisations.

Although the scholarly output of Elsaesser measured by the number and quality of publications is impressive in itself, it is a manifestation of only one type of activity that this scholar pursues. Another is his organisational activity, expressed through initiatives that have had a lasting impact on the development of research into film and audio-visual culture. Thus, in 1976 he initiated at the University of East Anglia in Norwich the first film studies department in Great Britain, offering a full range of Bachelor, Master and PhD programmes. In the early nineties he moved to Amsterdam and there, just as in England, he founded – also the first in the Netherlands – the Department of Film and Television Studies (later renamed Department of Media and Culture). He also initiated the prestigious book series "Film Culture in Transition" published by Amsterdam University Press, for which he was the General Editor and oversaw the publication of sixty volumes. He also coordinated several large research programmes in cooperation with the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, of which he was one of the five founders. He is a member of the Advisory Board of several academic journals, and has participated in transnational research programmes conducted in England, Italy, Denmark, Portugal and Germany.

Thomas Elsaesser also conducted lively pedagogic activity. The list of universities where he taught as a visiting professor is long. There are a number of American universities (Yale, Columbia, New York University, University of Iowa and the different campuses of the University of California) and European ones (Bergen, Stockholm, Cambridge, Vienna, Ferrara, Hamburg, Berlin), as well as Tel Aviv and Brisbane. He also supervised the theses of about thirty-five doctoral students, many of whom went on to become themselves outstanding film and media experts. Among them are leading researchers of contemporary audiovisual culture, working in many countries on different continents, such as Ginette Vincendeau, Professor at King's College London, Ravi Vasudevan from the Sarai Centre in New Delhi, Michael Wedel, Professor at the Film University Potsdam-Babelsberg, Malte Hagener, Professor at the University in Marburg, Patricia Pisters, Professor at the University of Amsterdam, Eleftheria Thanouli, Professor at

the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Then there is Warren Buckland from Oxford Brookes University, Mehlis Behlil from Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Marijke de Valck from the University of Utrecht, Tarja Laine at the University of Amsterdam, and Seung-hoon Jeong from New York University in Abu Dhabi. All these scholars have made significant contributions in the world of film studies both as authors and teachers. In recent years, in spite of his retirement, Thomas Elsaesser led a very intense – too intense, perhaps – academic life, as a most desired keynote speaker at academic conferences around the world. It is during such a lecturing tour in China that he passed away.

After years of researching different film cultures and teaching about cinema and the arts, in 2017 Thomas Elsaesser stood behind the camera and made his own movie, a personal documentary entitled *The Sun Island*. The starting point was home movies from the 1940s, made with an amateur standard eight camera by his father and documenting the life of the Elsaesser family – and notably his grandfather, the architect Martin Elsaesser – at the summer house on an island near Berlin between the mid-1930 and the mid-1940s. In the voice over commentary, spoken by the author, the suggestion is made that it was these family films that might have been the reason why Elsaesser took up cinema studies professionally. Be this as it may, *The Sun Island* presents a very interesting family saga, showing Germany during these momentous years from an unknown perspective – the war, fascism, politics are the outer horizon, but what we see is the ordinary everyday life of a not quite ordinary family.

To the list of universities where Thomas Elsaessar taught can be added the University of Gdańsk. He was a visiting professor there in the winter semester of the academic year 2017/2018, teaching two courses: one on the general theory of cinema for undergraduate and graduate students (based on the Polish translation of *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses*, 2015) and the other a seminar on European Cinema and Continental Philosophy for PhD students. He usually came to Gdańsk from Berlin, where he was Senior Fellow at the *Cinepoetics* research initiative at the Free University.

Caring about the precision of his argument, Elsaesser preferred to read from specially prepared texts, or to offer contextualising commentary on passages from his publications, as well as from chapters he was currently working on. The – illustrated – lectures were always open for interventions by the listeners, giving rise to lively discussions, especially in the advanced classes. During these PhD seminars in Gdansk the idea of translating into Polish some of Elsaesser's essays on mind-game films and some other aspects of contemporary cinema, putting them together and publishing them as a separate volume.

Thomas selected the essays and the seminar participants translated them. The official launch of the book was at the beginning of October 2018 during the conference "Psychoanalysis in Our Time. Psychoanalysis, Nationalism and Ideology". Thomas was very happy with the book and he planned to publish it in English too.

Mind-Game Films

A trend bearing many names, out of which "puzzle films" is probably the most popular, has stirred perhaps the hottest debate in film studies of recent years. This debate was not limited to the circles of academic film studies, it attracted commentators from many other areas, be they philosophers, physicists, film fans and aficionados, or many others. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that this trend also attracted Elsaesser, who even reserved his own, carefully chosen name for it: *mind-game films*. Out of the many papers in which this issue was tackled more or less directly, two seem to be especially pertinent: *The Mind-Game Films* (2009) and *Contingency, Causality, Complexity: Distributed Agency in The Mind-Game Film* (2018B). These two essays bracket a decade of their author's very intense research on the subject and they testify to the evolution of his thinking. The lecture on these two essays is, by the way, a fascinating experience in methodology and history of ideas, but Elsaesser did not stop there. Recently he worked on yet another paper on mind-game films (*Mind-game Films as a/the Tipping Point*), an extract of which we publish in this issue.

The first of the abovementioned essays is probably Elsaesser's earliest attempt at touching on the subject, and it has the character of a symptom and a social allegory, in spirit close to Elsaesser's general debt to Walter Benjamin. Mind-game films are treated as *signum temporis*. Elsaesser puts forward his thesis that two basic representational systems have dominated Western thinking: the visual-mimetic, underlying easel painting, and then photography and film, and the verbal-symbolic, personified by printing and the book. These allowed Europe to "make great strides at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries", but they may have "exhausted their capabilities of modelling and representing the modern world". Similarly, the narrative form – the bourgeois novel – that has dominated for the past two centuries still has its advantages, but "it also has a number of limitations": there are many new tasks of organising information in an intuitive order for which narrative may not provide the right tools" (2009, p. 23). It is quite possible, says Elsaesser, that we live in a period of another epistemic shift:

> "[...] the turn of the 20th and 21st century will be seen as a similar moment [as that between 1470 and 1520], an epochal turn in the field of representational systems, this time entwined around the computer, mobile telephone and digitalisation. Even if the implications – the philosophical and political consequences – of this turn are not yet as clear as those from the Renaissance or the Enlightenment period, it's safe to say that there was a constant perspective that made painting (and cinema) a kind "Windows to the world" competes with many screens / monitors / interfaces (with virtual windows characteristic of them, refreshed images, built-in links, as well as various types of graphics, tomography and visualisation) and that the book in which the written text becomes variable and searchable, and also dynamically linked with images, diagrams or graphics, is also in a phase of transformation. As a consequence, the story (as traditionally the most effective form of combining different information) must compete with the archive and database, and their forms of organisation and contact with the user" (2009, p. 24).

Mind-game films would in this perspective be transitional forms: they are still narrative (and even classically narrative in some of their features), but they also complicate the time-space coordinates of traditional narrative to such an extent that they are also leaving linear narrative behind.

In the second text on the subject of mind-game films Elsaesser characterises his earlier approach as perhaps too sociological, in the sense of mainly explaining the appearance of mind-game films owing to economic, technological and demographic reasons. Since similar films have already appeared before, especially in the so-called modernist trend of European art cinema, the genealogy according to which mind-game films are a reaction to external changes may be too simple an argument. It seems more accurate to also point to some age-old philosophical questions, which traditionally concern issues such as: the reality of other minds, the nature perception and human consciousness, and the different reality status and types of reference of the simulacrum, the copy and the fake.

In his new article, Elsaesser does not so much give up the sociological perspective as add another dimension: "The task in this essay […] is to complement my earlier symptomatic, sociological and economic reading of mind-game films with a reassessment of their status […] from a philosophical perspective" (2018B, p. 14). It seems, however, that in Elsaesser's writing, on this subject at least, both these points of view – symptomatic and philosophical – are constantly present. Where they seem to clash, the overarching role of the approach which – for the sake of simplicity I called sociological – remains intact, even

as it demands development and requires further refinement. Elsaesser's methodological position is not easy to capture with labels, because it defies explicit classifications. It is neither a declared cognitivist, nor a psycho-semiotic approach, but neither does it subscribe to phenomenology; it neither belongs to postmodernism nor to gender-and-identity studies, although probably several of these orientations are close to him. If he draws from each, he fully identifies with none of them, displaying a great ability to use findings from the various schools of contemporary thought, without falling into methodological contradictions and inconsistencies. Characteristic in this respect is a declaration that one finds in one of his essays ("Too late, too soon: body, time and agency"), in which he suggests the possibility of reconciling the thought of Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault with Deleuze and cognitivism, insofar as the former two understand 'soft' or discursive power as formatting the senses, and the latter two both reject psychoanalysis (2005B).

If I had to characterise Elsaesser intellectually, I would say that his writings are distant derivatives of Karl Marx's theses about the base defining the superstructure, reformulated in the spirit of Benjamin, with more weight given to culture yet spiced with a pinch of Marshall McLuhan's technological determinism, although he rarely if ever cites the latter, choosing instead to name Friedrich Kittler as a source of inspiration.

If we chance a simplification, we could say that with this approach, works of art – or more neutrally 'cultural texts' – reflect in their own structure the changes that are taking place in the "productive forces", defined as comprising the social structure, as well as the "means of production", including technology. Speaking generally, Elsaesser tries to explore how the changes in technological developments affect cinema at the level of form and structure, and not (merely) of content. Since one of the dimensions of this change is temporal reversibility and a greater complexity in cause and effect relations (both typical to mind-game films), cinema is not merely a reflection of these changes, but also part of their cause and their concrete embodiment.

It is thus at the level of structure that general considerations arise. Elsaesser is tackling the philosophical issues just named – the reality of other minds, the nature of perception and humanity's consciousness, as well as time or causality – not in an abstract way, through logical analysis, but by embedding these concepts in a specific historical, social and cultural situation. He does not reflect on the reality of other minds or the nature of perception per se, but examines how such minds are portrayed in certain films and what this may tell us about our world and our times.

Agency

As is clear from the above, Elsaesser writes about many different things, combining various orientations and points of view within an overall coherent statement. Let us also acknowledge that he writes about very different films, always in an engaging way and without value judgement or prejudice: whether a megahit such as *Avatar* (2011B), or an esoteric oddity like David Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2014), whether Steven Spielberg's adaptation of a Philip K. Dick story such as *Minority Report* (2014B) or a politically controversial film like Katherine Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* (2016B), in addition to numerous mind-game films, melodramas as well as classics of modernist film. The focus is not only on movies: at least equally important are the broader contexts, such as the director's place in film culture or the image- and brand-name politics of film studios, which shows the impact of the so-called "new film history", with which Elsaesser is sometimes identified (Hendrykowski, 2015; Elsaesser, 2009B).

Although Elsaesser combines with great ease a variety of topics, points of view and methods, one can, in my opinion, nonetheless pick out the leading issue, indicated by the frequency of the word "agency", which can be variously understood as "efficacy", sometimes as "driving power", and sometimes as "action". Broadly speaking, agency names the instance that has decisive influence on the course of events and the shape of affairs both inside films, within the fictional worlds presented, and outside, within film culture at large. According to Elsaesser, we can observe some fundamental changes in the way agency functions: emanating not from a single source (the protagonist, and/or antagonist), but "distributed" across several instances, both embodied and structural, both visible and invisible, both operating at the micro-level and the macro-level. Contemporary cinema – and especially mind-game films – on the one hand documents these transformations by drawing attention to them, while on the other hand it promotes forms of agency and introduces protagonists that have adapted to and can cope with the new conditions.

Again, at the risk of a certain simplification (but I hope with the benefit of clarifying the argument), one can present the following summary: typical for classical cinema was the essential unity in the functioning of agency. Within the world represented, the course of events was the result of the will of the main character(s), not for nothing called "hero(es)". Ideally, the hero eventually realised his intentions and achieved his goals, in spite of obstacles and by overcoming his opponents. In more complex situations, the hero's goals could not be fully carried out, since in the course of events and as a result of the clash of various protagonists, these goals underwent a transformation. But even in

such cases, it was possible to identify the locus of agency, to name it, and to enumerate the factors and forces at play. As a consequence, classical cinema was perhaps an unintentional but powerful propaganda tool for the ideology of individualism, and in a sense, this also linked it to the ideology of humanism. Not coincidentally, the centre of almost every frame in classical narrative, regardless of the film's genre, is occupied by an active human figure.

It would be hard to find a more emphatic visual symbol for "having dominion over the earth" than agency in classical narrative, and thus for the conviction that humanity is the centre of the world, both as a species and as embodied in the individual human being. A similar singularity of attributing agency has characterised the dominant ways of describing the functioning of film culture. Here the director-as-author (for film studies) and the producer (for the institution) were the only instances recognised as competing for top priority. Agency was attributed to the director (in art cinema) or to the producer (in commercial cinema), often with the implication that the finished product, i.e. the film, was the result of a combination of these two vectors, whether in terms of conflict, cooperation or synergy, but always with the confidence that the forces of agency can be distinguished and named. Such a division of labour signalled a clear and consistent message, already known in advance as self-expression (in the case of the director), and as ideology (in the case of a producer/studio).

This description is obviously very simplified, also with reference to classical cinema, and Elsaesser himself would probably not entirely agree with it. However, it is not our task or intention to accurately describe the functioning classical cinema, but to sketch the background against which the transformations of contemporary cinema can become more clearly visible. The picture outlined above can also be called a linear, uni-directional, dualistic model of agency: from cause to effect, from intention to implementation, from subject to object, from observer to observed, from male to female, from man to the world. And this simple set of relationships, which reflects the mechanistic way of understanding the world, has been, according to Elsaesser, questioned as much by modern civilisation as by cinema which, being an inseparable part of the world, participates in its transformations.

> "[...] our idea of autonomy – this is a single source and rational action – is complicated by mediation patterns, randomness and mutual interdependence. These "rhizomatic" tendencies are strengthened by electronic communication and the Internet, whose architecture is the place of simultaneous, multidirectional, recursive and looped interactions" (2017, p. 65).

When it comes to movie characters, "the mind-game film question is not only the 'can-do' posture of the action hero of classical Hollywood, but also the very notion of a 'fully self-present', the autonomous individual" (Elsaesser, 2018, p. 29).

One of the most notable manifestations of these changes in agency is the frequency with which the protagonists of mind-game films display symptoms of certain kinds of mental conditions or "pathologies". Elsaesser lists four in particular: amnesia, autism, paranoia and schizophrenia. Of course, mentally ill people are by definition not fully autonomous individuals: their agency is thwarted and their relationship with the world is disturbed. It can happen that the world in which the characters function has all the hallmarks of an objectively existing world, yet may turn out to be the projection of a severely disturbed individual mind (*A Beautiful Mind, Spider*): a fact not only not known to the protagonist but for much of the film also unsuspected by the viewer. What is interesting, however, is that Elsaesser does not treat these pathologies as case studies, but calls them "productive" because he thinks that they are an adaptive response to new living conditions in contemporary society and – as in the case of the protagonist of *A Beautiful Mind* – are capable of making a valuable contribution to the emergence of new solutions, forging new connections, and embodying new ways of thinking and acting, made necessary by extreme conditions (such as modern warfare), by our altered ways of day-to-day living, which are often the result of technologies now deeply embedded in our environment and habits.

On the one hand – Elsaesser states – we are, thus, dealing with pathologies (of subjectivity, of consciousness, of memory and identity): indications of crisis and uncertainty in the relationship of the self with itself and with the world (and by extension: of the spectator with the screen). On the other hand, these apparently damaged minds and bodies are capable of displaying remarkable faculties at times, being in touch with agents from another world (*The Sixth Sense*), foretelling imminent disaster (*Donnie Darko*), or starting popular protest movements (*Fight Club*). Their 'disability' functions as empowerment, and their minds, by seemingly losing control, gain a different kind of relation to the man-made, routinised or automated surroundings, but also to the more "cosmic" energies, which usually centre on the new physics of time travel, curved spaces, stochastic systems and warps in the universe. In other words, these pathologies are presented to the spectator in some sense as *productive pathologies* (2009, p. 26).

Another dimension of the crisis of agency is visible in post-classical films as a change in the way we understand causal relationships. Formerly perceived as

the basic way of combining individual scenes and episodes, presented as obvious and natural, linear causality has lost its character of inevitability: it ceases to be a solution, and instead becomes a problem. Elsaesser devotes much space to redefining causality, which he sometimes calls "retroactive" (when something is projected backwards, before it becomes a force or a cause in the past, affecting the present), and sometimes contingent (when "contingency becomes our new causality").

Situations, where what is classically perceived as a "result" changes its vector, as it were, and overtakes the "cause" are most commonly found in films with a time travel motif or plot premise, but also in other films where the chronology is disturbed, such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. These reversed cause-effect relationships are a manifestation of the crisis in the classic form of filmic storytelling, with films not necessarily ceasing to be narrative, but becoming "part-text, part-archive, part-point of departure, part node in a rhizomatic, expandable network of inter-tribal communication" (2009, p. 35).

The conviction that there is a crisis of agency also manifests itself in the persistence with which Elsaesser rejects the name most often used for the films that interest him – puzzle films – and instead sticks to the one coined by himself: mind-game films. To him its not just a terminological issue: the word puzzle, or "a puzzle", suggests that the viewer's task is to *solve* it, to find the missing piece(s), and to rearrange the elements in such a way that we end up with a neat, consistent picture. In other words: cut the corners, smooth the rough edges, and eliminate the ambiguities or contradictions.

Meanwhile, as we face a world full of multilateral dependencies and interconnections, full of complexities and truly pluralistic, where many inconsistencies in thoughts, ideas, views, and states of affairs exist in parallel and side by side, we should not strive to eliminate contradictions, ambiguities, differences, but learn to live with them. Mind-game films, as Elsaesser conceives them, rely on maintaining this constant mental tension, where the goal is not to understand the world – if we consider 'understanding' as accepting one simple interpretation, and eliminating all other possibilities – but to grasp it, in all its multi-faceted complexity. Mind-game films express just this philosophy, they teach this attitude, by presenting types of agency in which the relationship between opportunity and contingency, between stochastic systems and predetermination takes the place of free will, individual decision and rational choice. They now manifest themselves as "distributed agency", often in the form of networks that function not so much by way of co-operation and collaboration, but rather of conflicted relations, which nonetheless achieve "results" because they are tied into a dynamic of "antagonistic reciprocity".

The consequence of accepting such an optics is Elsaesser's penchant for collecting paradoxes and contradictions. This is particularly noticeable in his text on David Lynch (2014). The American director is featured there through the prism of a performative self-contradiction, which arises "when one makes a claim that contradicts the validity of the *means* that are used to make it, i.e. which contradicts your *performance* of the claim" (2014, p. 50–51). The category of self-contradiction allows Elsaesser to highlight various contradictions in Lynch, such as defining him as a director who functions both inside and outside of Hollywood, who while being an *auteur* (admired as such by the French and the Cannes Film Festival) is also a part of the American film industry, who strives after authenticity but is also the creator of virtual realities, who is a pioneer in making programmes for television but is also its severest critic, who has nothing but contempt for people watching films on mobile phones, and shows this in an advertisement for the Apple iPhone. The rules of the excluded middle do not apply in Elsaesser's thinking, and what prevails is a belief in the need to learn to live in the midst of contradictions and antagonisms.

This applies not only to the directorial persona (besides Lynch, Elsaesser makes similar cases for James Cameron [2011B] and Michael Haneke [2010]), but also for the functioning of the film industry as a whole. Rejecting a priori the concept of a unified, coherent message, planned by a central authorial instance (be it the producer or the director), Elsaesser shows how the movies of modern Hollywood, wanting to reach the largest possible audiences of diverse background, faiths and group identity ("access for all"), deliberately incorporates a level of ideological incoherence ("structured ambiguity"), thanks to which various groups of viewers, who in real life not only have little in common, but are sometimes even antagonistic to each other, can nonetheless identify with Hollywood movies and treat them as if they spoke for them. By a typical Elsaesser paradox, the sender (i.e. Hollywood) would therefore be exercising control by getting rid of it, at least in part, or put it differently, by means of a skilful management of multiple – foreign and/or conflicting – points of view.

By elaborating his argument about Hollywood balancing "access for all" with "keeping control by giving it up", Elsaesser hints that he is updating an old formula, once proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss for the study of myths: that these are best understood as "imaginary solutions to real contradictions". This formula, also used by Rick Altman (1984), when he treated film genres as a modern form of myths, meant that the contradictions for which in real social life there is no solution, can be tamed, relaxed, and even reconciled by means of narrative conventions and generic features. While Altman attributed

such a function to classic Hollywood movies, mind-game movies, according to Elsaesser, subvert this formula. It may even be their greatest achievement, more important than narratological issues, such as narrative complexities or looping. Instead of offering "imaginary solutions" they emphasise "real contradictions". Every impasse in the mind-game films – Elsaesser says – "can be understood as an indication of some real contradictions – be it in the capitalist system, in the organisation of society, or in the human condition – for which we have no solution, neither imagined nor real" (2018, p. 26). So it is not about eliminating contradictions or solving them through substitution, but about learning to live with them, because they are an indispensable and integral part of the modern world.

Slips, happy accidents, fortunate mistakes

At the same time, when speaking as a philosopher of cinema, Elsaesser does not think of films as a source of knowledge about reality, but potentially as a reality in their own right: "[...] cinema, or more generally, the photographic image, is the reality of the twentieth century, whether we like it or not. 'The lie of the image is the truth of our world,' as Jean Luc Nancy so pithily put it. As a consequence, we tend to treat […] "the cinema," as if it was the West's (or our modernity's) only anthropology that still matters, turning film studies into the reassuring murmur of ubiquitous auto-ethnography, academia's equivalent to data mining" (2009C, pp. 125–126). Yet Elsaesser draws not only intellectual benefits, but also purely sensual pleasure from contact with different types of audio-visual performances. This, too, he spoke about in his thank-you speech, from which I quoted at the beginning:

> There is surely also another side to cinema: the terrors and pleasures of a way of "being in the world" not dependent on my subjectivity, which Andre Bazin was the first to insist on, relieving me of the burden of self-consciousness, of existential guilt, or simply of my body, for the space of two hours, releasing me from the need to make sense of my life and the obligation to shape it into a work of authenticity, of truth and relentless self-improvement.
>
> […] Because of its somewhat "performative" position in the academy, hovering over several disciplines, such as literature, art history, philosophy, gender studies, and a host of others, film studies is comparable to a bumblebee (feeding off, but also pollinating its hosts), and it can permit itself (if it wants to, if it's bold enough) to be experimental, curious, adventurous, and even irresponsible: in short, opportunistic, meaning that it can seize opportunities when they present themselves, and "parapractic," meaning it can afford slippages, happy accidents, and fortunate mistakes. This, as I have been trying to suggest,

is how I have known film studies, this is how I have practiced it, and this is how I would like to remember it" (2009C, p. 126).

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Thomas Elsaesser provided this humorous interpretation during his lecture delivered at the University of Gdańsk on 15th October, 2017.

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Thomas Elsaesser[1]

Mind-Games, Meta Cinema and Self-Allegory: The Case of Inception

Argo, I am arguing, is not a mind-game film, but plays mind-games with history, as an ideological maneuver that allows Hollywood to celebrate itself, while contributing yet another narrative emplotment to the standard trope of American war films, which is: "let no man be left behind", i.e. rescue the boys and bring them home. From *Rambo* to *Black Hawk Down*, from *Apocalypse Now* to *Saving Private Ryan,* the rescue scenario is America's self-serving representation of what are otherwise (ruinous or failed) invasive military missions (for 'restoring democracy'). If *Saving Private Ryan* is a different case – as I try to show in the chapter devoted to the film – it is also because WWII is still considered one of the United States' honorable and just wars, and because Spielberg's film questions the very logic of "save and rescue" one (man/cause/community) and not another.

A film that also reworks the 'heroic' rescue mission trope in the reflexive mode is Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*, paying homage to *Saving Private Ryan* in its opening segment, before opting for a different kind of complex narrative with interlocking actions and the same characters turning up in different segments. Mostly, *Dunkirk*'s disorienting elements are the compressed and dilated timescales across its three hours duration[2].

[1] An excerpt from the manuscript *Mind-game Films as Tipping Points*. Courtesy of Thomas Elsaesser.

[2] For a reading of *Dunkirk* in the spirit of time-bending, see Matt Zoller Seitz (2017), and Tracey J. Kinney (2018).

But it is Nolan's *Inception* (whose plot, incidentally, also pivots on the homecoming trope) that is perhaps the most paradigmatic mind-game film, **serving as a kind of summary for the different steps of my argument.** We saw how it obeys the rules of classical Hollywood narrative construction while also embodying to perfection the video-game logic as identified by Buckland. Its narrational strategies have been identified not so much as unreliable or deceptive, but as so complex as to defy analysis. Part of the difficulty stems from the way the power-relations among the protagonists are 'nested' in dreams-within-dreams: a mise-en-abyme that is further complicated not only by so-called 'lucid' (i.e. shared) dreams, but by characters finding themselves inside someone else's dream. Thus, given the non-chronological narration, with unmarked flashbacks that could be flash-forwards (and vice-versa), doubled by asymmetrical power-relations of who is in whose dream (and by extension, who is manipulating whom), *Inception* represents a special case of the uneven distribution of knowledge to be found in most films working with suspense, anticipation and retrospective revision, as well as with identification and participation. Nolan visualizes (or better: diagrams) the nested narrative through an image of the Penrose stairs, with their four 90-degree turns, infinitely ascending and descending in a continuous loop, and indicates an (equally ascending and descending) verticality by way of an old-fashioned, scissor-gate elevator. For Eliot Panek *Inception* is extreme, in that a similarly Penrose-like architecture applies to the distribution of knowledge as it does to the reality/dream status of the images and the nested narrative levels, while also implicating the audience:

> "The audience finds out, later, that Cobb and Arthur know that they are in a dream within a dream. However, the audience possesses a bit of knowledge that Cobb and Arthur do not: when Arthur asks, "What's going on up there?" the audience knows something he and Cobb do not know – that the rumblings are being caused by rioters running through the streets, blowing up cars. This knowledge might keep the audience from totally giving up on interpreting the scene: being kept disoriented for too long while characters, apparently, know more than you do is likely to feel alienating. […Yet] the protagonists also know something that the first-time viewer cannot know: that they are in a dream within a dream. It is thus not easy to say who is at an advantage here in terms of knowledge (the audience or the protagonists), but if one had to decide, one would likely say that the audience is still at a disadvantage, not even knowing the extent to which any of what they see is 'real' within the diegetic universe" (Panek, 2014, p. 81).

Detailing what he calls the "back-and-forth" between "revealing that the protagonist and antagonist had knowledge that the other (and the audience) did not", Panek uses sophisticated narratological tools to establish how carefully *Inception* is plotted as a *film*, and how it both seeks to engage an audience through the management of knowledge distribution, while simultaneously maintaining a high degree of confusion and deliberate disorientation, verging (for some viewers) on incoherence.

Inception, however, is above all the mind-game film as meta-cinema, and not merely by the way it so self-referentially flaunts its Escher-like labyrinths and Gestalt-switch tromp l'oeuils, taking us back to the duck-rabbit version of mind-game undecidability. Nor is *Inception* meta-cinema merely because it is so self-evidently readable (and frequently read) as an allegory of filmmaking, with its star Leonardo DiCaprio, the alter ego of the director, in much the way that Marcello Mastroianni was Federico Fellini's alter ego in *8 1/2*:

> The heist team quite neatly maps to major players in a film production. Cobb is the director while Arthur, the guy who does the research and who sets up the places to sleep, is the producer. Ariadne, the dream architect, is the screenwriter – she creates the world that will be entered. Eames is the actor (this is so obvious that the character sits at an old fashioned mirrored vanity, the type which stage actors would use). Yusuf is the technical guy […] That leaves two key figures. Saito is the money guy, the big corporate suit who fancies himself a part of the game. And Fischer, the mark, is the audience. Cobb, as a director, takes Fischer through an engaging, stimulating and exciting journey, one that leads him to an understanding about himself. Cobb is the big time movie director […] who brings the action, who brings the spectacle, but who also brings the meaning and the humanity and the emotion (ONTD, 2010)[3].

As the reference to Fellini indicates, *Inception* is furthermore meta-cinematic in that it alludes to more movies than one would care to enumerate: from James Bond, *Bourne*, *Mission Impossible* blockbusters to *Dirty Dozen*, *Oceans 11* heist

[3] In fact, Nolan himself has detailed these analogies: "Nolan says that the metaphor for cinema developed organically as he wrote the script over a 10-year period. Cobb's crew of mind-hackers don't infiltrate people's "real" dreams - they actually build ersatz dreams and place them inside people's heads, in the same way moviemakers craft worlds that are transmitted into our brains via a movie projector. Nolan explained that each member of the team serves a role that has a movie analog. The Architect (Ellen Page) would be the production designer. The Forger (Tom Hardy) would be the actor. The Point Man (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) would be The Producer. The Extractor (DiCaprio) would be the director. And [Fisher] The Mark (Cillian Murphy) would be us - the audience. "In trying to write a team-based creative process, I wrote the one I know," says Nolan […] "It's rare that you can identify yourself so clearly in a film. This film is very clear for me." (Jensen, 2010).

films, from Buñuel (*Un Chien Andalou*) to Cocteau (*Orphee*), and from Antonioni (*Zabriskie Point*) to the Wachowski Brothers (*The Matrix*), the allusions and homages are so pervasive that they sometimes take the form of an entire film-within-the-film pastiche.

However, we must add another layer: *Inception* allegorizes quite specifically *digital* filmmaking, insofar as in contemporary cinema, more and more devolves on post-production, with the film taking shape through outsourced special effects labs and sub-contracted work stations. "Dreaming" here stands for "digitizing": every reality, every solid object, every setting or city can become liquid, malleable, expand or contract, explode or vanish, neutralizing the laws of nature and suspending the force of gravity. However, the meta-cinematic dimension of *Inception* goes further even than authorial self-portrait, digital dematerialization, or as an allegory of the teamwork and post-production division of labor required for the making of a contemporary blockbuster film. The very action the plot revolves around, namely inception is what not only this, but all movies strive to do: extract profit from 'dreams' and plant ideas in minds. The 'real' title of the film, in other words, is 'cinema', which means that *Inception* is a mind-game film not least because it is an allegory of a mind-game: an elaborate manipulation of the viewers' sense of reality, their orientation in space and time, across the act of testing their capacity for comprehending a narrative by trying to follow a story. And while the references to dream levels, 'kicks', 'limbo' may mimetically enact the moves of a video game and mirror the actions of the players, the narration gives the audience just enough of an 'Ariadne' thread to follow the leads – movie suspense fashion – through the labyrinth, in the expectation of coming out at the other end, and together with our hero, returning 'home'.

If *Inception* is the *mise-en-abyme* of inception as the meta-cinematic truth of contemporary cinema, then the question arises: does it formulate an ideological critique or present a postmodern celebration? After all, it is a heist-movie: these avatars of a film crew are thieves and criminals, and the stand-in for the audience is called "the Mark"– the target or victim. Quite openly we are told that we are 'robbed in broad daylight', as it were, except that the robbery takes place in the darkness of a movie-theater. The film candidly concedes that extraction and inception is what cinema shares with advertising, propaganda, brainwashing, hypnosis and other forms of influence peddling and mind-control. Yet this in turn suggests that the sort of symptomatic reading or ideological critique as conducted by Garrett Stewart no longer has traction, given how openly the film hides this analogy between cinema and inception in plain sight. Such ideological readings risk doing much the same as Bordwell does: translate mind-game

complexity and narrative ambiguity 'back' into what we already know, whether it is classical story construction or capitalist corporate ideology. It assumes that it can reveal what the mind-game tries to hide, and ends up disambiguating the undecidability on the side of its ideological message.

But perhaps this is because the question: critical or celebratory, deconstructive or conformist, classical or postmodern is wrongly posed. I have been operating with a different set of terms, arguing that mind-game films mimetically enact and reflexively allegorize the material and technological conditions that make them possible. Mimesis and allegory in this context are not two diametrically opposed modes of representation, or affirmative and critical by another name, but more the two sides of the same coin, which allows the film to address and appeal to several distinct constituencies and as such another version of "access for all" while "keeping control" – control here being the hiding in plain sight or the robbery in broad daylight.

However, in the case of *Inception*, one can argue that the film's narrative architecture resembles not only a kind of tromp l'oeil perspective, in which the two-dimensionality of the screen is used for three-dimensional illusionist tricks (the Penrose stairs as the film's structural metaphor), but that there is also a parallax of another kind at work, which tempts us to look at the wrong thing or follow the wrong person, and thereby miss what is also going on. For instance, the most sustained debates surrounding *Inception* concerned the question whether the spinning top (the telltale 'totem' that was supposed to help separate reality from dream) at the end was wobbling and about to fall, or kept spinning: by cutting to black, Nolan left us 'in the dark', and thus undecided whether Cobb when reunited with his children was still in a dream, or finally back 'in the real world'. All options were debated, and plausible solutions offered for each (the spinning top is a red herring, because it is not his totem at all, but Mal's, his deceased wife, while his totem is the wedding ring, which he sometimes wears and at other times does not; the whole film is a dream, and the dream/reality divide is a red herring; etc.). These different possibilities alert us to the structuring principle of equally plausible alternatives, i.e. undecidability, but why stop there? Why not, as Todd McGowan has done, argue that Cobb is not the central figure but decentered in relation to his own 'desire', which makes Mal the film's gravitational center. Or – given the powerfully Oedipal thematics that run through the film, with Saito and Fisher senior clearly functioning as father figures – why not add the Professor (Michael Caine), Mal's father, Cobb's father-in-law and the one who lets Cobb take ownership of another of his 'daughters', Ariadne. And what if Ariadne, who is the one figuring out the role Mal still plays in Cobb's 'subcon-

scious', has been 'delegated' by the Professor to extract and incept Cobb, which is what her name suggests, as the one who holds all the threads? The Professor, having lost Mal through Cobb's recklessness, certainly has motives for wanting to 'control' Cobb. What is important is not whether this is the correct version, but merely the fact that there are several additional possibilities of how the narrative can be framed and reframed, centered and decentered, thus maintaining the story's parallax displacement and with it the possibility that a shift of angle might reveal a different view of the object.

Almost everyone writing about the film also acknowledges "*Inception* was clearly built with ambiguity in mind and that's going to make finding a final, true answer nigh-impossible."[4] However, this has not stopped critics and commentators staking their reputation on giving a definitive reading, mostly focused on how to interpret the ending, and deciding whether Cobb in the final scene is still dreaming, or awake in some more fictionally 'real' reality, where he is united with his children. By positing so openly the question of what is real and what is dream, of why dreams can feel so real, and how we can tell whether we are dreaming or not, *Inception* has also attracted its fair share of philosophers. The bait here is a problem as old as philosophy itself, going back to Plato and the parable of the Cave, it itself became the myth of origin of this sort of cinema: what if the phenomenal world we see, touch, and grasp is merely a chimera, the reflection of some ideal world of forms we can only attain through abstract concepts (or as we would now say: through mathematics)? While this debate between Socrates and Glaucon in *The Republic* about the nature of perception and knowledge has been kept alive through Descartes, Hume, Bishop Berkeley (to Hilary Putnam's 'brain in a vat' thought experiment), the neurosciences have given a new life to the possibility of either a radical disconnect between our brains and our bodies, or of a mind entirely dependent on electro-chemical impulses, in order to see or sense and thus to know anything at all. Thus, *Inception* can be seen as Platonic in its emphasis on 'ideas' but also anti-Platonic in that it treats these ideas not as guarantors of some higher truth, but as the very stuff that can be instrumentalized, manipulated, monetized. Ideas are actually referred to in the script as 'parasites' that worm themselves into the brain: more like *idées fixes* or obsessions, and thus once more close to paranoia and addiction: the Holy Grail of Hollywood today.

As a multidimensional, non-linear film, a tale told by competing narrational authorities, requiring several viewings, giving rise to mutually compatible but diametrically opposed interpretations, and offering layer upon layer of meta-cinematic reflexivity, *Inception* fulfills all the criteria of the mind-game film as

[4] 'Williamb', "Inception 2nd take", https://chud.com/inception-2nd-take/.

I have laid them out in this chapter. Packed into an Oedipal story of father-son rivalry and a family melodrama of guilt, trauma and the return of the repressed, Nolan also delivers a self-presentation as candid self-exposure: 'that's how we do it, in the Hollywood film business of today; we sub-contract the best talents from all over the world, and we treat the most beautiful spots on the planet as our film sets, which when we feel like it, we blow up, foul up or fold over.' Cool confidence, detached equanimity, and irony laced with cynicism keep their balance in this 'realistic' assessment of global Hollywood.

Assertive or anxious allegorizing is nothing new to both classical and post-classical cinema, as J.D. Connor (who prefers the term 'neo-classical') has been demonstrating for the past decade and more. *Inception*, produced in conjunction with Legendary by Warner Bros., with whom Nolan forged a close relationship after the *Batman* franchise, lends itself especially well to a reading that highlights the competing centers of power and authority within global entertainment conglomerates, which in the film are identified as being in the business of dominating the world's 'energy' market, itself an apt metaphor for cinema as an affect and emotion machine. Furthermore, if filmmakers in the US – Hollywood studios and independents, separately and in relation to each other – are indeed at all levels tied into competitive-cooperative relationships, then Hollywood is best characterized by the positive/negative feedback loops that I try to capture in my formula 'access for all' while 'keeping control'. The tension inherent in this formula no doubt needs to be further elaborated in terms of the specific budgetary moves (e.g. tax credits, labor contracts, choice of locations, crews etc.), legal maneuvers and interaction with authorities, which determine the material conditions of a script ending up as the finished movie, but it provides a template for the ways the corporate-entrepreneurial power-constellation enters into the film's narrative and allegorizes the self-representation of the production companies involved, while also keeping the contending forces in balance, which – as *Inception* makes clear – means stealing from people in such a way that they believe they are freely giving.

Yet in this chapter, my main focus has been on mind-game films, and how and why they generate moments of undecidability, whose uses and function are potentially in conflict, so that undecidability itself becomes that which keeps the balance, and cinema at the tipping point. Such work of undecidability – and as I hope has been clear throughout, constructing semantic Penrose steps and structural Escher labyrinths is *work*: demanding significant dramaturgical expertise and considerable writing skills – such may well work in response to the old William Goldman adage about Hollywood: 'nobody knows anything'. What Gold-

man meant was that no-one in the motion picture business, irrespective of their position in the corporate hierarchy, their talent or their experience *knows* for certain what film is going to succeed, or indeed why those that are successful, have become so. What this implies, however, is not that it's just "dumb luck", but that there are probably too many variables for 'linear' prediction, which is indeed one way in which narrative complexity and non-linearity of the kind typical of mind-game films allegorizes the real world conditions under which films get made in the era of creative agency-led one-off package deals:

> "If every screenplay is a business plan, then every production is a dummy corporation, a virtual corporation that gives rise to and reflects the actual corporation that it is. In *Production Culture*, John Thornton Caldwell puts it like this: 'Because film and television are so capital intensive, a script also functions as a financial prospectus, a detailed investment opportunity, and a corporate proposal.' Is a star available? Is a location "fresh"? Should this movie be marketed for Christmas release? Does it have a guaranteed cable slot? How will it play across the windows of distribution? These are a film's virtual times and spaces, and as they become actual, they may also, and by that very same maneuver, be retained in their virtuality, as images and sounds, as self-allegorizations" (Connor, 2014, p. 143).

Assuming that for producers, complex narratives are a way of keeping contending economic interests, strategic objectives and managerial decisions in balance, then on the side of the audience undecidability takes the form of not being able to agree not so much *what* a film means, but on *how* it means. As such, it may be the appropriate conditions for an age of increasing (political) polarization, but also of increasing skepticism. To the *nobody knows anything* would correspond *nobody can agree on anything*, which is what mind-game films self-referentially stage rather then merely provoke.

A similar case has been made for long-running television series, such as *Game of Thrones*, which was specifically contrasted with *Lord of the Rings* on the grounds of the disagreements it was able to sustain: "What made *Game of Thrones* emblematic of its time is how it divided its audience from start to finish, right down to the matter of what a happy ending would even constitute. It gave its intense fandom multiple angles to debate as well as to enjoy. […] The most popular fantasy epics tend to focus on a quest the audience agrees on. The Ring must be destroyed, Voldemort must be defeated, Aslan must prevail. [With *Game of Thrones*] a certain amount of dissonance [was] built in to a saga

that combined the HBO sensibility — dark psychological realism and realpolitik moral ambiguity — with epic high fantasy: a genre in which, once upon a time, the only shades of gray were in the wizards' cloaks." (Poniewozik, 2019). If even fantasy genres are banking on undecidability, then the mind-game 'virus' has begun to go mainstream.

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Evolution of Thomas Elsaesser's Concept of the 'Mind-Game' Film: A Personal Assessment

Intellectual Collaborations

I worked with Thomas Elsaesser for over three decades on numerous projects. Our intellectual collaboration began in the early 1990s, soon after I completed my Ph.D. thesis ('Filmic Meaning: The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface') under his supervision. Thomas invited me to co-teach on the MA Film Theory class he had just established at the University of Amsterdam. I travelled regularly from the UK to Amsterdam in the 1990s, where I gave presentations on *mise-en-scène* theory, statistical style analysis, narration, and videogame logic. We collaborated on writing up our separate MA seminar notes as a book. This took several years, but the co-authored volume eventually emerged in 2002 – *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press). It is a record of those heady Amsterdam seminars from the 1990s, and we were pleased to see our film theory book sell several thousand copies and be translated into Italian and Japanese. It was during this MA class that both of us developed theories of complex storytelling in the 1990s, with current films released in the cinema – including *12 Monkeys* (1995), *Lost Highway* (1997), *eXistenZ* (1999), and *Memento* (2000).

In another collaboration of sorts, I edited an anthology on 'film semiology after Metz' in 1994-95. Thomas invited me to publish it in his new book series, Film Culture in Transition. *The Film Spectator: From Sign to Mind* (Amsterdam University Press, 1995), my first book, appeared as the fifth volume of the series. (The series is still going, with over 50 volumes.)

We spent a decade, from 2008 to 2017, on one of his major projects – to publish his collected essays in a series of volumes. This was no mean feat – not only because he published several hundred essays, but also because he usually had several drafts of each. Thomas entrusted me to read his various drafts, to suggest edits and rearrange the table of contents. The first volume, *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York: Routledge) came out in 2012. I remember the difficulties we faced trying to keep it under 250,000 words. Thomas graciously recognized my efforts with a paragraph-long comment in the book's Acknowledgements. Additional collections of essays followed. The final volume of his collected essays is yet to be published.

The Mind-Game Film: 2006-2017

One of the most ambitious ideas Thomas developed was that of the 'mind-game' film, an idea that underwent numerous revisions since its first formulation in 2006. I was fortunate to be able to include Thomas's first major statement on the mind-game film in my edited collection *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). My puzzle film project formally began in September 2005, with the following email to friends and colleagues: 'I'm planning to put together a book proposal on complex storytelling in contemporary World cinema. The book will cover complex storytelling in both American cinema (*Lost Highway, Mulholland Drive Memento*), Wong Kar-Wai (especially *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*), Korean cinema (Hong Sang-soo), European cinema, and others'.

Thomas's concept of the mind-game film crystallised in written form the following year, in 2006. His ideas came together in a keynote paper written for and presented at the international Colloquium 'Moving Images - The Morphing of the Real and Its Vicissitudes', held at Tel Aviv University on June 7-9, 2006 (Thomas presented his paper on 7th of June in the evening). Thomas sent me the first draft as an attachment in an email dated 22 August 2006: 'here it is', he wrote in the accompanying email, 'not quite in the way I presented it in Tel Aviv, but with all the half-finished thoughts and repetitions of a spoken presentation. It will at least give you an idea whether (some of) it fits into your book'. The attachment, called 'Mind-game Movies: Tel Aviv Paper', is almost 14,000 words

(the paper plus many pages of additional notes). Thomas again entrusted me to read this draft and to suggest edits.

On 6 September 2006 I sent Thomas the following email: 'I have now read your paper on mind-game films, and would like to open my "complex storytelling" volume with it – or, at least, an edited version. I have carved out a short (6,500 word) paper from your much longer paper'. Unfortunately, I can no longer locate this short version, although I remember reducing Thomas's references to Žižek and Deleuze. But, clearly, my editing was too severe, for the final version that ended up in my *Puzzle Films* book is 11,500 words.

On 27 April 2007 I sent the book manuscript to the publishers. At the last minute I added *Puzzle Films* to the title, with the former title (*Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, minus the word 'world') serving as the subtitle. In my Introduction to the volume I stressed the narratological dimension of the puzzle film.

Thomas was always uneasy with the term 'puzzle film', for it suggested to him a problem that simply needs to be unravelled and resolved. He also contested my exclusive emphasis on narratology, for he conceived mind-game films not simply as narratological puzzles to be deciphered but as films that are 'symptomatic for wider changes in the culture's way with moving images and virtual worlds' ('The Mind-Game Film', p. 39). In his chapter he did draw upon narratology, but also psychology and psychopathology, history and politics, and Žižek, in order to develop his ideas around schizophrenia, paranoia, amnesia, the risk society, and his notion of productive pathologies. In a world of risk, contingency and uncertainty, he argued, paranoia is no longer a pathology, but is a rational way of dealing with the contemporary world, as a mode of adapting to it. He argued that the mind-game film addresses 'epistemological problems (how do we know what we know) and ontological doubts (about other worlds, other minds)' ('The Mind-Game Film', p. 15).

Due to the success of the puzzle film book, I decided to edit a sequel, called *Hollywood Puzzle Films* (Routledge, 2014). I again approached Thomas to contribute. In an email dated 5 August 2013, he wrote: 'Personally, I am fascinated by the phenomenon of "retroactive anticipation," i.e. the loop where something is recognized in the present as having been anticipated in the past, which is, of course, an effect created in the present in order to make the past enable or empower the present'. He suggested analysing this phenomenon in the many Hollywood adaptations of Philip K. Dick's fiction. In November of the same year we were both invited to present keynotes at the conference 'Film, Virtuality, and the

Body' in Rome, where Thomas updated me on his chapter, now called 'Philip K. Dick, The Mind-Game Film, and Retroactive Causality'. It was published in the volume in 2014.

A few years after completing this extraordinary essay on Philip K. Dick, Thomas began rethinking his conception of the mind-game film. In another collaboration of sorts, he sent me early drafts of his ideas. He gradually reworked the mind-game film using the concept of 'distributed agency'. He presented the paper at the conference 'Fast, Slow & Reverse: Faces of Contemporary Film Narration: 'Around Mainstream Cinema', in Gdańsk, 24–25 May 2017 (where both of us were again invited to give keynote presentations). He published the final version as 'Contingency, Causality, Complexity: Distributed Agency in The Mind-Game Film' ("New Review of Film and Television Studies", 16, 1, [2018], pp. 1–39), an essay which he generously dedicated to me. In the abstract he noted that 'this essay complements my earlier symptomatic, sociological and economic reading of mind-game films ('The Mind-Game Film', 2009) with a reassessment of their status as a privileged (though minoritarian) object of study for contemporary cinema from a philosophical perspective. This essay also updates the analysis given in the 2009 essay, mindful that there have in recent years been a number of popular big-budget films that qualify as mind-game films' (2018, p. 1). The abstract then lists what he considered at the time to be the twelve key features of mind-game films:

> "(1) multiple universes, (2) multiple temporalities, (3) causality between coincidence and conjunction, (4) feedback: looped and retroactive causalities, (5) *mise-en-abyme* constructions, (6) the observer as part of the observed, (7) living with contradictions, (8) imaginary resolutions no longer dissolve real contradictions, (9) antagonistic mutuality under conditions of distributed agency, (10) agency – with the self, against the self, (11) time travel films as black boxes and (12) the mind-game film as *pharmakon"* (2018, p. 1).

He concluded the abstract by noting that, 'Ultimately, mind-game films amplify ontological instability and dismantle both the sovereign subject and its antidote, the divided self of modern subjectivity, in view of accepting more complex but also self-contradictory, more limited but also more extended forms of agency' (2018, p. 1).

The Mind-Game Film: Unpublished Papers From 2019

Thomas tackled the mind-game film again in 2019 while formulating the topic for his as yet unpublished collection of essays on complex storytelling and the mind-game film. These 2019 papers include the following titles (the dates

indicate the time he emailed them to me, and the quotations are from his description of the papers in his emails):

'Toggle Bars and Tipping Points' (22 April 2019; revision on 27 April)

> 'the first six pages of my new introductory chapter'.

'The History of the Present as a Paranoid Mind-Game' (29 April 2019)

> 'this is the first and very rough draft of what I now think might become the final chapter of my book. I've written it as lecture notes for the last session of my Columbia Mind-game class tomorrow, so it's not at all worked out. Hopefully, however, the outlines of an argument do emerge, which should also justify my symptomatic/parapractic reading of the mind-game film, against narratological, cognitivist and phenomenological approaches to puzzle films'.

'Why Mind-Game/Puzzle Films' (3 pages; 30 May 2019)

> 'a new 12 point list about mind-game films, which might serve as the underlying rationale of my Introductory chapter'.

'The (Re-)Turn to Non-Linear Storytelling: Counterfactual History and Looped Narratives' (15 September 2019)

Thomas presented this paper at the Screenwriting Research Network conference in Porto on 14 September. It is primarily about non-linear storytelling, and Thomas does not use the term 'mind-game film' (although non-linearity is one of its features).

This proliferation of papers in 2018-19 attests to Thomas's intense desire to reformulate his concept of the mind-game film. I thought he had finalised it in his 2018 paper 'Contingency, Causality, Complexity', with its twelve variables. But he wanted to push further. To me it seems that the 2019 introductory notes and papers are spin-offs from that 2018 paper, developing specific variables rather than reformulating the entire mind-game framework. With the concept continually under revision in his mind, it is impossible to know where next he would have taken the concept of the mind-game film.

Panoptikum 2019, 22: 43-50.

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Thomas Elsaesser and I – a memory

I met Thomas Elsaesser at the Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference in Montreal in March 2015. I was hanging around the Routledge book stand looking at my newly edited collection *Embodied Encounters: New Approaches to Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Thomas came up and picked up one of the books, also at the stand. I noticed the title and said: 'Oh this is a great volume' and he said, smiling and winking at me 'I know I wrote it'. I was delighted to have met him as much of his work is of course foundational for anybody studying film. We laughed and joked about how we were checking out that our books were at the publishers' stand. I said: 'But I am really a filmmaker and new to academia'. Thomas asked if he would know anything I had done and I replied that perhaps *Married to the Eiffel Tower* (2008), a documentary film of mine about women who fall in love with objects and more people, a film which has become very well known internationally. 'Aha' Thomas said 'yes, I know it well. It is a sort of a documentary mind-game film, right?' and then we talked and talked, and never stopped talking for almost five years, until he suddenly died, so unexpectedly in China. This is how we met. That is in any event one version of the introduction. Michael Renov has another one and he always says he in fact introduced us at the Columbia drinks party later that day – but the encounter at the stand was indeed the first time we actually met, Renov's subsequent introduction notwithstanding. From that moment we became close friends, with Thomas Elsaesser adopting the position of the mentor and a father figure to me. Whilst I accepted this situation in principle gladly and gratefully, I was probably a difficult protégée as I saw him as brilliant but also patriarchal.

We spent many a discussion arguing about asymmetrical power relationships in cinema and in society and we both treasured our differences.

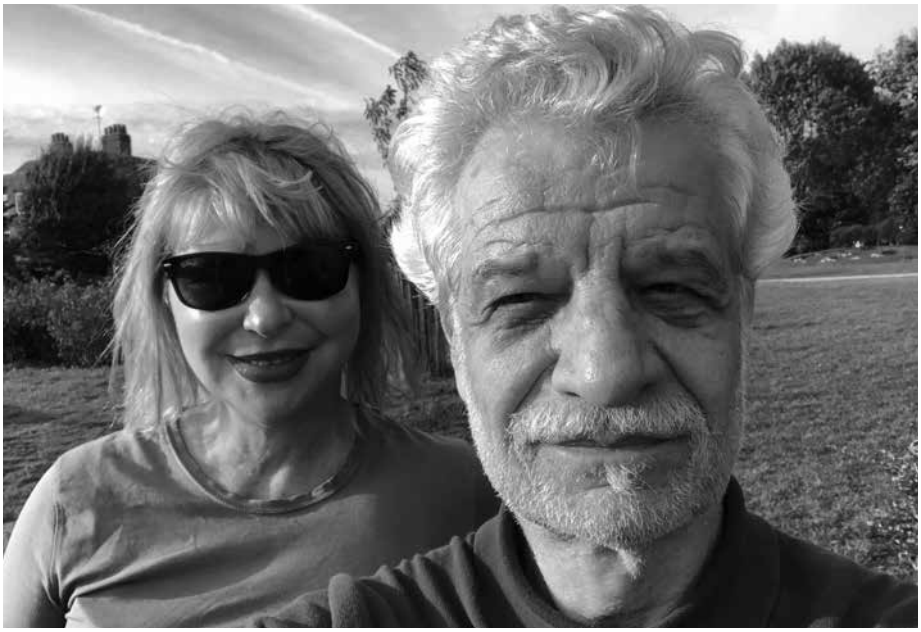
The 'father figure' idea which started as a sort of joke took root and Thomas became so much more in my life than a senior colleague. I introduced him to WhatsApp and on it we exchanged thoughts about life, cinema, culture, our friends and families, and just about everything, sometimes several times a day. It was the most special and unique relationship of my life, without a doubt, as it would not have been easy to categorise it: it was uncannily reminiscent of my relationship with my late distant and intellectual father, yes, but clearly different: we were also fellow scholars, be it separated by different generational expectations and different experience. We met regularly, including at Gdansk University where we overlapped a little with our visiting professorships in 2018-2019, but there were also other occasional conferences and workshops. We had a huge public disagreement at the Screenwriting conference in Porto in September 2019 but we made up soon after. We always discussed our differences and always found a way to carry on the friendship. Our rows – which were many and all about intellectual disagreements – were also quite similar to those I had with my father before he passed away. We talked about that too and how life brings these surprises to us all, the repetitions and miracles of being alive. Thomas was particularly interested in my writing and my filmmaking, and encouraged me to develop my fiction writing too – a project still under construction.

At that time too when we first met, already in his 70's Thomas was developing his film project – a documentary about his family, a film which was eventually completed in 2018. This project was important and reminiscent of Roland Barthes's notion of the importance of 'late work' (2011 [1980]). In a discussion of his own desire to do something new late in life, Barthes talks about 'a Complete Break' (2011: p. 214), a phrase that refers to an older accomplished thinker (or writer or artist) trying something totally new, 'a Beginning, a Vita Nova: a rebirth'. Barthes explains that such a project relates to one's desire: 'to be immortal is to be completely reborn; the work to be written is the mediator of this second kind of immortality' (ibidem.: pp. 214–15). That is to say, an immortality in which in one's work will develop and change with the creator, continuously learning and creating something that will be different, innovative and generally fabulous[1]. Barthes gives examples of such moves by some writers (Mallarmé, Michelet, Proust) and of course his own planned novel was to be such a Complete Break. I wonder if Thomas Elsaesser's film project, completed when he was 75, might have been

[1] One could argue that one of Barthes's attempted 'Complete Breaks' was the acknowledgement of the return of the author which he too was so involved in demolishing in his previous work.

designed to be that too – a complete break and a new beginning. Whether it was a further desire to assure his and his family's immortality is less clear, but there might well have been an element of that too in the undertaking.

Over the years, Thomas was on many occasions the first reader of my books and articles, as well as of my creative work, which he was particularly interested in as that was something he was wanting to develop for himself. He enjoyed my documentary *Lovers in Time*, which was completed at the time of our first meeting in 2015 and which we then co-wrote a chapter about for a book on World Cinema (2019); he was the first critic of the feature film I made in Zimbabwe (*Escape*) and subsequent projects, short films and my experimental drama *Repented* (2019) that he was particularly fond of. He wanted to move away from purely scholarly work and become more of an artist so we talked about that extensively.



It is in this context that I invited Thomas to be one of the keynotes at a conference I organised at my own institution in 2018, the University of Bedfordshire, provocatively entitled "Creative Practice Research in the Age of Neoliberal Hopelessness". I wanted to hear about Elsaesser's long-fulfilled ambition to make a film and what knowledge he might have felt he produced during its making. We discussed the project at length and were excited at the new challenge. Dur-

ing his keynote he coined the phrase 'tactical compliance', which became a very controversial notion at the conference and also in the forthcoming book inspired by it (which I am editing and which will appear in 2020 published by Edinburgh University Press). It is hard to critique a work of such a notable scholar, even when he is a friend, and even more so now that he is gone. Thomas' film and the talk he delivered at the conference, which will be included in the forthcoming book, fascinating though it is, focuses less on knowledge or knowledges (as Haraway (1988) would have it) but more on what creativity might mean in general and what the practicalities of making of his first film were. In terms of his film, he wrote about the necessity of a particular moment in time (involving a German Bank taking over a building his grandfather had designed), his grandfather's legacy and an uneasy relationship with his German producer. Elsaesser's essay describes his decision to proceed to work with the professional producer and editor in order to get his film made despite having profound professional and personal issues with them. In other words, despite his reservations, he decided to work with these professionals in the spirit of 'tactical compliance'. Here the phrase simply means an opportunistic but necessary decision to use those who had a professional experience of putting things together despite conceptual and professional difficulties. At the time of the conference, his keynote phrase was a basis for heated discussion, some of which is reproduced in the forthcoming volume.

The film is based on Elsaesser's family's home movies, shot by his father before and during the Second World War. Home movies from any historical period have a certain charm about them and this is no exception. The core of the film is the story featuring his grandfather, a notable architect Martin Elsaesser, and his wife Liesel, Thomas Elsaesser's grandmother. In the documentary we discover that his grandmother had a stormy and passionate love affair with her husband's colleague, a garden designer called Leberecht Migge. It was Migge's dream to create a self-sustaining paradise of a garden which would offer both nourishment and beauty. He and Elsaesser's grandmother did set up such a paradise island outside Berlin, called *The Sun Island*, which is also the title of the film.

In May 2016 Thomas asked me, his junior friend but also an experienced documentary filmmaker who has made many films for broadcast television, to look at his first edit of *The Sun Island* and suggest changes/improvements. At that time Thomas Elsaesser was already infuriated by his producer Reihart's ideas regarding a possible inclusion of some general archival footage from the Second World War in the film – as a visual and contextual juxtaposition to the home movies Elsaesser presented. I saw a three-hour long assembly in Amsterdam. It was a very difficult session and I wrote long emails to Elsaesser after the

event, which I will not be reproducing here. Suffice to say, I suggested dramatic cuts, writing a strong narrative and working closely with the television professionals as the film needed a firm and experienced hand. I felt that as there were already people involved it would not have been right for me to be involved beyond that advice as that might have confused matters further. I despaired over the difficulties but suggested it might have been to the film's benefit to stay with the producers. I also knew I would have wanted to take over the project creatively which was not something Thomas would have welcomed at that point.

In my emails there was something else though, something far more important, and this line I will quote here: 'I can understand Reihart trying to create something against the background of the actual historical events – it is not idiotic, it's an attempt to make it all clearer. This was not just a love story. War was raging in Europe'. For me then, and now, the bracketing of the atrocities of the Second World War is a conceptual and ethical flaw in the film, and possibly has made it into a questionable ethical gesture. There is a disquiet about focusing only on the idyllic life on the island and the romantic affairs of its inhabitants without any engagement whatsoever with the storms of the war of Europe at the very same time and his family's involvement in it, including the male relatives being in the German army at the time, and wearing Nazi swastikas, a fact that is mentioned only in passing. On the other hand, his mother was in fact Jewish, and hiding at the time and then had to carry on hiding, in peace times in Germany, a very common trait and also one that I am familiar with in my own family.

Regarding Thomas Elsaesser's piece of work, I am indeed amongst many people who get 'special thanks' at the end of the film. I am certainly in good company there as Michael Renov is credited too. Some of my suggestions of writing a strong narrative and cutting the film dramatically were implemented – but not the crucial one. The film as is disavows the simple fact that in some way Elsaesser's family, like so many others in Germany at the time, was indeed complicit with the Nazi regime. The words 'compliant' and 'complicit' have the same etymological root and in some way mean a similar thing: to be acquiescent with a certain course of action. The failure to acknowledge more clearly – at least in visual terms, never mind in some kind of deeper reflection – the atrocities of the Nazi regime which the Elsaesser family were in some way involved in, can be viewed as ethically problematic. Perhaps it is indeed the difficulty at getting at the feminine auto-ethnographic statement here but perhaps also there is a desire to hide from the demands a painful recognition of one's own historical legacy, which in Thomas Elsaesser's case is in fact two-fold: Nazi and Jewish. So more discussions followed, and what I have written below is in part a result of these exchanges.

In the now classic work on post-war trauma, *The Inability to Mourn* (1967), the German psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich make a point that the Germans quickly identified with new post-war regimes without dealing with their long commitment to Hitler, creating systems of denial and forgetting. It was as if the Germans chose not to deal with the past. As a result, the authors claimed more than 50 years ago, the German psyche may have never freed itself from Hitler because it did not go through the rituals that true mourning demanded. What is quite extraordinary here is that Thomas Elsaesser used the Mitscherlichs's research in his own academic work quite extensively, in his discussion of New German Cinema in his volume of 1989. Discussing Mitscherlich, Elsaesser confirms: 'Instead of discussing this past, Germans prefer to bury it' (1989: p. 242) and yet, somehow, when it came to making his own film these concerns are put aside.

Thomas' silence is palpable not only in the film but also in his keynote and in the book chapter. In some ways, therefore, he missed an opportunity for a more profound production of knowledge relating to his personal legacy of the Second World War that making of such a deeply subjective film may have offered. He was insistent he did not wish to include 'the bigger picture' – 'no, not in my family film', he would say, and he refused to amend it. As friends and colleagues, Thomas and I discussed the matter at length after the conference and after many screenings of his film, including some in Poland and in Amsterdam, which I introduced. We discussed the matter last time in late November 2019 and agreed that the book for Edinburgh University Press should go to print the way it was and that there might be time for 'a further deeper reflection' in due course. We were happy to leave it this way – an open ended conversation, like so many, but with a hope that a further development would follow.

Unfortunately, and shockingly, Thomas died unexpectedly in China on 4th December 2019 at the beginning of his lecture tour. As it happens, he showed his film to the Chinese students at Peking University and this is what he wrote to me in an email of 3rd December or it might already in fact have been the 4th December his time, perhaps one of his very final emails: 'So far I have found very appreciative but also very smart and critically astute audiences. Tonight's screening of my film was a special event, with Chinese subtitles and very good discussion after. Peking University is the top in the country and the quality of the students shows it. I am very lucky'. It appears that Thomas Elsaesser died happy, even if we all felt it was well before his time. He died pretty much a few hours later, becoming unconscious in his sleep and never re-gaining consciousness.

We were scheduled to discuss the illustrations for his chapter the following day but this was not to be. What remains is a trace of our discussions and 'the deeper reflection' that Thomas Elsaesser was preparing to write will now not happen. *The Sun Island* remains a very special and moving film but it is also an example of how very hard it is to produce knowledge out of auto-ethnographic material and how potentially ethically problematic such a project might be when the subject of the interrogation is our own life or that of our family.

In his reflection on the process of creation (and writing in particular), Barthes sets out 'three trials' (2011: p. 173): the first one is to decide to embark upon 'the Work' at all, choosing 'the object', the second one is the 'step-by-step management of' the work and the third one is 'the moral trial' including a decision of how the work 'fits in with the social (historical social)' (ibidem, p. 173). Elsewhere in the book he talks about the ethical always trumping the aesthetic and that it is a hard call. Barthes calls one's commitment to the Work potentially 'heroic' – 'an uncompromising attachment to a Practice' (ibidem, p. 281), which clearly is in direct opposition to any form of tactical compliance. One has to say that Barthes did of course write many very influential works – but *not* the very final one he wanted to write. Many reasons could have been behind that but undoubtedly any 'uncompromising Practice' is excruciatingly hard, a lot harder than many people realise. Whatever anybody's views on Thomas Elsaesser's film might be, it is very clear that his whole life and work is a testimony to his heroic and indeed uncompromising attachment to his practice, which of course includes first and foremost his academic work but which also includes this film, *The Sun Island*, his love letter to his family. Thomas Elsaesser took risks and never stopped exploring and expanding his intellectual horizons – for our benefit too. He was also prepared for the younger generations to discuss and critique his work, teaching us all how to open spaces for the generative intellectual engagement. There is no doubt at all that his work and his spirit will continue to be a guiding light for us all.

Because of the nature of his passing, which was utterly unexpected, it is hard for me not to continue checking my phone, as I have done for almost 5 years, to see if there is perhaps a text from him. It is impossible to accept that there would be no further communications, no further guidance, or argument, or just anything. That part of our friendship is over. As a friend and a mentee I am bereft. As a scholar and an artist, I begin to understand that what is left is the richness of Thomas Elsaesser's work and his thoughts as written and that this is plenty for us all to draw from. His encouragement and faith in the power of creativity and academic rigour stays and will need to be enough now to guide us.

As creative practice researchers, we need to keep questioning the rules, the law, the attitudes, the systems. We need to cross boundaries in order to stay faithful to our internal campus and question that too. Thomas Elsaesser was one of the most difficult people I have ever known. He was stubborn, single minded, irritatingly short-tempered at times, he could appear narcissistic and preoccupied. He was also breathtakingly erudite, intellectually and emotionally generous, funny and very respectful of my work and that of others. He was endlessly forgiving and tolerant, immensely optimistic and curious about new ways of seeing things and boundlessly grateful about what the world had to offer. To say I will miss him is the understatement of my life but I also feel very lucky to have had the chance to learn from him and to be his friend, 'his creative inspiration', as he said many a time, and his intellectual sparring partner in the last 5 years of his life.

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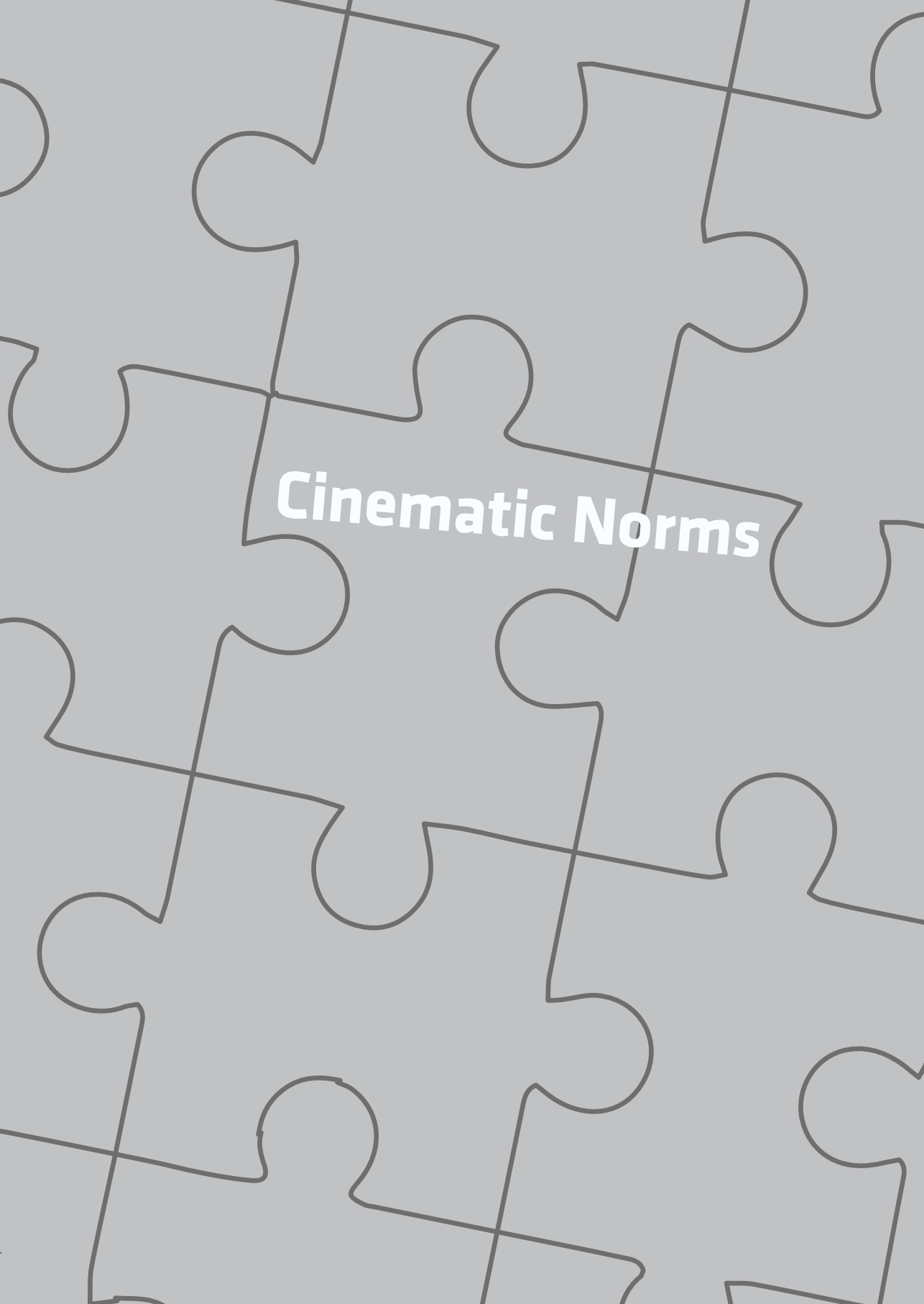
Cinematic Norms

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Norms, Forms and Roles: Notes on the Concept of Norm (Not Just) in Neoformalist Poetics of Cinema

Norm as a tool of structural analysis and writing of aesthetically based history is a concept designed by Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský in his articles and lectures from the 1930s. Although Mukařovský's concept has been elaborated mostly in the "domestic" fields of literary studies and structural aesthetics[1], it has also become part of a consistent research project in another country and another discipline. For a few decades, American film scholars, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, have been handling this idea. This article follows three main goals, regarding the fact that in the academic work of Bordwell and Thompson *norm* appeared regularly throughout the 1980s, fulfilling several functions:

(1) The broadest aim of this article is to reconstruct specific roles the concept of norm played in the process of establishing the so-called *neoformalist poetics* approach, represented by Bordwell and Thompson. In other words, the article is going to outline the "centrifugal" functions of norm in polemics with other approaches as well as the "centripetal" ones in elaborating a particular research project and formulating the influential model of

[1] See Vodička, 1948, 1969; Sus, 1966, 1967; Steiner, 1976, pp. 90–100; Striedter, 1989, pp. 207–221; Chvatík, 1994, pp. 27–31; Sládek, 2015, pp. 202–207.

so-called classical Hollywood cinema. By returning to Jan Mukařovský's starting points, we will be able to more clearly understand how his concept was employed and transformed by neoformalist poeticians in order to solve the problems of film studies as an academic discipline on the one hand and problems in formulating concrete research projects on the other.

(2) The more particular goal of this article is to point out certain shifts in neoformalist poeticians' handling of the concept of norm after they formulated the classical Hollywood cinema model. The concept of norm was initially used by them as a tool for bottom-up research of the stylistic history of cinema, as a hollow category for its unbiased explanation. However, consequently it has also become a somewhat filled category applied rather top-down as an interpretative background for assessing its alternatives.

(3) That leads us to the final goal of this article: to answer the question why this re-assessment and interrogation of roles played by norm in neoformalist poetics matters now. By returning to the original concept of norm and by the treatise of its changing functions for film study, the article aims to remind us of the usefulness and flexibility of this research tool. As will be suggested in the last part of this article, we still know too little about stylistic and narrative histories of so-called *regional cinemas*. If we want to understand their stylistic and narrative history properly, the concept of norm is highly worthwhile – but only if is reached by bottom-up research as the hollow category for the unbiased explanation of certain cinematic phenomena.

So this article does not aim to re-evaluate the model of (classical) Hollywood cinema as *a* norm or *the* norm as was formulated by neoformalist poetics but rather to explain how *norm* served neoformalist poeticians in their attempt to understand (classical) Hollywood cinema instead[2]. Through reconstruction of the discussion and the research, we can re-evaluate the possibilities of norm just as the tool for a better understanding of regional cinemas' *historical poetics*.

Jan Mukařovský and (aesthetic) norms

Before we get to the work of Bordwell and Thompson, it is appropriate to at least briefly explain the role of the (aesthetic) norm in the writing of Jan

[2] This article is a fundamentally rewritten and extended version of my conference paper presented in 2011 in Prague and of the recently (eight years later) published form of this paper in the "Litikon" journal (Kokeš, 2019).

Mukařovský[3]. First of all, Mukařovský understood *norm* as a kind of *regulatory principle* which guides the individual artist towards his intended goal. As Peter Steiner wrote, the very choice to name such a principle as norm "was perhaps not a happy one, for the word 'norm' often refers to an obligatory rule and this is not what the [Prague] Structuralists had in mind. Further, in the realm of art any reference to norms brings to mind various schools of normative aesthetics which attempted to differentiate between art and non-art on the basis of fixed rules" (Steiner, 1976, p. 90). However, Mukařovský decided to use this label (influenced by contemporary legal theorists from Vienna and Brno; ibidem) and elaborated his concept for the first time in the 1935 article *Aesthetic Function and Aesthetic Norm as Social Facts* (Mukařovský, 1935), which became the basis for the famous 1936 monographic essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social Facts* (Mukařovský, 1936; in English, Mukařovský, 1970). This development is significant because the original dichotomy of aesthetic function/aesthetic norm eventually became a trichotomy of aesthetic function/aesthetic norm/aesthetic value. In this trichotomy, however, the aesthetic norm remained slightly part of the original dichotomy (where it had had a regulatory role, which also had had an evaluative dimension) – and slightly became part of the new trichotomy (where it should only have a regulatory dimension, while evaluative aspects are covered by value). This indeterminate transitive role of the aesthetic norm is also recognisable from Mukařovský's final characteristic at the very end of the study, where he explains the aesthetic norm as:

> "The aesthetic norm, the regulator of the aesthetic function, is not an unchanging law, but a process which is constantly being renewed. By its distribution in strata of older and newer norms, lower and higher, etc., and by its evolutionary transformations, it is incorporated into social evolution, sometimes indicating exclusive membership in a given social milieu, sometimes individual shifts from stratum to stratum, or, finally, accompanying and signalling shifts in the total structure of society" (Mukařovský, 1970, p. 95).

What matters to us is that it is highly problematic to use the norm in these contexts as a fully functional tool in the history of (film) style. The focus of the essay is not to understand preferred solutions to artistic problems[4], but to offer a programme of a sociological approach to aesthetics. The aesthetic norm is

[3] He was not the only one who began to work with the term. Later Ernst Gombrich (Gombrich, 1971, pp. 81–98, 302) turned to *norm* independently, and the concept of norm can be found in the history of film style in the concept of Barry Salt (Salt, 2009 [originally 1984]). Neither of them referred to Mukařovský.

[4] More about the problem-solving model of stylistic research as well as about questions of conceptualising film style in Burnett, 2008.

only one part of a complex network of relationships between it, aesthetic function and aesthetic value. Moreover, as such, the norm is primarily an aesthetic one, and the background for its understanding is not the other types of norms with which the creators come into contact. Although Mukařovský thinks about parallel norms (Mukařovský, 1970, pp. 55–58), he does not elaborate them further and remains at a high level of theoretical generality. The proposed system is undoubtedly impressive and abounds with many unique ideas, *but*… On the one hand, there are several logical flaws (see: Fořt, 2006; Przylipiak, 2019). On the other hand, if we separate the concept of norm from this system and use it as a tool for writing stylistic history, it would lead to a significant shift in Mukařovský's argumentation.

In other words, if we want to understand the ways and likely reasons of dealing with the concept of norm in the texts of David Bordwell, it should be remembered that his writing about it was not originally based on the above-cited study. Bordwell's source material was the short article *The Aesthetic Norm*, prepared by Jan Mukařovský in 1937 for IXth International Congress of Philosophy in Paris (Mukařovský, 1937) and translated into English by John Burbank and Peter Steiner in 1978 (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 49–56)[5]. Just this short article by Mukařovský offers a sufficiently open and at the same time efficient enough model of a norm to be able to serve the aims of the history of film style or, more generally, the historical poetics of cinema.

It offers a dynamic tool that (1) can explain the construction of particular film work. Mukařovský writes: "The structure of a work of art has the nature of an unstable equilibrium of different types of norms, aesthetic and others, which obtain in the work and are applied in part positively, in part negatively" (ibidem, p. 56). The concept of norm, as proposed here, also has potential to explain (2) the reasons for the construction of the artwork, depending on the specific empirical conditions of its production at a particular time and place. Mukařovský offers a categorisation of norms that can be applied in an artwork. The final artwork is thus the result of negotiation, confrontation of heterogeneous norms: "Such a confrontation of heterogeneous norms is, of course, felt as a conflict but as a desirable conflict, which is a part of the intention from which the work arose" (ibidem, p. 52). Surely, Mukařovský does not speak in this text about the empirical conditions of the art-working or about artworks as a result of solving specific artistic problems. However, it is not contrary to his arguments to think of several types of norms as a set of particular constraints that the artist is con-

[5] Bordwell does not refer to *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Value as Social Facts* until later in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell, 1985, p. 349), where he selects only those citations that are in accordance to what Mukařovský wrote in *The Aesthetic Norm*.

fronted with. Finally, this short article offers tools to (3) understand the long-term influence of norms from a historical perspective:

> "We can (…) consider as proven that the interrelations among all these norms, which function as instruments for artistic devices, are too complex, too differentiated, and too unstable for the positive value of the work to be able to appear as virtually identical with the perfect fulfilment of all norms obtained in it. The history of art has much more the nature of a perpetual revolt against the norm. There are, of course, periods tending toward maximally attainable harmony and stability; are usually called periods of classicism. On the other hand, there are periods when art seeks out maximal lability in the structure of artistic works" (Mukařovský, 1978, p. 54).

In contrast to the firm, highly complex theoretical system of the first article, in this case, Mukařovský offers a very dynamic and very flexible analytical tool. Moreover, even in its suggestion of so-called anthropological dimension of norms, the article to some extent compliant with some later considerations of the so-called cognitive perspective in film studies, of which David Bordwell became an exponent (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, pp. 7–9; Bordwell, 1985, 1989).

Roles of norms as arguments in polemics

It can be said that David Bordwell, since the beginning of his academic career in the 1970s, has been somewhat sceptical about certain tendencies of then-prevailing "continental" film theorising, though not as much as a few years later. Although Bordwell did not publish the first of his fairly critical articles until the early 1980s (Bordwell, 1981a, 1983), he drew up his idea of a more appropriate direction of theoretical thinking about cinema as early as the late 1970s, when he co/published two methodologically ambitious texts.

First, together with Kristin Thompson, he wrote the first edition of *Film Art: An Introduction* (Bordwell, Thompson, 1979). This resulted from several years of their teaching introductory courses (ibidem, p. iv), in which they gradually developed their idea of the right direction of film education (cf. Bordwell, 1976). One of the points in which this book represented an alternative was its distinct following of the assumptions, analytical tools and terminology

of Russian literary formalism[6]. Second, in the same year, Bordwell published his first more systematic commentary on the state and aims of film researching: *Criticism, Theory, and the Particular* (Bordwell, 1979) as the editorial for a special issue of "Film Criticism". In it, he indicated worry "that most critical analyses produce no general knowledge" (ibidem, p. 1). He suggested where research should go: to analyse film form, to historical perspective, but above all to *norms*:

> "To make criticism concrete, we need to construct a conception of the dominant ways in which films are put together and understood in certain times and places. The elaboration of such models has barely begun, but some precedents can guide us. The principle of a norm was a central feature of Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist poetics. Every work, it was argued, had to be situated with respect to the reigning canons of artistic practice" (ibidem, p. 5).

In an endnote, we then read that "[t]he most thorough discussion of the concept of norm is Jan Mukařovský, 'The Aesthetic Norm'" (ibidem, p. 8)[7]. Already at an early stage in Bordwell's historical research, as well as in its polemics with contemporary film theorising, we can find Mukařovský's concept of norms as a fundamental argument in the debate on the direction of film research.

In his later programmatic contributions from the first half of the 1980s, Bordwell followed a distinct rhetorical tactic. Taking a relatively established analytical approach to cinema (e.g. Christian Metz's theory of codes and subcodes, textual analysis, or *mise-en-scène* criticism), he appreciated the research possibilities of this approach, critically analysed it – and then subsequently presented *his* ap-

[6] Admittedly, Russian formalism was extensively debated during the first half of the 1970s in continental theoretical reflections on cinema, especially in the British journal "Screen". However, the formalism remained only one of a series of theoretical and methodological impulses, which the emerging field of film studies took from other disciplines. Film scholars tested their potential, combined them with other impulses – and then abandoned them. For example, Boris Eichenbaum's application of the concept of inner speech (e. g. Willemen, 1974) and Vladimir J. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (e. g. Wollen, 1976; Erens, 1977) have been discussed and applied. Thus, the pursuit with which Bordwell and Thompson followed and further developed Russian formalism (and Czech structuralism) was indeed an alternative.

[7] Although we can find a similar reference in the 1981 article *Textual Analysis, etc.* (Bordwell, 1981, p. 129), Bordwell was probably not quite sure for a long time to whom the concept of norms was attributed. We can suppose this not only from the careful wording in these articles but also from his later essay *Lowering the Stakes*. Bordwell also speaks about norms primarily concerning Russian formalism. It is particularly apparent in the footnote where (regarding Peter Steiner's essay; Steiner, 1982) Bordwell writes: "It seems evident to me that a thoroughgoing Formalist account of cinema will have to take account of the contributions of Czech Structuralism, especially in the domain of research into historical norms" (Bordwell, 1983, p. 16). This error is also because he and Kristin Thompson based their re/interpretations of both formalistic and Czech structuralist texts on a considerably limited number of English-language translations.

proach as its improvement, as its modification, which, however, takes into account the historical perspective (e.g. Bordwell, 1981a, 1983, 1985A).

Nevertheless, Bordwell's rhetoric has grown to sarcastic criticism with the gradual verification of the functionality and effectiveness of his approach, and his assault culminated in the 1980s with a biting article *Historical Poetics of Cinema* (Bordwell, 1989b). In the first half of this fully programmatic article, he primarily introduced the traditions of poetics, its possible classification, the potential for film research and the research goals that it wants to follow with its poetics of cinema (ibidem, pp. 369–385). However, in the second half, he unexpectedly put his position in very striking contrast with a certain trend of film studies. The trend which – according to Bordwell – "treats cinema study as an instance of the study of the 'human subject,' employing tenets based on Saussurean semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and Barthesian textual theory" (ibidem, p. 385). Bordwell calls it *SLAB theory* (ibidem). According to him, instead of asking research questions, the representatives of SLAB theory put doctrine at the centre of interest, they do not conduct systematic research, and they use concepts to construct interpretative narratives instead of using concepts to construct explanatory propositions (ibidem, pp. 385–392). Notwithstanding, it results from the argumentative construction of the article that Bordwell did not primarily attempt the scholarly disqualification of his opponents. Preferably, he reinforced the rhetorical tactics I explained above: the overwhelming criticism of opponents served him as a highly useful comparative tool to demonstrate the benefits of his proposed poetic alternative. Historical poetics of cinema puts research problems and research questions at the centre of interest, conducting systematic research and using concepts to construct explanatory propositions.

If we go back in time, Bordwell and Thompson have improved and examined their alternative to SLAB theory since the second half of the 1970s. Kristin Thompson's attitude can be considered dominantly analytical. At the centre of this attitude is, as much as possible, sensitive "centripetal" analysis of the film work, from which the more general "centrifugal" problems are approached. She called it *neoformalist analysis* in her published dissertation (Thompson, 1981), the programmatic essay in "Iris" (Thompson, 1983, pp. 42–49) and her book of eleven detailed formalistic film analyses *Breaking the Glass Armor* (Thompson, 1988). However, such a label is problematic because the same attitude can be observed in several of her 1970s analyses (e.g. Thompson, 1976, 1977, 1979), where she had *not yet* worked with formalistic terminology. On the other hand, she was evolving the same attitude in her 1990s analyses

(Thompson, 1999), where she *no longer* worked with formalistic terminology. However, if we perceive her neo/formalism as a research *perspective* rather than as a set of conceptual tools within a particular *approach* (Thompson, 1983; Thompson, 1988, pp. 3–46), it may be referred to as *neoformalist film analysing*. A more general aesthetic variant of it can be observed in the writing of Bordwell, who called his attitude *poetics of cinema* (Bordwell, 1981A, 1985, 1988) and usually approaches the analysis of particular film work(s) from the solving of more general "centrifugal" problems such as particular narrative or stylistic techniques, diverse narrative or stylistic traditions, the role of authorship in the context of a specific mode of production, et cetera. In the most elaborate version, it is then possible to consider the research perspective of the *historical poetics of the cinema* (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985; Bordwell, 1989A). However, in the light of considerable simplification, we can think of all these attitudes as three variants of one perspective or rather a research programme with comparable points of departure: *the neoformalist poetics*.

How does it all relate to the concept of norm we are discussing? Bordwell wrote in the study *Historical Poetics of Cinema* that both historical poetics and neoformalism are:

> "associated with research she [Thompson] and I [Bordwell] have done over the past dozen years or so. *The trend* derives principally from Slavic poetics, in particular the Russian and Czech thinkers, but it is also influenced by the more or less oblique ‹return to Slavic theory› one finds in Todorov, Genette, the 1966-1970 Barthes, and contemporary Israeli poeticians like Meir Sternberg. [...] Neoformalism presumes that one cannot discover factual answers to questions about films› construction without carefully devising analytical concepts appropriate to these questions. [...] In sum, *neoformalist poetics* makes theoretically defined, open-ended, corrigible, and falsifiable claims" (Bordwell, 1989A, pp. 378–379; emphasis by RDK).

Thus, in this article, neoformalist poetics presents a set of assumptions and a way of asking questions. According to Bordwell, neoformalist poetics is sincerely empirical and emphasises research into the facts of films. Bordwell understands its hypotheses are grounded:

> "in a theoretical *activity* rather than a fixed theory. This theorizing moves across various levels of generality and deploys various concepts and categories. It does not presume global propositions to which the researcher pledges unswerving allegiance and which automatically block our noticing recalcitrant data" (ibidem, pp. 380; emphasis by DB).

At the centre of the research interest of neoformalist poetics is the effort to answer the questions as best as possible and thus to achieve distinctly formulated and empirically testable knowledge. In other words, neoformalist poetics wants to offer *explanations* instead of *explications* (ibidem, p. 375). It, accordingly, provides flexible definitions and deploys "hollow" categories and "hollow" principles. And what is one of the essential "hollow" principles? Yes, "that of norms" (ibidem, p. 381).

The postulates of the Russian formalists allowed Bordwell and Thompson to offer their attitude as an alternative one. Both gradually developed their concept of film form as a system of interconnected elements as well as turning to other formalistic concepts which they have refined, adapted and expanded, such as the syuzhet and the fabula, the motivations or the dominant. They managed to unite a largely heterogeneous field of Russian formalism (cf. Steiner, 1984, pp. 15–43) into a systemised and coherent approach to cinema (Thompson, 1981, pp. 8–60; Thompson 1988, pp. 3–46). Nevertheless, how can this approach be effectively dynamised from a historical perspective? Shlovsky's concept of *defamiliarisation* (ostranenie), which played a vital role in the programmatically conceived version of neoformalist film analysis by Kristin Thompson (Thompson, 1981, 1988), seemed to be one possible key.

Frank Kessler describes in his article *Ostranenie, Innovation, and Media History* three ways in which Kristin Thompson used the term defamiliarisation in *Breaking the Glass Armor*. Firstly, it offers her a methodological weapon, when "it allows her to eschew what she calls a 'communications model of art' proposing instead an approach that places the artwork in a realm that is different from other cultural phenomena because it must be perceived in a specific way" (Kessler, 2010, p. 64). Secondly, it offers her an analytical tool because "it becomes a central concept for the analysis of artistic form" (ibidem, p. 64). Thirdly, "it is important for the neoformalist approach in that it makes it necessary to look at the individual artwork in its historical context in order to be able to appreciate the way in which it defamiliarizes habitualized formal patterns and devices" (ibidem, p. 64). However, Kessler also draws attention to the relative mechanicality of this concept (ibidem, p. 67). After all, Peter Steiner, concerning Sklovsky's concept of formalism as a machine, has already explained the problems that arise when trying to use them to study literary history (Steiner, 1984, pp. 44–67)[8].

[8] For more about neoformalist applications of Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarisation (ostranenie) see the very short book *Der Neoformalismus und das Konzept der Verfremdung in der Filmkunst* (Keller, 2015).

On the other hand, David Bordwell has never dealt with the concept of defamiliarisation explicitly, let alone systematically in the context of his historical poetics (see also Kessler, 2010, p. 64). Indeed, it was the already discussed Mukařovský article *The Aesthetic Norm* (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 49–56), which provided him with a much more competent device for understanding the transformations of film form in a historical perspective. As was explained above, in 1979, the potential of norms as a tool of historical research had been cautiously suggested by Bordwell, while he only mentioned Mukařovský in an endnote (Bordwell, 1979). In 1983, Bordwell had already put norms at the forefront of the historical poetics of cinema project, although without mentioning Mukařovský (Bordwell, 1983). In texts published in 1985, however, Bordwell not only openly accepted the norm as Mukařovský's concept, but he elaborated it and applied it comprehensively. We go back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when Bordwell, Thompson and Janet Staiger were working intensively on far-reaching research – and Mukařovský's norm played an essential role in this.

Roles of norms in research methodology

The book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, written by these three authors, represents a maximalist attempt to demonstrate the achievement of the neoformalist poetics' ambitions, as explained above. On the one hand, the authors scrupulously shot-by-shot stylistically and narratively analysed two *large* samples of films (unbiased and biased). On the other hand, the authors conducted extensive archive research, they explored the impact of screenwriting manuals on film practice, and they became familiar with film production practices (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985).

In the opening chapter, Bordwell writes:

> "My goal here is to identify, at several levels of generality, to what extent Hollywood filmmaking adheres to integral and limited stylistic conventions. […] The point is simply that Hollywood films constitute a fairly coherent aesthetic tradition which sustains individual creation. […] Before there are auteurs, there are constraints; before there are deviations, there are norms. […] The first, and crucial step is to assume that Classical filmmaking constitutes an aesthetic system that can characterize salient features of the individual work. The system cannot determine every minute detail of the work, but it isolates preferred practices and sets limits upon invention. The problem is, in other words, that of defining what Jan Mukařovský has called aesthetic *norms*" (ibidem, pp. 3–4)

Mukařovský's concept of norms has thus become a fundamental methodological tool for the historical research of Hollywood cinema, which is further systematically elaborated: "Mukařovský's work helps us [authors of the book] move toward defining the Hollywood cinema as an aesthetic system. Plainly, the Hollywood style has functioned historically as a set of norms" (ibidem, p. 5). In so doing, Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson offered a new conception of *classical cinema*, which acquired a specific and, above all, non-evaluative meaning – which is derived, among other things, from Mukařovský's approach. Bordwell writes that "it might seem rash to claim that Hollywood's norms have not drastically changed since around 1920, but Mukařovský points out that periods of 'classicism' tend toward harmony and stability" (ibidem, p. 5). Mukařovský's (implied) concept of style, based on a set of different types of norms applied to artwork, leads to Bordwell's claim, which is again in compliance with that of Mukařovský: no artwork, and therefore no Hollywood film, perfectly embody all norms. "No Hollywood film *is* the classical system; each is an 'unstable equilibrium' of classical norms" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 5).

Bordwell not only gradually assesses the usefulness of Mukařovský's concept, but each of his relatively abstract stimuli systematically develops and applies consistently to thinking about such a complex and considerable quantity as Hollywood cinema till the 1960s. Bordwell does not suffice only with the aesthetic norms but develops Mukařovský's idea of operating different types of norms and presupposes their mutual interference:

> "As all these points indicate, the chief virtue of Mukařovský's work is to enable us to think of a group film style not as a monolith but as a complex system of specific forces in dynamic interaction. […] Any group style offers a *range* of alternatives. Classical filmmaking is not, strictly speaking, formulaic; there is always another way to do something. […] At the same time, the [Hollywood] style remains a unified system because the paradigm offers *bounded* alternatives" (ibidem, p. 5).

However, if the classical style is a set of norms, Bordwell maintains it is necessary to offer ways to differentiate levels of generality: (a) devices, (b) systems (narrative logic, cinematic time, cinematic space), (c) relations of systems. Bordwell assumes that "the total style can be defined as the relation of those systems to each other" (ibidem, p. 6). It is these three levels of generality, combined with the concept of norms, which then allow the authors of the book to study the stability and change of style from a historical perspective. How? Whereas at the second and third level – i.e. systems and relations of systems – Bordwell in his reconstruction of the classical stylistic paradigm observes

strong historical continuity, at the level of film devices the most significant changes proceed. For particular effects in the arrangement of narrative causality, time and space and relationships between them, different devices were dominantly used in different periods. According to Bordwell, however, within a self-regulatory set of governing classical norms, all of these devices were subordinated to the so-called functional equivalence principle: "Basic principles govern not only the elements in the paradigm but also the ways in which the elements may function" (ibidem, p. 5). In particular, new devices such as film sound or Technicolor film functionally replace other devices without altering the set of norms at higher levels of systems and relations of systems – and stability is maintained.

Furthermore, it is necessary to consider that the basis for the historical periodisation of this one history of style and narrative was not *only* the norms but *also* the film industry itself. More particularly, it was the Hollywood film industry as "the most proximate and pertinent institution for creating, regulating, and maintaining those norms[, which] is not to say that film style and mode of production march across decades in perfect synchronization" (ibidem, p. 9). As we will see, the norms were just one aspect of the game, and the profound explanation of the film industry as a specific mode of production is at least as groundbreaking as the explanation of the role of norms for this industry – and its community of filmmakers. They "analyzed the tight interaction among sectors of the Hollywood film industry. […] [T]here could be rapid communication between various production sectors–filmmakers, technology firms, supply houses, and coordinating bodies like the Academy. This interchange facilitated stylistic change through innovations of sound recording, lighting, lenses, and the like" (Bordwell, 2016, p. 26). So, synchronic as well as diachronic understanding and explaining of the standard functioning of this system of relations at the levels of (a) the film industry, (b) the filmmaking community, and (c) the constructional principles by which film works are built has been another essential dimension of this research. Concerning these questions, they asked what the self-regulative system of the governing principles of Hollywood Cinema as an aesthetic system is. In other words, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is explaining its creative matrix *not just* as a set of norms, but as *the classical norm* of its kind. Logically, the basis of this aesthetic research of this *norm* should not be an aesthetically exceptional film, but *an ordinary film*.

Noticeably, in defining this research goal, David Bordwell was inspired by Roman Jakobson, Mukařovský's friend and colleague from the Prague Lin-

guistic Circle. Bordwell quotes from an interview with Jakobson: "[I believe] that a very important thing in analyzing trends in the cinema or the structure of a film, is the necessity of considering the base, the *background* of the spectator's habits. What films is the spectator used to seeing? To what forms is he accustomed?" (cited in: Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 10, cf. Jakobson, 1973). Bordwell adds: "My analysis of the norms of the classical style thus gives privileged place not to the aberrant film that breaks or tests the rules but to the quietly conformist film that tries simply to follow them" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 10). Thus, if Jan Mukařovský's concept of norms provided a fundamental methodological tool for aesthetically based historical research for the book, Roman Jakobson indirectly helped refine its framework research questions. Nevertheless, to what extent and in what ways have aesthetic norms been influenced by other sets of norms? It is evident that the aim is not to reconstruct the argumentation and summarise the conclusions of this lengthy book, but again to point out *some* of the roles played by the concept of norms in its explanations.

Roles of norms in the results of this research

Although Bordwell initially summarises Mukařovský's own differentiation of norms and tries to find empirical cinematic parallels for them (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, pp. 4–5)[9], all three authors apparently avoid using these categories in the rest of the book. They rely on the context of argumentation from which the characteristics of discussed norms should emerge, instead.

Nevertheless, for the sake of the further interpretation of their rhetorical tactics, I offer as an analytical tool my own typology of norms with which filmmakers deal. From the perspective of the historical poetics we can understand them as a system of concentric circles – proceeding from the "central" constraints primarily artistic to the "outer" constraints primarily non-artistic: (1) *Aesthetic norms* refer to the set of preferred artistic solutions of particular creative problems at a given time and place. (2) *Artistic norms*, on the other hand, represent rather long-standing constructive traditions, whether within

[9] Mukařovský speaks about material norms, technical norms, practical norms, and norms of aesthetic traditions (Mukařovský, 1978, pp. 53–54). However, this differentiation is relatively unclear as well as it is its relation to the very concept of the aesthetic norm. It is not apparent from his argumentation, whether they are other types of norms than the aesthetic norm, or they are part of it. But as Mukařovský scholar Ondřej Sládek told me in personal conversation, this typology is broadly considered to be a working proposal rather than a definitive taxonomy. Although Bordwell did not offer his own typology in this book, he proposed a kind of differentiation in his other 1980s works: *extrinsic norms* and *intrinsic norms* (Bordwell, 1985, pp. 150–155; Bordwell, 1988). However, a more detailed discussion of this proposal and the degree of its equivalence to Mukařovský's original concept is too complex to be dealt with in this article.

the same art form (in our case cinema) or other art forms (e.g. theatre, literature, painting, architecture, music, comics et cetera, but also diverse folklore traditions). These can be specific schemata (cf. Gombrich, 1960), but even more complex sets of techniques (e.g. genres, art schools, art movements). As a particular type of artistic norms, we can see authorial norms. The set of involved artistic norms may follow aesthetic norms, but may also represent a radical alternative to them. (3) *Industrial norms* we can see as a set of norms shared by a specific filmmaking community at a given time and place. They are in the way of a division of labour, shooting plans, star systems et cetera. They take the form of economic (budgetary) constraints that filmmakers have to adapt to. They also take the form of the supposed distribution circuit into which their film is to enter. The specific area of industrial norms is represented by the technology options available to filmmakers at a given time and place – and preferred ways of dealing with them. We can speak about film prints, cameras, lighting equipment, backdrops, camera dollies and cranes, sound systems et cetera. (4) *Social norms* then stand at the most general level in the typology. Society influences the filmmakers, and thus it is a wide range of impulses and limitations which, in different filmmaking traditions and at different times, operate with varying intensity, for example in the fields of ideology, morality, religious beliefs, politics, nationalism or demands formulated by authors of various forms of reviews.

Yet, the real effectivity of such a categorisation as a historical tool, of course, will only appear in particular research. However, it stays beyond the ambition of this text, who it is going to serve instead as the heuristic tool for meta-analysis of ways by which Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson explained a particular set of restraints and relations. In other words, the previous chapters suggested how they explain the ways in which classical Hollywood cinema, while working with aesthetic norms, simultaneously involves the constraints represented by industrial norms. However, let us take a closer look at some of their research and rhetoric tactics.

The stylistic and narrative analysis of their unbiased and biased sample might have led Bordwell and Thompson to some questions: Well, we revealed sets of the preferred creative options how to construct narrative logic, time and space, how to distribute information, how to guide viewers' attention, et cetera. But why? Why were these and not other options preferred? On the other hand, Janet Staiger was an expert on the historiography of cinema as an industry, cinema as a mode of production, cinema as a specific kind of division of labour. From her perspective, it is possible to analyse sets of particular conditions,

the functioning of the filmmaking community, the internal discussions of this community about aesthetic norms or what is the standard of quality film.

In this interaction of diverse research perspectives, we can see what makes *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* ground-breaking in its treatment of the concept of norms. Let us suppose that Bordwell and Thompson had offered "only" a set of aesthetic norms or the interpretation of classical cinema as one complex aesthetic norm. Even in this case, we could still consider the classical norm as a kind of main analytical background for a better understanding of such systems of norms which may be seen as an alternative to the classical one (cf. Thompson, 1988, p. 21–25). Mukařovský's concept of norm itself would undoubtedly offer some ways how to structure these findings – but to no small extent, Bordwell and Thompson would primarily develop some of the analytical assumptions about the aesthetic preferences of Hollywood cinema they had already formulated during the 1970s (Bordwell, Thompson, 1976; Bordwell, 1977; Bordwell, Thompson, 1979).

In other words, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* shed new light on the topic at least for two main reasons. First, the authors regarded interaction of different types of norms at the level of analysis of a large sample of films. They endeavoured to use a so-called unbiased sample, so the central sample of one hundred analyzed films was generated as randomly it was possible. Second, the authors regarded several complementary research perspectives when thinking about all these norms. At the same time, these two reasons invoked heated polemics on the one hand (cf. King, 1986; Britton, 1989; Altman, 1992; Cowie, 1998; Ray, 2001 [1988]; see also: Przylipiak, 2019)[10] and initiated partially critical, but well-considered research projects on the other (cf. Lastra, 2000; Keil, 2002; Maltby, 2003; Grieveson, Kramer, 2004, esp. pp. 271–278; Keating, 2010, 2019; loosely Crisp, 1997).

Moreover, the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* were well aware of these aspects of their research and explicitly commented on them. In this context, Bordwell and Staiger mentioned the programmatic article by Russian formalists Yuri Tynjanov and Roman Jakobson entitled *Problems in the Study of Language and Literature* (1928). Although Bordwell and Staiger did so in connection with technological aspects of industrial norms, the cited words of Tynjanov and Jakobson can be generalised to the overall handling of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* with Mukařovský's concept of norms in a historical perspective. They have indicated the limits of an autonomous history of style since the disclosure of the immanent laws (i. e. aesthetic norms) of the history of cinema do not explain

[10] For summarisation of some of these polemic arguments see Jenkins, 1995.

> "the rate of change or the choice of a particular evolutionary path from among those which are in theory possible, since the immanent laws of literary (linguistic) evolution represent only an indeterminate equation whose solution may be any of a number (albeit limited) of possible solutions, but not necessarily a single one. The question of the specific evolutionary path chosen, or at least of the dominant, can be answered only by analyzing the correlation between the literary series and other historical series" (cited in: Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 248)[11].

In terms of industrial norms, Hollywood cinema thus operated as a systematically, vertically as well as horizontally, organised model of a collective working, production mechanisms and economic factors. Hollywood film was a highly regulated mode of production, in which "once the device had proven its narrative virtues, it was rationalized economically" (ibidem, p. 84). If it is true, can we still talk about researching an aesthetic system given that its aesthetic functions seem to be subordinate to the demands of the production system that was intended to make money? We can; because, according to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, it was actually the classical style just like the aesthetic system which corrected how the production system would work – and although modes of production have changed, the classical style persisted. As Bordwell and Staiger explain:

> "Within the mode of production, the tensions of standardization and differentiation, the increase in specialization, and the tendency of Hollywood's institutions to focus energy and capital toward a controlled uniformity all crucially depended upon the norms of the classical style. Similarly, while technological change [i.e. industrial norms; rem. RDK] had to be economically beneficial in the long run, the directions and functions of such change were strongly contained by stylistic premises. Classical norms dictated how cameras, lighting, laboratory equipment, sound recording, deep-focus cinematography, color, and widescreen could be introduced and used" (ibidem, p. 367).

[11] They used translation from "Russian Poetics in Translation", 1977, No. 4, which I do not have. For juxtaposition, I offer another translation of the same part with slightly different accents: "A disclosure of the immanent laws […] do not allow us to explain the tempo of evolution or the chosen path of evolution when several, theoretically possible, evolutionary paths are given. This is owing to the fact that the immanent laws (i.e. aesthetic norms) of literary (and, corresponding, linguistic) evolution form an indeterminate equation; although they admit only a limited number of possible solutions, they do not necessarily specify a unique solution. The question of a specific choice of path, or at least of the dominant, can be solved only through an analysis of the correlation between the literary series and other historical series" (Tynjanov, Jakobson, 1980, pp. 30–31).

On the other hand, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* also offers numerous discoveries grounded primarily in the realm of aesthetic explanations. Academic knowledge about the range and sorts of preferred solutions of particular artistic problems with which Hollywood filmmakers operated has been widely corrected, significantly expanded, and functionally explained. The authors thus answered many new questions both in the perspective of synchronic poetics (what aesthetic norms persisted across decades) and in the perspective of diachronic poetics (how and why was the classical style as a set of aesthetic norms formulated during the 1910s). A particular category of such discoveries is represented by the explanations of the interactions between the classical aesthetic norm and (a) other influential sets of artistic norms, (b) a set of social norms in Hollywood cinema.

As has been said, Bordwell explains Hollywood cinema as a representation of a period of classicism, according to Mukařovský as a period tending toward maximally attainable harmony and stability. Thus, if alternative systems of *artistic norms* (e.g. by the entrance of films of such tradition into American distribution or by the employing of foreign filmmakers, often immigrants) influenced the classical aesthetic norm, this influence was, according to Bordwell, highly selective and had the form of effective assimilation. Let us look at the impact of the artistic norms of German Expressionist cinema, for example. American filmmakers imitated expressionist lighting, cinematography, or special effects in the 1920s, but this assimilation was selective. In other words, it has given some techniques a specific function within the classical aesthetic norm. For example, this function could be a genre one:

> low-key lighting was used "for mystery, distorted perspectives in horror films, and odd angles for shock effects. [...] Most important, German Expressionist techniques for indicating character subjectivity were seized upon for momentary, intensified inserts. [...] Other formal traits of Expressionist cinema – the more episodic and open-ended narrative, the entirely subjective film, or the slower tempo of story events – were not imitated by Hollywood; the classical style took only what could extend and elaborate its principles without challenging them" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 73).

The artistic norms of German Expressionism thus potentially evolved a set of classical film norms on the level of devices, but at the same time, only those that strengthened the relations of systems (causality, time and space) were selected and assimilated to maintain functions of the classical style.

Furthermore, if we consider *social norms* as we defined them above, an inherent part of them will be an effect of ideology. According to Bordwell, there is need to "recognize the specific formal operations through which classical principles reinforce dominant ideological positions" (ibidem, 82) such as goal-oriented and psychologically defined characters, through an "objective" and straightforward order of the story or a coherent spatial arrangement in the theatrical tradition. All these factors clustered around assumptions about the nature of social existence and narrative resolution could work to transcend the social conflict represented in the film, often by displacing it into the individual, the couple, the family, or the communal good (ibidem, 82). However, Bordwell's explanation of how social norms influence aesthetic norms is much simpler than the previous one of how artistic norms influence them. The analysis of an ideology serves Bordwell primarily to grasp the specific research problem of happy endings in the classical era, although he construes (surprisingly) its arguments in reverse: happy endings do not necessarily need to be explained but can be an *explanation* instead. Indeed, if the Hollywood style is being attacked as ideologically uniform, Bordwell indirectly suggests that when these social norms have been confronted with the application of aesthetic norms, such uniformity might have been momentarily broken down. How? With the help of happy endings:

> "If the ending, especially the happy ending, is inadequately motivated, then the film creates a possibly productive split of story from narration. By including an ending that runs counter to what went before, deviant narration indicates extratextual, social, historical limits [i.e. social norms; rem. RDK] to its authority. […] [Some films] tend to foreground the arbitrary conventionality of the ending and can even raise ideological questions. […] The happy ending may be there, but to some extent the need for it is criticized. […] We can understand those [problematic] moments only by recognizing the norms operating in the Hollywood cinema […]" (ibidem, 83).

In the above-mentioned monographic essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm, and Function as Social Facts*, Jan Mukařovský classifies film *not* as art, but as one of the transitional phenomena "which are basically rooted outside of the aesthetic realm, but which tend toward art without wholly becoming art" (Mukařovský, 1970, p. 12). According to Mukařovský, it is because of its "industrialness" determined by purely commercial considerations and as such film must "instantly and passively absorb every newly discovered improvement of its technological basis" (ibidem, p. 12). Mukařovský argues with the example "with the rapid

tempo of innovation in talking motion pictures, which have in a very brief time destroyed the bases for artistic development established by the silent film" (ibidem, p. 12–13). Ironically, the authors of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* unintentionally used Mukařovský's own terminology *to prove he was wrong*[12]. In their explanation, any consideration of stylistic changes due to the influence of technological constraints must take into account their *timing* and *causation* (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 1985, p. 248). The immanent development of Hollywood film must be related to other historical series because this – in Mukařovský's words – has never been passive. While any technological change should serve the conditions of long-term economic benefit (industrial norms), it has been governed mainly by the requirements of classical aesthetic norms, which makes Hollywood cinema *an aesthetic system*.

Some final remarks to following applications of the classical norm

As was suggested above, many of the premises, concepts, arguments, hypotheses and resulting conclusions how *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* proposed, have been criticised and widely discussed[13]. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to summarise or analyse these objections and counter-arguments, let alone contribute to the discussion with my own objections and counter-arguments. Why? On the one hand, this article's research question was *not* to appraise the legitimacy of the polemical position that Bordwell and Thompson held during the 1980s. On the other hand, it also did not ask how plausible the conclusions reached by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* were – nor what they perhaps omitted, overlooked and misrepresented. No, the set of research questions this article has (so far) asked were: How did Mukařovský's concept of norm get into one long-term research programme of neoformalist poetics? What role did the concept play in self-definition of the neoformalist poetics research programme in contrast with other research programmes? What role did the concept play in formulating and executing one particular research project under this programme? In these trajectories, the concept of norm has proved to be a very flexible "hollow category", which can answer a wide array of research questions related to

[12] Remarkably, Roman Jakobson (Mukařovský's friend and colleague) not only fully considered (sound) film to be autonomous art in 1933, but he also began his argumentation with the idea of a *norm* (though intuitive and unsystematic): "We are witnessing the rise of a new art. It is growing in leaps and bound, detaching itself from the influence of the older arts and even beginning to influence them itself. It creates its own norms, its own laws, and then confidently rejects them" (Jakobson, 1981, p.161 [in Czech, 1933]).

[13] Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson reacted to some of them in the retrospective on-line essay *The Classical Hollywood Cinema Twenty-Five Years Along*: http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/classical.php (cit. 24th December 2019).

historical poetics of film style and narrative. In other words, we have shifted the focus of the analysis from (a) the level of subjects of discussion or subjects of research to (b) the level of conceptual tools used. It allowed us to concentrate on the more general explanatory possibilities of the concept of a norm as a research tool.

Furthermore, this leads us to a more general question: How can we formulate our own research projects of historical poetics on the base of these observations? Yes, such a question could undoubtedly lead to a separate article. I am more interested in the role that *a* classical Hollywood cinema as *the* aesthetic norm can or should play in these projects, instead. We can say that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* book was the result of consistent bottom-up empirical research, and as such followed the demands that Bordwell and Thompson pushed forward in the 1980s. Admittedly, we could ask to what extent its strict "bottom-up-ness" represents *the research story* and to what extent *the research process*. Nevertheless, there is no reason not to believe that the majority of Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger's findings and conclusions came from the rigorous primary research of a large sample of aesthetic and non-aesthetic material.

What is remarkable in this respect is the methodological as well as the rhetorical operation that David Bordwell made "outside" *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. That is to say, the concept of norm also played a significant role in his following book *Narration in the Fiction Film*, which he wrote after *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*. The third part of *Narration in the Fiction Film*, entitled "Historical Modes of Narration", can be considered to be a kind of a sequel to *The Classical Hollywood Cinema.* Most importantly, from the conclusions that Thompson, Staiger and he made in this book on classical Hollywood cinema as *the long-standing aesthetic norm of the studio system*, Bordwell has *de facto* made the *global aesthetic norm*: "In fictional filmmaking, one mode of narration has achieved predominance. Whether we call it mainstream, dominant, or classical cinema we intuitively recognize an ordinary, easily comprehensible movie when we see it. Our survey of narrational modes can properly start with this Classical tradition, since it relies on the strongest schemata and the most classicism: Hollywood studio filmmaking of the years 1917 to 1960" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 156). Bordwell implicitly develops here the assumption we find earlier in his book on Carl Theodor Dreyer: "By 1926 Hollywood's conception of a film dominated most of the world. Other conceptions were minority options, perceived and judged in relation to American practice. If we construct a model of narrative structure in classical Hollywood filmmaking, salient aspects of Dreyer's early work stand out sharply" (Bordwell, 1981A, p. 25).

In both cases, we can see a top-down approach to the concept of norm. That is to say, Bordwell builds on the assumption that if Hollywood production has dominated in overseas distribution[14], its stylistic and narrative techniques somewhat automatically began to form a paradigm of options preferred by filmmakers there. In other words, whereas in the case of Hollywood, the incoming artistic norms were promptly *assimilated* by classical Hollywood aesthetic norm (see above), in other cinemas it was just the classical Hollywood film as an incoming artistic norm which more or less *assimilates* aesthetic norms there. However, why should that be?

Elsewhere, concerning the historical poetics of style and narrative of Czech cinema, I proposed my own concept of so-called *regional cinema*: that is, a set of feature films produced primarily in a particular region and primarily for this region without precluding its ambitions to reach out of the region (Kokeš, forthcoming). It is an admittedly pragmatic concept, designed for a purpose as it takes into account issues and questions linked to a tradition of the poetics of cinema. Czech cinema has been predominantly regional, and its export ambition has been modest. At least concerning the silent period (which I have already analysed), the influence of classical Hollywood artistic norms was neither global nor universally assimilative facing regional aesthetic norms. It does not mean that Czech filmmakers in any sense intentionally rebelled against Hollywood artistic norms. We can rather observe long-term regional continuities of aesthetic norms (or even parallel sets of aesthetic norms). These continuities have their own causes and their own historical explanations. Yes, Hollywood artistic norms could have influenced some of the creative options preferred by Czech filmmakers, but many others were not influenced by them. What is guaranteed, by the top-down application of *classical (Hollywood) norm* as the universal set of international aesthetic standards, is that we will only learn very little about specificities or even contexts of aesthetic norms of a given regional production. It is because techniques that are typical for classical Hollywood norms gain prominence at the expense of the techniques typical for this regional production (Kokeš, forthcoming).

So if we are asking what role the classical Hollywood cinema as *the* aesthetic norm can or should play in our own historical poetics projects, my answer would be somewhat reluctant, especially if such a project is not going to be an analy-

[14] Moreover, it is also not as much unequivocal as it is usually supposed to be. It was demonstrated, for example, by Joseph Garncarz in the article *Germany Goes Global: Challenging the Theory of Hollywood's Dominance on International Markets*, in which he showed based on the example of German film distribution that at least in its case Hollywood films did not reach stable *popularity* until the 1980s (Garncarz, 2008, pp. 37–48).

sis of Hollywood[15]. However, even if we ask about *the influence* of the so-called classical norm, it should be regarded that the level of analysis in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* was quite high in order to understand and explain the pretty complex system of relations, horizontally as well as vertically. Bordwell writes, they "aimed to bring out the norms or implicit standards that Hollywood filmmakers as a community practiced. We did try to suggest that these norms formed a set of options, a paradigm from which a filmmaker might pick. […] It's nonetheless fair to say that we emphasized the menu over the meal" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 2010). In other words, they wanted to analyse and explain classical Hollywood cinema bottom-up as a system which is *unique* in these aspects. So why should we suppose that these norms and implicit standards of this complex relationship in this community should be plausible as an explanative background to systems with different communities? Well, maybe it is, maybe the system of norms is something that almost everybody shares or at least would like to share in the sense Bordwell suggests in the citation above. However, in this case, we can cite his own argument he used against applications of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to Hollywood films:

> "Propp set out to differentiate, by necessary and sufficient conditions, a specific class of tales. To the extent that his conclusions are valid for other classes, the features he specifies cannot demarcate this class. If we make Propp successful in describing most or all narrative structures, then he fails to distinguish the wondertale as a genre. He cannot succeed in both. Now if he aims to define the specificity of the wondertale and fails, there is no reason to assume that he has successfully described something else and thus no reason to take his scheme as a model of analysis. If I seek to differentiate owls from doves, and I err so thoroughly that all my claims hold good for ostriches and penguins too, it does not follow that I have accidentally provided an accurate description of the entire bird kingdom. It is at least as likely that I am wrong on all counts. If Propp is wrong about his domain of material, then there is no compelling reason to believe that he is inadvertently right about anything else" (Bordwell, 1988A, p. 12).

To sum up, the concept of norm appears to be an extremely useful and flexible research tool of writing a stylistic and narrative history of cinema, but it is such a tool only if it is reached by bottom-up research. In order to understand aesthetic norms related to the poetics of any area of cinema, we should begin with an original analysis of its own material and thus develop its own premises,

[15] Besides that, there are other, more or less parallel, explanations for comparable problems to the explanation of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson. Cf. for example Altman, 1992A; Maltby, 2003; Salt, 2006, 2009; Elsaesser, 2012.

categories and methods. It will only be after we understand these aesthetic norms and explain them in particular empirical conditions (concerning other norms) that it will become possible to compare our results with discoveries about aesthetic norms acquired by someone else (cf. Kokeš, forthcoming). If we follow these principles, the concept of norm can surely be enormously helpful to us – as well as the knowledge of the research decisions made by the proponents of neoformalist poetics when they used the concept of norm as such a tool[16].

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Norms, Forms and Roles: Notes on the Concept of Norm (Not Just) in Neoformalist Poetics of Cinema

Norm as a tool of structural analysis and writing of aesthetically based history is a concept designed by Czech structuralist Jan Mukařovský. For several decades, the American film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have been handling this notion. After a review of the original concept, the article follows three main goals: (1) The broadest aim is to reconstruct specific

roles the concept played in the process of establishing the so-called neoformalist poetics approach. By returning to Mukařovský's starting points, we should be able to more clearly understand how his concept of norm was employed and transformed by neoformalist poeticians in order to solve the problems of film studies as an academic discipline on the one hand and problems in formulating concrete research projects on the other. (2) The more particular goal is to point out certain shifts in neoformalist poeticians' handling of the concept of norm after they formulated the classical Hollywood cinema model. The concept of norm was initially used by them as a tool for bottom-up research of the stylistic history of cinema, as a hollow category for its unbiased explanation. However, consequently it has also become a somewhat filled category applied rather top-down as an interpretative background for assessing its alternatives. (3) The final goal is to answer the question why this re-assessment and interrogation of roles played by norm in neoformalist poetics matters now. By returning to the original concept of norm and by the treatise of its changing functions for film study, the article aims to remind us of the usefulness and flexibility of this research tool. As is suggested in the last part of the article, we still know too little about historical poetics of so-called regional cinemas. If we want to understand them properly, the concept of norm is highly worthwhile – but only if is reached by bottom-up research as the hollow category for the unbiased explanation of certain cinematic phenomena.

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On the Notion of Norm in David Bordwell's System

This paper originated as a by-product of work over a collection of essays about narration in contemporary cinema (Przylipiak, forthcoming). Seeking methodological inspiration I reached for classical "Wisconsin project" books, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson[1], *Narration in the Fiction Film*[2], both published in 1985. A look in this direction seemed natural to me, as I based my first book (1994) on this approach and I have always felt very close to it. Moreover, the significance of these two books in film studies can't be overestimated. At the time of their publication they were virtually showered with praises. CHC was called "a classic in film studies" (Elsaesser, 1985A, p. 52), "A landmark in the history of academic film studies in the United States" (Allen 1985, p. 87), a book which "is going to change the way American film history is studied" (Gunning, 1987, p. 74); NiFF "was heralded as a work that 'will undoubtedly ground the discussion for years to come' (Kozloff, 1986, p. 43)" (Arroyo, p. 75). After many years Thomas Elsaesser regarded both works (together with Gilles Deleuze's cinema books and the rise of cognitivism – all happening at about the same time) as a turning point, from which "the cinema, or rather "film", has entered an entirely different space of reflexivity and conceptualisation" (2009, p. 125).

[1] From now on when referring to this book I will use the abbreviation: CHC.
[2] From now on when referring to this book I will use the abbreviation: NiFF.

Obviously, it is not my intention here to review books which were published 35 years ago, or to do justice to their enormous wealth of concepts and information. Working on the aforementioned collection I asked myself whether the concepts and categories worked out and launched in the mid-80s are still relevant. Can they be used for describing contemporary cinema? And, as a matter of fact, which concepts from the enormous, overwhelming wealth of concepts and categories launched in these books can be regarded as essential? An answer to this last question has been provided by Bordwell himself, who stated in the introduction to *Classical Hollywood Cinema* that "to see Hollywood filmmaking from 1917-1960 as a unified mode of film practice is to argue for a coherent system whereby aesthetic norms and the mode of film production reinforced one another. This argument is the basis of this book." (CHC, p XIV). Three words in this short statement seem to me essential to the Bordwellian approach: system, norm and mode. Each of them deserve close analysis. In this paper I am focusing on the notion of norm, which in my opinion occupies a central place in the abovementioned approach.

The notion of the norm is absolutely fundamental for the Bordwellian project. Classical Hollywood cinema is presented as a set of norms. Moreover, a whole realm of fiction films across periods, styles and countries is perceived through a prism of norms and deviations from the norm. A mode of the classical Hollywood film functions like a peculiar "Sevres metre", a precisely calibrated, universally agreed basic point of reference. Deviations from "classical norms" provide a background against which alternative styles are delineated. So, the notion of the norm is absolutely crucial to the whole project which features so prominently in CHC and NiFF, but which is also present in such books as *Film Art: an Introduction, Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, *Breaking the Glass Armor" and others.*

Taking into account how important the category of norm is to the whole project, astonishingly little space has been devoted either by Bordwell or his followers and critics to the concept's history and analysis. A remark voiced in an anniversary blog article that "Nowadays (…) one wouldn't need the extensive discussion of artistic norms David launched in Chapter 1" (Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, 2009), is, to say the least, overblown, when we realise that less than two pages was devoted to theoretical discussion of artistic norms in monumental CHC and not much more in the only slightly less monumental NiFF. Numerous commentators have discussed various aspects and dimensions of Bordwell's oeuvre, but the notion of norm was left out of this discussion. Yet this notion and the way it is used by Bordwell undoubtedly deserves such discussion, especially when we take into account the enormous influence that Bordwell's research and approach have exerted on film studies.

Bordwell – Mukařovský

It is well known that Bordwell borrowed the notion of norm first of all from Jan Mukařovský – he declares many times adherence to the ideas of this Czech structuralist. Yet a closer look at Mukařovský's writings reveals that the ties between the two researchers are problematic. A small prelude to this complication is the fact that Bordwell originally referred only to a short, 8-page paper by Mukařovský (1977), and when he turned later to the Mukařovský's main text on norms, *Estetická funkce*, *norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty* published in English in 1970, he selected only those citations that were in accordance with what Mukařovský wrote in *The Aesthetic Norm* (Kokeš, 2020). This situation makes an analysis of the relationship between Mukařovský's ideas and their Bordwellian application more complicated, because it is not quite certain which of Mukařovský's texts we should refer to. I decided to base my analysis on the longer and more famous essay, firstly, because Bordwell also refers to it, in NiFF; secondly, because this is a complete display of Mukařovský's ideas.

When we take this path, it is evident that Bordwell left large parts of Mukařovský's legacy unaddressed. Two omissions are particularly significant: the justification of a norm and its changeability. The question about justification can be formulated in the following way: What is the basis on which certain styles achieve the status of a norm, while others do not? Mukařovský addresses this issue directly. He stresses that the aesthetic norm "exists as a law striving for unchanging validity" and mentions previous attempts at finding "universally binding conditions of beauty" (1970, p. 24). He also points out that in the majority of cases modern aesthetics is sceptical about the very existence and validity of norms (p. 24). Mukařovský seems to go against the current of modern aesthetics, and turns to anthropological premises, the basic properties of man, which justify the tendency of the aesthetic norm toward legal validity (p. 28). These properties are as follows: for the temporal arts – rhythm, based on the regularity of blood circulation and breathing; for spatial arts – vertical and horizontal lines, right angles and symmetry, which can be derived entirely from the structure and usual positioning of the human body; for painting – the complementarity of colours and several phenomena of colour and intensity contrast; and for sculpture – the law of the stability of the centre of gravity.

What is crucial is the relationship between aesthetic principles and aesthetic norms. Mukařovský rejects the idea that they should overlap, that the norms simply embody the principles. This, he claims, "would mean the negation of the history of art" (p. 28), where the principles are much more frequently violated than observed. So, the crucial importance of the principles

is different. The point is not that the norms adhere to principles, but that principles provide a natural point of reference, a background, against which works of art are perceived. "The great variety of aesthetic norms (…) always point to a single denominator, the psychophysical composition of man as a species. The principles are spontaneously functioning criteria for the conformity and discrepancy of concrete norms with regard to this composition" (p. 28). The aesthetic principle becomes in essence a mental tool used in the process of perception of works of art, a base for spontaneous evaluation of conformity or discrepancy of a concrete norm with the principle. Admittedly, in the course of his argument the position of the aesthetic principle is weakened, as, trying to explain a tension "between the requirement that the norm have overall validity – without which there would be no norm – and its actual limitation and variability" (p. 24), Mukařovský ceases to refer to the aesthetic principle, and begins to refer to the relationship between an older and a newly-created norm. Still, the aesthetic principle based on anthropological premises provides a firm validation for aesthetic norms.

Actually, what seems to draw his attention in the first place is neither the norm per se, nor its stability and external validity, but rather changeability, variability, a multitude of norms. The bulk of the chapter on norms attempts to explain this. Mukařovský's explanation of changeability and variability of norms is of a sociological nature. The source and innovator of aesthetic norms is lofty art, which in turn is embraced by a dominant social stratum. The aesthetic norms established by the dominant class "leak" to the lower social strata, and are taken over by them. One must admit that this schema is simple and clear. This clarity becomes blurred, however, when Mukařovský introduces two complications. The first has to do with the category of newness. Mukařovský draws a hierarchy of the aesthetic norms and crowns it with "the newest canon, one that is the least automatic and the least involved with other types of norms" (p. 46). In order to maintain consistency in his reasoning, Mukařovský should claim that this newest canon is produced by the highest social class, a dominant or ruling one. Indeed, such a suggestion appears: "It may seem that the hierarchy of aesthetic canons is directly related to the hierarchy of social strata" (p. 46). Yet, in the very next sentence he weakens his claim and warns that although it is "not without some justification", it shouldn't be applied dogmatically, because it does happen that the newest form does not originate from the highest class, but, for example, from young people who belong to other classes. The second, vertical integration of social hierarchy and hierarchy of aesthetic norms is also disturbed by horizontal divisions into age groups, sex and profession, due to which "members of the same social stratum

will have different tastes, and (…) conversely, members of different strata (…) may have very similar tastes" (p. 46). In effect, this part of the book contains contradictory and mutually exclusive statements.

Bordwell declares his adherence to Mukařovský's work, but a reading of the latter's work reveals that the ties between the two researchers are rather weak. It seems that the only thing that was really borrowed was the notion itself, but this notion has been emptied of the content and context which Mukařovský gave to it and filled with things that the Czech structuralist never wrote about. Mukařovský links aesthetic norms tightly with aesthetic function and aesthetic value. For him these three notions denominate three aspects of an aesthetic unity. "A dissertation about one of them which would not take into account the other two would be incomplete" (1970A)[3]. Yet Bordwell writes nothing about aesthetic function (he writes about functions of various devices, but that is a totally different thing) and next to nothing about aesthetic value. Mukařovský devotes a lot of space to the issue of the justification of a norm's claim to absolute validity, Bordwell does not touch on this issue. The crux of the matter for Mukařovský is changeability, variability and the multitude of aesthetic norms; Bordwell practically leaves this issue aside. Mukařovský links the norms (together with functions and values) with sociological matters, which Bordwell doesn't do. At the same time, Bordwell links the aesthetic norm with two different contexts: the mode of production and perceptual habits and expectations of a virtual viewer. Neither of these contexts is present in Mukařovský's work. Moreover, Bordwell places norms within a three level structure of film aesthetics, with special stress on the second level, that of systems of narrative logic, cinematic time and cinematic space, which means that the norms refer to these particular systems. This way of thinking is also completely alien to Mukařovský. So, in fact, Bordwell's and Mukařovský's understanding of norms differ drastically.

To this objection one can answer that Bordwell had the right to take from Mukařovský what he wanted, and he didn't have to take all of Mukařovský's thoughts as they come. This is undoubtedly true. The problem is, however, that simply leaving aside the difficult matters that plagued Mukařovský does not make them non-existent. At least two of them should be considered in depth, because they help to verify the status of a norm and its usability as a general tool for the description of cinema, outside the context of Bordwell's studies. These two issues are justification and changeability of the aesthetic norm.

[3] The quoted sentence belongs to the preface which has not been translated in the American Ann Arbor edition.

Justification of norms

As I mentioned above, Mukařovský sought the base and justification of an aesthetic norm in the anthropological equipment of a human being. Bordwell generally renounces the "Vitruvian"[4] idea, cherished by Mukařovský, according to which properties of man determine art. To some extent this idea returns with the notion of "canonic story format" as a natural way of telling/receiving stories, a "template" of narrative structure in contemporary Western cultures, which serves as "reference points for the identification of "less intelligible narratives (…)" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 35). Yet two important differences must be voiced: first, Bordwell does not link the canonic story format with the norm; secondly he does not plant it so much inside the human race as in "contemporary Western culture". The canonic story format is not innate, but "learned from one's experience of stories" (1885, p. 149). So, in spite of some superficial resemblances we can't say that Bordwell followed Mukařovský's path in seeking foundations for the norm.

If not a Vitruvian man, then what? In NiFF one reads that "[t]he notion of norm is straightforward: any film can be seen as seeking to meet or not to meet a coherent standard established by fiat or by previous practice" (p. 159). This "fiat" is interesting, but, unfortunately, Bordwell does not elaborate on it. One possibility is that this "fiat" is a decision of industry, as CHC is based on the idea of a systemic relationship of mutual influences between aesthetic norms and modes of film production. Yet, the arguments that support it are rather vague, in fact in many parts of this book we can find statements which show that the relationship is rather unidirectional, from style to modes of production, and not the other way round. Janet Staiger herself seems to corroborate this, when she writes: "It is true that production practices, on occasion, caused certain stylistic techniques. But overall, Hollywood's production practices need to be seen as an *effect* of economic and ideological/signifying practices. In some instances, as we have seen, a production practice affected the film style, but in general, **we have to look elsewhere for explanations of why films looked and sounded as they did**." (emphasis: MP) (CHC, p. 142). Similar conclusions can be found in the chapter which summarises a description of evolution of production modes in Hollywood, where one reads that while "[T]here is no question that economic factors have strongly affected the development of the classical style", in the last analysis these are stylistic factors that "can explain the most specific and interesting aspects of Hollywood filmmaking. The particular nature of the classical norms depended upon models of

[4] I owe this reference to Vitruvian man to Thomas Elsaesser.

storytelling drawn from literature, theatre, music, and the visual arts" (CHC, p. 367). Many other statements of this kind can be found in CHC. If this is true with regard to American film which has been analysed in detail, it is even more true with regard to other styles, as Bordwell does not link them with "modes of production" at all, asserting that "[i]t would be naïve to think that alternative styles necessarily lead to alternative production procedures, still less fundamental shifts in the mode of production" (CHC, p. 383)[5].

So, if not "fiat", then previous practice is the source of norms. The norm is simply the most often used solution within the systems of narrative logic, time and space (CHC) or within the systems of style and syuzhet (NiFF). In other words, the norms are the most often used ways of constructing film narration, time and space, or, in another variant, film style and syuzhet. Strengthened by trade journals and manuals, they became the proper ways or solutions, measures of standards, quality and aesthetic values. Why these particular ways and solutions became the norms, and not other ones, Bordwell does not explain, but one can guess that what was decisive was the audience's approval. Why, in turn, the audience, or rather its majority, approved some solutions and rejected others, is also not specified, but one can guess again that what was decisive was a force of habit formed in contact with older forms of representational art, such as literature and theatre.

The genesis of norms is not a matter of principal interest for Bordwell, though. The stance he adopts is, so to say, archaeological. He excavates remnants of a past epoch and on their basis tries to discover which solutions were the most often employed, and consequently elevated to the status of norms. The basis for this was provided by 100 randomly selected films out of at least 15 000 films made in the USA between 1915 and 1960 (a so called unbiased sample, UnS). The findings were corroborated by analyses of almost 200 titles chosen basically "for their quality or historical influence" (CHC, p. 10), which made up the so called Extended Sample (ES). This procedure raised some doubts. Barry King questioned the reliability and representativeness of the unbiased sample, pointing out that it made up only 0,66% of the whole output (1986, p. 84). Bordwell replied that it was still better than to "generalise on the classical system on the basis of a single film" (1988, p. 74), which is undoubtedly true but does not solve the issue of

[5] The issue of naivety with respect to a production/style relationship clearly plagued Bordwell, as in *Narration in the Fiction* one can read that "Accepting a historical basis for narrational norms requires recognizing that every mode of narration is tied to a mode of film production and reception. It would be naïve to think that, in a mass medium like cinema, norms rise and fall of their own accord." (NiFF, p. 154).

representativeness. The next doubt concerns the danger of petition principii fallacy. It was Mukařovský himself who warned against it, stating that "a tendency to preserve the overall force of the norm through empirical deduction of criteria from existing works presumed to be exemplary models (…) must confront either incomplete induction or petitio principii" (1970A, p. 24). This petitio principii fallacy can be phrased as follows: how can we choose exemplary works without a prior setting of the criteria on the basis of which the given works are regarded as exemplary? In other words, in order to choose exemplary works, we should know the criteria to begin with; but these criteria can only be deduced from exemplary works. The way to avoid the petitio principii fallacy was to select – as exemplary – 100 films out of around 15 000 films produced between 1916 and 1960. An adjective which determines this sample – called "an **unbiased** sample" – looks like a rebuttal of the petitio principii charge. And yet, this charge cannot be so easily dismissed. Barry King pointed out that the concept of the classical style was present in earlier Bordwell and Thompson works, namely, *Space and Narrative in the Works of Ozu* and *Film Art: an Introduction*. King concludes that analyses from CHC "can be considered as providing the ground of this earlier analysis" (1986, p. 76), but I would say rather that they can be considered as a way of corroborating a previously formulated hypothesis. If so, then even if the sample was unbiased, its scrutiny wasn't so. King states that this scrutiny was governed by "the criterion of aesthetic pertinence" (1986, p. 86), which means that the researchers looked for pertinent structures and devices, probably ones that correspond with the concept of the classical style.

Mukařovský's "exemplary model" takes on a rather peculiar form in CHC – that of "typical film", called also "the quietly conformist film" and "ordinary film" (CHC, p. 10). Bordwell openly acknowledges that it goes against the custom in film history of focusing primarily on masterworks and innovations. Yet, a masterpiece approach, with all its faults, had at least one asset: it referred to concrete works of art, and therefore any sort of generalisation had an easily identifiable base. In the case of typical film it is different, for "[N]o one film is the classical cinema" (CHC, p. 239), no one film is a typical film. Typical film is a model, a Platonic ideal. So, the norms in fact and in spite of the author's declaration, are inferred from some metaphysical model. All concrete works are just approximations, more or less imperfect hypostases. Also, the *petitio principii* fallacy reappears: the norms are inferred from typical films, but in order to know which film is typical one must know the norms beforehand.

The basic question, which should be answered, is this: to what extent is the notion of a norm binding? We expect of a norm to be something more impor-

tant, more fundamental than just being one style among many others. If so, the question of justification of norms returns. Is a norm based on any sort of "higher order", being that of ideals of beauty, or innate or learned capacities or features of the human race? Or is a norm simply based on statistics, "nothing other than consistency of application" (Elsaesser, 1985, p. 53)? And another name for the dominant style? And if the latter is true, how to construe a sample, and analysis of this sample, to avoid the *petition principii fallac*y.

Bordwell: norm…

The next question is this: what exactly are the norms which lie at the base of the whole Bordwellian project? In CHC some possibilities are mentioned. First, there is the level of Hollywood self-awareness, that is, how Hollywood of the classical era saw itself. It is based on an "enormous body of statements and assumptions to be found in trade journals, technical manuals, memoirs, and publicity handouts" and consists of six basic points: primacy of storytelling; stress on unity as "a basic attribute of film form"; realism; effacement, invisibility, transparency of film form; comprehensibility and unambiguity; emotional appeal that "transcends class and nation" (CHC, p. 3). This description of industry self-awareness is quite convincing, but Bordwell soon dismisses it, stating that Hollywood's own assumptions do not exhaustively account for its practice and that "the institutions' discourse should not set our agenda for analysis" (CHC, p. 4). This dismissal is not very firm, though. The Hollywood practice cannot be accounted for by the Hollywood assumptions exhaustively, which means that it can be accounted for inexhaustively, to some extent. Indeed, some of the above-mentioned points – like primacy of storytelling – have been directly transferred to the Bordwell system of norms; some have been borrowed [transferred]? in disguise, like transparency, which Bordwell puts in the rubric of self-consciousness. Bordwell often refers to some of them – like realism – in spite of the fact that they are not present among his norms. Moreover, Bordwell very often supports his arguments with quotes from the "enormous body of statement" from the era, which, by the way, has been generally appraised. So, dismissal is only partial, tentative, but still, if we are looking for the Bordwellian norm(s), we must look elsewhere. Other possible norms which are mentioned – but only briefly – are those connected with the notion of classicism. Bordwell mentions elegance, unity, rule-governed craftmanship, and concludes this chapter with the following remark: "Before the auteurs, there are constraints; before there are deviations, there are norms" (CHC, p. 4). Obviously, this brief remark cannot be called normative, but it does set a frame for the whole project. And, after all, unity is listed among the main features of the classical style.

The structure of norms and their place in an overall system of film aesthetics is different in each of the two books. In CHC, Bordwell states that "any fictional narrative film possesses three systems: A system of narrative logic, which depends upon story events and causal relations and parallelisms among them; A system of cinematic time; and a system of cinematic space" (p. 6)." Apart from these three basic systems, a distinct chapter is devoted to "the continuity system" (pp. 194–213), without, however, establishing a structural link between it and the three other systems. Norms belong first of all to level number two (that of systems) and – to a lesser degree – to level number three (that of relations among systems). It means that they basically govern an organisation of filmic narration, time and space. And indeed, this is how it is described in subsequent chapters of Part One of the book.

In NiFF the situation changes, as it is stated that "filmic narration involves two principal formal systems, syuzhet and style", whereas the range of time and space seem to be downgraded, as they become merely "two stylistic aspects of the film medium" (p. 16). The relationship between these two classifications is far from clear. Theoretically we could, perhaps, assume, that each of them refers to something different. CHC encompasses "style", whereas NiFF is about "narration", so one could say that the latter book is narrower and discusses only one section of the former, namely narration. This would create a rather awkward structure though, in which a style encompasses narration (as one of its "systems"), which, in turn, encompasses a style ("filmic narration involves two principal formal systems, syuzhet and style"). Also, the line between narration and style is rather blurred (perhaps it is to some extent unavoidable), because if "style" simply names the film's systematic use of cinematic devices" (p. 50) and narration is "the process whereby the film's syuzhet and style interact in the course of cueing and channelling the spectator's construction of the fabula" (p. 53), then it is quite evident that narration also uses "cinematic devices", and that style "belongs" to the process of narration. And, indeed, in numerous, brilliant analyses that Bordwell carries out in both books, the two spheres constantly overlap and intermingle. So, if the option to "insert" NiFF into CHC (in other words – narration into style) fails, another option could be to prefer one of these methodologies over another. A natural candidate for this preference could be NiFF, as it was written later (although published in the same year) and can be, perhaps, treated as the "next step" in relation to CHC, but no reliable source (such as the author's statement) supports this idea.

After this short detour, let us return to the main track of my argument, that is a comparison of the place of norms in both books. As I mentioned before, in

CHC norms pertain to the level of systems and govern the organisation of filmic narration, time and space. In NiFF the situation is more complex. We can delineate at least three levels of norms. First, these are norms of the classical film. Its place in the system is dual. On the one hand, it is just a mode, on an equal footing with the three other modes delineated by Bordwell (art cinema, historical-materialist and parametric); on the other hand, however, the classical mode is special, because, apart from being a mode, it provides a template, against which other modes are foregrounded. Therefore "classical cinema" can be called the "ur-code", the mode of modes. The next level consists of modes (three or four, depending how we qualify the classical mode). "A narrational mode is a historically distinct set of norms of narrational construction and comprehension" (p. 150). Here, the abovementioned difference in statuses of norms is clearly visible. Bordwell, referring to Mukařovský, posits "an initial distinction between the reigning norm – the canonized style, the mainstream practice – and deviations from that. In fictional cinema, the split would correspond to the average viewer's distinction between ordinary movies and the offbeat stuff" (p. 150). Ordinary movies, as we have seen before, are "classical Hollywood films", the offbeat stuff are various alternatives. This offbeat stuff, however, can also be codified, along norms which Bordwell calls "extrinsic". "A deviation from the mainstream practice tends itself to be organised with respect to another extrinsic norm, however much a minority affair it may be" (p. 150). So, modes contain extrinsic norms, that is norms which are, so to say, external to individual films and common to all films which make up a mode, "however much a minority affair it may be" (sic!). Below this level another level exists, that of "intrinsic norms", that is norms that are specific to some individual films, or, to use a Bordwellian phrase, "the standards attained within the text itself" (p. 150). An intrinsic norm can be "rare or unique" to a given film, but it can also overlap with an extrinsic one, that of a mode, and also – that of a genre. Generally, Bordwell does not refer to norms other than modes as ways of grouping films, such as genres, historical currents or authorial styles (incidentally, they are the most common and popular ways of putting films together in film criticism and film studies). The only exceptions he makes are situations in which an extrinsic or intrinsic mode is transgressed; a possible explanation of this situation can be that a transgression is motivated by another norm, most often a generic one. A good example is a depiction of *Murder My Sweet,* which "restricts the syuzhet to what Marlowe knows; as one basis for our continuous hypothesis-forming activity, this constitutes an intrinsic norm of the film's narration. But the restriction of the syuzhet is a convention of the detective genre. (…). Here the norm that the film attains matches one already canonized extrinsically" (p. 151).

Now, after this reconstruction of the structures of norms in CHC and NiFF I come to the point which turns out to be unexpectedly difficult. What are the particular norms? Can we pinpoint each of them? Can we make a comprehensive list? It turns out to be very difficult, and in this point Bordwell continues Mukařovský's tradition, albeit in a slightly different form. Mukařovský, having briefly discussed several aesthetic principles, concludes that this list is far from complete, and "[E]ven if it were complete, it is certain in advance that its network would not be so vast and dense as to contain the equivalents of all possible detailed aesthetic norms" (170A, p. 30). In his essay Mukařovský avoids discussing particular norms and never analyses particular works of art, concentrating rather on fluidity of norms. Bordwell, on the other hand, devotes a lot of space to detailed analyses of films, and at first glance it seems that they are carried out with special attention to norms. However, a sharper look reveals that it is usually not easy to extract norms from the masses of detailed data and observations, the more so as Bordwell never pinpoints norms, and very rarely names them as such. He usually depicts various aspects of a film form within a given mode, leaving it to the reader to decide whether this or that aspect has a normative character. This is true even with respect to the classical style, which is far better described than other modes.

There are three systems in CHC: of narrative logic, cinematic time and cinematic space. The norms belong to these systems and make up a set of precepts, which determine what a Hollywood film should look (and sound) like. These precepts include many different things. For instance, the system of narrative logic includes such things as character-centred causality, moderate and changing self-consciousness, high knowledgeability, functions of musical accompaniment (e.g. it provides a continuity factor, expresses a character's mental state), "primacy effect" in building characters, stimulation of viewers' activity using gaps and omissions. The system of cinematic time concerns order of events (preference for chronology, flashbacks are rare, flash-forwards do not exist), duration (ellipses are commonly used), ways of marking ellipses until the 1950's (irises, fades, dissolves), deadlines, continuity (via match-on-action, eyeline-match cutting, sound), accompanying of dissolve on the image track by sound after 1928, subordination of time to causality ("Time in the classical film is a vehicle for causality, not a process to be investigated on its own", p. 47), preference for fast editing ("The audience never gets a chance to relax and think about the story holes", p. 48), a preference for cross-cutting (which signifies simultaneity) over parallel editing, where temporal relation between events is unspecified). The system of cinematic space includes such points as subordination of film space to narrative and its "realistic" character ("The screen might be likened to a plate-

glass window through which the observer looks with one eye at the actual scene", p. 50), centred, balanced frame composition, which imitates post-Renaissance painting (a human body, shown from the front, is the centre of narrative and graphic interest), careful representation of depth by set design, lighting, camera movements, sound (p. 54), personalisation of space (the classical film charges objects with personal meanings, p. 55), spatial orientation by means of continuity editing (analytical, eyeline, earline, shot-reverse short cuts), 180° and axis of action rule, redundancy of camera placements.

In *Narration in the Fiction Film* the structure is different. As already mentioned before, time and space lose their status of systems and become "stylistic aspects", whereas the status of "systems" is attributed to syuzhet and style. It can be assumed that time and space are, so to say, subsumed under the broader category of style. Consequently, the part on classical narration in NiFF consists of chapters about "Canonic Narration" and "Classical Style", and also about the "Classical Spectator". The features of "canonic narration" (without determining if all of them are "norms") include such points as:

- Character-centred causality.
- The plot consists of an undisturbed stage, the disturbance, the struggle, and the elimination of the disturbance.
- "In classical fabula construction, causality is the prime unifying principle" (p. 157).
- "Spatial configurations are motivated by realism (a newspaper office must contain desks, typewriters, phones) and, chiefly, by compositional necessity (the desk and typewriter will be used to write causally significant new stories; the phones form crucial links among characters)" (p. 157).
- "Causality also motivates temporal principles of organisation (The process is especially evident in a device highly characteristic of classical narration – the deadline)" (p. 157).
- Usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere – work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships.
- The syuzhet is always broken up into segments. In the silent era, the typical Hollywood film would contain between nine and eighteen sequences; in the sound era between fourteen and thirty-five (with

post-war films tending to have more sequences). The bounds of the sequence will be marked by some standardised punctations (dissolve, fade, wipe, sound bridge)

- At least one line of action must be left suspended, in order to motivate the shifts to the next scene, which picks up the suspended line (often via a "dialogue hook"). Hence the famous "linearity" of classical construction.
- The classical syuzhet has the tendency to develop toward full and adequate knowledge. "The classical film moves steadily toward a growing awareness of absolute truth" (p. 159).
- The classical film is usually crowned with a happy ending. Out of 100 films from the unbiased sample, over 60 ended with "the display of a reunited romantic couple) and many more could be said to end happily" (p. 159). The ending either skilfully ties up all ends, or appears more like "deux ex machina", Brechtian "mounted messenger". The device of closing the film with an epilogue is used, a brief celebration of the stable state achieved by the main characters.
- The classical narration tends to be omniscient, highly communicative, and moderately self-conscious. This observation must be attenuated, though, in two respects. First, generic factors often create variations upon these precepts. Secondly, the temporal progression makes narrational properties fluctuate across the film, and these fluctuations are also codified.
- Gaps will seldom be permanent, but can also be mitigated by generic conventions.
- The suyzhet's construction of time powerfully shapes the fluctuating overtness of narration. When the syuzhet adheres to chronological order and omits the causally unimportant periods of time, the narration becomes highly communicative and unselfconscious. On the other hand, when a montage sequence compresses a political campaign, a murder trial, or the effects of Prohibition into moments, the narration becomes overtly omniscient.
- Figures are adjusted for moderate self-consciousness by angling the bodies more or less frontally but avoiding to-camera gazes (p. 161).
- Most important is the tendency of the classical film to render narrational omniscience as spatial *omnipresence.*

- Manipulation of *mise-en-scene* (figure behaviour, lighting, setting, costume) creates an apparently independent profilmic event, which becomes the tangible story world framed and recorded from without. Classical narration thus depends upon the notion of the invisible observer.
- Hollywood narratives are highly redundant.
- The classical film assumes clear distinctions among objective diegetic reality, characters' mental states, and inserted narrational commentary.
- The range of knowledge in the flashback portion is often not identical with that of the character doing the remembering.

These are the main points extracted from the chapter on "canonic narration". The text is unbroken, continuous, without any highlights or underlines, full of minor details and examples, so, perhaps, some slightly different interpretation and a slightly different list of features or "norms" is possible. The next chapter, "classical style", is ordered differently, as it contains three main points, numbered and highlighted in italics, namely:

On the whole, classical narration treats film technique as a vehicle for the syuzhet's transmission of fabula information.

1. In classical narration, style typically encourages the spectator to construct a coherent, consistent time and space for the fabula action.
2. Classical style consists of a strictly limited number of particular technical devices organised into a stable paradigm and ranked probabilistically according to the syuzhet demands.

Within these points a reader can find many observations which they have come across before, under different headings, concerning, for example, position of bodies and faces (which "become the focal points of attention", p. 162), editing ("as the characters interact, the scene is broken into closer views of action and reaction", p. 162), "hooks" between scenes ("the scene usually closes on a portion of the space (…) that provides a transition to the next scene", p. 162), and so on.

When we look at these lists and classifications more closely, some problems arise. Some points in CHC and NiFF overlap, some differ. For example, points about character-centred causality, levels of self-consciousness, knowledgeability and communicativeness, and deadlines overlap (although sometimes in slightly different phrasing). On the other hand, many points which can be found in one of

these books do not exist in the other one. For example, remarks about the narrative function of musical accompaniment, primacy effect, or highly probable and sharply exclusive hypotheses, present in CHC, are absent from NiFF. And the other way round: some points present in NiFF are absent from CHC, such as remarks about dramaturgy of classical film (the undisturbed stage, the disturbance, the struggle, and the elimination of the disturbance), realist motivation of spatial configurations, or clear distinctions between objective diegetic reality and characters' mental states. So, the question arises, which of these two lists is binding? Which of the abovementioned "points" or "features" have the status of norms?

The next thing: The lists above are heterogeneous, consisting of points which have different logical statuses. Some of them are very general (like those about high knowledgeability or moderate self-consciousness, or about time in the classical film as a vehicle for causality), some are very detailed, like remarks about the narrative function of music or punctuation marks which indicated ellipses until the late 50s. Most of them are textual, that is point to various features of film texts, but some concern rather an assumed viewer's activity or reaction (classical narration asks the viewers to form hypotheses, or encourages viewers to ask questions and provide answers), which are probably difficult to codify. Some points seem fairly obvious and apply to all kinds of feature films in history (e.g. the syuzhet is always broken up into segments); some resemble less a description of particular features, but rather a directional instruction to film-makers (classical narration treats film technique as a vehicle for the syuzhet's transmission of fabula information).

On the whole, what is clearly visible is that descriptive and normative aspects intermingle and it is very difficult, if not simply impossible, to separate them. Moreover, accumulation of details makes it very difficult do decide which of the numerous features and traits of films from the classical period are essential, and which are of secondary stature, even if they are often used, which of them are "norms", and which are just "aspects", "factors", "features", "devices", "principles" – to name some expressions which Bordwell uses interchangeably, without proper consideration of their difference.

If this is the case with the mode that was analysed and described most carefully, in the most minute details – the classical mode – then the same all the more can be said about other modes. The statistical base for each of them is incomparably smaller than for the classical mode – in the case of the parametric mode it is simply minuscule.

… And deviation

This leads us right to the crucial point in the whole two-book project: the dialectics of norm and deviation. In *The classical Hollywood Cinema* there are two short chapters on the styles that deviate from norms: "The bound of difference" and "Alternative modes of film practice" – altogether 21 pages in a 500-page book. This proportion is telling: it is the norm and various – economic, aesthetical, technological – dimensions of its implementation and consolidation which focuses Bordwell's attention. In *The Narration in the Fiction Film* the situation is different: the classical mode is juxtaposed with three possible alternatives, so one can say that there are various forms of deviation which focus Bordwell's attention in that case. Both books taken together illustrate two possible approaches to the dialectics of norm/deviation.

The chapter's very title from CHC – "The Bounds of Difference" – is meaningful. The difference in classical Hollywood cinema is bound, constrained, must be somehow squeezed into a predetermined format. Indeed, this is the conclusion of this chapter: "In Hollywood cinema there are no subversive films, only subversive moments. For social and economic reasons, no Hollywood film can provide a distinct and coherent alternative to the classical model" (p. 81). The reasoning which leads to this conclusion deserves attention, though. Bordwell takes into consideration three forms of possible subversion and deviation: borrowings from European avant-garde (avant-garde music, German Expressionist cinema, Soviet montage cinema); film noir ("the most deeply problematic group of films produced in Hollywood", p. 75); cinema of (American) auteurs. All these potential forms of subversion have been tamed by the classical form (the norm) by the following means:

> selectivity (especially in the case of borrowings from European avant-garde): subversive styles were not taken by the classical style as they come. Hollywood picked up only those elements that it could use for its own purposes.
>
> Motivation (especially in the case of "non-realistic" genres and film noir): According to Bordwell's description, motivation is "the process by which a narrative justifies its story material and the plot's presentation of that story material" (p. 19)[6]. In other words, motivation provides an explanation why this or that element was used in a given film. Bordwell enumerates four sorts of motivation: compositional, realistic, intertextual and artistic. It is

[6] Ibidem, p. 19.

intertextual motivation – and its sub-class, generic motivation in particular – which proves to be especially effective in taming potential subversions.

Paradigmatic character of classical style (especially in the case of auteur cinema): As Thomas Elsaesser aptly summarised it, "different formal devices or techniques (for example, camera movement or lighting, music or color) can substitute for one another because they can fulfill the same role without breaking the norms and violating unity or coherence" (1985A, p. 55).

Out of these three forms of dealing with deviations, especially interesting is that of motivation[7]. Two of its four types (realist and compositional) support classical style; the main function of the remaining two (intertextual and artistic) is to tame and justify subversions, to explain why some films or parts of films which at first sight seem to blatantly break a norm in essence do not break it at all and can be easily reconciled with it. Especially prominent in this respect is intertextual motivation, and its sub-type – generic motivation. Intertextual motivation means that the usage of a given element in a film is motivated by the fact that similar elements are used in films of the same class, especially a genre. Exemplary cases are the genres of comedy, musical and melodrama, which are pitted against "a conception of the classical film as a "realist" text" (CHC, p. 71). These genres are characterised by a high level of stylisation or – in the case of the musical – blatantly unrealistic situations, which are difficult to reconcile with realism. Yet, although realism is regarded by Bordwell as an essential ingredient of the classical style (does it mean that it is a norm? that it belongs to the norm?), these blatantly unrealistic stylisations or inserts do not undermine the norm, because the "most 'radical' moments, are in fact codified through generic conventions" (p. 71). In the case of film noir, "the most deeply problematic group of films produced in Hollywood" (p. 75), intertextual motivation is of a different nature, because it refers not to the body of films, but to literature. "Every characteristic narrative device of film noir was already conventional in American crime fiction and drama of the 1930s and 1940s" (p. 76). A semi-documentary trend within film noir, which appeared after the war, is explained by reference to another literary trend – "the police-procedural novel in crime fiction" (p. 76) – and also by "wartime limits on set construction and the "realism" of combat documentaries" (p. 77).

[7] I am not sure if in the remaining two cases we can speak about deviations at all; the paradigmatic character of classical style by definition does not violate the norm, as it means that various devices may fulfil the same function within a given norm; selectivity as a matter of fact can be regarded as a variant of a paradigm: other "devices" fulfil the same function, like, for example, expressing characters' mental states; that, for example, music used in a given part of a film is "avant-garde" does not make it less "pleonastic" or "self-effacing" (these are the terms used by Bordwell to describe "the norm" with respect to musical accompaniment), provided the strange sounds overlap with and express turmoil in a character's head).

An intertextual motivation seems to me a smart trick to bypass serious problems and contradictions which are inherent in the Bordwellian system. The norm is that Hollywood films are realistic. Yet, it is quite obvious that most Hollywood films rather resemble various sorts of fantasies, and many basic Hollywood genres are non-realist by definition (musical, sci-fi, horror). At this point intertextual motivation gives a hand: yes, these genres break the norm, but it is motivated generically. A norm has it that classical style is "invisible", "self-effacing"[8]. Yet some films and genres blatantly break this rule: musicals, melodramas, some types of comedies overtly flaunt their un-selfconsiousness. Here, again, the notion of motivation helps: yes, they break the rule, but it is motivated generically; simply, these genres are like that. One norm of the classical style is high knowledgeability. Yet some films and some genres, like detective films or – more prominently – films noir – suppress knowledge, flaunt mystery and uncertainty, and use even – especially the latter ones – permanent gaps. What can be done about that? Here, like in previous cases, generic motivation comes to the rescue: yes, the classical style is characterised by high knowledgeability, but some genres within Hollywood cinema are exempt from this rule. As Elisabeth Cowie aptly pointed out, the very definition of classical Hollywood narrative includes "virtually all possible deviations, so that every exception therefore proves the rule. The church is so broad that heresy is impossible. (…) As a result, it is argued, as viewers we are not at all disturbed when Judy Garland bursts into song, since we expect her to sing in films; audiences read such elements in relation to the star-image and/or generic conventions. Nor is the unity of film disrupted, it is claimed, since it is premised on the inclusion of such elements. Such elements do, however, disrupt classical narrative" (Cowie, 1998, p. 178, 183).

A problem with this explanation and justification is that most classical Hollywood films are generic productions. That means that a great number of classical films do not obey the rules of classical cinema. Or, if we are attached to thinking in terms of norms, we can phrase it differently and speak about the conflict between norms of modes and norms of genres. Generally speaking, the notion of mode, essential to Bordwellian thinking, as a matter of fact borrowed by Bordwell from Noel Burch (1991; see also: Bordwell, 1998), deserves more space and attention than I can devote to it here. Undoubtedly the relationship between modes and other ways of grouping films (such as genres, auteurs, national or international "schools" or "currents") is far from clear and demands elaboration.

[8] Bordwell dismisses these terms and instead of them he speaks about a low or moderate level of self-consciousness, but in essence these are the same things.

Theoretically, intertextual motivation can abolish distinctions between the classical style and any other kinds of films, even those which Bordwell distinguished as different modes. Do art films break the rule of character-centred causality? Yes, they do, but it can be justified by intertextual motivation: these films are like that. Do historical-materialist films break the rules of spatial continuity? Yes, they do, but that can be explained with reference to other films from the period, and also experience of the PROLETKULT theatre. And so on, and so forth.

Yet, we must do Bordwell justice: he does not do that. On the contrary, in NiFF he employs quite the opposite tactics: not so much to dilute differences, to absorb them in the classical system by means of motivation, but rather to stress differences, in order to sharply delineate alternative modes. This is plain when he describes an analytical strategy of "prominence" which "refers to the perceived highlighting of a narrational tactic with respect to an extrinsic norm. In art cinema, for instance, shifts between "objective" action and "subjective" moments are often not signalled by the narration. This creates a suppressed gap which we retrospectively try to fill (…). These suppressed gaps leap into prominence against the background of the classical mode, which provides explicit signals for the transitions between objectivity and subjectivity. Jancso's use of the long take in *The Confrontation* is an instance of stylistic prominence, since it deviates sharply from normal decoupage practice" (NiFF, p. 150). It is evident here that alternative aesthetic solutions gain prominence against the background of "the classical mode" or "normal decoupage practice". In addition, the double meaning of "extrinsic norm" stands out here too. It refers to the classical style here, but theoretically extrinsic norms make up other modes too, so it would be more precise to say that the aforementioned transition breaks the extrinsic norm of classical cinema, but is perfectly in accordance with the extrinsic norm of the art mode.

So, alternative stylistic modes gain prominence against the background of the classical mode, because they deviate from "normal" film practice of "ordinary film. Admittedly, Bordwell himself dismisses such an analytical proceeding, finding it insufficient. In CHC, one finds the following passage: "The historical hegemony of Hollywood makes acute and urgent the need to study film styles and modes of production that differ from Hollywood's. But a great deal more needs to be done in order to specify the salient differences involved. Theorists usually discuss alternatives to the classical cinema in general and largely negative terms. If the classical style is "invisible", we will then praise films that show the camera. To the pleasure of the classical style, critics have countered a cinema of "unpleasure" or frustration or boredom; to a representation of depth, a cinema of flatness or "materiality". Working with such mighty opposites, it becomes easy

to claim that the favoured filmmaker (Godard, Vertov, Stan Brakhage, whoever) "subverts" or "deconstructs" the dominant style. One task of this book has been to show that such polarities lack nuance and precision. Moreover, one cannot simply oppose narrative or pleasure; one must at the same time show how films can construct systematic alternatives" (p. 379).

It is evident here that Bordwell is fully aware of the confines inherent to an approach based on simple comparison of "the norm" (the classical style) and "deviation" and is trying to overcome them. Yet, his success in this respect is rather modest. It seems that the American scholar is unable to break away from the structure he himself created, from the prison he himself designed and erected with such great effort. This is plainly visible in the description of all three alternative modes described in NiFF (although I fully agree with Andras Balint Kovacs, who stated, that in fact there are only two modes in NiFF – classical and modernist, as the differences between the three alternative modes are much less important than the similarities, which are unified in their opposition to the classical cinema) (Kovacs, 2007, pp. 52–55; 57–60; Ostaszewski, 2018). Let us take as an example the description of the art mode from this book. It begins with a reservation which resembles the one quoted above: "We could characterize this mode by simply inventorying our theoretical categories. We could say that the suyzhet here is not as redundant as in the classical film; that there are permanent and suppressed gaps; that the narration tends to be less generically motivated" (NiFF, p 205). Yet, Bordwell claims, such an atomistic list would not get at "the underlying principles" (is this a synonym of norms?). So far so good, Bordwell seems to be trying to construct systematic alternatives, a set of extrinsic norms proper to art cinema, which would not come down to simple negatives of the classical mode. Yet, in his next moves the repressed returns, and a background of the classical mode is ever-present, giving "the underlying principles" of the art mode strength and distinctiveness. To give just a few examples: the three "underlying principles" – called in the very next sentence "procedural schemata" – are "objective" realism, "expressive or subjective realism, and narrational commentary" (NiFF, p. 205). The first of these "principles" or "schemata", "objective" realism is pitted against "traditional" realism rooted in XIX century literature and theatre and characteristic to the classical cinema. "For the classical cinema", Bordwell states, "reality" is assumed to be tacit coherence among events, a consistency and clarity of individual identity. (…). But art-cinema narration (…) questions such a definition of the real: the world's laws may not be knowable, personal psychology may be indeterminate" (p. 206). In what follows, this background is present, sometimes overtly. ("In the name of verisimilitude, the tight causality of classical Hollywood construction is replaced by a more tenuous linking of events" (p. 206). "We have seen that the classical film focuses the specta-

tor's expectations upon the ongoing causal chain by shaping the syuzhet's dramatic duration around explicit deadlines. But the art film typically lacks such devices" (p. 207), sometimes in a more subtle and clandestine way, when the classical style seems to be a default value. For instance, when an example of a new verisimilitude of time in art cinema narration is *temps mort* in a conversation (p. 206), we understand that it is meaningful in comparison with the classical style, where there are no *temps morts*. An identical situation is with the two remaining "underlying principles". "Subjective realism" means that art cinema focuses more on characters than on action. It is explained and foregrounded in a series of overt or covert juxtapositions. When we read that "art film relies upon psychological causation no less than does the classical narrative", but "the prototypical characters of the art cinema tend to lack clear-cut traits, motives, and goals" (p. 207), it is quite plain that it gains prominence against a background of the classical mode, in which the main characters have clear-cut traits (primacy effect) and strive to reach well-defined goals. Then we learn that when "the Hollywood protagonist speeds toward the target, the art-film protagonist is presented as sliding passively from one situation to another" (p. 207), and that whereas "classical film resembles a short story by Poe, art cinema is closer to Chechov" (p. 207). And so on, and so forth. General tactics of juxtaposition, of presenting an alternative mode against the background of the classical one, is ever-present, also in presenting the third principle, overt narrational commentary, where "[s]tylistic devices that gain prominence with respect to classical norms – an unusual angle, a stressed bit of cutting, a striking camera movement, an unrealistic shift in lighting or setting, a disjunction on the sound track, or any other breakdown of objective realism which is not motivated as subjectivity – can be taken as the narration's commentary" (p. 206).

One can ask what is wrong with that. Well, this is a binary system, so all fierce attacks which have been levelled at binarism in recent years also concern it (Przylipiak, 2020). In addition, a point of reference sets the limits of vision, and the vision established by a norm/deviation model can be very confining. When we take into account the question asked at the beginning of this paper – whether the concepts and categories worked out and launched in the mid-80s are still relevant, whether they can be used for describing contemporary cinema – one more doubt comes to one's mind. All reservations voiced above notwithstanding, one must admit not only that the Bordwellian system meant a great leap forward in conceptualisation of film aesthetics, but it was also intuitively right, because a common feeling was (and perhaps still is) that films dubbed "classical" were characterised by a high level of uniformity, that cinema in the era of the classical Hollywood cinema was indeed standardised. Today, in the era of changeability and variability, this feeling of standardisation is much weaker, or perhaps even

non-existent. To use an accurate phrase of Elizabeth Cowie, in contemporary American films "[s]tylistic norms have changed, and perhaps no longer exist as a consistent group of norms" (Cowie, p. 188). Research into film aesthetics must stand on its own feet.

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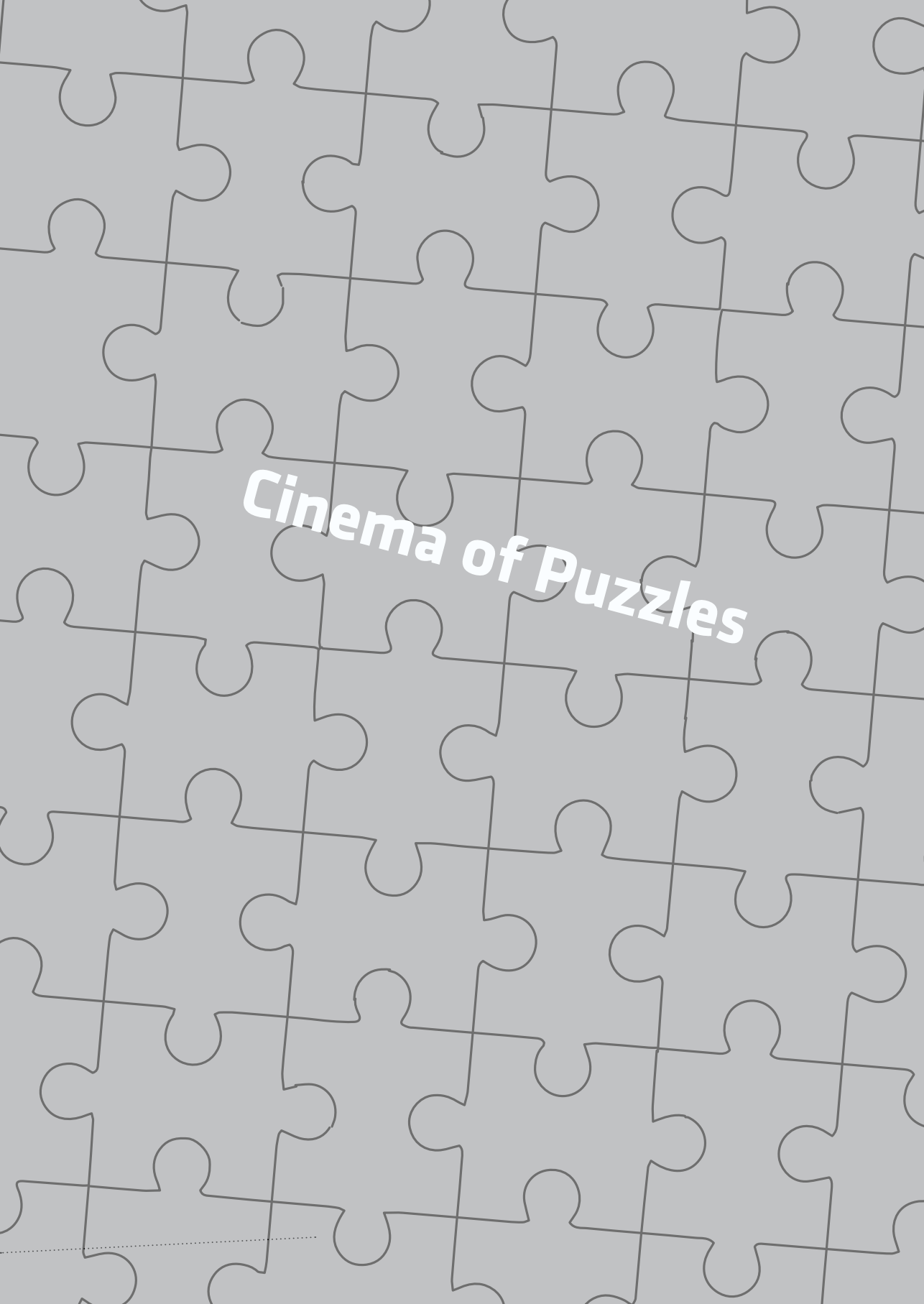
On the notion of norm in David Bordwell's system

The paper scrutinizes a notion of norm in David Bordwell's system of film aesthetics. It concerns such issues as: a relationship between Jan Mukařovský's concept of norm and the use Bordwell is making of it; procedures of establishing norms on the basis of sample analysis; justification of norms; list of norms and their status; a dialectic of norm and deviation as a tool for film analysis.

Keywords: Norm/deviation, film structuralism, typical film


Cinema of Puzzles

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From Point of View to Mind-game Films – Between Subjective Techniques and Strategies

My assumption is that the analysis of subjectivisation (subjective narrative) – one of the key elements in the development of a film medium[1] – may use two different perspectives: pragmatic and historical.

The first one focuses on an analysis of an audiovisual text. When the technique of subjectivity is incorporated into a shot or scene, it generates the intertwining between analytical conclusions and possible interpretations. Ultimately, it often results in a choice of the most plausible interpretation or a presentation of a few different versions of meaning (Jakubowska, 2006, pp. 13–37). Let us take a frame from *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (see below) (1973, dir. Wojciech Jerzy Has) as an example of an analytical-interpretative dilemma.

When we pose a question on *how* the departure from the objectivising technique is accomplished, the answer to the question seems very straightforward: through the application of a point of view. However, if we want to expand on the answer, we should refer to the question of *who*. Who owns the gaze, who sees the film character in this way? And lastly, what is the purpose in applying this unusual perspective?

[1] These issues will be considered within the general context of narration in feature films as distinct from documentaries.

Does the author-narrator (heterodiegetic narrator)[2] want to highlight the idea of being enclosed in a glass ball, thus referring to the poetic concept of Bruno Schulz, the author of the book the film is based on?[3] Does the character-narrator (homodiegetic narrator) tell the story through pictures as if he were taking part in the events taking place in his consciousness, and in this way he can watch himself, which would be impossible in the real world? Or perhaps the gaze from below, as if one were looking from the grave, belongs to those who have died. Are the dead a symbolic collective character who also represent those who died during the Holocaust?

The second perspective – which is instrumental for this article – assumes a historical development of subjectivisation techniques, but there is much more. I would like to answer the question about the way in which these techniques fit into the differences between paradigms and modes of cinema. Here

[2] The author-narrator (heterodiegetic narrator) – a narrator who is not a part of the storyworld as opposed to the homodiegetic narrator who is an element of the storyworld as a character.

[3] I give a more complex interpretation of the idea of a glass ball in Has's film in my analysis of *The Hourglass Sanatorium*, but I also consider other inspirations which come from Bruno Schulz's poetic storyworld (Jakubowska 2010).

I refer to the current research landscape within Polish film studies. For Jacek Ostaszewski, subjectivisation is limited to the presentation of events from the perspective of a film character. His decision results from the issues generated by the notion of a narrator and also a focaliser. Ostaszewski (2017, pp. 266–271) comments on the theories by David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Seymour Chatman, Gérard Genette, François Jost. This thought trajectory – marked by certain reluctance to include a heterodiegetic narrator in subjectivisation techniques – is also adopted by Robert Birkholc (2019), although his argumentation is less precise, similarly to his conceptual framework. An earlier proposal by Mirosław Przylipiak (1987) has a broader spectrum – it encompasses a character, a character-narrator and a heterodiegetic narrator. In this context, we also need to include Barbara Szczekała's definition narrowing down subjectivity to "a radically personal point of view of a character which concentrates on events which are non-existing outside his own mental sphere" (2019, p. 134).

I would like the perspectives delineated above to be examined, but also taken to extremes. If we want to detect the tendencies which are representative of different models of narration, we cannot consider only the point of view of a film character. Examples of subjectivisation techniques, which are limited solely to the character and the character-narrator, do not illustrate fully the dynamics of changes in this field. I adopt the elementary distinction proposed by Edward Branigan: "When a text is considered as an *object* for contemplation, there must of necessity be some conception of a *subject* who presents the text (author), tells the story (narrator), lives in the fictional world (character), and who listens, watches, and desires that the story be told (viewer)"(Braningan, 1984, p. 1). Even if a contemporary film is an object for play more than contemplation, a subject pertains to the level of an author-narrator (between poles of presenting and telling), character-narrator (between poles of living in the fictional world and telling/presenting his world and his life) as well as a viewer who may assume different stances (from contemplation to play). I assume that the evolution of how subjectivisation is used plays a fundamental role in the nature of the transition taking place within the scope of a film narrative (and broadly speaking in the culture of the 20th and 21st century). Therefore, one must point to the dominant and/or most distinctive techniques. I will also contemplate the distinction between a technique and a strategy in reference to narrative subjectivisation.

Not only does the theory of film narrative call for broadening of the point of view of a subject but also for clarifying the nature of an object, separating

what is told from the level of techniques and strategies i.e. how it is told (Branigan, 1984, p. 4). Hence in this article I will consider the relational nature of subjectivisation in accordance with the answers to the questions of who, what and how. I adopt the division of subjectivisation techniques proposed by Mirosław Przylipiak (1987) as a starting point for further considerations.

- Point of view
- Interior monologue
- Point of hearing/ listening
- Free indirect subjective
- Mindscreen (or mind images)
- Frame
- Discourse

What is important here is that although the classification stems from classical cinema, the author aims to broaden it and make it more universal so that it may encompass some trends in the development of subjectivisation which emerged in later modernist narrative. The character of the classification is historical as it emerged in relation to the author's current research while indicating some borrowings (David Bordwell, Edward Branigan, Marek Hendrykowski, Alicja Helman).

In this context, the synthesis of historical developments which I propose here is a sketch (I am not researching subjectivisation techniques in the context of the early cinema of attractions[4], I am only giving a few filmic examples for each model). It comes from the desire to picture the dynamics of the development of subjectivisation techniques but it does not have a normative character because the historical process is not only linear but is also based on repetitions and reinterpretations[5].

[4] At that time film narrative was just evolving and it is difficult not to agree with researchers who indicate that early cinema had the character of a spectacle rather than being narrative-driven (T. Gunning, 1986, pp. 63–70). I will not find the place for any discussion about this issue in my article.

[5] Generally, I use a periodisation of historical modes of film narration which is based on Ostaszewski's proposal (2018). Although I will also point to some suggestions, doubts or just commentaries for this.

Subjectivisation techniques – Pre-Classical Cinema (melodramatic narrative)[6] and Pre-Modernist Cinema (expressionism)

- WHO?

In the context of the developments of subjectivisation techniques, isolating a melodramatic narrative during the period of silent cinema seems perfectly justified. We may observe the growing importance of a film character, but – it needs to be emphasised – it is a collective character, whose emotions are clearly depicted primarily through reactions and actions which result from them (Ostaszewski 2018, pp. 56–58). An author-narrator emerges in this context – it is him who models the story that is being told and puts forward an interpretation of events – which is usually unambiguous, although his unique role is not disclosed just yet. Rick Altman emphasises: "The narrator follows no single character throughout but instead alternates regularly between two groups whose conflict provides the plot. Because the group, rather than an individual, plays the lead role, individuals serve primarily as placeholders, defined by the group, rather than as characters whose development constitutes an independent subject of interest." (2008, p. 55).

- WHAT?

Against the background of images depicting the plot, the role of perception and affects is employed; agency and subjectivity is not associated with an individual but a collective character. The characters' emotions, which are put to use as representative for a group, are presented on the screen in a more pronounced way and shape the dramaturgy.

- HOW?

Undoubtedly **point-of-view shots** begin to play an important role, although the technique is achieved by means of an editing phrase (a shot-countershot) as developed in classical film narrative. Yet, it does organise our perception of space, forms causal links and surely leads to a subjective point of view: both a collective one and that of an individual (Ostaszewski 2018, p. 64). Among the subjectivisation techniques identified by Przylipiak we will not find one that

[6] Ostaszewski didn't use the term "pre-classical cinema" in his major classification, although it seems to be a logical consequence of his concept. He suggests that before the cinema achieves "classical" maturity about 1917 we can distinguish "early cinema of attraction" (which looses its innovative impact about 1906) and melodramatic narrative (2018, pp. 53–54). I want to emphasise the major change between Ostaszewski's order and mine in a presentation of historical process which we can call pre-modernist narrative. Because he refers to it (with expressionism) in the context of modernists' paradigm of narration. This displacement is very significant for me. For my research it is an important assumption that since the beginning of narrative cinema we have observed a conflict between classical and modernist modes of narration.

gives an account of a character's emotions. It may be described as **affection-image,** which at that time is 'the close-up, and the close-up is the face' (Deleuze, 1996, p. 87). The French philosopher notices:

> "The face is this organ-carrying plate of nerves which has sacrificed most of its global mobility and which gathers or expresses in a free way all kinds of tiny local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden. Each time we discover these two poles in something – reflecting surface and intensive micro-movements – we can say that thing has been treated as a face [*visage*]: it has been 'envisaged' or rather 'faceified' [*visagéifiée*]" (1996, pp. 87–88).

These motifs (the face and close-up) deserve to be accentuated particularly in the work of David W. Griffith. Although Ostaszewski tends to favour Elsaesser's belief that close-ups in this period of cinema should be defined by their role in the dramaturgy, he does mention a shot of a gangster in *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912) and describes it as semi-subjective (2018, p. 64). At this point it is him who introduces the concept of subjectivisation in his classification encompassing the point of view of an author-narrator. It should be noticed that this movement – from a collective protagonist to an individual with his emotional perspective – was a dominant element in French impressionism and in Kammerspiel in German cinema (Kłys, 2010, pp. 423–438). The best example of this tendency is *The Last Laugh* (1924, Friedrich Murnau). We can see clearly the emancipation of the personality; the central position is taken by a relationship between the hero and social environment, so when the man feels negatively about people his image of the world changes towards darkness. On this background, we notice that the classical narration stands back – it is more interested in a tension seeing-knowing than a tension seeing-feeling.

Mindscreen, as one of the subjectivisation techniques, owes much to the avant-guard movements in the cinema of the 1920s and to expressionism in particular. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920, Robert Wiene) has been discussed multiple times in this context (Kracauer, 2009, Eisner, 2011, Garbicz, 1981, Kłys, 2010, Ostaszewski, 2018, pp. 140–142, Birkholc, 2019, pp. 48–49). The film was unique not only in its own era. First of all, it offers a broad repertoire of techniques linked to a character's subjective point of view, character-narrator who tells his story, and author-narrator who gives his frame of the story. Secondly, Ostaszewski is right when he emphasises that the film constitutes a turning-point: "As Kracauer has already acknowledged, Robert Wiene's film gave birth to a trend of frame composition. It established a level of a metadiscourse while

exposing the mere act of telling a story" (2018, p. 141). The addition of the frame was vitally important (it was written later than the first version of the script), to rid the story of its dangerous plausibility. It was easier to assume that the main character went mad and to accept Caligari's triumph than that the houses bend and twist, auguring the fall of the world, which "believes" in Caligari.

Subjectivisation techniques – Classical Cinema

- WHO?

The leading role in classical narrative is given to **a character who acts**. Although it is the plot that comes to the fore, the character also becomes a subject of film analyses. The gradual discovery of a character's individuality is precisely what drives the dynamic development of subjectivisation techniques. Only against this background does a **character-narrator** who recounts events but rarely reveals his mental processes become an important figure. According to the general rule, there is "no narrative without a narrator" (Chatman, 1978). An author-narrator (heterodiegetic narrator) is often concealed. If he reveals his role, he does it as a non-personal narrator or an "image displayer" (Helman, 1997). It is often the case that theories that put this cinema period in the spotlight move away from viewing the film narrator as a subject, and instead put forward a category of narrative instance. Bordwell's argument, referred to numerous times, that it is unjustified to anthropomorphise film narrative[7], verifies both the future development of film narrative and post-classical narratology, which makes anthromorphism of narration its most significant feature (Fludernik, 2005) and discusses city spaces or gardens in terms of storytelling. The spectator is led by linear narrative; cognitivists perceive it as his thought trajectory. Deleuze defines thinking as an exclusive activity that does not occur when a spectator simply follows the suggested logic of cause and effect. He views the spectator as a mental and spiritual automaton that loses its subjectivity.

- WHAT?

Movement-image is an essential category for classical cinema (Deleuze, 1996). Actions and reactions are responsible for a propagation of movement. Perceptions are a foundation for a character's actions and they determine the nature of the fundamental relationship between him and the world. Sensory-motor organisation of images is given the leading role. In this cinema period a receptive character of

[7] Jacek Ostaszewski, while having objections to the notion of a narrator (2017, p. 269), in his analyses of *Apocalypse Now* and *Bad Luck* – explicitly expresses the need for this notion, although he employs different terms: 'narrative', 'an image displayer', 'heterodiegetic narrator'.

Birkholc refers to Bordwell's interpretation and does not subject it to critical analysis.

perception is the rule. Emotional states gradually gain more and more importance: they provide motivation for a character's actions on the one hand and they are a factor which influences the affective tone or modifications of perception. The organisation of a system of storytelling serves the purpose of separating objectivisation as a dominant tendency from subjectivisation as a supplement to the process of storytelling. Therefore, perceptions, emotions as well as mental states become part of a framework, which enables them to be accurately isolated.

- HOW?

Point of view (POV) – is the fundamental and favoured subjectivisation technique within classical film narrative. Having said that, when it comes to the changes occurring in the relationship between silent film and sound film, it is necessary to include **a point of hearing/listening** (or sound perspective). *Lady in the Lake* (1947, Robert Montgomery), the most frequently referenced example of first-person narrative, applies both techniques. Yet, the film is not representative of classical narrative as it was considered an experiment and was not regarded highly. It is worth highlighting that Montgomery's film is not so much a matter of using the technique but building a subjectivisation strategy based entirely on the point of view/ point of hearing of the detective. The camera is integrated with his eyes which hinders our examination of the character's emotions. It is only when the man sees himself in the mirror that we can see his face. It is a significant example as it foreshadows the transition from techniques to strategies in a later period of film narrative.

Perception-image understood as a sound-optical image (Deleuze, 1996) applies the point of view and the aural point of a hero's being in the fictional world (they may complement one another or enter into conflict/interaction). On this background I would like to include Braningan's notion of **reflection** (Branigan, 1979), when a camera shows what a character sees but not strictly from his point of view. These techniques depict perception processes through movement of a camera, montage or a colour scheme. **Affection-image** may apply the techniques previously mentioned, combined with camera work: face close-ups, shots revealing a character's motor skills. In *Blackmail* (1929, Alfred Hitchcock) perception is disrupted by the characters' emotions. In the scene at the table, a woman loses touch with reality as the only word she can hear uttered clearly by another character is "knife", as the latter character has committed a murder. In modern narrative a film will extend 'sound design" in its emotional functions. In this context, **projection** (Branigan) is a more complex technique aimed at giving an impression that both the character's emotions and his perception are projected into the diegetic world, yet they do not undermine its ontological plausibility.

Monologue – the story of a character-narrator – I point to this technique, although it may be coupled with frame narrative or discourse during which a character directly addresses the viewer. There may be various motivations for a monologue: initiated by a question about a different character or an event, it may be an expression of a spontaneous story addressed to a real or an imagined interlocutor and often it is a frame for a memory-image, giving way to mindscreen. In *Double Indemnity* (1944, Billy Wilder) a character records his confession on a tape-recorder in an office and reveals the truth about a murder.

Interior monologue – in its auditory classical form – is a local technique with limited application in audiovisual text, it is based on voice over – we can hear a character's internal voice. Contemporary films, which explore the classical model of storytelling also use it. Teenagers in *The End of F***ing World* (series TV 2017-2019) discover their thoughts and feelings which strongly contrast with their behaviour. A young man seems to be nice but his face masks dark dreams about killing the girl. Interior monologue in this function keeps closer to the category "monologue" outside mental images but we can notice that this technique, as far back as classical cinema, has evolved into mindscreen.

Retrospection in the classification proposed by Przylipiak is included in the technique of mind images, and in the context of modernist narrative, his decision is fully legitimate. Branigan, however, treats subjective retrospection and mental processes independently. His intention is to distinguish these forms of subjectivity which are characteristic of classical cinema according to what is essential for this type of narrative – starting from potentially the least subjectivised to the most subjectivised. This approach allows a memory to be described as stretched between a former perception and a current, mental "reworking" of that perception. Here, Bordwell uses the term of subjective motivation, thus emphasising an objective which is both realistic and compatible with the mythicised category of truth nature of retrospection in classical narrative.

Mindscreen (or mind images) is another complex technique including: anticipation-image, dream-image, hallucination-image and retrospection subjected to an intense distortion. But, once again, in its classical form we observe a strong border between subjectivity and objectivity. In *Spellbound* (1945, Alfred Hitchcock) a sequence of dreams are designed by Salvador Dali. Finally, the director and the artist are intensifying it by means of camera work, montage, lighting and shadows, special effects and symbols: an eye, a man without a face, scissors or a macabre landscape. Surrealistic images give us a work of subconsciousness based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. But in the later film *Vertigo,* (1958)

Alfred Hitchcock provokes a big change in the classical narration into a deformation of objective reality. Yet, it needs to be emphasised that mindscreen, not only conveying some complex processes, makes use of the techniques mentioned earlier (POV, perception-image, affection-image and projection which may cast onto the outside world both emotional and mental states), but also gives an impulse to change techniques into the strategy.

Interior monologue could be a complex technique within mental processes and certainly it is particularly important in the context of research into subjectivisation theory and the development of cinema itself. We can observe this evolution between classical and modern cinema. Interior monologue unfolds in a person's mind and it may include both memory-images and all the other techniques referred to earlier. The most interesting examples emerge within film noir, a critical point in the development of classical narrative (see: *Sunset Boulevard*, 1950, Billy Wilder).

In *How to Be Loved* (*Jak być kochaną*, Wojciech Jerzy Has) the interior monologue of the character is bookended by shots which depict looking in the mirror and make use of the technique of POV at the time when the female character is re-applying lipstick. Mindscreen encompasses a whole range of memories: from the most distant from the pre-war period, to post-war memories. In the interior monologue, presented as a voice-over, the character is commenting on her flight to Paris – the reasons behind it and her own emotional state; the perception of the outside world is complemented by her own projection and fantasies expressed in her thoughts. Lack of continuity and jumping between different regions of memory open the film up towards memory narrative, characteristic of modernist narrative. However, the desire to organise her memories is the main motivation for the character who wants to see her own life from a distance, from a bird's-eye perspective. Whether this is possible is another matter. Balancing between a depiction of reality and a depiction of consciousness translates to balancing between tendencies present in classical narrative and surpassing them.

What is important with regards to the techniques depicting mental processes –considering a broad range of different tones of emotional and mental condition, their intensity or deviation from an assumed norm – is exposing subjectivity against the background of objective reality.

Frame is identified as a distinct technique in both Branigan's and Przylipiak's proposals. Przylipiak emphasises its autonomous role, whereas in my

view it is an auxiliary technique precisely because it encompasses border imagery. Yet, if we want to grasp the constitutional characteristics of classical narrative, framing remains extremely important. It is also fundamental in the philosophical perspective as it allows one in classical storytelling to separate an objective perspective from a subjective one. For this purpose the frame is one of the best techniques.

Subjectivisation as strategy – Modernist Cinema[8]

- WHO?

We can detect two tendencies in modernist cinema. One is focused around a character and the point of gravity in a story is shifted from the "mystery of the plot" towards the "mystery of the character" (Ostaszewski, 2016, p. 53). Deleuze emphasised that a character perceives rather than acts. The reasons for retreating from acting may vary; it may be shock, trauma, boredom, alienation, but it results in action coming to a halt or significantly slowing down. The character is no longer predictable. His motivations are unclear. We notice a break from the sensory-motor scheme and cause-and-effect logic. The character is activated and so is the author-narrator, who presents subjectivity and also subjectivises presentation. The breaking from narrative links compels the spectator to reflect.

The other tendency lessens the role of a character and makes him a purely conventional figure. 'Filmmakers' attention is further drawn towards the author-narrator. A different and explicitly personalised perspective is manifested in films and it goes against classical narrative and its theoretical analysis. The development of modernist narrative strongly indicates that subjectivisation does not need to apply solely to a character; its effect may be that a heterodiegetic narrator – sometimes explicitly and closely linked to the author – is empowered. In modernist cinema an author-intellectual is equipped with a pen-like camera and he attempts to add his own stamp. Even if the theory of film narrative formally pinpoints the category in the textual field via the concept of an implied author, it has to be acknowledged that auteur cinema celebrates its own triumph in this cinema period and it gives an impulse to the

[8] In Ostaszewski's classification the modernists period in cinematography consists of free waves: premodernist cinema (1919-1929), modernist (1950-1975) and slow cinema (the first decade of 21st century). We can find an alternative solution in Rafał Syska's book. He proposes not only his own dating (modernism: 1950-1982) but also persuades us to use the idea of 'neomodernist cinema' for the third wave. Each of these classifications has weak and strong arguments. But I think that the concept 'slow cinema' is based rather on critical perspective and looses in this name a strong bond with modernism. I use both terms "neomodernists cinema and slow cinema in my text.

development of subjectivisation techniques in other areas thus significantly broadening the concept of subjectivisation[9] which provokes reinterpretations of classical theory of narration.

- WHAT?

If, in agreement with Deleuze, we acknowledge the transition from movement-image to time-image to be the major breakthrough, it should not come as a surprise that an exploration of consciousness is the most dominant feature of modernist narrative. Consequently, mindscreen takes precedence over other subjectivisation techniques. In this context memory has a unique role: memories are no longer a distinct and clearly circumscribed part of narrative. In this regard, Ostaszewski is correct when he writes: "What determines modernist narrative […] is the promotion of subjectivisation from being deployed locally in order to justify the use of retrospection to the rank of a general compositional strategy" (Ostaszewski, 2016, p. 53). This movement, from technique to strategy, seems to be the most important thing. Firstly, the strategy discovered from the author's perspective, it is a fully deliberate decision to build a special attitude towards artistic work as an expression of an individual storyworld (Lubelski, 1992, pp. 15–19). Secondly, Lubelski remains Michela Foucault's conception. According to the French philosopher, the strategy "triggers discourse possibilities" and indicates over individual controlled and normalised ways of enunciating/storytelling as "regulated discourse" (Foucault 1977, pp. 92–99). Thirdly, the strategy exposes elements of a fight (it has a strong collocation with military action). In this case we can observe the battle between free subjectivity and limited, tight gripped over subjectivity. Fourthly, it is a category strictly related to a game. And in this sense we should notice the relational model in filmic narrative – even a small change in one region has an effect in another (Żyto, 2010, pp. 10–13). All these meanings play important roles, although they are not exposed with the same force. For modernism a crucial feature is the relation between author and "regulated discourse", for postmodernism a game and discourse, for mind-game films the tension between a fight and a game will be key, in this context they are a special part of postmodern tendencies.

[9] In this context the objections made Birkholc follow the classical narrative theory formulated for the purpose of classical narrative. The phenomenon distinguished by the author: "The effect of subjectifying narration which is created in modernist cinema does not need to be related to the point of view of the character", does not make him reinterpret the subjectivisation theory but results in defending the existing opinions of some authority figures, in some ways against the explicit examples given by the author. Birkholc, R. (2019). *Podwójna perspektywa. O subiektywizacji zapośredniczonej w filmie*. Kraków: Universitas, p. 62..

- HOW?

The techniques mentioned in the context of classical narrative are still being developed and made use of, but the three strategies that define subjectivisation most pronouncedly in this period of cinema are **discourse, free indirect subjective** and **mindscreen**. All strategies emerged as a part of the evolution of film narrative, and also of ideological and philosophical changes.

Przylipiak defines **discourse** as a technique which "is materialised by means of an explicitly pronounced transition of the film and each of its elements into a statement". He expands on his definition by stating that "the condition [for it] is that a real or a fictional author is present – in some way – in the diegetic world and that he is aware of language and the act of communication and reveals explicitly what is presented is his statement – an artistic creation". Przylipiak gives an example of *Providence* (1977, Alain Resnais) where the creative process is explicitly revealed. The situation, when the creativity is simultaneously presented as a story about the author and his work and constructed into discourse in such a way as to discuss the possibilities of it is an important stream not only in modern cinema (*8½,* 1963, Federico Fellini, *Carmen,* 1983, Carlos Saura) but also in the next period in cinema (*Adaptation*, 2002, Spike Jonze).

But it is necessary to highlight a different aspect of discourse, or more precisely dominance of discourse, which Przylipiak does not observe in his classification. An example, which is equally representative for this strategy, is *Pierrot le fou* (1965, Jean-Luc Godard), where there is no "framing" with regards to the creative process. In this film characters remain conventional figures and they are easily manipulated by the heterodiegetic narrator. It is transparent that the relationship between the heterodiegetic narrator, the implied narrator and the actual author in Godard's work veers towards a strongly personalised figure of an author-narrator. The author-intellectual often puts forward a so-called film academic essay on a subject (*The Illumination,* Krzysztof Zanussi, 1973) addressed to the spectator-intellectual.

Free indirect subjective in Przylipiak's theory takes a secondary position[10]. However, in modernist narrative it seems to have a more important status. It makes use of reflection and projection in their subtle form. Birkholc emphasises that free indirect subjective is distinguished by overlapping two points of view – that of the character and the narrator (2019, p. 81). However, Przylipiak reserves this technique for those films that "invoke in the spectator an irresist-

[10] Giving the interior monologue such a high position in the ranking seems to be motivated by research on the relationship between literary narrative and film narrative rather than the true importance of the technique in the context of classical narrative.

ible feeling of subjectivisation although they do not apply any bold procedures" (1987, p. 241). Hence, *Chinatown* by Roman Polański (1974) and *The Mirror* by Tarkowski (1975) are among the examples he enumerates. I believe that his intuition for indicating the technique that subtly "softens" an objective picture of the world, accentuates the extent of information available to the character and balances between the subjective and the objective is entirely legitimate. Birkholc includes films such as *The Dancing Hawk* (1978, Grzegorz Królikiewicz) but also *Natural Born Killers* (1994, Oliver Stone) or *Requiem for a Dream* (2002, Darren Aronofsky) within the scope of the technique. I would like to argue that the use of focalisation in analyses does not authorise an extension of this technique as what Birkholc does is *de facto* dismantling it as he fails to recognise that the films he examines reveal mental processes and sometimes a discourse technique. In those films, it is not so much the double perspective but the multiple points of view of the character, the character-narrator and the author-narrator that play an important role.

As part of mindscreen, "memory narratives" become complex strategies developing numerous techniques. From today's perspective *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959, Alain Resnais) seems an extraordinarily important film for the entire film trend of "narrative of memory". The experience of war exerts an influence on characters' attitudes and simultaneously they are an expression of cultural reworking of the post-war traumas. Subjectivity encompasses the whole of the narrative and objectifying elements such as a museum or documentary photography are merely a counterpoint.

The strategies that evolved from the exploration of time are described in multiple ways: crystalline narrative (Deleuze, 1995) and modular narrative (Cameron, 2008). In this context it is desirable to distinguish labyrinthine narrative, which may reference some issues related to memory as well as discourse strategies. *The Saragossa Manuscript* is an excellent example of problematising the category of a narrator and the use of the device of a story within a story. A character from the outer story becomes a character-narrator in the inner story and another character appears in his story who starts telling his own story and so on. Regression and shifting between multiple storytelling levels are also possible. It may appear as a paradox when it turns out that one of the stories of the innermost levels probably belongs to the outer level (Jakubowska, 2013, p. 349).

Subjectivisation techniques and strategies – contemporary Post-Classical Cinema[11] (the cinema of attractions, interactive techniques)

My intention is to identify three aspects, which are the most influential for the development of subjectivisation in contemporary film narrative. The extent of their impact varies. Changes generated by the first two tendencies are a result of the development of technologies. Meanwhile, the contemporary cinema of attractions as well as the films that make use of interactive techniques spawn some changes of subjectivisation techniques and strategies within the scope of the answer to the questions of who(?) what (?) and how(?).

- WHO?

The dominant role is again given to **the character who acts.** We can notice sensory-motor relationships recurring with great impact. The author-narrator is hidden as he returns to the formula of "an image displayer". What is interesting here is that the spectator becomes the centre of attention – it is about getting him excited, whether emotionally (intensified in 3D, 4D or 5D cinema) or through the possibility of him manipulating the film narrative. What is at stake here is gaining access to the character's experience, the impact of that experience on the spectator, triggering the spectator's subjective sensory sensations or drawing him into making choices about his preferred narrative pathways.

- WHAT?

The main tendency is bound for changing the storyworld into the game-world. In cinema of attractions a character-player possesses super powers for fighting against a 'bad' antagonist (antihero) or a 'bad' world. As in early narration he represents a group which defends right and values. We have only two sides: white and black, without shadows or any doubts. Fast cinema guarantees only strong impulses: adrenaline, maximises immersion in the world full of chases, traps, explosions, destruction, total war or star wars. The most representative series launched was *Star Wars* (1977, Georges Lucas) and then continued by *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014, James Gunn) in contemporary cinema.

[11] Describing contemporary cinematography I have decided to highlight two tendencies: post-classical and postmodernist cinema. Post-classical films continue to change classical norms and rules of storytelling at the same time. Ostaszewski gives examples and theoretical background which is based on wide research (2018, pp. 128–132). He marks 1975 as the starting point of this tendency – the premiere of *Jaws* (Steven Spielbierg). Nevertheless, I will focus on the last three decades of cinema (1990-2020). I will also try to stress that in my opinion mind-game films as a part of postmodernist narrative play a more important role of subjectivisation strategy in contemporary cinema.

- HOW?

Perception-image is used in order to integrate the point of view with sound perspective and also with the centre of kinetic sensations. Filmmakers transfer the experience of a gamer onto the film narrative. This inspiration is strongly emphasised by Ostaszewski. This reference to video games is rightly indicated in the change of terminology: the first-person narrator becomes the first-person shooter. *Hardcore Henry* (2015, Ilya Naishuller) is a telling example of the shift where the technique becomes a strategy. The action of the film recalls a multi-level video game with the possibility of progressing to the next level where different types of weapons and surroundings are introduced (Ostaszewski, 2017, p. 274).

Free indirect subjectivity is described by Ostaszewski with a reference to the third-person narrative and a semi-subjective image [Mitry] but it applies mainly to the gamer's experience. The film theorist analyses *Elephant* (Gus van Sant, 2003) in this context. "Before the two armed teenagers attack people in the school building in Portland, the camera follows the future victims around the building corridors. The last act of the film – hunting for the school students – reminds the viewer of the aesthetics of TPS (third-person shooter games)." (Ostaszewski 2017, p. 275).

This strategy remains innovative precisely when we consider references made to game narrative and it applies to those films in which the presence of the main character on the screen takes the form of an avatar.

"Interactive" techniques are another tool which redefines the category of subjectivisation. Ostaszewski does not include these types of phenomena as they are not included in his definition of subjectivisation. Yet, I propose to consider that in this case, the receiver, similarly to a game user, is confronted with some possible choices. His choices are subjective although they are restricted to some strictly limited options[12]. The technique applies to the film narrative structure. Alternative scenes/events/choices are available to the recipient. Interactive tendency is still a space for experiments rather than belonging to an existent and clearly defined cinema movement. However, *Sufferrosa* (2010, D. Marcinkowski), a film referencing the labyrinthine narrative structure of *The Saragossa Manuscript,* is a symptomatic example of when branching out of a story may result in a differ-

[12] Not only has the mode of production altered narrative paradigms that formerly seemed unchangeable but also the reception of highly varied formats in film history. Thus, for a long time, there has been a rule that the speed and the sequentiality of a film's projection is mechanically fixed so that the viewer has no possibility to interrupting the "reading" to "leaf" back and forth through the scenes or to studying the composition of a single shot for longer than the actual running time.

ent structure of the film text – the recipient may decide on the order of different segments of the story and activate the chosen options. What is interesting is that *Black Mirror*: *Bandersnatch*, 2019 again uses framing. Similarly to classical narrative, we encounter border imagery: the film action is paused so that the recipient has time to take action and choose between available options. On an intellectual level the choice between different brands of breakfast cereal is not attractive for the gamer/spectator. The slowing down of action may discourage him rather than draw him to a computer screen. Although the artistic value of *Black Mirror*: *Bandersnatch* is not high, it proves that the development of subjectivisation techniques on the part of the recipient, considering current distribution models via the Internet and digital platforms, is possible. Indeed, the door has been opened.

Subjectivity strategies – contemporary Post-modernist cinema (mind-game films)

The most symptomatic trend for the development of subjectivisation techniques is the contemporary mind-game film. This strategy has evolved primarily from modernist narrative, which, however, has been significantly redefined. It takes advantage of the broad range of subjectivisation techniques with all their complexity, and thus makes a philosophical perspective an important motivation and a basis for exploration.

- WHO?

The character again acts, but his actions take place in the realms of consciousness or in virtual worlds. Therefore, his actions may be illusory, conceived and fictional. **The character is no longer in control of his actions.** As long as the character-forger was a figure who, according to Deleuze, evolved from modernist narrative, in the narrative of mind-game films he often turns into an unaware forger: his schizophrenia, paranoia or trauma completely impair his consciousness. The subject's identity falls apart and this, in turn, results in the deconstruction of the character and the narrator, their intermingling, their constant revaluation and redefinition. The role of an unreliable narrator gains in importance (Ostaszewski, 2010). The intensification of the receiver's engagement is a characteristic feature which distinguishes it from modernist narrative. What is interesting here is that neo-modernist films (Syska, 2014) often create an effect of distancing from the character. Contemplation as a preferred attitude of a viewer in slow-cinema seems to neutralise the process of identification with the protagonist. Whereas mind-game films place importance on identifying with him. The viewer becomes a player incorporated into the text. His perception and emotional activity and engagement are closely related to the character –

they allow for experiencing alternative states of consciousness, exploration of split personality and paranoid states. "Productive pathologies" are considered in the context of schizoanalysis (Deleuze, Guattari 1983) as a diagnosis of contemporary society transposed to the context of cinema and developed there (Elsaesser 2018, pp. 40–47).

- WHAT**?**

Virtual worlds are the main subject matter of mind game films. They are the culmination of the trend, envisaged in Deleuze's theory, to explore the cinema of time-image and a cluster of the features of crystalline narrative. The myths of an objective world, objective time and the myth of truth have collapsed. In this context Patricia Pisters' proposal to add a concept of the neuro-image (2012) to Deleuze's classification seems compelling.

The phenomenon of mind-game films is well explored in Polish film studies. It is influenced by the reception of Buckland's (2009) and Elsaesser's (2018) theories, but also by Polish researchers. Przylipiak initiated the research with his proposal of a classification, which favoured as a crucial category 'indiscernibility' (2016, pp. 251–255). In my opinion it is the same direction which was noticed by Deleuze, when the optical or visual description replaced the motor action: "We run in fact into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernibility: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer even a place from which we do not ask" (1995, p. 7).

With this in mind, Barbara Szczekała's monograph (2018), in which the author favours a pragmatic perspective and very skilfully employs the concept of focalisation in her research, deserves particular acknowledgement. Subjectivisation takes extreme forms which result from the intensification of life amidst the screens as well as the annexation of changes in the area of philosophical thought (both ontological and epistemological) by cinema. In this context, Manfred Jahn's constructivist idea that she refers to has echoed loudly – "it is founded on the assumption that we cannot access things the way they are" (2017, p. 136). Szczekała chooses to adhere to cognitive studies grounded within the framework of classical narrative in the works of Bordwell and Branigan. She acknowledges, however, that this constructivist perspective may also be adequate in the case of mind-game films.

For the purpose of her own research Szczekała narrows down the notion of subjectivity (2018, p. 319), which I mentioned in my introduction. The narrowing down of the concept works well in the context of the research revolving

around mind-game films, but it does not reflect the dynamic relationship between objectivisation and subjectivisation which is present throughout the history of cinema.

- HOW?

Mind-game films (Elsaesser, 2018, pp. 29–35) defined in the context of postclassical narrative appear to be the most precise term although puzzle films (Buckland, 2009, p. 1–12) define the same phenomenon and refer to the same film titles: *Lost Highway* (1997, David Lynch), *Mulholland Drive* (2001, David Lynch), *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher), *eXistenZ* (1999, David Cronenberg), *Memento* (2000, Christopher Nolan), *The Prestige* (2006, Christopher Nolan), *Inception,* (2010, Christopher Nolan). Barbara Szczekała is right to favour Elsaesser's term in the title of her monograph although she adheres to Buckland's interpretation and treats both terms as synonyms. Yet, the difference resulting from employing that particular term seems to be as significant as the relationship between labyrinthine narrative and rhizome narrative. The two terms: forking-path films (Bordwell, 2006, pp. 80–86, pp. 92–93) and puzzle films were coined in the context of classical narrative theory. Szczekała describes Bordwell's intentions accurately: "[He] tried to "rationalise" or "linearise" any impossibilities and contradictions within the narrative, and import them into the classical model of storytelling that he reworked himself" (2018, p.38). In other words the term puzzle films suggests that any complexities and contradictions within narrative may be put together into a whole, just like scattered pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The studies on labyrinthine narrative and rhizome narrative in Poland also addressed this issue. The comparison of genealogy and aims of the two narrative structures pointed to some common features while marking the difference with regards to their philosophical foundations. The concept of rhizome appears to be more adequate "if we want to put emphasis on 'the lack of any a priori order' and contradictory hypotheses generated by these narratives, particularly when we take into account the ontological and epistemological status of the depicted reality" (Żyto, Jakubowska, 2015, p. 20). Undoubtedly analyses of David Lynch's films, reading in postmodern paradigm and relation labyrinth – rhizome, opened the door to mind-game films (Jakubowska, 2006, pp. 127–222).

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that rhizome narrative (or network narrative) does not capture the game-related aspect of the films discussed here, which seems to be particularly important. The same objection could be raised with regards to *modular narratives* (Cameron, 2008). *Misdirection films* (Friedman, 2017) are, in turn, based on the idea of retrospective reinterpretations. Szczekała sums up this issue: "What *misdirection films* have in common with Elsaesser's and Buck-

land's theories (and what makes them different from Bordwell's theory) is an assumption that "narrative games" are an alternative model of storytelling and they bear the hallmarks of a genre which had been present (although it was, so to say, "dormant") almost throughout the whole history of cinema and eventually started to flourish in the mid 1990s" (2018, p. 39). The above paragraphs can be compared with Andrzej Zalewski's category 'strategic disorientation" which aims "to destroy regular canons and provoke a perceiver to ask the fundamental questions" (1998, p. 7.) In mind-game films radical subjectivisation, which concerns the homodiegetic narrator, the heterodiegetic narrator, and the main character themself is a fundamental question. Pulling the viewer into the game concerns primarily the relationship between objective and subjective, and the levels of subjectivity. Furthermore, the game changes identification from passive into active. Instead of contemplative projection-identification it proposes an affective game of identification with the character who went mad. Subjective feeling of the world does not go backstage, but it is a dangerous centre. Only sometimes do we succeed in completing the filmed puzzle, to add the frame, which similarly to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* gives us the impression of "control" of the worlds' unbelievability. Other films seem to be an impossible puzzle.

Conclusions

It is possible to grasp the complexity and the dynamics of subjectivisation techniques only under the condition that we acknowledge that audiovisual text and a methodical inquiry to find answers to the questions of WHO?, WHAT?, HOW? are communicating vessels; this acknowledgement also creates an opportunity for a comprehensive approach to the processes occurring throughout the history of film narrative. It also reveals how subjectivisation techniques develop into strategies and how certain figures are given less or more importance within narratives. Therefore, it is essential to refer to the historical perspective of the theory of film narrative. Classifications based on classical narrative require reinterpretation. They are clearly determined by the context of initial assumptions, which are no longer adequate for the research of both modernist and contemporary films. Some of the problems start to belong to the dimension of historical debates. It becomes secondary to decide whether a researcher is more prone to employ the concept of a narrator (who tells a story) or a focaliser (who sees/shows) once the definition of narrative in post-classical narrative theory is not limited to the medium of film and is considered to be a category within transmedialism while the process of storytelling is viewed in very broad terms. In the context of changes within the history of narrative, subjectivisation appears to be a fundamental concept. However, when its definition is narrowed down, it neither reflects the character of changes in the

scope of the opposition between objective-subjective nor does its resonance with the notions of individuality, personality or the bias of a group/community put forward the subjective as the objective.

I have no doubts that the conflict between the faith in the objective and the faith in the subjective present in cinema leads to the ultimate victory of subjectivity, while what is objective becomes inaccessible. Yet, it is an unusual victory.

In the 1980s, according to Deleuze's diagnosis, we no longer believed in love or death, we did not believe in what happened to us because the world reminded us of a mediocre film. Deleuze valued modernist cinema as it compelled our reflection and our realisation that we needed to have faith in the world. His postulate to abandon cinema was a metaphysical gesture and it was a way to return the spectator his body and enable him to regain faith in the world. However, today our presence in the cinema is exclusive as we are surrounded by electronic and digital screens belonging to a complex network of correlations between the authorities, the capital and the flow of information chaos and falsifications. In this context, there seems to be no way out beyond the controversial reality of the screens. Private and public lives evolve on the screens and what is private becomes public and what is public becomes private. We do not exist unless we exist on the screens of social media. Unless we connect to a group – a collective character who puts forward a profiled subjectivity – we do not exist.

Schizophrenicity was to be an introduction to a life devoid of fascism. (Foucault 1983). However hotspots of fascism are the answer to the terror of identification – they just propose a righteous, objective image of the world, where the "narrator-author" is hiding backstage.

The cultural struggle for the character's individuality fails as soon as we can no longer rely on him. Mind-game films offer us an exercise in "productive pathologies", they teach us non-linear thinking, by means of leaps, associations, and all while being distracted. They teach us to switch between schizophrenic regions where nothing is the way it appears to be. What they have to offer is a love-hate game and a life-death game. It will bring a victory or a failure. They put the case at knifepoint. Ultimately they do not offer faith in the world but they deprive us of faith in "I". Deleuze's optimistic prospect for Ego (Me = Others) assumes the victory of pluralism, tolerance and diversity instead of egocentrism. But there is also the most dangerous option: Me or Others. Contemporary cinema reminds us, that mind-blow is also world-blow.

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From Point of View to Mind-game Films – Between Subjective Techniques and Strategies.

The starting point for this paper is the statement that subjectivisation (subjective narrative) – is one of the key elements in a film medium. However, when its definition is narrowed down, it neither reflects the character of changes in the scope of the opposition between objective-subjective nor its resonance with the notions of individuality, personality or the community.

I focus on a historical expansion of subjectivisation techniques, but there is much more. I would like to answer the question about the way in which these techniques fit into the differences between paradigms and modes of cinema. Firstly, I consider subjectivisation techniques in Pre-Classical Cinema, Pre-Modernist Cinema and Classical Cinema. Secondly, I reveal how subjectivisation techniques develop into strategies and how certain figures are given less or more importance within narratives. In this context I research subjectivisation in Modernist Cinema. Thirdly, I draw attention to the relationship between subjectivisation techniques and strategies in contemporary Post-Classical Cinema (the cinema of attractions, interactive techniques). My final suggestion is that mind-game films (representing Postmodernist Cinema) are the domain of a subjectivisation strategy. I have no doubt that the conflict between faith in the objective and faith in the subjective present in cinema leads to the ultimate victory of subjectivity, while what is objective becomes inaccessible.

Mind-game films offer us an exercise in "productive pathologies", they teach us non-linear thinking, by means of leaps, associations, and all while being distracted. They teach us to switch between schizophrenic regions where nothing is the way it appears to be.

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Spiral, Slasher, and Sequel: Case of *Happy Death Day* (2017) and *Happy Death Day 2U* (2019)

This article is going to focus on the films *Happy Death Day* (2017) and *Happy Death Day 2U* (2019). *Both* are movies from Blumhouse Productions. *Both* were directed by Christopher Landon. *Both* follow the same group of young characters confronted with a mysterious serial killer in a baby mask. Above all, *both* handle *the spiral narrative*. As I wrote elsewhere[1], as such, we can recognise a specific storytelling pattern with a protagonist stuck in an iterative segment of space, time and causality – and this protagonist is not only fully aware of this situation but also tries to deal with it. What for other unaware characters is a *closed* loop is for the protagonist an *open* experience with an odd number of turns of time spiral. That is why I call it *the spiral narrative*, which is known mostly from high-budget films such as *Groundhog Day* (1993) or *Edge Of Tomorrow* (2014). Nevertheless, as will be explained, it occurs in dozens of other theatrical films, VOD films, television films or television shows.

However, what are the reasons why, when there is an extensive set of works to choose from, do I take just the doublet of *Happy Death Day* films? (1) On their example, the article is going to discuss my general hypothesis about spiral narrative works as a series of applications of the *innovative narrative schema* as

[1] See: Kokeš, 2018; Kokeš, forthcoming.

an aesthetic tool. Such a hypothesis consists of three broader dimensions: (a) the *aesthetic dimension*, i.e. the spiral schema as a part of the artistic work; (b) the *creative dimension*, i.e. *the spiral schema* as part of the problem-solution process of filmmaking; (c) the *production dimension*, i.e. the spiral schema as a part of the competition of audiovisual production. (2) An even more important reason, though, for selecting just these two films has been the very fact that *Happy Death Day 2U* is a sequel of *Happy Death Day*. In the "post-classical era" of global franchises, sequels, prequels, remakes, reboots and transmedia storytellings, this does not seem to be exceptional. However, in the context of the spiral narrative, this is an unprecedented step that raises several questions.

It is possible to say that since the 1990s creators have appealed to this schema *to innovate already established patterns*. It may be the established development of a character (such as a "grumpy and selfish person becomes a better man", e.g. *Groundhog Day*). It may be subject matter (such as the "significance of Christmas for family values", e.g. *Christmas Every Day*, 1996). It may be a way to effectively motivate the construction of reasonably extreme situations in which the protagonists of long-term television series are involved (only until 1999, I have discovered eleven episodes of American long-running television series using the spiral schema). Nevertheless, most often, as we will see, the spiral narrative schema seems to be used as a tool of *another* genre or subgenre innovation. In other words, with the help of the schema application, they can show well-known techniques, situations or characters in a new context. Does it mean that before the 1990s spiral narrative appearances were rarer? No, before the 1990s there were none[2].

As was suggested, there are three dimensions in which we can think about spiral narratives. Although this article is mainly formally an analytical one, the questions connected to the aesthetic dimension of the spiral narrative will not stay in the centre. Questions like: Based on what principles do spiral narratives work as formal systems? What types of fictional worlds do they establish? What

[2] I refer primarily to North American audiovisual production. This is because, although we can speak of several instances of spiral narrative audiovisual works outside North American production, such applications of the schema are highly uncommon. As far as I know, we could not find a country outside the United States and Canada where more than one such film was made (South Korea, Italy, Sweden, Czech Republic, Germany). Quite specific examples of spiral narratives are represented in a Russian film from 1987 and a Japanese film from 1984, because both of them are significantly different from all other spiral narratives, in their mood as well as in the parallel narrative techniques they involved. It is a question of if they were known outside their domestic countries before the first American applications of the spiral schema were shot (1990 short film *12:01 PM* based on the short story by Richard Lupoff, 1993 television feature film *12:01* based on the same story, 1993 *Groundhog Day*). Of course we can consider other predecessors like Charles Dicken's novelette *A Christmas Carol*, films about one-more-chance to do something (e.g. 1947 *Repeat Performance*, 1987 *Peggy Sue Got Married* or 1990 *Mr. Destiny*) or European loop narrative films (e.g. 1987 Krzysztof Kieślowski's *Blind Chance*). More about this in ibidem.

logic do they follow? For us, more important will be the questions focused on creative and production aspects. In the former dimension, we can ask: To what extent and in what ways do filmmakers use a spiral narrative schema to innovate already established patterns? To what degree and how do they negotiate with various patterns, models and traditions? In what ways do they deal with the necessarily repetitive features of such storytelling? How do they guide our attention? In the latter dimension, there is another question: Based on what likely strategy producers consider as a good idea to look for innovative potential in a spiral narrative schema? Because despite its modifiable potential, the application of the basic narrative situation is still fairly overlapping. It should be said that on the one hand, it is not in the possibilities of this article to answer this relatively complex set of questions[3], while on the other hand, the article is going to consider them while explaining *Happy Death Day* and *Happy Death Day 2u*.

Problems, intentions, artworks

However, we are confronted with a problem: How can we actually consider a work of art as the result of an innovative process? Let us turn to several suggestions formulated by art historian Michael Baxandall who offers thoughts about the artist in terms of problem and solution: "The maker of a picture or other historical artefact is a man addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution. To understand it we try to reconstruct both the specific problem it was designed to solve and the specific circumstances out of which he was addressing it. This reconstruction is not identical with what he internally experienced […]" (Baxandall, 1985, pp. 14–15). "Indeed I want explicitly to eschew any ambition to construct a narrative of how [the man] came to his design. […] What we are faced with is simply the task of organizing, in relation to a complex *form*, a number of heterogeneous *circumstances* that appear to have had a part in the designer's conception" (ibidem, p. 30).

But how to formulate such a problem in the case of an *artwork* and how to grasp the eternally elusive concept of an artistic *intention*? Baxandall writes that "the intention to which I am committed is not an actual, particular psychological state or even a historical set of mental events inside the heads [of artists]. […] Rather, it is primarily a general condition of rational human action which I posit in the course of arranging my circumstantial facts or moving about the triangle of re-enactment" (ibidem, p. 41). By triangle, he means the relationship between concepts of problem, concepts of culture (resources used or not used) and con-

[3] For some answers see ibidem. In my thinking about innovative schema I loosely appear from Ernst Gombrich (Gombrich, 1960; Gombrich, 1971).

cepts serves for our description of the artwork. The most important for us is that "what we do if we want to know about [the artist] is to play a conceptual game on the triangle. […] Indeed the whole basis of what I am calling inferential criticism is that one brings all three corners of the triangle, in an active relation to each other, to description of the object. Description and explanation interpenetrate each other" (ibidem, 34).

It is time, to sum up, what we can borrow from these considerations for our own interests (however, only in necessary simplifying of *ad hoc* inspiration). It should be just the conceptual game of inferential criticism that is going to remain at the centre of our attempt to explain the creative as well as the production dimension behind *Happy Death Day* and *Happy Death Day 2u*. The aim of this conceptual game is not reconstructing the *actual* narrative of the creative process, the *actual* form, order and causality of artistic decisions in the intentional flux (cf. ibidem, 62–67). The aim is to understand these films concerning the solved creative and production problems: To innovate an established horror subgenre of slasher. To design a sequel to a film with such a specific narrative constellation that had never been "sequelised". To promote and sell such a film in competition with other films. We could only work with a general knowledge of Hollywood production practice or the history of Hollywood genres, cycles and trends (cf. Neale, 2000; Nowell, 2010; Zoë, 2019). However, I do propose to include in this inferential game the kind of historical material rarely used to analyse films, the so-called *press kits*. Of course, such materials tell us rather little about how the film was *actually* made, combining reliable and unreliable information, rearranging the chronology and causality of events, changing the roles of individual participants of the creative process.

As John Thornton Caldwell writes, through press kits "public relations officers, publicists, and marketers traditionally provided 'useful' background and backstory about films and television programs. […] Structurally, EPKs [electronic press kits, but the traditional as well] provide a fundamental connection and means of communication between the industry's producing cultures and audience's consuming cultures" (Caldwell, 2008, p. 291). Kristin Thompson is slightly more sarcastic when she explains EPKs as a godsend for journalists working in the world of infotainment: "You know only what the publicists want you to know, but you know enough to appear well-informed. You can cover the film as if it were news, illustrating your piece with images and footage, all the while hitting the notes that the marketers want hit" (Thompson, 2007, p. 123). In other words, EPKs offer the desirable narrative behind the creation of the film we should believe that is the actual one. Reading such materials, bearing in mind

that they offer only *a story* about the filmmaking process, can be a useful source of cues as to which problems for solving and which artistic decisions the creators want us to believe they consider central ones. It is only one corner of the triangle, but one we can effectively relate to another one: the explanation of the film(s)[4].

Through the statements of the creators in these press kits, I am going to infer how they were aiming to innovate the horror subgenre of slasher and what their main goals might have been (concepts of problem). Then, in a brief formal analysis regarding these problems, I will explain what particular narrative and stylistic tactics have been used in the form of a particular film (concepts of our description of the artwork). Subsequently, I will offer a possible production explanation of why Blumhouse Productions decided to make their own spiral narrative in 2017 – although audiovisual spiral narratives began to increase after 2014 (concepts of culture). In the last part of my article, however, I want to move beyond these explanations. As suggested, the following 2019 *Happy Death Day 2U* is not only another spiral narrative, but it is the *very first sequel* to a spiral narrative film. The filmmakers thus faced another aesthetic challenge. How to innovate in a sequel to a movie that was already an innovation – in both cases through using the spiral schema that it builds on a repetitive play? [5]

The creative dimension: one set of problems

The small film studio Blumhouse Productions – which produced *Happy Death Day* – specialises in rather low-budget horror films. In this case, the filmmakers decided, therefore, to innovate the horror sub-genre: *slasher*. That might be considered as a surprising creative decision because even the slasher underwent a similar innovation in the mid-1990s[6], with *Scream* (1996) being the most important for us. It was precisely the *Scream* that represented a similarly self-consciousness sub-genre innovation as *Happy Death Day*.

On the one hand, as Valerie Wee writes, *Scream*, apart from its widely commented postmodern elements, "updated the defining conventions of the slasher-film genre - in particular, how the series has revised the treatment of the monster-villain and the final female survivor, two of the key narrative ele-

[4] Another approach is offered by Vinzenz Hediger in his article about the making-of films as a set of four discursive indexes: authorial, technological, star, filmmaking as great fun as well as hard work (Hediger, 2005, pp. 332–341).

[5] All following quotations are from official US press kits for both films, which were kindly provided to me by a Czech distributor (CinemArt; I would like to thank Petr Slavík for them).

[6] Sotiris Petridis writes about a seven-year long "Self-Referential Cycle". He identifies *New Nightmare* (1994) as the first important film of this cycle. See: Petridis, 2019 [cited from the Kindle version; without pagination]. In relation to the *Scream* trilogy cf. as well Henderson, 2014, pp. 152–154.

ments central to the slasher-film genre" (Wee, 2006 p. 50). On the other hand, according to Fran Pheasant-Kelly, *Scream* was significantly different from its predecessors: "Scream was marked by irony, cleverness and knowingness, and often positioned itself in opposition to its predecessors. In other words, even though it stimulates other films, it is at the same time often antithetical to them, and, even though it is a copy, it has come to replace the original" (Pheasant-Kelly, 2015, p. 160).

To a certain extent, we can similarly consider *Happy Death Day*. However, the film's creators have chosen different ways compared to *Scream*. In *Happy Death Day*, techniques for engaging irony, cleverness, and knowingness concerning the slasher formulae are intended solely for the knowledgeable viewer, while the characters themselves are not aware of them, rather the contrary. While *Scream* exploited the diversity of existing approaches to slashers by unifying them into one system of rules, *Happy Death Day*, on the other hand, uses this actual hypothetical system of rules against our knowledge of them and builds on diversity. In other words, in the case of *Scream*, it was precisely this cultural encyclopaedia and the set of formulae extracted from previous slashers that were used as the innovative pattern. In the case of *Happy Death Day*, this very knowledge of unified slasher's formulae is what is innovated. On the one hand, the plot does not depend on the gradual killing of a group of young characters, but on the repeated killing of the same character. On the other hand, this is only possible thanks to the application of the spiral narrative schema.

According to the press kit for *Happy Death Day*, the initial creative impulse seems to be the one that Scott Lobdell, the writer of the film, speaks of: "Like most horror fans, I noticed the staple where the bad girl dies at the beginning of the story and the good girl is left to stand alone against the killer. I was intrigued by the challenge of writing a movie where the bad girl and the good girl were one and the same." It is essential for two reasons. Firstly, we can notice the same ambition to revise the "final female survivor", as was discussed in connection with *Scream* by Valerie Wee. Secondly, as we will see, the spiral narrative in this context seems to be the most appropriate way to achieve this innovation. Indeed, the same can be said about most protagonists of spiral narrative film as the creators say about the heroine called Tree. According to them, she "starts out as an incredibly unlikeable and selfish person, and it is a joy to watch her evolve into someone that you come to care and root for." In the case of slasher, however, this is a necessary condition for the very narrative functionality in the context of the spiral schema application. If the protagonist were nice, it would be quite unpleasant for the audience to watch her die. Con-

versely, when the protagonist is exceptionally horrible, it is fun to watch her die – and not just once, but repeatedly.

The concept of creative premise (or artistic problem) formulated in the press kit story is one thing, and its possible unfolding in film work is another. What tactics did the filmmakers use to construct their film and to guide our attention? Some techniques are suggested in the press kit, but as usual, it withholds the more interesting ones. Nevertheless, the primary technique has already been mentioned – and the lead actress, Jessica Rothe amusingly recaps it: "Tree is a true modern-day scream queen, and her transformation from bitchy victim to badass heroine is one you do not get to see often." Another vital hint comes from Lobdell again: "Most teen slasher movies feature a series of victims being picked off throughout - once you are terrorized and killed you are never heard from again. I was interested in the idea of a character who gets to react to her death - one who can stalk her killer and who is given the opportunity to make the most of the last day of her life." But how? To answer this question and understand how creators innovate on the aesthetic level of the film itself with the aid of a spiral narrative, we need to proceed to a formal analysis.

The aesthetic dimension: three formal tactics

I presume that the film follows three broader formal tactics. The first tactic is primarily typical for this film in order to innovate a slasher subgenre. The second tactic is connected with the broader set of aesthetic norms of spiral narratives. The third tactic points to the profound interdependence of the application of the innovative schema with so-called classical norms of Hollywood storytelling.

Before moving to these tactics, I would like to summarise some story information about *Happy Death Day*: The film's spiral is driven by the schedule of one day… Regardless of when and how Tree dies, she wakes up to the next turn of her time spiral with a hangover on her B-day at 9 a.m. in the room of a student called Carter in the dorm[7]. During that day, she should meet her ex, her roommate, her posh classmates, her (married) lover – and her killer in a baby mask. She should also meet her father, but she is trying to avoid this and does not answer his phone calls. On the same day as Tree repeatedly dies, a mad killer named Tombs escapes from the local hospital.

The first tactic deals with the standard artistic challenge of spiral narratives at the level of the overall film construction: How to keep our attention when a repetitive formula is applied? In the case of *Happy Death Day*, the plot is di-

[7] A similar pattern is used in the Netflix spiral show *The Russian Doll*.

vided into three larger blocks, each of which has a different function. The first block is *genre self-referential* and somewhat corresponds to the techniques we remember from *Scream*. The second block acts as a *narrative resumption*. The third block follows the function of *narrative refocusing*. We can begin with the assumption that when the creators refer solely to slasher when talking about *Happy Death Day*, they do not tell us the whole truth. In fact, in the middle of the film, slasher's aesthetic norms tend to be abandoned, and the filmmakers turn instead to the aesthetic norms of criminal fiction. It is remarkable, however, how slasher norms are utilised in an innovative way, especially in the first block of the film plot[8].

The opening block of *Happy Death Day* consists of the first thirty-eight minutes of screen duration. These include the first three turns of time spiral – and the first three murders of Tree. All these turns communicate spectacularly with knowledgeable viewers as they vary three different settings where slashers' murders are usually carried out: in public parks, at student parties and in the apparent security of home. The important thing is that unlike the characters of *Scream*, Tree does not know scary movies. Therefore, she is not aware of the slasher conventions at all – and each of her next rational steps finally leads her to the next modification of the slasher and her next murder. In the first turn of the time spiral, Tree is killed in the park while heading for a student party. The second turn, following the aesthetic norms of spiral narratives, represents one great *déjà vu* in which the character refuses to believe she is in the spiral and considers the previous turn to be a dream. But just before Tree enters the park where she would be killed again, she decides to take a different path – and get to the relative safety of the student party, where she obviously can't die among a lot of people. Of course, she will die there. The third day and the third turn of the time spiral lead her to the next rational step: I cannot die when I am securely locked in at home. Of course, she will also die this time.

Each of these three turns is stylistically different. With each of them the creators are gradually increasing the expressiveness of techniques suggesting a deeper and deeper level of subjectification. After these three turns, however, it is possible to say – with the help of Murray Smith's terms – that we as spectators are gradually moved from a distance alignment with Tree to a phase of allegiance with her (cf. Smith, 1995, pp. 82–86). Moreover, with the fourth turn, desperate Tree finally becomes more active and creates an alliance with Carter. The concise second block is mainly an attractive montage sequence:

[8] The great variety of types of murders cannot be considered in any way innovative, yet there have been too many slasher films before and hundreds of people have been murdered in the oddest ways in them.

Tree reduces the list of suspects, while she is repeatedly dying in a fun way – and the narrative summarises all of the characters. And right here – in the middle of the film – the superiority of innovation of the slasher conventions ends, because there seem to be no suspects left. In the third block, the narrative *refocuses* on the mad hospital killer who escapes that night. That means not only a change in Tree and Carter's goals while trying to prevent the madman from escaping from the hospital. That also means the displacement of existing *Happy Death Day* internal norms: once again, Tree is killed by the murderer in a baby mask, the next time she deliberately kills herself, and the third time she dies by "mistake" after everything looks happy. As a result, Tree finally realises it was her roommate who had been hiding under the baby mask. Besides, this final twist effectively connects the second half of the film with the first half – and the whole system is unified.

The second tactic solves a long-term artistic problem of spiral narratives: The creators need to maintain the awareness that we are following the same iterative segment of space, time and causality. That means the same series of states of affair and events that differ only in the impact of the protagonist's actions in the spiral. At the same time, they need us to be entirely oriented without having to repeat all the events. In the case of *Happy Death Day*, the filmmakers apply a tactic I call *referring to plot chunks*. As for *plot chunks,* I understand them as the established, recognisably discrete sequences of events, settings and talks inside the turn of the time spiral. For filmmakers, these chunks are essential reference points with which they can work effectively without having to repeat them in their entirety in each turn of the time spiral. *Happy Death Day* relies on these chunks especially in the first block: (a) Tree's waking up at Carter's dorm in the morning and meeting his friend Ryan; (b) going home around the same groups of characters; (c) a brief encounter with a former boyfriend with whom Tree had only one date; two dialogues in her house, namely; (d) with her classmate Danielle and; (e) the roommate Lori; (f) an afternoon meeting with classmates; (g) an afternoon meeting with her lover, dr. Gregory; (h) the way to the party. While the representations of later chunks are more and more elliptical or eliminated – since Tree chooses a different way through "her" day, the early chunks at least at the level of shots tend to be preserved. The second block then refers to the individual chunks of the first block, and the third block supplies new ones – especially the intrusion into the hospital, where the mad killer Tombs is. By referring to these chunks, the filmmakers can maintain the effect of a unified spiral – while simultaneously developing parallel or alternative storylines.

The third tactic is connected to the convention that "usually the classical [plot] presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance [or another private line of action], the other one involving another sphere – work, war, a mission or quest" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 157). The work line of action is superior in *Happy Death Day* and takes the form of clear goals, even explicitly formulated tasks. In contrast, the private line of action does not take the form of goals. Romantic motifs, as well as the trauma from her mother's death and necessity to find common ground with her father, appear later in the film, gradually resulting from the context and serve primarily to build our allegiance with Tree. Moreover, the origin of the spiral is not explained, which – similar to *Groundhog Day* – eventually leads to an emphasis on the axiological transformation of the main character into a better person and establishing a happy heterosexual relationship.

In the previous paragraphs, I have tried to explain some aspects of innovative work possible to do through a spiral narrative schema, using the example of *Happy Death Day*. On the one hand, the creators served it as a tool for further innovation of the slasher; on the other, it represented an aesthetic challenge in following specific narrative tactics. Scott Lobdell himself says in the press kit: "When you have to keep experiencing the same day over and over again, it is easy to fall into a trap. We establish the day and then we repeat it, so that the audience and the character understand what is happening. Once we do those things, we immediately take Tree off course. She starts to try to outsmart her own death - and in doing so - the story takes the audience to different places and gives them unexpected experiences." To some extent, this passage represents a bridge between the creators' starting points and the observations of my analysis. I believe that through understanding the form of *Happy Death Day*, it has offered several explanations of how they achieved their goals.

The production dimension: many spiral narratives

So, why did producer Jason Blum likely consider it a good idea to invest just in the "spiral" innovation of the horror genre? That is not a pointless question since the number of audiovisual works with spiral narratives has increased significantly since 2011: *Source Code (2011), 12 Dates of Christmas* (2011), *A Wedding Christmas Date* (2012), *Edge Of Tomorrow* (2014), *Premature* (2014), *Arq* (2016), *Time Rush* (2016), *Christmas all Over Again* (2016), *Valentine's Again* (2017), *Before I Fall* (2017), *Naked* (2017), *When We First Met* (2018), *Russian Doll*, and *Boss Level* (announced 2020). Admittedly, it is outside of the possibilities of this article to demonstrably reveal the logic behind production

decisions. Nevertheless, the question cannot be ignored in the future: Why do specialised genre filmmakers not mind that they just use the innovative schema that many others use at the same time to innovate, thus losing exclusivity? I can offer a purely working hypothesis, for which clues can also be found in the press kit.

There are spiral narratives in which film stars play and have a big budget. One such film was *Edge Of Tomorrow* with Tom Cruise. And then there are spiral narratives that have innovated another genre: a romantic comedy for adolescent boys (*Premature*), a romantic drama for adolescent girls (*Before I Fall*) or a television audience on holiday (Christmas movies, *Valentine's Day*). In the case of movies with films stars for a broad audience, producers like Jason Blum (from Blumhouse Productions) seem to know that they cannot compete with them, so they explicitly use them as a reference framework: "Multiple films across various genres have elegantly pulled it [plot device] off - from Doug Liman's *Edge Of Tomorrow* to Richard Curtis' *About Time* - and Scott Lobdell's screenplay for *Happy Death Day* tackles this premise with surprising results." More surprising is the case of films such as *Premature* or *Before I Fall*, whose young audience might appreciate a spiral horror film – but the creators of *Happy Death Day* do not mention these films in their press kit. Why? Perhaps because in such a case, they could no longer sell their film as one based on such an innovative idea. As director Christopher Landon says in the press kit: "That was [application of the spiral schema to slasher] when the light bulb turned on, because the concept alone was a slam dunk to me - it was just really clever." If the press kit admitted that many other genre filmmakers have had a similarly clever idea in recent years, it would probably be less "really clever". Thus, if I can judge from my research so far, the spiral narrative schema application is either suppressed in the promotion (*Edge Of Tomorrow*), or other spiral narrative films are concealed. The filmmakers probably assume that their audience is mostly unfamiliar with them – and will, therefore, appreciate the innovative value of applying a spiral narrative schema for their film.

The sequel problem

So we can say that the spiral narrative schema is so recognisable, on the one hand, that the creators seem to be trying to conceal most of its existing applications. Sometimes they even emphasise non-spiral aspects of their films, even though spiral narrative construction is their main attraction (*Source Code, Edge Of Tomorrow*). On the other hand, this schema is so effective that filmmakers

keep coming back to it – but until recently, they have not tried a film *sequel*[9]. There were many rumours about a sequel to *Groundhog Day*, but filmmakers never really even started working on it. Danny Rubin, the screenwriter of *Groundhog Day*, wrote in his book: "Here's my idea [about the sequel]. Open with a grand sequel title, such as 'It's Groundhog Day – Again!' Or 'Groundhog II: Return to Punxsutawney.' After that, just [show] the original movie" (Rubin, 2012; [cited from Kindle version; without pagination]). Since 2014, similar rumours have been spreading about a sequel to *Edge Of Tomorrow*, but even its creators have not yet made significant progress. In October 2019, Doug Liman, as the director of the first film and a possible sequel, declared that they had finally finished the screenplay. But now it seems unlikely that they will start making the film before 2021 or 2022, if at all[10].

It is probably obvious why I have devoted so much time to thinking about a sequel to a spiral narrative film. I do this because only the creators of *Happy Death Day* decided to break this rule of not doing sequels and find a way to deal with the potential obstacles. From the perspective of Blumhouse Productions' existing films, however, this seems to be simply a reasonable step that followed the company's long-term production strategy: If your horror movie becomes successful enough, create a series based on it[11]. They verified the functionality of this approach in film series such as *Paranormal Activity* (six films so far; 2007–2015), *Insidious* (four films so far; 2010–2018), *The Purge* (four films so far; 2013–2018), or the two films by M. Night Shyamalan *Split* (2017) and *Glass* (2019), which were connected to his much older *Unbreakable* (2000). Moreover, at least in the cases of *Paranormal Activity* or *The Purge*, they were also based on strong innovative concepts that did not seem suitable for their re-applications in sequels.

[9] There is a television show *Day Break* (2006) whose creators tried to develop a spiral narrative schema over thirteen episodes – but it was cancelled after six episodes for lack of audience. Fortunately, it appeared as a whole legally available on the Internet and was also released on DVD, so we have this unique narrative experiment available in its entirety (for upcoming analysis).

[10] See for example on-line: <https://hnentertainment.co/doug-liman-says-edge-of-tomorrow-sequel-script-ready-may-shoot-once-tom-cruise-finishes-next-two-mission-impossible-movies/>, <https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2484260/will-edge-of-tomorrow-2-actually-happen-heres-what-doug-liman-says> (both cit. 31st October 2019).

[11] Such a hypothesis is not only analytical. Producer Jason Blum explains it fairly explicitly: "On originals, I never think about what a sequel could be. I can't. [...] On sequels, it's the opposite. On *Purge 2* or *Insidious 4*, we totally think about the sequel because we know one is coming. When we have an original and the original connects with audiences, then we see if we can make a second one. Sometimes you can't. I don't know if there'll ever be a sequel to *Get Out*. Some of them work for sequels and some of them just don't. We tackle the sequel if the movie's a big success. But then, once we're living in the franchise, we do think about not putting ourselves at a dead end story-wise, so we have a place to go to make more. Like we do with *Purge* and *Insidious*" (Kaye, 2019).

The screenwriter of the first film, Scott Lobdell, did not participate this time, so director Christopher Landon also wrote the screenplay. As we will see, in seeking an innovative approach to the spiral narrative, he has mostly remained faithful to the pattern that directed the first film – but at the same time, he uses our knowledge against us… and against Tree as well. Even this time we could use a parallel with *Scream* 2 (1997), in which the sequel principles became the object of innovation and "postmodernist" irony – and the characters wondered which of the conceivable sequel principles might be followed by a killer or killers. Unlike *Scream*, however, *Scream* 2 no longer works with a fairly closed system of formulae and the characters are at a disadvantage. Their encyclopedicity does not help them, and even the most knowledgeable character eventually dies. The creators of *Happy Death Day 2U* again choose rather the opposite way than the creators of *Scream* 2. While Tree lacked genre knowledge in *Happy Death Day* and the film was not heading for a unified set of slasher genre rules, in *Happy Death Day 2U* Tree not only *knows*, but a very consistent system of rules directs the fictional world.

Remarkable, however, is the modification of the narrative tactics that were applied in the first film as I explained above. *Happy Death Day 2U* also develops several blocks with different functions: (a) continuation and external variation, (b) returning and internal variation, (c) complete re-genrefication. In the first block, Ryan – the supporting character from the previous film – becomes the protagonist locked in the spiral, while Tree is just a knowledgeable supporting character. However, this is only the trick we expect from the sequel – and the essential fact of the first block is the scientific explanation of the previous film's spiral through quantum physics. In the twenty-fifth minute of the film's screening, an explosion will occur in the lab, and it is Tree again who will stay in the *new* spiral.

What is more, she was moved back to the same moment as last time in the first film... but in a parallel reality with some significant changes. First, causal changes. The main murderer is not the same person as last time. Second, the relational changes. Tree's beloved boyfriend Carter is dating someone else – and, above all, Tree's mother is alive. Tree must decide whether she wants to stay in this world or her original world. Either way, a complex mathematical equation needs to be solved to end the spiral. Furthermore, because the group of students have a limited time, it is Tree who must remember all the wrong solutions across the turns of the time spiral. So she is not being killed this time; it is she who kills herself to advance the equation.

The plot chunks of the previous film became the narrative key to distinguishing different realities. Carefully established sets of events and dialogues from the first film maintain the transparency of the intricate multi-level causality of

the second film. The third narrative tactic followed by the filmmakers in the previous film is also used and reversed: The working goal becomes just a means of solving primarily private goals to stay in a superior position this time. And what about the exploited genre formulae? This time they are also changing: from slasher through melodrama to a heist. The spiral narrative itself is innovated, if not only for the backward explaining of the spiral effect. However, spiral narrative schema remains a device of effective innovation as well, combined with other related schemas: time travel, parallel realities, changing of innovated genres.

Conclusions

As already mentioned, Blumhouse Productions is a company that prefers to create film series – and the final sequence of *Happy Death Day 2U* seemed a clear step towards the next sequel. Nevertheless, director Christopher Landon, on July 17, 2019, openly wrote on Twitter that "[s]ince I keep reading stuff about it, I'll say it loud: There Is *No Happy Death Day 3* In Development. It's just a rumor…unless @netflix wants to pony-up and finish this trilogy, it just ain't happening."[12] However, the two *Happy Death Day* films already in existence have provided us with an unprecedented opportunity to analyse filmmakers' treatment of spiral narrative schema from a brand new perspective. First, we could see how the filmmakers likely think of the spiral narrative as a useful plot device, reasonably equivalent to our thinking of spiral narrative as an innovative schema. Second, through brief narrative analysis, we revealed and explained some of the tactics that the filmmakers followed in their efforts to accommodate the broader patterns to the needs of a spiral narrative schema application. Thirdly, thanks to the sequel, we were able to compare how they dealt with the obstacles of being forced to innovate their own innovations – and to what extent the spiral narrative has changed from a superior scheme to just one of a pattern that is subject to creative revision. This article primarily aimed to be a formal analytical contribution to the discussion of filmmaking treatment of the spiral narrative schema, on the one hand, and the discussion of ways of innovation in popular storytelling on the other. Nevertheless, I believe that through case studies of *Happy Death Day* and *Happy Death Day 2u*, it has helped to clarify the more general research questions that can be asked about these fields[13].

[12] On-line: <https://twitter.com/creetureshow/status/1151491893663952896?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw> (cit. 10th December 2019)

[13] I would like to thank Ondřej Pavlík and Janka Kokešová for their inspiring comments on the draft of the article. I am also grateful to the students of my lecture series on spiral narratives for their questions and suggestions. And again, I thank Jeremy Pearman for his proofreading.

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Spirals, Slashers, and Sequel: Case of *Happy Death Day* (2017) and *Happy Death Day 2U* (2019)

This article focuses on the films *Happy Death Day* (2017) and *Happy Death Day 2U* (2019). Both handle the spiral narrative, which is recognised by the article as a specific storytelling pattern with a protagonist stuck in an iterative segment of space, time and causality – and this protagonist is not only fully aware of this situation but also tries to deal with it. What for other unaware characters is a closed loop is for the protagonist an open experience with an odd number of turns of time spiral. The spiral narrative is known mostly from high-budget films such as *Groundhog Day* (1993) or *Edge Of Tomorrow* (2014). Nevertheless, as the article explains, it occurs in dozens of other theatrical films, VOD films, television films or television shows. However, what are the reasons why, when there is an extensive set of works to choose from, does the article take just the doublet of *Happy Death Day* films? (1) On their example, the article discusses the author's general hypothesis about spiral narrative works as a series of applications of the innovative narrative schema as an aesthetic tool. Such a hypothesis consists of three broader dimensions: (a) the aesthetic dimension, i.e. the spiral schema as a part of the art work; (b) the creative dimension, i.e. the spiral schema as part of the problem-solution process of filmmaking; (c) the production dimension, i.e. the spiral schema as a part of the competition of audiovisual production. (2) An even more important reason, though, for selecting just these two films has been the fact that *Happy Death Day 2U* is a sequel of *Happy Death Day*. In the „post-classical era" of global franchises, sequels, prequels, remakes, reboots and transmedia storytellings, this does not seem to be exceptional. However, in the context of the spiral narrative, this is an unprecedented step that raises several questions the article asks.

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Puzzle Plots in TV Serials: The Challenges for Enigma-Driven Storytelling in Long-Running Formats

Introduction: Definitions and Concepts[1]

So-called "puzzle films" have been very successful in the last three decades and have attracted considerable critical and academic attention. With the recent shift of funds, talents, and star power to the production of TV serials, the question arises how well the particular kind of narrative complexity associated with puzzle plots may thrive in long-running formats spanning entire seasons[2]. In order to give a tentative answer to this question, I will in this article undertake a comparative analysis of three works that may be considered typical examples of puzzle plots: the feature film *Open Your Eyes* (*Abre los ojos*, 1997, Alejandro Amenábar), and the TV serials *Westworld* (2016–, HBO, Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy) and *Dark* (2017–, Netflix, Jantje Friese and Baran bo Odar). But before embarking on this analysis, some preliminary considerations about how to define narrative complexity in general and the puzzle plot in particular may be in order.

[1] I would like to thank Joseph Swann for the revision of the English text.

[2] I use the term "TV serial" (and not "TV series") for shows whose stories span whole seasons.

In his introduction to *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema*, Warren Buckland, editor of that volume, defines the puzzle plot as follows:

> "A puzzle plot is intricate in the sense that the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing, the events are not simply interwoven, but entangled. […] This volume unites them [the puzzle films] on the basis of their shared storytelling complexity. […] [T]he majority of […] puzzle films are distinct in that they break the boundaries of the classical, unified mimetic plot. The puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events. […] [P]uzzle films embrace non-linearity, time loops, and fragmented spatio-temporal reality. These films blur the boundaries between different levels of reality, are riddled with gaps, deception, labyrinthine structures, ambiguity, and overt coincidences. They are populated with characters who are schizophrenic, lose their memory, are unreliable narrators, or are dead (but without us – or them – realizing)" (2009, pp. 5–6.).

Puzzle plots, then, display a high degree of complexity, are non-classical and potentially anti-mimetic in nature and feature particular structural devices such as time-loops, non-linearity, or unreliability. But Kiss and Willemsen argue (2017, pp. 19–20) that this definition is overly general and lacks precise characterisation. It displaces the need for clarification to the underlying questions: What is narrative complexity? What are the norms of classical storytelling? – And it does so all the more, given that the examples referred to in the volume as puzzle films appear quite diverse, ranging from the relatively conventional *Sliding Doors* (1998, Peter Howitt) to the highly experimental *Inland Empire* (2006, David Lynch). Kiss and Willemsen propose shifting the focus from structural patterns to the examination of reception processes, especially the level of cognitive effort required to construct a coherent story. I will follow this shift, paying particular attention to different kinds of narrative complexity and their relation to the puzzle plot.

From a cognitive point of view, classical narration may, generally speaking, be said to favour an easy understanding by allowing spectators to quickly orient themselves in a coherent world with clear plotlines. In contrast, with its fictional universes full of real or apparent contradictions, inconsistencies and paradoxes, and/or its multiple entangling plotlines, complex narration makes comprehension more difficult, especially in the initial phase of a work in which we expect to be enlightened by expository information. This is, however, a general statement, and it needs differentiation. I propose, therefore, to acknowledge different dimensions of complexity. First, we need to distinguish between a quantitative

and a qualitative dimension. If we are faced with a large number of important elements (main characters, plotlines, dramatic questions, etc.) which demand rapid processing of a high volume of new information, the complexity is quantitative. If, on the other hand, our understanding is hampered by contradictory, inconsistent, paradoxical or missing information, the complexity is qualitative. In the former, mental overload may be the result, in the latter, cognitive dissonance. Both stand in the way of a smooth and unobtrusive apprehension of the basic narrative coordinates, but they stand differently.

Secondly, we need to distinguish between complex stories and complex storytelling. There are four possible combinations of these two. A simple story may be told in a straightforward manner. A complex story may be told in a straightforward manner – i.e. in such a way that the telling makes understanding as easy as the complexity of the narrated events allows. A simple story may be told in a complex manner, for example by giving a nonlinear or elliptic account of what happened. And the perception of an already complex story may be further obscured by an unconventional rendering of its information.

Puzzle Plots and Narrative Complexity

Applying these definitions to the subject of this article, how can we clarify the connection between narrative complexity and the puzzle plot, especially the kind that occurs in feature films? Puzzle films, I would say, form a subgroup of the broader class of complex films. In other words, every puzzle film is complex, but not every complex film is a puzzle film. What particular features, then, do puzzle films exhibit? Here I would argue that qualitative rather than quantitative dimensions of complexity are paramount. The complex telling is more prevalent than the complex story as such. And open dramatic questions raised by narrative incongruities and triggering intensified hypothesis-building are of prime importance. Noël Carroll has argued that popular narratives may generally be regarded as grounded in a question-answer structure (1990, pp. 130–136). And in classical narration future-oriented Yes/No questions prevail: Will the boy get the girl? Will the hero defeat his enemy? Will the heroine save the world? The distinctive questions characteristic of puzzle plots, however, are more open and concern the present situation or past developments leading up to it, such as: What is going on? Why is this character acting like that? What kind of world am I dealing with? How are these occurrences connected with each other? How can I explain these happenings? How can I resolve these contradictions?

Puzzle plots are designed to confuse and disturb, to pose enigmas, and to keep spectators guessing about what is going on and how to resolve the various

conundrums. Do they present a satisfactory resolution in the end? Most puzzles are there to be resolved. There is a sense of urgency and impending denouement throughout. And we normally expect a payoff after the long phase of confusion and considerable cognitive effort invested. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the final plot twist, a particularly effective way of answering all these questions at a single stroke, is the preferred form of closure in many puzzle films. But here again, a note of clarification is called for. Although many puzzle films feature final plot twists, not every film with a final plot twist is a puzzle film. If we are led to construct a coherent world and a conclusive storyline which only in the end turn out to be a deception, as is the case in well-known films such as *Fight Club* (1999, David Fincher), *The Sixth Sense* (1999, M. Night Shyamalan), or *Shutter Island* (2010, Martin Scorsese), the phase of confusion and disorientation – an indispensable feature of the puzzle plot in my stricter conception of the term – is missing. Hence, contrary to many scholars writing on puzzle films (e.g. Buckland, 2009/2014; Klecker, 2013), I agree with Kiss and Willemsen (2017, pp. 49–56) that films which only build on false leads in order to rectify them in final plot twists are not true puzzle films[3]. Unreliable narration of this deceptive kind lacks the prolonged effect of perturbation constitutive of the puzzle plot.

In some cases, the enigmas are not resolved. Kiss and Willemsen propose the term "impossible puzzle films" for examples like *Donnie Darko* (2001, Richard Kelly), *Chasing Sleep* (2000, Michael Walker), or David Lynch's "L.A. Trilogy" (*Lost Highway*, 1996; *Mulholland Drive*, 2001; *Inland Empire*, 2006). Contrary to art cinema's modernist impetus towards a general sense of uncertainty and contingency, unresolved puzzle films still engage spectators in trying to figure out how the apparent incongruities and paradoxes may be explained rationally, and thus "do not let [them] escape from [their] natural, navigation-driven plot structuring struggle" (Kiss, 2013, p. 250).

The Appeal of Puzzle Plots

What makes puzzle plots – with or without resolution – convincing? What is their particular appeal? For one thing, the phase of disorientation had better be intriguing. Confusion, a state of mind we normally dislike in real-life contexts, may be enjoyed with respect to artworks, but only if our curiosity is aroused. A high level of suspense and forward dynamics also helps one endure a (provisional) lack of knowledge. High stakes, deadlines, and danger facing the protagonist all contribute to the urge to press on through, despite bewildering

[3] For a more nuanced distinction between puzzles with surprising solutions versus apparent coherences as false leads see: Brütsch, 2018, pp. 137–142.

circumstances. Hence most puzzle films stage a chain of events with strong immersive qualities. At the same time, because of the incoherent and contradictory elements complicating our assessment of the story, they also self-reflexively point to and problematise conventional mechanisms of narration and comprehension.

If the enigmas are resolved in a twist, the unsettling nature of the resolution, relieved by the simplicity and logical consistency of the final explanation, are paramount in achieving viewer satisfaction: they are, so to speak, the payoff for the cognitive effort invested. And even if the enigmas are not resolved, the call for clarification must still be strong enough to encourage repeated attempts at explaining the strange happenings. The fact that unresolved puzzle films such as *Donnie Darko*, *Mulholland Drive* or *Primer* (2004, Shane Carruth) have generated considerable cult followings and extensive critical and academic coverage shows that the absence of an unequivocal conclusion need not impair the success of puzzle films, at least with niche audiences ready to engage in sophisticated exegesis of complex narratives[4].

Bewildering Self-Deceit in *Open Your Eyes*

After these general remarks about narrative complexity and puzzle plots, I will turn to a comparative analysis of *Open Your Eyes*, *Westworld*, and *Dark*. *Open Your Eyes* recounts the story of a well-off, attractive young man, César, who falls in love with Sofía, the girl who accompanies his best friend to his birthday party[5]. He spends the night with her, but the following morning his jealous ex-girlfriend Nuria is lying in wait, and she persuades him to go with her to her place for a final sexual fling. On their way there she intentionally drives into a wall. César survives the "accident", but his face is so badly maimed that the surgeons cannot, and Sofía will not, do anything more for him. His misery is complete when, out on a club evening with his friend and Sofía, he sees them making out, and they finally leave him there alone. The following morning, however, Sofía suddenly stands before him, apologises and kisses him. Shortly afterwards, new surgical techniques restore his face to its pristine beauty and the world seems whole again. But not for long. Strange things happen. One night César finds Nuria instead of Sofía next to him in bed, and both his friend and the police confirm that the woman he thinks is Nuria is in fact his girlfriend and the woman who died in the car crash was Sofía. Yet only a little later Sofía turns up at his apartment. César embraces her blissfully and they make love, but in the

[4] For a detailed and well-argued assessment of possible reasons for the appeal of "impossible puzzle films" see: Kiss, Willemsen, 2018, pp. 183–207.

[5] I permit myself to reuse here a synopsis of *Open Your Eyes* written for an article in which I analyse the film from a slightly different angle (Brütsch, 2018, p. 137).

very act of doing so he realizes that the woman beneath him is Nuria. In despair, he grabs a pillow and presses it over her face until she stops breathing. Hurriedly leaving Sofía's apartment, he catches sight of his face in the mirror and realizes with horror that the disfigurement has returned. After this, César is committed to a secure psychiatric institution, where – after some initial reluctance – he confides in a psychologist.

In *Open Your Eyes*, events get out of hand early on, and César's emotional ups and downs may be compared to a ride on a roller coaster. The phase in which our curiosity as spectators is particularly aroused only sets in, however, when Sofía suddenly returns and César's face is restored. These wondrous developments happen out of the blue and raise the question how to explain Sofía's change of behaviour psychologically and the doctors' sudden progress technologically. The subsequent inexplicable happenings – notably Sofía's replacement by Nuria and the reversion of César's face to its disfigured state – add confusion to our incredulity. We are further disoriented by uncanny repetitions and strange events like César's faintly uttered wish for quiet, which mysteriously brings a crowded bar to silence.

These surprising turnarounds, identity switches, and inconsistencies raise many questions. Could it be that César is the victim of a conspiracy orchestrated by his business partners and his ex-girlfriend? Has he become delusional due to heavy medication after the accident? Are the bizarre events merely part of a dream? Or do we have to reassess our conception of the fictional world and opt for a marvellous universe not bound by the laws of reality as we know it? Even though there are clues for each of these explanations, none of them appears conclusive.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that we are given a retrospective account of the events leading up to César's confinement, his confessions to the psychologist providing the opportuity for repeated flashbacks informing us about what happened from his own restricted point-of-view. Starting off with César already locked up and wearing a mask, *Open Your Eyes* thus first establishes a detective plot, raising questions such as: Why is César being kept prisoner in a mental institution? Who did he kill and why did he do it? Why is he hiding his face? However, these questions are soon answered during the phase of disorientation, ceding centre stage to the more open puzzle questions noted above. These are resolved only towards the end of the film, when faint memories and dream images evoked during the therapy sessions solidify into recollections of a firm called Life Extension whose business, it transpires, is to offer its clients a posthumous second life in a virtual reality tailored to their wishes – a life that seamlessly continues their former existence from their own chosen point.

How convincing is the puzzle structure of *Open Your Eyes*? To first hook the audience with an ostensible detective plot (involving the protagonist as potential offender and victim) and only later to shift to the more confusing puzzle plot, proves a clever move, prompting viewers to adopt an attitude that is both compassionate and forensic. The ensuing phase of disorientation arouses our interest by teasing us with various plausible explanations. And the final resolution turns out to be surprising (it calls into play a solution not considered before), game-changing (it requires a substantial reconstruction of the timelines and levels of reality in the story), plausible within a fictional context (it is supported by pre-conceptions about cryonics and virtual reality), and illuminating (the contradictions are revealed to be products of César's interior psychological struggle)[6].

The Dual Strategy of *Westworld*

Open Your Eyes, therefore, perfectly matches the strict conception of puzzle plot outlined above[7]. Far from being reserved to feature films, however, the term "puzzle" has, for example, been frequently used in reviews and online-comments about *Westworld* to characterise the particular appeal of this HBO-produced TV serial. This prompts the question whether *Westworld* is an exception to the rule that viewers do not want to remain for a whole season in a state of disorientation, ignorance and confusion, and if so why?

The action of *Westworld's* first season unfolds in an amusement park which allows visitors to experience a Wild West populated by robots acting as cowboys and Indians. Despite their genuine appearance and human-like behaviour, the "hosts" are programmed to be subservient and not to harm any of the guests. Looking at the characters and plotlines, we can recognise an initial major difference from *Open Your Eyes*. *Westworld* features six main characters (Dolores, Meave, Bernard, Ford, William, and the "Man in Black") and six secondary characters (Teddy, Theresa, Elsie, Lee, Charlotte, and Logan), all of whom are distributed among three different camps (robots, guests, and park executives). Moreover, there are no less than six main plotlines: Dolores' awakening, Meave's awakening, Ford's endeavour, the quest of the "Man in Black", William's quest, and the power-struggles among park executives. Each episode involves between three to five of these plotlines, resulting in what German-language TV studies call "Zopfdramaturgie": a dramatic structure that resembles a plait or braid.

[6] The only reservation I would make regards the all too explicit and verbose clarification provided at the moment of the twist.

[7] Other examples for puzzle plots in feature films are: *Angel Heart* (1987, Alan Parker); *Identity* (2003, James Mangold); *The Machinist* (*El Maquinista*, 2004, Brad Andersson); Stay (2005, Marc Forster).

Compared with the single protagonist and single main storyline of *Open Your Eyes*, *Westworld* displays a level of quantitative complexity not often found in feature films, but quite commonplace in today's TV serials. Of itself, this dispersion of narrative content (which helps to expand plot developments over a whole season) is clearly not enough to establish a puzzle structure, but it may form the basis for it[8]. However, what about qualitative complexity? In order to assess *Westworld* in this regard, we need to examine the kinds of plotlines established and the nature of the dramatic questions they raise. In the first episodes, two distinct series of incidents are staged to catch our attention: Some of the hosts playing secondary roles appear to not function correctly and have to be brought in for remedial maintenance. At the same time, the two hosts playing primary roles, Dolores and Meave, experience flashbacks to past cycles despite the fact that their memories are wiped clean after each assignment. The dramatic questions suggested by these incidents are: Why are some hosts not functioning as programmed? And more urgently: Are the hosts about to awaken? Will the human beings lose control? It is important to note that these latter questions, which run like a thread through the entire season and are responsible for generating much of its suspense, are in fact future-oriented yes/no-questions to which, moreover, we already know the answers: The hosts will awaken and the park executives will lose control. We know this, not just because the feature film of the same title – a work on which *Westworld* is loosely based – serves as an explicit pre-text, but also because the course of action ensues from a dramatic constellation we are well acquainted with from popular movies such as *Jaws* (1975, Steven Spielberg), *Jurassic Park* (1993, Steven Spielberg), or *Jurassic World* (2015, Colin Trevorrow): In a tourist zone or theme park, the safety of visitors is in danger, yet profit-oriented operators refuse to acknowledge the menace.

As well as the hosts' malfunctioning and awakening, the intrigues and conflicts among park executives take up a considerable amount of screen time. Hence, the second most important dramatic question is: Who will gain the upper hand in the park's management structure? The main antagonists in this rivalry are Ford (co-founder and creative director) and Charlotte (executive director of the board), while Bernard, Theresa, and Lee occupy intermediate positions of variable loyalty to one or the other. This dramatic question, again, is not a completely open puzzle regarding past or present states of affairs, but a focused, future-oriented suspense question with two possible outcomes. And the way this plotline unfolds is also classical, with Ford, representing the artistic side, at first

[8] For many authors, such as Jason Mittell (2015), multiple plotlines and story arcs spanning whole seasons are sufficient grounds for a TV serial to be called complex. I would advocate a more restricted use of the concept of narrative complexity.

apparently defeated but in the end triumphant over Charlotte, who stands for reckless business interests.

How, then, do we assess *Westworld's* present state of affairs? A major claim in my introduction to this essay, and in the analysis of *Open Your Eyes*, was that puzzle plots confront viewers with situations, behaviours and conditions which are, at least initially, hard to make sense of. *Westworld*, in this respect, works simultaneously on two levels. On the one hand, it acquaints viewers with the operating principles of the park and most of the major characters and their responsibilities in an explicit, explanatory way. On the other hand, and from the first episode onwards, it introduces elements that for a long time remain mysterious, suggesting that the park's genesis and development were fraught with problems that still affect the present situation. Among the questions raised in this context are: What are Bernard's interviews with Dolores about? Whose voice does Dolores hear inside her head? Who is Wyatt and who was Arnold? What massacre took place and why? What exactly is "the maze" and where is the entrance to it? Who is the "Man in Black" and why does he act so cruelly? How are we to understand "the game" and its deeper level? And in connection with the power struggle mentioned above: What are the real interests of the park management? What is Ford up to with his "new storyline"?

Westworld's puzzle-like quality essentially relies on these intriguing elements and the open questions they raise. It is important to note, however, that the sense of ignorance and confusion they evoke is counterbalanced by the orienting forces of the exposition and the clearly focused suspense issues of the robots' awakening and their mentors' (apparent) loss of control. In this way, the puzzling elements are embedded in a classical structure facilitating audience participation over a whole season. An examination of the cliffhangers of season one – traditionally points of prime interest in TV serials – confirms the importance given to a solid, even conventional backbone: In seven out the ten episode endings, either the awakening of the hosts or the power struggle among the park executives is in focus, and only three endings (episodes two, three and eight) are directly related to the open puzzle questions.

How, then, are the questions raised in the first episodes resolved in the course of season one? In contrast to feature films, TV serials rarely withhold answers to all the pressing questions until the very end; the risk of frustrating viewers left in ignorance for too long is too great. Partial revelations often set in much earlier, and the final resolution may take the form of a series of twists and turns spanning the last two or more episodes. In *Westworld*, the first significant disclosures come in episode six, and the cascade of major revelations

starts in the middle of episode nine and continues through the concluding one-and-a-half episodes.

A striking aspect of this extended season one finale is that its revelations are not always answers to the explicitly raised suspense or puzzle questions, but make us realise that we must revise some basic assumptions: Thus Bernard is not a human being but a host, and William and the "Man in Black" are not two individuals but one. I argued in the introduction that films based merely on false leads resulting in twist endings do not meet the requirements of a puzzle plot. In *Westworld*, however, with its array of plotlines – some of them distinctly puzzling in nature – audience deception may well add to the overall impression of complexity, especially if its resolution entails a considerable rearrangement of timelines and character relations and affects other, as yet unclarified issues.

A distinguishing mark of this resolution is the merging of plotlines. To name just a few of the conjunctions brought to light in the finale: The "maze" and the "game", both of which deeply intrigued the Man in Black, turn out to be meant for Meave and Dolores, assisting them in attaining willpower. The awakening of these hosts is revealed to be part of Ford's plan to prevail in the power struggle among park executives. And the danger resulting from the liberation of the robots complies, in turn, with the Man in Black's quest to reach a place "where actions have real consequences".

The overall question that arises from my reception-oriented line of investigation is: How convincing is the dramatic structure of *Westworld's* first season? The combination of a classical backbone with a number of enigmas and puzzling questions appears compelling. The degree of confusion the viewer is expected to endure is well dosed and counterbalanced by a number of straightforward developments. The surprising turns and anticipated climaxes in the final stage are skilfully orchestrated. Some of the revelations are both effective and easy to understand. The weak point is the convoluted backstory about the foundation of the park and the plans to bring the hosts to consciousness, which turn out to be so complex that, in my viewing experience at least, their elucidation causes more frowns than epiphanies. The strategy of further complicating an already complex action by rendering story information in a fragmented, disordered way, is all the more problematic in season two, where Bernard's painstaking attempt to reconstruct his actions is juxtaposed with a plotline (Meave's search for her daughter) that is so straightforward as to be uninteresting. As I pointed out in the introduction, the complex telling of a simple story may yield more convincing puzzle effects than the further complication of already complex storylines.

Multiple Enigmas in *Dark*

Let's turn to our third and last example, *Dark* – the first Netflix-financed TV serial to be produced and shot in Germany. The action is set in the fictional town of Winden in 2019 and begins in the aftermath of a child's mysterious disappearance. When a second child disappears (in the first episode) the inhabitants are alarmed and police investigators intensify their search. Like *Open Your Eyes*, *Dark* thus starts off as a detective plot, but it, too, steers in a different direction as soon as some other incidents occur which cannot be brought in line with the laws of our reality. The second missing child, it turns out in episode two, got lost in a tunnel leading directly to the year 1986! As the number of characters travelling through time – and the time periods involved – multiply, it becomes clear that *Dark* relies heavily on supernatural causality to achieve its puzzling effects. How, then, does *Dark* complicate comprehension without compromising the viewer's fascination with these unusual happenings? And how does its strategy compare with those of *Open Your Eyes* and *Westworld*?

After all, *Dark* features even more main characters than *Westworld*. The action evolves mainly around the members of four different families, and as more and more eras come into play, no less than four generations are concerned, setting the stage for a myriad of relationships, intrigues and conflicts. Even more striking, however, is the number of enigmas that surface: more than two dozen dramatic questions are raised in the first season alone. They concern a variety of issues: the missing children (Where are they? Who kidnapped them?); unknown characters showing up (Who are they? Where do they come from? What are their plans?); the strange behaviour of established characters (What do they know?); the secret activities of the nuclear power plant executives (What are they hiding?); abnormal occurrences (Why are whole flocks of animals dying simultaneously?); and unusual places and objects (Where does the tunnel lead? What are the nursery and the clockwork for?). Most of these questions are typical of puzzle plots in the sense defined at the beginning of this essay: they are open and they address unresolved issues relating to the present situation, or past developments leading up to it[9].

In light of such rampant complexity the question is all the more urgent: How does *Dark* keep its viewers tuned in? As in *Westworld*, the slightly privileged status of one character, Jonas, gives us a hint[10]. But more importantly, the enigmas are skilfully distributed over the whole season, with each episode (starting with

[9] The cyclical nature of *Dark's* universe progressively undermines an unequivocal timeline, but a general sense of before, now and after still prevails for a certain time.

[10] In *Westworld*, Dolores stands out as more important than the other main characters.

the first) resolving at least one. However, new enigmas are raised all through season one and the total number of open questions remains only marginally manageable. Yet the cognitive effort invested is rewarded with partial solutions in each episode. Furthermore, in the course of the season, the impression grows that all these enigmas are somehow connected. And as soon as time travel and loop structures are established as part of the fictional world, we are ready to accept solutions that no longer adhere to the logics of our reality.

In addition to this careful dosage of disorienting effects, audience participation is also maintained by the intrigues and conflicts that take place among closely connected families in a small town: these per se provide enough subject matter for an entertaining TV serial. And *Dark* is positively convincing on this level, not least due to excellent performances, genuine dialogues, and a *mise-en-scène* no less adequate to the oppressive atmosphere of provincial northern Germany than it is to the profound mystery of a universe that progresses in cycles.

Unlike *Westworld*, *Dark* does not answer all its questions at the end of the first season only in order to install a new set of enigmas at the beginning of the second. To be sure, the number of questions resolved increases in the last four (of ten) episodes, but many relevant issues remain unresolved. An important change takes place, however, at the turn of the seasons. As the identities and intentions of the various time travellers are revealed, two camps fighting for supremacy emerge. And one of the most pressing questions established at this juncture is: Who will win this epic battle? Needless to say, this is not a puzzle, but a future-oriented suspense question, bringing *Dark's* second season close to the dramatic structure of *Westworld's* first.

Conclusion: Opportunities and Pitfalls for Puzzle Plots in TV Serials

What are the requirements and pitfalls for puzzle plots in TV serials? One feature film and two TV serials are too limited a sample to authorise any universal claims. Nevertheless, some of my findings may also hold for a larger range of oeuvres. I will, therefore, conclude with some general remarks that further research may either confirm or disprove.

Given that disorientation, confusion, and a lack of knowledge are constitutive of the puzzle effect, the biggest challenge to its viability in TV serials is the extra-long running time. Both *Westworld* and *Dark* prevent audience frustration by providing partial resolutions before the end of the season and by establishing supplementary attractions of a more classical and easy-to-grasp nature, such as future-oriented and focused suspense-questions or entertaining intrigues and

machinations involving an array of protagonists. The continual alternation between plotlines and main characters – a trademark of contemporary TV serials – facilitates such a strategy and even allows for the establishment of multiple enigmas. The challenge then shifts to meaningfully correlating the diverse elements and convincingly orchestrating the disclosure of their connections. Concerning the season's ending, two options prevail: Either the enigmas are resolved and a new set of questions are established in the following season; and in this case new reasons for mystifying the circumstances and withholding explanations have to be found. Or the riddles are only partially resolved, leaving viewers in the dark about a number of pertinent questions, in which case the partial solutions still need to justify the cognitive effort invested. Indeed, expectations of the (deferred) solutions will grow accordingly, and with them the risk of disappointment – as the case of *Lost* (2004–2010, ABC, J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof, Jeffrey Lieber) has graphically demonstrated. To deliberately leave a whole series of puzzling questions altogether unanswered, as unresolved puzzle films do, does not seem a viable option for the final season of a TV serial.

Embedded in a larger structure, puzzle elements can, it seems, play an important role in TV serials, as the examples of *Dark* and *Westworld's* first season testify. However, reactions to *Westworld's* second season[11] remind us that spectators' capacities to unravel convoluted plotlines have their limits, and the final revelation of what really happened may only satisfy if the entanglements do not appear overly construed. Accordingly, puzzle plots in TV serials will likely remain a niche phenomenon, but for shows addressing metaphysical conundrums such as the nature of our universe, human identity, or free will, a narrative mode that evades easy comprehension may well prove rewarding.

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[11] According to Nielsen ratings, linear audience dropped 16 percent compared to the average for the first season (cf. Wittmer, 2018), and the audience score on the review-aggregation website rottentomatoes.com dropped from 92 to 74 – though the critics' score only slightly diminished.

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Puzzle Plots in TV-Serials: The Challenges for Enigma-driven Storytelling in Long-running Formats

The article conducts a comparative analysis of a feature film (*Open your Eyes*) and two TV serials (*Westworld* and *Dark*) in order to find out how well the narrative complexity characteristic of puzzle plots may work in long-running formats. Given the core constituents of the puzzle effect − disorientation, confusion, and lack of knowledge − the biggest challenge for its viability in a TV serial is the extra-long running time. Both *Westworld* and *Dark* prevent audience frustration by already providing partial resolutions before the season ends, and by establishing supplementary attractions of a more classical and easy-to-grasp nature, such as future-oriented suspense-questions, or entertaining intrigues and machinations involving the whole cast of protagonists. Even in the larger structure of the TV serial, puzzle elements may, then, play an important role. However, spectators' capacities to unravel convoluted plotlines have their limits, and the final revelation of what really happened may only satisfy if the entanglements are not overly construed. Due to these high demands, puzzle plots in TV serials will likely remain a niche phenomenon.

Keywords: puzzle plot; narrative complexity; TV serial; dramatic questions; cognitive effort; disorientation; multiple enigmas; false lead; final twist

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Infinite Narratives on Infinite Earths. The Evolution of Modern Superhero Films

Introduction

Since 2017 the newly established cinematic meta-genre known as a comic book film – which is synonymous with a superhero movie with its dominant super-human characters – seems to gain more and more recognition as not only a profitable but also respectable line of modern cinema. Following the critical and financial success of James Mangold's *Logan* (2017) – this dark and nostalgic 'farewell' to the beloved *X-Men* franchise's actors and characters like Hugh Jackman (Wolverine) and Patrick Stewart (Professor X) that was able to receive the historic, first Oscar nomination in a 'serious' category for adapted screenplay (while recent superhero films were almost excluisvely recognised in the 'technical' categories with David Ayer's *Suicide Squad* actually winning the prize for best makeup and hairstyling at the 2017 ceremony) – in 2018 *Black Panther* (dir. R. Coogler) was defined by some of the critics as a cultural phenomenon (mostly in the United States for its unprecedented focus on a black superhero character and moving the film's narrative towards Afro-American culture and tradition as well as becoming the first ever superhero film to be nominated as a Best Picture of The Year in the 2019 American Film Academy Awards. Besides the final verdict of the Academy (which eventually appreciated Peter Farrelly's *Green Book*) the 2019 ceremony still managed to highlight a milestone for superhero cinema

by picking an animated feature – *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* – as the Best Animated Film (and according to many observers it was the *Spider-Verse* and not *Black Panther* that deserved a place amongst the Best Picture-nominees). The short-term future for superhero films seems to be even more impressive after 2019 with Todd Phillips's *Joker* receiving a massive positive response from both critics and viewers and surprisingly winning the Venice Film Festival's main prize – The Golden Lion. This milestone in the history of superhero films could lead not only to the first-ever Best Picture prize being received by a comic book-inspired film at the 2020 gala but also to many new artistic directions for further comic book-based instalments by continuing the more self-aware and experimental approach as presented in *Joker*. The main goal of this article will be to unravel some unexplored narrative patterns of comic book superhero stories that may lead to a completely new landscape of superhero cinema in the future. The key concept of a quantum narrative will be presented here as a comic book-based formula that can produce an altering stories within a given film franchise and shape them as an individual 'puzzle' in an overall multi-diegetic representation of a whole superhero universe.

From plot-less to plot-altering narratives

Before analysing possible new directions for superhero films and their narrative/thematic fresh ideas it is crucial to reconstruct the most recent reception of this section of cinema. For more than a decade (since the premiere of Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* in 2008, starting the Marvel Cinematic Universe) the superhero-themed blockbusters have dominated popular cinema which is clearly exemplified by the 2019 film *Avengers: Endgame* (dir. A. Russo, J. Russo) topping James Cameron's *Avatar* as the most profitable film of all-times. What is significant, however, is that besides the obviously enthusiastic approach of modern viewers towards the comic book-inspired film series most of the critics still remain rather sceptical about the actual 'quality' of this new trend. As Luke Buckmaster writes in his very critical reception of *Avengers: Endgame* and his expected 'damages' that Russo's film may bring with its success: "Just as Donald Trump's presidency shows there's no bottom in American politics, only various kinds of falling, these onerous and intellectually lazy blockbusters – which serve up plates of visual gibberish and laugh at the very idea of concepts such as narrative efficiency – prove the studio has no nadir. Nothing it won't stoop to" (Buckmaster, 2019). It is interesting that amongst the general contempt for superheroes-led 'lazy blockbusters' Buckmaster feels the need to underline the element of a limited 'narrative efficiency' as the main guilt of *Endgame* (the most elaborate narrative case of a modern comic book film). It is nothing new, however, to find a crit-

icism of superhero stories as never-truly-ended plots that constantly recycle the same characters, twists and narrative patterns to serve the most predictable (and safe) form of entertainment. Such a criticism can be found in Douglas Wolk's approach towards the superhero comics which, according to Wolk, "aren't really meant to be read as freestanding works […]. Instead, superhero comics' readers understand each thirty-two-page long pamphlet as a small element of one of two gigantic narratives [represented by the brands of DC Comics and Marvel Comics – T.Ż.]" (Wolk, 2007, p. 90). The lack of narrative efficiency that disgrace superhero films as texts that are expected to present a coherent and 'efficient' story appears to be nothing less than a direct adaptation of superheroes' original attributes from the comics – that is the narrative's insufficiency as one of the main 'pleasures' of this genre.

Is is quite obvious then that some of the film critics and theorists are reluctant to appreciate superhero films since they do not necessarily respect the 'traditional' values of popular features and borrows most of their narrative tools from the area of comics. Some of the researchers, however, are trying to find a way to put superhero films into the audiovisual patterns of storytelling, suggesting that this area of cinema can be regarded not only as 'motion comics'. Such is the case of Maya Philips's article "The Narrative Experiment That Is the Marvel Cinematic Universe" that stands in contrast to Buckmaster's critical view and tries to appreciate the new narrative formula of Marvel Studios' productions by comparing them to the formula of a soap opera: "*Unlike most novels and films, soaps are all middle*, he [Rick Altman – T.Ż.] writes. Despite their length, soaps tend to feel hemmed in. […]. Both soaps and fantasies may contain traditional plot-based narratives with moments of *resolution or convergence*, but, in a sense, such moments aren't the point. It's the fictional world that's most alluring" (Phillips, 2019). Philips uses the same argument that could be found in Wolk's opinion about superhero comics – the key thing here is not to regard an individual text (film or comic) as a separate, self-dependent whole but rather as a part of a bigger structure than never truly stays absolutely self-contained and thematically closed. The lack of any 'finality', 'resolution' or 'efficiency' (as Buckmaster suggested) may once again be seen as something unfit for a long-term exploration within the classic narrative model of cinema but, as the Marvel Cinematic Universe proves, it seemingly happens to be the most attractive form of film storytelling right now. One could argue that maybe we shouldn't perceive these never-ending stories as narrative systems but only as secondary 'attractions' within superhero-based productions with the main focus aimed at the characters, their relationships and evolution between the series of films to be even. As for the narrative conditions of superhero films it is not accurate to treat them as plot-less or plot-ignoring (narrative-ignoring) artefacts but rather as plot-altering cases where

the 'story' or 'narrative' may be seen as schematic, fractured, unfinished or insufficient but nevertheless this particular notion comes from the organic nature of superhero stories. A superhero story (as a film or a comic book) can be regarded as incomplete in terms of narrative efficiency but the thing is that a superhero story can never truly achieve this efficiency and frankly this is not the goal of these stories at all. The 'pleasure' of superhero narrative comes from the idea that it can never be finished or resolved in any way – therefore any new story is only a set-up to another arc, any new arc leads to a new crisis or crossover, any new crossover results in shifts in the status of individual characters or their stories and any narrative shifts may cause the start of alternate stories or interpretations of the same motif etc. The elements of 'variation' and 'reliance' appears then as the core ingredients of the superhero theme. As a result, the process of exploring the interconnectiveness and alternate routes within the superhero narratives stand as the major 'attractions' of superhero-related productions for both their rich potential of narrative 'variations' and commercial immensity in selling these arcs. As Russell Backman concludes about the nature of superhero serialised narratives: "Serialization pulls the alternate direction toward continual and perpetual action – the maintenance of some stable traits over the extended period of time. The balance between cataclysm and continuity has led superhero comics again and again toward the development of narrative tropes of revision, opening their narrative worlds up to maximal contingency" (Backman, 2014, p. 203).

From Infinite Earths to Infinite Narratives

Until now superhero films seemed to follow mostly the 'continuity' element from Backman's approach, focusing on the superhero-related narrative concept of a fictional universe. Right now – following the global success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – the idea of a 'universe' (a set of individual stories/films correlated within the bigger fictional world and intertextual narrative structure) has become the main 'novelty' of superhero films that is inspiring many other comic and non-comic related franchises to build theirs own universe-like systems (Żaglewski, 2017). The main 'profit' that comes from a 'universe-al' approach – especially within the superhero narratives – is the aforementioned feel of continuity that shapes the set of superheroe titles (as individual and incomplete as they are) into their final form and meaning that depends on intertextual 'flow' of characters, plots and diegetic consequences. After a decade of dominance by the universe-centred sort of comic book films it would be efficient, however, to look at a second category referred to by Backman, which is 'cataclysm', that stands for the inevitable points of diversification and inconsistency within superhero narratives that lead directly towards the concept of a diegetic and narrative multiverse (as a more elabo-

rate form of a universe dependent on creating alternate timelines and interpretations). As Backman himself explains: "Marie-Laure Ryan, a narratologist writing about multiple universe fiction, describes the type of storytelling that *What If? e*ngages in as the exploration of counterfactual narrative circumstances. […]. Ryan relates multiple universes to modal logic, which is not concerned with the truth of any statement, but only with the truth conditions of counterfactual statements. For both modal logic and narratives about alternate timelines, internal consistency rather than actual occurrence determines validity" (Backman, 2014, p. 207). The second comic book-related 'novelty' in shaping the general conditions of popular storytelling would be a strategy of synchronic stratification of characters, storylines or even whole fictional manifestations of a given universe as well as its meanings and turning points. In other words, within the tradition of superhero comic books there exists an infinite amount of 'counterfactual' interpretations of a given element – some that drastically re-shape the common concept about a certain hero or their adventures and some others that just explore the 'what if?' approach, where a given artist can propose a contradictory vision of well-known stories.

This overwhelming spread of possible superhero narratives – not only heading towards widening the horizontal timeline but also its vertical 'alternations' – can surely be regarded as one of the most ambitious in the history of popular fiction or even, as Nick J. Lowe suggests, "the largest narrative constructions in human history (exceeding, for example, the vast body of myth, legend and story that underlies Greek and Latin literature)" (Kaveney, 2006, p. 25). The scale of the superhero multiverse structure is most accurately manifested in one of the original graphic stories that actually explored this idea in comics – namely in *Crisis on Infinite Earths* written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by George Pérez in 1985. This 12-issue storyline presented by DC Comics was basically the very first use of a multiverse concept based on clashing all the former iterations of DC Comics' characters (living on different 'Earths' that represented different moments in DC history) in the form of a 'narrative orgy' (Darius, 2015). that ended up in spawning a new, consistent DC universe (at least until another multiverse-related conflict). The historical meaning of *Crisis on Infinite Earths* came from the very first recognition of any existing iteration of a given character (or narrative *Earth*) as valid and possibly still narratively 'useful' to explore some 'counterfactual' ideas about DC's tradition. By turning into a 'multilayered' version of a diegetic world both DC and Marvel – that also followed this trend to sustain its own multiverse – actually proposed a very interesting experiment in serialised storytelling that surely complicated the traditional 'linear' narrative. Superhero stories had now become not only timely but also narratively 'infinite' since the idea of a 'definitive' interpretation was no longer present nor canonical. As for the strictly narrative consequences of

such an approach, superhero storytelling turned from serialised patterns towards the 'quantum seriality' or 'quantum narrative'. Such is the suggestion of William Proctor who proposed to define 'quantum seriality' as "a labyrinthine narrative network that incorporates a wide array of transmedia expressions into an ontological order that rationalizes divergent textualities as part and parcel of the same story system that canonizes all […] creations" (Proctor, 2017, p. 320). By taking inspiration from quantum physics and translating its foundations for the purpose of narrative research, Proctor assumes that heading towards the multiverse structure in fiction results in perceiving both DC and Marvel superhero storyworlds as hyperdiegetic creations where every action or event can lead to a number of 'quantum events' that "creates an alternative timeline or world that continues along its own pathway through time and space, completely cut off from the parallel line" (Ibidem, p. 321). A quantum narrative would be then a complete reevaluation of film narrative's 'efficiency' (as Buckmaster lamented) towards an even more radical undermining of the 'finality', 'completeness' or self-independence of a single realisation (namely a comic book or a comic book-based film). It is crucial however to look here at these new possibilities not as a perversion or nullification of a film's narrative system but as a chance to actually widen its conditions by using 'altering' mechanisms. It should highlight once again the new ideas, inspired by superhero comics, about a narrative's 'resolution' or 'efficiency' as a result of intertextual collaboration between the 'quantum paths' of cinematic franchises.

Introducing quantum seriality in modern superhero films

The idea of quantum narrative was fully introduced in the 2019 blockbuster *Avengers: Endgame* where the very concept of a multiverse and a multiverse-related narrative was introduced as a crucial part of the film's plot. The latest Avengers feature deals with a time travel concept which is used as a solution to the catastrophic events of a former film (*Avengers: Infinity War*) that ended up with a massive reduction of all living beings in the universe down to 50 percent. The main goal for human survivors in *Endgame* is to go back in time not to simply stop or erase the apocalyptic moment but rather to gather all the mystical artefacts (called Infinity Stones) from the past to undo the decimation in the present. As one of the film's humorous scene explains, our popular knowledge about time travel and 'solving the problems of the future by reshaping the past' (as presented in *Back to the Future*, *The Terminator* or numerous episodes of the *Star Trek* series) is wrong and does not correlate with the quantum mechanics of possible time travelling-tools. On a few occasions within the *Avengers: Endgame* storyline the creators are clearly introducing the idea of an 'infinite multiverse' which is a direct response to the Avengers' mission to find the Infinity Stones. As one of

the characters explains in the movie: "Think about it: If you travel to the past, that past becomes your future, and your former present becomes the past! Which can't now be changed by your new future!", and the other continues: "The Infinity Stones create what you experience as the flow of time. Remove one stone and that flow splits. Now, this may benefit your reality, but my new one, not so much. In this new branch reality, without our chief weapon against the forces of darkness, our world would be over-run and millions would suffer". As a result *Avengers: Endgame* ends not only with the final triumph of Earth's superheroes but also with open possibilities to explore new branches of time (realities) that were shaped after the film's 'time heist'. Finally, the rather coherent and unified timeline of the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise splits into at least four new possible narrative paths – each of them caused by some changes that happened in MCU's 'history' through the events of *Endgame*. It was quickly announced that this new possibility in storytelling will be explored by further productions from Marvel Studios like the *Loki* series (developed as an exclusive mini-series for the new Disney+ streaming platform) that will continue the time/narrative branch caused by *Endgame* where the titular anti-hero changes the continuity of MCU's former timeline (presented by the movies) and leads to an 'alternate' look at milestone events or never-before-seen backstage of Marvel's cinematic mythology.

When it comes to pointing out the leader in embracing a 'multiverse' narrative within cinematic productions the title should be taken by *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* animated feature (premiered in December 2018) that went even further with familiarising cinema-goers with the comic-related concept. As far as the story goes *Into the Spider-verse* concentrates on Miles Morales – a young boy who happens to gain spider-like powers (just like the 'original' Spider-Man – Peter Parker) and has to deal with the heritage of 'with great powers comes great responsibility'. The innovative status of the film comes with the idea of clashing Miles with other iterations of Spider-Man from other narrative universes. And so Morales teams-up with Spider-Gwen (a teenage female Spider-Man), Spider-Noir (a Spider-Man character inspired by the film noir aesthetic and living in the period of World War II), Penny Parker (an anime-themed young girl from the future with a spider-robot as her sidekick), Spider-Ham (a Looney Tunes-like 'cartoon character' in a spider costume from a Looney Tunes-like universe) and finally Peter B. Parker (a much more 'classic' version of the original Spider-Man but still a rather 'unexpected' variation of this hero with a mid-life crisis). All of these strange versions of the Spider-Man idea come together through a strange, realities-converging machine designed by the film's main antagonist who finally learns that there are possibly infinite manifestations of the web-slinging hero. Although it is rather an innovative aspect in presenting a superhero fantasy by

adapting some crucial elements from Dan Slott's *Spider-verse* comic book event from 2014, it is interesting to look at this particular production as yet another attempt to dramatically broaden the idea of a cinematic superhero-led feature. Like Terrence Wandtke accurately explains: "Like oral culture, superhero stories maintain a basic core for their characters but retell (or redraw) their stories over time and produce many variants. As Walter Ong, Marshall McLuhan, and more recently John Miles Foley have argued, the electronic and digital ages do not engage in this anti-canonical practice organically but self-consciously: perhaps preferring the recent to the original but definitely telling stories that place variants alongside each other. […]. Moreover, the film is a quantum leap beyond fan fiction alternative arcs and into the digital age embrace of narrative and narratology based on variants" (Yanes, 2019). As Wandtke suggests, *Into the spider-verse*"serves as a 'graphic' introduction to the mass audience of a 'quantum seriality' by underlining the fact that there is no such thing as a 'definitive' interpretation within superhero stories and 'every story matters' in terms of creating a variation-based multiverse of concepts and themes. Both *Avengers: Endgame* and *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* are seemingly circling around the multiverse-al quantum narrative to illustrate that there are endless narrative 'paths' to explore, not only as follow-ups or spin-offs to the dominant storylines but also (or perhaps, above all) as alternate/counter-factual routes to explore by an individual artist who wants to challenge the 'canonical' interpretations to, as Martin Flanagan observes, "handle all the problems posed by a Multiverse, not as a pressure, or a threat of alienating spectators, but as a vein of narrative to be celebrated" (Yanes, 2019).

Future instalments of quantum seriality

As it seems, after the financial and critical success of recent superhero films that endure the idea of a narrative multiverse (in *Avengers: Endgame*, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* and *Joker*) it would be reasonable to assume that in the following years the quantum narrative will become more prominent within the area of comic book cinema. The terms of quantum seriality will definitely have to change the general conditions of superhero film storytelling techniques that were established, until now, mostly by the universe-concentrated methods. Moving towards the multiverse concept in cinema – especially for the superhero franchises – will surely lead to at least three main 'novelties' for superhero-based cinema that can be listed as:

- More 'loose' connections between the films within a given universe/multiverse;

- A chance to introduce a more 'authorial' approach to superhero films by engaging creators interested in 'playing' with the superhero genre and not developing long-term narratives;
- A proper introduction to the idea of 'cinematic imprints' (following the comic books' imprints editions) regarded as an independent line of comic book films dedicated to serve 'alternative' storylines and portrayals.

All three components above can be seen as a natural evolution for recent superhero films, often criticised for being too preservative or box office-orientated to actually bring some interesting variations of comic book characters. Besides few exceptions – such as Christopher Nolan's "Dark Knight Trilogy" – comic book films (especially in the era of Marvel's dominance) seemingly stuck in predictable forms of repeatable narratives surrounding the 'universe' approach of intersected titles and between-film crossovers. With this new approach on the horizon both Marvel and DC-related film content can actually move towards more complicated and diversified readings of their characters without harming the 'core' universe of both companies (that stands only as a starting point for infinite alterations). And so, it wouldn't be too hard to imagine such unlikeable projects as Quentin Tarantino's *Luke Cage* film that has been hinted at many times before by the director of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* as his comic book dream project. As Tarantino himself admitted, the main reason why he stands outside the superhero-craze in Hollywood is the fact that he is not interested in developing a 'shared' storyline with any larger narrative construct (like the Marvel Cinematic Universe). Instead, his vision for *Luke Cage* was constantly referred to as a strongly 'authorial' approach that embraces the comic book roots of the character that dives into the 70s and the blaxploitation aesthetic. According to Tarantino the reason why he wasn't considered before as a 'natural' choice for the *Luke Cage* cinematic feature is: "Well, frankly, to tell you the truth, I might be one of the pains in their asses because I love the way the character was presented so much in the 70s. I'm not really that open to a rethinking on who he was. I just think that first issue, that original issue… was so good, and it was really Marvel's attempt to try to do a blaxploitation movie vibe as one of their superhero comics. And I thought they nailed it. Absolutely nailed it. So, just take that Issue 1 and put it in script form and do that. The Luke Cage: Hero for Hire era… that's the era" (Fitzpatrick, 2019). With this new multiverse-based way of planning comic book films such a project like the 70s Jackie Brown-themed *Luke Cage* is surely much more likely to happen by grabbing a director like Tarantino and involving him in the comic book franchise without, however, any further attachments to the sequels or crossovers.

A multiverse's quantum narrative strategy can be seen in fact as a 'rescue plan' for these franchises that failed to establish a fully-functioning universe structure in their pursuit of following the success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Such is the case of the so called DC Extended Universe – a cinematic equivalent to the DC Comic series – managed by Warner Bros. film studio. After a critically unsuccessful run of a few initial DCEU productions – like *Man of Steel* (dir. Z. Snyder, 2013), *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (dir. Z. Snyder, 2016), *Suicide Squad* (dir. D. Ayer, 2016) and *Justice League* (dir. Z. Snyder, 2017) – it became obvious for the studio's executives that their present creative approach (in simply copying MCU's 'interconnected' set of universe-dedicated movies) was not working at all and a fresh approach needed to be taken. After the disastrous – both financially and artistically – reception of *Justice League* as an unsatisfying culmination of DCEU's Marvel-like plan there came a new installation within this franchise that completely rejected the former, 'Marvel-wannabe' status. James Wan's *Aquaman* (2018) and David F. Sandberg's *Shazam* (2019) proved to be an engaging and promising restart for DC's films by manifesting strongly the new 'philosophy' of the studio to avoid a Marvel-based strategy to build a coherent universe and instead to propose much more self-dependent and stand-alone features. The newest entry to this DCEU 'unfastened' universe that transparently reaches towards a multiverse logic in serving 'authorial' stories and not just 'parts' or spin-offs to a bigger narrative is Todd Phillips's *Joker*. This strange yet original interpretation of one of the most iconic villains in the history of comics was seemingly planned from the very beginning as a strictly 'individual' production that doesn't need any connections to a 'main' cinematic universe but instead wants to be a separate look at a character that may still appear in different form (and with a different actor) within the 'core' line of movies. As the director of the movie explains: "It's not really connected to that [DC Movie] Universe. And it was really intentionally not. I mean the original idea when I went to [Warner Bros.] with the idea was not just about one movie, but about a label - sort of a side label to DC, where you can do these kind of character study, low-rent, low-budget movies, where you get a filmmaker to come in and do some deep dive into a character. So it was never meant to connect, so I don't see it connecting to anything in the future. I think this is just this movie, you know?" (Chichizola, 2019). Being the latest – and the most radical – representative of the quantum narrative within a comic book film line *Joker* may actually foreshadow the future trend for this type of movie to actually find a balance between the universe/'everything-is-connected' model and the 'label' of films that doesn't have any universe-al restrictions or relations by being just an individual 'variation' about a character or story. With some interesting new projects coming from DCEU –

like *Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)* (dir. C. Yan, 2020), *The Suicide Squad* (dir. J. Gunn, 2021), *Wonder Woman 1984* (dir. P. Jenkins, 2020) and *The Batman* (dir. M. Reeves, 2021) – it is not difficult to imagine all of these films as yet another experiment in serving more independent manifestations from acclaimed directors and not just bulding-blocks in the 'universe' scheme. And maybe with these titles on the horizon DCEU is taking a first step towards the birth of the very first proper cinematic version of the comic book imprint strategy which Todd Phillips himself pitched directly as a reflection of DC comics' Black line of more 'mature' graphic superhero content: "I said *Let Joker be the first, then let's get fucking great filmmakers to come in. Instead of trying to live in the shadow of the beast (MCU), let's do something they can't.* This included $30 million budgets, no CGI hoopla. *Let's strip that all away. It'll be liberating*" (Scarnato, 2019).

By adapting the 'imprint' philosophy this new line of 'multiverse-al' comic book films should follow, the original publishing strategy which is often referred to as subsidiaries of a given comic company which focuses on a specified group of readers and specific (mostly adult/violent) topics and visions of a certain character. Historically the most significant comic book imprint – namely DC's so called *Elseworlds* line of comics that started in 1989 – was planned from the very beginning as a line of titles which were supposed to give a concrete artist the chance to experiment or to break the most 'canonical' foundations of DC'c icons. And so, the very first titles within *Elseworlds* offer – such as *Batman: Gotham by Gaslight* by Brian Augustyn and Mike Mignola, *Superman: Red Son* by Mike Millar and Dave Johnson/Andrew Robinson/Walden Wong/Killian Plunkett, *Wonder Woman: Amazonia* by William Messner-Loebs and Phil Winslade or *Batman: Nosferatu* by Jean-Marc Lofficier, Randy Lofficier and Ted McKeever – brilliantly illustrate this 'separated' and 'unrestricted' approach towards the classic heroes by portraying Batman as a Victorian vigilante fighting Jack the Ripper (in *Gotham by Gaslight*), Superman as a Soviet champion (in *Red Son*), Wonder Woman in a XIXth Century setting (in *Amazonia*) and Batman once again as no less than a proper vampire-character in F.W. Murnau's expressionistic aesthetic. The 'imprint' approach – just as in *Elseworlds* instalments – gives an unprecedented freedom to the artist to re-establish even the most 'sacred' interpretations of comic book heroes which actually ensures a vitality and recurring interest in these narratives. By following the success of the *Joker* it is rather safe to assume that through a rising fatigue of a 'classical' universe approach in comic book cinema both Marvel's and DC's cinematic worlds will have to look at these quantum, independent imprint-inspired narratives that will explore alternative or counterfactual routes of established film storylines. As a result this newly-established form of 'quantum' superhero cinema could be perceived as a not necessarily linear

(narratively more vertical than horizontal) version of David Bordwell's 'forking-path' structure (executed within the meta-diegetic structure of several 'entangled' titles) where a single, counter-factual narrative can bring an altering perception/meaning for a given element of a general 'universe' system. Such is the case of the *Joker* which is not merely an origin story of the famous villain (served as a classical franchise-driven spin-off) but it is rather a separate voice for the DC cinematic universe – the one that doesn't connect with any previous or further instalment but one that serves as an alternative image of a certain part of this multi-layered universe. With these new ways of reviving a franchise which – once again – shouldn't be treated only as commercial exploitation but also as a never before seen opportunity to re-establish superhero titles accordingly to the uncompromising tastes of gifted creators it can be predicted that superhero-inspired cinema will not meet its end in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion: Altering the narratives or alienating the viewers?

Talking about the predictable dominance of superhero cinema within the landscape of modern film production may once again sound almost apocalyptic to observers like Luke Buckmaster who stand for bringing back the classical narrative condition of popular films. By doing so all the negative voices about the "Avengers effect" commonly circle around its negative impact on spectators and their lack of ability to appreciate any non-superhero related content which leads to some bizarre conclusions about 'fanboy-ization' of film literacy and criticism. As Buckmaster himself tries to diagnose: "Marvel Comic Universe superfans are among the most passionate readers of film criticism in the current times. Whereas some readers (a diminishing number, it feels like) enjoy reading reviews that offer a different opinion to their own, understanding that this is a valuable exercise and not some kind of poison, the vast majority of MCU superfans consume reviews in order to have their own opinions validated, or to render the critic as a kind of cartoon villain to rebel against – their own (much less intimidating) Thanos" (Buckmaster, 2019). So are superhero movies really just reducing film discourse to its very primal 'like/dislike' discussion and the whole film experience to a primitive struggle between comic fan subculture and ignorant critics? Not exactly, but they are surely changing the way a film is 'consumed' by reaching once again towards the area of the original comics.

Amongst many concerns that Douglas Wolk underlines about the 'non-coherent' nature of superhero comics is the case of their reception – namely a universe-determined need to constantly leap between the titles, search for the narrative connections and build final meanings on the bricks of storylines

left within many stories – we do appreciate the 'work' of comic readers that actually engage strictly intertextual 'powers' to move between the storylines, unify narratives and always broaden the horizon of universe's/multiverse's landscape. Comic book 'superreaders' (as Wolk refers to them) are now becoming 'superviewers' since the very same kind of textual 'lecture' is invading popular cinema through superhero films that paradoxically demands much more 'awareness' in the department of diegetic consequences and connections. As Justin Mack accurately sums up, modern superhero franchises illustrates the growing role of the viewer's 'hyperconsciousness' reflecting the presence of a given superhero character between many media iterations and eventually leading to "demonstrate an awareness of their antecedents and their rivals in the marketplace" (Mack, 2014, p. 140). A quantum narrative-approach, that may be seen as an insolvable complication for the common viewer to actually discriminate against the simultaneous iterations of the same figures, should be perceived then as a direct reflection of modern transmedia popular culture for which the idea of 'variability" – as Terence Wandtke observed about *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* – is a dominant element. Instead of 'alienating the viewers' as a result of a multiverse-al approach with its quantum storylines maybe it would be more efficient to look once again at the field of comic book culture where the growing line of 'alternate' narrative routes actually doesn't really reject the readers but encourages them to more conscious, 'selective' reading by following specific iterations or individual reading paths to actually understand recent events in a given universe/multiverse.Nevertheless all of the issues highlighted in this article could once again be seen as a direct 'threat' to the classic narrative system of cinema by following the ideas of 'incompleteness', 'variability', 'counterfactuality' and searching for a neverending 'variation'. However, as I have tried to present, the 'comic book' invasion upon popular cinema can also be regarded as a fresh opportunity to actually widen the narrative tools of film by using this strictly 'comic book' idea of quantum multiverses to open the predictable forms of cinematic franchises. The inevitable 'superhero-isation' of cinema that can be seen today and that will probably endure for the following years may finally result in yet another revolutionary milestone for the cinematic experience by moving it into an intriguing transmedia form that combines film and graphic narrative. And when eventually a multiverse logic reaches its narrative peak in cinema there are other concepts of superhero narratives that are waiting to be adapted, such as the megaverse, metaverse, omniverse etc. One way or another, we are observing just a starting point for the evolution of superhero film.

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Infinite Narratives on Infinite Earths. The evolution of modern superhero films

After almost 20 years of a succesful run of superhero films it seems that we are now entering into the fully-developed format of this kind of cinema. Through films like "*Avengers: Infinity War*", "*Logan*" or "*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse*" the general audience all over the world is becoming familiar with strictly comics-based forms and ideas like retcon, crossover or the multiverse paradigm (that serves as a model for 'infinite' superhero narratives and limitless iterations of characters). Despite the fact that popular cinema had already introduced some of these elements before – like the crossover aesthetic in Universal Studios' horrors from the 1930s and 1940s – modern superhero cinematic universes can be seen as much more demanding productions for the viewers in terms of following strongly comic books-based modes of the 'multiverse-centric' perception. As a result we can right now observe an emerging process of turning even the non-superheroic popular cinematic features into very 'comic book-y' narrative patterns. In this article I'm interested in analyzing the most recent cases of superhero cinema by looking at some specific titles as a way of introducing the narrative systems and tools from superhero comics into cinema.

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Showing the Complexity of the Simple – The Art -puzzle of Hong Sang-soo

Probably the first two words that comes to mind when one looks at the works of renowned South Korean film director, Hong Sang-soo, are simplicity and confusion. He has shown deep interest in complex (or some might say: confusing) storytelling since the beginning of his career, and this interest is still clearly detectable in his work up until today. Since modernist art cinema has an affinity with unconventional narrative structures, it is not surprising that an *auteur* like Hong is attracted to complexity. What is significant is his consistency in developing a personal, and sometimes very experimental concept in relation to complex narratives, puzzle structures and modular forms. He often uses extreme variants of certain stylistic devices in order to challenge conventions of film perception and creates experimental lessons in narrative construction that borders being didactic.

In a way Hong's (often black and white) films are the analog answer to the challenges of digital culture, and the modernist art cinema version of puzzle films and database narratives. In my article I intend to demonstrate the very Hongian strategy of producing *auteurist* puzzle films by creating confusion on the perceptive and narrative level.

Producing puzzle

A certain trend of films that use innovative narrative techniques have become more and more visible in international film culture since the mid-1990s. The phenomenon has many names in the scholarly literature from puzzle films, to mind-game cinema, from complex storytelling to database narrative. (The starting point of the trend is interesting here because it coincides with the launch of Hong's film making career – his first film, *The Day a Pig Fell into a Well* [*Doejiga umul-e ppajin nal*], which premiered in 1996.)[1]

The origins of the narrative strategies that characterize these films are explained from many different perspectives in scholarly literature, and are very often connected to the new era of the digital image, the digital culture of databases, and the overall interactive character of digital culture. When summarizing the features of these films Warren Buckland writes: "A puzzle plot is intricate in the sense that the arrangement of events is not just complex, but complicated and perplexing; the events are not simply interwoven, but entangled." (2009, p. 3). When writing about "mind-game films" Thomas Elsaesser further notes that these works have the common feature of having delight in disorienting and misleading their spectators (2009, p. 15). Considering their intriguing plot structures it is not surprising that the early films of Hong Sang-soo attracted the attention of scholars interested in the trend – a text about his debut movie (*The Day a Pig Fell into a Well*) was included in one of the early collections of essays devoted exclusively to the trend of puzzle films (Detelbaum, 2009).

What we also have to note in the case of such *auteurs* as Hong, is that the presence of puzzle structure in their work must also be understood historically, in the framework of art-cinema's style and narrative structure. When Buckland states that "[t]he puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events. Puzzle film constitutes a post-classical mode of filmic representation and experience not delimited by mimesis" (2009, p. 5) – the "post-classical" can be related to the two concepts formulated by David Bordwell in connection to narrative strategies that are "post", or rather "beyond" the classical mode: art-cinema narration and parametric narration (Bordwell, 1985).

The question of whether the features spotted in Hong's films connect them to the puzzle film trend or plainly define them as art-cinema, will always linger around in studies analyzing his works. Nevertheless, I believe that since the con-

[1] When referring to Hong's films I use the English titles and the romanization of Korean titles according to the Korean Film Database maintained by the Korean Film Archive: www.kmdb.or.kr.

nection is evident it is worth taking it as an opportunity to understand the works of Hong more, on the one hand, and the formal and historical embeddedness of the puzzle trend in art-film history on the other.

Hong's character as an art-cinema *auteur* also makes place for some thinking about a factor in relation to puzzle films that Elsaesser claimed to be usually missing from scholarly approaches. He stated that theoretical interest mainly concentrates on the narratologist approach, that is interested only in definitions and general rules of how these films operate and create unique effects. This approach is not interested in interpretation. The other dominant approach, however, what Elsaesser calls "high theory and social commentary", are only interested in interpretation and "promote the cinema – across such films – as examples of »doing philosophy«" (2009, pp. 35–36). In Elseasser's opinion what is missing is the consideration of the material conditions and economic implications that might play an important role in the proliferation of this kind of cinema. Hollywood has its own (economically founded) logic to use the format (pp. 36–38), and also has the international film festival circuit of which Hong's films are obviously a part. His filmmaking is based on a unique working practice that not only provides greater (economic, artistic) independence and freedom for the author, but at the same time is sculpted as a structure that is able to deliver high complexity at a low production cost. Hong always works with very limited resources – very simple locations, a limited number of characters, a rather simple story, and an extremely small staff of seven-eight people – that gives him maximum freedom in financial terms. The intriguing, complex effects are always created through (easy to produce, simple) repetitions, and repetitions with variations. His films are art-cinema versions of what Allan Cameron calls modular narrative: "'Modular narrative' and 'database narrative' are terms applicable to narratives that foreground the relationship between the temporality of the story and the order of its telling" (2008, p. 1). It can be said that the constant use of modular narrative is one of the major features of Hong's authorial style. The combination of a very cheap and flexible production style with his modular thinking has been developed into a flexible mode of writing, an *écriture* that is constantly taking shape on the spot by way of the (digital) *caméra stylo* in the real Astrucian sense (Astruc, 1948).

In his first three films before the *Turning Gate* (*Saeng-hwal-eui Bal-gyun*, 2002) Hong used to write long scripts but then switched to start production with only a treatment and write the day's script every morning on location (Huh, 2007, p. 42). His very flexible and quick method led to an increasing number of films

being produced per year, especially after 2008 when he switched to shooting digital – he sometimes makes two, or even three films per year.[2]

Hong spoke about his production method in detail at the 55th New York Film Festival in 2017 (Directors Dialogue). His average film has a budget under 100 000 USD, shooting usually takes two or three weeks[3].Actual preparations of a film project start one month before shooting starts: Hong chooses the locations and actors, and reserves them for the planned shooting period without knowing what exactly he will shoot. One week before shooting he starts to concentrate on themes, topics and ideas that might be included in the film, but leaves these ideas floating freely without deciding on any fixed concept. One day before shooting he makes up his mind and informs the owner of the location where the next day's shoot will take place, and the actors that should be on location the following day. On the first day of shooting Hong writes the first day's script (three or four scenes) between 4 a.m. and 9 a.m., then the actors start memorizing the first scene for one hour, and shooting starts at around 10 a.m. This process is repeated every day during shooting.

In a way this method truly embodies the idea of a *camera stylo* as a flexible and personal tool of the filmmaker enabling him to create as freely in the context of the highly technical medium of film as a writer creates their story with a pen on paper. This process also invokes some connections to the phenomenon that Marsha Kinder calls database narrative: "Database narratives refers to narratives whose structure exposes or thematizes the dual processes of selection and combination that lie at the heart of all stories and that are crucial to language: the selection of particular data (characters, images, sounds, events) from a series of databases or paradigms, which are then combined to generate specific tales" (2002, p. 6). She also notes that this structure can be found in a wide range of European art films, experimental documentaries, and more mainstream independents such as Groundhog Day, Pulp Fiction, Run Lola Run, and the like. "Such narratives reveal the arbitrariness of the particular choices made, and the possibility of making other combinations which would create alternative stories" (p. 6).

The Hongian "database" of locations and actors is created one month before shooting starts, then a database of ideas are collected during the week before shooting starts, and finally this pre-constituted collection of elements are combined day after day, on the spot during the shooting process: the result usually is

[2] 2019 was the first year since 2008 when Hong did not make a film; he finished three in 2016, two in 2017, and one in 2018.

[3] During the opening titles of *Hotel by the River* voice over narration states: "the film was shot between January 29 and February 14, 2018".

a network of close similarities, repetitions and variations of spaces and actions. "People tell me that I make films about reality. They're wrong. I make films based on structures that I have thought up." – says Hong (Hartzell, Paquet).

This puzzle structure might be applied, on a more general, transtextual level, to the oeuvre of Hong Sang-soo as often happens in *auteur* cinema. Bordwell's remark applies not only to European films but Hong's oeuvre as well: "The force of the European art film lay in large measure in making not genre but the author's oeuvre the pertinent set of transtextual relations" (1985, p. 232).

Puzzled senses: perceptual reeducation

"The less you know, the more you see."[4]

The characteristics of art-cinema on many levels show similarities to the concept of the puzzle film structure. According to Bordwell's description, in art-cinema narration the syuzhet is less redundant than in classical cinema, gaps are permanent and suppressed, exposition is delayed and distributed, and narration is less generically motivated (1985, p. 205) – in general, understanding the story may require more effort. The parametric form goes even further and has more strong affinities towards the puzzle structure. Its alternative names such as "dialectical" and "permutational" (1985, p. 274) sound suggestive in this regard. Hong's style seems to fit into this category: in parametric form "the film's stylistic system creates patterns distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system. Film style may be organized and emphasized to a degree that makes it at least equal in importance to syuzhet patterns" (p. 275).

The main elements, – organization and emphasis – create this effect in most of Hong's films are the uncertain relation between shots (unmarked jumps in space and time between shots), unmarked switches to flashbacks and imaginary sequences. But most of the time these confusing occurrences take place in the context of very simple and realistic situations. We could say that Hong creates a feeling similar to surrealistic occurrences in Bunuel films meanwhile staying distinctly realistic.

What creates the uncomfortable and partly unrealistic feeling on the viewers part is the provocation the film's formal elements create. These films test the audience on a perceptual and cognitive level. Marshall Deutelbaum gives a very appropriate name to this strategy: "perceptual reeducation" (p. 208). Hong's whole oeuvre starts with a gesture that introduces in 80 seconds one of the major elements that will be present basically in all of the 23 full length features produced

[4] Jo Moon-kyeong, the director in *Hahaha* (*Hahaha*, 2010).

by Hong up until today. His debut film, *The Day a Pig Fell Into a Well* starts with an enigmatic soundtrack: under the title credits three different, unconnected soundbites can be heard. The first one is an announcer at a bus station that immediately evokes the space of a bus station and a possible story of traveling; the second is a completely mysterious sequence where a female voice lists enigmatic commands; and finally, the third part contains a screeching noise followed by the sound of foot steps and knocking on a door – at the same time modernist, inauspicious sounding music also can be heard. Right after the title credits all expectations created by the soundscape of the title credit are erased by a close up of a pretty fruitbush on a rooftop.

The film has four major characters whose parallel storylines are presented as consecutive plot sequences: the first part introduces the not so successful writer who has a married lover; the second is the sequence of a man's business trip to the countryside; the third is the story of a girl who works in a cinema and is in love with the writer; and finally there is the sequence of the married lover who turns out to be the wife of the businessman from the second sequence. The attentive viewer will recognize some 38 minutes into the film the repetition of the first sound bite from the title credits: during the journey of the businessman we hear the voice of the same announcer at a bus station. The sound of the strange commands will return some 63 minutes into the film when it turns out that the girl in the third sequence records voiceovers for videogames at a studio. And finally, the third soundbite with the screeching noise and the footsteps returns at 103 minutes in the fourth part, just before the dramatic revelation (that is visible only to the viewer and not to the character of the married lover, who came to the flat of the writer to look for him) that the writer and her young lover have been killed and their bodies are lying inside the flat. Hong plays with these sound bites just like he plays with the blocks of the story – building a carefully designed structure where the connecting pieces of the big picture are not necessarily arranged in a way that makes it easy to understand the connections and causes.

The film is a typical example of the delayed and distributed exposition where viewers are kept in the dark for a long time in relation to the exact causal connections of the events. For example, the second sequence of the businessman takes place between the 36th and 57th minutes of the film, but we have to wait till the 92th minute in the fourth sequence to see that the storylines of the married lover and the businessman meet, and we learn that they are actually husband and wife.

The exact timeline of the story is probably impossible to figure out on first viewing, even for a very attentive viewer. There are some verbal hints, but only the strategically, but not so demonstratively, placed wall calendars of each se-

quence are the ones that could help to figure out that the story starts some time in September and ends in November. The only date that probably can be easily recognized even on first viewing by way of a very visibly placed calendar is the date 26th of October, the writer's birthday. We learn this in the third sequence when the young lover buys a birthday present for the writer but in the evening finds him with the other woman in his flat. At this moment in the film (at around 76 minute), on the 26th of October in the story, three of the major characters' storylines meet spatially, and probably this is also the day the husband's business trip to the countryside starts.

The whole structure of the film amounts to a difficult memory test that is – I believe – impossible to fully comprehend on first viewing. The overall structure can be understood but spotting the sophisticated little details needs repeated viewings. On a second viewing one can easily recognize hidden repetitions and refrains: the writer and the husband had already briefly met in the first sequence; the first sequence actually ends with a shot where the writer and the man who later turns out to be his killer are in the same space; and the third sequence about the young lover ends with a shot where she makes love to the killer – it means that at the end of their respective episodes the writer and the young lover are both in the same space with the man who later turns out to be their killer, but this connection most probably remains hidden on the first viewing. The pieces of the puzzle are placed at great (temporal) distance from each other that makes it extremely difficult to match them together during the first viewing.

Although the four major sequences of the plot are clearly separated by shots of a dark screen, because of the loose connections and lack of redundancies the viewer is kept in constant limbo. Furthermore, in each sequence the editing technique from time to time makes it really difficult to decode even simple plot events. For example, at the beginning of the third episode when the married lover sets off to go and look for the writer at his home, a mysterious and slightly suspicious man is introduced in a few shots who seems to be following the woman to the taxi stand, he stands one step behind the woman in the last shot. After a cut, the taxi arrives with the woman inside and she realizes that her wallet is gone – probably the suspicious man had stolen it. This episode seems to have no function in the syuzhet, but here again comes to mind what Bordwell write about the role of stylistic elements in parametric form: "If a film's stylistic devices achieve prominence, and if they are organized according to more or less rigorous principles, independent of syuzhet needs, then we need not motivate style by appealing to thematic considerations" (p. 283). These elements are part of Hong's overall style that work not on a thematic level, but

play a part in the "perceptual reeducation" of the viewer, and as a commentary about cinematic representation.

Even though these editing and cutting methods keep the viewer on edge, an unmarked dream sequence – another constantly used stylistic devise throughout Hong's carrier – can always make the audience vigilant again. Such an episode is a central piece of the last sequence of the film in which the married lover dreams about her own funeral where all the major characters of the story come together. The scene not only foreshadows the tragic outcome of the film's story but also suggests that it is death (probably the death of the young child of the couple) that initially destroyed the marriage of the businessman and his wife.

In Hong's oeuvre, even when a film seems to have a rather conventional narrative style, unmarked dream sequences and repetitions still evoke a mysterious, puzzled feeling: in *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (*Nuguui ttaldo anin Haewon*, 2013) only unmarked dream sequences and constant repetitions create the feeling of a complicated narrative concept; *Our Sunhi* (*Uri Sunhi*, 2013) the constant repetition of certain elements of the narrative (dialogue, situations) causes the same feeling; in *Right Now, Wrong Then* (*Ji-geum-eun mat-go geu-ttae-neun teul-li-da*, 2015) the film repeats the same story twice with a different moral message, and its effect is partly created by the alertness of the viewer looking for differences and similarities between the two parts; in *Hotel by the River* (*Gang-byeon ho-tel*, 2018) it is the constantly repeated motif of falling asleep and waking up that makes the status of certain shots questionable and the narrative structure more ambiguous looking.

In all of these cases the attention of the spectator is sharpened by the mechanism that is a characteristic of art-film narration: "In general, as causal connections in the fabula are weakened, parallelisms come to the fore. The films sharpen character delineation by implementing us to compare agents, attitudes, and situations" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 207).

Although Hong's third film, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (*O, Sujeong!,* 2000) is one of the most striking memory tests for the audience – the amazingly complex and playful narrative labyrinth of the film is analyzed in detail by Marshall Deutelbaum (2005) – and one of the most complex time-puzzles of the oeuvre, these early films, and actually most of Hong's films, do not eliminate temporal linearity. The linear story line can be – with more or less difficulty – reconstructed, it is the gaps in plot structure created through misleading techniques of narration and cutting that confuse the audience. According to Deutelbaum these methods ultimately result in a strengthened realism: the film "presents viewers with a narrative whose uncertainties of meaning and mo-

tivation mirror the limits of understanding what viewers encounter in everyday reality" (2009, p. 214), and calls it "epistemological realism that asks them [the viewers] to ponder the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions, the extent of its validity, as well as its inevitable uncertainties" (2009, p. 215).

As mentioned earlier the puzzling methods that Hong uses are connected to strategies of parametric narration that sometimes subordinates the syuzhet to stylistic structures.

Parametric syuzhet "tends to be recognizable by its deformities. One symptom is an abnormal ellipticality. Causes and effects may be disjoined, major scenes may be omitted, duration may be skipped over. […] has an episodic construction that yields only glimpses of character psychology and presents unmarked excerpts from an indeterminate fabula duration. A contrary symptom is an abnormal repetitiveness […] the syuzhet is telling us too little too often, flattening big scenes and trivial gestures to the same level. Some filmmakers are notable for using both tactics." (Bordwell, 1985, p. 288). Bordwell mentions Ozu and Bresson as examples, and we can add Hong Sang-soo to the list. We have seen above that constant repetitions and variations are present in most of his films, but at the same time omissions and ellipses are also major stylistic features.

Hong uses a limited amount of formal elements in visual storytelling. He likes and often repeats ensemble shots of people sitting around tables eating and drinking (a group table shot)[5], shots that show two people from the side as facing each other at a table are also frequent. Camera movements are limited, the camera is often fixed – the fixed long take is a prominent feature[6]. Because of the limited range of the techniques used, when a new tool is introduced it makes a strong effect: *Tale of Cinema* (*Geuk-jang-jeon*, 2005) is a memorable moment of the oeuvre in this regard. Hong introduced two new stylistic features that had never been used before but became regular devices after this film: voice over narration, and the perplexing and ubiquitous use of the zoom lens.

Based on his last film, *Hotel by the River*, I also suspect that he is probably about to introduce a new device: the strategic use of slightly out of focus images. The film is a simple story about meetings between a poet, his two sons, and two women at a countryside hotel. Towards the end of the film, at a deeply symbolic moment when the poet is reading his poem about a mysterious boy to the two women, shots of a young man working at a gas station appear on the screen.

[5] Detailed discussion of one of the group table shots of *Virgin Stripped Bare by her Bachelors* can be found in: Bordwell, 2005. pp. 3–7; Raymond, 2015, pp. 196–217.

[6] Raymond's article 'Two-Shots and Group Shots' contains detailed analysis of shot length throughout Hong's career.

First, we see totals of the gas station slightly out of focus, then a medium shot of a man in which he is clearly out of focus. At the closing shot of the film, after we have been informed about the death of the main character (the poet), we see the two women sleeping, while the image slightly falls out of focus and a film ends. Considering the sparse palette of Hong's stylistic devices, the appearance of such a tool at a very significant moment in the film always makes a strong effect – especially for viewers who follow the developments in Hong's films regularly. The use of these out of focus images at the end create a mysterious coda that urges the viewer to reorganize their interpretation of the film, and creates the usual airy feeling that there must be a lot more hidden under the cunningly simple surface. It is similar to what Elsaesser wrote about mind-game films: "the spectator's own meaning-making activity involves constant retroactive revision, new reality-checks, displacements and reorganization not only of temporal sequence, but of mental space" (2009, p. 21). But it is also a symptom of the minimalist parametric strategy that is present in the films of Ozu, Mizoguchi, Bresson, and also Hong: sparse parametric strategy "are often seen as creating mysterious and mystical films. It is as if a self-sustaining style evokes, on its edges, elusive phantoms of connotation, as the viewer tries out one signification after another on the impassive structure. The recognition of order triggers a search for meaning" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 298).

Puzzlingly simple: lessons in narration

"Naught shall go ill when you find your mate."[7]

When defining puzzle films Warren Buckland states: "the complexity of puzzle films operates on two levels: narrative and narration. It emphasizes the complex telling (plot, narration) of a simple or complex story (narrative)" (2009, p. 6). Hong's specialty is to tell an extremely simple story (men want women) either in a complex or in a confusing way. As shown above, the confusion is often created by those techniques that target the audience's perceptual conventions. It is obvious from the start of his career that on a thematic level Hong was probably interested exclusively in romantic relationships between men and women, meanwhile he is obsessed with the creation of as many different narrative structures as possible to tell compelling stories about this eternal topic.

From his early films one of his main obsessions has been to interpret simple love stories by creating intriguing episodic structures by reorganizing the plot into, sometimes mechanical, structures that go against easy and conventional

[7] Written insert/chapter title in *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors.*

understanding. Films such as *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* are proof that he is "less interested in dramatic structure than a pattern" (Bordwell, 2007, p. 24). While the film suggests that it repeats the same story from two points of view (a man's and a woman's) and, by way of seemingly mechanical numbering of episodes, suggests that we see the same time periods and the same events differently in the repetition because of the different points of view and differing memories of the two characters, it seems that – as Marshall Deutelbaum convincingly argues (2005) – that is not the case, and actually almost the whole plot can be rearranged into a linear storyline without the need of interpreting the repeated episodes as different interpretations of the same event from different points of view. But again, on first viewing it is impossible to fully understand the operations of the extremely complex structure that seems to be a puzzle created by an engineer. Such patterns and geometric models of narration are so evident in Hong's films, that Bordwell even labeled the phenomena "geometric model of story-telling" (2007, p. 24).

Elsaesser also notes that in mind-game films "the most intriguing and innovative feature is this insistence on temporality as a separate dimension of consciousness and identity, the play on nonlinear sequence or inverted causality, on chance and contingency, on synchronicity and simultaneity and their effects on characters, agency, and human relations: we are in worlds that often look just like ours, but where multiple time-lines coexist, where the narrative engenders its own loops or Möbius strips" (2009, p. 21). Even if plots ultimately can be "solved" and rearranged into a linear storyline, as is possible in many of Hong's films, the complicated temporality that the viewer experiences, has the above mentioned effect on characters, agency, and human relations – for Hong the puzzle structure becomes the interpretative tool for understanding human relations. All of Hong's stories are about rather simple male-female relationships and desires, and evidence the crux of the art films so that "its attempt to pronounce judgments upon modern life and la condition humaine, depends upon its formal organization" (Bordwell, 1985, p. 207).

Thanks to the fragmentary structure of the plot in most of Hong's films, his characters' psychological motivation is also part of the mystery created by the unusual structure. There is a film that seems to be a demonstrative exercise in how to deconstruct one of the most important building blocks of a narrative: the coherence of a character. As *The Day a Pig Fell into a Well* and *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* can be seen as exercises in deconstructing temporal structure of a narrative, *Yourself and Yours* (*Dang-sin-ja-sin-gwa dang-si-nui geot*, 2016) seems to be an exercise in deconstructing the concept of a coherent character in

a narrative structure. This film's love story develops further the usual tricks of unmarked dream and imagination sequences that constantly keeps narrative reality in question. This time Hong even creates spatial continuity between reality and imagination: inside the same shot the film switches between narrative reality and imagination by camera movement only. However, the main puzzle feature, the whole structure of the plot is built around, is the complete deconstruction of the coherence of the female character who is the object of many male characters' desire in the film. During repeated encounters the girl seems not to recognize a man but provides the explanation that the man is mistaken since she has a twin sister and the man must have met her sister earlier. The film creates a structure where the viewer, together with characters of the film, are kept in constant suspension whether the girl actually has a twin sister or is simply trying to mislead the people around her. The film even hints at a third explanation of the girl having some kind of illness that might include memory problems. The confusingly overlapping imaginary scenes, the contradictory occurrences and the suspended coherence of the character makes this film another primary example of the experiments conducted in the narrative laboratory of Hong Sang-soo.

Another narrative feature that Hong seems to be obsessed with is the modular structure. According to Allan Cameron "[t]he characteristic structures of modular narratives can be created through temporal fragmentation, through the juxtaposition of conflicting versions of events or through the organization of narrative material by non-narrative principles" (2008, p. 4) – all three are frequent features of Hong's cinema.

Temporal fragmentation is a feature that is present from the first scene of his first film and has played an important role ever since. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* could be considered an interesting step in the direction of juxtaposing conflicting versions of events, but *The Day He Arrives* (*Bukchon-banghyang*, 2011) was the real definitive step. This was the first film where, unlike in his earlier works, "the pieces of the puzzle do not really fit together. Instead, they are separate visions of the same event" (Raymond, 2014, p. 32). Marc Raymond reads the film in relation to Timothy Corrigan's concept of the essay film (2011) and interprets the strategy as a "commentary on the cinematic recreation of events that can never really be more than representation", and concludes: "Hong increasingly places less importance on understanding his fictional constructions as part of a reality in which there is a 'correct' interpretation and more on having the audience remain open 'to multiple positions and incarnations" (2014, p. 32). As the films directed by Hong since *The Day He Arrives* can testify, he kept his interest in both types of film structure:

sometimes it is only the plot that is puzzling and a linear story is still there, but sometimes multiple realities are in play.

When connecting the phenomenon of the mind-game film to digital culture and database structures, Elsaesser argues that the new technologies of data storage and retrieval naturally engender new forms of narrative that sequence and link data differently into structures where a story is not necessarily composed of a beginning, a middle, and an ending (2009, p. 22). According to him, the new challenges to narrative can be defined in three directions: embracing the rhizome, the archive, and the database as we are already experiencing it in the forms of hypertexts and networked structures of cyberspace; see it as a complement to (modernist) narrative that is "accommodating seriality, multiple options, and open-endedness within a broadly telic and goal-oriented storytelling format"; and the "third direction would reassess the present state and future potential of the material object and symbolic form which has largely shaped linear narrative in both word and image: the printed book" (p. 23).

An interesting development can be spotted lately in Hong's films: the motif of traditional, linear, verbal culture in the form of the written/printed book is becoming more and more prominent. In *The Day He Arrives* the central location that was the axis of the perplexingly repeated episodes was already called: "Novel", *Claire's Camera* (*Keul-le-eo-ui ka-me-la*, 2016) featured a book that helps to bond two characters coming from different cultures when the Korean man asks the French woman to read for him, and *The Day After* (*Geu hu*, 2017) even takes place at a publishing house. However, the most intriguing film where narrative experimentation with modularity is connected to the concept of the written text is *Hill of Freedom* (*Jayu-ui eon-deok*, 2014). Here the modular structure that is often associated with digital culture and databases is related to a traditional, analog format: a collection of letters. The whole film can be interpreted as a certain kind of mockery of the modular thinking of the digital age by creating a fun, modular story out of a very analog joke.

As usual, the story is about a man (desperately) looking for a woman. Mori arrives from Japan to Seoul to look for a woman (Kwon) he used to work with two years earlier and whom he has romantic feelings for. He can not find her at home and decides to stay in a guesthouse close to her place while waiting for her return. In the meantime, while waiting, he writes letters to the woman about the things happening to him. The plot of the film starts with Kwon arriving back from her travels to the place she works and where Mori left the letters written to her throughout his waiting. As Kwon starts to read the letters their content comes to life on the screen – this is how we get to learn the story of Mori. But

after Kwon reads the first letter and we see the first episode of Mori's story on the screen, Kwon takes the letters and decides to leave the office. On her way out she trips up on the steps and drops the letters – this moment (accentuated by the first ever crossfade in Hong's oeuvre) becomes the axis of the plot. We gradually realize that when Kwon dropped the letters the order of them became mixed up, so during the rest of the film the episodes of Mori's story appear in a random order as Kwon is reading the mixed-up letters.

The film becomes a playful exercise in plot construction and narrative complexity, teaching a lesson to the viewer about the role that order and linearity play in the understanding of stories. As *Yourself and Yours* seemed to be a lesson about what role character coherence plays in narratives, this one is a very direct lesson in plot arrangement. An extra layer of lesson is being taught by Mori who reads a book titled "Time" in the film. When asked what the book is about, he answers: "It says that time is not a real thing (…) Our brain makes up a mind frame of time continuity: past, present, and future. I think you don't have to experience life like that (…) But at the end we can not escape from this frame of mind because our brain evolved this way."

The entire film is a direct reflection on Hong's own filmmaking practice that constantly experiments with the possibilities of manipulating the time structure of storytelling, the limitations of understanding stories whose structure go directly against the conventions or frame of mind that postulate the understanding of reality as a linear concept.

In the film an extra twist further added to the randomized plot structure created by the mixed-up letters. In the crucial scene when the letters are being mixed up on the steps, it is clearly visible to the (attentive) viewer that one letter was left behind by Kwon. At the end of the film, after the plot (and the story) seem to have been closed – Kwon had read all the letters, gone to meet Mori, and they had left together for Japan and lived happily ever after – suddenly a shot appears on the screen that seems to be an episode (the lost letter?) from Mori's story. The shot starts with an image of the sleeping Mori – Hong's favourite technique to alert his viewers that some of the events they have just seen probably were the dream of the sleeping character. But when did the dream start? Maybe everything that happened in Mori's story after the scene that he is waking up at that moment was a dream? But what does "after" mean in this context where there are so many timelines – the timeline of Mori writing the letters, the timeline of the mixed up letters through which Kwon and the audience experience Mori's story, and the timeline of Hong's film in which the status of this last shot seems to be questioning the hierarchy between plot and story, between narrated fiction and the filmmaker's reality?

At first, it might sound that this film is a rather mechanical exercise in modular, non-linear story telling that plays with the idea of "the organization of narrative material by non-narrative principles" (Cameron, 2008, p. 4), but obviously it is more than that. *Hill of Freedom* can be read as an *ars poetica* and a research report from the narrative laboratory of Hong Sang-soo, where he experiments with film form in order to convince audiences that non-conventional cinematic storytelling can make a difference in understanding the seemingly simple stories of our very complex reality.

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Showing the Complexity of the Simple – – The Art-puzzle of Hong Sang-soo

Renowned South Korean film director, Hong Sang-soo, has shown deep interest in complex (or some might say: confusing) storytelling throughout his entire career. Since modernist art cinema has an affinity with unconventional narrative structures, it is not surprising that an auteur like Hong is attracted to complexity. What is interesting here is that Hong's (often black and white) films are a kind of analogue answer to the challenges of digital culture, a modernist art cinema version of puzzle films and database narratives. The article analyses the very Hongian strategy of producing *auteurist* puzzle films by creating confusion on a perceptive and narrative level.

Firstly, the article summarises how Hong's unique film making practice not only provides significant (economic, artistic) independence and freedom to the author, but at the same time proves to be a structure that delivers high complexity at a low production cost. Secondly, the article analyses the puzzling techniques used by Hong that work on a perceptual level, and often turn his films into high level memory tests; and how these structures play a part in the "perceptual reeducation" of viewers while also serving as commentaries on cinematic representation. And finally, the article concludes with an analysis of the narrative techniques used by Hong to tell extremely simple stories about the eternal topic of "men want women" in a complex, confusing and compelling way.

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Legendy Polskie Allegro jako narracja transmedialna

Myśl Arystotelesa, iż „całość to więcej niż suma jej składników", nie straciła na aktualności – z połączenia różnych elementów powstają nowe wartości. Podobne spostrzeżenia mają autorzy piszący o zagadnieniach związanych z transmediami, badający, jakie zmiany powstają w efekcie połączenia różnych tekstów kultury. Jednak nie tylko połączenia mają znaczenie. Umberto Eco w *Semiologii życia codziennego* stwierdza, iż „w zależności od kanału zmienia się w pewnym stopniu sens przekazu i, być może, również ciężar ideologiczny" (Eco, 1996, s. 172).

Celem niniejszego studium jest analiza serii *Legendy Polskie*, współprodukowanej przez Allegro, jako narracji transmedialnej. Pragnę zweryfikować, czy *Legendy Polskie Allegro* wykazują podobieństwa do supersystemu rozrywkowego, uniwersum, opowieści transmedialnych, i czy zarazem bazowanie na polskiej kulturze i kulturze popularnej jako takiej wpłynęło na całość serii i jej formę.

Struktury medialne – zależności i podobieństwa

Supersystem rozrywkowy, uniwersum, opowieści transmedialne, świat transmedialny – to pojęcia często określające podobne zjawiska; zasadnicza różnica pomiędzy nimi przejawia się w skupieniu na nieco innych aspektach. Chociaż opowieści podzielone na różne kanały i środki przekazu można było spotkać już wcześniej, to pojęcie supersystemu rozrywkowego, jako pierwsze na określenie tego typu struktury, zostało wprowadzone w pracy Marshy Kinder z 1991 roku.

Napisała ona, iż:

> „Supersystem jest intertekstualną siecią skonstruowaną wokół figury lub grupy figur z popkultury, które mogą być fikcjonalne […] albo «prawdziwe» […]. Aby być supersystemem, sieć musi obejmować kilka trybów produkcji; musi odwoływać się do różnych pokoleń, klas, subkultur etnicznych, które są targetowane przy użyciu zróżnicowanych strategii; musi wspierać «kolekcjonowalność» poprzez rozprzestrzenianie powiązanych produktów; i musi nastąpić gwałtowne utowarowienie, którego sukces staje się «wydarzeniem medialnym», które dramatycznie przyspiesza krzywą wzrostu komercyjnego sukcesu" (Kinder, 1991, s. 122).

Ta definicja, chociaż od jej publikacji minęło już wiele lat, wciąż jest aktualna. Stanowiła ona również bazę i inspirację dla tworzenia kolejnych pojęć, takich jak na przykład opowiadanie transmedialne sformułowane przez Henry'ego Jenkinsa. Czym zatem jest opowiadanie transmedialne? Jest to „sztuka tworzenia światów" (Jenkins, 2007, s. 25).

[Rozwija się ona] „na różnych platformach medialnych, a każdy tekst stanowi wyróżniającą się i ważną część całości. W idealnej formie opowiadania transmedialnego każde medium porusza się w sferze, w której jest najlepsze […]. Każda forma dostępu do marki powinna być samowystarczalna […] każdy produkt jest punktem dostępu do marki jako całości. […] dobra marka transmedialna stara się przyciągnąć odmiennych zwolenników, inaczej prezentując treści w różnych mediach" (Jenkins, 2007, s. 95–97).

Widzimy zatem, iż niemal to samo zjawisko przez Kinder nazwane zostało supersystemem rozrywkowym, zaś przez Jenkinsa – opowieścią transmedialną.

Zbliżone do Jenkinsa stanowisko prezentuje Carlos Scolari, który stwierdził, iż opowieść transmedialna jest „strukturą narracyjną, która używa zarówno różnych języków (słownego, obrazowego itd.), jak i różnych mediów (kino, komiks, telewizja, gry wideo, itd.)" (*Encyclopædia Britannica*). By w pełni doświadczać złożoności świata transmedialnego, musimy włożyć większy wysiłek niż w przypadku opowieści komunikowanej przez jedno medium. Zadaniem widza jest poszukiwanie elementów, łączenie ich. Nie ma jednego tekstu, który zawierałby wszystkie informacje; w narracji transmedialnej „zapoznanie się z każdą platformą medialną z osobna daje możliwość uzupełnienia poznanych wcześniej treści, co idzie w parze z odkryciem całej opowieści" (Kozera, 2016, s. 83–84). W ten sposób każdy element jest istotny dla narracji, bowiem wnosi nowe treści. Niemal wyeliminowana zostaje kategoria dodatku (Dominas, 2016); wszystkie elementy stanowią część przedstawianej historii, wszystkie stanowią część uniwersum.

Każdy tekst jest istotny. „Każdy wnosi coś do skarbca miejsc, postaci, motywów podejmowanych przez kolejne teksty" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 140). Ale też każda część opowiadania transmedialnego może być doświadczana bez znajomości innych elementów. Dzięki różnicowaniu mediów, w których rozciągnięta jest opowieść, jest ona w stanie przyciągać zróżnicowanych odbiorców.

Analizując inne pojęcia i teorie, takie jak świat transmedialny, narracja transmedialna i *crossmedia*, możemy dostrzec, że na ogół wychodzą one od stworzonej przez Kinder definicji Można je objąć pojęciem **transmedia**, stanowiącym niejako termin parasolowy. Transmedia zdefiniowano „jako doświadczenie poprzez i pomiędzy granicami, w których łączy się wiele platform medialnych, […] łącząc treści z promocją, funkcjonowanie i niefunkcjonalność, handel i demokratyzację, doświadczenie i uczestnictwo […]" (Freeman, Gambarato, 2019, s. 11). W ten sposób staje się ono „czymś więcej niż sumą jego części – przeplatając przemysł, sztukę, praktykę i kulturę" (Freeman, Gambarato, 2019, s. 11). Niewątpliwie **narracja transmedialna**, określona przez Kalina Kalinova i Gerganę Markovą jako „multimedialny produkt, który komunikuje swoją narrację przez dużą liczbę zintegrowanych środków/kanałów medialnych" (Kalinov, Markova, 2016; za: Kalinov, 2017, s. 66), mieści się w definicji transmediów. Podobnie jak pojęcie **świata transmedialnego**. Taki świat, stworzony w jednym utworze, „służy jako pretekst i punkt zaczepienia dla kolejnego" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 135), może się z niego „wywodzić repertuar fikcjonalnych narracji aktualizujących się za pośrednictwem szeregu reprezentacji w różnorodnych mediach" (Klastrup, Tosca; za: Maj, 2017, s. 22). Zdaniem Jenkinsa (2016):

> „[ś]wiaty są systemami z wieloma ruchomymi częściami (pod względem postaci, instytucji, lokalizacji), które mogą generować wiele opowieści z wieloma bohaterami, którzy są połączeni ze sobą za pomocą swoich struktur. Częścią tego, co napędza konsumpcję transmedialną, jest pragnienie zagłębienia się w te światy, prześledzenia ich historii i zrozumienia ich podstawowych systemów".

Jednak czym jest transmedialność i dlaczego ma stanowić alternatywę dla znanych nam dotychczas narracji? Przyglądając się koncepcji transmedialności, możemy stwierdzić, iż nie jest ona zjawiskiem specyficznym wyłącznie dla naszych czasów. Teoretycy doszukują się prekursorskich transmedialnych narracji w odległych epokach; są nimi, między innymi, historia rycerzy okrągłego stołu czy Biblia. Transmedialność możemy znaleźć nie tylko w opowieściach fikcyjnych, ale też w opowieściach niefikcyjnych, w dziennikarstwie, aktywizmie, marketingu itd. (Freeman, Gambarato, 2018). Stwarza ona wiele możliwości w różnych dziedzinach, pozwalając dotrzeć do większej, bardziej zdywersyfi-

kowanej grupy ludzi, budując dla każdej z nich taką narrację i wykorzystując takie medium, które do niej najlepiej przemówi. Wcześniejsze utwory stanowią „pretekst i punkt zaczepienia dla kolejnego, tworzona opowieść z czasem staje się uniwersum rozpiętym na sieci fabularnych nici […] rozwijającym się w czasie i wciąż otwartym na nowe podboje" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 135). Pojawiają się elementy takie jak „fantastyczna faktografia", które „urealistyczniają uniwersum i pogłębiają jego immersyjność" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 141). Mogą być to leksykony, mapy, przewodniki, wszystko to, co systematyzuje informacje o uniwersum, pogłębia naszą wiedzę.

Badanie opowieści transmedialnych wymyka się znanym nam systemom badawczym. Ze względu na to, jakim ogromem informacji i środków przekazu dysponuje narracja transmedialna, a co ważniejsze, w jaki sposób wszystkie elementy łączą się ze sobą, nie ma wypracowanych sposobów badania i analizy takich systemów. Zazwyczaj badamy kulturę, skupiając się na jednym z jej elementów, resztę uznając za dodatek; taki system, w którym każdy element jest równie wartościowy, się nie sprawdza. Sposoby badania tekstów kultury, odpowiednio wypracowane do różnych mediów, nie pokazują pełnego obrazu opowieści, mamy bowiem do czynienia z „olbrzymim światem pełnym fabuł – w tym rywalizujących ze sobą i potencjalnych" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 140). Metody stosowane do badania historii linearnych sprawdzają się do pracy nad wycinkiem, nie są jednak w stanie objąć narracji transmedialnej całościowo.

„Liniowe modele nie ujmują […] specyfiki tych fabuł zanurzonych w bezliku innych wzajemnie powiązanych opowieści. Stosują się do fragmentarycznych multiplikowanych historii, obnażając ich wtórność, nie wyjaśniają jednak wyczerpująco fenomenu ekspansji świata przedstawionego" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 139).

By pokazać sieć powiązań, jaka zbudowana jest między poszczególnymi elementami, można badać narrację jako hipertekst. Jednak i to nie stanowi rozwiązania pokazującego pełnię narracji, ujawnia bowiem tylko sieć powiązań, a nie oddaje „dynamiki świata i jego potencjału do tworzenia wciąż nowych opowieści" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 140). Fabuły nie są tak istotne w budowaniu narracji transmedialnych, bowiem mają one funkcję podrzędną – służą rozbudowywaniu świata, „często są wtórne, bywają fragmentaryczne i umieszczone w sieci nawiązań wymykają się liniowym opisom" (Fabiszewski, 2011, s. 140). W opowieści transmedialnej nie jest ważne budowanie jednej narracji, jednej historii – opowiadana historia może rozszerzać się w nieskończoność. Nie jest już ważny jeden bohater czy grupa; postać, która w jednym elemencie była drugoplanowa, w innym może okazać się kluczowa, stanowić oś narracji; miejsce czy przedmiot, które były tłem, mogą okazać się konstytutywne dla rozwoju akcji

w innym wycinku. Narracja transmedialna obecna w supersystemach rozrywkowych posiada:

> „[…] szczególną, gnostycką konstrukcję ideową, w której zło i dobro są w świecie równoważne i pojedynek między nimi toczy się na równych prawach, w nieskończoność. Zwycięstwa dobra nigdy nie są ostateczne, zatem happy end jest tylko chwilowy" (Sitarski, 2017).

Dzięki zastosowaniu tego typu środków kolejne fabuły mają przestrzeń na rozwój, a my dzięki temu mamy przestrzeń na eksplorację świata.

Tym, co stanowi o sile transmedialności, jest także relacja między twórcami a odbiorcami. W każdej narracji transmedialnej możemy wskazać tekst czy grupę tekstów założycielskich, a tym samym – pierwszego autora (autorów). Nie istnieje jednak koniec narracji, nie jesteśmy w stanie wyznaczyć jej granic, gdyż jest ona w stanie rozwijać się we wszystkie strony, na różnych płaszczyznach. Nie podąża za jednym bohaterem, miejscem czy czasem. Jedyne, co skupia opowieść, to jeden świat. Oprócz tekstów **oficjalnych** powstają elementy budowane przez fanów. Możliwe są teksty apokryficzne, alternatywne, nie ma jednej dobrej drogi tworzenia. Początek narracji jest nadawany odgórnie, kolejne elementy mogą być uzupełniane oddolnie (Maj, 2017).

Dzięki zaangażowaniu widza we wcześniejsze projekty, przyzwyczajaniu go do bohaterów i reguł rządzących danym światem, możliwe jest tworzenie bardziej skomplikowanych form. W momencie, gdy tworzymy kolejny już wytwór, możemy pozwolić sobie na więcej – publiczność zdążyła zaznajomić się już z bohaterami, zrozumieć zasady panujące w świecie i poznać jego geografię. Twórcy nie muszą na nowo poświęcać czasu na tłumaczenie widowni, jaki jest to świat – pokazują jedynie punkty zaczepienia. Powstające w ten sposób opowieści niejako wymuszają na widzu aktywność. Sam fakt, że fragmenty historii można odnaleźć w różnych mediach, w obrębie różnych platform, sprawia, że widzowie zamieniają się w poszukiwaczy, detektywów.

W świecie transmedialnym trudno mówić o autorskości jako całości; wraz z rozrastaniem się systemu, artystycznymi kolaboracjami i zacieraniem się granic między twórcą a odbiorcą, możemy tylko wskazać twórców poszczególnych elementów. Platformy medialne dostrzegają korzyści płynące z tej wieloosobowej autorskości. Zadają pytania, proszą o rady, organizują liczne konkursy, zachęcają do pisania *fan-fiction*, robienia fan-artów. Każdy kolejny element dodawany do transmedialnej opowieści przywiązuje widzów do stworzonego świata, sprawia, że sięgają po wcześniej już istniejące elementy, motywuje też do tworzenia własnych elementów opowieści. Powstaje efekt kuli śniegowej, który można zapoczątkować

nawet za pomocą stosunkowo niewielkiego budżetu – dzięki użyciu Internetu (Bernardo, 2015). Baza fanów gwarantuje, że każdy kolejny projekt ma już silną grupę odbiorców. Angażowanie widowni sprawia, że fani stają się niejako ambasadorami produkcji, zwiększając jej potencjał marketingowy (Bernardo, 2015). Twórczość zostaje „przesunięta z bieguna autorskiej paradygmatyczności (kanoniczności) ku biegunowi fanowskiej kooperatywności (apokryficzności)" (Maj, 2017, s. 23). W świecie transmedialnym „światotwórca jest w efekcie tylko jednym z twórców – owszem, tym który zapoczątkował owego świata istnienie, ale nieustępującym niczym wszystkim tym, którzy poznają ów świat na tyle, by współdzielić doświadczenie światoodczucia" (Klastrup, Tosca; za: Maj, 2017, s. 23).

Ze względu na model przekazywania historii zmianie uległo nie tylko stanowisko fana – odbiorcy i jego wpływ na powstający świat, ale także wzajemne relacje fanów; narracje transmedialne zbliżają do siebie, zakładają współpracę. Mamy do czynienia z hipertowarzyskością, odbiorcy współpracują ze sobą „dzięki nieustannej wymianie informacji oraz zbiorowej inteligencji. Warunkiem uczestnictwa w tym systemie jest ciągłe poszukiwanie i zaangażowanie w procesy wytwarzania nowych treści" (Dominas, 2016, s. 30). Właśnie dzięki kolektywnej pracy i współpracy, możliwej przede wszystkim dzięki Internetowi i nowym mediom, takie poznanie jest dla odbiorcy dostępne. Ułatwiona komunikacja i dostęp do kultury pozwalają na demokratyzację, sięgnięcie do różnych środowisk i grup wiekowych. Dzięki łączeniu platform medialnych online i offline treść może przyciągać odbiorców niezaznajomionych z nowymi mediami.

Legendy Polskie Allegro

W ostatnich latach pojawił się twór, który w swoim dotychczasowym rozwoju przypomina powstawanie supersystemu. Są to *Legendy Polskie Allegro.* Ten projekt ma dopiero kilka lat, zatem pojawia się pytanie, czy na tym etapie jesteśmy w stanie określić, czy jest to nowy polski supersystem rozrywkowy? A jeśli tak – czy jest on udany?

Legendy Polskie zaistniały na rynku w nieco inny sposób niż większość tego typu produkcji. Gdy platforma aukcyjna Allegro poprosiła o wykonanie reklamy, chciała postawić na marketing nietypowy, nieoczywisty. Twórcy platformy chcieli wejść w rolę mecenasa kultury, stworzyć „pewien rodzaj ekscytacji wokół Allegro" (*Legendy Polskie. Kulisy projektu*, 2015). Z pomysłów, jakie zaproponowały firmy, wybrano najmniej przypominający **klasyczną** reklamę – projekt Platige Image i Tomasza Bagińskiego. Poskutkowało to stworzeniem w 2015 roku krótkometrażowych filmów *Smok* i *Twardowsky*, a także zbioru opowiadań *Legendy Polskie,* w którym swoje teksty opublikowali znani już ze swojej

wcześniejszej twórczości autorzy. Ilustrował je Marcin Panasiuk. Filmy zostały opublikowane na YouTubie, na oficjalnym kanale platformy. Również zbiór opowiadań został udostępniony bezpłatnie do czytania i pobierania na stronie platformy. Zgodnie z założeniami miało powstać sześć opowiadań i dwa niepowiązane ze sobą filmy (*Legendy Polskie Allegro* [Panel], 2018). Kiedy okazało się, że tego typu przekaz odpowiada fanom, a liczniki oglądalności i pobierania przewyższają oczekiwania – nawet sześciokrotnie („Magazyn Allegro", 2016a) – postanowiono kontynuować produkcję i stworzyć *Uniwersum Legend Polskich*[1]. Za punkt, który łączy różne elementy tego uniwersum, uznano piekło polskie. Zlokalizowano je w Raczkach, gdzie w bloku, wyglądającym jak pozostałość po PGR-ach, na piętrze minus sześćset sześćdziesiątym szóstym możemy spotkać Borutę – szefa piekła polskiego (*Legendy Polskie Allegro* [Panel], 2018).

W ten sposób w 2016 roku powstały kolejne filmy z serii: *Bazyliszek, Twardowsky 2.0* i *Jaga*. Równocześnie, ze względu na popularność, jaką cieszyły się covery polskich piosenek użyte w filmach, powstawały teledyski, które rozwijały niektóre wątki i postaci przedstawione w cyklu. Do tej pory powstało sześć teledysków. Widzimy w nich znanych nam bohaterów, a także nowe postaci i lokalizacje. Powstał także audiobook (opublikowany też w formie ebooka), *Wywiad z Borutą*, z którego mogliśmy wysłuchać rozmowy z szefem polskiego piekła.

W 2018 roku, podczas Pyrkonu, ogłoszono film fabularny z Uniwersum Legend Polskich – pod roboczym tytułem *Twardowsky 3.14*.[2]. Ze względu na skalę projektu do Allegro i Platige Image dołączył Next Film w roli koproducenta i dystrybutora. Pełen metraż, zgodnie z zapowiedziami, miał pojawić się w czwartym kwartale 2019 roku, jednak termin ten nie został dotrzymany. Twórcy zapowiadali, że film będzie łączyć „przeszłość, teraźniejszość i przyszłość", a także skupiać się na osobie Twardowskiego. Historia ma łączyć się z istniejącymi już elementami, jednak ma być także samodzielna. By można było cieszyć się filmem, nie będzie konieczna znajomość wcześniejszych produkcji z serii. Na pytania fanów o innych bohaterów – czy zostaną oni odsunięci na bok – twórcy informowali, że pracują jeszcze nad kilkoma projektami związanymi z *Legendami*, i że „nikt nie powiedział, że na jednej fabule się skończy…" (*Legendy Polskie Allegro* [Panel], 2018).

[1] Cykl filmów kinowych zapowiadano również pod tytułem *Legendy Polskie. Uniwersum* – przyp. red.

[2] Nazwa *Twardowsky 3.14*, nawiązuje do liczby PI, będącej niejako skrótowcem od *Platige Image,* mamy więc do czynienia z *Twardowskim Platige Image* z serii *Legendy Polskie Allegro.* Możemy uznać to za zaznaczenie roli firmy w tym projekcie. Film będzie stanowić też trzecią filmową część historii Twardowskiego.

System operacyjny polskiej popkultury

Twórcy sami określają swoje produkcje jako „system operacyjny polskiej popkultury". Deklarują, że są **kulturotechem**, czyli inspirują się „lokalnym dorobkiem kulturowym wykorzystującym nowe technologie do tworzenia i szerokiego rozpowszechniania treści" (Kobylecki; za: Kamiński, 2017). W różnorakich artykułach czy wywiadach podkreślają, że zależy im na integralności projektu, jego innowacyjności, a także, iż mają duże ambicje i planują je realizować na wielką skalę. Projekt ten ma opowiadać o „naszych cechach narodowych w pozytywnym ich znaczeniu: o tym, że jesteśmy dumni, przedsiębiorczy, zaradni i ambitni" (Iller; za: Kamiński, 2017). W wywiadach podkreślają, że ich celem jest zbudowanie „legendarnego uniwersum", a padające ze strony fanów określenia takie jak *Słowiańscy Avengersi* przyjmują z radością. Chociaż Boruta w *Wywiadzie…* mówi o nich pogardliwie, „że ci by nawet PIT-u nie potrafili wypełnić", to sami twórcy zdają się czerpać wiele z amerykańskiego supersystemu rozrywkowego. Mimo iż do skali *Avengersów Legendom* nieco brakuje, to jednak widać podobieństwa w ich konstrukcji. Nasz *Twardowsky* jawi się na razie niczym Marvelowski Iron Man. W *Wywiadzie z Borutą* dziennikarka nazywa go ikoną polskiej przedsiębiorczości, celebrytą itd. W przestrzeni tego uniwersum możemy odnaleźć jeszcze kilka podobieństw. Tym, co najbardziej łączy *Legendy* z uniwersum Marvela, jest to, co łączy je także z innymi światami transmedialnymi – myślenie całościowe o projekcie, budowanie transmedialnej narracji, kierowanie produktów do zdywersyfikowanej widowni czy korzystanie z różnorodnych mediów.

Transmedialny świat

Stworzony przez Allegro i Platige Image system zawiera przynajmniej część cech wyróżniających narracje transmedialne. *Legendy Polskie Allegro* składają się ze zbioru opowiadań i ilustrujących je grafik, filmów krótkometrażowych, teledysków, audiobooków, a także serii gadżetów powiązanych z uniwersum. Do tego możemy dołączyć liczne materiały zza kulis, wywiady z autorami, artykuły podkreślające popularność *Legend*. Całość składa się z narracji korzystającej z kilku mediów i ze zintegrowanej promocji. Promowane są nie tylko elementy uniwersum, ale również twórcy i aktorzy; i tak, w promocyjnej kampanii gadżetów i ubrań, modelką jest aktorka grająca w *Legendach* rolę Diablicy (*Legendy Polskie Allegro*, [Panel], 2018).

Tym, co podnosi rangę *Legend* i sprawia, że trafiają one do zróżnicowanych odbiorców, są z pewnością nazwiska twórców. Opowiadania wyszły spod pióra autorów z pisarskim dorobkiem. Również Platige Image i nazwisko Bagińskiego

są powszechnie znane w branży, między innymi dzięki animacji *Katedra,* nominowanej do Oscara w 2003 roku. Operatorem pierwszych krótkich metraży w cyklu *Legend* był Łukasz Żal, operator oscarowej *Idy.* Projekt daje szansę również młodszym twórcom, którzy nie zdążyli jeszcze zaistnieć w branży – reżyserią teledysków zajmowali się twórcy z polskich szkół filmowych. W projekcie bierze udział cała plejada aktorskich gwiazd, wywodząca się zarówno z teatru, jak i filmu: mamy szanowanych aktorów filmowych z wypracowaną pozycją, takich jak Robert Więckiewicz, Krystyna Janda i Olaf Lubaszenko, czy też pojawiający się epizodycznie Jerzy Stuhr. Są też przedstawiciele nieco młodszego pokolenia – Paweł Domagała i Michalina Olszańska, a także aktorzy teatralni – Piotr Machalica i Tomasz Drabek. Pojawia się też para youtuberów, Aleksandra Kasprzyk i Maciej Dąbrowski[3]. Ze względu na udział reprezentantów różnych pokoleń i różnorodnych mediów widzowie w różnym wieku i korzystający z odmiennych środków przekazu mogą odnaleźć znane sobie twarze.

Forma przekazu, kanał przekazu a odbiorca

Różnicowanie formy przekazu jest kolejnym mechanizmem kierowania produkcji do różnych grup wiekowych. Te różnice pojawiają się zarówno w wyborze medium, jak i w obrębie jednej platformy. I tak film *Smok* jest wyraźnie skierowany do nieco młodszej widowni; możemy tu dostrzec wiele nawiązań zrozumiałych dla osób dobrze obeznanych z Internetem, np. do popularnych youtuberów; pojawiają się też memy, część informacji jest podana wprost z mediów społecznościowych. Są też intertekstualne nawiązania do kultury popularnej, np. do *Ghost in the Shell* czy do *Powrotu Batmana*. W filmie wyraźnie zarysowane są lokalne sprawy społeczne – smok reklamuje maczety (nawiązujące do niesławnych ataków przy użyciu maczet na ulicach Krakowa), w mieście oprócz Smoka panuje też smog (złowieszcza siła, która terroryzuje mieszkańców i sprawia że boją się wychodzić z domów – z telewizji możemy dowiedzieć się o „rekordowym stężeniu siarki w powietrzu"). Z kolei *Twardowsky* zdaje się być filmem bazującym na nostalgii. Bohater jest nieco starszy i chociaż jego baza na księżycu jest nowoczesna, to znajduje się w niej wręcz ołtarzyk polskości. Jego dobytek jest zbiorem przedmiotów luźno powiązanych; szalik biało-czerwony, perski dywan, szklanki w koszyczkach itd. Całości towarzyszą nieco starsze piosenki, ale karą dla diablicy jest nowoczesny utwór disco polo. *Bazyliszek* jest zbiorem memów, „sucharów" wygłaszanych poważnym głosem przez Bardachę. Na zbiór jego kwestii składają się rymowanki („tak czy owak, Zbigniew Nowak"), neologizmy („Rybokalipsa!"), przekręcone teksty („Karpie Diem"), powiedzonka („Znikniem jak praca w Radomiu"). Również jego bratanek, Boguś

[3] Twórcy figurują na YouTubie jako MishON i Człowiek Warga – przyp. red.

Kołodziej, ostatni potomek Piastów, reprezentuje podobny poziom humoru („Jeśli spotkacie dziewczynę, która dopiero wam się przyśniła…? To zła wódka!"). Także narrator opowiada o jego dalszych losach w podobnym tonie („I zabrał swój słowiański wkurw na mecz Legii, ale go nie wpuścili"). Po raz pierwszy widzimy tutaj stworzenie, które nie ma postaci humanoidalnej; jest w pełni komputerowo wygenerowanym fantastycznym stworem, inspirowanym słowiańską demonologią. *Jaga* w swojej formie przypomina bardziej film akcji. Widzimy konsekwencje działań Twardowskiego; główna bohaterka uwolniła się z celi w piekle polskim, a specjalny odział ABW, Żelazna Góra, odpowiedzialny za walkę z siłami nadprzyrodzonymi, próbuje ją złapać. Pojawia się coś dla miłośników scen walki w zwolnionym tempie i zatrzymywania czasu. Jaga nie akceptuje uprzemysłowienia świata i, podpuszczana przez Borutę, zaczyna dokonywać jego destrukcji, by przywrócić go do stanu, w jakim znała go wcześniej – z czasów świętych gajów. Twórcy podkreślają, że jest to pierwsza polska superbohaterka, silna kobieta (Stachowiak, 2016), hołdując najwyraźniej teorii, że budowanie silnej, kobiecej bohaterki powinno opierać się na scenie, w której pokonuje ona grupę uzbrojonych mężczyzn.

Opowiadania, audiobooki, teledyski

Na zbiór opowiadań składają się historie, które nie mają tak bezpośrednich powiązań między sobą, jak filmy krótkometrażowe. Pojawia się to samo uniwersum, podobny sposób łączenia technologii i mitów słowiańskich, w części z nich wspomniana zostaje postać Twardowskiego, jednak opowiadania nie mają wspólnych bohaterów ani czasu akcji. Autorzy zbioru zagłębiają się bardziej w opowiadane historie, poszerzają świat; każde opowiadanie pisane jest w innym stylu i innym językiem, czasem wyraźnie podejmując próbę stworzenia młodzieżowej, słowiańskiej wersji języka polskiego. Opowiadania nawiązują do mitów i legend polskich, a także do historii Polski.

W audiobooku również pojawia się wiele nawiązań do historii Polski, na przykład odbywający w piekle karę są postaciami historycznymi, a diabeł składa deklarację, że to on napisał kroniki Galla Anonima. Są też ewokowane elementy popkultury – Boruta informuje, że „uwielbia zapach macierzanki o poranku", oznajmia, że zawsze ratował Polskę, rozwiązywał wszystkie problemy, komunikuje, że ktoś „zadbał o ten kawałek podłogi"[4]. Jest też obecna słowiańska mitologia – Boruta przedstawia się dziennikarce jako Borowy (inna nazwa Boruty), wspomina też o bóstwach ze słowiańskiego panteonu i o swojej roli w ich uwięzieniu, przedstawia także krwawą i mroczną wizję Słowian za ich panowania.

[4] Tutaj mamy do czynienia z podwójnym nawiązaniem, bowiem z piosenki *Mój jest ten kawałek podłogi,* powstał również cover z teledyskiem w ramach serii *Legendy Polskie Allegro*.

W teledyskach możemy również odnaleźć nawiązania do innych dzieł, tak bezpośrednie jak postać Marysi, małej dziewczynki z piekieł, jadącej korytarzami na rowerku niczym chłopiec z *Śnienia* w coverze *Jezu, jak się cieszę,* czy też bardziej subtelne, implicytne, jak klasycznie zmontowana scena pościgu Rzepichy za sługami Boruty w teledysku do piosenki *Cichosza,* w którym Rzepicha, dzięki zdolnościom i turbo napędowi poloneza, może odjechać z pościgu zwycięsko.

Audiobook i zbiór opowiadań cieszyły się nieco mniejszą popularnością niż teledyski i filmy krótkometrażowe, jednak doszukiwać się w tym możemy specyfiki medium i mniejszej widoczności tych elementów. Mimo zróżnicowanej popularności wśród fanów, większość platform przekazu treści wnosi coś nowego do historii, udowadniając, iż są częścią opowieści transmedialnej. Informacje zawarte w przestrzeni różnych mediów nie duplikują się wzajemnie, każde medium dostarcza nowych komunikatów. Jak sami twórcy deklarują, „nie chcą ograniczać się wyłącznie do filmów i ich celem jest zbudowanie całego uniwersum, w którym te legendy w różnych formach będą mogły funkcjonować" (Żabierek, 2016). Każda prezentowana przez nich forma poszerza obraz i pozwala na lepsze poznanie bohaterów, wprowadza nowych i pokazuje świat, którego są częścią.

Promocja polskiej kultury

Seria *Legend* tworzona jest dla różnych grup wiekowych i mających różne wykształcenie kulturowe oraz możliwości odczytywania nawiązań (czy to do współczesnego polskiego Internetu, do światowej popkultury, czy do sytuacji społecznej, historii, polityki). Twórcy uznają, że zbudowany przez nich świat może stać się „dobrą platformą do rozpowszechniania polskiej kultury – zarówno w Polsce, jak i poza granicami kraju" (Gardyniak, 2017). Elementy audiowizualne mogą być zrozumiałe dla widzów spoza Polski na poziomie językowym, bowiem są do nich dopasowane napisy. W Internecie można znaleźć kilkanaście wideorecenzji zrobionych przez zagranicznych widzów. Mimo braku rozpoznania wielu elementów i nawiązań, większość tego typu recenzji jest pozytywna – oglądający doceniają techniczne aspekty i sferę wizualną produkcji. Tak jak Boruta w *Wywiadzie…* mówi, iż „ludzie nie wiedzą, skąd przyszli i dlatego są tacy zagubieni", tak te słowa zdają się przyświecać również twórcom *Legend.* Próbują oni opowiedzieć historię na nowo, tworząc jej alternatywną wersję, budując gloryfikujące mity. Powracają do niektórych wydarzeń, historii, legend, baśni, zapełniają luki fantazją, przekształcając je zgodnie ze swoim pomysłem.

Wizja Polski prezentowana w *Legendach* przypomina nieco tę, którą chcą światu zaprezentować turbosłowianie. Uważają oni, że istniało mocarne Imperium Lechitów, które przez spisek wrogich sił zostało wymazane z historii; mocarstwo

to miało władać dużą częścią Europy, być bardziej rozwinięte niż okoliczne ludy, prezentować wyższą kulturę itd. Szczegóły tej teorii spiskowej są zróżnicowane w zależności od autora tekstu. Większość koncepcji bazuje na nacjonalistycznych, gloryfikujących wizjach przeszłości Polski. By potwierdzić swoje teorie, megalomanię narodową, ich autorzy powołują się na fałszywe źródła, takie jak np. Księga Prokosza, będąca kawałem, w który zaangażował się znany ze swojego kunsztu fałszerz, sprawiając, że żart towarzyski został przez niektórych przyjęty jako autentyczne źródło. I na to źródło powołuje się też w audiobooku Boruta. Trudno stwierdzić, czy twórcy *Legend* traktują to odwołanie jako grę z widzem, sprawiając, by fałszerstwo w naszym świecie stało się prawdą w uniwersum *Legend*, czy też hołdują teorii, iż informacja o fałszerstwie też jest częścią spisku. Co niepokojące, styl i nomenklatura również posiadają punkty wspólne z wypowiedziami turbosłowian: komentarze o „jakości krwi" dziennikarki, które wygłasza Boruta, uznając jej krew za „dobrą" na podstawie tego, że jej przodkowie zamieszkiwali polską ziemię od tysięcy lat; piekielny podział dusz na rodzaje (w teledysku do piosenki *Kocham Wolność*, widzimy że na „karcie" informacyjnej o Twardowskym, trzymanej przez Rokitę, widnieje kategoria: „rodzaj duszy: szlachta"); palący się w piekle segment celebrycki, wypełniony szlachtą, królami, rycerzami, których opisuje oprowadzający dziennikarkę Boruta.

Szczęśliwie megalomania narodowa prezentowana w tej serii jest fantastyką w wydaniu *Legend Polskich Allegro.* Podobieństwa i wspólne idee z turbosławizmem czy nacjonalizmem mogą niepokoić, chociaż odpowiedniki tego typu działań widzimy też w innych dużych supersystemach – również tam następuje apoteoza narodowych mitów, częściej widzimy nawarstwianie i gloryfikację historii, mało kto jest gotowy na dekonstrukcję mitów. Często przeciwnikiem jest „zło z obcego kraju", niekoniecznie wrogie wojska, ale przykładowo tajni agenci snujący intrygi. Uniwersum *Legend* wypełniają też postaci z mitologii słowiańskiej i każda z nich, chociaż pojawia się po „złej", piekielnej stronie, nie jest jednoznacznie negatywna. Bazyliszek (wielkie oczy, głos dziecka mówiący, że „chce się tylko bawić" – nie jesteśmy w stanie stwierdzić czy kierują nim złe intencje, czy raczej brak zrozumienia ze strony świata i strach), Jaga (która może i dokonuje destrukcji przemysłowych tworów ludzkości, ale jej intencje – powrót do natury, „oczyszczenie" środowiska – są raczej spójne z myśleniem ekologicznym, które powinno nam przyświecać, choć może nie w tak ekstremalnej formie), również Boruta, Rokita czy Marysia, mimo że stanowią część polskiego piekła, przedstawieni są w taki sposób, byśmy mogli się z nimi utożsamić. Także historia „Lucynki", diablicy, którą poznajemy w teledysku *Aleja Gwiazd*, wzbudza w nas raczej współczucie, niż niechęć.

Fikcyjne, niefikcyjne

Świat widziany w *Legendach* jest połączeniem świata niefikcyjnego i fikcyjnego, które wzajem się przenikają (Ryan, 1997). Jest to świat, w którym w przeszłości rządzili ci sami królowie, co w naszym; późniejsze losy niektórych z nich poznajemy z audiobooka *Wywiad z Borutą.* W tym uniwersum mamy grającego hejnalistę, a także kronikę Galla Anonima, do której autorstwa przyznaje się Boruta. Jest to świat, w którym, podobnie jak u nas, istnieje *Sztuka spadania* Bagińskiego, jej plakat widzimy na jednej ze stron internetowych w *Smoku.*

Nie jest to dla nas świat zupełnie nowy; osadzony jest w naszej rzeczywistości. Istniejący już w znanych nam legendach i podaniach świat w *Legendach Polskich Allegro* pojawia się w nowej wersji. Zachodzą zmiany – zarówno na poziomie przeszłych zdarzeń, rozwoju technologii czy istnienia istot nadprzyrodzonych. Otrzymujemy inną interpretację mitów, są one pokazane w nowej, futurystycznej formie. Alternatywna do naszej rzeczywistość jest zlepkiem elementów znanych już wcześniej, jednak niełączonych ze sobą na taką skalę na rodzimym gruncie.

Jest to z jednej strony świat dobrze nam znany, z drugiej strony – bardzo obcy. Piekło polskie, chociaż znajduje się w Raczkach, jest też częścią szerszego systemu, lokalną instytucją, twórcy zresztą nie wykluczają pojawienia się w najnowszym filmie „większych jednostek organizacyjnych niż piekło polskie" (*Legendy Polskie Allegro*, [Panel], 2018). Za Sukiennicami widzimy chmurę smogu, a ulicami jeżdżą polonezy, których używają między innymi Bardacha i Boguś Kołodziej, jadąc nad jezioro „za siedmioma marketami".

Twórcy sami mówią, iż bawią się realiami fizycznego świata – wprowadzają dźwięk w kosmosie, mogące hamować w przestrzeni kosmicznej statki itd. (Bagiński, 2016). Pojawiają się też fantastyczne postaci z legend czy baśni – humanoidalne diabły czy Bazyliszek. Widzimy też zbiór scen widowiskowych, jakie rzadko mamy okazję oglądać w polskiej kinematografii. Pojawia się Kraków w zupełnie nowej odsłonie; raz, apokaliptycznie wyludniony, następnie oglądamy jego emblematyczny element, wieżę Mariacką, niszczoną przez nowoczesną, bojową machinę. Miasto pojawia się jako obiekt apokaliptyczno-technologicznego ataku i jako widzowie możemy doświadczyć wpływu tejże sytuacji na znajomą przestrzeń. Z kolei w *Jadze* miasta pojawiają się w kontekście zagłady ekologicznej.

Wspomniane „relikty polskiej mocy" jawią się nam jako magiczne artefakty. Mowa między innymi o Szczerbcu (mieczu koronacyjnym królów polskich) czy o magicznym lustrze, za pomocą którego Twardowsky potrafił przywracać się do życia. Relikty pojawiają się w kilku miejscach w serii, ale bez rozwijania

wątku. Takie działanie ułatwia wyjście do kolejnych opowieści, bowiem odbiorcy zostają wcześniej zaciekawieni, są gotowi i chętni, by poznać ciąg dalszy rozpoczętych historii.

W poszczególnych elementach, składających się na uniwersum, dopracowane zostają różnorakie drobiazgi, które dają nam poczucie, że, dzięki wiedzy z innych części dostrzegamy więcej niuansów. Wydaje się, iż twórcy przemyśleli to, w jakiej formie budują narrację i struktura świata łączy się zarówno na płaszczyźnie ogólnej, jak i szczegółowej. I tak na przykład, przyglądając się rejestracjom aut, widzimy, że słudzy Boruty jeżdżą pojazdami o szatańskim numerze rejestracyjnym BSU0666, odwołującymi się do lokalizacji polskiego piekła – BSU to rejestracja z Suwałk, a to przecież w powiecie suwalskim, w Raczkach, na poziomie minus 666 znajduje się polskie piekło. 666 to również numer telefonu Boruty. Rzepicha z kolei ma na rejestracji adres ZGR3141, Żelazna Góra 3,14, czyli PI, Platige Image. Z kolei w *Twardowskym 2.0* widzimy akta Adolfa Kamczatkowa, bohatera *Smoka*.

Rozrastające się uniwersum w dużym stopniu zbudowane jest na bazie konfliktu między starym a nowym. Pojawia się antagonizm między Jagą (natura, ekologia, święte gaje) a nowoczesnym, zurbanizowanym i uprzemysłowionym światem; między krakowiakami a smogiem (wytwór naszej uprzemysłowionej cywilizacji). Technologia w dużej mierze jest tu sygnowana logiem Twardowskiego – zaczynając od systemu nawigacji w aucie, poprzez reklamy sprzętu w *Smoku,* po lusterko, przy którym goli się Boguś Kołodziej. Piekielny system nie używa wytworów Twardowskiego, widzimy za to problem przeniesienia piekła w nowy system. Takie problemy przenoszenia dużej jednostki na grunt nowej (nowszej?) technologii przypominają nieco wyzwania dużych korporacji czy państw związane z digitalizacją. Boruta z trudem radzi sobie z nowoczesnym systemem, Rokita zdaje się zaś dobrze rozumieć, jak on działa. Rokita, chociaż z wyglądu zdaje się być starszy, pozycją ustępuje Borucie. Jednak ze scen w teledysku możemy wnioskować zmianę organizacji władzy w polskim piekle – i może się to stać właśnie przy udziale Rokity i Marysi. Bo przecież, zgodnie z przypisywanymi Darwinowi słowami, przetrwają ci, którzy są najbardziej podatni na zmiany, nie najsilniejsi.

Przemieszanie nowej i starej technologii pojawia się nie tylko w postaci komputerowej – Jagę filmuje z jednej strony nowocześniejsza kamera, z drugiej starszy model. Mamy nieustanne połączenie tego, co nowe i tego, co stare. Tak samo w uniwersum spotykamy się z problemem przenoszenia takich treści jak mitologia w realia XXI wieku. Czy Boruta nauczy się obsługi komputera? Czy my nauczymy się obsługiwać ten „system operacyjny polskiej popkultu-

ry"? Zderzają się na naszych oczach różne paradygmaty – w *Smoku* z czystą, fizyczną siłą walczy robot. W wielu elementach *Legend…* mamy zderzenie różnych porządków świata, zarówno w kategoriach technologii, jak i sposobów działania, poglądów. Ale o ile z jednego technologicznego świata bohaterowie z mniejszym lub większym trudem przechodzą, mogą się go nauczyć, to ze świata słowiańskich mitów do świata współczesnego nie zawsze przejście jest możliwe. Czy Jaga jest w stanie się przystosować, tak jak zrobił to Boruta? Czy my, jako widzowie, jesteśmy w stanie przejść do tego świata? Czy jest on dla nas dostępny? Zdaje się, że do pewnego stopnia tak, jak pokazują wyniki oglądalności dotychczasowych wytworów *Legend*.

W *Wywiadzie z Borutą* jeden z twórców stwierdził, iż „audiobook nie powstawał w oderwaniu od projektu, tylko był jego integralną częścią…" (*Wywiad z Borutą. Rozmowy z autorami*, 2016). Te słowa doskonale podsumowują, czym jest budowanie opowieści transmedialnej – tworzeniem integralnych części opowieści**,** równoprawnych wobec innych składowych, które wspólnie doprowadzą do powstania większego tworu kulturowego. Czy *Legendy Polskie Allegro* są takim tworem tylko w teorii, czy też realizują koncepcję uniwersum? Ze względu na popularność pierwszych dwóch filmów krótkometrażowych i zbioru opowiadań stworzono kolejne krótkie metraże. Ze względu na zainteresowanie fanów nowymi aranżacjami muzycznymi, stworzono też teledyski, a obecnie w produkcji jest film pełnometrażowy. Allegro stawia na współpracę z miłośnikami *Legend*, zapytując ich o opinie dotyczące tworzonego świata, czy o to, których bohaterów najchętniej zobaczyliby na ekranie. Interakcja z fanami i ich udział w kreacji stanowią ważny punkt rozwoju uniwersum. Jednak widoczne dotąd formy współpracy są prowokowane odgórnie, ze strony firmy Allegro, która na swoich profilach w mediach społecznościowych pyta fanów o zdanie, założyła również grupę na Facebooku, gdzie prezentuje różne rozwiązania i zbiera od nich opinie („Magazyn Allegro", 2016A). W ramach skomercjalizowanej partycypacji można zostać **aniołem Allegro** poprzez wsparcie produkcji filmowej, otrzymać wyróżnienie w postaci uwzględnienia w napisach, biletu na premierę, czy nawet, za odpowiednio wysoką kwotę – statystować w filmie. Te formy aktywizacji miłośników wiążą ich z marką. Niewiele jest jednak przykładów działalności fanowskiej, oddolnych, autonomicznych inicjatyw. Można odnaleźć pojedyncze przykłady fanartów czy proste komiksy inspirowane *Legendami Polskimi Allegro*. Pojawiają się też filmy rozpatrywane jako „reakcje" lub „analizy" poszczególnych epizodów *Legend…*, wersje „ocenzurowane" filmu o Twardowskym czy ponowny montaż fragmentów uniwersum, w formie teledysków do kolejnych piosenek. Widzimy pojedyncze memy, quizy (*Którą postacią z Legend Polskich jesteś?*). Twórcy *Legend…* próbują zainteresować i zaangażować fanów na różne

sposoby, za pomocą paratekstów i wydarzeń promujących: *making of*, wywiady z twórcami, teasery, zwiastuny, opowieści autorów opowiadań czy audiobooka o procesie tworzenia, panel na wydarzeniach branżowych, takich jak Cameraimage czy Pyrkon, czy sprzedaż scenariuszy w ramach aukcji WOŚP. Jednak dialog z fanami wyciszył się wraz z informacją o produkcji *Twardowsky 3.14*. Pod ostatnimi publikowanymi postami pojawiają się komentarze niezadowolonych fanów, którzy domagają się informacji o postępach w projekcie.

Konkluzja

Uniwersum *Legend* rozwija się na różnych płaszczyznach a pojawiające się w różnych mediach informacje nie powielają się, tylko uzupełniają, tak, jak powinno dziać się to w narracji transmedialnej. Skierowane jest do różnych grup odbiorców; może przyciągać do siebie widzów pochodzących z różnych środowisk, w zróżnicowanym wieku. Jest to produkcja bardziej zrozumiała dla polskich niż zagranicznych widzów. Mocne osadzenie w polskiej kulturze, bazowanie na polskich legendach i podaniach nie prowadzą jednak do niezrozumiałości przekazu. Widz spoza słowiańskiego kręgu kulturowego wciąż może odnaleźć elementy uniwersalne. Pod względem zrozumiałości najmniej przejrzystym zdaje się audiobook, bowiem większość wypowiedzi bazuje na polskiej historii. Postmodernistyczna forma – gdy odbiorcy nie mogą odczytać większości elementów w kontekście ich nawiązań – traci wiele ze swojego uroku, zamieniając się w mało innowacyjną opowieść, budzącą raczej niesmak, ze względu na delikatny seksizm i nacjonalizm. W dotychczasowych produkcjach największy nacisk położony był na postać Twardowskiego (Twardowsky'ego); jednak dopiero wraz z dalszym rozwojem uniwersum będziemy w stanie stwierdzić, czy to na nim skupi się główna oś prowadzonej narracji, czy też inni bohaterowie otrzymają z czasem równie dużo przestrzeni.

W teorii Kinder wraz z rozwojem w supersystem powinien nastąpić gwałtowny wzrost sprzedaży. Jednak w przypadku *Legend,* gdzie większość elementów systemu jest dostępna za darmo w Internecie (filmy krótkometrażowe, teledyski, zbiór opowiadań, audiobook), a tylko nieliczne (niewielkie gadżety, ubrania, możliwość statystowania) są odpłatne, trudno mówić o gwałtownym wzroście sprzedaży, zwłaszcza, że na rynek weszły dopiero wraz z pojawieniem się pierwszych informacji o filmie. Czy merchandising *Legend* jest sukcesem, prawdopodobnie dowiemy się dopiero po premierze filmu pełnometrażowego (o ile do niej dojdzie), wtedy też będziemy mogli mówić o komercyjnym sukcesie *Legend,* które jak dotąd stanowiły dla twórców raczej kapitał społeczny, kulturowy, reklamę marki. Znaczenie będzie miało też podejście producentów do paratekstów

i merchandisingu, bowiem sposób prowadzenia tych elementów może wpłynąć na powodzenie i popularność całego uniwersum. Istotną rolę odegra również charakter reklamy zastosowanej do promocji – czy wykroczy ona poza dotychczasowe akcje promujące cykl *Legend* i stanie się nowym „wydarzeniem medialnym", zgodnie z definicją Marshy Kinder.

Tematycznie *Legendy Polskie Allegro* wpisują się w popularne na świecie nurty szukania zapomnianych, nieco odstawionych na bok historii, opowiadania na nowo znanych narracji. Mamy tu do czynienia z próbą zbudowania uniwersum w swojej wczesnej fazie. Wraz z jego rozwojem przekonamy się, czy forma, jaką wybiorą jej twórcy, odniesie sukces, czy też przejdzie bez echa i zostanie zapomniana. Jednak dotychczasowe działania, grono fanów i marka, jaka już powstała, sprawiają, że możemy jej wróżyć komercyjny sukces – o ile dojdzie do produkcji filmu pełnometrażowego. Jednak przedłużająca się przerwa, jakiej obecnie doświadczamy, i brak informacji o rozwoju projektu oddalają nieco wizję sukcesu.

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Allegro Polish Legends

The first short films from the *Allegro Polish Legends* series attracted great popularity. Further productions were created on the wave of this trend – short films, audiobooks and music videos. A feature film was also announced. *The Legends* are a unique narrative in Polish popular culture, not only because of the circumstances of its creation, but also the manner of its execution, distribution and the subject matter. In the article, I analyse this popular series, judging whether it can be considered a transmedia narrative. Firstly, I reflect on concepts such as an entertainment supersystem, a universe, a narrative and a transmedia story. Secondly, I relate these concepts to *The Legends* in an attempt to ascertain their applicability in an analysis of the series. I also reflect on the current situation of the franchise, as well as its potential and development prospects.

Keywords: *Allegro Polish Legends*, transmedia, transmedia narrative, universe, supersystem

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Przejawy nostalgii w dziedzinie sztuki filmowej: studium przypadku musicalu filmowego

Nostalgia

Pamięć, jako pojęcie stosowane w naukach humanistycznych, historycznych czy społecznych obejmuje szerokie spektrum zagadnień. Jak słusznie zauważa profesor Katarzyna Kaniowska, zagadnienie pamięci może stwarzać kłopoty w kwestii metodologicznej, z powodu trudności w dobraniu mechanizmów do jej badania, ponieważ w różnych dziedzinach może ona mieć całkiem inny wymiar i zastosowanie. W zależności od badanego dyskursu, w którym poruszane jest to zagadnienie, specjaliści podkreślają różne osobliwości zagadnienia pamięci, w dyskursie historycznym na przykład pamięć określona jest jako jeden z czynników narracji wydarzeń historycznych, w antropologii natomiast ważny jest indywidualny i kulturowy skutek pamięci, jej obecność w sposobie myślenia człowieka (Kaniowska, 2003).

W moich rozważaniach zajmę się pojęciem nostalgii, zwłaszcza nostalgii w sztuce filmowej. Szczególne przypadki występowania tego zjawiska omówię na przykładzie musicalu filmowego, który jest głównym obszarem moich zainteresowań naukowych oraz czysto rozrywkowych. W potocznym wyobrażeniu nostalgia związana jest z odczuwaniem tęsknoty za miejscem, często krajem ojczystym, bądź też za czymś co wydarzyło się w przeszłości, co utrwaliło się w pamięci, czy za czymś wyobrażonym, wymarzonym.

Przejawy nostalgii w dziedzinie kinematografii określane są często jako elementy postmodernistyczne dzieła. W filmie, szczególnie w musicalu filmowym, uczucie nostalgii często przejawia się w stylistyce pastiszu, jest też ściśle powiązane z intertekstualnością i inspiracjami wcześniejszymi dziełami filmowymi lub nawiązaniami do nich w danym filmie. Linda Hutcheon, najbardziej znana ze swojej teorii postmodernizmu, twierdzi, że estetyka nostalgii może zatem być w mniejszym stopniu sprawą tradycyjnie rozumianej pamięci, a w większym – kwestią złożonej projekcji; przywołanie częściowej, wyidealizowanej historii zderza się z niezadowoleniem z teraźniejszości (Hutcheon, Valdés, 1998-2000, s. 20). Również w nawiązaniu do postmodernizmu o nostalgii w filmie pisał Fredric Jameson, który nazywa operujący taką estetyką film „ahistoryczną reprodukcją i pustym pastiszem" (Jameson, 1982, s. 6), podkreślając niemożność ukazania „prawdziwej" historii za pomocą nostalgicznych, przywołujących wizualnie estetykę lat przeszłych zabiegów stylistycznych. Jednak Jameson stwierdza również, że współczesne społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne jest skazane na poszukiwanie swojej historii poprzez przywoływanie obrazów i stereotypów na temat przeszłości, która sama w sobie pozostaje na zawsze poza zasięgiem. Jameson nazywa ten specyficzny gatunek „filmem nostalgicznym" (oryg. ang. *nostalgia film*), który w wąskim znaczeniu obejmuje filmy traktujące o przeszłości oraz o konkretnych, ważnych momentach dla danego pokolenia z przeszłości. Przykładem może być *Amerykańskie graffiti* (1973, reż. George Lucas), film stylizowany na lata 50. XX wieku w Stanach Zjednoczonych, epokę Eisenhowera, czy *Chinatown* (1974, reż. Roman Polański), jeden z pierwszych filmów gatunku *neo-noir*, którego fabuła i estetyczny styl nawiązują do lat 30. XX wieku. Natomiast w szerszym znaczeniu jest to przywołanie pewnych emocji związanych z czyjąś młodością czy wcześniejszym okresem, przykładowo poprzez odtworzenie specyficznych kształtów, charakterystycznych cech obiektów sztuki z przeszłości, które wywołują wspomnienia czasu, który przeminął. Nostalgia w tym kontekście, jak twierdzi Jameson, jest punktem wyjścia do dyskusji na temat ponownego prezentowania zdarzeń, często postrzeganego jako fałszywa pamiątka zdolna przekształcić „prawdziwą" historię w fantazyjną rozrywkę.

Od momentu powstania terminu „nostalgia" była ona kojarzona z pewną patologią, niebezpieczną ze względu na to, jak działała na ludzką wyobraźnię, ale też ze względu na wspomnianą już powyżej możliwość zastąpienia praktycznej rzeczywistości fikcyjnym ideałem (DeFalco, 2004). Określenie „nostalgia" po raz pierwszy opisał w XVII wieku szwajcarski student medycyny, Johannes Hofer, który zajmował się analizą stanów emocjonalnych kupców przebywających przez dłuższy czas poza domem. Hofer nostalgią określił chorobową tęsknotę za domem, która przejawiała się m.in. przez melancholię (powracające myśli

o domu), bezsenność, anoreksję, utratę pragnienia, stupor czy gorączkowanie; wszystko to przypisywał diabolicznym siłom usytuowanym w mózgu (Lewicka, Prusik, Zaleski, 2014). Aż do lat 70. XX wieku nostalgia była rozpatrywana w kategoriach chorób psychiatrycznych, wiązano ją z czynnikami biologicznymi, środowiskowymi czy psychicznymi, a za wspólną cechę wszelkich jej źródeł uznawano tęsknotę za utraconym domem. Dopiero z czasem pojęcie nostalgii zinterpretowane zostało również jako emocjonalny powrót myślami do wydarzeń i sytuacji z przeszłości. Początkowo określano nostalgię mianem patologii, w dzisiejszych kontekstach nostalgia konotowana jest raczej pozytywnie. Wiąże się to ze zdolnością nostalgii do przechowywania i przywoływania emocji uznawanych ogólnie za pozytywne, które służą budowaniu pamięci i tożsamości, zarówno indywidualnej, jak i zbiorowej.

W kulturze, szczególnie w kulturze audiowizualnej od dłuższego czasu można zauważyć wciąż aktualną modę na stylistykę retro. Przeszłe dekady są na nowo interpretowane, nie tylko przez historyczne fakty, ale przede wszystkim przez obrazy, mody, style, ikony danych czasów, przez które z innego punktu widzenia poznajemy przeszłe warunki. Również wspomnienia są narzędziem do poznawania przeszłości, które bardziej niż efektem pracy pamięci, są efektem złudności nostalgii, przemycanej do zbiorowej świadomości w mediach i nośnikach kultury popularnej. Svetlana Boym pisze, że „słowo «nostalgia» wywodzi się z dwóch greckich rdzeni – *nostos* – co oznacza «powrót do domu» i *algia*, które określa «tęsknotę»", autorka definiuje ją jako „tęsknotę za domem, którego już nie ma lub nigdy nie było" (Boym, 2014). Warto zauważyć, że tęsknota za miejscem jest nierozerwalna z tęsknotą za czasem. Wspomnienie i wyobrażenie danego miejsca i czasu określają jego charakter, niekoniecznie ten „prawdziwy historycznie", ale też ten, który poprzez obrazy, literaturę czy filmy zostanie utrwalony i przekazany dalszym pokoleniom, choć zostanie on oczywiście przekształcany, w zależności od kontekstu, dla którego będzie ważny, i w którym zostanie przywołany. Boym zauważa, że nostalgiczna tęsknota dotyczyć może nie tylko miejsca czy czasu, ale również obiektu pożądania, szczególnego czasu, który został utracony – „czasu – dzieciństwa, wolniejszego rytmu naszych snów" (Boym, 2001, s. XV), w którym nie mieliśmy odniesienia do tego, co było wcześniej, dlatego dzieciństwo czy młodość są okresami, które zazwyczaj najmilej wspominamy. Jednak, jak słusznie zauważa Patrycja Włodek (2014), nostalgia przejawiająca się w kulturze popularnej, w tym w kinie amerykańskim, nie tylko dotyczy czegoś utraconego, ale tak naprawdę, nadając pewnym obiektom znamion „nostalgicznego kultu nieśmiertelności", wydostaje te przedmioty z niebytu i zapewnia im miejsce w pamięci i świadomości dużej części społeczeństwa, które jest pod ostrzałem nośników kultury popularnej. W kinematografii amery-

kańskiej, również w gatunku, jakim jest musical filmowy, ów fenomen, tęsknota za lepszymi, przeszłymi czasami, próba reaktywacji ich atmosfery często wyraża się w stylistyce retro, która utożsamiana jest z nostalgią, pastiszem, intertekstualnością dzieła czy jego elementami postmodernistycznymi, scharakteryzowanymi powyżej. Nostalgia zatem, omawiana w kontekście filmowym nabiera, oprócz ładunku emocjonalno-psychologicznego, również wymiaru estetycznego. Istotę stylu retro, w nawiązaniu do nostalgiczności dzieła filmowego trafnie określa Simon Reynolds, który nazywa ją „samoświadomą fetyszyzacją stylizacji danego okresu (w muzyce, modzie, designie), kreatywnie wyrażoną przez cytat i pastisz" oraz bardziej ogólnie, stylistykę tę przedstawia jako „luźne określenie wszystkich zjawisk odnoszących się do relatywnie nieodległej przeszłości kultury popularnej". Stylistyka retro, nostalgia, to w końcu zabiegi stylistyczne, które zajmują się tematyką przeszłości, która funkcjonuje we współczesności. Wart uwagi jest fakt, że pomimo iż nostalgia zasadniczo jest elementem pamięci, to jednak nie pamięć, chociażby ta zbiorowa, decyduje o tym, co zostanie tematem nostalgicznych rozmyślań. Pamięć zbiorowa czy wspomnienia mogą obejmować szeroki wachlarz wydarzeń, przekazy o minionych zachowaniach, tradycjach czy znanych osobistościach, natomiast nostalgia obejmuje tylko niektóre momenty, niektóre figury w historii. Tutaj znów zrozumiały jest komentarz Boym, która dostrzega różnicę między elementami pamięci zbiorowej, takimi jak tęsknota, a nostalgią. Stwierdza ona, że „podczas gdy tęsknota jest uniwersalna, nostalgia może dzielić" (Boym, 2001, s. XIII). Gdy nostalgia dotyczy jakiegoś tematu, jest on świadomie zmieniony, dopasowany do współczesnego zagadnienia, którego dotyczy, a więc jest również ekskluzywny. Zatem głównym nośnikiem elementów nostalgicznych są media czy ogólnie kultura audiowizualna, popularna czy masowa, dostępna szerokiej rzeszy odbiorców. Media prezentują przeszłość według pewnych schematów – wspomnienia i skojarzenia zawarte są w artefaktach, obrazach, piosenkach czy cytatach z innych filmów i tylko w ten sposób te objęte nostalgią elementy mogą stać się powszechnie rozpoznawane.

Nostalgia w musicalu filmowym

Nostalgia jest pojęciem charakterystycznym dla musicalu filmowego, jednym z czynników takiej zależności jest specyfika tego gatunku filmowego, który często przez filmoznawców uznawany jest za gatunek postmodernistyczny. W tym ujęciu film postmodernistyczny łamie bariery pomiędzy kulturą wysoką a niską, często przekształcając typowe wyobrażenia o rasie, płci, statusie społecznym czy czasie, aby stworzyć coś odmiennego niż to, co wpisuje się w tradycyjną narrację. Dodatkowo nurt ten czerpie z przeszłej tradycji, w myśl, że dotychczas wszystko już zostało napisane i stworzone i nie ma możliwości wymyślenia czegoś nowe-

go i oryginalnego. Nostalgia jest jednym z elementów postmodernistycznych, obok takich zabiegów, jak występowanie hiperrzeczywistości, użycie pastiszu czy zburzenie czwartej ściany (ang. *breaking the fourth wall*). Ważną techniką postmodernistyczną jest również zakłócenie czasu i przestrzeni, o którym Fredric Jameson (1991, s. 20) pisze jako o celowej technice uzyskania estetycznego efektu, ważnej aby wydobyć nowe znaczenie tego, co przeszłe, pseudo-historyczne, gdzie wagę przywiązuje się bardziej do przeszłej estetyki i stylu, niż do historii, która się za nimi kryła.

Martha Shearer w swojej publikacji *New York City and the Hollywood Musical. Dancing in the Streets* poświęca cały rozdział tak zwanemu „musicalowi nostalgicznemu" (ang. *the nostalgia musical*), takim mianem określa musicale głównie z lat 40. XX wieku, których akcja rozgrywała się na przełomie XIX i XX wieku, szczególnie podczas tak zwanych „szalonych lat dziewięćdziesiątych", często w historycznie wyidealizowanym mieście, jak Chicago, Boston czy Nowy Jork. Jak zauważa, musicale odnosiły sukcesy też we wcześniejszych i późniejszych dekadach, ale właśnie w opisywanym okresie *nostalgia musical* był u szczytu popularności. Jak pisze Shearer, musicale tego okresu były produktami systemu dedykowanego podstępowi, pewnej sztuczce, gdzie tworzone były w całości sztuczne odwzorowania realnych obszarów, czy to w Nowym Jorku, czy w innej lokalizacji. W musicalach tego okresu można dostrzec tendencję, która ze współczesnego zurbanizowanego miasta, przenosi widza do przeszłości w małym miasteczku, lub na wsi. Tekst Marthy Shearer jest jedną z nielicznych analiz musicalu pod kątem miejsca, w którym został zrealizowany oraz historycznie uwarunkowanej nostalgii. Jest ona tutaj silnie powiązana z urbanizacją, geografią i samym miejscem akcji.

Jednak odniesienia do przeszłego wyglądu miejskiego krajobrazu służyły współczesnym debatom na temat rozbudowy miasta, powstawania nowych wieżowców i całkowitej zmiany wyglądu danej przestrzeni. Co ciekawe, okres przełomu wieków czy wspomnianych już „szalonych lat dziewięćdziesiątych", w latach 40. XX wieku odbierany był i ukazywany w filmach jako spokojny i przyjemny. Historycznie jednak okres ten, szczególnie zaś rok 1893, był etapem największego do tamtego czasu kryzysu ekonomicznego w Stanach Zjednoczonych, napięć rasowo-etnicznych oraz strajków robotników. Pięćdziesiąt lat później czasy te były już jednak mitologizowane jako spokojny i dobry okres, po którym nastąpiły drastyczne zmiany, tak jak na przykład w Nowym Jorku – powstanie pierwszych wieżowców czy zwiększenie liczby ludności przez napływ imigrantów. Koniec XIX wieku był punktem zwrotnym w historii USA oraz początkiem amerykańskiej miejskiej nowoczesności, natomiast przywoływany

w filmach lat 40. XX wieku, odbierany był jako czas, do którego przyjemnie powraca się wspomnieniami, szczególnie w konfrontacji z ówczesną współczesnością oraz napięciami wojennymi. Przykłady nostalgicznych musicali tego okresu, o których pisze Shearer, to m.in. *Nowojorska piękność* (1952, reż. Charles Walters), romans z Fredem Astairem i Verą-Ellen w rolach głównych czy *Coney Island* (1943, reż. Walter Lang) z Betty Grable. Akcja tych filmów toczy się w znanych lokalizacjach Nowego Jorku – Greenwich Village (*Nowojorska piękność*) i w tytułowym Coney Island w latach 90. XIX wieku. Produkcje te wykorzystują charakterystyczne znaczniki dziewiątej dekady XIX wieku, wspomniane już wyżej „artefakty", wywołujące nostalgiczne skojarzenia – często można dostrzec kataryniarza z małpką, osoby sprzątające ulice, chłopca rozwożącego gazety na rowerze, kierowcę tramwaju miejskiego czy wszechobecne drzwi wahadłowe (Shearer, 2016, s. 75–112).

Pierwsze musicale filmowe, które zarazem były jednymi z pierwszych filmów dźwiękowych, stały się natychmiastowymi przebojami. Rok 1928 był dla Hollywood dość chaotyczny, większość studiów filmowych nie było przygotowanych na tak duży popyt filmów dźwiękowych, oznaczało to całkowitą zmianę w dotychczasowym procesie produkcji, w krótkim czasie twórcy filmów musieli uporać się ze zmianą stylu aktorstwa, reżyserii, edycji i kadrowania – wszystkie te elementy musiały zostać przekształcone, żeby odpowiednio wpisać się w nowe, nadające całkiem innowacyjny filmowi kształt, medium dźwiękowe. Ten chaotyczny, ale przełomowy moment w kulturze i w historii kina amerykańskiego jest motywem ważnym dla kinematografii i często powraca się do niego w nostalgicznych obrazach, jako do początku tego, czym dzisiaj jest Hollywood. Czas ten stał się również inspiracją do nakręcenia musicalu filmowego, który uważany jest za najlepszy w historii tego gatunku (AFI, 2005), a zarazem można go nazwać musicalem nostalgicznym – *Deszczowej piosenki* (1952*,* reż. Gene Kelly, Stanley Donen). Akcja tego musicalu, w którym główną rolę odgrywa jedna z najjaśniejszych gwiazd ekranu tamtego okresu – Gene Kelly, rozgrywa się właśnie pod koniec lat 20. XX wieku. Humorystycznie przedstawione są zmagania ekipy filmowej próbującej przekształcić swój niemy film na nowe, dźwiękowe medium. Główną rolę w nowym filmie ma odegrać gwiazda kina niemego Lina Lamont (w tej roli Jean Hagen), której mocny brooklyński akcent przyczynić się może do spektakularnej porażki filmu (do tej pory w niemych filmach, w których występowała aktorka, nie miał on żadnego znaczenia dla jakości produkcji). Film ten, który ukazywał problemy, z jakimi przemysł filmowy borykał się wraz z nadejściem dźwięku, jest jednym z najlepszych filmów o historii kina, a zarazem stał się jednym z najbardziej rozpoznawalnych musicali wszechczasów, jego wpływ na kulturę popularną jest ogromny i trwa do dziś. Co ciekawe, w odróżnieniu od

współczesnych filmów, z kategorii „epidemii retro" (Bahr, 2012), których akcja rozgrywa się w tamtym czasie, takich jak *Artysta* (2011, reż. Michel Hazanavicius), *Deszczowa piosenka* nie idealizuje czasów filmu niemego, ale raczej skupia się na pozytywnym „kroku naprzód" przemysłu filmowego, podczas gdy film z 2011 roku pozwala jego bohaterowi pogrążyć się w smutku nad końcem pewnej epoki, przez co widzowie mają wrażenie, że było to coś lepszego, coś, do czego nie ma już powrotu. Trzeba jednak zauważyć, że w 1952 roku niewielu tęskniło za okresem, który to bezpośrednio poprzedzał wielką depresję, a później kolejną wojnę światową. Wraz z upływem lat i zmianą perspektywy historycznej, łatwiej jest jednak docenić minione czasy i przyznać, że życie wydawało się łatwiejsze i spokojniejsze przed jakąkolwiek technologiczną innowacją.

Popularność musicalu często wiąże się z funkcją ideologiczną, optymistyczne przesłanie i pełna nadziei na lepsze jutro postawa jest bliska idei amerykańskiego snu, ale też nostalgiczne powroty myślami do wcześniejszych lub wyobrażonych lepszych czasów pełnią funkcję eskapistyczną dla zmęczonego problemami życia codziennego widza. Jednak często też bywa, szczególnie w potocznym wyobrażeniu, że musical filmowy jest synonimem kina wyłącznie rozrywkowego, pozbawionego głębszych treści – kojarzony z przystojnymi panami we frakach oraz pięknymi tancerkami pojawiającymi się na ekranie. Warto jednak zauważyć, że wbrew potocznemu wyobrażeniu za musicalem filmowym kryje się coś jeszcze, można go odczytywać jako tekst kulturowy, który niesie ze sobą konkretny przekaz, a odczytywany w kontekście jego powstania lub czasów, o jakich traktuje, stanowi swoiste źródło informacji o amerykańskich realiach danej epoki, o ludziach, dla których powstał i ich potrzebach, ale też o tych, którzy go zrealizowali.

W zależności od historycznego czasu, w jakim powstawały musicale filmowe, pełniły one różną rolę w społeczeństwie. Musical ewoluował w czasie pod względem estetycznym, ale mechanizmów ewolucji musicalu filmowego należy szukać również w kontekście kulturowo-historycznym. W zależności od dekady czy danego etapu w historii Stanów Zjednoczonych, w jakim są produkowane, musicale są w mniejszym lub większym stopniu odpowiedzią na zapotrzebowanie społeczne, uwarunkowane sytuacją ekonomiczną czy polityczną w kraju. Dana sytuacja społeczna czy kulturowa jest jednocześnie inspiracją, ale często również głównym tematem musicali.

Pomimo nadejścia wielkiego kryzysu musicale filmowe były w dalszym ciągu masowo produkowane, tym razem ze względu na zapotrzebowanie społeczne, była to jedna z niewielu możliwości, aby zmęczone trudnościami życia codziennego społeczeństwo mogło mieć chwilę wytchnienia. W tym czasie powstało kilka podkategorii musicalu, takich jak musicale rewiowe, popularne w tym okre-

sie, nie prezentowały one szczególnej czy specyficznej tendencji w filmowaniu czy rozbudowanej fabuły, ale raczej koncentrowały się na sekwencjach tanecznych, piosenkach i skeczach komediowych. Wykonywane numery w filmie nie były ze sobą przemyślnie powiązane, nie było między nimi ciągu przyczynowo -skutkowego. W musicalu rewiowym akcent raczej kładziony był na doborową obsadę, starano się dobierać jak największe gwiazdy, tak jak np. w filmie produkcji studia MGM *Hollywood Revue* (1929, reż. Charles Reisner), w którym występowały postaci takie jak Buster Keaton czy Joan Crawford. W tym trudnym dla społeczeństwa amerykańskiego czasie operetka, kolejny podgatunek musicalu, również miała swoje pięć minut. Pomimo tego, że wielki kryzys dotykał całego społeczeństwa amerykańskiego, a w 1933 roku u szczytu depresji 25% obywateli doświadczyło bezrobocia, wciąż pomiędzy 60 a 70 milionów Amerykanów każdego tygodnia odwiedzało kiNo. Aby zrozumieć ten fenomen, gdy pogrążone w biedzie społeczeństwo nadal chce wydawać swoje ciężko zarobione pieniądze na rozrywkę, jaką jest kino, trzeba zrozumieć relację, w jaką wchodził przemysł filmowy z potrzebami społeczeństwa – a ten wychodził im naprzeciw. Niezależnie od kryzysu ekonomicznego zaspokojenie potrzeb konsumentów stało na pierwszym miejscu. W ogarniętych konsumpcjonizmem Stanach Zjednoczonych towary stały się obiektami kultury, tak samo stało się z filmami. Filmy te odzwierciedlały amerykańskie pragnienia i na odwrót, był to jeden z powodów, dla których Hollywood było w latach 30. XX wieku tak ważnym elementem w życiu społeczno-kulturalnym Ameryki. Filmy produkowane w tym czasie wzięły na siebie odpowiedzialność za przywrócenie mitycznych, amerykańskich wartości takich jak indywidualizm, brak podziałów klasowych czy postęp. Musicale takie jak *Poszukiwaczki złota* (1933, reż. Mervyn LeRoy, Busby Berkeley), *Ulica szaleństw* (reż. Lloyd Bacon, Busby Berkeley, 1933) czy *Nocne motyle* (1933, reż. Lloyd Bacon, Busby Berkeley) bezpośrednio nawiązywały do okresu wielkiej depresji i stały się najlepiej zarabiającymi produkcjami dekady.

W filmie *Poszukiwaczki złota* akcja rozpoczyna się próbą występu scenicznego, którego głównym motywem są pieniądze, niestety z powodu niezapłaconych rachunków przedstawienie zostaje zawieszone przez wierzycieli producenta; jest to jedno z wielu bezpośrednich nawiązań do czasów kryzysu w tej produkcji. Jednak cztery główne bohaterki, jak i ich przedstawienie, zostają uratowane przez utalentowanego muzyka, który okazuje się również synem milionera. Takie szczęśliwe zakończenie jest typowym dla musicali tworzonych w czasie wielkiego kryzysu, produkcje te oprócz dawki realizmu i odniesień do problemów dnia codziennego miały napawać publiczność optymizmem i nadzieją na lepsze jutro. Wszystkie trzy kultowe musicale tego okresu – *Poszukiwaczki złota, Ulica szaleństw*, jak i *Nocne motyle* należały do podgatunku musicalu, zwanego *backsta-*

ge musical. Był to rodzaj musicalu, który cieszył się największą popularnością w tamtym czasie, akcja takiej produkcji toczyła się wokół historii osób tworzących przedstawienia teatralne bądź przeznaczone na duży ekran, czyli rozgrywała się za kulisami (z ang. *backstage*). Takie rozwiązanie powodowało łatwość w uzasadnieniu obecności przedstawień muzycznych i tanecznych w fabule filmu. W początkowej fazie rozwoju musicalu filmowego takie uzasadnienie było koniecznie, żeby publiczność przyzwyczaiła się i zaakceptowała charakterystykę nowego gatunku – ówczesna publiczność jeszcze nie przywykła do obecności muzyki, śpiewu i układów tanecznych zintegrowanych z fabułą, dlatego to właśnie produkcja *backstage musicali* odnosiła sukcesy finansowe. Za choreografię i reżyserię układów tanecznych wyżej wspomnianych produkcji odpowiedzialny był Busby Berkeley, jeden z najbardziej uznanych reżyserów *backstage musicali*, sekwencje taneczne w jego choreografii charakteryzowały się tworzeniem geometrycznych, płynnie zmieniających się kształtów tworzonych przez ciała tancerek, często nagrywanych ujęciem kamery z lotu ptaka. Berkeley był jednym z pierwszych reżyserów, którzy rozumieli i brali pod uwagę ruch kamery podczas nagrywania ujęcia. W przeciwieństwie do swoich poprzedników nie rejestrował obrazów z jednego punktu, ale przesuwał kamerę wraz z przesuwającymi się tancerzami. Był również pierwszym, który użył kadrów ze zbliżeniem pojedynczych tancerzy oraz prekursorem częstych zmian punktu widzenia filmowego widza – w przeciwieństwie do statycznego widza teatralnego. Pomimo braku profesjonalnej edukacji w dziedzinie filmowego medium jego musicale okresu lat 30. XX wieku zostały uznane za moment przełomowy w kulturze amerykańskiej (Kenrick, 2004). Musicale wyprodukowane przez niego dla studia Warner Brothers, w połączeniu z muzyką pisaną przez Ala Dubina i Harry'ego Warrena tworzyły optymistyczną atmosferę z obiecującym przesłaniem sukcesu, podczas pracy w grupie. W połączeniu z wizualną ekstrawagancją, czasami nawet wulgarnymi (jak na tamte czasy) czy erotycznymi obrazami, musicale Berkeleya służyły jako filmowa dystrakcja od ekonomicznych trudów życia codziennego w czasach wielkiego kryzysu.

Produkcje musicalowe opisywanego okresu nie ukazywały już idealistycznej perspektywy lat dwudziestych, ale dawały ludziom bardziej realistyczne wizje aspiracji i przyszłych osiągnięć. Gwiazdy takie jak Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Shirley Temple czy Fred Astaire stały się symbolami siły, odwagi, charyzmy, wrażliwości i triumfu. Musicale te odzwierciedlały narastającą w społeczeństwie amerykańskim potrzebę ucieczki od codziennych problemów, ale pomiędzy magicznym światem, jak z krainy Oz prezentowano również bardziej realistyczne sceny dotkniętych kryzysem miast czy domów. Oprócz tego, że fabuła odnosiła się do realiów to skonstruowana była tak, że pod koniec akcja

przybierała pozytywny obrót zdarzeń, tym samym musicale zwiększały morale i sprawiały, że życie w czasach wielkiej depresji stawało się nieco bardziej znośne. W tym wypadku w musicalach okresu wielkiego głodu nostalgia, tak jak pisze Linda Hutcheon, nie była kwestią tradycyjnie rozumianej pamięci, ale dotyczyła pewnej złożonej projekcji, która przedstawiana była w filmach tego okresu, przywołanie wyidealizowanej historii konfrontowano zaś z niezadowoleniem z obecnej sytuacji społeczno-ekonomicznej. Nostalgię w musicalach wielkiego kryzysu można odczytywać również przez pryzmat rozważań Svetlany Boym, jako „tęsknotę za domem, którego już nie ma" (Boym, 2001), a w przywoływanym momencie historycznym w Stanach Zjednoczonych była to dość dosłowna interpretacja.

Jednym z najbardziej aktualnych, ale też najbardziej spektakularnych i odnoszących sukcesy nostalgicznych musicali XXI wieku jest produkcja *La La Land,* (reż. Damien Chazelle, 2016). Jest to pierwsza oryginalna produkcja musicalowa tego stulecia (większość musicali to adaptacje sztuk teatralnych lub książek), pomimo że składa się z niesamowitej liczby odniesień do znanych filmów, nie tylko musicali, ale też artefaktów (o których pisze Boym), takich jak obrazy, miejsca czy muzyka. Niemałym wyzwaniem jest znalezienie w tym musicalu chociaż jednej sceny, która nie nawiązywałaby do poprzednich dzieł artystycznych różnego rodzaju. *La La Land* jest samoświadomym listem miłosnym do starego Hollywood i dlatego z całą pewnością można go nazwać filmem zarówno postmodernistycznym, jak i nostalgicznym, w nawiązaniu do wcześniej przywoływanej myśli Jamesona. Główni bohaterowie tej produkcji to mieszkający w Los Angeles Sebastian (grany przez Ryana Goslinga), muzyk jazzowy, przepełniony romantyczną tęsknotą za przeszłością, szczególnie za latami świetności muzyki jazzowej i chęcią przywrócenia tego stylu do łask oraz Mia (Emma Stone), aktorka, która stara się odnaleźć swą własną drogę we współczesnym Hollywood, jednocześnie idealizując i wspominając filmową historię miasta, w którym żyje. Od samego początku do wielkiego finału *La La Land* jest naszpikowany odniesieniami pełnymi uznania dla Złotej Ery Hollywood. Jednak, jak zauważa David Sims, nostalgia w *La La Land* jest „nostalgią obosieczną" (Sims, 2017), pomimo wielu nawiązań do przeszłych filmów, kultu aktorów takich jak Humphrey Bogart oraz muzyków jak Dizzy Gillespie czy Charlie Parker oraz bohaterów wyglądających jak wyciągnięci z filmów poprzednich dekad i zachwalających minione czasy, reżyser filmu Damien Chazelle stworzył film, który rozumie granice kultu przeszłej sztuki, która w obecnych czasach jest dość skostniała. Ta dwustronność nostalgii, o której wspomina Sims, dotyczy zakończenia filmu, które nie jest oczywistym happy endem, a trzymanie się kurczowo przeszłości nie do końca kończy się dobrze dla bohaterów. Nostalgia prowadzi ich do osiągnięcia swoich

zawodowych celów – Mia zostaje sławną aktorką, a Sebastian prowadzi swój wymarzony jazzowy klub, ale nie zapewnia im osobistego szczęścia, para rozstaje się i tylko w końcowej, sennej sekwencji, zaprezentowane jest wspólne, szczęśliwe życie dwójki bohaterów, które jednak się nie spełniło.

Musical filmowy od zawsze był jednym z najbardziej nostalgicznych gatunków filmowych. Często wynika to z powiązania tego gatunku ze stylistyką postmodernistyczną oraz faktem, że większość musicali filmowych to adaptacje, czy to sztuk teatralnych, czy powieści, przez co są to pewnego rodzaje transformacje i rekonstrukcje przeszłych tekstów na współczesne potrzeby srebrnego ekranu. Główną funkcją musicalu jest funkcja eskapistyczna, oderwanie się od rzeczywistości, codziennych problemów, co niejednokrotnie łączy się z uczuciem nostalgii, powrotem myślami do przeszłego czasu, który z perspektywy lat, zawsze wydaje się być lepszy i bardziej sprzyjający. Pomimo tego, że przejawy nostalgii w musicalu filmowym nie maja wiele wspólnego z tradycyjnie pojmowanym pojęciem nostalgii, niezaprzeczalnie ślady nostalgii charakteryzowanej przez Svetlanę Boym, Lindę Hutcheon czy Fredrica Jamesona dostrzegalne są w wielu musicalach filmowych.

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Nostalgia in the Field of Film Art: Case Study of a Film Musical

This article deals with the notion of nostalgia, especially nostalgia appearing in the film medium, and more specifically in the American film musical. After tracing the birth of the concept of nostalgia, recalled here are the characteristics of nostalgia, which in a film musical are associated with the fashion for retro, evoking the old times, associated with a better life, prosperity, compared to contemporary times. Traces of nostalgia in the film musical can be seen especially in films from the Great Depression period, but the current fashion for nostalgia is strongly manifested for example in *La La Land*, the most successful musical of past years, which marked the genres renaissance.

Keywords: nostalgia, film musical, film, American film musical, Great Depression, American history

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