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Beyond the Reel —— Meta-reality in Film

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Richard N. Donovan

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Abstract: Beyond the Reel —— Meta-reality in Film

Richard Donovan, 1994

This thesis examines how a film establishes its own sense of 'reality' which goes beyond the mere representation of 'real life'. It introduces the term *meta-reality* to define this phenomenon, examines how meta-reality comes into being, its characteristics, and what effects it may have on the film viewer. The thesis employs a narratological approach to this issue, suggesting that narrative is the ultimate creative force in film, and that meta-reality is the cooperative product of narrator, narrative and narratee.

Chapter One presents a case for the existence of filmic meta-reality and the usefulness of this term to the film theorist.

Chapter Two examines the essential characteristics of the film medium, comparing some of the major film theories of the twentieth century.

Chapter Three explores the similarities and differences between film and other artforms. It points up an affinity between film and novel which seems to belie their fundamentally different media.

Chapter Four examines film narrative, and determines the four basic principles of narrative: generation, cohesion, revelation and explication. It suggests that a filmmaker's narrative objectives in creating a meta-reality closely mirror these principles.

Chapter Five discusses the narrative acts at work in a film text which effect the filmmaker's narrative objectives.

Chapter Six is a case study of an excerpt of the film *Mosshill*, which identifies the working of narrative acts in the text, and relates these to the filmmaker's narrative objectives.

Chapter Seven summarizes the foregoing discussion, and suggests avenues for further research into filmic meta-reality.

Preface and Acknowledgements

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This thesis comprises two parts:

1. Written section (found herein).
2. Video section. A VHS videotape accompanies the written Case Study in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Richard Donovan, February 1994.

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Introduction

When dinosaurs once again walk the earth in the film *Jurassic Park*, is this somehow less 'real' a film phenomenon than, say, the down-to-earth portrayal of a real-life individual in *My Left Foot*? Equally, when newcomer black writer-director John Singleton releases his portrait of racial issues *Boyz N The Hood*, can we compare the work's spare, unobtrusive storytelling with established black writer-director Spike Lee's overt techniques in the race portrait *Do The Right Thing*? And how can two viewers come away with divergent opinions of such a film? Why is it likely that they may disagree on the 'point' of the story, the issues raised, and the filmmaker's intentions, while still agreeing that the filmmaker is talented?

Here I am identifying three matters which are central to my thesis: the question of the reality which the filmic *text* portrays, the reality which the *author(s)* intend(s),[1] and the reality which the *viewer* perceives. All films are fictions in the sense that someone *makes* them (Latin: *fictio*, a fashioning, from *fingere*, to shape): they never spontaneously come into existence, no matter how natural they may appear. Even a documentary creates its own agenda of priorities and focuses out of lived existence, thereby manufacturing an entity that has never existed before. Nevertheless, 'fiction' does not equate with 'non-reality', no matter how much the mass media may have confounded the distinction. As I will be contending in this thesis, a fiction is no less real than a stone, except in some limited physical terms. In many ways, in fact, a fiction, or, as I prefer to call it, a *text*, exhibits aspects of reality which a stone could never merit: psychological, mental and spiritual dimensions which are ultimately a product of perception, but are no less real for this. As George Bluestone reminds us in quoting the theorist Arnheim, "art is just as much and just as little a part of material life as anything else in this world" (Bluestone, 8).

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[1] By *author*, I mean the people who have played a significant role in the conceptualization and development of the story that we see on screen. This could include novelist, script writer, story editor, director and others. For the purposes of this thesis, I will consider script writer and director as the originators of a film narrative.

Hence, *reality* is not a very helpful term to apply to these issues, first because it is such a general concept, and hence encompasses, for my purposes, too wide a gamut of ontological and epistemological questions (that is, questions of the nature of existence and how we interpret it). Second, 'reality' carries with it connotations of absolute truth and unassailable physical fact which would lend a utilitarian air to our discussion. The main focus of my essay is not film techniques and the properties of film and filmed physical objects that underlie these techniques; it is the organizing structures that we find operating when the author originates his or her ideas, when these ideas are realized before a camera and in the cutting room, and when the viewer perceives this manifestation on the screen. For the purposes of this essay, I will be adopting the term *meta-reality* in preference to 'reality', because this term limits our discussion, and also recognizes the special, transcendent place that the text occupies in the wider Reality of our universe. Let us examine what such a term encompasses for the world of film.

First, I believe that a film's essence lies in its ability to construct a reality-in-itself and -for-itself which is both coherent and cogent. In other words, a successful film is both believable and successful in convincing us of its believability. I feel that we should replace the phrase 'suspension of disbelief' in describing this process, because it does not do the text justice. Certainly, the bare requirement of a text is that it induces us to accept its 'world' as a temporary equivalent to the one we occupy 'outside' of the text; but in many cases, a text does much more than that, presenting us with ideas and feelings which seem somehow *heightened*, causing us not only to pause for a look (the product of this suspension of disbelief), but furthermore to *pause for thought*. Sometimes we feel that an author, be it of a book, film or sculpture, has captured the essence of some reality which we rarely 'live' ourselves. Sometimes, a film may cause us to laugh or cry when we are not normally disposed to such actions; it may force us to examine issues that we would normally ignore. Sometimes, indeed, a film may seem *more real to us than our own lives*, in that it distils the 'stuff of life' into a form much more concentrated and potent than that of everyday life. And yet, how closely a given film represents the 'real' world is largely irrelevant, I

feel, to how real an entity we perceive it to be. How a film *reflects* our daily lives is no more important a consideration than how it may *affect* or even *effect* these lives. For the point about all art is that it uses nature —— its physical form —— to transcend nature. I will contend in this thesis that the only reality that must be respected in film (at least, representational film) is the reality of the *narrative*: if the story does not work, everything else is in vain.

Second, an important aspect of this self-contained reality is the storyteller's intentions for his or her story. He or she may be simply content to tell a good yarn, one which is compelling and memorable simply by virtue of its superficial coherence. Then again, the filmmaker may want to address certain themes or issues in the work, even presenting his or her personal convictions or attitudes. Most filmmakers of course place their works somewhere on the continuum between pure superficiality and a story supersaturated with comment. How the filmmaker 'orientates' his or her work has a direct bearing on the entity which presents itself to the viewer at the end of the process.

Further, film, like all artforms involving the active participation of more than one person at the creation stage, presents special problems in analyzing who the 'author' is to begin with. Unless the director also is writer, cinematographer, actor(s) and editor of a film, he or she cannot be said to be the sole author of a work in the way that a writer could. The celebrated *auteur* theory of Godard and his contemporaries, still very much stock-in-trade for the film critic, has done much to introduce the popular notion that the director 'authors' the film, however logic dictates otherwise. I prefer to say that the director *makes* the film, relying on the talents and ideas of a number of people, but using them in a way that he or she synthesizes. Thus, I am not diminishing the importance of the director: no matter how talented the screenwriter, it is he or she that is the 'bridger of worlds', transforming the verbal script into the audiovisual scenario that we recognize as the film, and often changing the script markedly in the process. However, to maintain the distinction between the *originator* of the film's story and the *realizer* of that story, I will use the term *filmmaker* in place of *author*. And what is important for this discussion is that how the filmmaker attempts to achieve his or her goals for a narrative will naturally help determine the effect the

work will have on its audience: that is, the reality it will convoke in the viewers' minds.

This leads us logically to the third triad of film's essence. The reality which the author induces cannot exist without the willing participation of the viewers themselves, a cooperation which the author must strive to evoke. Thus I will consider how a viewer's preconceptions must influence his or her perceptions of a film as a meta-reality, and how the author of the text could be seen as the 'first viewer' of the text that he envisages.[2]

To summarize, in this thesis, I am addressing questions central to the nature of film as an artform: what is the status of film reality, how is it created, what forms can this reality take, and what effect can these forms have on our lives (should we allow them to). Just as viewers and readers are no longer being regarded as purely passive consumers in relation to the 'texts' they see and hear, we can no longer regard the text itself as either merely derivative (imitative) of 'reality', or entirely abstracted from it. Nor is the text merely the author's consciousness 'on a plate', delivered to us whole for our consumption. Film in the end is as much potentiality as actuality, and, as theorists have found, it thus defies complete description, despite its phenomenal basis, evidence in itself that the extent of its influence in the world does not end at the movie-theatre doors, let alone at the edge of the screen frame.

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[2] This notion is based on the discussion of the term in Branigan, *passim*.

Chapter One —— Meta-reality and Film

To explain how and why I am utilizing the term *meta-reality* in my discussion of reality in film, I must first point out that I will be using a narratological approach throughout this work. This means that I will be addressing issues of film *language*, film *technique* and film's *societal context* only inasmuch as they reflect an aspect of the narrative in film. The reasons for this approach will become obvious in a moment.

Film is one of the few artforms which can genuinely claim to tell a detailed, complex story. In fact, film, like the novel, is so closely synonymous with story-telling that we largely *expect* it to undertake this act. Despite the odd exception, people have not been known to flock to the theatres to see documentaries (even though these may well qualify as 'fictions'); they wish to have a fictional world presented to them, for reasons ranging from escapism to artistic stimulation. However, I feel there is more to film's proclivity for narration than simply that film is suited to this,[1] and encouraged in its tendencies by an eager public. What this bent for story-telling implies is that the worth of a representational[2] film lies not just in the effects which it creates from moment to moment —— it is 'shadowed' by some shifting entity which arises from the combination of moments, a synthetic element which does not exist in any particular image or sound, but rather in the totality of accrued images and sounds.

At the conceptual level, a film engages its viewers not so much in the individual ideas or feelings it evokes, but in what it alludes to in the ideational *spaces between the effects*, the causal connections and associations that we seem naturally to establish as we watch.[3] This process, based in the uniquely human tendency to attribute meaning to events (be it *'writer' or 'reader'*), has important

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[1] We will examine reasons for this appositeness in a later section of this thesis.

[2] That is, a film which takes the physical world as the basis for its representation, rather than some abstract play of light and colours which is created directly *on* the celluloid (for example the so-called direct films of Len Lye).

[3] The term *synergy* is sometimes applied to a totality of such connections, in which the whole cannot be entirely accounted for by examining its parts.

consequences for the discussion of film reality. For in my view, narrative actually *enables the film to assume its own reality.*

Everyday life, no matter how disorganized and aleatory it may appear, can claim to be part of Reality by the undeniable physical form it takes. However, when someone dares to construct their own fictional world, he or she ultimately feels the need to give it some structure, some meaning, in order to have people accept it as a valid alternative to the everyday world.[4] Perhaps this is because humans are able to regard abstract qualities as just as real as physical objects. Pain, pleasure, nausea, lust, boredom, courage: these things cannot be quantified, yet nor can they be denied as being powerful forces in our lives. Arranging these abstractions into some structure that *explains* their existence is a common way for humans to reify them. Hence, film, be it drama or documentary, invariably uses narrative as a validation of its existence as an artform. Moreover, it acts as both a means for a filmmaker to *generate* the artform, and a means for the viewer to *appreciate* it. Narrative structure is thus not just a framework for the text, onto which the artist grafts his or her effects; it is an important *construing force* in the creation and apprehension of the text.[5]

One might argue that some films deliberately defy narrative expectations, and yet they still 'miraculously' assert their right to be considered as art: the work of Ruiz and Godard comes to mind. Yet the urge to find meaning is so strong in both creator and viewer that, like the sharpened senses of a blind person, somehow, other elements of the film will assume the roles of storyteller,[6] and we are able to come away from the film with some story in our heads, even if it is no cosy boy-meets-girl encapsulation. If consecutivity inevitably assumes the

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[4] Even apparently random artforms, such as splashing paint on a canvas, may be lent a structural significance, if, for example, they form part of an artist's portfolio, and are hence contextually signifying. But the consideration of such non-narrative 'texts' is outside the scope of this discussion.

[5] *Construal* is at once an act of *constructing* and *comprehending*; and if we accept the idea (which I will address later) of the text-maker as veritable *first reader*, this is a process which takes place in both senses even in the act of creating the text.

[6] For example, instead of cause-and-effect linear temporality, a complex of motifs may tell a story.

status of causality in the human mind, narrative thus seems to me an unavoidable construct in an artform that must take place in *time*.

If narrative is so important a factor in the creation and appreciation of film, then it follows that it is also a prime constituent in the establishment of a film's reality. Note that I do not say 'sense of reality'. If a film's effects limited themselves only to the moment of the showing, then perhaps we could be content with the aforementioned 'suspension of disbelief', for then we would be dealing with the temporary maintenance of an acknowledged illusion which is soon passed. (As I will later argue, the effect of the moment, the instantaneous insight, *is* in fact an important part of film reality —— but only within the context of the *narrative*.) Just as we find it difficult to identify with a character's trials unless we already 'know' them from additional information, a carefully staged 'moment' means so much more to us in its narrative context than out of it.

What bearing does narratology have on meta-reality? My idea to use this term came out of the French linguist Genette's definitions for the story or *histoire* level of narrative. He put forward the terms *diegesis*, *hypodiegesis* and *extradiegesis* to explain the three functions of narrative at this level.

Diegesis is most obviously the story as the text presents it to us in the form of a fictional world; but it is more than that. As the linguist Christian Metz informs us,

> The term was introduced into the framework of the cinema by Etienne Souriau. It designates the film's *represented* instance ... —— that is to say, the sum of a film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements....
>
> [Mast and Cohen, 168]

Extradiegesis is the narration of the story world (that is, comments upon it) by a narrator existing outside of the diegesis. In a novel, this could be the

'author',[7] or a character external or internal to the story itself, contributing a certain quality to the telling of the story. In Dickens' *Bleak House*, for example, there are two distinct narrators, one, the sensitive and caring character Esther, internal to the story (and hence using the first-person *I*) and one external (using the more detached third-person), imparting a much more cynical interpretation to events. The contrast of the two sources of extradiegesis provides the reader with valuable information about the diegetic world itself. Applying this general concept to film, we may include among extradiegetic elements: an external narrator, who may indeed appear as a character external to the action, or merely as a voice-over; music that creates an effect rather than being part of the story-world itself; and captions such as 'Prague 1902'.

The cinematic difference is that, film not being a verbally mediated artform, it need not have a manifestly human-originated narrative such as the novel, a composite of human language, demands. This has led some people to argue that in fact film is not so strongly narrated as the novel. However, it soon becomes obvious that extradiegetic commentary is still present in the film, since humans control what we are allowed to see and hear on the screen, whether or not humans are talking directly to us at the time. To adapt a truism, *actions can speak like words*, these actions including the unseen manipulation of the camera, the unpersoned selection and combination of shots through editing, and the disembodied production of music. Thus, film narrative often conceals its commentary behind the façade of 'natural action': events appear to make themselves, rather than be described (and hence commented on) as in the novel.

The third story-level, hypodiegesis, is a story internal to the greater story, being dependent on an actual diegetic character to tell it (this is the 'story-within-a-story' technique).[8] Hypodiegesis, Genette suggests, acts to reinforce the structures and content of the prime story.[9]

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[7] The authorial voice of a given work cannot be taken to represent the actual writer of the work, as it is as much a textual construct as the diegesis itself.

[8] The French cinematic term *mise en abyme* ('putting into the abyss') captures well the sense of internal mirroring which is implied here (cf. Gardies and Bessalel, 12).

[9] This description is based on Rimmon-Kenan, 91.

What these terms do not encompass in delineating text-level narrative are the overarching structures of signification that remain largely implicit in the telling of the story. Such elements as the development of themes and ironic commentary fit into this category; but it can mean something as basic as the text's finding its own 'voice', its own sense of relative autonomy. These aspects are not so much outside the story (extradiegetic) as starting within it and extending *beyond* it —— what I would call *metadiegetic*.[10]

Metadiegesis, this *narrative resonance*, gives the story a significance beyond its diegesis, helping to render it relevant to readers'/viewers' actual life experiences. While it is an overall product of the text, it remains accessible at many points throughout the narrative. Further, this element is often much more *contentious* than the other diegetic elements, because it requires an act of interpretation beyond establishing the causal narrative structure that we discussed in the introduction. However, the patent worth of such a synthetic element lies in the 'narrative glue' effect to which I alluded earlier. It is an 'effect between the spaces', ultimately helping to cohere the entire text.

By analogy, I have adopted the term *meta-reality* to orientate a text, be it cinematic, novelistic or balletic, in relation to the reality of the 'world at large'. Hence, if we may in one way consider life as a narrative,[11] 'reality' becomes the equivalent of diegesis: our lived existence. 'Extra-reality' is perhaps our belief systems, those patterns of moral and philosophical 'commentary' which circumscribe our actions.[12]

Further, if "all the world's a stage", then we, the players, are capable of narrating our own 'hypo-reality' within this world. This takes the form of our thoughts about and reactions to reality and extra-reality. It is at this point in the

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[10] While other literary terms have been applied to this phenomenon, it is useful for my purposes to choose a term which relates this concept to Genette's narrative hierarchy, because of the importance I place on narrative in the reality-making process. Sometimes the term 'metadiegesis' is used to mean 'hypodiegesis', however I consider this to be an innacurate usage, considering the implications of the prefix 'meta-' which are outlined below.

[11] Given the human propensity to impose a sense of order on life in just such a way, this is a reasonable proposition in the context of art's place in the world.

[12] One could compare this concept with Freud's *super-ego*.

analogy that narrative differs from lived existence, in that in real life, the 'characters' can become aware of the 'story' they are living (rare in fictional literary narrative), and hence begin to comment on, and so narrate, their *own story*.

A condition for the existence of meta-reality in such a system is that some being is able to construe new information about the system from what he or she perceives to be the structures inherent in it. From consciousness of the 'wider picture', meta-reality may emerge. However, such consciousness does not actually become a meta-real text, transcending its origins, until it is somehow articulated (and, ideally, recorded), so that others may experience it. The moment an idea is articulated, it becomes a reality in and of the world —— an experiential reality, which may or may not affect physical reality itself, for example through human actions in response to it. The text thus at once remains dependent on this physical reality for its origination, and is a part of this reality. Yet, as I will soon discuss, the text goes beyond its origins to set up a nexus of meaning that not only transcends physical reality, but also *exists* in a way no less valid than this reality.

The worth of applying the term *meta-reality* to the discussion of film is manifold. First, as I conclude above, all texts, all examples of artforms, are meta-realities insofar as they contribute to the overall reality of the universe in which we live. Hence the term is designed to break down the barriers between 'everyday life' and 'art' which were so carefully established in the Renaissance period. Many people regard art as something which may affect them a little while they are exposed to it, but which seemingly holds little relevance for them outside the time and space in which they behold it. On the contrary, I feel art's influence spills over into the rest of our lives, subtly affecting the way in which we live them. In this way, in the cinematic arena, socially ground-breaking films both mirror and impel society's changing attitudes, while conventional screenplays help to maintain societal norms even as they reflect them. (However, in this thesis, I am primarily concerned to outline the effects that occur while one is watching a film. I can only begin to suggest the 'extra-mural' effects of cinema, given the limits of this work.)

Furthermore, I see all texts as meta-realities because they use their undeniably physical reality as a starting-point to create a further reality which is much more than its concrete manifestation. For example, the novel is firstly marks on a page, then meaningful marks (an example of language), then meaningful language (an example of story or exposition which has a purpose beyond organizing language into grammatically and lexically acceptable combinations). Similarly, a film is (in one mode of signification) firstly images on a screen and sound from a speaker (elements which have pro-filmic, physical correlates), then meaningful images/sound (the juxtaposition of elements creating meaning), then meaningful juxtaposition (story or exposition again). Meta-reality is the second and third inflections of language (be it verbal or non-verbal). The second inflection is contextual meaning; the third inflection is the meaningful structuring of meaning into patterns that extend beyond the topical. For our purposes, I will be concentrating on this third inflection, and on how film's unique qualities encourage the agent of structuration, the people involved in its creation, to follow certain patterns of meaning-making.

Summarizing the two main points I have made above, a meta-reality both asserts itself as one of the many threads of the universal Reality, and claims its own special weft of that reality, one which is only brought from potentiality to existence by someone's imagination. The meta-real, the *fiction*, does not equate with *non-reality*: it merely indicates a reality whose limited physical signification does not contain its entire essence.

Film fiction's apparent closeness to 'reality' offers both tools and traps to the text-maker, some of which we will explore later. A common trap that critics fall into when judging how 'realistic' a film is is that they fail to realize that although film has an undeniably physical starting-point, it often aims for wider goals than reflecting reality. The film is *idea-driven*, not appearance-driven, as I will argue.[13]

It is worth spending a moment pondering the multiple implications of the prefix *meta-* in this term 'meta-reality'. The definition which I have applied so

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[13] This is not to say that films are never exercises in superficial imagery, just as novels may consist of a string of clichés.

far is that of 'transcending or going beyond' something. Film takes physical traces, both visual and audio, and gives them meaning beyond the here-and-now physical and temporal.

Expanding on this, we can read *meta-* as 'change': the transformation of individual signifying elements into a synthetic semiosis. Here, we mean taking discrete shots and sounds and combining them. As in Eisenstein's montage theory (to be discussed), we can suggest that these elements then become emptied of their original meaning and filled with new, structurally induced, ones.

A third nuance of *meta-* acts as a qualification of the cheerful transcendence intimated above —— *meta-* as 'happening behind or after'. Thus, however much a meta-reality may transcend its organic origins, it cannot exist without them. A physical base remains a prerequisite for creating ideational resonance; and furthermore, a (representational) film cannot sustain itself on abstract imagery for long. To present abstract ideas, it normally must use concrete images.

Finally, there is the simplest definition of the term: *meta-* simply meaning 'more'. Seeing a film as 'more reality' is perhaps this thesis in a nutshell. Such a description blurs the boundaries of art and life, and acknowledges that art *is* life, despite the fact, and indeed because of the fact, that it is a construct. That we spend much of our life (or at least free time) unquestioningly taking in other people's ideas and dreams in the form of 'diversionary' art means that we may fail to recognize just what is supposedly 'filling in the spaces' between our working moments. The social dangers of downplaying film and other arts' part in making our Reality can be seen in the way that many governments minimize their funding of artistic projects in times of recession, supposedly seeing the arts as somehow less essential to our wellbeing than such things as military defence and industrial development.

Extending the meta-real metaphor still further, we could regard humanity itself as the *meta-animal*, attempting to transcend the exigencies of physical existence in the need for mental, emotional and spiritual expression. Language in its many forms, both verbal and otherwise, mediates our very thoughts about life. We cannot interpret the world for more than a moment without categorizing

what we see, and the film is a type of categorizing agent, not using an arbitrary group of signs, but rather selecting and combining traces taken directly from the physical (pro-filmic) to comment back on the world from which they are taken.

To conclude this introduction, let me recapitulate my general objectives in this thesis. I hope to identify the characteristics in a film which may make up its meta-reality, elements which arise from the text's general disposition of structure and content, the 'author''s intentions and the viewer's interpretations. Then I wish to examine the ways in which these realities may manifest themselves in actual texts. I will be drawing upon examples from well-known films, as well as using a portion of my own film *Mosshill* as the subject of close analysis. Finally, I will suggest some of the implications of these realities for appreciating film's role in our lives: film acting *beyond the reel.*

Chapter Two —— The Essential Nature of Film

As I indicated in the introduction, the phenomenal basis of film plays an important part in delineating the potentials of the medium for creating a meta-reality. Film is most commonly compared to the novel not because it is physically similar to film, rather because it shares a predisposition to conveying narrative structure. (This also seems the most useful explanation of the widespread cross-pollination of films and novels, with adaptations both ways.)[1] However, before we examine film's narrative significance, we should take the time to look at what are the essential, inescapable properties of the medium, and the implications of these for film's ability to create realities for us. Recalling one of the definitions of *meta-*, we note that while meta-reality may transcend its physical origins, they always subtend it, and hence are an unavoidable starting-point. This century's film theorists have spent much time debating film's basic properties, and it will be fruitful to examine the various points of view available before coming to our own conclusions.

The expressionists

Expressionism preceded realism, reaching its ascendancy in the 1920s in Germany, and at the same time in Eastern Europe in the shape of Formalism. It could be seen as opposing the realist purpose of film (which as we will see is to reflect faithfully the physical world), pointing rather to the reality of the *idea* as being the driving force of film. Arnheim was the chief German exponent of this principle, while the Eastern European Formalists, notably Eisenstein and Pudovkin, espoused a similar point of view. All of them saw film as primarily a means to an expressive end rather than some sacred embodiment of nature. The early Eisenstein, for example, regarded his medium as a powerful way to present a discussion of social issues. His classic film *Battleship Potemkin* demonstrates both this contention, and his willingness to use montage (sometimes regarded by

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[1] See my unpublished research essay *A Novel Idea: The Process of Novelization* (1990) for a discussion of the adaptation of a film into a novel.

the realists, especially Bazin, as 'unnatural' and spatiotemporally disruptive) as a technique the better with which to portray his social concerns.

Eisenstein saw montage in particular as a way to transcend physical reality, by emptying shots of their original, impoverished signification (e.g. 'eye' and 'pocket-watch'),[2] and, by juxtaposing them, synthesize his own, more compelling meaning (e.g., 'someone is looking at a pocket-watch', or potentially, 'someone is coveting a pocket-watch').[3] He rejected the commonly held theory of such contemporaries as Pudovkin, that montage was the *linkage* of images; rather, he saw it as an active meaning-making process in which images *collided*, their conflict almost literally ex-pressing a dialectical synthesis in the mind of the viewer.

Eisenstein gives a telling example of his conception of expressionism's essence and its antithesis to realism in the following description of his technique:

> we cause a monstrous disproportion of the parts of a normally flowing event, and suddenly dismember the event into "close-up of clutching hands," "medium shots of the struggle," and "extreme close-up of bulging eyes," in making a montage disintegration of the event in various planes.... By combining these monstrous incongruities we newly collect the disintegrated event into one whole, but in *our* aspect. According to the treatment of our relation to the event.
>
> [Mast and Cohen, 95]

The idea of in fact *purposely* fostering such "monstrous incongruities" and dismemberments of depicted events was apt to turn Bazin's blood cold (as we will see). But for Eisenstein, it was simply the means to an affective end —— an event presented in the way *that the filmmaker wanted it to be presented*, rather than in a way somehow dictated by the mere physical circumstances of the event.

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[2] Impoverished in that by itself, it 'meant' little more than what it iconically represented, and hence did not really justify its presence. Pudovkin's term for this concept was the "dead object". (Bluestone, 18.)

[3] Many interpretations of this exemplary juxtaposition are possible, depending on the context (field of synthetic meaning) in which they are shown.

In this manipulation lay for Eisenstein one of the essential constituting forces of cinema.

Arnheim in his turn rejected the realist belief that film's purpose is slavishly to re-present nature, instead arguing that human impulse goes beyond the urge to copy (and hence psychologically to possess), extending to a desire to *create something new* from nature's raw materials. In asserting this, he ironically sided himself with the realist Kracauer, at least in the respect that, seeing film's inherent representational limitations as its source of strength —— its formal basis, that which distinguishes it from nature —— he resisted moves to introduce sound, colour and three-dimensionality, as did Arnheim, since they seemed to him to encroach upon the photographic image's supreme domain of making meaning in film.

Monaco sums up the expressionist 'philosophy' succinctly when he suggests that

> [f]or Eisenstein it was necessary to destroy realism in order to approach reality. The real key to the system of film is not the artist's relationship with his raw materials, but rather his relationship with his audience.
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> [Monaco, 327]

(However, expressionism really only explores one side of this relationship: how the "artist" communicates *to* his or her audience. We must look elsewhere in film theory to find a reasonable treatment of the issue of the audience's contribution to art, which we will do shortly in a discussion of cognitive psychology.)

It seems to me that while the expressionists can be credited with raising the artistic potential of film to greater heights in their quest to fathom its expressionistic qualities, there are certain dangers inherent in the manipulation of 'real' images for artistic ends, dangers which are borne out in many modern-day films which seem to sacrifice logicality and consistency for hollow effect. The realists were all too sensitive to such dangers, and attempted to counteract them with an appeal to the 'higher purpose' of film as they saw it.

The realists

The realist camp ascribed to a theoretical position established in the 1920s largely as a reaction to expressionism. It had a moral tenet aimed at avoiding the abuse of power of the medium by respecting its aesthetics rather than 'exploiting' them. Realism had such proponents as the German Siegfried Kracauer and the French André Bazin, and such practitioners as the only-recently deceased director Renoir. For these people, film's basis was in accurately representing reality (physical verisimilitude), and it thus achieved the most and was most true to its essence when it strove for realism of images, cutting, dialogue, etc.

The realists were thus opposed to such stylistic choices as would introduce what Bazin described as *spatial and temporal discontinuity*,[4] or which would explore a filmmaker's favoured interpretations of events at the expense of the viewers'. For realists, the expressionist idea of manipulation smacked of coercion, denying the viewer the right to his or her own interpretation of events. The realist saw him or herself as returning film to its rightful role of artform subjugated to its societal context, just as form most serve content.

However, while the realists may have agreed on the importance of respecting film's essential nature when constructing a work, they differed on what this nature actually was. Kracauer saw film as an 'anti-art', because its photographic, apparently unmediated origins meant that it was not dependent on formalism like the other formal arts: it did not have to bear the imprint of its maker's hands. However, he may have gone too far in suggesting that because film was "uniquely equipped to record and reveal physical reality",[5] it *should* do this, and this alone. He argued that film's ultimate and exclusive purpose is to redeem reality from the tyranny of technological advancement by *recording* it:

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[4] Phrase paraphrasing Bazin's writings in *What is Cinema?*, excerpted in Mast and Cohen, passim.

[5] Monaco, 320.

> Having been divorced from physical reality by both scientific and esthetic abstraction, we need the redemption film offers: we need to be brought back into communication with the physical world. Film can mediate reality for us.
>
> [Monaco's paraphrase, Monaco, 321]

Bazin, however, challenged this, asserting that film's function "is not to redeem physical reality but to exempt us from our physical destiny", as Mast and Cohen put it (3). That is, he posited the 'myth of total cinema' as lying behind inventors' attempts at filmically recreating reality, their ultimate aim being to reproduce reality with perfect accuracy. Hence, every technical advance brought film ever closer to that mythical simulacrum. As Monaco puts it,

> film is the asymptote to reality, the imaginary line that the geometric curve approaches but never touches.
>
> [Monaco, 329]

In sum, Bazin was more concerned with the accuracy of the act of (visual) reproduction than with the fate of the physical reality itself, distancing him from Kracauer's lofty ideals for the medium.[6]

Nevertheless, inherent in this concern was a belief that a film's world should be as intelligible as, if not more so than, the real world itself. The author's preoccupations should not obfuscate the presentation of reality. Bazin clearly gave the viewer an active meaning-making status, empowering him or her to interpret what happens on the screen, and furthermore to choose what to interpret. He thus favoured deep-focus shots in which all foreground and background elements were clear, allowing the viewer freedom in selecting what he or she wanted to look at. Further, he espoused the so-called long-take style[7]

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[6] Jean Mitry points out however that Bazin does lapse into arguing a neo-Platonist position for a metaphysical value for film: "the power of the film to reveal absolute reality" at the expense of his consideration of its "phenomenological value —— the ability of film to put the viewer in touch with perspectival, individual, and personal experiences of reality" (Lewis, 46).

[7] This is roughly equivalent to the mise-en-scène approach described below.

which afforded the fewest possible interruptions to the 'natural' rhythms of the on-screen action.

The filmmaker Astruc shared Bazin's concerns when he coined the celebrated term *cinéma-stylo* (cinema-pen), suggesting that film had the potential to be every bit as expressive as the novel, but in its own way, by being true to its image-based nature. Astruc, like Bazin, eschewed "'outside' [extradiegetic] devices such as [voice-over] commentary and quasi-literary form."[8] These they saw as shackling the film to an unsuited predecessor, the novel, thereby preventing film from developing its own forms of expression.

The Hollywood of the forties and fifties appropriated some of the European realists' ideas to justify and sustain the 'conventional realism' of the films that they produced. The emphasis at that time was on conveying a story as seamlessly and unobtrusively as possible. The ultimate compliment was when an audience was not aware of the film mechanics at all: the editing was 'invisible', the camera movements carefully synchronized with on-screen action so as to cloak them, the lighting 'natural', and so on. Many films of the current era subscribe to much the same approach: they are geared simply to telling a story in as accessible a way as possible. Nevertheless, the apparently natural, straightforward appearance of such films is ironically a carefully contrived nexus of illusory techniques designed to plug up holes in the realism, paper over elisions of time and space, stave off the boredom of the mundane.[9]

Were we to attempt to create a film that was truly realistic, taking the realists' ideas to their extreme, we would find a film both limited in its movement in space and time, interminable in its development, and ultimately of little interest as a meta-reality. This is because we would be unable to cut the shot (as editing interferes with spatio-temporality); the camera, approximating the human eye, would be stuck on a 50mm lens, and hand-held (for a lack of axial and lateral movement is not very 'true to life'); there would be no music to underscore the

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[8] Bacher, 230.

[9] Bazin himself concedes the necessity of creating an impression of reality in his use of such terms as "aesthetic realism" and "psychological realism" in his work *What is Cinema?* (excerpted in Mast and Cohen).

on-screen action; and we would not be able to identify cast or crew members, let alone the film itself, as there would be no credits. Ironically, such a film would inevitably fail to be taken seriously. "Is this for real?" some might ask incredulously. The point is that the *impression* of reality, as Bazin himself concedes, is ultimately more important than 'realism' per se. Indeed, as Mast and Cohen suggest, echoing V. F. Perkins, the very iconicity of film images may act to *efface* the recognition that film is accurately reproducing reality: "The credibility which photography and movement confer on films' images encourages us to place an inaccurate construction on an accurate series of images." (Mast and Cohen, 4.)

Ultimately, then, it appears that the realist/expressionist antagonism is not as clear-cut as its proponents might have wished. Each side makes valid points about the nature of film, but neither can claim to have captured the essence of cinematic reality. However, it was not long before theorists began to establish a constructive *via media* between the two extremes.

Jean Mitry

In the 1950s, the French film theorist Jean Mitry, with the benefit of hindsight and practical film-making experience, brought together what he considered to be the most convincing and useful elements of each of the two schools' theories. He both acknowledged that film's essence is the photographic image, based in the concrete reality it has recorded, and pointed to its expressive power in being something more than the original reality. This phenomenon he called the *double nature of the image*.

An image is at once the 'same' as its referent —— being a mechanical, iconic representation —— and 'other': because it is two-dimensional, projected at a different size, has no concrete reality other than the celluloid and the photons that shine through it, and is framed, thereby removing it from its original context, it transforms its subject into something new. That the image has become a sign for the original object means that it can represent more than this physical reality. In short, it has the potential to become a symbol for other things, particularly (as

Eisenstein noted) in concert with other images. This in part explains the phenomenon of filmic *photogénie* (a term coined by Louis Delluc) which first captured Mitry's heart as a child —— "that ''magic power'' of the cinema to render on the screen a world more compelling than the world outside the theater" (Lewis, 1).

Photogénie is one face of meta-reality, a product both of the physical world and the intangible imagination of people who have transformed this world. As Brian Lewis adds, "The perceived world is neither superficial, a token for things beyond, nor profound, the absolute reality." (Ibid., 42.) And, further, Lewis quotes Mitry: "concrete reality becomes the vehicle for the construction of its own imaginary counterpart." (Ibid., 48.)

Mitry's compromise means that the expressionist desire to manipulate the world is tempered by the realist concern for an uncluttered portrayal of existence: for an image to mean something other than what it is, it must first mean *something*. Implicit in this statement is the need to find a consistency of ideas and a consistency of portrayal in making a film. A film full of great ideas, but which presents them in a messy, incoherent way, is a failure. Equally, an immaculately shot film is hollow and unconvincing if the ideas behind it are inchoate. A film achieves *photogénie* when it is able to overlay form and content in the same frame.

Mitry reached an equally significant compromise in pointing to the underlying similarity of the goals of the montage/mise-en-scène antagonists, which equated roughly with the expressionist/realist divisions.[10] While acknowledging the differences of effect of the two general filmmaking techniques, Mitry argued that in fact they were often just alternatives for achieving much the same end: a fluid change in the spatial relationships between objects and camera. Thus, as I interpret him, Mitry suggests that a filmmaker's underlying objectives may often be achieved in a number of ways, making ideas as much an integral of reality-making in film as the techniques which realize them. Revisiting the realists'

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[10] Expressionists tended to favour a montage-based style, that is, one that privileges editing in the organization of shots, while realists preferred long-take mise-en-scène, in which one changes shot size and framing by moving the camera instead of cutting.

concern that editing fragments the cinematic world, we can suggest that this is only one possible effect: another is in fact to augment a viewer's perception of this world by 'weeding out' elements that contribute little to the filmmaker's idea of the world, instead rendering the film-reality down to its essential elements. Whether or not a filmmaker succeeds in cutting together this world in an efficacious way depends not so much on the inherent nature of editing itself, but rather on how it is employed.

Similarly, tying the essence of film to the technical limitations of any particular era (as Kracauer and Arnheim did with the silent, black-and-white film of the early twentieth century) is as illogical as wishing that the English language had not developed beyond Shakespeare's version. All artforms pass through phases of development which are just as valid as what has come before. Film is a protean entity in the same way, and as long as we exercise care in using the new technologies which have an impact upon it (such as the seamless silicon graphics in *Jurassic Park*), we can only advance film's expressive potential. As Monaco notes, "Many of the limitations [of the film form which Arnheim] lists ... are far less important in terms of how we perceive a film than in terms of how we construct one." (Monaco, 319.) We perhaps need to go beyond preoccupations with technical details and look at what they are able to manifest. However, we should be careful not to confuse the presentation of a world increasingly close to the outward appearance of 'real life' with the issue of meta-realism, because of the significance of *how* these images are presented to us.

La nouvelle vague —— the 'New Wave'

The mid-1950s also heralded the so-called 'New Wave' of French filmmakers, riding on the crest of which were such notables as Truffaut and Godard. Espousing the *politique des auteurs* ('auteur' policy) through *Les cahiers du cinéma*, they wanted to re-define the nature of film reality, partly in opposition to the neo-realists' rigorously phenomenal basis for expression, a basis precluding 'meddling' with the reality of the presented events.

As Monaco puts it, "It was not material realism or even psychological realism that counted now, but rather intellectual realism." (Ibid., 332) It was here that the New Wave diverged from their expressionist mentors: they had shifted the focus away from the expression of certain events (which the expressionists implicitly condoned along with the realists) to the idea of expressing simply *the author's existential point of view* (both literal and figurative).[11] Film thus was seen as a *statement* as much as (if not more so than) a *reflection* of existence: it was *self-possessed.*

Instantly, there could be a shift away from the debate of prescriptivistic discussion, in this case, the 'correct' way to approach the making of a film:

> Techniques ... then cease to be of main interest. We are more concerned with the "voice" of a film: is the filmmaker operating in good faith? Is he speaking directly to us? Has he designed a machine of manipulation? Or is the film an honest discourse?
>
> [Ibid., 333-4]

Jean-Luc Godard paralleled Mitry in attempting to reconcile the montage/mise-en-scène theories as aspects of the same "cinematic activity" (Ibid., 332). He at once rejected the manipulative nature of expressionism and the weak and ineffectual obeisance to 'reality' which he saw realism proposing.

Semiotics

With the 1960s came another approach to the workings of film, this time a self-styled scientific approach. The French linguist Christian Metz acknowledged Mitry's contribution to the synthesis of film theory originating in the first half of the twentieth century, but felt however that Mitry failed to separate his analysis of film from certain assumptions about the moral 'higher purpose' of film. In

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[11] This differs from Eisenstein's focus on the importance of the filmmaker's aforementioned "relation to the event" in that he is concerned with dealing with social, external issues, while many of the New Wave group were engaged in introspective soul-searching both about their own minds and their own films.

order to critique films adequately, Metz argued, it was necessary to employ a system of analysis which was completely 'objective'.

Metz believed he had found such a system in the semiotic theories of French linguist de Saussure and his contemporaries, which he thus applied to film. Metz transformed the idea of film's 'language system' or 'expressive power' into a stack of codes with different roles in the meaning-making process. The semiotic codes were held to overlay and inform image and sound at three levels: first, pure codes ('this image represents a house'); second, cinematic codes ('this image of a house represents an establishing shot of a location'); and third, cultural codes ('this image of a house is a symbol of affluent security'). Hence, Metz would have seen Eisenstein's espousal of social responsibility in film as not so much the natural expression of an artist than as a highly conventionalized system of cultural assumptions about what was 'right' and 'wrong' in Russian society, packaged in a series of images which relied upon certain assumptions about cause and effect, proximity of objects and so on to enable him to communicate these ideas to the viewer.

Further, Metz reduced the issues of montage and mise-en-scène to a simple question of combination (paradigm) and selection (syntagm), whereby the filmmaker chooses to display certain objects simultaneously within the shot (in space), and then to juxtapose these objects with others in time.

In sum, the importance of semiotics (and later post-structuralism) in examining film's workings is that it may help to disabuse us of the seamlessly 'natural' appearance of the iconic film image, reminding us that a series of images may be just as laden with cultural and other preconceptions and connotations as a series of words is.

Despite the useful role that a structural approach has had in challenging the assumptions of preceding film theory, it is not without its own problems. Critics, Mitry among them, have seen semiotics as reducing film signification to nothing more than this rigid system of signs, obviating such human concepts as inspiration, transcendence and *la photogénie,* phenomena which for him defy encoding or decoding. Semiotics, these gainsayers contend, fails to explain the motivations behind the significations.

Cognitive psychology and the 'reader'

Among the new schools of thought that saw the rise of such ideas as deconstruction in the latter half of the twentieth century has been a group anxious to highlight the importance of the reader (or viewer) in the textual process. As Monaco notes, "The center of interest has shifted from generative to receptive theories. We are now no longer so concerned with how a film is made as with how it is perceived and what effect it has on our lives." (Ibid., 316.)[12] Edward Branigan, a major proponent, has explored the idea that each viewer brings to a film a set of ready-made narrative schemata which influence how he or she 'reads' the film (or indeed writes it in the first place).[13] He contends that the viewer is hence an active participant in the film narration, construing meaning from what he or she experiences.

This theory adds an extra dimension to the analysis of film —— the act of comprehension is lent almost the same status as the act of creation, because in many ways it *is* this act of creation. When we discuss the third triad of the text which I mentioned earlier, we will return to this theory.

Meta-realism

To speak in broad terms, the realists emphasized the importance of film's essential phenomenal properties, the expressionists privileged the author's intentions in exploiting these properties, the semiologists pointed out how the text's properties are not entirely determined by intentionality, and the reader-response camp invested the viewer with the power to create the final version of

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[12] In this thesis, I am making a point of studying some generative theory, but from the point of view of the receptive 'first reader' who takes into account the effects and expectations of the viewer in the generative process.

[13] Branigan notes that the film author (screen writer and director) can be regarded as the 'first reader' of the nascent text which he or she creates, anticipating and possibly confounding the ultimate viewer's expectations, for various effects. We will consider the implications of this 'first reader' in a later section.

the text he or she is watching. Together, these theories may be seen to synthesize an approach to film which regards it as a *meta-real entity*.

Hence, meta-realism acknowledges the importance of film's photographic, iconic origins (like the realists) but asserts film's right, indeed need, to manipulate these origins to the requirements of the psychological and ideational realities of the narrative (as the expressionists saw form serving content).

For me, meta-reality is a product of the coincidence of the author's intentions and expression; the text's physical properties; and the viewer's perception of the text (purpose, design and effect). To put it another way, the author wants to convey certain ideas, uses the film medium to set up narrative pathways for these ideas (what I call narrative *acts*), and then the viewer interprets these acts to complete the transmission of ideas. Note that I am not merely subscribing to the basic transmission model of mass communication by pointing out the three major textual agents in meta-reality; the fact that each agent has a signal effect upon the final apprehension of meta-reality means that no longer is the sender's message entirely what he or she intended; no longer does the medium merely transmit the message; and no longer does the receiver passively accept the message uninterpreted.

In short, I see a place both for the classical realist film and the 'auteur' film of expressionist tendencies. The first type, despite (carefully engineered) appearances, *is* capable of original comment on its own story, and the second, despite appearances, may tell a story that is redolent with psychological reality. There is a place both for the ambiguity which encourages the viewer to make his or her unique interpretation of events, and the author's denotation which can guide the viewer away from the morass of meaninglessness.

Both 'realistic' and 'expressionist' film types have the potential first to convince the viewer that they are worth looking at (pausing for a look) and then that they are worth thinking about —— equally during and after the film experience (pausing for thought). In this way, they connect with the mind, which is itself an amalgam of lived physical experience, subjective perception, and internalized fictions. In some ways, a film is a projection of the human mind's

desire for order and meaning —— which some interpret as a desire for control over the physical.

I thus stress the need to keep all three elements in mind when examining the issue of meta-reality. I will hence be examining each agent carefully in the course of this essay; however, I will not artificially section them off in the course of analysis, rather, like the triple-lens system of old movie cameras, I will bring each into play when it is appropriate.

Chapter Three —— Film and Other Artforms

Having examined some ways in which theorists have defined the nature and expressive power of film, I wish now to put cinema into its cultural context, outlining film's unique potentials for meta-reality by contrasting it with other forms of expression. I have chosen to examine photography and drama in some detail, as they can be viewed as the antecedents of important aspects of film form. While there is some merit comparing film to music, painting, sculpture and architecture, I feel that this would digress from the main thrust of this thesis, and hence I will make only passing reference to these artforms here. Finally, I will carefully compare the film and the novel, artforms which owe their undeniable affiliation not to the similarities of their media, which are few, rather to the shared preoccupations which arise from their *narrative basis*.

If we consider film's general appearance as a basis for comparison, we could describe it as sharing with photography an iconographic medium and with the theatre a dramatic subject. Like photography, film takes its images directly from real life, using mechanical and chemical processes which are unmediated by human interpretation, at least in any specific way.[14] In addition, both media are framed, that is, given specific spatial boundaries, though the photograph has the freedom to assume a number of side ratios, while the cinematic image is usually limited to one or two set proportions. In many ways, we can see photography as the direct progenitor of cinematography, in that it set up the expectations of being able to record the world directly, and in a way that was extremely faithful to that world. Not satisfied with producing static snapshots of a mercurial world, inventors, acting to fulfil Bazin's myth of total cinema in their striving to approximate nature's appearance, developed such devices as the kinetoscope. This device employed a series of related photographs (or pictures) on a ring which, when turned, induced the illusion of movement by blending the successive images into one another.

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[14] The exception to this is computer-generated imagery, which is playing an increasing role in the cinema.

The critical point at which cinema clearly broke away from its forebear was the introduction of light projection, using technology borrowed largely from the 'magic lantern', which projected static drawings. Combining projection, photography and successive images, the Lumière brothers among others synthesized the basis of today's cinema.

This description of the origins of cinema reveals several obvious divergences in the workings of photography and film. First, photography is a reflective medium on paper, while film is a projective medium, bouncing light off a reflective surface. Second, photography is static, capturing a moment in time and isolating it from its context. Film, on the other hand, is inescapably dynamic, despite the fact that its movement is illusory, being composed of a sequence of static images. The point is that film captures the essence of movement and transmits it to the audience. In doing so, it contextualizes each individual image by the action of the preceding and following images, something which in photography is only achieved by a layout of images (uncommon) or, incompletely, by *captioning*. The concept of the caption, or comment, is worth dwelling on, for it encapsulates a significant point about the interpretation of images.

As I have pointed out in earlier research, "Film is *conceptually* ambiguous",[15] a property which photography shares. The very *concreteness* of the iconic image precludes it from portraying complex *abstract* ideas to the viewer —— *unless it is part of a context of images* whose juxtaposition synthesizes such a reading. Captioning in photography is an attempt at supplementing the 'ideational opacity' of the image. Words, themselves *pictorially* ambiguous, incapable of rendering exact and complex visual experiences, are however able to *contextualize* a dislocated picture (and, symbiotically, the picture's unmistakeable trace acts to *validate* the caption's 'claims'). While film does on occasion resort to verbal captioning of various sorts to perform the same task, more often than not it can achieve a similar effect by the use of non-visual

[15] Donovan, 10.

elements such as music, or purely by the accretion of contextual significance which takes place in film time.[16]

Thus film is able to orientate its own material in space and time without the need for external description. Further, it is able to move within the boundaries of space and time in a way inaccessible to the photograph. For, while the film is trammelled by a frame just as is the photograph, limiting the size of image which it can show at any given moment, it may move across its subjects, and jump between different subjects at will, actions which are both functions of its temporal nature.

The final physical distinction between film and photograph is the element of sound, something which few photographs acquire. Audio is often an underrated element of cinema, and of course it is not essential to the film experience, as the first decades of film attest to. However, the sound film is here to stay: the sound track adds undeniably important levels of meaning to the images it accompanies (indeed, sometimes it appears that the images are accompanying it).

Beyond the phenomenal comparison of film and photograph, there is the issue of narrative. A photograph may isolate a moment in a story, but it cannot elucidate a plot or follow the growth of a character. Film's temporal fluidity combines with its photographic pellucidity of image to make it potentially an excellent story-teller, as V.F. Perkins suggests:

> The movie offers its reality in a sequence of privileged moments during which actions achieve a clarity and intensity seldom found in everyday life. Motive and gesture, action and reaction, cause and effect, are brought into a more immediate, dynamic and revealing relationship. The filmmaker fashions a world more concentrated and more shaped than that of our usual experience ... primarily in the sphere of action and appearance rather than of reflection or debate.
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> [Mast and Cohen, 49-50]

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[16] I will examine the relationship of words and images more closely when I compare novel and film.

If film shares with photography the accurate duplication of actual objects, it shares with theatre the portrayal of action in 'real' time. Thus film uses photography's powers of reproduction to convey drama's immediate impact. However, the apparent similarity between staged drama and filmed drama led to the sometime misuse of film, in that some early directors attempted to make filmed plays, set on overt 'stages' and shot wide, rather than allow film its own idiom of action. As Jean Mitry pointed out, the focus of theatre is the *words* that the actors speak. Staging and costuming are secondary, and with good reason. For theatre, no matter how lavish its sets and how remarkable its set changes (take the set-dressing for *Les Misérables*), cannot shift between locations in the blink of an eye, as can cinema; and more importantly, it cannot alter the spatial relationship between the audience and the actors.

In film, the images are the focus: words, a form of captioning (verbal exposition), certainly have their place, but do not necessarily form the essential of a scene. And the film camera is ably equipped to capitalize on the power of the image. It can zoom in and out, dolly towards and track around the subject, tilt up and down, observe from above and below, cut to a close-up to highlight detail, or cut back to a wide shot to reveal a vista, and all in the space of a few seconds, or, in the case of the editing options, in as little as one twenty-fourth of a second.

To summarize, if film's temporality lends it an expressive dimension above photography, its spatiality gives it more flexibility of scene and visual emphasis than the stage. I must at this point make it clear that this is not privileging film as an artform. One could argue, for example, that photography's static nature is in fact its strength: it is freed from the linear march of time, and the viewer is thus able to contemplate the recorded moment without the exigencies of time whipping it away into the stream of sensations that characterizes film. Similarly, the fact that large audiences still frequent stage theatres attests to drama's visceral potency. That one becomes fidgety when viewing a filmed play illustrates that live action carries with it the thrill of uncertainty: what will these human beings do next? With film, the image still has an immediacy, because it accurately represents a pro-filmic scene, but it is one step back from that of drama. The

frame and two-dimensionality means that the image is 'glassed in'. It exists in an "historic present" as V.F. Perkins termed it,[17] the audience knowing as they watch the opening credits that the story is a *fait accompli*, but allowing the ever-forgiving 'suspension of disbelief' to suppress that knowledge from their conscious minds.

As I said earlier, I will not draw on the other visual arts in my comparison with film; suffice it to say that film is eminently capable of incorporating them into its scheme: the roles of the art director and set dresser, to name but two, are extremely important in a film, for a film looks only as good as what it has to work with before the camera. Few films work without a music score as well, and it is significant that film is able to combine the affective power of a score with discrete on-screen events, thereby producing a synthesis of concrete action and abstract "bath of affect"[18] which is a new form of expression.

Since the advent of cinema, film and novel have been intertwined like star-crossed lovers, conducting a passionate and often painful romance which has borne several children, namely, the film-based-on-a-book, the novelization (a book based on a film),[19] the *pre*-novelization (a book developed by a film production company which can easily be adapted into a film if wanted) and the tie-in novel (a pre-existing novel which suddenly receives fresh recognition when it is re-published simultaneously with the film which bears its name).[20]

The first of these has been the most prodigious child, with many of the so-called classic films originating in print. Despite the criticism that adaptations have attracted, and the undoubted merit of films whose screenplays are entirely novel (no pun intended), we cannot ignore the role that literature has played in the development of *filmic* reality in this century. Why is this the case?

What film and novel share with no other artform, apart from television, is the potential to create an *ongoing fictional world*. You may object that drama,

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[17] Mast and Cohen, 48.

[18] Gorbman, 6.

[19] See my research essay on novelization for a detailed discussion of this phenomenon.

[20] Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* is a current salient example.

for example, usually sustains a narrative into which the viewer is drawn, and in which he or she may participate emotionally and mentally. But this is not the same as creating a self-contained universe which is replete with images and sensations as well as ideas and characters. The novel, with its verbal basis, is best at exploring the internal world of the human, a world of sensations, emotions and concepts which is seen as interacting with the outside physicality of life. As I suggest in my essay on the novelization,

> the novel cannot reproduce the exactitudes of physical detail that film can achieve. It is always *pictorially* ambiguous. Yet it can endlessly and coherently explore abstract ideas (the 'concept') by virtue of its indirect, mediating existence between pure object (what one might call the 'event' world) and pure idea (the 'comment' world).
>
> [Donovan, 9-10]

By contrast, the film is "*conceptually* ambiguous" (Ibid., 10) in that its enforced reproduction of concrete images (only partially supplemented by verbal exposition) means that it cannot directly express many of the ideas which contemplative words may make explicit in a moment. Lewis highlights the phenomenal difference in the workings of film and novel thus:

> literature works through the abstract towards the concrete, a mental image of reality. Film works through the concrete towards the abstract, a system of ideas.
>
> [Lewis, 57]

But despite the limitations which each medium's inherent characteristics impose, each, making full use of its strengths, may elaborate a convincingly seamless complex of sensations which approximates a reality. As I alluded to in the introduction, it requires the willing participation of the apprehender to complete the meta-reality which these media so create: nevertheless, the end result is indeed some sort of reality. It may be in one way an illusion, but its potential

effects on the viewer are not at all illusory. And after all, there is much debate about whether objective realities exist at all. 'Physical' need not necessarily equate with 'real' —— as the quantum physicist will point out, the apparently unshakeable reality of the atom is subject to principles of uncertainty once one looks beyond the so-called 'classical', or surface-level, aspect of matter. Could it be that, as Kant suggested, each individual creates his or her perceptive universe as the sum of a myriad subjectivities of shape, colour, smell, feel and so on?

Film and novel have the same end —— *to convey ideas*. This is perhaps a key to understanding the phenomenon of meta-reality. For it is easy to become side-tracked by film's apparent basis in images. No representative film of any note was made without a script. A script writer may well have experienced his or her film as a series of images, impressions and sensations, but at some point, these must be set down on paper in a form communicable to other people. Sometimes a story-board may enliven this process: but the fact remains that words shadow the images that make it to the screen in their stead. This is not to say that words could do the job better. In fact, the screenplay is little more than the 'film-foetus', inchoate, unprepared for public exposure. A script usually remains a document consulted by the film's crew and actors, rarely making it to general publication, simply because the words on its pages are *devoted to their eventual portrayal in sight and sound*. They act as a temporary vessel for the filmmakers' ideas, a makeshift cypher which is like the skeletal construction framework around a building, to be removed when the building can at last stand on its own. But the point is that films do not work if their only impetus is their visual content. They must be driven by narrative, a structure which is simply more obvious in the patently narrated novel.

Often film conceals its narrative basis behind the 'natural' self-creation which appears to exist in its resolute succession of scenes. It seems to require neither a 'writer' to articulate its ideas and images, nor a 'reader''s mind to act as a surrogate for these. Yet in fact, as the meta-real triad indicates, it does indeed need writer and reader if it is to be anything more than a random jumble of uninterpretable sensations. As Lewis points out, a film shot

> speaks as a result of a synthesis in the mind of the spectator —— that is, through an implication which "roosts" upon one element as a result of its perceived relationships with other elements. The spectator completes the circuit.
>
> [Lewis, 19]

The novel is somewhat more explicit in its need for narrator and narratee. Words do not simply issue 'naturally' forth from a scene, nor will they offer up even their most superficial meaning without interpretation, since, being a set of arbitrary signifiers, they mean nothing without a mind's recognition. If film uses the spectator's mind as a 'roosting-post' for its implications, the novel similarly uses the reader's imagination as a 'surrogate' for the images it can only describe.

This brief exploration of the similarities and differences in the workings of film and novel sets the scene for an examination of how each medium deals with the narrative process. In the next chapter, I will use this discussion to elucidate the powers and limitations of film narrative in producing meta-realities.

Chapter Four —— Meta-reality in Film

In this chapter, I will examine the key role of narrative in establishing meta-reality in film. First, we will discuss the nature of narrative in a film context, examining the etymology of the term and citing some theorists' definitions. Second, we will scrutinize film narrative's workings, in particular the complex interaction of narrator (filmmaker), narration (text) and narratee (viewer) in producing the meta-reality that we regard loosely as 'narration'. We will, as deconstructionists are fond of doing, problematicize the nature of these three components, questioning who the 'author' of a film actually is, looking at how the text distorts as it mediates a message, and determining how large is the role of narratee in determining a text's meta-reality: is (s)he a mere 'receiver' in the narrative chain, or does (s)he contribute to the meaning-making process? Third, we will look at the reasons for the predominance of narrative forms in film, proffering possible technical and psychological reasons for their presence. In introducing a set of authorial narrative objectives in film, I will distinguish those other types of meta-reality which are not strictly narration, but which almost always depend on it for their existence (authorial comment, etc.).

Narrative and film

Narrative is more than story, more than plot, more than authorial comment: it is a synthesis of these, working simultaneously in the text. But further, narrative is more than text: it is also narrator and narratee, a fact that may become obscured when one is dealing with the apparently self-narrating phenomenon of film, which seemingly requires neither narrator to mediate its iconic images, nor viewer to lend it spatio-temporal existence.[1]

The knowledge that narrative is an amalgam of elements bound up with the telling and receiving of a story and the organization of its contents helps us

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[1] As we concluded in the last chapter, this is a key distinction between the *surface* working of film and novel. The novel both has a patent narrator (who must have arranged the text) and requires a complicit reader to turn its arbitrary signs on paper into a comprehensible 'world' in the mind.

understand how narrative operates, but it fails to address the question of what narrative *is*. Why is a succession of story elements such as two people falling in love, an evil spoiler, a crisis and a happy ending a narrative in one form, and a senseless jumble in another? Why can a carefully structured set of temporally consecutive events fail to work as a narrative?

To sort out what constitutes a narrative, let us begin by referring to various definitions the term. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary is a good place to start, as it gives us the etymological background.

"To narrate," it says, is "[t]o relate, recount, give an account of." The verb comes from the Latin *narrare*, itself from the substantive *gnarus* or *knowing*. From this derives the *narration*: "That which is narrated; a story, narrative, account." A narrative, in turn, is either an account or tale, or significantly, in a later established usage, "[t]he practice or act of narrating".

This definition sets up an immediate friction between the traditional understanding of narrative —— a patently verbal act, mediated by reportative language —— and the modern conception of film narrative —— a direct, iconic representation, not reporting actions so much as 're-enacting' them.

So a narration is (often) a story, or the act of telling a story. This ambiguity is revealing, as it blurs the distinctions between the story that is told and the *way* it is told. We may define the former as diegesis and the latter as affective stylistics —— the effects of *how* one tells a story. Genette distinguished three elements in the act of narration: story/diegesis ("*histoire*"), text ("*récit*") and narration ("*narration*").[2] He maintained that 'story' is the events abstracted from their textual disposition and arranged in chronological order. 'Text' was for him the medium in which the story was communicated to a 'reader': the discourse. Finally, the act of telling was the narration: the means by which the abstract idea was fused with the concrete method of recording and transmitting information. As we will explore later, narration often is seen as acting as such a bridge between organizations of 'data'.

Unfortunately, in practice, the clear-cut distinctions between these aspects of the narrative become confounded. This is largely because, in both film and

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[2] Based on Rimmon-Kenan, *passim*.

novel, it is often hard to discern the act of telling from what is told, nor equally between story and a *version* of that story. In the first case, this is because, as we have discovered, diegetic actions and events may often have the perlocutory force of extradiegetic, commentative, elements. This shifting signification is the result of the dynamism in the relationship of idea and object —— we are constantly borrowing the one to represent the other, and vice versa. For example, in a book, a scar may come to represent evil in a character, while a person who goes mad may be described as having a 'scarred mind'. Similarly, in a film, blood may represent death, while in the next scene, a dream sequence, a death may come to mean a life of drudgery and petty happenstance.

While this metaphysical interplay of concrete and abstract representations may interfere with our attempts to distinguish the discrete roles of the narrative, it does not make the task impossible. Merely, it imposes the caveat that we not be too quick to prescribe when it comes to analyzing narrative workings.

The reason for the second difficulty —— distinguishing between versions of the same story —— is that we cannot know the diegesis except through its individual textual manifestations. We are never privy to the proto-story itself, merely a version of it.[3] This has several salutary implications for our analysis. First, it encourages us not to look for a normative 'best' version of a story, one perfectly and logically ordered and causally sealed. Second, it invites us to clarify the issue of the effect of the *text* on the *story* that is told. The Russian theorist Todorov argued that articulation bestows meaning:

> Meaning does not exist before being articulated and perceived ...; there do not exist two utterances of identical meaning if their articulation has followed a different course.
>
> [Rimmon-Kenan, 8]

Along similar lines, reader response theorists suggest that a text is not completed until the viewer interprets it: that in fact it is meaningless without a

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[3] Cf. Bremond: "The subject of the tale ... is words one reads, it is images one sees, it is gestures one deciphers, but through them it is a story one follows." (Rimmon-Kenan, 7.)

perceiver. (I would argue that while a perceiver is essential, the author him- or herself fulfils this role in being effectively the 'first reader' of their own work.)

Nevertheless, some theorists, among them Propp and Greimas, have argued the existence of an 'autonomous' or 'immanent' layer of meaning to the narrative, which by definition exists independent of textual details. In other words, they posit a narrative semiosis prior to language of any kind. Evidence supporting this theory is found most basically in the fact that we are able to recognize enough of a similarity between the film and book version of a story to say that they (do or do not) represent the same story.

There is no doubt in my mind that articulation, or form, is a type of meaning. Still, there is no escaping the fact that form is entirely dependent upon content for its existence. Ultimately, the difference between versions of the same story is the way they *affect* you. In the next chapter, I will examine some of the ways in which a filmmaker may attempt to tell a particular version of their story, and at the same time affect the viewer in particular ways.

Branigan provides a definition of narrative as an *activity* in which both narrator and narratee could be seen to be engaged:

> narrative is a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience. More specifically, narrative is a way of organizing spatial and temporal data into a cause-effect chain of events with a beginning, middle, and end that embodies a judgment about the nature of the events as well as demonstrates how it is possible to know, and hence to narrate, the events.
>
> [Branigan, 3]

This last point may remind us that the Latin *gnarus*, knowing, is the root of 'narrative': it implies humanity's desire to 'possess' the world around us by knowing it, making sense of it. This is an activity that both creator and viewer attempt.

There is at once a symbiosis and a conflict at work in this relationship. On the one hand, narrator and narratee must work together to make sense of the

text to which they are bonded, otherwise the meta-reality of the work will remain unrealized, either because the author has not put together a comprehensible articulation, or because the viewer has refused to interpret the textual data provided. On the other hand, narrator and narratee are constantly battling for power, this power taking the form of knowledge. As Branigan suggests,

> By operating from outside the diegetic world, the narration regulates our access to that world and thus produces effects based on knowledge not available to the characters.
>
> [Ibid., 22]

And, by implication, in regulating our (the viewer's) access to diegetic information, the narration is producing effects based on knowledge that is *not initially* known to the viewer. Narrative is thus in one sense a regulator of knowledge, a generally linear textual duct through which information is extruded at the behest of the narrator. Certainly, then, the plurality of textual power lies with the narrator; but this does not mean that he or she dictates meaning to the viewer, for both narrative and narratee also must be complicit in the meaning-making process, otherwise there is narrative oblivion.

I find it useful to employ the analogy of text as mirror: not in this case Shakespeare's mimetic mirror "held up to nature", for our enquiries in this thesis have taken us beyond the mere issue of duplication of reality as the singular validation for art's existence. Here, I use the text-mirror metaphor to highlight the structural and con-structural relationship of narrator and narratee *through* narrative.

Let us imagine the narrator's *mind* looking in a conceptual mirror (the narrative) in which (s)he can see reflected back the conception of his/her textual ideas. Is not this reflection the author's *reading* of his or her own work, a partial objectification[4] of the ideas that have been running around in his or her head, and which now stand before him or her in a form that can be apprehended? In other

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[4] In the sense of distinguishing cognitive subject *I* from perceived object *it*.

words, the text or artform is a record of the artist's ideas *which become distinct from the artist when they are so articulated.*

Another viewer, not the 'author' of the creative image, looking into the mirror, will see the same image, but naturally will perceive it in his or her own way ('from a different angle'), bringing to bear the experiences and attitudes of his or her own lifetime. However, though other perceivers create their own *meaning* from this image, they *did not create the image itself* —— it is the 'author's' creation and does not depend on the perceiver's perception of it to exist *per se*, only to exist *beyond the author's consciousness*, and hence to become a meta-real text.

This analogy demonstrates the crucial distinction between generating meaning and effecting meaning. The narrator creates textual meaning, and in fact realizes this meaning in being the first reader of the text. But each individual responding to the work as a viewer finds different meaning in it, each completing the conceptual-perceptual circuit in a slightly different way. I do not ascribe to the idea that there is *no* meaning without the viewer completing the circuit, because implicit in creation there is already perception, as said in the previous paragraph.

In fact, then, a narrator is just a narratee who is creating his or her own narrative to perceive, somehow transferring the lessons he or she has learnt in comprehending narrative passively to construing it actively in the formation of the narrative, just as a child moves from absorbing linguistic information to making its own sentences.

The idea of *construal* which I touched on is crucial to understanding the narrator-narratee relationship. Construal is at once the act of construction and comprehension of a text, the active-process equivalent of text's form and content respectively. Thus nothing can be created without its being simultaneously 'read', and equally nothing can be read without being created in the mind at the moment of perception. Such a viewpoint allows us to free the filmmaker from the isolation of the role of exclusive 'creator', as (s)he is thus tacitly acknowledging the role of viewer in the very act of creation. Similarly, the viewer is freed from

the total passivity which 'voyeurism' implies, finding a positive act of construction overlayed on the act of comprehension.[5]

For me, the joy of art is that it can inspire further creation. Today's watcher is tomorrow's maker, and it is only through this chain that meta-realities will continue to exist. Certainly, the vast majority of a film audience will not become filmmakers —— but the conceptual task which they are encouraged to perform each time that they see a film or read a novel contributes to their life experience in an incalculable way.

However, if the text itself is a mirror, it is a distorted mirror. If the medium is not quite the message, it is at least the *shape* of the message, and as the film medium is external to both narrator and narratee, it is subject to its *own* properties. Thus, not only may many an author find that the text (s)he creates differs considerably from what (s)he had intended, but (s)he may also discover that this difference *adds* to the initial vision. It is the common experience of writers that their ideas seemingly 'write themselves'. If this is the case with writing, it is potentially more so with film, as there are so many additional external agents at work in film production, in terms of people, objects, equipment and conditions. (We shall revisit this issue in the next section.)

As I mentioned earlier, while the novel is largely unilateral in production and medium, requiring only one author and one method of articulation, the film is multilateral, requiring a raft of production personnel and employing several simultaneous layers of information. It is time to look at the implications of this multi-laterality for the film's narrative workings. I believe that this nature is at once one of film's greatest narrative strengths, and perhaps its most serious potential for narrational chaos.

Simultaneous audio-visual components mean that the film is partially freed from the constraints of temporal linearity which dog the novel. Film can thus create juxtapositions of these layers which imply certain meanings in a direct yet not overtly explicit way. As we will see in the next section, this ability can create some of film's unique meta-real aspects.

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[5] One might argue that film challenges the viewer to *impose* meaning on actions, while a novel challenges the reader to *extract* meaning from a multiplicity of verbal meanings.

Further, in strictly narrative terms, multiple layering allows extradiegetic information to *accompany* diegetic information, enabling simultaneous description and commentary in a way much more flexible than attempting to comment through actions alone, and also much less obtrusive than the explicit comments of a verbal narrator (as in a novel). An example is the use of music to connote a certain atmosphere or attitude: it is clearly extradiegetic, but it unobtrusively enhances the emotional impact of a scene.

While film has been criticized for a lack of narrative subtlety, I believe it is capable of a great deal. Later sections will demonstrate this.

However, while the text may apparently add to the vision, it may equally detract from it. The dangers of a multi-layered narrative are similar to the dangers of having many people with input into a film's conception. There is the risk of *disarticulation*, not only of layers of meaning, but also of discrete shot from discrete shot —— Bazin's fear of spatio-temporal discontinuity. Just as people may not be able to agree on a unified approach to a project, the different layers of a film may act against each other, effectively neutralizing the others' effects. This can result in anything from the edge being taken off an important moment in the narrative, to the whole narrative structure being imperilled.

An example for me is the prevalence of over-scored films, that is, films in which a music soundtrack regularly punctuates the action and dialogue. American films are particularly guilty of the excesses of this practice. The danger of saturating a film with extradiegetic music is that it may evacuate many potential details of emotional nuance from a scene and replace them with bland generalities. This is particularly true of films which use pre-recorded music to underlay their scenes: the music not only pervades the scene, it is also unresponsive to the scene's development. Rather, the scene itself must follow the lead of the 'indifferent' music; if it does not, at best, the music is adding nothing to the scene; as worst, the two elements may jar so badly that they disrupt the narrative impetus.

Here what has happened is that the (in film terms) perfectly legitimate practice of using extradiegetic music to complement the diegesis at another level

has been misused, privileging one of the simultaneous layers at the expense of the others. Inequilibrium in the use of narrative devices courts disaster.

Besides the multiplicity of expressive layers, their sheer variety provides part of an explanation for the existence of this danger. Film not only benefits from working on multiple media levels simultaneously; it actually *needs* to do this to perform all the narrative tasks demanded of it. For, as a moment's reflection reveals, the separate layers of a film *cannot perform all storytelling functions*. To coin a phrase, these layers all possess areas in which they are to some extent *semantically mute*.

For example, images are *ideationally* mute to some degree: they are much better at showing than telling, more adept at revealing than explaining, stating than commenting. Clever montage or mise-en-scène, that is, juxtapositions of images, may set up *implications* or *associations*, but, at bottom, images lack the ideational explicitness of words.

One may remember in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* where Gulliver encounters a race whose members communicate solely with objects, such as balls and sticks, which they would hold up to indicate their ideas. Gulliver points out to us the limitations of such a concrete sign system in articulating complex ideas. Indeed, how ungainly and inefficient such a system appears alongside the sophistications and nuances of our speech, writing, or indeed manual signing systems.

This example perhaps reminds us that language, after cave paintings, is arguably the first meta-reality that humanity developed: a physical system, based on vibrating air or, later, marks on some sort of page (be it stone or paper), which transcends its physicality in expressing what we *think and feel*, not only what we do, through a set of (arguably) arbitrary signs.[6] In the latter stages of humanity, we have developed further meta-real media, such as the film, which to

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[6] Earlier, of course, alphabets did bear some iconic association with real objects: for example, the Phoenician character *aleph*, from which the Greek *alpha* derived, and thereafter our *A*, originally depicted an ox's head. However, most of the world's alphabets quickly outgrew this pictographic attachment, finding that ideographs (pictures representing ideas) were more flexible; and some went even further, entirely severing graphical links between characters and objects, and instead imposing what many feel are arbitrary phonic associations on their characters. English uses such a system.

some extent return us to the iconic representational methods of the cave painting, but which, because of their mediating technology, have much more control over the number and ordering of images presented, not to mention their manipulation and presentation.

However, if I may be Gulliver for a moment, it appears that there is still a limitation imposed upon images of any sort which presents some problems. Reality *is* more than physical manifestations, no matter how symptomatic these may be of our internal mental and spiritual mechanisms. And yet physicality is all with which images can provide us, no matter how sophisticated and mediated they may be. Try watching a film without a soundtrack, and you will probably grasp the basic storyline —— but how much subtlety you will miss! Even so-called silent films were regularly supplemented by two other levels apart from the 'real-life' images: the intertitle, providing details and explanations of action and dialogue, and the pianist's musical accompaniment (usually carefully scored for the film), suggesting an emotional interpretation of the images, and even more importantly, helping to suppress with the immediacy of sound the 'otherness' of the images —— their potential 'non-thereness' —— which a two-dimensional black-and-white image could evoke.

There is something like a picture-caption symbiosis at work here (alluding to our earlier discussion of the photograph as an antecedent of the film). Just as a caption (here, the verbal forms of dialogue and superimposed titles) can *inform* and *locate* (contextualize) a picture (here, the moving series of photographic images), the picture can *validate* the caption, providing apparent empirical proof of the caption's veracity. And at any moment, this relationship could fall apart, if a discrepancy were to open up between defining and validation.

We observe a hint of the effects of such a disarticulation of layers in the intentional film technique of *overlapping*, in which we hear sound and perhaps dialogue from the following scene, and yet the picture holds on the preceding scene. This tension intrigues the viewer, and also acts as a cohesive device, inextricably linking two disparate scenarios, the tension inevitably being released with the cut to the scene that matches the sound.

Harking back to our comparison of film and novel, we see that the novel, for all its limitations in being restricted to a purely verbal medium, has the advantage over film of a more stable or unified method of articulation. The word, being required to perform all narrative tasks, thus *can* do them all. To coin another phrase, the word is *dextrous*. It can sketch a scene, describe a mental state, enunciate dialogue and provide authorial comment, all using the same family of signifiers.

Indeed, the word's representational flexibility might lead us to question film's touted status as the more 'natural' narrative medium of the two, based on its iconic directness. It may be claimed that the film is the natural storyteller, somehow more accessible to the public in that it can represent to us actual traces of actions, rather than being mediated to us by arbitrary signs which must be 'surrogated' in our minds to reconstruct the narrative. And, at first glance, it does appear that film is a more 'realistic' medium than verbal text in that it is capable of accurately and directly reproducing the actual images and sounds found in 'real life'.

Text, on the other hand, must put the author's subjectified descriptions of the world through the linear 'word-wringer', grudgingly paying out a 'story-line' one word at a time in a manner which precludes the reproduction of simultaneous events, etc. For example, I think that a novel has difficulty describing a complicated action: it will either fail to describe it fully, or will become bogged down in the description, effectively obscuring the action itself. The image has the advantage of being able to express detail and whole in the same depiction —— if it cannot do this in one shot, than at least it may 'cut away' for a close-up and 'cut back' to a wide shot in a moment.

Further, text is subject to linguistic double inflection —— that is, not only must the reader grasp the arbitrarily imposed meaning of individual words, he or she must also interpret their contextual meaning when they are combined in a certain text to make sense of the singular events and ideas which they portray.[7] Film, by contrast, seems free of many of these linear constraints, can deal

[7] I have experienced this phenomenon first-hand in studying French and German literature: one is faced with both the task of understanding, and at the same time interpreting the utterance.

effortlessly with simultaneous actions and sounds, and does not require that the viewer understand the images to perceive them clearly.

Yet another moment's thought may challenge the apparent ease with which cinema is able to construct a verisimilitudinous reality. How natural is it for a series of *images* to portray an *idea* that originated in a person's mind? Surely language, bathed in the resonance of thousands of years' development of denotative and connotative meaning, is supremely equipped to make explicit the *internal* realities which lie at the heart of *'story'*. Are not the actions which punctuate film-time often merely superficial manifestations of the underlying, complex ideas and emotions of people?

Film, being primarily a visual medium, is open to criticism for bereaving a subtle original text (often a literary 'classic') of much of its significance by reducing ideas to mere vestiges of their former selves. It is suggested that film is incapable of explaining the non-visual in any sustained, precise manner.

Further, one may have recourse to the definition of 'narration' as an act of *recounting*: that is, not a re-enactment of events, but a reportage of them. We talk of story-*telling*, not story-*showing*. Even theatre, as we discussed earlier, can be seen as being based around the verbal. Shakespeare is remembered for his words, not his stagings, and much of the 'action' of his plays takes place off-stage, becoming dramatic reality *only through the word of report*. Hence, is the 'on-stage' action of the film such a revelation of story-telling after all?

Next, approaching the issue of film's narrative suitability from a production point of view, we can see film as being compromised by its commercial and technical exigencies. How can narrative remain untainted when it is faced with innumerable script and film re-edits, headstrong actors, capricious art directors, tightfisted producers and ratings-sensitive executive producers who often wish the film to appeal to the 'broadest-possible' audience?

And from a sociological perspective, there is something sinister about a medium which can exploit its apparent naturalism to avoid political critiquing: film can embody the ideology of its time and place without explicitly articulating it (which writing must do to some extent), thereby legitimizing a certain social system by the apparent portrayal of reality. An early example of film as

ideological tool is D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which apparently condoned anti-black sentiment (though Griffith tried to make amends for this perception in later films); a few decades later, there were the beautifully shot Nazi propaganda films of the 1930s and -40s; and many would argue that the phenomenon is alive and well in the nineties.

Were I at this point asked to act as film's apologist in the face of such condemnation, I would take a deep breath before replying that film is indeed open to such manipulation and narrative perfunctoriness —— but that it does not inevitably succumb to these possibilities. Granted, film is patently a demonstrative rather than a locutive medium: it shows more directly than it tells. But this does not mean that it cannot comment on what it shows, nor that it is unable to explore complicated issues. As Rimmon-Kenan notes,

> there is nothing inherently good or bad in either showing or telling ... each has its advantages and disadvantages, and their relative success or failure depends on their functionality in the given work.
>
> [Rimmon-Kenan, 106]

Indeed, there are certain advantages inherent in the need, and hence ability, to express some concepts non-verbally. Word-based language is very often the act of making something explicit; the novel is inevitably engaged in this activity, prying into people's minds, individuating particular details of a scene, commenting on actions. The film, on the other hand, while capable of presenting physical events in explicit detail, down to the smallest hair on a person's nose, does not provide a *verbal breakdown* of these events, instead substituting a *visual breakdown* composed of a series of shots. If the viewer is 'relieved' of the task of conjuring up in his or her mind the images of the scene, (s)he is instead required to infer the motivations and 'reasons' behind the superficial actions ('Why did that woman frown at her friend?') and furthermore, to interpret the meaning of presented images ('Why are the roses covered with dust?').

I am aware of the danger of generalizing these areas of difference. After all, a novel may choose to present images without explaining them, just as a film

may use voice-over to provide an insight into a character's mind. But my point is that each media has *tendencies* towards these different means of expression of the same basic events.

Why film needs narrative

Earlier, I suggested that narrative is essential to film: however, we have not yet examined just how thoroughgoing film's dependence on narrative structure and devices may be. One might argue, for example, that film's ability to present accurate 'copies' of reality means that it can take much more licence with story, using only the most nominal of story-lines as an excuse for a series of flashy set-pieces. Indeed, it appears that many Hollywood producers (and directors) have just such an attitude, seemingly espousing the motto, *the best way to prevent the viewer from seeing the holes in the plot is to poke them in the eye with it first.* Violence has become as much a mainstay of the story as beginning, middle and end. One could regard it as the logical extreme of a Machiavellian extrapolation from the notion of conflict to the ultimate physical act of conflict —— violence. In other words, some argue, if a story needs conflict, and film is good at showing actions, the best film story shows conflict through action: *violence.* Similarly, everyone is interested in a love story, and as film cannot show love, the next best thing is to show the physical expression of it —— and the *ultimate* physical expression of it is *sex.* Hence, film's ability to reproduce physicality can be debased to the point where the only drama it is called upon to elicit is the clichéd sex-and-violence duad.

However, this tells us more about the monetary pressures on filmmaking than it does about film's narrative potential —— the proof of this is the many films that are cleverly scripted, challenging the viewer as they keep him or her wrapped up in the story without the need for gimmicks or pointless spectacle. That the general public will respond to quality film-making is indisputable. As I write, for example, Kenneth Branagh's screen adaptation of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* is being acclaimed by critic and audience alike; and yet, no one dies in the film, nor do the players bare all.

If a film can succeed without directly satisfying humanity's baser instincts, then it must be doing so by appealing to our brains. And this is where narrative comes in. The most obvious need that film has for narrative is to provide a *reason* for showing what it shows: not necessarily a utilitarian purpose, such as edifying the viewer; merely something to interest us. While the Lumière brothers' first films of a train arriving at a station and so on might have been at the time of their release sufficient in themselves to validate their existence, since they demonstrated almost for the first time photography's ability to capture both the form and movement of reality, audiences would soon have tired of the medium had not such innovators as Méliès seized on film's story-telling potential and hence created a rudimentary vocabulary of narrative techniques in the process.[8]

Thus, the narrative impulse inherent in the filmmaker as artist can be held responsible for innovating the techniques of the filmmaker as scientist.

In meta-real terms, the narrative allows a film to assume its own identity apart from the pro-filmic, real-life images which it initially records. A narrative provides an alternate reality in the narrator's and narratee's minds which temporarily parallels what we regard as reality. As Mitry noted, it is the double nature of the image, the quality of *otherness* nestling with the quality of *hereness*, which allows narrative room to operate: though the images are taken from real life, the effect of combining them is to synthesize a whole new otherness which supersedes the initial, now impoverished (original) reality.

How narrative helps form this meta-reality occurs in several ways. I believe we can identify four main functions which narrative plays in the film, functions which have implications for narrator, narrative and narratee alike in the creation of filmic meta-reality.

The first major function of the narrative is *generation*: the creation of story material. Narrative has acted not simply to support the story but also to help generate it since the times of the earliest great (recorded) storytellers of the

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[8] Méliès 'discovered' the basic principles of editing, as well as some reality-altering 'tricks' such as the jump cut, allowing him to make things disappear. Soon after, the early American director D. W. Griffith was credited with institutionalizing such filmic mainstays as the pan and fade.

Western world, such as Homer and Virgil. Being of the oral tradition, they did not produce a written record of their stories, and thus had to rely on a structuring system which would both allow them to produce a story with relative ease, and then to store it in their memories for easy recall. It is easy for us in the age of permanent and flexible recording methods to underestimate the usefulness of the narrative and narrative devices in allowing a story to continue its existence beyond the initial utterance. As Bordwell notes, investing a series of events with a human intentionality helps us remember the order and detail of events. Similarly, I think, this process provides patterns of motivation and causality which impel a story. This point may seem obvious, but it is worth making, to remind us that the fundamental nature of a meta-reality is the creation of an entity which is complete in itself. Narrative distinguishes a series of recorded events from the apparent un-narratedness of much of 'real life'.

When I was attempting to write the screenplay for *Mosshill*, I found I had a few vague events in my mind, as well as a bunch of characters. It was not until I began to place these events and characters in an acceptable narrative, imagining how they would work on screen, that the story 'came to life' for me.

The second major function of narrative is *cohesion*. Simply put, narrative is a bonding device for film: it is the crossover point at which production and perception combine. At the textual level, narrative bonds deep story structure to surface structure, allowing characters, actions and places to articulate themes, and conversely, themes to inform characters' actions, and to colour our perception of images and scenes.

Narrative linearity fragments a theme into digestible 'bites' through specific manifestations in the plot, and then re-combines it through the repetition of the thematic concept in the various guises of characterization, action and scene.[9] This allows the meta-real implications of the theme to be elicited, humanizing them in a way that makes them accessible to the viewer. At the same time, narrative calls upon the power of the photographic image to express *sameness* through the actions and thoughts of the characters, encouraging the

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[9] This is a form of *parallelism*, a linguistic term used to describe material that shows patterning and repetition as a device for foregrounding a particular meaning.

viewer to compare them with 'real-life' actions and thoughts[10] which (s)he may have experienced. Narrative thus at once particularizes the general, and universalizes the specific, a process commonly associated with the creation of a work of art.

If diegesis is like the 'guts' of the story, then narrative is like a shell (rather than the internal 'bones'), for, not only does the narrative structure the elements of the story, holding them together with causality and rhetoric, it also presents the exterior shape of the story to the viewer. Diegesis, being the chronologically abstracted deep structure, has no physical manifestation: it relies on external forces to give it textual permanence.

Many film narrative theories are informed by the notion of narrative coherence, and a brief outline of some of these is useful to us in gauging the importance of coherence to filmic meta-reality. These theories may be loosely termed *formalist*.

The grandfather of narrative formalism was the Russian linguist Vladimir Propp. Propp was one of the first theorists to get to grips with the structural details of the narrative rather than being preoccupied with themes. This represented a shift in thinking from analysis of *subject matter* to analysis of *function and structure*. Propp analyzed the corpus of Russian folk tales for the existence of what he suspected were common narrative elements. In his landmark work *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), he proposed a list of 31 *functions*, among which, he claimed, *all* such stories had equivalents in their make-up. By 'functions', Propp meant something like the basic significance of a character's action or an event. An example is the *interdiction*, where a character or law forbids someone from committing a certain act (for example, visiting a maiden or turning a key). Naturally, this would shortly be followed by a *violation* of this interdiction, with attendant functions as the repercussions of this. Few stories would have all the functions, nor would they share the same elements: but, he asserted, the order in which these functions appeared would remain constant, as would the archetypal roles ('spheres of action') which the characters would play.

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[10] Usually expressed indirectly in film.

The seven spheres of action were the *hero*, the *princess and her father*, the *villain*, the *false hero*, the *donor*, the *helper* and the *dispatcher*.[11]

This singularity of a repeated order of functions suggested to Propp that narrative is a relatively fixed system of organisation which acts logically in a text through specific character roles to determine its development from beginning to end. The strength of this idea lies in its practical basis: unlike the majority of his contemporaries, Propp developed his ideas out of many concrete examples of existing texts, and was able to demonstrate the validity of his theories by adducing these stories. However, this very fact is also the reason for the fatal weakness in his theory: tying it so closely to a certain kind of narrative, and further, one which could be regarded as formulaic because of its consistent patterning across the genre, Propp severely limits the use of his theory in *productively* analysing complicated narrative structures.

For example, Lapsley and Westlake highlight Peter Wollen's Proppian analysis of the film *North by Northwest*, suggesting that while such an approach produces a generally good match between narrative functions and character motivations and actions in the film, it cannot accommodate, for example, the point in the narrative where the character Eve is required, as Wollen is quoted as saying, "to play the contradictory roles of villain and princess, antagonist and object of desire" (Lapsley and Westlake, 133). Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, they express the reservation that a desire to apply the Proppian model consistently to a text may have led to the theorist overlooking elements that fail to fit the model:

> There was also the problem that while the analysis had the effect of highlighting some aspects of the film it neglected others. In certain respects the analysis was a *reading against the grain*.
>
> [Ibid., 133, my emphasis]

Many advocates of Propp's narrative theories have acknowledged the limitations of their applicability, and attempted to produce a more widely

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[11] Based on Lapsley and Westlake, 131.

acceptable system of analysis. Generally, this has meant a more abstract approach to narrative structure, which in turn has its advantages and disadvantages.

The Russian theorist Todorov was fascinated by the apparent symmetries in narrative structure, a function, as he saw it, of the unifying qualities of good narrative. He established a set of so-called 'minimal narrative' *transformations*, that is, proto-events or -actions, using logical symbols to represent them in a sort of 'story-equation'. The story would begin with equilibrium (A): say, a cat sauntering across a footpath. Then a disruption (B) would occur: an errant dog might come yelping down the street. In a kind of symmetrical reflection of A, there would be a recognition of this disruption, and the urge to neutralize it (-A): here, a girl passing on a skateboard might see the cat's plight. Next comes the attempt to redress the disruption B, which is notated as a direct counter to the disruption itself (-B) —— the girl scoops up the cat and leaves the dog gaping in her wake. This act, being successful, logically leads to the final transformation, the reinstatement of the initial equilibrium (A): the cat is restored to safety, and may stroll on unmolested.

Similarly, the French linguist Greimas has seen symmetries binding and unifying the elements of narrative. He too reduces narrative to a simple set of values, with his 'square of opposition' taken from traditional logic. As Branigan notes,

> For Greimas, narrative becomes a special working through of contraries, subcontraries, converses, and contradictories.
>
> [Branigan, 9]

As with Todorov, contrast becomes for Greimas a tool of cohesion, opposites creating a centrifugal force of narrative that impels a story in a certain orbit which in its ending brings the story back to the initial state.

The limitations of such theories become obvious when one applies them to actual film narratives. For a start, many films do not begin in a state of equilibrium; similarly, many end apparently without returning the story to its initial state. As Branigan observes, later narratologists have moved away from

linguistic and logical formalism, deciding that they are not "flexible enough to capture the wide-ranging, often speculative aspect of interpretation" (Branigan, 9).

Second, adhering rigorously to the logic of formalism may reduce a narrative to a dry equation which not only bears little relationship to the story but also dangerously simplifies the forces at work in the narrative. For example, Kathleen Murphy quotes James H. Kavanaugh's Greimasian analysis of the film *Alien*, then criticizes it for its reductiveness:

> *A Greimasian semantic rectangle will foreground the structural importance of the cat in the complex of signifiers generated from the notion "human"....*
>
> .....
>
> *The founding term in the film is* human *(S), represented by the image of Ripley as the strong woman. The antihuman (-S) is, of course, the alien, and the not-human ($\bar{S}$) is Ash, the robot. The cat, then, functions in the slot of the not-antihuman (-$\bar{S}$), an indispensable role in this drama.*
>
> ——James H. Kavanaugh, "Feminism, Humanism and Science in *Alien*"
>
> .....
>
> This brand of self-evident, infantile pushing-about of alphabet blocks doubtlessly advances today's hapless young faculty on their tenure tracks. But its dominance, along with related forms of theory that can be expressed only in obscenely inorganic, anti- and inhuman language, ensures than the world of books and movies, images/ideas, is drained of color, wit, idiosyncratic heat, joy, and sensuality, for starters.... What kind of sad new species must be matriculating in the humanities these days, armed for life with "scientific" diagrams....[12]

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[12] Kathleen Murphy, 'The Last Temptation of Sigourney Weaver', *Film Comment:* July-August 1992, 17.

Furthermore, these narrative models provide little rationale, apart from a call for aesthetic balance, for their symmetrical basis. The theorist Heath, while retaining the sense of narrative symmetry, looked for the subversive forces at work in such a patterning, and suggested that in fact, the narrative need for 'violence', the disruption of equilibrium (Eisenstein's 'conflict') often results in 'excess' —— disruptive elements which escape the neat neutralization process mentioned above. An example of this disruption would be a not completely happy, or resolved, ending to a story.[13]

Narrative hence becomes an attempt to master a set of underlying "psychic and ideological processes at work in the text" (Branigan, 10), a process which is not always successful. Raymond Bellour suggests that the battle for textual cohesion is a "play of sameness and difference", as Lapsley and Westlake put it:

> Although it might seem that difference is dominant [in a film], with continual changes of content through new events, characters, words spoken, and of form through framing, lighting, camera angle and most obviously the succession of shots, the lasting impression given by all successful narratives is one of cohesion and coherence. Alongside the tendency towards difference, therefore, there is a counter-tendency towards sameness: heterogeneity is countered by homogeneity; asymmetry by symmetry.
>
> [Lapsley and Westlake, 134]

In the end, it seems to me, narrative gravitates towards structure and parallelism, against randomness and difference, because this is the only way to distinguish fictive (fashioned) story from lived story; or, if not distinguish from, at least to justify its existence alongside lived story.

Further at the level of the text, narrative acts in tandem with the paradigm-syntagm selection-combination process of montage, providing *motivation* for the filmmaker's initial set-ups, and for the later re-combination of these elements into a completed text. This is like the double articulation of the verbal text.

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[13] This description is based on Branigan, 10.

At the production/creation stage, narrative further bonds author to text, allowing him or her to make the text their own.[14] Narrative allows the 'teller' or 'organizer of the telling' to determine his or her obtrusiveness in the telling process. Narrative techniques may simply amount to story-telling, however, they may have a much greater impact than this, as we will examine soon.

Narrative bonds narrator to narratee in both a pragmatic and metaphysical sense. The narration enables the narrator to communicate with the narratee, and in fact provides a *reason* for this communication. Second, as we discovered earlier, in the act of creating and composing the narrative, the author identifies with the narratee, both considering his or her audience, and *becoming* in effect the first audience of the work.

Finally, completing the triadic circuit, narrative bonds text to viewer. Branigan feels that a formalist approach to narrative fails to explain what really distinguishes narrative from other types of text (which may also employ logicality and balance in their structure). For him, the distinction lies in the perceiver's act of narrative comprehension,[15] based on our mind's instinctual search for pattern —— a narrative *schema*:

> A schema is an arrangement of knowledge *already possessed* by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new sensory data....
>
> [Branigan, 13]

Thus, instead of narrative being a rigid set of causal progressions, it becomes a probabilistic stratagem based on assumptions and expectations of what will happen in a story. Thus, we *expect* a basic beginning/middle/end structure: whether or not we get it is up to the author, and (s)he is in turn working from a set of expectations of the *viewer's* expectations.

A cognitive schema of this type is hence a powerful organizing tool, or device of cohesion, which not only tends to fit events in their linear place-box,

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[14] Akin to what I call *claiming* the text in my 1990 essay.

[15] But I think that there is a further element to be considered: the narrative as an action in its own right —— to be discussed.

but also tends to generalize about the information being presented so as to globally interpret it:

> perceivers tend to *remember* a story in terms of *categories of information stated as propositions, interpretations, and summaries* rather than remembering the way the story is actually presented or its surface features. It requires great effort to recall the exact words used in a novel or the exact sequence of shots, angles, lighting, etc. used in a film.
>
> [Ibid., 14]

This last statement suggests how the brain's natural disposition may, according to some theories of brain operation, actually help a filmmaker present a cohesive world to the audience, because a reasonable narrative will 'paper over' the fragmented nature of montage, and the disparate nature of multiple levels of information.

Narrative hence links text to viewer because of the expectations it evokes in the viewer about what a text will contain. It also acts as a mnemonic device, allowing the viewer to remember the overall structure of a story, even though (s)he will probably forget the details.

Having created a 'world' and made it cohere, the next task of the narrative is perhaps to control the flow of information about this world. In narrative terms, knowledge is definitely power, and when and where pieces of information are revealed in the course of a narrative can markedly influence how a story affects its beholders.

This selecting-ordering/paradigmatic-syntagmatic process is also the author's opportunity to present a certain 'angle' on a story, separating the *discours* or text from the *histoire* or diegesis that supposedly subtends the story. It is the author's chance to tell a version of the story.

The filmmaker may chose to fulfil or thwart the viewer's expectations about how or what information is to be revealed, with various effects (to be discussed). The author both consciously and unconsciously is playing the viewer when creating the narrative, using his or her position of epistemological power

to set up affective stylistics in the narrative which 'feed' knowledge to the viewer in the way that the author believes most effectively portrays the story's power.

Finally, the fourth major purpose of the narrative as I see it is to *explain* the events which it reveals. This does not mean that a narrative should provide an exhaustive exposition of its contents; nor that a narrative provides a sole, definitive explanation of them. More accurately, narrative *supports* its story on all media levels: the music contributes to our reading of the pictures, the pictures contextualize the dialogue; the dialogue provides motivations for the actions we see; and so on. This is the process of *captioning* which I have mentioned twice before: the captioned, and caption, the shown and the explained, are not fixed: it is not always the role of picture to show and dialogue to tell; sometimes it is the other way around, or other elements take the roles. Perhaps this is the greatest power of film narrative: its ability to signify in many different combinations of means, enabling us to explore meaning and expression in as many ways.

This fourth major property of narrative may lead us to posit an overall action of narrative, namely *to complement the story*. At bottom, narrative's task is to enable a story to exist in a textual form. *It is not the story itself*, for, though it undoubtedly acts within the story at times, it is ultimately an exterior agent which actively chooses the story to be told, tells it, and in the act of telling, distinguishes it at once from other stories, other versions of the same story, and must importantly, from 'real life'.

> By operating from outside the diegetic world, the narration regulates our access to that world and thus produces effects based on knowledge not available to the characters.
>
> [Ibid., 22]

Meta-reality inhabits narrative, as narrative lends story the right to exist as an independent entity. A story needs no more justification for its existence than being a story (—— yet how much this implies). It need not re-present history (though it may); it need not touch upon social issues (though it often

does); and it need not painstakingly re-enact real-life existence (though it has been known to). Narrative structure is all the validation it requires —— but this structure carries with it a raft of obligations on the part of the author, and expectations on behalf of the viewer.

One might object at this point that such an analysis makes out the film narrative to be a noble entity that provides its own justification for existence, and is always constructive and well-organized —— something which I have already shown to be not always the case. I would agree if my analysis of film narrative were to stop here. But we have yet to discuss the concomitant forces which match the four major narrative effects I have mentioned above. As Derrida suggests, a force for order implies the existence of a force for chaos. He talks of the 'trace' of the opposite within each force, a trace which paradoxically *defines* its opposite. For example, without disorder, order becomes a useless term.

If a narrative can *generate* a story, it can also destroy it. In film, the danger lies in superficial actions overwhelming the underlying message. A director may decide to allow a story to twist a certain way, purely for the sake of another car chase, another explosion. Such an approach upsets the balance of showing and telling which impels the narrative. Too much showing dilutes thematic power of a film; too much telling is an under-utilization of film's story-making potential, and tends to bore the audience.

And, as the *idea* is fundamental to film narrative, and hence to film meta-reality, if the idea is lost in a quagmire or visuals or effects, the story is essentially lost, too —— it has lost its *integrity*, its wholeness. Without structure, a meta-reality has no justification for existence, as I said earlier.

Structure can thus break down when one layer of the medium dominates the others. This is the *disarticulation* of which I spoke earlier. Similarly, in terms of temporality, a film narrative may fail to cohere —— may, in fact, *dissolve* —— if it breaks the 'rules' of causality without setting up new rules to guide us through the temporal jumps. For example, if a film uses a series of flashbacks intercalated with 'current time', it must be careful to 'signpost' these

jumps, and furthermore to provide some sort of semantic justification for this action.

Furthermore, failing to reveal enough information to the viewer in the course of a narrative may leave the 'goal' of the narrative 'trajectory' (as Bordwell puts it) unreached. Irresolution is different from, say, an 'open' ending, in that while the latter is intended as an 'effect' of the narrative, encouraging the viewer to draw his or her own conclusions (or not), the former is open *by default*.

The line between explaining and confounding is also drawn at the point of *intentionality*: unless there is an intention (unconscious or not) for all levels to complement each other, there is the danger that they will disarticulate and hence *confuse* the point of a scene rather than clarify it.

But having seen the destructive nature of the opposites of narrative's four main actions, we must not altogether discount the possibility that these negatives may actually have their place in the author's narrative strategies. As Eisenstein knew so well, conflict is the spice of drama; and conflict need not be acted out at the level of the diegesis —— it can also be acted out *within the process of narration*.

This possibility hinges on the crucial issue of *intentionality*, which we have just broached. Having decided for the sake of argument that it is the *filmmaker* who narrates the film narrative, we must examine how much (s)he can be aware of the choices of selection and combination that constitute the finished text. As a filmmaker myself, I feel that I was responsible for much of the 'look' of my film; however, there are certain patterns in it which I do not remember actually consciously producing, but which appear to contribute to the film's general style. There are two possible explanations for these phenomena: either I unconsciously worked in certain elements of repetition and complementarity, my subconscious mind instinctively organizing levels of expression that my conscious mind had ignored. Or, the very stuff of the medium in which I was working was responsible for the apparent echoes of content in form.

The first argument represents the position of what Bordwell calls explicatory meaning. He suggests that explicatory film critics look for a textual unity composed of explicit and implicit *intended* meanings, based on "pattern,

coherence and consistency" (Bordwell, 68), which the filmmaker may either consciously or unconsciously *intend.*[16]

The second argument reflects Derrida's contention that intentionality is merely one effect of the text, along with other effects such as creating 'suspension of disbelief'. This astounding idea implies that the text itself precedes all meaning, even the maker's meaning: that, until a text is created, the maker cannot know what his or her intentions are for it.

It seems clear that one can effect a Mitry-like compromise between these two positions. While a filmmaker does a great deal of conscious determining in the act of making a film, (s)he is also *allowing the formal nature of the medium* —— its temporal flow, editing rhythm, framing 'grammar', etc. —— to echo his or her main thematic and stylistic preoccupations in a way which is singularly expressive in not issuing from a purely rationally contrived artifice.

Improvisation has been a (small) part of film vocabulary from the start: Chaplin often used material which he extemporized on the spot, and these days, directors and producers are only too pleased to have Robin Williams ad-libbing on the set. Directors may discover *in situ* a reading of the script or an addition to it which did not enter their minds at the pre-production stage. Yet this is not a case of allowing randomness or the external environment to shape a film: rather, it is allowing the conditions in which a film is made (scenes, actors, crew, technical considerations) to contribute a little of their formal qualities to the more pronounced determinacies of the film narrative. While a film ultimately distinguishes its meta-reality from real life, it nevertheless remains a product of this reality, just as our minds, so long as they inhabit our bodies, owe something of their character to their physical seat, the brain.

As a final comment on this issue of intentionality, it is interesting to suggest that what I have outlined above is an example of the text 'talking back' to its creator, an aspect of the meta-real triad which we have partially examined. Using a medium implies that we abide by its rules —— that we, in effect, *listen*

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[16] Opposed to this position in Bordwell's estimation are the symptomatic critics, who feel that (particularly in 'reading' mainstream films) the true meaning of a text is often repressed, and is the filmmaker's underlying intention for a film's theme, etc., even though (s)he may not realize it.

to it. If we break too many rules, we impoverish the meaning that we transmit with it.

Having acknowledged that the issue of intention in a meta-real text is not entirely clear-cut, we must nevertheless concede that the filmmaker is in a better position than anyone or anything to portray his or her intentions through the text that (s)he is constructing. This is common sense. As I have implied in the latter part of this chapter, narrative is the filmmaker's vehicle for his or her intentions: this vehicle may be a bicycle or a juggernaut; that is, how intrusive is the narrator's presence in a story may vary considerably between narratives. It all depends on what overall *objectives* the narrator has for his or her narrative.

In the next chapter, I will identify these narrative objectives, and explore some ways in which the narrator uses the four major principles of narrative —— generative, cohesive, revelatory and explicative —— to *affect the viewer*, and thereby to *effect certain aspects of meta-reality*.

Chapter Five —— Narrative Acts

How does a filmmaker go about creating a meta-reality? First, (s)he needs a story —— but let us note first that the *kind* of story is *completely irrelevant to the issue of meta-reality*. Any story, from the Flintstones to the search for the Meaning of Life, has been and will be attempted on film.

What is really important, for meta-reality at least, is *how* the filmmaker tells the story. The plot basis of many of Shakespeare's plays was often quite mediocre; his genius lay in how he embellished and optimized the material he had to work with. This act —— narration —— as I have said is the essence of meta-reality. The viewer may very soon forget how a story is told, allowing his or her brain to reconstitute a neat *histoire* from the portrayal of events —— but *how* the story was told has a two-fold purpose:

- to affect the viewer at the moment of perception and within the film-time;

- to affect the viewer outside of the film-time.

The first purpose is an end in itself, just as the sensation of taste, though evanescent, is an end in itself. But at the same time, the first purpose fulfils the second purpose: by analogy, taste not only acts in the moment, but also encourages us to *continue eating*, and to *return to the act of eating* at a later time. If something tastes unpleasant, we become disinclined to eat it again. In a similar way, telling a story effectively and engagingly not only fulfils the viewer's expectations at the moment of perception, but —— equally importantly —— fosters in the viewer some sense of wonder and specialness about the meta-reality which (s)he unconsciously retains when the film ends.

Ultimately, all acts of perception are transient. No matter how long we stare at a painting, we will eventually be required to avert our gaze, or leave it. Yet this inevitability of absentation does not detract from the moment of experience, nor does it prevent us from taking pleasure in the significance and impact of the painting on us at any time when we are away from it. The

phenomenon I am describing could be termed *meta-real resonance*: the fact that a fiction, a fashioned thing, may linger in our minds even when it is not before us: and linger at least as strongly as our memories of 'real' objects and events. It is through this resonance, I believe, that the meta-real transcends the limitations of time.

Relevant to this is Barthes' and Chatman's recognition of two basic types of story events: kernel events and catalyst events.[17] If kernel events are the parts of the story that we remember, then the catalyst events are the elements, visible and invisible, which both *help and encourage us to remember these kernels*. Thus one reason why it is important to distinguish narrative from the story it relates is that the narrative is not simply a slave to the story: it spends some of its time setting up other relational structures, which include rhetorical effects, themes, and extra-diegetic comment.

So much of what we experience in a film does not make it to our ultimate long-term consciousness of the meta-reality of which it is part —— but then, that was never its job. Just as the artist does not expect, or even want, the viewer to be aware of a particular brush-stroke that he or she has made in a painting (and is probably not consciously aware of it him- or herself), the filmmaker does not expect his or her audience to retain every detail of a film. As I have stated many times, a film is awash with multiple levels of information: what is important in the act of perception is not the observation of every detail, but the apprehension of a *patterning* emergent in the detail. Narrative *generates* the detail (from the 'dead' images), *coheres* a pattern from it, *reveals* the pattern in various ways, and helps to *explain* its significance to us. But this narrative action is present in both narrator and narratee: meaning resides in both, even if it *originates* only in the former.

I believe that a meta-reality is essentially *the medium's self-expression*. This does not mean that narrator and narratee play no part in this expression, rather that it is *not* simply the author's expression, nor the narrator's expression taking place in the text —— largely because these people are employing something outside of themselves to express their ideas. They must do this,

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[17] Discussed in Rimmon-Kenan, 16.

because, unlike the oral narrator, they cannot be physically present (nor would they want to be) at the act of communication. And in the act of transference from the mind to the text, the author is handing the *act* of authorship to the text, just as the narrator is handing the *act* of narration to the text, and thereby they must abide by the rules of the textual medium, otherwise their meaning will be lost.

Comparing film and novel, the novel text amounts to the least degree of transference of power, because there is only one human involved in the process (apart from the editor), and only one medial level —— written text. At the other end of the scale, however, the filmmaker, working with many other interpreters of his or her vision, and often using someone else's script, must frame shots with some consistency,[1] must use lighting of some sort, must make shots at least one twenty-fourth of a second long, must splice shots together linearly, etc. These mandates comprise a narrational system which cannot be flouted. The reason for this interdiction is that breaking these rules risks the *ideational void.* In other words, no-one will be able to understand or identify with your work, or at the least, infelicities will interfere with your narration. And without meaning, meta-reality is next to worthless.

Because stories depend on the process of building up step by step, an ordering process is the consequence. Thus, the filmmaker's objectives are not so much imposed by a person on the outside of a text, as issue from the text itself. The narrator's narrative objectives are in effect the demands of the text translated into human motivations. Meta-reality not only asserts its right to distinguish itself from 'everyday reality' —— it also asserts its right to exist independent of the minds that supposedly created it.

The great works of Leonardo da Vinci, the wonderful pieces of Mozart —— these have not only outlived their creators, they have subsumed the people into themselves. Hence, we know about these people not because of their personalities (though we may appreciate these too) but because of their *works.* Similarly, a filmmaker *is* his or her films to the viewer —— and the only justification for his or her existence, within the films' terms, is to create them.

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[1] For example, the filmmaker cannot cut off people's heads or set the camera off-balance without a good reason.

Strangely, this argument seems to be re-asserting the outdated and erroneous idea of the film narrating itself. As Derrida would have said, if the narrator defines the text, (s)he is in turn defined in his or her role as narrator *only by having narrated the text.*

The logical outcome of such a medium-determined system is that a narrator's objectives in creating a text are the text's tacit instructions to him or her about how to create it. If the narrator fails to follow these, meta-reality will not be achieved. Not only does a medium influence its maker in the creation of meta-reality, it also influences the *very story* that is *told.* This phenomenon has been called forward causality (parallel with Bazin's idea of psychological reality) in which the plot requires something diegetic to happen in order to fulfil a certain structure or design in it. This is not always simple diegetic necessity (though it often is). Sometimes the story itself is subsumed by the *text's needs*: the text becomes an entity in its own right, more a statement than a story, merely using the pretext of story as the encapsulation of this statement.

The narrator's objectives hence closely parallel the four basic actions of the narrative, as they are simply the *humanization* of textual process.

If a text needs the *generating* mechanism of narrative, a filmmaker feels the need (the text 'tells' him or her) to create a diegetic world for a story to inhabit. This must be a world that is affected (at least to some extent) by the laws of cause and effect, a world with distinguishable form —— in short, a world with which a viewer could identify. It must be such, for if a world does not fulfil these criteria, it will fail as a meta-reality, for no viewer will be able to complete the 'circuit of meaning' that enables meta-realities to justify their existence.

Having established an environment for the story, a filmmaker needs to construct a coherent diegesis. This means that the events portrayed must bear some relation to each other: shot must follow shot, scene must follow scene —— however, this relationship may be established *retroactively.* In other words, apparently incongruous scenes may be shown to be linked at a later time in the narrative.

Linking must not only occur in *time* but also across the media boundaries of the film at any given moment. Sound must complement image, dialogue must

synchronize with lip movements. Furthermore, the narrator relies on the narratee's assumed desire to accept the world as coherent (see below) to help with the process. 'Higher' functions of narrative such as plot and theme are brought into play to help cover over any cracks in the diegesis (Bazin's spatio-temporal discontinuities). We may recall V. F. Perkins' assertion, paraphrased earlier by Mast and Cohen, that the "particular magic of the narrative film is to make us put an inaccurate construction on an accurate series of images".[2] Coherence, whether tangible in the film or evoked in the viewer's mind, is structure, and structure validates the existence of a meta-reality.

Inherent in both the acts of creation and coherence is the process of selection and combination of materials, an action which also determines the singular text that tells the story. When two films about Robin Hood were released recently, we could tell them apart because the selections (of actors, locations, dialogue, music and shots) and combinations (montage, mixing) in each were different. The story of each was reasonably similar —— yet they are undeniably distinct meta-realities, not merely re-tellings of the same proto-story. Hence the act of telling in cinema is also the act of telling from a particular angle.

Having created a consistent world and a coherent story, the filmmaker must, crucially, persuade the viewer to accept and remain interested in the story as told:

> The story-teller's freedom to create is inhibited by his two first requirements: clarity and credibility. In movies, the most direct and concrete method of narration, these aims impose a greater restraint than on any other medium. The audience has to know what is happening, of course, but it must also be convinced by what it sees.
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> [V.F. Perkins, Mast and Cohen, 50]

In short, the filmmaker must create a *reality* for his or her audience. Verisimilitude is not enough to succeed in this endeavour: in Bazin's words, the filmmaker must establish a 'psychological reality' which not only appears to

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[2] V. F. Perkins, Mast and Cohen, 49.

reconstruct the physicalities of life, but also the ideas and emotions of life. People are looking to a film to make them pause for thought, be it during the film or after it —— preferably both.

For some people, action or spectacle may be enough to do this; for others, a pull at the heartstrings may satisfy them; others still may be looking to have their ideas about life challenged. Hence, the narrator's objectives for his or her meta-reality need not be particularly noble or lofty. It may be enough for a film to tell a good, rousing story whose power lies more in the moment of perception than in the hours that follow.

Many films, however, attempt to endue their story with a theme or themes; that is, general, timeless concepts which act to magnify and summarize the time-and-place-bound actions and events specific to a text. A narrator may not have a theme at the front of his or her mind when making a film: indeed, there may be no clear theme, apart from some obvious good-versus-evil conflict; but if a filmmaker wants his or her film to be more than specifically memorable, (s)he usually needs to invest the concrete presence of his or her images with the resonance of the universalizing theme.

Theme is hence a type of coherence, but a coherence beyond individual actions. If we imagine a theme as a holographic image, and the story process as breaking up this image into smaller pieces, then when we look closely in each piece of the whole, we can see the whole picture in miniature in each piece. A film devoid of a theme is often characterized as episodic, for it fails to relate itself to general experience: to the incessant human activity of giving sense to our lives.

Sometimes a filmmaker is not content just to tell a story; (s)he feels the need to make a statement. Writer-director Spike Lee, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, leaves an unmistakeable stamp on his films. We feel the presence of a *director*. He uses contrived narrative structures, fantasy sequences, bizarre camera angles and lenses to tell his stories. Yet few people would argue that his films present an unrealistic view of society —— quite the opposite. Lee is able to draw our attention to certain truths as he sees them precisely by his use of extradiegetic devices. The viewers remain aware of a creative force mediating between them and the story, but allow it, even applaud it, because it contributes

to the *experience*. Other filmmakers leave it to the actors and settings to do the same thing. Both naturalistic- and expressionistic-leaning films have their merits.

I have outlined above what I consider to be the main narrative objectives of the filmmaker. No filmmaker will give the same priority to each objective; some objectives may, indeed, appear unfulfilled or rather unaddressed. One filmmaker, for example, may be concerned only with coherently presenting a story; another, however, may see story as a marginal element of the work, using it as a very flimsy framework for an artistic statement. All mixtures of objectives may be successful. Their success depends in the main on how well the filmmaker can support them from moment to moment in the text.

Like Propp, I believe there is a place for direct textual analysis in the formulation of any general statements about narrative. Unlike Propp, I am looking for statements which first can be applied to complicated narrative situations, and which second deal with the psychology of narrative *itself*, rather than the functioning of any particular *stories*.

Propp's narrative functions fail to address the ways in which narrative itself functions. If characters have actions, narratives —— as I have shown —— do too: they act upon the events, moulding them for aesthetic purposes. They act to delineate the narrator's structuration, allowing certain techniques and precluding others. They act on the viewer, providing textual cues, clues and challenges.

Let me thus introduce the term *narrative act* to describe this meta-diegetic process. I will outline here some of the concrete acts used to fulfil the narrative objectives of the narrator, and as a corollary, the four principles of narrative itself.

The general nature of narrative acts is that they seem to work in contrastive pairs. Just as in general terms, generation has its counterpart destruction, cohesion its dissolution, revelation its suppression and explication its confusion, the narrator uses specific contrastive techniques in the text itself. Why is this? As we discussed earlier, the essential drive of narrative is *conflict*, balanced by the structuring principle of *complementarity* —— difference and sameness.

I think that film's primarily linear nature makes an alternation between these principles a necessity: if everything is homogeneous, the viewer cannot distinguish good from bad, beginning from ending, climax from bathos; similarly, if all is contrast, there is no pattern, no consistency, and hence no story.

Thus, as Ellis suggests,

> The filmic narrative is composed of intricate patterns of repetition and innovation of material at all levels.
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> [Ellis, 66]

Like an oarsman, the narrator impels the narrative by balancing opposite forces throughout the journey.

These opposing binaries take many forms, and it is of course arguable how they should be labelled, or, indeed, whether they should be. However, I believe, like Bordwell, that there is a place for the direct analysis of narrative technique:

> most textual effects are the result of deliberate and founding choices, and these affect form, style, and different sorts of meaning. Just as a poet's use of iambic pentameter or sonnet form is unlikely to be involuntary, so the filmmaker's decisions about camera placement, performance, or editing constitute relatively stable creative acts whose situational logic can be investigated.
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> [Bordwell, 268]

Bordwell believes that it is salutary for the theorist to temper his or her abstract heuristics with hands-on analysis. Recalling Aristotle, he calls for the establishment of a "poetics of cinema":

> I conceive this as the study of how, in determinate circumstances, films are put together, serve specific functions, and achieve specific effects.
>
> [Ibid., 266]

In the following section, I will, I hope, go some way towards fulfilling Bordwell's call for such a poetics. My particular focus is on the *effects* that film narrative employs to enhance its meta-reality. In treating a section of an actual film narrative, I hope to demonstrate some narrative acts in operation.

Chapter Six —— Case Study: Excerpt from the Opening Sequence of *Mosshill*

In this chapter, I will use a section of my own film to demonstrate some of the principles of meta-reality which I see as prevalent in narrative film. I must first qualify this exercise in several ways. First, I make no claims for the quality of the exemplar; it was, after all, produced on a low budget and by film amateurs. Based on my own earlier statements, one could argue with some success that the quality of the text influences the analysis of the other parts of the narrational triad. This is true; however, the best I can do is to offer an analysis of a film *under ideal conditions*; were I to factor in all the variables of textual weaknesses in low-budget productions, I would not effect a productive analysis within the ambit of this discussion.

Despite the above caveat, I think this is a useful piece to analyze primarily because it allows me to conduct a *sustained and multi-level analysis* of my own work. I can thus validly claim to approach this analysis from the perspective of the *narrator*, the filmmaker. Any claims I may make for the text are thus those of its narrator, and furthermore, a narrator responding to the text in its completed state. They are not intended to be the definitive interpretation of the material, as I acknowledge that everyone will respond differently to it. And, as these are the expectations and readings of a narrator for his text, critics in the Bordwell camp cannot so readily criticize the analysis for being excessively coloured by a theorist's heuristic devices. Since I am both theorist and practitioner, critic and creator of the text, I am in a unique position to elucidate the narrational devices in the text. I am not interested in an 'objective' analysis, because, as Bordwell demonstrates, the act of interpretation renders this a nonsense. Instead, I hope to provide an insight into the narrational process.

One could argue that, placing myself in the role of theorist in constructing this analysis, I will read the text too 'deeply', descry patterns out of the flimsiest collection of details, exaggerate the filmmaker's powers to influence the viewer. True, I will not be content to suggest only the most obvious workings of the text: but remember that I noted that the viewer cannot be expected *consciously* to

apprehend every detail of the filmscape as it unfolds. Each element contributes to the whole —— and while not every element is significant beyond itself, many elements are part of a pattern, and as such, they justify specific analysis as part of such a semantic complex. Hence, I will not be pointing out obscure details in the text as if they are hidden gems; rather, I will latch onto any elements which seem to me to contribute to a sequence of effects in the text.

Indeed, this piece is also fruitful for our purposes in that it contains in a relatively short sequence many of the patterns that feature in an entire film narrative, in terms of filmmaking objectives and accompanying narrative acts to effect these objectives. There are many patterns to observe, and many details to inform these patterns.

The structure of this case study is as follows. I will present in italics a verbal sketch of a section of the chosen sequence. I will follow this with an analysis of the section which will consider my conscious intentions as a filmmaker in presenting the material in the given way, as well as a more abstract analysis of the scene's workings, and suggestions as to how the results may affect the viewer. After I have treated the sequence in this way, I will give attention to the overall patterns of the sequence. Finally, I will examine the general types of narrative acts which this sequence exemplifies, and draw some conclusions about them.

I do not intend to examine every shot in this sequence; rather, when I feel that a shot has some particular significance as part of a group, I will highlight it. Some shots do little more than advance the plot: while this is a perfectly valid action, as I have suggested earlier, I am particularly interested in the range of meta-real forms which can occur in a film.

I am providing a video-tape of the film under discussion, to assist the reader in grasping the points I will make. I would suggest that the reader view at least the first ten minutes of this before reading this chapter.

Case study —— excerpt from *Mosshill.*

(I am omitting analysis of the opening teaser of the film, and concentrating on the initial credit sequence and what follows it; however, I will provide a brief description of the events leading up to the credits.)

The film opens with a sequence set in a fictional Australian university called Haxaw. Three officials are upset with a promotional video they have received from Mosshill university in New Zealand. They view the video with looks of derision, and remark that it poses a threat to their own institution's viability, in that it may help Mosshill 'poach' their students. They express the intention to rectify the situation by taking some unspoken action against Mosshill.

In the final shot of the scene, a close-up of a television screen, we see the end shot of the Mosshill promotional video, which is frozen. There is the Mosshill logo and words "Nurturing the Tree of Knowledge for the Next Millennium" (coloured blue on a green background). The logo is suddenly replaced by a red screen emblazoned with the word "SOLD" in large, white, flashing letters. The flashing is synchronized with an electronic beeping sound. After several flashes, the image begins to de-focus. At the same time, the main Mosshill music theme begins to play, at the same tempo as the beeping, which incidentally is pitched at the tonic note of the music.

The filmmaker has opted to reveal the Australian schemers' plans to take over Mosshill University not through verbal exposition, which is one of the least characteristically *cinematic* forms of informing the viewer, rather through the juxtaposition of the two images on the screen. This is a succinct, slightly chilling way of suggesting the current state of Mosshill (or at least how it is promoted: as a happy, carefree place) in contrast with a possible future state ("sold" to the Australian institution).

Underscoring this foreboding contrast is a spare melody line, evocative to the attuned listener of the piano theme in *The Exorcist.* It echoes the feeling of both anticipation and malevolence which the image juxtaposition has instigated.

The synchronicity of music and electronic beeping, coupled with the compatibility of note pitches, could be seen to imprint the diegetic —— here, the television screen images and beeping —— with an extradiegetic 'stamp' of significance. In other words, the way that the non-story element of music, which acts as a narrative device, parallels the story elements of image and sound, establishes a resonance in the images which will last beyond their appearance on screen.

This section therefore encourages the viewer to make two quite different kinds of connections: diegetically, between current and future potential states of Mosshill; and extra-diegetically, between two levels of the narrative (audio-visual story-level and extra-diegetic soundtrack-level).

After a few more flashes, the image cuts to black, synchronized with a beat of the music. In a moment, credits appear in white lettering. After general, introductory credits ("Massey University Drama Society in Association with BlueScreen Productions Presents", etc.), the image cuts to a wide shot of a university campus on a sunny day. The film's name 'Mosshill' *fades onto this image. There is a montage of shots around the campus, some of which are superimposed with cast and crew credits. As the music comes to an end, the sequence finishes on a shot of sunlit trees, then fades to black.*

Some edits during the credit sequence synchronize with music beats; others do not. Overall, however, there is a sense that the music and credits are linked rhythmically. The credit contents are also echoed to some extent by the images that underlie them. The names of the major female cast members appear over a shot of a woman student reading, while male cast members' names are superimposed on a shot of a group of male students. Secondary actors' names appear in a group, superimposed over a wide shot of a crowd of students. More abstract roles, such as composer and producers, are backed by 'de-humanized' shots of buildings, scenic vistas and birds.

Moreover, not all shots in the credit montage are titled, suggesting that the purpose of the sequence is as much to establish the autonomy and coherence of the fictional university environment as to name those who helped create it in the

'real' world. By backing actors' names with shots of generally analogous people (e.g. fulfilling similar gender roles) whom the viewer designates as diegetic agents for the purpose of the film, the filmmaker establishes a link between the two worlds, tacitly encouraging the viewer to accept the actors as part of this meta-world.

On a more general level, the credit sequence parallels the montage of shots of a university contained in the fictional hypodiegetic promotional video shown in the preceding teaser. Here, the sequence is itself acting as a kind of promotion, but this time as a promotion for the very film narrative that follows it, anticipating the environment in which much of the action will take place. The shots are idyllic, just the sort that would appear in an actual promotional video of such a place. The final shot in the sequence is in fact an almost exact replica of the final photographic image that appears in the fictional promotional video —— of a leafy, sunlit tree. The timing of the falling of a leaf with the last note of the music is intended to enhance the feeling of harmony and happiness which the credits engender. But at the same time, the memory of the threats to the idyll of the promotional video which arise in the teaser may qualify this bliss in the mind of the viewer: is it not possible that this world is *too* close to perfection, as contrived as its imagery? An apparent affirmation comes with the fade-in to the next scene, which I will discuss in a moment.

Looking at the credits music track in general terms, it is interesting to note the movement from ominousness to positivity which it suggests. As I said earlier, the music begins melancholically. It is set against a de-focused, red image, and then blackness, a somewhat sombre start. However, as it develops, the lyrical lightness of the music is inescapable, with a choir adding an ethereal quality. Nevertheless, the piece is inescapably in a minor key, meaning that it cannot entirely shrug off the lugubrious legacy of the opening bars. This tension is resolved, however, in the closing bars, with a shift to the major key, and a pleasant rising arpeggio. One could see the transition that occurs as an anticipation of the global movements in the film narrative —— from the dire threat to the university which the teaser exposes, to the eventual resolution of the threat and the restoration of harmony.

(In fact, the filmmaker uses a major version of the opening theme at the very end of the film to echo this sentiment, finishing the film on another rising arpeggio, effectively and symmetrically confirming the ending which the opening music adumbrates.)

Overall, the credit sequence encourages the viewer firstly to accept the diegetic world even as he or she acknowledges the existence of 'real' people behind the characters; secondly to recall the Mosshill promotional video and the ambivalence attached to it; and thirdly to anticipate an eventual resolution to the problems that may occur.

The final shot of the credits sequence, evincing the glory of golden-leaved trees on a summer's day, is countered immediately in the form of the next shot to fade in. We see an autumnal, almost wintry shot of the Mosshill concourse, dull and grey, with rain teeming on the flagstones and the trees reduced to doleful skeletons of their former selves. A caption confirms the temporal change: "Mosshill, Late Autumn". The concourse is deserted. The soundtrack is empty apart from the outside ambience. After a few seconds, we see a distant figure descend the concourse steps. We cut closer to see a young woman carrying a pile of books. Suddenly, a woman's voice off-screen exclaims the woman's name: "Gwen!". The woman turns to greet her friend, and they embrace, then talk about the vacation they have just had, Gwen's academic success, and the financial considerations of being a student. They walk to a large stone building, and enter, apparently in good spirits.

First, this scene foreshadows negative events, somewhat in the way that novels employ the literary conceit of *pathetic fallacy*, the external landscape projecting human humour, be it good or bad. Here, the weather is bad, and for a short while, at least, we see a single human figure, isolated and small amid a depressing environment. Second, the contrast of this scene with the one preceding it establishes an unspoken comment on both scenes which acts to temper *both* of the points of view that they appear to represent. The dialectic established suggests not only that 'the idyll is unrealistic, and may be under

threat', but also that 'the university looks drab now, but it is not always like this' (or even, 'the university is under threat now, but it may not be later').

The chasm between these two representations of the same place is also room for humour. The disparity between 'promoted' image (sunny and bustling) and 'reality' (rainy and deserted) creates an irony that may make us laugh. Perhaps people in a local audience would be more likely to appreciate this disparity.[1]

In this last shot of the exterior scene, Linda and Gwen enter a building, with the camera having just completed a pan to the left to follow them. This is a wide two-shot. Abruptly, before the pair have actually exited shot, we cut to a close-up of a piece of chalk drawing a line under the words "NO LATER". The chalk moves quickly to the right. On the audio level, the sound of the chalk cuts in immediately after laughter in the previous shot.

This transition between scenes is narratorially notable in several ways. We can identify half a dozen simultaneous 'challenges' to the previous shot's content and form. First, at the visual level, the *wide* shot of an *exterior* is countered by the *close-up* of an *interior* shot. Moreover, the change in framing means that we move from a shot of two *people* to one of a *'disembodied'* hand, chalk and blackboard. Next, in terms of movement of image, the movement to the *left* in the first shot is balanced by a sudden movement to the *right* in the second shot. Further, the sound changes from laughter to an abrupt, rasping chalk sound. And finally, the jocular nature of the first shot receives an apparent rebuke in the form of the imperious admonition that "NO LATER" implies. The viewer is for a moment dislocated from the world being built for him or her, temporarily left ill-at-ease, until we cut to a wide shot of a tutor describing an assignment on the blackboard.

This transition is an example of the filmmaker apparently 'breaking the rules' of narration in deliberately attempting to fragment instead of cohere, confuse instead of explain. But the *effect* that he is after is to make the viewer

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[1] Indeed, this was often the reaction of my Palmerston North audiences to this juxtaposition.

pause for thought, and attempt to impose his or her own interpretations on the transition. Such a device, in 'going against the grain' of narrative felicity, tends to foreground the filmmaker/narrator's presence in the narrative process. It is also a challenge to the viewer to make sense of what is presented.

The tutorial environment, which is the new scene, proves not to be quite as formidable as the transition may have suggested (perhaps some viewers might have recalled painful school memories at the sight of the admonition on the blackboard). We view the end of a Women's Literature tutorial which Gwen and her friend Linda have attended. Gwen gets up to leave with her friend, but the tutor stops her. The tutor asks Gwen if she is free for a meeting with the Vice Chancellor's assistant the next day. We cut from a medium close-up profile of Gwen's bemused face to a big close-up of a toilet-door sign changing almost immediately, and noisily, to the 'engaged' position.

This transition is similar to that which began the previous scene —— that is, the abrupt cut to a piece of chalk. Again, it poses a conundrum for the viewer: how to resolve the 'violence' of the discontinuity. Most viewers would interpret this as in some way a negative response to the posed question, but as it does not come from Gwen or anything which has so far been associated with her, the direct semantic meaning of 'engaged' seems irrelevant to the viewer, except in that it can be interpreted as providing a lateral-thinking 'jump' in mind of the narrator. This produces a slightly comic effect, like a combined aural-visual pun. In addition, the jarring effect suggests Gwen's disconcerted state —— she is left wondering what is going on, as the viewer jumps to another location, similarly bemused.

This transition is another example of film's ability to evoke simultaneous, equally valid meanings from a form of instantaneous juxtaposition that does not promote one particular interpretation over another. The viewer is free to recognize as many or as few meanings in the comparison as he or she wishes, and is equally free to assign relative importance to these. This is not to say that film cannot foreground particular concerns if it wishes; simply that, by dint of its

multi-layered nature, it can allow alternate readings, both complementary and undermining, to co-exist in the cadre of the moment. Sometimes, the power of a filmic moment lies in its very inability to be verbally resolved.

In the next scene, we meet the second major character, Simon. He sits down on a toilet, but we soon discover that his purpose there is research rather than use. He is in the process of recording the toilet-wall graffiti in manilla folders when someone enters the toilet block, apparently looking for him. We do not see the intruder's face. Simon appears worried, and is reluctant to respond to the visitor. When he does, he discovers that the man is merely passing on a message from the Vice Chancellor's Assistant about a meeting.

This scene is fraught with iconicity (parallelism) across the 'film-band'. When the 'interloper' arrives, eerie music precedes him and accompanies him across the toilet block. Both the intruder's and Simon's actions are in sync with the musical phrases, and moreover, the pair perform parallel actions on similarly rising arpeggiaic motifs in the score: the intruder puts his hands at his waist in a potentially challenging stance, then as if answering the unseen action, Simon raises his folders to his chest. Each character seems to be readying himself for some confrontation. There are several layers of iconicity in the next shots, when Simon apparently 'sees' the intruder reaching for his pocket (an impossibility, as we know that Simon is on the other side of a toilet cubicle door). In a series of rapidly intercutting shots, we see almost at the same moment a close-up of the intruder's hand moving to his pocket, a close-up of Simon's face, then a cut back to the hand progressing, then a cut back to a big close-up of Simon's face, then back to the hand, and finally an extreme close-up of Simon's staring eye. This sequence is synchronized to the accelerating music. Patently, the sequence is engineered to disorientate, emphasize, intensify movement and reactions: overall, to create a state of rising tension.

But much more of interest to the narratologist is occurring here. Two elements of this sequence break the 'rules' of cinema 'realism'. Both concern the knowledge to which a character, and in this case the viewer, is allowed access.

We experience a distorted focalisation of narrative through Simon: first, we see the intruder's arrival, and we see Simon's reaction, presumably to the sound of his footsteps —— but *we cannot hear the footsteps ourselves*, only the ominous music that attends them. Nor can we see the identity of the intruder: it is *suppressed*. Second, Simon appears to be demonstrating second sight in sensing what is happening outside the cubicle. The way the sequence is constructed, with an apparent match between Simon's eyeline, looking right, out of shot, and the intruder's hand movement, happening while he is apparently facing Simon, encourages this view. Though we 'know' that this is not in fact happening, as Simon is unlikely to be psychic within the bounds of the expectations already established in the film (i.e. normal laws of physics seem to apply), the attempt to go against the grain of this realism has the effect of colouring the audience's perceptions of the events, compelling them to share Simon's fears, no matter how unfounded they may be. A subjectivization of point of view is occurring here. The audience is not allowed to step back and make an objective assessment of the events, something which the apparent third-person style of film normally allows.

Nevertheless, the audience is allowed a certain degree of distance from Simon in that the scene's portrayal is most likely hyperbolic; elements of the presentation parody scenes from suspense films such as *Psycho* and *Witness*.[2] This is thus a paradox of the filmic process: we are given a psychological insight into Simon's overactive imagination, while at the same time we are allowed to pull back from his character to laugh at him a little.

It appears that the exaggeration of conventional and acceptable filmic iconicity techniques allows the audience this dual attitude towards the scene. Extending any technique beyond mere complementarity of content has the effect of *commentary* (usually conflicting with the superficial mood of the diegesis itself), or at least of inviting the audience to have a certain *disposition* towards the material which the situation alone, played 'straight', might not suggest.

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[2] In fact, I based the scene very loosely on a vaguely similar, though deadly serious, scene in *Witness*.

I proffer a particular criticism of this scene in that I feel it is let down by a climax that is simply *too* bathetic. Certainly, the parodic style is setting the audience up for a deflation of Simon's fearful expectations, and that is exactly what happens when he is presented with a message rather than a revolver muzzle. But what is missing in the final shots is the last-minute doubt that should be in the viewer's mind. The filmmaker fails to keep the viewer uncertain until the last moment; instead, as soon as Simon opens the toilet door and peers out, he cuts to a boring two-shot that destroys the rhythm of the sequence.

Simon, puzzled by the message, places it in a folder marked 'unintelligible'. Cut to the next scene, in which we see Sandra, the third major character, running along a street.

The first notable element of this transition is the sound overlap: we hear Sandra's footfalls before the image changes to her. This splitting of audio and visual elements has the effect of intertwining the two scenes, and hence linking the two characters together. Again, this is not a causal link: it is an act of anticipation of a future association between the two characters at the *diegetic* level. Hence, the mechanical association, almost a forced yoking of ideas, will eventually be replaced by a proper diegetic association as the plot unfolds.

Also of note is the way the transition is in some ways a mirror image of the previous scene transition. Here, we cut from a humorous set-up in the form of the word 'unintelligible''s association with the letter from the Assistant to a (briefly) profile shot of a woman running to the right of shot. In the previous transition, we cut from a woman facing left of shot to a word on a toilet door which evokes humour. The only significant difference in the working of humour at these two points is that in the first, the humour requires trans-scenic juxtaposition, while in the second, the humour is contained solely in the first scene's internal juxtaposition of letter and folder title. In other words, the first scene's humour is an effect of montage, while the second's is an effect of mise-en-scène.

At a psychological level, the transition structure for a moment may reinstate in the viewer's mind the fear of being sought after which dogged Simon: the footsteps (unseen this time, rather than unheard as they were before) are unsourced (in filmic jargon, 'unmotivated') and therefore unidentifiable.

In Sandra's introductory scene, first we see a series of close-up shots of parts of Sandra's body as she runs. We see something like a transmitter attached to her foot, and in a house, a computer is monitoring Sandra's running. At a house, the phone rings, and an answerphone records a message for her from her thesis supervisor. At the same time, Sandra's watch beeps. She stops and listens to the message emanating from her watch, which asks her to attend a meeting with the Vice Chancellor's Assistant the next day. Then Sandra runs off again.

The technique of cutting together parts of something to present an impression of the whole harks back to Eisenstein's montage principles. Here, the effect is to involve us in Sandra's world of concentration. She seems a very inward-looking individual, something echoed by the close-up cinemtography which shuts out her environment, focusing solely on her. In addition, the close-up style enables the filmmaker to foreground the unusual technology with which she literally bristles.

This scene also demonstrates one of film's most basic cohesive narrative techniques in portraying simultaneous actions in two different locations through consecutive switches between the two locations. The viewer sees Sandra running, a close-up of an electronic device on her shoe, then a computer apparently tracking her progress on a map, and, by the consecutivity of the shots, assumes that the two events are simultaneous. The thematic matching of 'electronic device' and 'computer' further aids the link. Having made the connection, the filmmaker underscores it by repeating the cut between the two locations, no longer having to provide a close-up of the electronic device in the exterior location to link with the computer monitoring.

From a shot of Sandra's feet exiting shot, the film cuts to a clock-radio display in Phil's bedroom. The display changes to 12:00 and the radio turns on. We see

a wide shot of the bedroom. It is in a state of disarray: bottles and clothes are strewn on the floor, while business and girlie magazines litter the bed. A telephone rings. The camera searches the room for someone to answer it. After a few seconds, Phil emerges from under the bed, dressed in pyjamas and clutching a teddy bear. He answers his cordless phone, and after a few seconds, exclaims: "See the V.C.? But I haven't done anything wrong!" He looks crestfallen, and slaps his knees in annoyance.

The initial transition shot of a clock-radio display has two major effects. First, it establishes the time of day which has been reached; second, the implication of the radio alarm's activation at 12:00 is that someone, probably a new character, has not wanted to be disturbed until this time, and is hence probably still asleep. The following wide shot of Phil's room acts both for and against this assumption. The room is quiet, countering Sandra's active state of jogging; there is no sign of an occupant in the bed. Nevertheless, the fact that the camera is roaming, looking for something or someone, keeps the possibility alive in the viewer's mind that someone is sleeping somewhere in the room. This is perhaps strengthened by the examination of the room's contents. Metonymic association is at work: these items and their disposition are *indices* of a certain type of person —— in short, a slob, one who might well sleep the morning away.

The mise-en-scène of the roving camera both builds up an image of the room's user in our minds, and establishes a search for its occupant. Were the scene instead cut into a sequence of shots, we would learn about the unseen person's habits, but not feel that we were searching him out. Here, an uninterrupted camera movement, obviously hand-determined and hence by implication humanly motivated, colours the shot with subjectivity.

The attempt to surprise the viewer by Phil's sudden appearance from *under* the bed in response to a telephone is spoiled somewhat by the camera's counterproductive anticipation of the action. Instead of letting the movement under the sheets provoke a camera movement to centre on this, the camera positions itself too early for his emergence.

The scene's contents work to provoke the viewer's ambivalence towards Phil in two ways. First, the items strewn around the room are indices both of an oversexed, boorish mentality and someone interested in business. Second, Phil's appearance from under the bed, both indicative of his excessive lifestyle (which leads him to ignore the social convention of sleeping *in* a bed) and perhaps of his iconoclasm, is countered thematically by his wearing pyjamas (rather than threadbare underwear, or nothing) and most obviously by his teddy bear. How are we to respond to this misfit?

Phil's response to an unexpected telephone call augments our classification of him as 'rule-breaker'. By saying "See the V.C.? But I haven't done anything wrong!" he inculcates himself in the mind of the viewer, the implication being that he has done things wrong in the past, and almost has a guilt complex about this. But at the same time, the wording of his response is that of a naughty schoolboy rather than the tertiary student we assume him to be.

Let us now turn to how audio works in this scene, in particular the radio voice-over. Here, the sound overlay is not echoing the visual (except in case (1)), but is 'doing its own thing'. Specifically:

1. The speaker confirms the time of day as noon.
2. The speaker confirms the existence of Mosshill University, with the authority of a media identity —— "You're listening to radio Mosshill...."
3. The speaker highlights potentially lucrative research going on at the university —— "... a special yeast that prevents potato rot".
4. The speaker highlights the user-pays education climate in which the university operates —— "What's it going to be this time —— hiring out the university at weekends?"
5. The radio provides the diegetic motivation for the music which leads into, and underscores the action of, the next scene.

The voice-over also has a purely pragmatic function: to prevent the viewer getting too bored by the visual hunt, by providing an extra layer of information to assimilate at the same time.

The music element is especially interesting here, as there is an overlap between the diegetic and extra-diegetic narrational domains. In Phil's bedroom, the music apparently comes from the radio, yet in the next scene, its function is more clearly that of narrational facilitation. The way that Phil's slapping of his legs synchronizes with the lead-in drum beat of the music lends the music more than diegetic status: his apparent ability to 'start' the music gives it psychological significance, as if it is a projection of, or comment on, his personality.

Such *synchronicity* of elements internal to the story with the external element of music, which one might designate *temporal iconicity*, is evidence of narrational action (remember the synchronization of beeping and music mentioned at the beginning of this analysis).

The music also helps expedite an important scene transition, significant because it breaks the pattern of new scene, new character. Here, we are moving into the main body of the story proper (albeit still just the *start* of the story). The focus *remains on Phil*, as we see him heading for the meeting.

Phil speeds down a tree-lined road on a rather small motor-bike, to the sound of heavy metal music.

The transition between scenes is from a medium shot of Phil's profile, with him in a state of relative inaction in his bedroom, to a medium close-up of Phil front-on, active, riding a motorcycle.

The effect of showing the same subject between consecutive scene shots is at once to indicate that a temporal elision has taken place, and to *deny* the importance of this omission. In other words, this transition asserts the validity of the elision. Time collapses like a concertina in between the two shots, and the mere fact that film can instantly assert its presence with a shot change (because it does not require time to build up its image) allows this. We could suggest that this technique approximates the novel's equally flexible treatment of time jumps, which it must however signal with a time marker:

> *Within a few minutes*, Phil was on his bike, roaring up the tree-lined avenue to the campus.

In film, this time marker is implicit. The mere act of the cut suggests "in a few minutes". If there were intervening shots, that is, cutaways, we could infer that more time had passed.

However, I would go further than this, and choose a slightly more narrationally imbued novel equivalent. The fact that the filmmaker chose *not* to join the two shots with others showing Phil getting dressed, going outside and getting on his bike gives the transition a near-metaphorical feel, in that it is almost the novelistic equivalent of:

> He was on his bike *in next to no time*, roaring up the avenue....

But if we think about the chain of events carefully, we realize that, if Phil is going up to the university for a meeting with the Vice Chancellor's Assistant and the other students, which we may infer that his motorbike ride takes place *the next day*. Thus, the elision has fooled us into forgetting the extra day entirely. We accept the truncated course of events because the present-tense images make any intervening time irrelevant.

Let us now look at some general issues arising from this case study. It is significant that much of this analysis centres on the transitions between scenes. It is worth spending a moment assessing what actually happens at a scene change. A scene change is the plot equivalent of a minor crisis.[3] Why? Because the filmmaker is forcing the viewer to adopt a completely different attitude to the one that the previous scene has instigated, just as a plot crisis involves the audience absorbing a revelation of some description. Once again, the scene has to be validated, given thematic or characterizational excuses for being there, which do not necessarily arise causally from the previous scene. (Exceptions are such events as someone dialling a telephone number in one scene, and it being

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[3] Although it doesn't actually affect the plot as such.

answered in another.) In the opening sequence of *Mosshill* that I have been analyzing, the narrational emphasis is on establishing the main characters in the plot, and has not yet shifted to the narrationally more 'cohesive' mode of establishing causal links between scenes. (This is more the domain of the arbitrarily designated 'Middle Section' of the narrative.) Yet, as I demonstrated earlier, scenes with no apparent causal connections can still be linked extradiegetically, by the use of music, sound overlap, the juxtaposition of similarly composed shots, and so on.

In some films, causal links may go hand in hand with characterization in the early stages of a film, where plot is advanced immediately. In *Mosshill,* this is not the filmmaker's object. The teaser has established a threat, and the film's subsequent opening sequence proper exists to set up the students' normal world before it has been disrupted by this menace. This parallels Todorov's transformational narrative theory, in which, as you may recall, an initial state, A, is disrupted by an opposing state, B, subsequently being returned to the initial state of comparative order (A) at the end. *Mosshill* fits this pattern quite well, though this approach fails to take into account the re-ordering process that is simultaneously taking place, in that the four students, strangers and hence apart at the beginning, are firmly related by the end of the narrative, brought together both physically and emotionally by their experiences. Hence, the Todorov model does not take into account character development, something which is more often a permanent transformation than an oscillation and eventual reversion to the initial state.

Taking our analysis back another step, how well does the above empirical analysis exemplify the principles of meta-reality in film which I outlined in the previous chapter? I believe that the analysis demonstrates how narrative acts are working within the text to produce a coherent story-world, a coherent story, and some authorial comment on this story.

We see evidence of several kinds of narrative acts at work in the sequence to effect cohesion. There are scenes joined by simple *consecutivity*, scenes joined by *sound overlap*, scenes joined by *extradiegetic music*, scenes joined by *thematic matching* (similar shot content), and so on. Secondly, there is cohesion within

scenes and within shots: *complementarity* between sound and image, and between sound and music. Thirdly, there is cohesion between temporally unconnected scenes: *anticipation* of events to occur, and *recollection* of events that have already occurred. All these devices act not only to hold the sequence together, but also to give it a significance *beyond the moment of presentation.*

At the same time, the narrative counterpart of cohesion, dissolution, is at work. But this does not mean dissolution by default (entropy), as it is intentional.[4] At various places in the text, elements are at odds with each other —— they appear to stand apart from one another rather than join together smoothly. Two juxtaposed scenes may display contrasting states, or may simply show no obvious relation between them; yet there may be good reason for setting up this conflict. Like the semi-colon I used in the last sentence, this juxtaposition brings together as much as it separates. If cohesion acts to make the viewer accept the diegetic world, the act of separation acts to make the viewer aware of the narrational process that mediates it, not to destroy this diegesis, merely to question its workings. Such a technique suggests that the filmmaker credits the viewer with intelligence —— and not simply the ability passively to absorb a story.

Second, there is evidence of a process of revelation and suppression occurring in the text. A prevalent feature is the use of close-ups, particularly at the beginning and end of scenes, which shut out most of the diegetic world, and (may) pique the viewer's interest. A special case of this phenomenon is when the face of the toilet messenger is temporarily suppressed to make him seen 'inhuman'.

The fact that the Australian plot to take over Mosshill is revealed at the very beginning has great implications for the following scenes, as we respond to everything we experience in the light of this. The students' meeting which is mentioned four times in this sequence takes on an ominous significance because of the viewer's 'inside knowledge' (a form of dramatic irony). The elements of

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[4] I have highlighted two instances in the text which seem to me to demonstrate unintended dissolution. At these points, the textual realization of the filmmaker's intentions has not worked as he would have liked. This attenuates the impact of a scene, and diminishes its meta-reality.

discord and threat which occur in the process of introducing the students, while of little significance in themselves, perhaps become like talismans of conflicts to come.

Naturally, it is impossible to avoid the acts of revelation and suppression in any story-telling, owing to narrative's enforced linearity. However, the filmmaker can choose to manipulate the basic *histoire* to a greater or lesser degree by ordering the release of information in a certain way. By electing to manipulate the story considerably, the filmmaker is establishing a dialogue of power with the viewer, challenging him or her to 'break the code' of the narrative jigsaw before he or she deigns to reveal the full pattern. In this case, it appears that the filmmaker is setting up a pattern of suppression of information typical of the 'suspense' genre.

Finally, to what extent does the narrative act to explain what it presents? In fact, the act of explanation is a combination of all the acts we have discussed. As I said earlier, the form of a narrative explains its contents: but whether it explains them fully, accurately or accessibly is another matter, and it is up to the viewer to assess the quality of the explanation.

For example, when ominous music plays in a scene, it explains that the scene should be interpreted as frightening. But when the music is overblown in comparison with the events shown, when characters' reactions seem exaggerated, the viewer is encouraged to re-evaluate such an interpretation, and perhaps to find the scene a humorous parody, or perhaps a silly pastiche. This demonstrates that the process of explanation is complex, and ultimately *incompletely determined.* While the filmmaker may be favouring a particular interpretation of a scene, the viewer may make another. This is partly due to film's multiplicity of information-levels, and partly to the different sets of neural connections which we all possess.

In this chapter, I have attempted to to support my theory of narrative acts with concrete examples from my own film material. I have tried to establish the narrator's objectives in using these acts, and the possible effects of them on the viewer. I have also tried to detail some of the many ways in which film can embody these narrative acts. My analysis has been in no way exhaustive, but I

hope that it has indicated both something of the expressive range of narrative acts, and the recurring nature of these acts in telling a story on film. The overpowing insistence of the screen image often masks the narrative techniques that encapsulate it; I hope that I have put the focus for a moment on the intriguing drama of *narrative itself.*

Chapter Seven —— Conclusions

In this thesis, I have discussed film's place in shaping our notion of Reality. I have argued for the existence of filmic meta-reality in this notion, suggesting that narrative plays a major role in creating the film entity as something related to, yet independent of, 'real life'. I have explained and illustrated the role of narrative acts in this process, showing that these techniques both complement the story, and create effects that transcend the story. Thus, to complete the meta-reality of *this* text, I must ensure that it is a consistently coherent entity. As we have observed, a useful cohesive technique is to recollect an earlier concern. I began this thesis by asking some questions, and it is time for me to re-address them in the light of the observations which we have made.

The first question concerned the issue of reality in film. Is a naturalistic film more 'real' than a fantasy film? Based on our exploration of this issue, my answer would be that when one is dealing with a fiction, a human act of shaping, verisimilitude is only one factor among many which may validate a text's existence. Is a Van Gogh painting's fantastical swirls and garish colours less 'real' an entity than a photo-perfect Cartesian-drawn landscape? Of course it is not. Indeed, many would argue that Van Gogh's signature brush strokes, his mediation between 'real life' and his rendering of it, are what distinguishes it from nature.[1]

Yet, at the same time, creating an apparently realistic film may be no less of an accomplishment. The *appearance* of reality is a carefully crafted illusion in itself, in which narrative acts to present a seamless diegesis without a hint of its contrived structure. Hence, overall, a film's reality is not so much how it reflects 'real life' as how effectively it portrays its own meta-world.

This suggestion goes some way towards answering the second question I put: does the level of narratorial involvement in a film determine its quality? Again, this is a matter of different kinds of meta-reality at work. When a filmmaker cares to have his or her story 'speak for itself', (s)he will remain in the

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[1] 'Distinguish' in the double sense: both differentiating it from 'real life' and raising it above nature.

shadows, as it were, allowing actions to motivate camera movements, the placement of objects to determine framings, and chronology to dictate the order in which events are shown. In such a film, the director is content, or even determined, to allow meta-reality to reside in that which is told, and only minimally in the telling itself.

Another director, however, may decide that his or her story is but a vehicle for an authorial message. (S)he may order a story strangely, encouraging the viewer to take particular notice of cause and effect; repeat certain images, actions or scenes until they strike the viewer as motifs; anticipate later events through flashforwards; emotionally underscore scenes with extradiegetic music; puzzle the viewer with visual tricks; suppress vital information, and so on. This is the other extreme, in which the meta-reality of the film resides as much (if not more) in the telling as in what is shown.

Of course, most films fall somewhere in between. The average film balances realism with authorial expression, allowing at one moment the diegesis to impel the narrative, and the next, a carefully orchestrated narrative act to do so. Strings of such 'kernel' and 'catalyst' acts create a crypto-organic narrative progression which is comprehensible to the viewer.

We can extend this discussion to the third question: why two movie-goers may have different interpretations of the same material. Just as each filmmaker comes to a work with different narrative objectives, every viewer approaches a film with certain pre-conceptions, and, more importantly, organized patterns of preconception —— narrative schemata —— which he or she will use to arrange narrative cues in many different ways. Some viewers will concentrate solely on the diegetic cues which allow them to apprehend a story-pattern. Others may be more aware of the narrative acts which affect the diegesis —— the often invisible 'shell' of the story —— and may thus gain extra information about the diegesis through these explicative cues. But the point is that no reading is invalid if it is *consistent* with the meta-reality presented.

If a filmmaker establishes consistent and effective patterns of complementarity and contrast, he or she has probably succeeded in creating a viable meta-reality that is open to, perhaps even invites, multiple readings. As

we have noted, the process of construal —— of simultaneous creation and comprehension —— unites filmmaker and viewer in a common process. What distinguishes narrator from narratee, looking into the 'textual mirror', is that the former originates while the latter interprets; and the act of interpretation, being far quicker than the act of creation,[2] permits the existence of as many interpretations of the same creation as there are spectators.

The answer to the above questions has concerned some facet of meta-reality. Let us conclude this thesis by reviewing the main issues that determine this phenomenon as a whole.

In the first chapter, we examined film reality through the eyes of the filmmakers and theorists of this century. From this examination, we might conclude that the flexibility and accuracy of film's phenomenal reproduction of 'real life' presents both pitfalls and opportunities for meta-reality.

On the one hand, film's essential nature may limit film reality to being a mere shadowing of 'real life' —— a mindless reproduction —— or equally condemn it to distorting what it records to such an extent that it becomes a manipulative tool for an unscrupulous propagandist's hidden agendas. It may be guilty of appropriating the naturalism of real-life images to the crime of perpetrating societal prejudices by presenting a distorted world not explicitly, as in how some dictator wants it to be (*à la Mein Kampf*), but rather insidiously, as if it already *is* this way (*à la* Nazi propaganda films). Film's basis in images may vitiate its meta-reality be reducing what it records to the clichéd superficiality of the 'action movie'. In short, film's meta-reality, fear some theorists, is always at risk on account of its phenomenal basis.

On the other hand, some see much potential for great meta-realities in film's intrinsic characteristics. Film can combine elements from most other arts to produce a hybrid form with the world-making powers of the novel, much of the immediacy of theatre, the emotional depth of music, the graceful movements of ballet, and the luminous images of painting. And to this amalgam it can add its unique qualities, such as the ability to change the scene in an instant, and

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[2] Often, the act of interpretation takes no longer than the act of viewing the film; whereas, the film-time naturally represents only a small fraction of the time taken to create the film.

hence to juxtapose ideas instantaneously. All these facets can come together to effect *la photogénie* —— the magic of cinema. What is important is that they often *do*. While there are many bad films made, there are good films to match them. And a film with a robust meta-reality cannot help but affect its viewers, and thereby extend its structures out beyond the film time itself, into the memory and attitudes of the recipient. The reason that people may fear film's misuse is that its combination of abilities makes it a tremendously powerful medium. Yet this is also a reason to revel in film's positive successes.

In our exploration of the narrational structures that underlie film, we have at times seen the cinematic text as somewhat like a living entity. A hundred parents are involved in its conception and delivery to us, yet like a developing foetus, it makes demands of its creators while still 'in utero'. The filmmaker unconsciously responds to his or her creation's basic needs for cohesion, ordering and explanation. And after a dramatic delivery of a couple of hours in a darkened room, someone scrutinizes this labour of love and marvels at its existence where before there was nothing. Often the event displays the inexplicable characteristics of a living being in seeming more than the sum of its parts, invested with an immanent force in the 'spaces between the effects' which touches the viewers' hearts and minds, an experience that will remain with them for a long time.

To put it less metaphorically, four elements determine filmic meta-reality: a narrator's objectives, the text's requirements, the narrative's acts and the viewer's interpretations —— but a film's touchstone is its *internal logic*. If a film is true to the objectives set for it, then it has succeeded. How big a success it is depends on how demanding these objectives have been. Ultimately,when someone analyzes the worth of a film, he or she should not be assessing how well it reproduces nature, how cleverly it employs cinematic devices, nor how nobly it tackles important issues. The person should assess whether the film has been true to its meta-reality.

In this thesis, I have searched for a way to analyze film which will not dispel the magic of cinema, nor abstract the analysis from the very directness of the artform. As an aspiring filmmaker, I wish to save my artform from dry theorizing and wild over-interpretation; as a theorist, I feel the need to find out

why some techniques work in a film and others do not —— and more importantly, what overarching narrative forces inform these techniques. I believe that my thoughts about a filmic meta-reality and the narrative acts that make it possible are a valid approach to answering such redoubtable questions.

To use a film metaphor, this thesis is like the opening sequence of a poetics of meta-reality, as Bordwell might term it —— a coming-to-grips with the practical ramifications of general principles in film narrative. The main players in the narrative have been introduced: I have outlined the broad principle of narrative objectives and acts, and provided an intriguing glimpse of close textual analysis which promises fruitful further investigation. We need a 'detective' to hunt down the tell-tale patterns at work in narrative techniques —— to sort out the myriad ways in which a film can generate its material, cohere it, reveal it and even explain it, and place these within a framework of understanding.

This is not to suggest that meta-reality is a case which can somehow be 'solved'; art, like life, is full of the indeterminable, and so it should be, if we are to continue to marvel at the act of creation in either domain. Nevertheless, if we want to get the most out of this most fascinating artform, it seems productive for us to scrutinize the meta-real. We should do so both with the sense of transcendent vision that inspires a director to conceive a film, and the down-to-earth pragmatism which enables him or her to bring that vision through all the trials of gestation, until it can cry out to the world, "I am a new life!"

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