The Modality of Film-Theatre: Disrupting the Absorption Effects of Hollywood Mode Films

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the

requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama,

University of London

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma, or other qualification.

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Abstract

The thesis proposes ‘film-theatre’ as a new theoretical and practical approach for disrupting the absorption effect of what are referred to as ‘Hollywood mode’ films. The Hollywood mode, which characterises most mainstream films and a significant number of independent films, uses a complex set of rules and conventions to produce the experience of a fictional world masquerading as reality. By concealing the apparatus that creates film’s spontaneous appearance of life from the spectator the Hollywood mode creates a psychological connection between the spectator and the protagonist’s objectives. In this ‘hypnotic’ state (referred to in the thesis as ‘absorption’), the spectator is incapable of making an objective and rational judgment concerning the subject matter on screen or the social realities underlying it or of assessing the mode of representation and its effects.

Through the alternative modality of film-theatre the thesis explores certain theatre techniques and performance and rehearsal practices as a source for strategies that interrupt the Hollywood mode, that arouse the spectator out of the sense of stupor that it creates, and that replace absorption with a self-reflexive dialectic effect. Three film-theatre techniques – improvisation, Brechtian alienation techniques, and the use of theatrical framing for extended periods of time – form the basis for case studies that examine how theatrical techniques and practices may be applied to film to provide alternative aesthetic possibilities to the Hollywood mode.

The thesis argues that film-theatre is increasingly relevant in the wake of major changes in the Hollywood film and television industry during the twenty-first century (including the rise of franchise films, resulting in an extreme form of absorption; a new risk-averse economic climate; monopolistic practices; and the

effects of globalisation on film cultures). These changes have led to a chronic crisis for the Hollywood film industry and the Hollywood mode itself. At the same time, however, they provide an opportunity for film-theatre to play an active, potentially subversive, role both as a challenge to the Hollywood mode and as a model for examining alternative modes of storytelling through film.

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Acknowledgments

I owe a deep and enduring debt of gratitude to my two tutors, Prof. Tony Fisher and Dr Joel Anderson, for their tireless and consistent guidance and support along the long journey that led to this thesis. They constantly challenged me to look beyond my first thoughts and impressions, to burrow deeper into the questions raised by the thesis, and to probe into the possibilities of the research not just for now but for the future. Beyond that, at times when I felt discouraged or disheartened, they lifted my spirits and gave me the fortitude to continue.

In addition, I have received ongoing and unconditional support, guidance, and instruction from the Research Department at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. The informative and varied organisation of seminars and workshops offered by the School provided the essential analytical and practical tools for developing the research and writing skills I needed for the thesis. Among the many professors, lecturers, and administrative personnel at the School who have helped me, it is difficult to single anyone out; the whole School contributed to the research in so many ways. But I would like to express sincere thanks in particular to Prof. Maria Delgado, Dr Tom Six, Kate Pitt, Daniel Hetherington, and Helen Davies, the Head of Library Services.

I thank Eugene Doyen, Lecturer in Film Practice at Queen Mary University of London. His support for my use of improvisation in my own films, as well as our collaboration on the Directing Film module at Queen Mary, were the inspiration for the broader themes developed in the thesis concerning the relationship of theatre and film.

I thank four actors – Harriet Madeley, Shane Bruce, Kristy Bruce, and Kathryn Worth – whose inspired improvisation work on my film, *Waking David*, demonstrated in a palpable and practical manner the value of theatre techniques in film and the justification for supporting them.

And finally, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to two people who helped me in the final states of the thesis preparation: my proofreader, Puck Fletcher, for his hard work, acute attention to detail, dedication to time commitments, and consummate professionalism, and Dr. Adelina Ong, whose probing questions helped to prepare me for the Viva examination.

Introduction: The Concept of Film-Theatre

The scope and aims of the thesis

Susan Sontag's article 'Film and Theatre' begins and ends with a question. At the beginning she asks 'whether there is an unbridgeable division, even opposition, between the two arts. Is there something genuinely "theatrical," different in kind from what is genuinely "cinematic"? Almost all opinion holds that there is.'[1] And, she concludes, 'we need a new idea. It will probably be a very simple one. Will we be able to recognize it?'[2] These questions broadly define the theoretical territory of this thesis, encompassing the three principal elements of its position – that there *is* a division and an opposition between the two arts, that it is not unbridgeable, and that there is an 'idea' that will help to bridge this gap. The thesis introduces 'film-theatre' as a theoretical and practical approach to filmmaking that bridges at least one area of this division between the two art forms.

The premise of film-theatre is that theatre techniques and practices and the conditions of reception by theatre audiences generally produce a self-reflexive, dialectical, and 'active' response to a performance from the spectator.[3] One reason

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[1] Susan Sontag, 'Film and Theatre,' *Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1 (1966): 24–37, https://doi.org/10.2307/1125262.

[2] Ibid., 37.

[3] In the thesis, I use the words 'dialectic' and 'dialectical' relatively loosely rather than in accordance with any specific theory or definition to explain the aesthetic that film-theatre produces in contrast to the Hollywood mode (described in more detail in the following section). The dialectical effect of films that conform to the principles of film-theatre is to complicate the relationship between subject and object. Unlike the Hegelian tradition of dialectics, I do not propose that all films made according to film-theatre necessarily lead to a higher positive determination or synthesis. By contrast, the aesthetics of film-theatre are the aesthetics of disruption, approximating more closely Theodor Adorno's approach to a 'negative dialectic.' Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2003). In various sections of the thesis – particularly in chapter 6 – I expand on the applicability of Adorno's approach to the objectives of film-theatre. The thesis does not, however, propose any all-encompassing dialectic for film-theatre. The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate the

for this response is the various aspects of the 'liveness' of theatre performances. In a theatre, the viewer is constantly being reminded – from various perspectives and by various means – that they are viewing a live performance and that what they are seeing is not 'real.'[4] This is a function of multiple factors, such as the configuration of seating in relation to the stage, the awareness that the characters are being performed by 'live' actors in front of them, and the way events on stage are presented to them – predominantly in extended sequences or sometimes whole acts without a set change.[5] Generally, therefore, the audience is aware of the apparatus of theatre. Theatre performances appear to an audience as 'mere artefacts, made-up objects that are being paraded before [them].'[6] As Brian Kullick has explained, theatre, a 'place of seeing' according to its Greek name *theatron*, provides the viewer with 'the opportunity of a sustained gaze where we can move slowly from looking to seeing.'[7]

By contrast, the dominant mode of filmmaking since at least as early as 1917 – referred to in the thesis as the 'Hollywood mode'[8] – almost invariably leads the

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capacity of film-theatre to interrupt the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode, and film-theatre may lead to various approaches to the dialectic that have this effect.

[4] There are, of course, some exceptions to this general observation about a theatre audience's reception of a performance (including bourgeois theatre and popular West End and Broadway musicals based on Hollywood films). See infra section 5.2.

[5] See chapter 2. See also Sarah Bay-Cheng, 'Following the Gaze: The Influence (and Problems) of Feminist Film Theory in Theater Criticism,' in Robert Knopf, ed., *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 162–71.

[6] Ibid. As Henri Gouhier wrote in *The Essence of Theatre*, 'the stage welcomes every illusion except that of presence; the actor is there in disguise, with the soul and voice of another, but he is nevertheless there and by the same token space calls out for him and for the solidity of his presence.' Quoted in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Volume I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 95.

[7] Brian Kulick, *How Greek Tragedy Works: A Guide for Directors, Dramaturges, and Playwrights* (Routledge, 2020), 120–21. Anne Bogart, a colleague of Kulick, adds, 'we learn to pay attention in a way that wakes up distinct elements of our innate intelligence. We acquire the ability to fill in the blanks, completing what we see on the stage.' Anne Bogart, 'Ways of Seeing', *SITI* (blog), 19 February 2019, https://siti.org/ways-of-seeing/.

[8] A more detailed explanation of the term 'Hollywood mode' is provided in the next section and in chapter 1. For present purposes, it encompasses 'mainstream' films, meaning nearly all films made

viewer into a state of 'absorption' in which their attention is directed through the narrative.[9] As André Bazin explains, the image presented in such films 'conceals the fact of the analysis, the mind of the spectator quite naturally accepting the viewpoints of the director which are justified by the geography of the action or the shifting emphasis of dramatic interest.'[10] This state of absorption is problematic because it induces in the viewer the illusion that what they are watching on the screen is 'realistic,' when in fact the screen image is no more than a naturalistic façade that conceals the film's ideology, preventing the viewer from engaging in a meaningful dialectical response to the film's subject and its underlying social and political conditions.

However, while the Hollywood mode is the 'dominant' mode of film, it is not universal; it is a paradigm with its own set of rules and conventions that collectively ensure the logic of absorption. And, since its origins during the period from 1907 to 1917, various films, filmmakers, and film movements have challenged it and sought aesthetic alternatives to its absorption effect. Many of those films have used aesthetic techniques that have more in common with theatre than with the Hollywood mode (including improvisation, long shots in depth,[11] and Brechtian alienation techniques),

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by large studios with a relatively high budget and intended for general cinema distribution. Superficially, this distinguishes mainstream films from what we often call 'art house' or 'independent' films. However, the distinction can be misleading, as the thesis will argue, because an increasing number of such films exhibit many of the aesthetic characteristics of mainstream films.

[9] As Peter Wollen explains, 'a seamless flow of images conceals the fact that the film is a construction, a fictional product, someone else's fantasy. The spectator becomes swept away and dragged into the narrative flow—and the dominant cinema employs a number of techniques to make certain that films do not call attention to their own workings in ways that might destroy the sense of illusion and the viewer's visual and narrative pleasure.' Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*,' *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972): 6–17.

[10] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 24–25.

[11] The 'long shot in depth' generally implies an extended, held shot (compared to the relatively short edits in Hollywood mode films) that also uses depth of field to allow the viewer to observe all the characters in a scene or shot at the same time. Orson Welles used this approach extensively in his films. See, for example, *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, dir., RKO Radio Pictures, Mercury Productions, 1941); *The Magnificent Ambersons* (Orson Welles, dir., Mercury Productions, 1942).

but, more importantly, they are 'theatrical' in the sense that they produce an aesthetic effect on the spectator that more closely approximates the dialectical, self-reflexive response of a theatre audience than a state of absorption. But although these films have attracted substantial critical attention, no serious attempt has been made to analyse them from the perspective of their theatricality.

Film-theatre is a theoretical and practical concept that creates a bridge from theatre to film by examining how theatre techniques, practices, and their aesthetic effects can be adapted for film to interrupt the absorption effect and stimulate a dialectical response from the viewer. It is both a new way of looking at existing films based on their engagement with – or rejection of – theatricality and a methodology for exploring new directions for film and filmmakers based on the use of theatre techniques and aesthetic effects. The thesis uses a two-part methodology to explore these objectives. The goal of the first part is to *identify* theatre techniques and practices that have the potential to be used in films, while the second part examines, largely through the selected case studies in chapters 3, 4, and 5, how these techniques and practices can be adapted for film. It follows that film-theatre is not intended to provide a taxonomy of theatre techniques and practices whose principal purpose is replication in film form for essentially stylistic purposes.[12] Its purpose, rather, is to understand how use of those techniques in films may lead to a self-reflexive response from the viewer. For this reason, the second component of the film-theatre methodology – adaptation – plays a central role in this thesis. In some

[12] There are of course multiple examples in film of stylistic appropriations of theatre techniques and practice, including theatre design and staging in *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, dir., MGM, 1951); extended shots in deep focus, as in *Victoria* (Sebastian Schipper, dir., Monkeyboy, 2015) and *1917* (Sam Mendes, dir., Dreamworks Pictures, Reliance Entertainment, New Republic Pictures, 2020); and the use of direct address to the audience (in a nod to Brechtian techniques) in *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, dir., Warner Bros., 1990) and most of the films of Woody Allen.

cases, the adaptation of theatre techniques may result in films that, superficially at least, don't appear to be theatrical at all and that, on the contrary, appear 'cinematic,' making extensive use of cinema's technical innovations and aesthetics. Examples include Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962) and *La Notte* (1962) and Jean-Luc Godard's *Weekend* (1968) and *Breathless* (1961).[13] The closing scenes in the two Antonioni films would be largely inconceivable within a theatre space. But, as the analysis of the duration image within the open frame in chapter 3 argues, the effect on the viewer is analogous to the experience of a theatre audience. Both films demand the viewer's active and constant attention and reflexion, while reimagining for film various theatre forms, aesthetic effects, and practices, including the open stage, extended scenes without a break in the narrative, and temporal and spatial ambiguity. Similarly, the two films of Godard rely on cinematographic techniques, including the jump cut and the extended tracking shot, that would be difficult to replicate in a theatre. But the function of both techniques is the same as their theatrical equivalents, to produce a Brechtian alienation effect, to 'make strange' the events and the characters presented in what superficially appear to be genre crime films.

Although the opportunities provided by film-theatre extend beyond interrupting the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films, it is nonetheless difficult to embark on an analysis of film-theatre without first understanding the aesthetic that it rejects; for, using Sontag's words, there *is* an 'opposition' between the Hollywood mode and theatre or at least the concept of theatre used by the film-theatre approach. It follows

[13] *L'Eclisse* (Michelangelo Antonioni, dir., Cineriz, Interopa Film, Paris Film, 1962); *La Notte* (Michelangelo Antonioni, dir., Nepi Film, Sofitedip, Silver Films, 1962); *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Les Films Impéria, Les Productions Georges de Beauregard, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC), 1961); *Week-end* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Comacico, Les Films Copernic, Lira Films, 1968).

that any meaningful analysis of film-theatre must at least begin by introducing, responding to, and problematising the Hollywood mode. Using the terminology of Jonas Barish, the thesis refers to this opposition as the 'antitheatrical prejudice.' While its form and scope have changed over time depending on the circumstances – political, sociological, religious, and psychological, for example – at a superficial level the antitheatrical prejudice is a prejudice against not only theatre but actors and performances. Barish argues, however, that it is more than a prejudice. Rather 'it comes to appear a kind of ontological malaise, a condition inseparable from our being which we can no more discard than we can shed our skins. It would seem to reflect something permanent about the way we reflect on ourselves and our lives.'[14] The presence of the actor, he argues, unleashes this 'malaise' in the sense that it destabilises ideas of fixed 'personhood.'[15] The position of the thesis is that this destabilisation conflicts with the aesthetic of Hollywood mode films, largely because the notion of 'fixed personhood' is one of its fundamental conditions.[16] The antitheatrical prejudice, in other words, is the ideological orientation of the Hollywood mode that leads inevitably to the logic of absorption – a logic that rejects the notion that the viewer should occupy a self-reflexive relationship with the film's subject.

This introduction and chapter 1 examine and problematise the Hollywood mode, the antitheatrical prejudice that provided its ideological justification, and the logic of absorption that was the product of the continuity system developed by it. This analysis is critical to understanding why film-theatre is necessary and what

[14] Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 2.

[15] Ibid., 1–5.

[16] See infra chapter 4.

challenges it faces. Chapters 2 through 6, which are devoted to the analysis of film-theatre, explore a methodology for both identifying theatre techniques and adapting them for use in films. In furtherance of these objectives, chapter 2 identifies three characteristics of the Hollywood mode's approach to narrative that produce absorption effects (character identification, temporal and spatial continuity, and narrative unity) and the three principal theatre techniques and practices that interrupt them (improvisation, the duration image within an open frame, and Brechtian alienation techniques). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 apply this methodology to the three selected theatre techniques by use of case studies of representative films in each category. While the details of the analysis of each respective technique are of course markedly different, they share two common purposes – first, they problematise the assumption of the antitheatrical prejudice that theatre has no role to play in film, and second, they seek to demonstrate the diversity and versatility of aesthetic possibilities that theatre techniques can provide when imaginatively adapted for use in films.

While Sontag's article provides a useful departure point and direction for the thesis by drawing attention to the conflict between film and theatre and exploring a range of possible solutions to the division between the two art forms, the immediate scope and aims of the thesis are more limited. First, the thesis is concerned with the use of theatre techniques and practices *in film*, and not the reverse. Although film plays an increasing role in theatre productions, that subject is largely beyond the scope of the thesis.[17] For the same reason, the thesis does not propose a theoretical approach that would unify both art forms. Whether or not, as Sontag implies, there is a common

[17] In the final chapter, however, I argue that a future direction for research could include the use of film in theatre. For examples of this use of film in theatre see infra, note 560.

animus between both arts, the aim of the thesis is to explore how the aesthetic and dialectical effects of theatre performances can be experienced in films through the use in films of theatre techniques and modes of rehearsal and performance practice. While this analysis may be useful to some extent in the discussion of such an *animus* or the 'quest for the definitive art form,'[18] the final answer to Sontag's question at the end of her article will have to be sought elsewhere.

The concept of film-theatre can, at best, aspire to provide a narrow bridge across a small part of the great divide between the two art forms. Nevertheless, the analysis of film-theatre in the thesis introduces new learning that contributes to the existing literature by suggesting new ways of looking at films and by opening new aesthetic opportunities for filmmakers. To avoid confusion, however, it is important at the outset to distinguish film-theatre from the vast body of film theory literature that analyses and often problematises the Hollywood mode, and specifically its absorption effects, from specific perspectives. This literature includes, for example, ontological approaches by André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer to film as the representation of reality,[19] psychoanalytical analysis of the male gaze,[20] and Marxist theories largely developed around the ideology of the Hollywood mode.[21] By contrast, while film-theatre is based on a theoretical approach to the aesthetic effects of theatre techniques and practices, its objective is to propose an alternative modality that includes a practical methodology for adapting theatre techniques for film as a means of interrupting absorption.

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[18] Sontag, 'Film and Theatre,' 34.

[19] See infra, the first two subsections of the literature review in this introduction.

[20] See infra, section 1.6.

[21] See infra, the literature review in this introduction.

The place of the 'Hollywood mode' within the research

As the previous section explains, an important preliminary step to analysing film theatre is understanding the nature, scope, and effect of the Hollywood mode. This subject is explored in detail in chapter 1, but for present purposes some preliminary 'map making' may be useful. In general terms, the Hollywood mode of film practice[22] embraces nearly all 'mainstream' films that have been produced in the West since the period from 1907 to 1917 (the formative period of the Hollywood mode), as well as several so-called independent or art house films and an increasing number of foreign films.[23] According to Kristin Thompson, the origins of the Hollywood mode can be traced to a relatively short period beginning in 1907. While there have been vast developments in film production technology in the more than a hundred years since then, its defining characteristics – including its antitheatrical prejudice and, along with it, the absorption effect – were almost fully formed by 1917.[24]

This mode has sometimes been referred to as the 'classical style', signifying perhaps its resilience and relative resistance to any fundamental changes for over a hundred years.[25] Both terms, 'classical' and 'style,' however, can be misleading, as they

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[22] I claim no originality for the use of this term in the thesis. The term was used extensively to describe the same field by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson in their extensive survey of this mode of film practice. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 1988).

[23] The history of this mode, the reasons for its success, and the technical and aesthetic characteristics that define it will be the subject of more detailed examination in chapter 1.

[24] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, xii–xiv.

[25] Bordwell notes that it was André Bazin who gave the term 'classical cinema' most currency: 'By 1939, Bazin declared, Hollywood filmmaking had acquired all the characteristics of a classical art.' Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 3–4 (citing Bazin, *What Is Cinema?Vol. 1„* 29).

suggest a particular era of filmmaking (such as German Expressionism or Soviet Montage), when in fact the aesthetics of mainstream films are constantly changing within each film genre (as are the genres themselves). For this reason, the thesis uses the term 'Hollywood mode' to describe the combination of rules, conventions, techniques, and aesthetic effects – notably absorption – that collectively describe the manner of production, distribution, and consumption of most mainstream films. Even this epithet is less than perfect, since many films made according to the Hollywood mode are not produced in Hollywood or by Hollywood production companies or studios. Several are independent films or films made in countries outside the West. However, 'Hollywood' is a convenient and reasonably appropriate descriptor, since many of the technical, aesthetic, and economic innovations through which the mode evolved were the product of the Hollywood film industry. Similarly, the term 'mode' signifies a type of film *practice* rather than a particular style. Indeed, styles of Hollywood mode films are constantly changing whereas the principal defining parameters of the Hollywood mode have remained relatively constant since 1917.

In the following passage from one of the leading treatises on the nature and characteristics of the Hollywood mode, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, David Bordwell, one of the co-authors, explains how the idea of a mode can be distinguished from temporal shifts in style and aesthetics:

> A mode of film practice, then, consists of a set of widely held stylistic norms sustained by and sustaining an integral mode of film production. These norms constitute a determinate set of assumptions about how a movie should behave, about what stories it properly tells and how it should tell them, about the range and functions of film technique, and about the activities of the spectator. These formal and stylistic norms will be created, shaped, and supported within a mode of film production – a characteristic ensemble of economic aims, a specific division of labor, and particular ways of conceiving and executing the work of filmmaking. *Through time, both the*

> *norms and the mode of production will change, as will the technology they employ, but certain fundamental aspects will remain constant.*[26]

As Bordwell explains, these 'norms' govern multiple aspects of the film production and distribution process. They relate not simply to questions of aesthetics but also to the industrial conditions of existence, which include the economic conditions that are the foundation of the global Hollywood film industry. Other chapters will examine in more detail the nature and extent of these norms, but, in general terms, they include questions of character motivation (the psychological motivation of the protagonist in the film and the viewer's identification with that motivation), the form and structure of narration (a kind of narrative 'unity' that requires all the elements of the film, including the script, the acting, the editing, set design, and music to serve the single narrative purpose of the film), the concept of continuity editing and narration with reference to time and space (according to which changes in time and space are 'sutured' together in a way that conceals from the viewer the artifice of the film apparatus), various elements of cinematography and lighting (notably, the various 'rules' about camera placement, shot selection, and framing, as well as the significance of close-up shots in terms of character and narrative development), the 'star' system (used to enable audiences to identify with certain high profile actors), and modes of distribution and consumption.

The economics of film production, distribution, and reception are also a function of these norms. In economic and industrial terms, their primary purpose is to affect the mode of consumption by the viewer, a subject that encompasses both the psychological or phenomenological effect that a film has on a viewer as well as the ability of any film to produce revenue from box office sales and other sources. These

[26] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, xiv (emphasis added).

norms establish what semiologists call a 'paradigm,' which implies a 'sense of the choices open to filmmakers within the tradition,' while reminding us that the Hollywood mode is still a unified system because the paradigm offers 'bounded alternatives.'[27]

Analysis of the literature relating to film-theatre

There are two recurring – and opposing – themes in the literature discussed in this section. The first is the influence of theatre, in one form or another, on film aesthetics since the period before the evolution of the Hollywood mode through to the present day. This theme is reflected in both the composition and mode of presentation of films before 1907, the so-called 'primitive mode.' The opposing theme is a function of the antitheatrical prejudice that resists any notion of 'theatricality' in films in favour of the logic of absorption. The thesis' position requires a review of the literature on both sides of this debate as a critical first step in proposing a theoretical and practical approach based on film-theatre. For this purpose, the literature review approaches the subject from various perspectives. The first relates to the early history of the relationship between film and theatre, covering both the role played by theatre in films prior to 1907 and the historical and aesthetic background to the evolution of the Hollywood mode, the logic of absorption that it created, and the antitheatrical prejudice. The second perspective is the problematisation of the Hollywood mode based on alternative, 'theatrical' approaches to film and various critical theories challenging its assumptions and aesthetics.

[27] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 5.

The theatrical origins of early film and evolution of the Hollywood mode

Noël Burch used the term 'primitive mode' to describe films made prior to 1907,[28] but this was an *ex post facto* characterisation used to distinguish the aesthetic of early film from the Hollywood mode, because at that time there was no other 'mode' from which these early films could be distinguished. Kristin Thompson's survey of this period indicates that the so-called primitive mode was 'theatrical' in several ways: the venues in which early films were screened and the programming of the films at these venues, the viewing position of the audience, the framing and editing of the films, and their content and form. The performance spaces, length of the films, and small-scale production facilities 'dictated the creation of films which modeled themselves largely on types of stage acts: the variety act, the fictional narrative, the scenic (views of interesting locales), the topical (presentations of current events), and the trick film.'[29] After locating pre-1907 cinema predominantly in the theatre (in terms of aesthetic presentation of the film's material) and music halls (the venues where these films were shown), Thompson's survey continues with a detailed examination of the technical, economic, and aesthetic reasons for the emergence of the Hollywood mode from 1907 to 1917. She attributes this mode to various influences and innovations, such as the growing popularity of the novella and technological developments in cinematography and editing.[30] However, while these factors clearly played a role in the evolution of the Hollywood mode, it is the position of the thesis that the mode is not reducible simply to a question of style but

[28] Burch, Noël. *Theory of film practice*. Translated by Helen R. Lane. Princton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

[29] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 163–65.

[30] Ibid., at chapter 7.

rather a function of a certain logic. The defining characteristic of this logic is the 'absorption' effects experienced by the viewer. And, as Bazin explains in *What Is Cinema?*,[31] the principal building block of the absorption effect is the continuity system of editing, which directs the viewer's attention effortlessly and 'invisibly' from one shot and one edit to another.[32]

While the logic of absorption represents the aesthetic effect produced by the apparatus of the Hollywood mode, it is the antitheatrical prejudice that both validates it and provides the theoretical basis for rejecting theatricality in films. Jonas Barish's trans-historical survey, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, provides the context and background for the prevalence of the antitheatrical prejudice during the formative period of the Hollywood mode. According to Barish, at a superficial level it represents the notion that theatre is synonymous with fakery and that by extension all actors are pretenders. However, based on the universality of the prejudice over time and its attraction to 'giants' such as Plato, Saint Augustine, Rousseau, and Nietzsche, he concludes that 'it is indeed more than a prejudice,' it is an 'ontological malaise.'[33] Nicholas Davis, reviewing Barish's work, located this 'ontological malaise' (or, in his own words, 'queasiness') in the 'tension between conceptions of the self as one, integral and immutable, and as susceptible to indefinite, willed change ("Protean," "metamorphic"), by analogy with the artful and obligatory self-transformation of the actor.'[34] Davis argues that opponents of theatre (notably the proponents of the

[31] André Bazin, 'What Is Cinema? Volume I', trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 24–25.

[32] As Tom Gunning has explained, one of the key figures in the development of this system was D. W. Griffith. Tom Gunning, *DW Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[33] Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 2.

[34] Nicholas Davis, review of *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, by Jonas Barish, *Comparative Drama* 15, no. 4 (1981): 381–83.

Hollywood mode and the logic of absorption) are committed to the conservation of a 'single, irreducible identity, while the friends of the theater have been inclined to confer value on proteanism and artful self-presentation on the principle that society and the world are themselves theaters.'[35] This notion of audience 'discomfort' is further developed by Nicholas Ridout, who examines the dialectical relationship between audience and actor within the context of stage fright and other obstacles confronted by actor and audience in performances, discovering in that relationship a possibility for self-reflexion by both audience and performer.[36]

During and after the formative period, various writers hailed the possibilities of the Hollywood mode as a new art form separate and distinct from theatre. Some emphasised what they regarded as the inherent realism of film as its distinguishing characteristic.[37] For others, it was the *formal* technical and aesthetic qualities of film that set it apart from theatre, including the variety of camera shots and angles (particularly the close up), framing, and continuity editing through which 'cinema had moved far from that of the fixed theatrical viewer located outside the depicted spectacle to the endlessly fluid and mobile viewer floating on the periphery of the ongoing action.'[38] Hugo Münsterberg, whose work *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* was perhaps the earliest attempt to analyse films in terms of their psychological impact, sought to claim for film the status of a new art form with its

[35] Ibid, 382.

[36] Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[37] Thus, Hanford C. Judson wrote in 'What Gets Over', *Moving Picture World*, 15 April 1911: 'The proper work of the photoplay is to give life *as life really is*, at its chosen, dramatic moments, and I believe that we shall find that all the well-known theatrical makeshifts, so effective on the stage, will be less effective in a photoplay than the simplicity of every-day life is.'

[38] Charlie Keil, 'All the Frame's a Stage': (Anti-)Theatricality and Cinematic Modernism, in *Against Theatre: Creative Destructions on the Modernist Stage,* Alan L. Ackerman and Martin Puchner, eds, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 76–95.

own unique aesthetic.[39] And Erwin Panofsky, summarising the various technical and aesthetic qualities of film in 1934, long after the maturity of the Hollywood mode, reinforced the underlying antitheatricality of all these approaches when he stressed that 'the imitation of a theater performance with a set stage, fixed entries and exits, and distinctly literary ambitions is the one thing the film must avoid.'[40]

Not all writers, however, were persuaded by this formalist approach to film. Others considered its ability to represent 'physical reality' as the defining quality of film. Siegfried Kracauer, for example, was concerned with the inherent nature of film, which he regarded as its photographic or cinematographic quality.[41] And while he conceded that films required the use of formal technical devices, he argued that these should always be subservient to the prioritisation of the photographic image. For Kracauer, film should concern itself solely with physical reality or nature. As he explained, 'films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties, like photographs, that is, they must record and reveal physical reality,' distinguishing 'other visible worlds [that] reach into this world without, however, really forming a part of it.'[42] Theatre belongs to this latter group since it 'suggests a universe of its own that would immediately crumble were it related to its real-life environment.'[43] Kracauer identified the two properties of film as the 'basic' and 'technical' properties.[44] The basic property of film is the same property it shares with

[39] Allan Langdale, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film: 'The Photoplay: A Psychological Study' and Other Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[40] Erwin Panofsky, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures [1934]', in Talbot, Daniel, ed. *Film: An Anthology* (Univ of California Press, 1970), 18.

[41] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 27-28.

[42] Ibid, 29.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid, 29-30.

photography – the ability to record and reveal physical reality.[45] The technical properties of film are the methods used 'to establish a meaningful continuity of shots,' specifically editing and the use of different types of shot (such as the close-up) or transitions (dissolves, fades) to link the images. In his view, the basic properties take precedence over the technical properties 'in the sense that they are responsible for the cinematic properties of a film.'[46]

A similar view was expressed by Allardyce Nicoll, who believed not only that film was the best medium for representing 'reality' but that cinematography removed the need for realist theatre and that therefore playwrights should rediscover theatrical convention, 'unlearn realism, revive poetic drama, or create new styles for the new settings.'[47] Nicoll's view, however, and to some degree the approach of Kracauer, seems to assume that physical reality, or the photographic or cinematographic quality of film, inherently avoids the problems of absorption by virtue of the fact that the images displayed are 'real' or 'realistic' and that theatre, by definition (since it cannot represent the natural world in the same way as film), is not 'realistic.' As the literature discussed in the following section indicates, however, Nicoll appears to have conflated naturalism (the appearance of reality) with the kind of reality that can look behind the façade or illusion of the screen image. This criticism can be made

[45] Ibid. For Roland Barthes, by contrast, a photograph provides a view of events that have already occurred. As Time Dant and Graeme Gilloch point out, the photographic image, unlike film, 'does not easily show the passage of time but it does show us that time has passed.' Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch, 'Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002), 3. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (Macmillan, 1981).

[46] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 87.

[47] Allardyce Nicoll, *Film and Theatre* (London: George G. Harrap, 1936), 181-187.

against both the formalist and so-called realist approaches to film. In short, neither of them is immune from absorption effects.[48]

Critical responses to the Hollywood mode

The logic of absorption was not a passing trend or 'style' during the early period of film development. On the contrary, it contributed to the enormous success of the Hollywood mode in transforming the film business from a series of music hall interludes or attractions into a global industry and paving the way for the hegemony of Hollywood and its mode of production. The various aesthetic and technical innovations that led to its evolution during the period from 1907 to 1917 were the basis for an increasingly complex set of rules and conventions designed to ensure the continued financial stability of the industry. Certainly, film styles and genres have changed, and new technologies have led to different aesthetics, but the fundamental principles of antitheatricality and absorption remained at the commercial heart of the industry. Gerben Bakker's survey of the industrialisation of the film industry investigates how 'motion pictures emerged from a world of traditional live entertainment and how this emergence set in motion a continuous process of creative destruction, development and productivity growth that is still going on in the entertainment industry today.'[49] He argues that Hollywood's hegemony over the film industry was a result of fierce competition for ticket sales in the 1910s. European

[48] For a persuasive response to Nicoll's view, see Eric Bentley, 'Realism and the Cinema,' in *The Playwright as Thinker* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), 8-16. Bentley argues that there is no radical distinction between stage and screen illusion; that this is not a matter of stage or screen but of the style chosen by the director, author, or producer. Bentley adds that, while Nicolls's view is true of certain movies and many audiences, it is not true of all possible movies and audiences.

[49] Gerben Bakker, *Entertainment Industrialised: The Emergence of the International Film Industry, 1890–1940*, Cambridge Studies in Economic History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11-17.

film producers lost the race because of the economic demands of the First World War, and this resulted in a handful of American companies dominating the business and the concentration of the business in California.

Along with this success, however, there have been several critical responses to the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode from multiple perspectives. Like Kracauer, André Bazin approached the problem of absorption from a realist viewpoint, but he then examined in depth the way that the conventions and aesthetics of the Hollywood mode produce this effect. In Bazin's view, this mode results in 'invisible' filmmaking.[50] For these reasons, Bazin elevated the long shot in depth over the continuity created by multiple cuts in the Hollywood mode film.

By contrast, Tom Gunning expresses a 'pro-theatrical' view that proudly proclaims for film its capacity for 'making images seen.'[51] As Gunning explains, early filmmaking (whether in the form of actuality films by Lumière or magical illusion by Méliès) was concerned less with narrative than with presenting a series of views to an audience:

> The relation to the spectator set up by the films of both Lumière and Méliès (and many other filmmakers before 1906) had a common basis, and one that differs from the primary spectator relations set up by narrative film after 1906. I will call this earlier conception of cinema, 'the cinema of attractions.'[52]

Gunning explains that the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention and 'expends little energy creating characters with psychological motivations or individual personality. Making use of both fictional and non-fictional attractions, its

[50] Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Volume I*, 24–25.

[51] Gunning, Tom. 'The cinema of attraction [s]: Early film, its spectator and the avant-garde.' *Theater and Film: A Comparative Anthology* (1986): 39.

[52] Ibid, 38-39.

energy moves outward to an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classical narrative.'[53] While of course the Hollywood mode's preference for narrative-based films eclipsed the cinema of attractions, the theoretical and practical orientation of the cinema of attractions to audience attention continued to influence several filmmakers after 1917. Sergei Eisenstein, for example, believed that film should consist of a montage of such attractions, creating a relation to the spectator entirely different from his absorption in 'illusory [depictions]' – a relation with the spectator that Gunning describes as 'exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption.'[54]

Another critical approach is concerned with the role played by absorption and the antitheatrical prejudice in various theories relating to the 'reification of culture' or cultural relations. This subject is concerned with how Marxist theories of commodity reification may be applied to the works of mass culture. The development of the concept of reification is largely attributable to the work of Georg Lukács on 'commodity structures' in his essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' from his book *History and Class Consciousness*.[55] Here he explains that the basis of commodity structures is that 'a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a "phantom objectivity," an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.'[56] Lukács's work influenced the philosophers of

[53] Ibid, 38-39.

[54] Ibid, 38-39. See also S. M. Eisenstein, 'Montage of Attractions: For Enough Stupidity in Every Wiseman,' trans. Daniel Gerould, *The Drama Review* 18, no. 1 (1974): 78–79.

[55] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (Malik-Verlag, 1923).

[56] Ibid., 93. Lukács explains that the commodity form 'stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can "own" or "dispose of" like the various objects of the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his

the Frankfurt School, including Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who together, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,[57] shifted the emphasis of the critique of capitalism through commodity structures away from the economic base towards the sphere of mass culture.[58] Following, in particular, Walter Benjamin's essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,'[59] Hollywood mode films have become a subject for the study of cultural reification.[60] According to Benjamin, the emergence of film marked the point at which the Western tradition of art – the 'auratic' tradition which maintained that the genius of the artist lay in his ability to configure the transcendence of the object which he had depicted – was overtaken by the technological media through which the image is produced and disseminated. Art, in other words, loses its place within relatively stable traditions of authority, obedience, and obligation and is transformed into a commodity which is designed for consumption by the masses.[61]

Louis Althusser's theories relating to how an individual may be 'hailed' or 'interpellated' as an unknowing subject into the acceptance and validation of social

physical and psychic "qualities" into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process.' Ibid.,100.

[57] Adorno, T. W., and Max Horkheimer, [1947]. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, translated by E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press (2002).

[58] As Fredric Jameson points out, the effect of reification is that the quality of various forms of human labour has been effectively 'bracketed or suspended by the market system, leaving all these activities free to be ruthlessly reorganized in efficiency terms as sheer means or instrumentality.' Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' *Social Text*, no. 1 (Winter, 1979): 130–48.

[59] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1936' in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 26.

[60] See Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia.'

[61] Benjamin, 'Work of Art,' 220.

and political conditions are particularly applicable to Hollywood mode films.[62] As Philip Green explains:

> The ideological function of cinema as an institution does exist independently of any particular audience's response to a particular film. This function is performed by means of what Louis Althusser calls 'interpellation': that is, the viewer is interpellated ('hailed') as a subject, as the bearer of a familiar social role, or rather one that has become familiar over time through the operation of ideological apparatuses that confirm the real conditions of existence.[63]

Referencing the various technical innovations and aesthetic effects of the Hollywood mode, Green, paraphrasing Althusser's comment about ideology, concludes that 'we do not speak the film, the film speaks us: and we do not even know we have been spoken.'[64] And from this it follows, according to Althusser, that we are interpellated as passive social spectators rather than social actors. Hollywood mode movies illustrate precisely how this process of interpellation works. In many of them (such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*[65]) there are representations of social and political injustice that need to be rectified or at least addressed and that demand the objective and analytical attention of the audience. However, the problem with absorption, as explained by Althusser, is that these films 'do not demand that we engage in action. They encourage us to enjoy, to take pleasure in, even the most horrific of socially realistic narratives: and to watch more movies.'[66]

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[62] Althusser, Louis. 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation).' *The anthropology of the state: A reader* 9, no. 1 (2006): 86-98.The types of conditions into which the viewer is hailed will depend on the film's narrative. They may include, for example, questions of discrimination, the environment, civil rights, corruption by public officials, corporate greed, and similar situations that seem to demand that the viewer takes social action in response. But the effect of hailing is that we do not engage in action, we are 'encouraged to enjoy, to take pleasure in, even the most horrific of socially realistic narratives: and to watch more movies.' Philip Green, 'Ideology and Ambiguity in Cinema', *Massachusetts Review* 34, no. 1 (1993): 103.

[63] Ibid., 102.

[64] Ibid., 103.

[65] *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, dir., Universal Pictures, Amblin Entertainment, 1994).

[66] Green, 'Ideology and Ambiguity,' 103.

The role of theatre techniques in interrupting absorption effects

While there is a wealth of literature that problematises the absorption effect, there is a relative dearth of works that explore the possibilities of using theatre techniques as a means for interrupting it. Several films, including all those examined in the case studies in chapters 3 through 5, have relied on 'theatrical' effects in one way or another to interrupt the absorption effect, and there is abundant literature about those films, their directors, and any film movements that they are related to. However, this literature tends to focus on those films and their directors or the specific technique in question, and there is a relative absence of literature that explores a theoretical and practical approach *based on* the use of these theatrical effects. For that matter, there is a relative dearth of literature that problematises the antitheatrical prejudice in the context of the absorption effect or that approaches the question of absorption from the perspective of theatricality and antitheatricality. Most of the literature that examines this approach, in fact, comes from sources outside film theory.

Interestingly, Michael Fried's opposition to what he regards as theatricality in modern art at least suggests a theoretical approach based on the distinction between 'theatricality' and absorption.[67] Richard Rushton argues that Fried's comments on film and theatricality should be taken seriously,

> for he uses a language and concepts that are a step removed from the traditions and cliches that inform contemporary film studies and film theory. Fried's observations on theatricality have the possibility therefore of encouraging new ways of thinking about cinema and of seeing old debates in

[67] Michael Fried's most definitive statement on theatricality occurs in 'Art and Objecthood,' in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); and *Manet's Modernism, or The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

> a new light. This is especially the case with issues of spectatorship and the audience's relation to the cinematic experience.[68]

While the thesis departs from Fried's view regarding the relative merits of absorption and theatricality, as applied to film the distinction he makes between absorption (which he associates with antitheatricality) and audience awareness (which he relates to 'theatricality') serves as a useful conceptual springboard for the examination in the thesis through case studies of the ability of theatre techniques and practices to interrupt absorption effects.[69] As Rushton indicates, Fried's views at least encourage an original way of thinking about theatricality in relation to film. Fried's exhortation to film theorists to develop this theoretical approach to absorption and theatricality, however, has gone largely unanswered.[70]

The theoretical distinction between the aesthetic effects of absorption versus theatricality drawn by Fried and the historical basis for a 'theatrical' approach to film examined by Gunning provide the conceptual blocks for building and defining the scope of film-theatre in the thesis. The question that remains for the thesis is *how* theatre techniques and practices can be used to interrupt absorption effects. Sarah Bay-Cheng provides a useful demonstration of how effectively these techniques could function for this purpose.[71] She sought to distinguish theatre from film in the context of Laura Mulvey's arguments regarding the cinematic gaze in her ground-

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[68] Richard Rushton, 'Early, Classical and Modern Cinema: Absorption and Theatricality', *Screen* 45, no. 3 (2004): 226–27, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/45.3.226.

[69] Fried assumes in his essay that cinema escapes theatricality 'automatically' (rather than by design, which is the case for Modernist art) by virtue of its inherent apparatus ('in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected away from us, the screen is not experienced as a kind of object existing, so to speak, in a specific physical relation to us, etc.'). But he makes no further attempt to apply his analysis to film. Further, as chapters 3 through 6 of the thesis argue, film-theatre demonstrates how various theatre techniques and practices may interrupt this 'automatic' state of absorption.

[70] See, for example, D. Morgan, 'Missed Connections', *Nonsite. Org*, Articles Issue 22, 2017.

[71] Bay-Cheng, 'Following the Gaze,' 162-172.

breaking essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.'[72] Bay-Cheng argues that the inherent nature of theatre performances creates a natural 'distance' between spectator and object that avoids many of the problems with the cinematic gaze discussed by Mulvey. Since several characteristics of live performance identified by Bay-Cheng are represented in the three examined techniques, it may be helpful briefly to list them. Specifically, Bay-Cheng identifies the following characteristics of theatre performance as distinct from film: first, the 'spectator has much greater freedom to look at whatever appears interesting. The eye has the freedom to scan the entire stage area with much greater freedom than in film.'[73] Second, on stage there is no (or relatively little) fragmentation of the female form. She notes that 'in virtually every live performance, the women on stage occupy the same space as the men.'[74] Third, cinema can adjust the scale of images of men and women on screen. From these and other characteristics of theatre performances, Bay-Cheng concludes that 'the gaze aimed at film is necessarily very different from the gaze aimed at live bodies on stage.'[75] The purpose of Bay-Cheng's essay was to refute the assumption that problems of the male gaze inherent in commercial films automatically extended to live performances of plays. Obviously, a film screening cannot precisely replicate the reception conditions of a live stage performance, but there is no reason why film cannot create at least some of the effects of theatricality by *adapting* theatre techniques and performance aesthetics for films.[76]

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[72] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' *Screen* 16, no. 3 (September 1975): 6–18.

[73] Bay-Cheng, 'Following the Gaze,' 166.

[74] Ibid, 167.

[75] Ibid, 168.

[76] Bazin noted that 'cinema has at its disposal means which favour a passive position or on the other hand, means which to a greater or lesser degree stimulate the consciousness of the spectator.' Bazin, *What Is Cinema?vol. 1*, 100.

Following similar lines in their survey of theatricality, Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait provide insight into how theatre interrupts the absorption effect. They examine the distinctions between so-called 'realistic' and 'theatricalistic' aesthetics, between authenticity (in the manner suggested by Fried) and theatricality.[77] And they demonstrate how theatre has a rich history (going back to Shakespeare's time or earlier) of examining itself through metadrama (plays that comment on the conventions of their genre, such as *The Frogs* by Aristophanes) and metatheatre (a performance calling attention to the presentational aspects of theatre and its conventions).[78] Davis and Postlewait's analysis of the aesthetic history of theatricality explores the possibilities of theatre as a means for producing an interaction between performer and audience and a dialectical and self-reflexive response from the spectator. Their historical and conceptual examination provides the foundation for my argument in the thesis that the aesthetic effects on an audience of the performance and rehearsal practices and techniques of theatre may be adapted to interrupt absorption effects in films.

The thesis' contribution to existing knowledge

Existing literature explores the Hollywood mode from multiple perspectives. Bordwell, for example, provides the first comprehensive study that characterises Hollywood films and the apparatus that create them as a 'mode' of film practice incorporating a complex set of rules and conventions relating to narrative structure, shots and setups, editing, and viewer consumption. Further, as the previous section

[77] Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds, *Theatricality*, Theatre and Performance Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[78] Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, 13–20.

indicates, the Hollywood mode has been problematised both directly in the literature and indirectly through films and film movements that propose alternative aesthetics. As explained above, there is some discussion in the literature of the relationship between film, theatricality, and antitheatricality. Intertextual analysis of the Hollywood mode by reference to both film theories and theatre practices (such as Elin Diamond's discussion of the relationship between Brechtian theory and feminist theory[79]) also brings us closer to an approach to film based on aesthetic opportunities provided by theatricality. And Bay-Cheng's examination of how theatre techniques and practices avoid many of the problems of the Hollywood mode's ideologies suggests the value of further research into the possibilities of using theatre techniques to interrupt absorption.

But what is absent from the literature is a theoretical and practical approach that both directly confronts and challenges the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode and proposes a theoretical and practical modality that is unconditionally anchored in theatrical techniques and practices. The contribution of the thesis to the literature is, first, to propose, analyse, and illustrate a new modality (or a 'counter-mode') that is based on a 'pro-theatrical' approach to film aesthetics and their effects and that challenges the accepted discourse about the Hollywood mode, and, second, by reference to the examples in the case studies in chapters 3 to 5, to explore a practical methodology that uses theatricality to examine how the dialectical effects of theatre techniques and practices can be reimagined and applied to film.

[79] Elin Diamond, 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism', *TDR (1988)* 32, no. 1 (1988): 82–94, https://doi.org/10.2307/1145871.

The thesis' methodology

The purpose of the thesis' methodology is to explore the concept of film-theatre as an alternative modality that will defeat or at least interrupt the absorption effects of Hollywood mode film. For this purpose, the methodology includes three primary steps. The first examines and problematises the Hollywood mode with reference to both its technical and aesthetic innovations and the major stages of its evolution during the period from 1907 to 1917. This is necessary to support the hypothesis that the Hollywood mode creates absorption effects.

The second step uses a predominantly inductive approach to develop the concept of film-theatre. The methodology for this step is developed in three principal stages. In the first I examine a selection of theatre techniques and rehearsal and performance practices that are capable of creating a dialectical effect on an audience and that can be transposed or 'adapted' for use in films. For this stage of the methodology, I have divided selected theatre techniques and practices into two categories. The first group comprises techniques that are *inherently* theatrical, meaning that their use in films is naturally calculated to induce in the viewer a heightened sense of self-reflexion and attentiveness. These include improvisation and long scenes without interruption or set change (referred to in its filmic equivalent as 'duration images within an open frame'). The second category comprises theatre techniques that interrupt absorption 'by design,' in the sense that they are dramatic devices specifically created for that purpose. The various forms of Brechtian alienation techniques are the principal focus of this part of the methodology.

The second stage of the film-theatre methodology involves 'pairing' and contrasting the selected theatre techniques with corresponding characteristics of the Hollywood

mode that lead to absorption. So, for example, in Hollywood mode films, the narrative is produced largely through the linking of frames in a seamless and continuous progression of action from one shot to another, allowing the viewer only enough time and space to comprehend what the director and editor have allowed them to see. By contrast, duration images within an open frame provide time and space that privilege the viewer's ability to reflect on *everything* in a scene, not simply what the closed frame includes. This pairing is analysed for all three selected theatre techniques in chapter 2. The purpose of the pairing is to provide a structure for examining how the theatre techniques can be adapted for film in a manner consistent with the objectives of film-theatre and for selecting representative case studies for each pair.

The final step of the methodology of chapter 2 sets out the delimitations for film-theatre. The thesis emphasises that the purpose of film-theatre is not simply to create a taxonomy of certain theatre techniques that can be used in film; it is to examine how the *dialectical effect* produced by these techniques can be reimagined and adapted for film. The last section of chapter 2 proposes and examines several criteria and delimitations that are intended to serve this purpose.

The third principal step in the methodology is the application of film-theatre to specific examples of films that are representative of each of the three selected theatre techniques. The case studies in chapters 3 to 5 are intended to demonstrate not only how these films have adapted theatre techniques and practices but to what extent they succeed in defeating or interrupting the Hollywood mode's absorption effect.

The thesis questions and exposition of the argument

The thesis is framed by two questions that represent polar positions – 'antitheatrical' and 'pro-theatrical' – in the relationship between film and theatre. This introduction and chapter 1 provide the analytical framework both for understanding these questions and for developing the argument in the following chapters that proposes film-theatre as an alternative modality to the Hollywood mode.

The absorption effect in Hollywood mode films

The first question asks to what extent the antitheatrical prejudice has contributed to a film aesthetic that has resulted in the logic of absorption and how this logic of absorption affects audiences' ability to have a meaningful dialectical response to a film's subject matter, including the socio-political conditions that provide the background to the film.[80]

The thesis explores this question in three stages. The first examines *how* the absorption effect arose as a defining characteristic of the Hollywood mode. While several factors contributed to the evolution and success of the Hollywood mode, a logical starting point in the thesis for the discussion of the absorption effect is the antitheatrical prejudice. It is relevant to the development of the Hollywood mode between 1907 and 1917 for various reasons. First, prior to the Hollywood mode, the 'mode' of filmmaking (referred to subsequently as the 'primitive mode' was predominantly 'theatrical' in the sense that early short films were shown in theatres and the aesthetic framing of them consisted primarily of single shots filmed from a

[80] This question and the following exposition of the argument are the principal subject of chapter 1.

camera in a position equivalent to the one occupied by a theatre audience.[81] In other words, these films looked like short vaudeville or music hall skits. The analysis of the antitheatrical prejudice therefore is an important step to understanding what led the film industry to discard the 'primitive mode' in favour of the Hollywood mode. Second, it represents an overt rejection of the aesthetic effect of theatre performances that produced self-reflexive, dialectical responses from the viewer in favour of a state of absorption. Prior to the dominance of the Hollywood mode, therefore, the concept of an alternative modality in the form of film-theatre would have been irrelevant and unnecessary.

The second stage of the analysis is concerned with the *nature* of absorption. There are two elements to this question; first, what technical and aesthetic elements of the Hollywood mode film apparatus give rise to absorption? Second, how do these elements create the absorption effect and in what manner is the absorption effect experienced by the viewer? At the centre of these questions is what is referred to as the 'continuity system.' Chapter 1 examines how the various conventions, aesthetics, and technical innovations of the continuity system were largely responsible for creating the logic of absorption. The continuity system is not simply a method of editing (although that is a critical part of the production process); it is rather a collective process underpinned by the logic of absorption.[82] The second element relates to the psychological response that the absorption effect produces, how, in

[81] The reference here to 'single shots' warrants some explanation. As the next chapter will explain in more detail, the term has two meanings. First, each 'shot' was the length of a continuous roll of film in the camera (in 1907, a few minutes in length). The shot was filmed by placing the camera in front of the subject and rolling the camera until the reel was finished. Second, there was little or no editing in the sense of continuity editing (also discussed in chapter 1). Therefore, if a scene extended over more than one reel, the reels were simply spliced together to provide some level of continuity. This would result in 'jump cuts' since inevitably the second and subsequent reels could not pick up the scene at the same point as in the earlier reels.

[82] This also includes the interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic music and sound.

other words, in addition to 'transporting' the viewer seamlessly through a spatio-temporal continuum, the continuity system leads the viewer to identify psychologically with the protagonist, to become focused almost exclusively on their ultimate objective to the exclusion of any 'extraneous' matter in the film (referred to by Kristin Thompson as 'cinematic excess'[83]).

The third stage of the analysis problematises the absorption effect. Since the Hollywood mode has become an almost global standard for film practice, problematisation is a useful research method for questioning its acceptability. Two strategies are used for this purpose. First, the thesis compares the Hollywood mode with other aesthetic approaches to film that do not rely on the various rules and aesthetics of the continuity system. Chapter 1 examines, for example, Bazin's and Kracauer's approach to the representation of 'physical reality,' which privileges the long shot in depth over continuity editing.[84] At the other end of the spectrum, the so-called 'montage of attractions' – developed by a number of Soviet filmmakers, including Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin – emphasises an even *more* radical version of editing than the continuity editing system of the Hollywood mode, in which the shot is *not* the basic unit of the narrative but merely a piece of raw footage that is intended to be cut and then reassembled and juxtaposed to other 'fragments' of film into a collage to create a dialectical image.[85] The second strategy

[83] Kristin Thompson, 'The Concept of Cinematic Excess,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 130–42.

[84] The 'long shot in depth' is described in more detail in chapters 1 and 3. In general terms, it refers to shots that are held for longer than the normal Hollywood mode shot and in which deep focus is used to create different fields of dramatic action. A good example is the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane.*

[85] Eisenstein described this dialectical image as a 'third something' in his book *The Film Sense*. Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. and ed. Jay Leyda, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1942), 9–10. See also Daniel Fairfax, 'Montage as Resonance: Chris Marker and the Dialectical Image,' *Senses of Cinema* 64 (2022). This approach is discussed in more detail in chapter 4, in the context of the use of Brechtian alienation techniques as a film-theatre technique.

argues that absorption is an illusion that presents to the viewer a false sense of 'realism' created by a façade of naturalism that obscures from the viewer the truth of the film's subject. The work merely gives a spontaneous appearance of reality because it uses forms, images, and text that appear normal or 'real' to the viewer.[86] Chapter 1 examines various theories that have problematised the absorption effect on this ground, including the use of absorption as a psychological device to orient the viewer towards the male gaze[87] and as a means for 'interpellating' or 'hailing' the viewer as a willing participant or 'subject' in a film's ideological socio-political conditions.[88] Another critical approach, discussed in more detail in chapter 6, is concerned with the role played by absorption and the antitheatrical prejudice in various theories relating to the 'reification of culture' or cultural relations.

Use of theatre techniques to interrupt absorption effects

The problematisation of the absorption effect leads to the second research question, which explores possible alternative aesthetic approaches that interrupt the absorption effect. The question here is to what extent may theatre techniques and practices be adapted for use in films in such a manner that they interrupt the absorption effect? And what other potential aesthetic possibilities do theatre techniques and practices offer to filmmakers?

These questions are explored in detail in chapter 2, which discusses the rationale and the methodology for using theatre techniques to interrupt absorption effects. The

[86] Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre", in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), paragraph 24. See also Adorno, Theodor, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht, and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and politics* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 79–85.

[87] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure.'

[88] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),' 86–98.

central hypothesis for this approach is that the antitheatrical prejudice that is used to justify the absorption effect is based on two flawed premises: first, that theatre is not 'realistic' because, unlike film, it lacks the capacity to portray physical reality (in terms of its indexicality); and second, that the capacity of theatre to elicit dialectical responses to a work's subject matter is somehow inappropriate for films or, worse, that a film viewer doesn't need this degree of self-reflexivity because the film provides, through the continuity system, an unambiguous roadmap to the film's purpose and meaning. The purpose of chapter 2 and the following chapters is to problematise both premises, while examining *how* theatre techniques and practices can be used to create an alternative aesthetic.

Film-theatre approaches this objective in various stages: first, it identifies any theatre techniques and practices (including rehearsal and performance practices, staging and blocking, reception conditions, and other resources) that might be adaptable for use in films. Second, it seeks to 'pair' those techniques with corresponding characteristics of the Hollywood mode that have been problematised in the earlier chapters of this thesis. This results in an understanding of the common ground ostensibly shared by film and theatre. And third, it provides an analytical structure for examining selected films that rely on one or more of the techniques included in this common ground. The film-theatre analytical process that follows seeks to answer various questions: how is the selected theatre technique distinguishable from corresponding aesthetics in Hollywood mode films? To what extent do the use of these techniques mandate a different approach to various stages of film production (for example, script writing, rehearsals, cinematography, editing)? What additional technical and aesthetic resources of film are needed to render a meaningful adaptation of theatre technique to film, and to what extent does the synthesis of both

the theatre and film techniques and aesthetics result in new aesthetic opportunities? And what is the aesthetic effect of this film-theatre process of adaptation?

There is no simple answer to these questions, but the thesis' position is that this is an area in which there is a gap in the literature. The original contribution of the thesis is to propose the modality of film-theatre as a conceptual and practical approach to understanding how theatre techniques interrupt the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode and how these techniques can be adapted for use in films. The methodology for this research involves the use of three illustrative case studies (the subjects of chapters 3 to 5) that explore three characteristics of the absorption effect in the Hollywood mode and that contrast them with three corresponding approaches in theatre that may be used to interrupt them.[89] While this list is not intended to be exhaustive, it provides a convenient framework within which film-theatre can be used to analyse the films selected for each case study. The three Hollywood mode characteristics analysed in the case studies are narrative continuity (or as Karen Thompson writes, the 'unity' of narration), character and psychological motivation (with which the audience is directed to identify), and continuity of time and space (that directs the viewer through the film). The corresponding theatre techniques that disrupt the effects produced by these characteristics of the Hollywood mode are, in the same order, Brechtian alienation, improvisation, and the use of duration within an open frame. The case studies use the film-theatre methodology to explore how each of these three forms of Hollywood mode absorption may be interrupted by adapting the corresponding theatre techniques to film form.

[89] The methodology of film-theatre that provides the basis for the case studies is analysed in chapter 2.

In chapter 3, film-theatre is used to examine how the notion of duration in theatre can be adapted for use in films and what aesthetic effects this produces. Theatre performances privilege an 'open frame' in the sense that most scenes continue for extended periods of time during which the audience is relatively free to choose where to cast its attention. By contrast, the continuity system results in films that are 'narratologically closed' in the sense that every object, character, gesture, and action seen within the limits of the frame must have a place in the film's plot.[90] While film cannot morphologically recreate the stage, film-theatre analysis shows how three films have used different film techniques and aesthetics to create the *effects* of an open frame, resulting in a dialectical relationship between viewer and subject. The films also demonstrate how the open frame – again, by contrast with the closed frame of Hollywood mode films – allows the audience to experience different kinds of temporality other than narratological time. Specifically, I here draw on Heidegger's concepts of 'world time' and 'originary time.'

Chapter 4 is concerned with characterisation in films. As this introduction has argued, one of the fundamental aesthetics of the Hollywood mode is the notion that the viewer should 'identify' with the protagonist's motivation to a particular goal. The protagonist's 'character' is therefore a function of this motivation. Hollywood mode films are devoted to achievement. As Raymond Carney argues, 'characters are defined in terms of their ability to do things (anything from freeing the hostage to getting the girl) – frequently by being pitted against each other in tests of wit or prowess. Hollywood understands life as essentially a matter of competition,

[90] Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 44–51. Braudy actually uses the terms 'closed film' and 'open film' rather than open and closed frames. However, his discussion of these terms makes it clear that he is analysing how images in the two respective types of film are presented in each scene or shot.

achievement, and reward.'[91] In chapter 4, film-theatre is used to examine ways in which theatre has used improvisation to provide an alternative narrative in which characters' motivations are secondary to how they interact with one another. At the heart of this work is the rehearsal work between actor and director in which either the narrative or the characters' relationships with each other or both are explored. And this work often results in a narrative that is antithetical to the Hollywood mode's approach. The concept of film-theatre is used to examine how these forms of theatre improvisation have been adapted for work in films, with case studies of films by John Cassavetes and Mike Leigh to demonstrate effective but diverse approaches.

The film-theatre case studies in chapter 5 demonstrate how Brechtian alienation techniques can be used in film to provide aesthetic alternatives to the narrative 'unity' of Hollywood mode films. Narrative unity is another aspect of the continuity system that is used to create the illusion of realism. The chapter explores the underlying rationale for Brecht's approach as well as the specific techniques he used and, through the case studies, provides various examples over the last century of films that have adapted Brechtian techniques to reveal the truth behind this illusion. The case studies display a variety of approaches, including the so-called Soviet montage aesthetic used by Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard's subversive approach to cinema during the French New Wave period and beyond, and the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Michael Haneke.

The final chapter turns its attention to an examination of the status of the absorption effect in the context of the global developments of the Hollywood film industry in

[91] Carney, Raymond, and Leonard Quart. *The Films of Mike Leigh: Embracing the World*. Cambridge Film Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 14-15.

the twenty-first century. The analysis here shifts from a detailed examination of specific films towards an assessment of the impact on the Hollywood mode of the industry's expansion into global markets, alternative forms of distribution, monopolisation, and the ascendancy of the franchise film. The chapter analyses these changes in the context of theories of reification, monopolistic practices, and instrumental reason. These changes provide both challenges and opportunities for filmmakers operating outside the sphere of the Hollywood mode and the Hollywood film industry. While these changes are indicative of a possible 'crisis' in the global film market, they may also open a path for the evolution of film outside the Hollywood mode; in such an environment, there will be a role for film-theatre to play.

Chapter 1: The Logic of Absorption in Hollywood Mode Films

1.1 The scope of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the first research question, which asks to what extent the antitheatrical prejudice has contributed to a film aesthetic that has resulted in the logic of absorption and how this logic of absorption affects audiences' ability to have a meaningful dialectical response to a film's subject matter. The question involves a discussion of three interrelated concepts: the antitheatrical prejudice, the Hollywood mode, and the logic of absorption. The antitheatrical prejudice provided the underlying rationale for the development of technical innovations and aesthetic norms and conventions that materialised in the Hollywood mode. And the logic of absorption is the defining aesthetic characteristic of the Hollywood mode, a reflection of the assumptions and premises of the antitheatrical prejudice.

The chapter examines the historical and aesthetic conditions that linked these three concepts in the formative period of the Hollywood mode between 1907 and 1917. Prior to 1907, the antitheatrical prejudice played little or no part in film aesthetics because films *were* 'theatrical' both in terms of content and form and the viewing conditions for the audience. But changes in market conditions and the increased demand for more narrative content and longer films led to the rise of the Hollywood mode and, along with it, the antitheatrical prejudice as cinema's underlying logic. Several explanations can be offered for the prevalence of antitheatricality at the time, including the need for the new art form to differentiate itself from theatre for marketing purposes. However, these reasons do not occupy significant attention in

the chapter, since the objective here is to understand *how* this prejudice influenced the aesthetics of the Hollywood mode and how those aesthetics in turn resulted in absorption effects.

The chapter therefore focuses on the principal technical and aesthetic innovation of the Hollywood mode that was responsible for absorption, namely the 'continuity system.' As the name implies, this included not just the method of editing known generally as 'continuity editing' but a whole system or regime of rules and conventions for cinematography as well as editing conventions. The chapter is broadly divided into three principal parts. The first part (sections 1.2 and 1.3) explores the development of the Hollywood mode during the formative period. Section 1.2 examines the theatrical antecedents and underpinnings of theatre prior to the formative period, specifically with reference to the so-called 'cinema of attractions,' a concept that takes on particular significance in the film-theatre case studies relating to Brechtian alienation techniques. Section 1.3 explores the evolution of the Hollywood mode, including the demand for narrative content that fuelled the growth of the Hollywood film industry, the technical and aesthetic challenges created by an increasing demand for longer narrative films, and the development of the continuity system in response to those challenges. The second part (section 1.4) focuses on the interconnection between the continuity system, the logic of absorption that it inevitably produced, and the antitheatrical prejudice that provided the theoretical justification for absorption. The final sections of the chapter (sections 1.5 and 1.6) problematise the Hollywood mode, first by comparing it to two other alternative aesthetic approaches to film narrative that evolved during the formative period and second by reference to critical theories concerning the absorption effect, particularly as they relate to the creation of ideological conditions of reception.

1.2 Theatricality in pre-1906 cinema

In her article 'Film and Theatre,' Susan Sontag observes that 'a commonplace of discussion has it that film and theatre are distinct and even antithetical arts, each giving rise to its own standards of judgment and canons of form.'[92] However, before 1907 there was no 'commonplace' position that the two arts were antithetical, and although there were obvious technical differences between them, there was less difference between their respective 'standards of judgment and canons of form' than may be supposed. Indeed, the concept of film-theatre at that time would have been relatively meaningless because film was already 'theatrical' in several ways. This section explores how, during a relatively short period starting in 1907, a largely synergistic relationship between film and theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century changed into an opposition between the two forms, leading to the claim by adherents of early cinema that film was a new art form separate and distinct from the theatre.

Prior to 1907, while there were different aesthetic approaches to subject matter and style, there was no specific notion of a 'mode' of filmmaking. The approach to film production before 1907 was subsequently termed the 'primitive mode,'[93] but this was an *ex post facto* characterisation (by Noël Burch) used to distinguish the aesthetic of early film from the Hollywood mode. The so-called primitive mode was theatrical in several ways: the venues in which early films were screened and the programming of the films at these venues, the viewing position of the audience, the framing and editing of the films, and their content and form. Early film history began, in a sense, *in* the theatre, both in the sense of the performance space and the

[92] Sontag, 'Film and Theatre,' 24.

[93] Burch, 'Theory of Film Practice,' 55.

role of the films in the overall programming of the performance. Films often appeared in theatres on music hall and vaudeville bills as 'dumb' acts, occupying a slot also held by animal acts and acrobats during the opening and closing of an evening's slate.[94] The performance spaces, length of the films, and small-scale production facilities 'dictated the creation of films which modeled themselves largely on types of stage acts: the variety act, the fictional narrative, the scenic (views of interesting locales), the topical (presentations of current events), and the trick film.'[95] Initially, eight or so short films might fill a twenty-minute slot in a vaudeville programme of several hours. As Bordwell notes, 'the overall emphasis was on variety, and the disparate films formed an act. As a consequence, no individual film was expected to stand by itself.'[96]

Second, the audience's *reception* of early silent films closely resembled the experience of a theatre audience. At a superficial level, this was an inevitable consequence of the inclusion of films in music halls and vaudeville theatres. But audience reception was also theatrical by virtue of the physical position of an audience in relation to the events on screen and of the framing or 'staging' of those events in the film itself. The form and presentation of early films were largely dictated by the technical limitations of cinematography and editing. Prior to 1907, film reels were relatively short (a few minutes) and cameras were generally fixed, with no ability to move by panning (following the action laterally) or tilting (moving

[94] 'The films themselves were rarely the attraction. Instead, audiences came for the novelty of witnessing a new technology and the thrill of seeing pictures move.' Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

[95] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 163–65.

[96] Ibid., 113–15.

up and down).[97] Further, editing at this stage was very basic. It usually consisted in simply joining one reel, which included one scene, with the next reel to create the content of the film.[98] The notion of continuity editing, according to which a single narrative can be continued seamlessly in time and space despite changes of location and variations in camera perspectives, was not known at this time. Therefore, early 'primitive' films closely resembled stage performances, which were presented as a series of separate scenes. In the primitive mode, the film places the audience in the same vantage point as a theatre audience. The action happens in front of the spectator and the film provides no guidance on what part of the frame, which character, or what action within the frame the spectator should pay attention to.[99] Like the staging of a play, each scene in the film is created by a single shot. The design and configuration of the set often resembled a stage design, and the actors addressed the audience in much the same way as they would have done in a theatre. Furthermore, mise-en-scène often imitated theatrical settings, and actors performed for the camera in much the same way that they would have performed on an actual stage.

> The spectator witnessed either a continuous stretch of time over a whole film or discrete blocks of time in one-shot scenes with ellipses or overlaps between. Filmmakers provided few cues to guide the spectator through the action; there was little of the redundancy of narrative information which the classical cinema would habitually provide.[100]

[97] Ibid., 163.

[98] Ibid., 160–62.

[99] 'The narrator was not *conscious* of being a narrator … the narration seldom attempted to guide the spectator actively.' Ibid.

[100] Ibid., 247.

In *Life of an American Fireman* (1903), for example, the main action consists of the rescue of a mother and child inside a burning apartment bedroom.[101] The whole scene, including the rescue of both by the fireman who enters and leaves the room through a window, is shown from beginning to end; then it is repeated in a separate shot taken from outside the building. There is obviously no synchronised action in these scenes. The only way to 'edit' them together known at that time was to run each scene after the other. Similar approaches were taken in *A Policeman's Love Affair* (1904) and *The Tunnel Workers* (1906).[102] The perspective and experience of the audience in each of these films therefore more closely resembled those of a theatre audience.

Another aesthetic characteristic that these early films shared with music hall and vaudeville performances was the notion of 'attraction.' As a result of the continuity system (examined in more detail below), a prerequisite of absorption is the 'invisibility' of the apparatus of film, meaning that the viewer becomes so absorbed or lost in the film's narrative that they are not conscious of watching a film (and, in a sense, the film is not 'watching' them). The Hollywood mode is so prevalent in films today (including several independent and foreign films) that it may be difficult to imagine that in the early days of film the opposite applied. Early filmmakers created films that were intended to draw the attention of audiences to the fact that they were watching a film. This was in fact part of the attraction. Tom Gunning, in 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,' notes that, flushed with the excitement of seeing Abel Gance's *La Roue*, the painter Fernand

[101] *Life of an American Fireman* (George Fleming, dir., Edison Manufacturing Company, 1903).

[102] *The Policeman's Love Affair* (Arthur Cooper, dir., Alpha Trading Company, 1906); *The Tunnel Workers* (Guy Hedlund, dir., American Mutoscope & Biograph, 1906).

Léger 'tried to define something of the radical possibilities of the cinema. The potential of the new art did not lie in "imitating the movements of nature" or in "the mistaken path" of its resemblance to theater. Its unique power was a "matter of making images seen."'[103] At the same time, various other writers of the avant-garde had envisioned the same kind of potential for film beyond its present constrained narrative form.

> Writings by the early modernists (Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists) on the cinema follow a pattern similar to Léger: enthusiasm for this new medium and its possibilities; and disappointment at the way it has already developed, its enslavement to traditional art forms, particularly theater and literature.[104]

Gunning develops an argument concerning the nature and purpose of pre-1907 films by reference to the traditional theorisation of the history of early cinema under the 'hegemony of narrative films.'[105] In Gunning's view the comments by Léger and other avant-garde writers (Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, for example) regarding early films demonstrate 'the strangely heterogeneous relation that film before 1906 (or so) bears to the films that follow,' signalling 'a new conception of film history and film form.'[106] This heterogeneity raises doubts for Gunning about the theorisation of early filmmakers such as George Smith, Georges Méliès, and Edwin Porter from the viewpoint of their contribution to film as a *storytelling* medium, particularly with respect to the evolution of narrative editing. Gunning's research into early film suggests that this narrative approach potentially distorts the

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[103] Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde,' in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 381–88, quoting Fernand Léger, 'A Critical Essay on the Plastic Qualities of Abel Gance's Film *The Wheel*,' in *Functions of Painting*, ed. and intro. Edward Fry, trans. Alexandra Anderson (New York: Viking, 1973), 21.

[104] Gunning, 'Cinema of Attraction[s],' 381.

[105] Ibid., 381.

[106] Ibid.

work of these filmmakers and others from the same period. He argues that early cinema was not dominated by the narrative impulse that later asserted its sway over the medium. Prior to 1906, actuality films (such as the travel films and topicals by Auguste and Louis Lumière) outnumbered fictional films. But, even within the field of 'non-actuality filming' (sometimes referred to as the 'Méliès tradition') the role of narrative is very different from conventional Hollywood mode narrative films. As Méliès explained discussing his own work:

> As for the scenario, the 'fable,' or 'tale,' I only consider it at the end. I can state that the scenario constructed in this manner has no importance, since I use it merely as a pretext for the 'stage effects,' the 'tricks,' or for a nicely arranged tableau.[107]

In Gunning's view, the differences between Méliès's and Lumière's respective approaches to filmmaking cannot be reduced to a simple distinction between narrative and non-narrative forms. What unites them is 'the relation to the spectator set up by their films, which sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting *a series of views* to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power (whether the realistic illusion of motion offered to the first audiences by Lumière, or the magical illusion concocted by Méliès), and exoticism.'[108] Compared to the later Hollywood mode films that came to be dictated by the narrative imperative and the resulting absorption that it created with the viewer, these early films repeatedly broke the illusion of 'reality' by directly making contact with the audience:

> This action, which is later perceived as spoiling the realistic illusion of the cinema, is here undertaken with brio, establishing contact with the audience. From comedians smirking at the camera, to the constant bowing and

[107] Georges Méliès, 'Importance du scénario,' quoted in Georges Sadoul, *Georges Méliès* (Paris: Seghers, 1961), 116 (translation by Gunning).

[108] Ibid.

> gesturing of the conjurors in magic films, this is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.[109]

As this quotation demonstrates, the 'trick' film is itself 'a series of displays, of magical attractions, rather than a primitive sketch of narrative continuity' and 'to approach even the plotted trick films, such as *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902),[110] simply as precursors of later narrative structures is to miss the point. The story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.'[111]

This form of 'theatricality' in pre-1906 films is important to the overall direction and position of the thesis not simply as a footnote to the discussion of the development of film and its evolution into the Hollywood mode. The overtly theatrical approach of these films continued to play a role in film aesthetics after the maturing of the Hollywood mode by 1917 and in fact provided a structure for some of the forms of film-theatre discussed in chapters 3 through 5 that interrupt the Hollywood mode. We shall return to the cinema of attractions in the last two sections of this chapter to examine its relationship to alternative modes of filmmaking that developed outside of the Hollywood mode. Nevertheless, as the next sections of this chapter argue, it was precisely the cinema of attractions – or at least its privileging of the direct

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[109] Ibid., 382. Of course, Gunning is referring here to a form of performance derived from vaudeville that uses a set of conventions directly opposed to the trends of the legitimate stage. 'The vaudeville aesthetic was based on "affective immediacy"—performers looked for immediate response from the audience and altered their act from night to night, theater to theater, and town to town depending upon the audience's reactions.' Robert Knopf, 'Buster Keaton in the Context of Stage Vaudeville and Silent Film Comedy,' in Knopf, *Theater and Film*, 61–67. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the important distinction is between the express use of theatricality in the form of direct contact with audiences in early silent films and the antitheatrical prejudice of narrative films in the Hollywood mode.

[110] *Le Voyage Dans La Lune* (Georges Méliès, dir., Star-Film, 1902).

[111] Gunning, 'Cinema of Attraction[s],' 383. Robert Knopf also provides an interesting insight into the work of Buster Keaton, who adapted his skills as a vaudeville artist into feature films. Robert Knopf, *The Theater and Cinema of Buster Keaton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

address to the audience over narrative absorption – that became the central concern of the Hollywood mode after 1906.

1.3 The evolution of the Hollywood mode

During the formative decade from 1907 to 1917, several influences – financial, technological, and aesthetic, in particular – led to the evolution of the Hollywood mode. One of the principal motivations for the changes in this period was an increasing demand for narrative content in films. At first, the size of film reels restricted the length of films to no more than a few minutes each.[112] But with the advent of the nickelodeon and the standardised 1,000-foot reel lasting for over 10 minutes, it became possible to create programmes of only three or four films.[113] As Kristin Thompson explains, with the longer film length came a change in audience expectations. The earlier vaudeville films were merely part of a programme that included several other live acts. Longer films needed to sustain audience interest, particularly when reels were spliced together to create feature length films.[114] 'Expanded length and the change in viewing circumstances undoubtedly played a large part in turning filmmakers away from a vaudeville model of presentation toward fiction and narrative.'[115] Economic factors also played a significant role in the turn in 1906 to 1908 to the narrative form. This was a function of the

[112] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 160–62.

[113] Ibid.

[114] The term 'feature film' was not originally a reference to a film's length. In the formative period it implied a film that could merit special advertising and billing because it was different from the other films on a programme (in much the same way that certain vaudeville acts would be sold as 'features' in advertising). However, one way of promoting films as 'features' was length, and from about 1906–1907, feature films started being produced in more than one-reel lengths, culminating in the present length which is typically about 90 minutes but often significantly longer. Ibid., 130.

[115] Ibid., 163.

nickelodeon boom at that time, public demand for more narrative content, and the predictability and economy of production costs for narrative films compared to topical or travel films.[116] Fictional films could be 'made at a low, predictable cost per foot, produced in or near a centralized studio, and released on a regular schedule.'[117]

As the demand for feature length narrative films increased, various technical and aesthetic solutions were found for providing audiences with content. One approach was the filmed play. Established plays would be filmed in the 'primitive' mode by simply placing a fixed camera in front of the actors as they performed. Apart from the occasional intercutting of objects and of course the use of titles, the only editing in these films was the cut from one scene to the next (like the change of scenes in the original stage play). Various theatre impresarios, such as Adolph Zukor and his Famous Players Film Company, produced films in this format, including *Les Amours de la Reine Élisabeth* (1912), starring Sarah Bernhardt.[118]

While Zukor and the Famous Players Film Company enjoyed some success with a run of filmed plays, their popularity was short-lived. One reason, of course, was that they were silent film adaptations of stage works which relied on dialogue. The transposition of stage plays to silent movies therefore depended on the use of intertitles since there were no other continuity, editing, or cinematography techniques to convey the narrative at that time. More importantly, for purposes of the subject of this chapter and the overall position of the thesis, the use of the new art form to simply re-play stage plays (but silently) appeared to defeat the purpose and

[116] Ibid., 115-116.

[117] Ibid.

[118] *Les Amours de la Reine Élisabeth* (Henri Desfontaines, dir., Pathé Frères, 1912).

potentialities of film (and, for that matter, of theatre). As Charlie Keil explains, emulation of the theatre came at a price. By comparing itself to the stage, 'cinema risked seeming like nothing more than a diminished imitator … slavish copying of theatre's methods would do little to establish cinema's unique formal capacities and thus proved ineffective in making a case for film as art.'[119]

The problems with this approach contributed to an antitheatrical sentiment that began to be manifested through various attempts to identify the unique qualities of cinema and its differences from theatre.[120] These distinguishing 'markers' took various forms. For example, one approach was to focus on film's qualities as a 'medium capable of harnessing the activities and settings of everyday life, as evidenced by the popularity of the *actualité*.'[121] The perception that one of film's unique properties was its ability to portray 'realism' became not only an aesthetic distinction from theatre but a major source of advertising. And, depending on the context, the nature and purpose of this realism varied. In one context, advertisers touted the photographic representation of physical reality, while in others, such as in the publicity for *Life of an American Fireman*, the realism was re-enacted events; a third approach focused on the element of authenticity.[122]

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[119] Keil, 'All the Frame's a Stage,' in Ackerman and Puchner, *Against Theatre*, 77.

[120] It was precisely this attempt to transpose stage works onto the screen that led Erwin Panofsky to make his now celebrated criticism of filmed plays, writing that 'these films represent the first conscious attempt at transplanting the movies from the folk art level to that of "real art"; but they also bear witness to the fact that this commendable goal could not be reached in so simple a manner. It was soon realized that the imitation of a theater performance with a set stage, fixed entries and exits, and distinctly literary ambitions is the one thing the film must avoid.' Panofsky, 'Style and Medium,' 18.

[121] Keil, 'All the Frame's a Stage,' in Ackerman and Puchner, *Against Theatre*, 77. As Keil noted, as filmmakers 'gravitated toward story-telling, they could continue to find ways to incorporate cinema's penchant for capturing the outside world, a world largely unavailable to theatrical modes of presentation.' See also Keil's discussion of the attitude of the trade press towards theatre (represented by the comments of Judson and others) at greater length in *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 39–44.

[122] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 98–100.

The principal area, however, in which cinema sought to distinguish itself from theatre was its formal technical and aesthetic qualities. It was through these qualities, unique to film, that cinema during this formative period developed the continuity system.[123] To evolve from a perceived 'slavish copying' of theatre's methods, filmmakers needed to find solutions to the problems of continuity posed by connecting several shots in a narrative structure.[124] As noted in the last section, cuts between shots in short films such as *Life of an American Fireman* were often disruptive because the techniques of continuity editing had not yet been developed. The continuity challenges presented by feature length films were therefore exponentially greater, and it became necessary to find methods to control the disruptive spatio-temporal effects of multiple shots and locales. This need became even more critical as early cinema's approach to the role and nature of narrative became entrenched in the concept of 'unity of action' according to which every strand of the story, every sub-plot, and the development of character trajectories were dictated by a 'single central animating idea' or theme.[125] Another way of describing this aesthetic objective is in terms of 'psychological causality,' according to which 'defined characters acted to achieve announced goals.'[126]

The concepts of unity of action and psychological causality, however, created their own technical and aesthetic challenges. In complete contrast to the filmed play

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[123] Panofsky, 'Style and Medium,' 15–32.

[124] The 'shot' was the basic building block of the continuity system. Its nature and purpose are explained in more detail below.

[125] 'One purpose must be seen to run throughout the whole series of incidents. If there are two series of incidents, they must be so woven together that, at the end of the story, it will be evident that one could not have taken place without the other. This constitutes the unity of action.' Alfred Hennequin, *The Art of Playwriting: Being a Practical Treatise on the Elements of Dramatic Construction; Intended for the Playwright, the Student, and the Dramatic Critic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1890), 91–92.

[126] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 17.

described above, where the spectator occupied a position like a theatre audience, this kind of narration involves placing the spectator at the optimum viewpoint for each shot and 'moving' the spectator's viewpoint from shot to shot. In order to accomplish this a new technical and aesthetic system was necessary to ensure that there was a minimum of disruption in the transitions from shot to shot.[127] While the disruption created in a short film like *Life of an American Fireman* by showing the same scene replayed from different perspectives may have been accepted by audiences at the time, it would have been unthinkable and extremely confusing to create a feature length film made up of multiple sequences that were 'discontinuous.' As Thompson explains:

> The filmic medium imposed its own unique demands. The filmmaker juxtaposes a series of disparate spaces, building from them an overall narrative space. That space is concrete, not the verbal construction of the novelist. Hence the filmmaker must be able to guide the spectator's understanding of spatial relations if the film's causal actions are to be clear. Editing, with its instantaneous changes of vantage point, presented a new aesthetic challenge, and filmmakers had to a considerable degree to thrash out their problems on their own. The resulting guidelines became the continuity system.[128]

Several technical and aesthetic solutions were developed during the formative period of the Hollywood mode to ensure the fluidity of movement in time and space while capturing and directing the viewer's attention. The fundamental concept that unified them was the continuity system. At the outset, it is important to understand that the term 'continuity system' is used here in a relatively broad sense. 'Continuity' is sometimes used in a narrower sense to describe the specific logic of editing used in

[127] 'There arose the enduring . . . image of the spectator as invisible onlooker present on the scene.' Ibid., 214.

[128] Ibid., 194–95.

Hollywood mode films,[129] but editing is simply the final, though critical, stage in the whole continuity system. The significance of the continuity system to the position of the thesis is that it is the technical and aesthetic system that results in absorption effects. As Thompson notes, 'with the growing emphasis on calculating how a film could be understood came new normative systems within the production sector.'[130] The growth of a trade press after 1907 (brought about by the nickelodeon boom and regularisation of production) contributed to making these norms uniform across the industry.[131]

In general terms, the cornerstone of the continuity system (and, for that matter, any mode or aesthetic of cinema) is the 'shot,' which is the basic unit of film material.[132] There are two aspects to the significance of the shot within the continuity system. The first relates to the hierarchy of the narrative structure – from shot to scene to sequence to completed film. The shot is a series of film frames (on a reel) that run for one uninterrupted period. For technical and historical reasons, early film shots were relatively short because the maximum reel length was limited to a few minutes. Perhaps in consequence of this antecedent, shots even in contemporary films made in the Hollywood mode tend to be short. 'Primitive' mode films consisted largely of a

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[129] The last two sections of this chapter and the subsequent chapters examine in greater detail the technical and aesthetic differences between the logic of continuity editing and that of other forms of editing, such as Soviet montage and the long shot in depth.

[130] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 287–88.

[131] Ibid. Almost from the beginning, trade papers and instruction books emphasised a specific conception of what constitutes a good film. In one of the earlier scenario books, Herbert Case Hoagland, of Pathé Frères, gave this advice to writers:

> Let one scene [shot] lead into the next scene wherever possible. Motion picture theater goers don't yearn for mental gymnastics and shouldn't be kept guessing as to who the characters are or why they are in the story at all. ... Keep your scenes in a sequence easily followed by the onlooker.

Herbert Case Hoagland, *How to Write a Photoplay* (New York: Magazine Maker Publishing Co., 1912), 12

[132] Ibid., 60.

series of shots joined together. This of course created a sense of discontinuity because the actors and camera would have to be reset after the first shot and the transition from shot to shot was not fluid. With the growth in popularity of the feature length film, combined with the desire to direct the viewer through the plot and the principal character's motivation and narrative trajectory, it became critical to ensure that all such transitions were 'invisible,' meaning that they would not reveal the technical limitations of the film apparatus. The second unit of film composition is the 'scene.' The scene is a dramatic event and is made up of a series of related shots, and a sequence is a series of scenes that have a dramatic through line or theme.[133] The combination of all the sequences will create the overall narrative of the film. In other words, with the continuity system, even though the action is broken into separate shots, there is a presupposed continuity of action – and therefore a presupposed continuity of space and time – with the order of shots determined by the logic of causality.

The second relevant characteristic of the shot within the continuity system relates to the *variety* of aesthetic choices for shot configuration. A discovery of early filmmakers during the formative period of the Hollywood mode was the ability to direct the viewer's attention through the narrative by using a combination of different shots in each scene. The three principal shots were the wide – or establishing – shot, the medium shot, and the closeup. By varying the use of these shots in a scene, the dramatic interest could be heightened. And, along with the variety of shots, the continuity system developed different positions and points of view for the camera, different conventions of shooting (including, for example, the

[133] There is no rule that a scene must comprise several shots, and in several films a scene may comprise a single shot. In fact, whole films have been made from a single shot. However, the continuity system is based on a dramatic development through several shots.

180-degree rule that established the arc of movement for the camera used to avoid disrupting the continuity of the scene), and different setups (such as cutaway or 'coverage' shots that presented the scene from different character perspectives).

Continuity editing was the essential binding element that connected these different shots. Largely developed through the experimentation of D. W. Griffith between 1908 and 1915, continuity editing (sometimes referred to as *découpage*) offered an equally diverse series of aesthetic choices to the filmmaker for editing together the various shots. These devices included cutting from a long shot to a closeup for dramatic effect, intercutting to highlight a particular object used in a scene, coverage shots to present the drama in a scene from different characters' points of view, and parallel action (such as the scene in *The Lonely Villa*, 1909, a rescue story in which Griffith intercuts between a helpless family and the burglars who have invaded their home and the husband who is hurrying home to rescue his family).[134]

1.4 The absorption effect and the antitheatrical prejudice

As the discussion in the last section demonstrates, the continuity system was created largely to satisfy a rapidly increasing demand by viewing audiences for narrative content, initially, and then for feature length narrative films. It therefore served a dual function: first, as a technical and aesthetic solution to the problems of discontinuity created by multiple shots from different perspectives; and, second, as a marketing strategy for attracting increasingly larger audiences. As the enterprise of the American – and later the Hollywood – film industry expanded globally, the continuity system became the foundation of the new Hollywood mode of film

[134] *The Lonely Villa* (D. W. Griffiths, dir., Biograph Company, 1909).

practice. In turn, the continuity system and the Hollywood mode that evolved from it spawned the creation of multiple rules and conventions relating to every aspect of the film production process from scriptwriting to final screening. To a large degree these rules and conventions were intended to protect enormous investments made in the USA film industry by entrepreneurs. The success of the continuity system in attracting large audiences in turn required additional investments – to build new studios, to hire stars, and to purchase scripts – and the rules and conventions were designed to secure those investments and minimise risk.[135]

By 1917, these rules and conventions had become standardised, and the Hollywood mode had become a paradigm for film production.[136] Variations in the formula created by the Hollywood film industry were possible but within the constraints of this paradigm. As Bordwell notes, 'any group style offers a *range* of alternatives,' but at the same time, the style remains a unified system because the paradigm offers *bounded* alternatives.[137] It follows that from 1917, the Hollywood mode had become the dominant system, 'in the sense that most American fiction films since that moment employed fundamentally similar narrative, temporal, and spatial systems.'[138]

The history, therefore, of the transition from the 'primitive' mode to the Hollywood mode is essentially a function of a competitive scramble for market dominance in a

[135] Chapter 6 explores in more detail the historical approach of the Hollywood film industry to managing risk and securing a favourable return on capital investments. See also Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 96–113.

[136] 'After 1917, a filmmaker's attempts to give his or her work a distinctive look would take place within well-defined limits. Filmmaking now was guided by a set of standards and norms often codified in print. A budding filmmaker could be taught the system and would be likely to receive basically the same advice from any experienced practitioner.' Ibid., 231.

[137] Ibid., 5 (emphasis added).

[138] Ibid.

new industry. As the needs of the viewing public morphed from film versions of music hall sketches to short narratives, then filmed plays, and finally feature length films, the motivation to secure the market while satisfying public demand influenced the direction of film's aesthetics and, as we have seen, led to the overwhelming success of the continuity system. The lynchpin of this success – and the basis for much of the early publicity and advertising about Hollywood mode films – was film's capacity to guide the viewer through the narrative by use of the multiple 'signposts' and directions that the continuity system provided. Of course, the evolution of the continuity system was hardly surprising at a time when there was no speech in films. Continuity editing sutured together the various types of shots and camera angles to tell a film's story with a minimum need for titles. However, its survival for almost a hundred years since *The Jazz Singer*, the first synchronised sound film, indicates that its value lies beyond the mere ability to tell a story visually. [139] Rather, its success more probably has been a function of its capacity to allow audiences to escape into the world of the film, to become absorbed by it.

Whatever the motivations – economic, aesthetic, psychological, technological, or otherwise – for the development of the continuity system, the absorption effect that it creates has now become ingrained in the Hollywood mode. Indeed, in chapter 6 I will argue that it has now 'evolved' into a more intensified, extreme form, in which absorption has become an instrument for the self-perpetuation of the Hollywood film industry itself. The remainder of this chapter analyse both the constituent characteristics of the absorption effect and the problems it creates. The antitheatrical prejudice provides the logical starting point for this discussion. Although the two

[139] *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, dir., Warner Bros., 1928).

terms serve different purposes, the antitheatrical prejudice and the absorption effect are inseparable concepts in the context of the Hollywood mode and the analysis of film-theatre in the following chapters. It is precisely *because* the Hollywood mode eschewed theatre techniques and practices and, more significantly, the aesthetic effects of theatre performances that the continuity system – and therefore the absorption effect – gained prominence.

Jonas Barish's work provides the key to understanding how the antitheatrical prejudice informs (and is informed by) the Hollywood mode and why it inexorably leads to absorption effects.[140] As the summary of Barish's work in the introduction to the thesis indicates, theatre creates an 'ontological queasiness' in the mind of the spectator by projecting a 'Protean' view that humans do not have a fixed essence and that we are all 'players.'[141] And it is this destabilisation that the Hollywood mode and the absorption effect seek to avoid by 'immersing' the viewer in the notion of a single psychological and narrative imperative for the principal characters in each film.

One of the earliest attempts to examine the aesthetics of the continuity system was by Hugo Münsterberg in his 1916 work *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*.[142] He sought both to analyse it in terms of its psychological effect on an audience and to claim for it the status of a new art form separate from theatre.[143] Münsterberg identified three distinguishing (in his words, 'superadded') characteristics of film

[140] A summary of the principal arguments of Barish is included in the introduction to the thesis in the first subsection of the literature review.

[141] This perception is of course reflected in Shakespeare's repeated references to humans as 'players' or 'actors' in, for example, *As You Like It* and *Macbeth*.

[142] See Langdale, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film*.

[143] To be clear, Münsterberg did not exactly describe the new medium in terms of 'absorption' *eo nomine*, but his analysis of films made according to the continuity system is replete with descriptions synonymous with the absorption effect.

that ‘hardly would be possible in a theatre’ – the ability of the camera to set a scene with natural and real backgrounds, the speed with which these backgrounds can be changed, and the ability of film to place the viewer in two or more places at more or less the same time.[144] The range of effects that could be produced by these ‘superadded elements’ moved film away from the direction of a ‘more and more perfect photographic reproduction of the theater stage’; in fact, it ‘led away from the theater altogether.’[145] These factors led Münsterberg to ask the question: ‘is it not really a new art which long since left behind the mere film reproduction of the theater and which ought to be acknowledged in its own esthetic independence?’[146] Münsterberg answered this question in two parts: the first (the psychological) focused on what he saw as the unique characteristic of film, and the second (the aesthetic) asked what characterises the independence of an art, what constitutes its autonomous conditions. The first part of his inquiry grew out of his conviction that the principal contribution of film as a separate art form was its ability to influence the mind of the spectator. He demonstrated how film achieved this through various mechanisms in a manner unattainable in a stage production. His starting point was the initial mental engagement undertaken by the film spectator. The motion which the spectator sees appears to be a true motion, but it is created by his own mind. The ‘essential condition is rather the inner mental activity which unites the separate phases in the idea of connected action.’[147] So, for example, although we see depth

[144] Langdale, *Hugo Münsterberg on Film*, 31–32.

[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid., 37. Surprisingly, Münsterberg argues that this right to independent recognition of film as a distinct art form had been ignored at the time when he wrote. Accepted wisdom at the time of his book apparently treated film primarily as a new recording mechanism that was not unlike the gramophone in the sense of something that ‘simply imitates the true art of the drama on the stage.’ Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 67.

and movement in a film, it is not real depth and movement but rather the impressions of depth and movement that we create through our own mental processes. By contrast, movement and depth on a stage are real. There is no need for our mental processes to 'create' depth and movement.

From this foundation, he developed an analysis of the psychology of film by reference to its ability to affect the spectator's attention through various techniques. The primary mechanism for this was the images themselves. As there was no speech in films at the time, the spectator's attention was forced onto the image above all else. Consequently, the spectator's attention is focused on facial expressions, hand movements, and other physical gestures. By contrast, in a theatre the audience's attention is constantly drawn to whoever is speaking at any given time: 'Every gesture and every mimic excitement stirs us now much more than if it were only the accompaniment of speech.'[148] A second factor identified by Münsterberg for gaining attention was the use of natural backgrounds. But, of all the techniques, the one that he considered the most critical in establishing film's superiority over the stage in engaging with the spectator's mental processes was the use of the closeup. For Münsterberg this was the foundation of the art of the 'photoplay.' 'The close-up', he wrote, 'has objectified in our world of perception our mental act of attention and by it has furnished art with a means which far transcends the power of any theater stage.'[149]

Having traversed the subject of film's ability to explore subjectivity through its various techniques, Münsterberg inevitably relies on this to justify his claim that film has its own aesthetic, separate from theatre; that it is a unique art form. For

[148] Ibid., 38.

[149] Ibid., 80.

Münsterberg, a claim of any medium to be an art form must rest not on its imitation of reality but on its ability to overcome it. As he explains:

> It is artistic just in so far as it does not imitate reality but changes the world, selects from it special features for new purposes, remodels the world and is through this truly creative. To imitate the world is a mechanical process; to transform the world so that it becomes a thing of beauty is the purpose of art. The highest art may be furthest removed from reality.[150]

He argues that film, by comparison to theatre, gives us a view of dramatic events that is completely shaped by the inner movements of the mind. Relying on these two models of aesthetics on the one hand, and his psychological research on the other, he concludes that film's unique aesthetic is to tell the human story 'by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination, and emotion.'[151] He concludes that film is in fact further away from physical reality than the theatre and that this distance from the physical world brings it nearer to the mental world.

Erwin Panofsky, by contrast, sought to create distance between early film and theatre by reference to the unique *formal* elements of film and its *technical* capabilities (particularly, the various techniques of continuity editing). He embraced film's potential to liberate the arts from what he perceived as the elitist constrictions of the theatre and welcomed the overtly commercial aspects of film, which 're-established that dynamic contact between art production and art consumption.'[152] Consequently, he had no objections to most types of film genre, including westerns, mysteries, detective stories, gangster and adventure films, fantasies and comedies, but he *was*

[150] Ibid., 129.

[151] Ibid., 124.

[152] Panofsky, 'Style and Medium,' 16.

concerned about the intrusion of *theatricality* – and specifically theatrical dialogue – into film. His objections were not based on subject matter, however, but on a combination of his own historical view of the origins of film and his conclusions regarding the technical characteristics of film.[153]

Panofsky traced film's origins to folk art and entertainment rather than theatre. He asserted that the earliest attempts at narrative film did not derive from theatre (as might have been expected). Instead, the earliest films added movement to works of art that were originally stationary. They were based on nineteenth-century postcards and paintings and waxworks, 'supplemented by comic strips, popular songs, pulp magazines and dime novels.'[154] Early attempts at imitating theatre performances, such as *Les Amours de la Reine Élisabeth*, were not successful, according to Panofsky, leading him to the conclusion that the imitation of a theatre performance 'is the one thing that film must avoid.'[155] The legitimate path to film's evolution, he argued, was not by mimicking theatre and running away from 'the folk-art character of the primitive film' but by developing it within the potential of the new medium. This, he claimed, could be achieved 'not by an artificial injection of literary values but by the exploitation of *the unique and specific possibilities of the new medium*,' by which he meant the specific technical possibilities and apparatus that were available to film, including controlled use of the camera, multiple forms of editing, dissolves, and special effects.[156] Panofsky argued that these technical possibilities had enabled film to create what he calls the 'dynamization of space' and the 'specialization of time,' meaning film continuity – the ability of the spectator, while

[153] Ibid., 15–21.

[154] Ibid, 17.

[155] Ibid., 18.

[156] Ibid. (emphasis added).

remaining in his seat, to follow the action and movement wherever the camera goes and however the narrative is told.[157] This, he argues, is in stark contrast to the world of the theatre, where the spectator occupies a fixed position not just by virtue of his seat in the theatre but by reference to the limitations of a stage set.

The arguments of Panofsky and Münsterberg for drawing aesthetic, psychological, and technical lines between film and theatre were reflected in commercial claims for the special qualities of the new medium. Eric Bentley, in his article 'Realism and the Cinema,' notes, for example, the following advertisement by the Lynds in the *Saturday Evening Post*:

> Go to a motion picture … and let yourself go. Before you know it you are living the story – laughing, loving, hating, struggling, winning! All the adventure, all the romances, all the excitement you lack in your daily life are in the Pictures. *They take you completely out of yourself into a wonderful new world … Out of the cage of everyday existence! If only for an afternoon or an evening – escape!*[158]

However, the antitheatrical prejudice is not merely a function of early intellectual writing and promotional literature designed to extol the virtues of film over theatre. It is *inherent* in the aesthetic effect of absorption that Hollywood mode films created. The fundamental characteristics, qualities, and purposes of continuity editing were directed towards an experience by the viewer that was quintessentially antitheatrical. To be clear, 'antitheatrical' in this context is not simply a rejection of the forms and techniques of theatre; it is a renunciation of the capacity of a stage performance to produce from an audience a dialectical response to the subject. In a Hollywood mode film, the audience is led to identify with the psychological motivation of the film's

[157] Ibid.

[158] Eric Bentley, 'Realism and the Cinema,' in *The Playwright as Thinker* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), quoted in Knopf, *Theater and Film*, 108–15 (emphasis added).

protagonist through each shot, scene, and sequence, providing an effortless transition between places, time periods, and events. This process of 'psychological identification' is inherently antitheatrical because it assumes and requires for its effect a technical and aesthetic quality that is not usually possible in theatre, notably the invisibility of the film apparatus. The objective of the continuity system is to present the film's narrative as 'real,' and for this purpose the film's apparatus must be 'invisible' to the viewer.[159] As Edward Branigan explains, 'it pretends that there is no impediment to looking, that the viewer sees clearly and effortlessly, that the world arrives naturally and effortlessly to one's attention.'[160]

Theatre by contrast has various resources at its disposal for counteracting absorption and challenging the viewer by placing distance between the viewer and the object of attention.[161] In theatre the artifice of a performance is usually apparent. For example, the spectator has much greater freedom to look at whatever appears interesting. As Sarah Bay-Cheng observes, 'the eye has the freedom to scan the entire stage area with much greater freedom than in film.'[162] On stage, the type of fragmentation of the human form that is possible in film through different shots, closeups, and editing is relatively difficult to represent. Similarly, most characters occupy the same space,

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[159] As Noël Burch explains, the Hollywood mode is the 'zero point' of filmmaking because 'it offers its forms to the viewer as "invisible."' Burch, 'Theory of Film Practice', 11. See also Edward Branigan, 'To Zero and Beyond: Noël Burch's Theory of Film Practice,' in Peter Lehman, ed., *Defining Cinema* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 149.

[160] Branigan, 'To Zero and Beyond,' 155. The literature offers several examples of the problems of 'zero' filmmaking, including Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking text on the relationship between zero filmmaking and the scopophilic instinct. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure.' See infra, section 1.6.

[161] Bazin expresses similar concerns about continuity editing in the context of his arguments (discussed in the next section) concerning realism in film. In Hollywood mode films, he argues, scenes are broken down (through, among other things, continuity editing) for one purpose – 'to analyze an episode according to the material or dramatic logic of the scene. *It is this logic which conceals the fact of the analysis*, the mind of the spectator quite naturally accepting the viewpoints of the director which are justified by the geography of the action or the shifting emphasis of "dramatic interest."' Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1,* 24 (emphasis added).

[162] Bay-Cheng, 'Following the Gaze,', 166.

while cinema can adjust the scale of images of characters on screen. At the same time, the stagecraft and set design on stage are more obviously artificial than in a film, and the nature of seating, lighting, and relationship of audience to performers mean that the viewer is constantly aware that they are watching an artificial construct rather than a representation of 'reality' in the sense of naturalistic images.[163] Theatre is self-reflexive in the sense that it draws attention to its own artificiality or to performance; we are always aware that we are facing an actor playing a character, so that character and actor are always present. As André Loiselle and Jeremy Maron explain, theatre is a 'space, any space that lends itself to the observation of performances which, *as performances*, challenge illusions of self-identity and self-presence. The theatre is thus the medium of to-be-looked-at-ness, to borrow Laura Mulvey's famous neologism.'[164] Another formulation, proposed by Michael Fried, relates theatricality to representations that call attention to their own 'representationality,' that 'attempt to impress the beholder and solicit his applause.'[165] As Davis and Postlewait explain, this self-reflexivity has a long history in theatre, pre-dating the concept of theatricality.[166] A number of playwrights from the Greek era to modern times have purposely used their characters to reflect on the nature of the play and their role in it. In a sense, *Hamlet* is a dialogue between the main character and the audience on the theatricality of the events in the play and his relationship to those events. And in the modern era, writers such as Bertolt Brecht,

[163] Ibid.

[164] André Loiselle and Jeremy Maron, *Stages of Reality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 4n5.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, 13–21.

Luigi Pirandello, and Eugène Ionescu have explicitly emphasised theatricality by devices designed to further distance the audience from the events on stage.[167]

The fundamental characteristic of theatre for purposes of film-theatre, therefore, is not only how a performance is presented physically to an audience but how the audience *responds* to it. While the Hollywood mode induces in the viewer a state of absorption, theatre techniques and performance practice direct the viewer to look and listen rather than see and hear, to engage in a dialectical response with the subject of the performance.[168]

1.5 Alternative 'modes' of film practice

The chapter to this point has explored the nature and scope of the antitheatrical prejudice and the absorption effect. In the wake of the global success of the Hollywood mode both in mainstream films and in a significant number of so-called independent films, it may appear to be the *only* mode of production.[169] To the extent that it refers not simply to the aesthetics and technical characteristics of the continuity system and the logic of absorption that it leads to but also to the whole system of rules, conventions, and production and distribution practices, the

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[167] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

[168] As Edward Branigan explains,

> The continuity style makes forms appear to disappear as if seeing the screen were like looking at the world through a window recently washed…. Transparency has the effect of greatly reducing or eliminating the viewer's perception of that definite and measurable separation between seeing and looking, recording and hearing, that Burch believes must necessarily exist when one attends to a film. Transparency tends to make the perception static and leaves the viewer passive and inert. (Branigan, 'To Zero and Beyond,' 149.)

[169] Examples of independent films on social, political, and human rights issues that are made according to the aesthetics of the Hollywood mode include: *Made in Dagenham* (Nigel Cole, dir., Audley Films, BBC Films, BMS Finance, 2010); *Suffragette* (Sarah Gavron, dir., Ruby Films, Pathé, Film4, 2015); *Promising Young Woman* (Emerald Fennell, dir., FilmNation Entertainment, Focus Features, LuckyChap Entertainment, 2020); *Pride* (Matthew Warchus, dir., Pathe UK, Pathé, CBS Films, 2014); *Lady Bird* (Greta Gerwig, dir., IAC Films, Scott Rudin Productions, Entertainment 360, 2017). See also note 466, infra, which includes other examples.

Hollywood mode, in its broadest sense of a mode of film practice, is practically unrivalled, at least in the West. However, while the hegemony of the Hollywood film industry – and along with it, the Hollywood mode – cannot be overlooked, the aim of the thesis is to problematise the Hollywood mode and examine film-theatre approaches that may be used to interrupt its absorption effect (the subject of the following chapters). The remainder of this chapter problematises the Hollywood mode through two strategies. This section challenges conventional assumptions about the Hollywood mode by examining alternative aesthetic approaches to the Hollywood mode that have existed since the period 1907–1917, and that are still in use today; and the following section examines from various theoretical perspectives the problems of the absorption effect.

The Hollywood mode was not accepted without reservation by filmmakers. Since the formative period in which the continuity system emerged at least two aesthetic approaches have pursued a different course. The first was a continuation and development of the so-called 'primitive' mode that existed in 1907.[170] This approach, described at length by Bazin in his essay 'The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,'[171] privileges the long shot over the use of continuity editing. In common with Siegfried Kracauer, Bazin's concern was the representation of 'physical reality.'[172] Bazin distinguished between film directors 'who put their faith in the

[170] This approach is discussed in further detail as the first of three types of film-theatre that may be used to interrupt absorption effects in chapter 3 (duration within the open frame).

[171] Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 23–41.

[172] Siegfried Kracauer, 'Basic Concepts,' in *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), quoted in *Defining Cinema*, ed. Peter Lehman (New Jersey: Athlone Press, 1997), 98–99. According to Kracauer, 'films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties, like photographs, that is, they must record and reveal physical reality.' This he distinguished from 'other visible worlds [that] reach into this world without, however, really forming a part of it.' Ibid.

image and those who put their faith in reality.'[173] By 'image' Bazin was referring to the cumulation of additional elements that are a function of the Hollywood mode (in comparison to what he described as the 'realistic' image captured by the film). In Bazin's words, the 'image' includes 'everything that the representation on the screen adds to the object there represented.'[174] This, he argued, could be reduced to two categories, 'those that relate to the plastics of the image and those that relate to the resources of montage, which, after all, is simply the ordering of images in time.'[175] And he further explained that by 'plastics' he meant 'the style of the sets, of the make-up, and, up to a point, even of the performance, to which we naturally add the lighting and, finally, the framing of the shot which gives us its composition.'[176]

For Bazin the problem with the 'image' (particularly with respect to montage) was that the apparatus that created it was 'invisible' to the viewer. Scenes are broken down just to analyse an episode according to the material or dramatic logic of the scene, and it is this logic, he concludes, 'that conceals the fact of the analysis, the mind of the spectator quite naturally accepting the viewpoints of the director which are justified by the geography of the action or the shifting emphasis of dramatic interest.'[177] Bazin's solution to the problem of 'invisibility' in the Hollywood mode (the functional equivalent of absorption effects) was a return to 'reality,' which meant for him films in which montage plays no (or little) part 'unless it be the negative one of inevitable elimination where reality superabounds.'[178] Bazin found

[173] Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol 1,* 24.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid., 26–27.

support for this approach in silent era films by Erich von Stroheim, F. W. Murnau, and Robert Flaherty and from the 'talkies' era by Orson Welles, William Wyler, and Jean Renoir.[179] He also noted that the 'shot in depth' (a long shot with deep focus, allowing the viewer to observe several 'planes' of action at the same time) in the films of these directors 'brings the spectator into a relationship with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality. Therefore, it is correct to say that, independently of the contents of the image, its structure is more realistic.'[180]

However, the problem with this 'realist' approach is that it privileges the ontological character of film as 'physical reality' without necessarily affecting the central problem of absorption. While the presentation of long shots in depth provides more viewing choices and thereby creates a sense of ambiguity that 'implies a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress,'[181] this does not necessarily interrupt the absorption effect. Martin Walsh, for example, rejects Bazin's view that deep focus, as used in F. W. Murnau's silent film *Sunrise*, represented the 'reality of dramatic space' and that in Murnau's and Stroheim's films (and, later, the films of Orson Welles), 'montage plays no part unless it be the negative one of inevitable elimination where reality superabounds.'[182] In Walsh's view, this physical 'reality' represented by deep focus and long shots is misleading and he concludes that the 'concomitant of this valuation of "realistic" cinema is the affirmation of illusionistic aesthetics.' He argues that films such as *Sunrise* evince the qualities of:

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid., 35.

[181] Ibid., 35-36.

[182] Ibid., 27.

> psychological penetration of character; an organic, closed structure; conservative ethic of hero and heroine reunited through benign fate, or optimism in the final triumph of 'human nature'; a technique of stylistic self-effacement that refuses to interrupt the identificatory propulsion towards catharsis – the use of *trompe l'oeil* backdrops, carefully painted to reassert perspectival laws, and hence reality, emphasises the desire to *hide* technique.[183]

The second approach, which existed before the evolution of the Hollywood mode but has survived in one form or another until the present, is the opposite of Bazin's preference for the realism of the photographic image. The so-called 'montage of attractions,' developed by a number of Soviet filmmakers, including Eisenstein and Pudovkin, in fact emphasised an even *more* radical version of editing than the continuity editing system of the Hollywood mode, in which the shot is *not* the basic unit of the narrative but merely a piece of raw footage that is intended to be cut and then reassembled and juxtaposed to other 'fragments' of film into a collage. This form of montage is known as 'dialectical montage' in the sense that it juxtaposes two or more shots that each reflect conflict with the object of evoking political or social change.[184] While a concept cannot be directly represented in an image, tensions and discord between juxtaposed images could stimulate an audience to grasp a conceptual connection by inference. This technique could be used to generate new political insights in audiences.[185]

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[183] Martin Walsh, *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema* (London: BFI, 1981), 16.

[184] This approach is discussed in more detail in chapter 5, in the context of the use of Brechtian alienation techniques.

[185] Sergei Eisenstein, 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,' in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* (New York: HBJ, 1949), 45–63.

Eisenstein saw the screen as a space in which the director 'decomposed reality into usable blocks or neutralized them and arranged them to construct new meaning through juxtaposition.'[186] As Eisenstein explained in *The Film Sense*:

> While playing with pieces of film, [the 'leftists of montage'] discovered a certain property in the toy which kept them astonished for a number of years. This property consisted in the fact *that two film pieces of any kind, placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition*.[187]

Compared to conventional approaches to narrative, which he described as 'a static "reflection" of an event of an event with all possibilities for activity within the limits of the event's logical action,' with the montage of attractions, 'we advance to a new plane – free montage of arbitrarily selected, independent (within the given composition and the subject links that hold the influencing actions together) attractions – all from the stand of establishing certain final thematic effects – this is montage of attractions.'[188] Eisenstein's use of the montage of attractions in film and its efficacy as an alternative to the Hollywood mode that interrupts the effects of absorption is more fully analysed and illustrated in chapter 5, which examines Eisenstein's approach to montage as an early form of Brechtian alienation technique.

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[186] 'Through montage, the filmmaker could shape the mental processes of the spectator by bombarding them with "a continuous string of shocks" coming from each of the various elements of the spectacle. Through this collision of attractions, the audience was forced to actively participate in the making of meaning by resolving the conflicting themes and attaining significance through synthesis.' Krupa Shah, 'Sergei Eisenstein, D. W. Griffith & Pudovkin: A Comparative Essay,' *Krupa Shah* (blog), 19 May 2020, https://drkrupashah.com/2020/05/19/sergei-eisenstein-d-w-griffith-pudovkin-a-comparative-essay/.

[187] Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 4 (emphasis in original).

[188] Ibid., 232.

1.6 Critical responses to the antitheatrical prejudice and absorption effect

The negative ramifications of absorption and the illusion of realism that gives rise to it have been the subject of several critical theories and approaches. One approach, for example, emphasises the psychological orientation of the viewer towards the male gaze. Laura Mulvey, in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' argues that the Hollywood mode hides the apparatus of film production from the viewer, while putting the viewer in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire and the 'male gaze.'[189] Mulvey suggests two distinct modes of the male gaze of this era: 'voyeuristic' (i.e., seeing woman as an image 'to be looked at') and 'fetishistic' (i.e., seeing woman as a substitute for 'the lack', the underlying psychoanalytic fear of castration).[190]

This discussion leads us again to the approach of Louis Althusser – previously summarised in the introduction – that uses the concept of hailing or interpellation to explain how the absorption effect renders the viewer a subject of the film's ideology. According to Althusser the spectator is 'hailed' or interpellated into a film's social conditions 'as a subject, as the bearer of a familiar social role, or rather one that has become familiar over time through the operation of ideological apparatuses that confirm the real conditions of existence.'[191] Applying Althusser's approach to Hollywood mode films, Philip Green argues that the social role into which viewers

[189] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure.' One of the antecedents for Mulvey's argument is the apparatus theories of Jean-Louis Baudry. Jean-Louis Baudry and Alan Williams, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1974): 39–47. According to Baudry, the cinema can appear as a sort of psychic apparatus of substitution, corresponding to the model defined by the dominant ideology. Through its system and mechanics of representation (camera, editing, projecting, spectator before the screen) the cinematic apparatus conceals its work and imposes an idealist ideology, rather than producing critical awareness in a spectator.

[190] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure,' 16-18.

[191] Green, 'Ideology and Ambiguity,' 102.

are interpellated is *as passive social spectators rather than social actors*. Modern (but not modernist) film, through its use of naturalistic cinematography, sympathetic protagonists, emotionally satisfying endings, and continuity editing (among other things) is:

> implicitly ideological by virtue of its structure alone, without regard to the necessary ambiguities of any particular narrative content. That is, the notion that human life makes sense, that social forces are comprehensible, and that 'happy' endings are normal conveys a secular version of the sentiment that 'God's in His Heaven / All's right with the world.'[192]

As Green observes, this ideology 'represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.'[193] In other words, ideological narratives 'treat the imaginary world of social unity as though it really were the natural and normal world, without acknowledging their own function of defining what is "normal" and "natural" within that world.'[194] The approach of the Hollywood mode of film to the ideology of the institutions that it represents (including, as Green points out, family, community, and nation) is not to have characters deliver speeches directly praising them (although, of course, this often happens as well[195]). Instead, the normal trajectory of a Hollywood film is to present a situation in which the institution is challenged or threatened but to present the challenge as an aberration that is defeated, vindicating the protagonists and recuperating the value of the institution.[196]

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[192] Ibid., 104.

[193] Ibid., 105.

[194] Ibid.

[195] An example is the functional equivalent of the St. Crispin's Day speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V* transposed into an alien invasion in *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, dir., Twentieth Century Fox, Centropolis Entertainment, 1996).

[196] Green, 'Ideology and Ambiguity,' 105. The film *Singin' in the Rain* applies this ideological approach to the Hollywood mode and the Hollywood film industry itself. Superficially, it appears to critique the Hollywood star system through the form of a seemingly theatrical genre, the musical. But

Other critical approaches, summarised in the literature review in the introduction, are concerned with the role played by absorption and the antitheatrical prejudice in various theories relating to the 'reification of culture' or cultural relations through works of mass culture. These theories will be analysed in detail in chapter 6, specifically with reference to changes in the Hollywood film industry during the twenty-first century, including the rise of the franchise film model and developments in horizontal expansion (global markets) and vertical integration (control of distribution media and locations) and modes of distribution.

1.7 From antitheatricality to film-theatre

As the final section of the introduction indicated, the purpose of the analysis in this chapter and the introduction was to identify the two overriding problems with the antitheatrical prejudice that are addressed in the thesis: first, by creating an aesthetic division between film and theatre, it inexorably leads to the absorption effect as the identifying characteristic of the Hollywood mode. Second, beyond its obvious connection with the absorption effect, it assumes that any kind of 'theatricality' is antithetical to film since it undermines or threatens film's perceived essential role – to represent 'reality.' The purpose of the introduction and this chapter was to analyse the scope of the antitheatrical prejudice as it relates to the Hollywood mode and the absorption effect and to problematise it. But this leaves open the following question: if the antitheatrical prejudice is flawed, in other words if 'theatricality' is not antithetical to film, what role *can* theatre techniques play in film aesthetics? The aim of the remaining chapters, which constitute the principal position of the thesis and its

its objective is ultimately to vindicate both the Hollywood mode and the star system by providing an ideological resolution in which the Hollywood mode remains intact. *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen, Gene Kelly, dir., Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), 1952).

contribution to existing research, is to propose a theoretical and practical methodology for examining how theatre techniques and practices can be used not only to interrupt the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode but also to suggest aesthetic possibilities for film outside the Hollywood mode.[197]

[197] A more detailed summary of the remaining chapters and how they develop the analysis of film-theatre is included in final section of the introduction.

Chapter 2: Film-Theatre: A Theoretical and Practical Approach for Interrupting Absorption

2.1. A 'new idea'?

The objective of the last chapter was to examine and problematise the absorption effect as the defining characteristic of the Hollywood mode. In this chapter I propose a theoretical and practical approach for interrupting absorption, which I refer to as 'film-theatre.' In response to her own question whether the 'divide' between theatre and film can be bridged, Sontag concludes that 'we need a new idea.'[198] The use of theatre techniques in film is not new; it does not break down the distinctions between theatre and film nor does it seek to explain whether a 'divide' between them should be maintained, or, for that matter, which should be the 'definitive' art form. But it does at least propose a structure for examining the relationship between theatre techniques and film, instead of dismissing theatre, as Erwin Panofsky proposes, as 'the one thing the film must avoid.'[199] And its aim is to suggest opportunities for filmmakers and producers to explore aesthetic choices outside the strictures of the Hollywood mode. In this limited sense and for these limited purposes, therefore, I propose that film-theatre, though not a new unifying *theory* of film and theatre, is at least a 'new idea' about how theatre techniques may be called into the service of film.

Further, as the literature review in the introduction indicates, there is a lack of available research on the use of theatre techniques and practices as a strategy for interrupting absorption effects. By contrast, as chapter 1 explains, there is abundant

[198] Sontag, 'Film and Theatre,' 37.

[199] Panofsky, 'Style and Medium,' 18.

authority for both analysing the absorption effects and problematising them. The position of the thesis is that the use of film-theatre as a strategy for mediating theatre techniques and practices with film techniques and aesthetics to create a new set of aesthetics that interrupt absorption contributes to existing learning and is a natural development from the existing literature and filmography that problematises the Hollywood mode.

The principal aim of film-theatre, therefore, is to propose a working methodology for creating *practical* solutions to the problems of absorption, not to explore any new theories of film. To illustrate the distinction, Gilles Deleuze, for example, argues that the Italian neorealist filmmakers created what was effectively a new film language in which action and narrative were subordinate to time and that the 'time image' became the foundation on which scenes and whole films were structured. As Deleuze describes it, the effect of these films 'was to prevent perception being extended into action *in order to put it in contact with thought*.'[200] In other words, in Deleuze's opinion, the Italian neorealist filmmakers created a film language that defeats absorption by engaging the viewer in 'thought' or, rather, by creating an aesthetic effect that leads to self-reflexion and a dialectical response to the subject matter (which would, of course, interrupt absorption). The function of film-theatre is to propose an approach based on theatre techniques and practices that have enabled other filmmakers to create a similar effect and that will serve as a model for future generations. According to the film-theatre methodology, certain aesthetic effects and characteristics of theatre's use of *space* (the open stage, long scenes without interruption, blocking modalities, etc.) combined with film's capacity to expand the

[200] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Continuum, 2005), 1 (emphasis added).

'frame' of the image (for example, by allowing for long tracking shots, as in Roberto Rossellini's *Paisà*,[201] or through a montage of still shots over time, as in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*) provide resources for creating similar effects and for exploring other aesthetic possibilities based on the substitution of action with the time image. In other words, the critical film theory (in this case, Deleuze's concept of the 'time image' and its effect of putting the viewer 'in contact with thought') informs film-theatre's selection of appropriate theatre techniques to disrupt the absorption effects of conventional Hollywood mode films. The subsequent chapters of the thesis seek to demonstrate how the same methodology (though applied in multiple different ways, through a variety of techniques and aesthetic effects) can be used for the other critical responses to the Hollywood mode analysed in the first two chapters, including Brechtian approaches to distancing; psychological theories based on the male 'gaze'; criticisms of the treatment of character; and various theories based on, among other things, mass culture, reification, and instrumental reason.

By way of caveat, the concept of film-theatre is based on certain assumptions that are not absolute. It assumes, for example, the use of theatre techniques that have a dialectical effect on the audience. There are doubtless certain theatre productions – including, for example, popular West End and Broadway musicals based on Hollywood films – that at least endeavour to create the same absorption effect as their cinematic counterparts. However, in most cases, theatre techniques adapted according to the methodology explained in this chapter will interrupt the absorption effect in films. This chapter does not propose a theory of theatre that excludes

[201] *Paisà* (Roberto Rossellini, dir., Organizzazione Film Internazionali (OFI), Foreign Film Productions, 1948).

absorption; rather it examines those theatre techniques and practices that *may be* effective for this purpose when adapted for film and under appropriate circumstances. And the function of this chapter is to define those circumstances and the delimitations that are necessary for film-theatre to provide an effective methodology for this purpose.

The following sections of this chapter outline the rationale and methodology for the application of film-theatre. Section 2.2 addresses the question of how film-theatre can be reconciled with notions of 'theatricality' and the antitheatrical prejudice that were discussed in the introduction and chapter 1. Film-theatre, of necessity, embraces the idea that theatre techniques should play a major role in interrupting absorption effects. However, this approach encounters resistance in the form of the antitheatrical prejudice in Hollywood mode films and the arguments of Michael Fried against 'theatricality' in the arts. This section responds to these arguments, while advocating the 'pro-theatricality' position of the thesis. Sections 2.3 to 2.5 outline the methodology for the application of film-theatre, including the various types of theatre techniques and practices selected and their corresponding purposes. Sections 2.3 introduces the various types of theatre techniques and practices that are considered appropriate for film-theatre analysis. In addition, it explains the methodology of 'matching' certain types of theatre technique and practice with corresponding manifestations of absorption in the Hollywood mode as an approach to demonstrating how film-theatre can be used to interrupt absorption. Section 2.4 sets out the delimitations of film-theatre techniques as they are used in the case studies. And the chapter concludes, in section 2.5, with a summary of the approach to selecting films for the case studies.

2.2 The need for a 'theatrical' alternative to absorption effects

The approach proposed in this chapter raises various preliminary questions. The first is why we need to discuss techniques for interrupting absorption at all, since, according to the first two chapters, there are abundant theoretical arguments against the Hollywood mode. And there is certainly no shortage of aesthetic, technical, and film distribution and production approaches that seemingly offer alternatives to the Hollywood mode and the Hollywood business model, including low budget or 'no-budget' filmmaking, self-distribution, and new strategies for film funding, distribution, and exhibition in what are commonly referred to as 'art house' cinemas. During the last two decades there have been some encouraging signs that independent film has been able to find innovative solutions in terms of funding, production, content, and distribution.[202] However, while these technical, business, and aesthetic approaches offer alternative content, distribution, and viewing platforms to mainstream films, their principal concern is not to interrupt the absorption effect. In many cases, as it happens, independent films do interrupt the absorption effect (as is demonstrated in the following three chapters). But there is no assurance that new markets and distribution outlets will always achieve this result. On the contrary, several so-called 'indie' films produced according to one or more of these approaches nevertheless create absorption effects.[203]

Further, certain film theories, while criticising the aesthetics of the Hollywood mode, do not necessarily preclude absorption effects. In chapter 1, for example, I argue that the approaches of Kracauer and Bazin to the ontological character of film as a

[202] These solutions are summarised in chapter 6.

[203] See, for example, the films cited in notes 169, 334, and 466.

representation of physical 'reality' do not always solve the problem of absorption. Finally, while many of the socio-political and economic theories or perspectives discussed in this thesis, including Althusser's analysis of interpellation and the works of Lukàcs, Adorno, and Horkheimer on concepts of the reification of culture and instrumental reason, raise serious concerns about the absorption effect, they do not suggest practical strategies for interrupting it. There is therefore a need in the literature and in practice for a systematic theoretical and practical approach that is not necessarily based on any film theory or movement but whose objective is simply to provide a methodology for interrupting the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode. Such an approach, it is hoped, will ultimately serve the interests of several critiques of the Hollywood mode and several critical theories challenge it, though in different ways depending on the type of theatre technique used and the problems that absorption causes.

But this raises the question – why theatre? What are the specific characteristics of theatre techniques and practices that justify selecting them as the basis for a methodology that interrupts absorption effects? In one sense this question is answered almost automatically by the antitheatrical prejudice itself. As the introduction and chapter 1 explain, the underlying rationale of the antitheatrical prejudice is to *avoid* the aesthetic effects of theatre techniques and practices precisely *because* they are antithetical to the notion of absorption in Hollywood mode films. But it is the very defining characteristics and aesthetic effects of 'theatricality' – from which the Hollywood mode recoils – that are most likely to produce a critical, self-reflexive, and dialectical response from the viewer.

At a superficial level, then, the obvious reason for turning to the theatre as a resource for developing a theoretical and practical methodology for interrupting the

absorption effect is precisely *because* 'theatricality' or – in contrast with the antitheatrical prejudice – 'pro-theatricality' has qualities that counteract absorption. By contrast, antitheatricality is an *inherent* characteristic – indeed, the *defining* characteristic – of the Hollywood mode because it is intended to produce, and does produce, an experience for the viewer that is antithetical both to the mode of performance and presentation of stage works and to the critical perspective of a theatre audience watching them.

Another more substantive reason for using theatricality to interrupt the absorption effect is the mode of reception or consumption of a theatre performance by the viewer. As Bay-Cheng has demonstrated, the inherent nature of theatre performance creates a natural 'distance' between spectator and object that avoids many of the problems of absorption.[204] The 'liveness' of the performance, the seating configuration, the length of scenes, and the aesthetics of stage set design and light, of course, contribute to this 'distance.' But film-theatre is concerned with more than finding ways to adapt specific characteristics of theatre performances to film (although that remains an important and necessary function). The primary objective of film-theatre is to explore approaches to film that approximate the *effect* that those characteristics have on an audience. Its purpose, in other words, is to examine how the underlying *practice* of theatre, in particular the relationship of the audience to the play – both physically and mentally – can be used to counteract the absorption effects of conventional films. The original Greek word for theatre – *theatron*, from *thea* (eyes) and *tron* (place) – was a reference to the area of the theatre where the

[204] Bay-Cheng, 'Following the Gaze,' 162–72. For further discussion of Bay-Cheng's arguments, see the final subsection of the literature review in the introduction. As Bay-Cheng observes, in the theatre, the 'spectator has much greater freedom to look at whatever appears interesting. The eye has the freedom to scan the entire stage area with much greater freedom than in film.' Ibid, 166.

audience sat. In addition, the word *theoros* (spectator) is in turn connected to the Greek word for theory, *theoria*, and derives from the Greek *theorein*, meaning to look at, to contemplate, to observe.[205] This provides a key to understanding the role of film-theatre. The purpose of film-theatre is to understand how theatre is *experienced* as a place of 'seeing,' meaning a place where the spectator goes to observe, and how this experience can be reimagined for a film audience. As Brian Kulick explains:

> Perhaps we could say that the power of theatre is that it gives us the opportunity of a sustained gaze where we can move slowly from looking to seeing. In such moments of ocular transmutation, we catch a glimpse of something other, something deeper; a second reality that tells us more about ourselves and the world we inhabit. This is the gift of theatre, allowing us to see through things to their core, where things are brought to light that might otherwise remain hidden.[206]

The question discussed here is to what extent the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode is justified. Does film have some quality or characteristic that *requires* it to reject not only techniques and practices based in the theatre but the aesthetic effects that theatre performances produce? Or stated another way, does the use of theatre techniques and practices or the resulting aesthetic effect on the audience diminish film's status as an art form? One obvious response is that there is no compelling reason why films should be limited to a single 'mode' or practice or a relatively rigid set of conventions and rules that dictate the nature of a film's aesthetic effects. While the Hollywood mode certainly dominates film production and distribution in the West – and is fast becoming a standard for films produced elsewhere – other approaches to film aesthetics based on theatre techniques have not

[205] Bogart, 'Ways of Seeing.' Bogart adds, 'we learn to pay attention in a way that wakes up distinct elements of our innate intelligence. We acquire the ability to fill in the blanks, completing what we see on the stage.'

[206] Kulick, *How Greek Tragedy Works*, 120–21.

only survived the creative evolution of the Hollywood mode of film practice in the period from 1907 to 1917 but enjoyed some degree of success, particularly through independent film distribution. The three following chapters provide several examples of how films and directors (and in some cases, film movements) have used theatre techniques since 1917 to interrupt absorption by engaging the spectator in a more meaningful and 'active' relationship with the film's subject matter. These films demonstrate how theatre techniques may offer multiple opportunities for filmmakers to expand their aesthetic palettes far beyond the constraints of the Hollywood mode.

As a preliminary matter, I will address the arguments for absorption by Michael Fried in his essay *Art and Objecthood*.[207] Fried used the term 'absorption' to characterise works of art that try to present themselves as though they are not explicitly intended to be viewed by an audience. Understood in this light, Fried concluded that 'the view of the audience is therefore one of *absorption* because the audience becomes absorbed by the scene at which they look; the audience is drawn into the drama that is depicted.'[208] In his criticism of the theatricality of minimalist art, Fried distinguished earlier art from 'literalist' art, noting that 'in previous art 'what is to be had from the work is located strictly within [it],' while 'the experience of literalist art is of an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*.'[209]

Absorption implies that the work being 'absorbed' by the viewer is organic and does not depend on the inclusion of the beholder for its validity or value. Fried's concerns about theatricality were a continuation of the writings of Clement Greenberg in

[207] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 148-173.

[208] Rushton, 'Early, Classical and Modern Cinema,' 227.

[209] Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' 153 (emphasis in original). See also Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*.

'Modernist Painting,' and they expressed a fear that painting and sculpture, for example, would lose their identity as 'institutions' by becoming theatrical. As Fried explained:

> Starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, (Greenberg) claimed in 'Modernist Painting,' the major arts, threatened for the first time with being assimilated to mere entertainment ... discovered that they could save themselves from that fate 'only by demonstrating that the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other kind of activity.'[210]

Greenberg's and Fried's solution was one of self-definition: 'Each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself.'[211] The role of each art was to eliminate

> any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of every other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure,' and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance.[212]

The question for the thesis is whether this distinction from theatre is essential to the 'purity' of film, and, if it is, whether we need a new approach to the definition of film. One argument is, of course, that films are not the same as minimalist art. Perhaps the most significant difference is the nature of film as a work that is *reproducible* for mass consumption, and it is this condition of reproducibility that validates – even requires – the intervention of theatre to avoid film's misuse as an instrument of political ideology. At the time of this thesis, one film may be

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[210] Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), in *Modernism with a Vengeance: 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian, vol. 4 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86, quoted in Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 34–35.

[211] Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting,' in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 5–10.

[212] Ibid, 68.

simultaneously watched – in multiple formats – in millions of homes and cinemas around the world.

In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' Walter Benjamin examined the importance of this characteristic of film, both ontologically as an art form and from a socio-political perspective in terms of how film could be used or misused in mass consumption.[213]A key concept in Benjamin's analysis is the notion of ritual or aura that applies to works of art. Citing the essay 'The Conquest of Ubiquity' (1928), by Paul Valéry,[214] Benjamin explained how works of art created and developed in past eras are different from contemporary works of art and that the understanding and treatment of art and of artistic technique must progressively develop in order to understand a work of art in the context of the modern time. Benjamin demonstrated how mechanical reproduction had devalued the nature of aura (uniqueness) in works of art and that, as a result, in the age of mechanical reproduction and in the absence of traditional and ritualistic value, the production of art is inherently based upon the praxis of politics. In the case of films, mechanical reproduction removes the presence of the actor and the elements of 'theatricality' from the viewer. The performance of the actor is presented to the audience through the camera, rather than in person on the stage, 'with the result that the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any

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[213] Benjamin, 'Work of Art.'

[214] Valéry, Paul. "The conquest of ubiquity." In *Aesthetics: The Collected Works of Paul Valery* (1964): 225-228.

personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera.'[215]

In many ways, the importance of Benjamin's analysis lies not only in his theoretical approach to the nature of film as a 'work of art' in the era where mechanical reproduction replaces ritual, aura, and authenticity, but also in the various potential uses of film in such conditions both as an instrument for reform and as a means of oppression. As he explained, 'the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.'[216] While Benjamin eschewed any detailed study of how films are produced and the purposes for which they are put into service, he understood how mass film production could substitute the aura of the work of art with new means of engaging the public. One of these he noted was the 'cult of the personality' or the cult of the movie star, which, 'fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the "phony spell of a commodity."'[217]

Benjamin's theories provide at least two reasons for not expanding Fried's analysis of objectivity to film. First, Fried is concerned with works of art that retain their auratic quality. The works that he describes are neither mass produced nor intended for mass consumption (unless it can be said that exhibiting works in a gallery constitutes mass consumption). It is precisely *because of* the nature of film as non-auratic art that is intended for mass consumption that it merits consideration separate from the kind of Modernist antitheatrical art that Fried refers to. According to

[215] Ibid., 10.

[216] Ibid., 6.

[217] Ibid., 12.

Benjamin, the concept of the 'aura' depends on art as an object residing in specific spaces. The fact that forms of art such as painting and sculpture must exist in one spatial location corresponds to their social and class function. They are the media of an elite aristocracy and middle class. They do not make themselves available to mass spectatorship. As Tony Gibart explains, 'the object's boundness to a specific space is requisite for what Benjamin calls the cult value of non-reproducible art.'[218] Reproducible art, unlike art with an aura, has no specific spatial location and is unable to be located as an object.

Nevertheless, Fried fleetingly mentions film in his essay but claims that it is not comparable to the modernist enterprise of defeating theatricality because film 'by its very nature escapes theater entirely.'[219] He assumes that this 'inherent' antitheatricality of film is a function of a phenomenology of the cinema that is based on 'the similarities and differences between it and stage drama – e.g., that in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film itself is projected *away* from us, and the screen is experienced as a kind of object existing in a specific physical relation to us.'[220] Fried's analysis of film is questionable in this way in light of the early history of film. As this and the earlier chapters of the thesis argue, the Hollywood mode is antitheatrical both inherently (because of the combination of technical elements that produce the absorption effect) and by design (as demonstrated by the literature). But the *purpose* of antitheatricality is different in each art form. For Fried and modernism, it is to defeat objecthood; for film, it is to

[218] Tony Gibart, 'Objecthood,' *The Chicago School of Media Theory* (blog), Winter 2002, https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/objecthood/.

[219] Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 8.

[220] Ibid.

maximise profits and control of the industry. The difference between the antitheatricality of modernist art and film is not that one is inherently antitheatrical and the other not; it is that the reproducibility of film – in contrast to the auratic quality of sculpture and painting – renders it an inappropriate subject for Fried's analysis.

A more important reason, however, for not extending the antitheatrical arguments of Fried to film is a function of the second subject of Benjamin's essay – that, in the absence of ritual and aura, mechanical reproduction may be used for political purposes; he offers horrifying predictions at the end of his essay of how 'Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate.'[221] For Benjamin the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. As he argues, 'the violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus [in this case, film] which is pressed into the production of ritual values.'[222] The arguments in the following chapters of the thesis – and the corresponding case studies – are based largely on two premises: first, that the mass consumption and reproducibility of films (now in multiple forms of distribution media, far more than at Benjamin's time) give film the capacity to reproduce and disseminate various ideologies through interpellation, reification and instrumental reason as well as psychological means; and, second, that

[221] Benjamin, 'Work of Art,' 19. Barish expresses similar concerns in the closing pages of *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, where he likens 'hard-line fundamentalist anti-theatricalism' with 'old-style antisemitism,' noting that 'the historical connection between them, indeed, goes back to a day when Jews and actors were lumped together as undesirable members of society, like prostitutes.' Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 464.

[222] Ibid. An example of this was the propaganda films that Leni Riefenstahl made during the Nazi era, including *Triumph des Willens* (Leni Riefenstahl, dir., Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion, Reichspropagandaleitung der NSDAP, 1935).

'theatricality' (meaning the use of film-theatre techniques and practices) is a necessary resource for interrupting the absorption effect that allows for the perpetuation of these ideologies.

2.3 The use of film-theatre as a methodology for interrupting absorption effects

The analysis of film-theatre in the thesis uses the concept of theatricality in two ways. First, certain theatre techniques and practices may be adapted for use in films. These are, in a sense, the 'nuts and bolts' of the film-theatre methodology. They are used by film-theatre to mediate with corresponding film techniques and aesthetics to interrupt absorption. Second, as the previous section explains, there is the mode of *reception* or *consumption* of the performance by the theatre audience, which, by comparison to Hollywood mode films at least, is conducive to a self-reflexive and contemplative response from the viewer rather than a state of absorption. As the following methodology indicates, these two aspects of film-theatre are interdependent. The mode of reception of a theatre audience is an essential starting point for film-theatre analysis in the thesis. Without it, the use of theatre techniques could become little more than a stylistic trope. But at the same time, these techniques and practices – or a cinematic adaptation of them – provide the essential mechanisms of film-theatre for interrupting absorption.

The methodology in this section is divided into two principal parts. The objective of the first part is to explain the meaning and function of film-theatre in the thesis and how it mediates between theatre techniques and practices on the one hand and the apparatus and aesthetics of film on the other to suggest practical approaches to interrupting the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode. Film-theatre uses various

steps for this objective: first, it identifies any theatre techniques and practices (including rehearsal and performance practices, staging and blocking, reception conditions, and other resources) that might be adaptable for use in films. Second, it seeks to 'pair' those techniques with corresponding characteristics of the Hollywood mode that have been problematised in the earlier chapters of this thesis. And third, it provides an analytical structure for examining selected films both to help understand the aesthetic effects produced by film-theatre in those films and to explore the possibilities of expanding aesthetic opportunities available to filmmakers outside the constrictions of the Hollywood mode. The second part provides a set of delimitations for selecting films that will form the focus of examination in the following three chapters.

2.3.1 An overview of film-theatre techniques and practices

Several theatre techniques could arguably be used in films, including not only the three categories selected for the case studies in chapters 3 through 5 (duration within the open frame, Brechtian alienation techniques, and improvisation) but also those relating to less obvious aspects of theatre production, such as set design and acting styles.[223] However, for purposes of the case studies, the examination of the aesthetic effects of these techniques is divided into two primary categories. The first group comprises theatre techniques that are based on rehearsal, performance, and dramaturgy. Included within this group are the various types of improvisation work,

[223] Pedro Almodovar, for example, has used his earlier experience with a theatre company to incorporate acting styles and various theatre practices and conventions in some of his films. Gwynne Edwards, 'Almodóvar and the Theatre,' *Anales de La Literatura Española Contemporánea* 30 (2005): 77–96. And Lars von Trier has incorporated ideas of stage design into two films, *Dogville* (Lars von Trier, dir., Zentropa Entertainments, Isabella Films B.V., Something Else B.V., 2003) and *Manderlay* (Lars von Trier, dir., Zentropa Entertainments, Isabella Films B.V., 2005).

whether used for dramaturgical purposes to devise a script or resolve obstacles during scene work or to create improvised performances before a live audience. The group would also include the range of theatre techniques used for rehearsing scenes, preparing the text, and blocking. In other words, a central concern of this group of techniques and practices is the relationship between director and actor or, in the case of ensemble or devised works, the form of collective or collaborative process that is used. In addition, the mode of *performance*, including the presentation of long scenes on stage over a sustained period and the relative lack of the kind of temporal or spatial continuity that is a function of continuity editing in Hollywood mode films, plays an important role in the analysis of duration within an open frame (the subject of chapter 3) as well as the use of improvisation (chapter 4).

The primary characteristic of this group of theatre techniques is that their use in film is *inherently* theatrical. By this I mean that the techniques are not used explicitly to defeat the illusion of reality in a Hollywood film. Since the aesthetic effect of these approaches is markedly different from the continuity editing, narrative structure, and style of Hollywood films, they lead to a heightened sense of wakefulness. In some cases, the theatricality comprises nothing more than the passive use of a theatre technique or the emulation of performance conditions (along the lines suggested above by Bay-Cheng[224]). So, for example, the use of improvisation by Mike Leigh and John Cassavetes inexorably calls attention to itself as a distinct aesthetic, separate from the aesthetics of most Hollywood films, as it presents a markedly different approach to character, psychological motivation, and narrative. Similarly,

[224] See the final section of the literature review in the introduction.

long shots in depth tend to replicate the experience of watching the events presented on stage.[225]

However, the thesis also explores the use of more *active* theatrical devices to convey a particular project to the audience. Some of these devices have a long history in theatre and include direct address (as in *Hamlet*), dialogue between actor and audience, and commentary (as in Greek choruses). More recently, they would also include specific alienation techniques such as those used by Brecht and other meta-theatrical practices (including the work of Pirandello, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski).[226] The film *Funny Games*[227] demonstrates how Michael Haneke uses these techniques alongside the more conventional long shot in depth not only to 'force the activity of discernment' by the spectator in what is happening on screen but to confront them, as guilty parties, with their role in allowing it to happen.[228] The techniques in this group are theatrical *by design* in the sense that they intentionally call the viewer's attention to the artificiality of the performance and the conditions of production.

2.3.2 'Matching sets' of film-theatre techniques

The preceding section provides a basic 'catalogue' of techniques and practices that could be considered for film-theatre purposes, but further research and guidelines are

[225] Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film adaptation of his play *The Bitter Tears of Petra Kant* demonstrates how the long shot in depth can be used to create a comparable dialectic effect and audience experience in a theatre, while also taking full advantage of the film medium. *Die Bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, dir., Filmverlag der Autoren, Tango Film, 1972).

[226] Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, 1–39.

[227] *Funny Games* (Michael Haneke, dir., Filmfonds Wien, Wega Film, Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF), 1998).

[228] John David Rhodes, 'Haneke, the Long Take, Realism,' *Journal of Cinema and Media* 47, no. 2 (2006): 17–21, at 19. See also Niels Niessen, 'The Staged Realism of Michael Haneke's *Caché*,' *Cinéma et oralité* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 2009), 181-199.

needed to determine how they can be applied in practice to interrupt absorption effects and in what contexts. For this purpose, I propose to distinguish three aesthetic and technical characteristics of the Hollywood mode and to locate, through a film-theatre analysis, their counterparts in theatre techniques and practices. In general terms, these characteristics comprise temporal and spatial continuity; narrative unity; and psychological character identification. And their corresponding theatre techniques and practices (in the same order) are the duration image within an open frame; Brechtian alienation techniques; and improvisation practices, as well as multiple other aspects of theatre work that privilege a close working relationship between director and actor, through rehearsals, blocking and improvisation. These categories (both the characteristics of the Hollywood mode and the corresponding theatre techniques) are proposed not with the aim of establishing a prescriptive set of criteria for examining the applicability of film-theatre but as a methodology for further research and for the examination of concrete examples and films in the following chapters.

There are some theoretical problems with this approach. One problem is that the separation of each of the three characteristics of the Hollywood mode is confusing because each is no more than an undivided part of the whole Hollywood mode aesthetic. Narrative unity is a function of continuity editing, and both are intended to evoke a viewer's identification with the principal protagonist in the film. The absorption effect is not a result of any single aesthetic or technical characteristic but the combination of the entire Hollywood mode film apparatus. Similarly, with respect to the corresponding theatre techniques and practices, it is rare that a single theatre technique will be used in a film to the exclusion of all others. Haneke and Godard, for example, both use a combination of Brechtian alienation techniques and

duration images in *Funny Games* and *Weekend*, while several improvised films by Cassavetes and Leigh use duration images. And, as with film, theatre productions cannot be clearly demarcated by reference to specific techniques. The way a scene is blocked and presented on stage – and for that matter, rehearsed – will be a function of several aesthetic and technical factors, such as whether improvisation is used, as well as to what extent alienation techniques are needed either for creating a stage work or rehearsing it. Nevertheless, I tentatively propose the use of these imperfect 'pairs' because they provide a structure for selecting films in the three following chapters as well as for examining how cinema techniques and aesthetics have been used to produce a corresponding dialectical effect for those films. As the following section of this chapter argues, film-theatre need not be limited to the use of a single theatre technique for a single aesthetic purpose.

The first 'matching set' of Hollywood mode characteristics and theatre techniques (examined in detail in the next chapter) relates to the use of continuity editing in films to direct the viewer's attention effortlessly through a continuum of time and space. In Hollywood mode films, the narrative is produced largely through the linking of frames in a seamless and continuous progression of action from one shot to another. While obviously each frame or shot contains important narrative information, the relevance of that information is determined by the link between the frame of one shot and the preceding or succeeding frame. The information contained within the frame and the logic of the cut from shot to shot are designed to be used solely to serve the dramatic logic of the scene.[229] The action of the film takes place within a 'closed' frame, meaning that the viewer is only given enough time to focus

[229] Deleuze observes that films that privilege montage over the image itself have a sort of reality, but this is 'a functional reality, strictly determined by the demands of the situation, even if those demands were as much poetic as dramatic.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 6.

in each frame on the events and objects strictly necessary for their direction into the next shot within a scene. While theatre has some technical and aesthetic means (including, for example, lighting and blocking as well as set changes) for representing continuity, the physical conditions of theatre performances do not allow for the same fluid continuity that is characteristic of the Hollywood mode. As a result, however, theatre privileges *duration* within an 'open' frame, meaning that the audience can select what to concentrate on and for how long in each scene. In chapter 3, I use a film-theatre analysis to examine how both the open frame and the 'duration image' that characterise theatre performances have been adapted to create multiple possibilities for exploring various temporalities in film.

The second group (chapter 4) relates to the Hollywood mode's approach to character. As Bordwell explains, 'psychological causality, presented through defined characters acting to achieve announced goals, gives the classical film its characteristic progression.'[230] 'Hollywood movies,' Ray Carney writes, 'are basically devoted to achievement. Characters are defined in terms of their ability to do things (anything from freeing the hostage to getting the girl) – frequently by being pitted against each other in tests of wit or prowess. Hollywood understands life as essentially a matter of competition, achievement, and reward.'[231] While theatre performances frequently include narratives that follow this same type of progression, the inherent conditions of staging (long scenes with multiple characters on an open stage) tend to inhibit the capacity of plays to reproduce the Hollywood mode's approach to psychological causality. In addition, however, theatre offers an

[230] Ibid., 17.

[231] Raymond Carney and Leonard Quart, *The Films of Mike Leigh: Embracing the World*, Cambridge Film Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14–15.

abundance of approaches to improvisation that are not typically used in Hollywood mode films and would be inconsistent with their production and shooting conventions. These include improvisation work during rehearsals and improvisation to create devised works. The rehearsal or creative processes used in theatre for improvisation are also significantly different from film practice, as they often include collaborative or collective approaches. John Cassavetes's approach to rehearsals, for example, is perhaps best defined as a collective relationship with his actors and crew.

The final matching set (discussed in chapter 5) relates to the characteristic of the Hollywood mode known as narrative unity. As Karen Thompson explains, the various techniques of the Hollywood mode are used 'to convey narrative through careful manipulation of audience attention.'[232] She adds that the ideal of the Hollywood mode:

> required a unified chain of causes and effects, varied by complicating circumstances (the development), concluding with a definite action which resolves the chain into a final effect (the climax) and which lingers to establish a new situation of *stasis* at the end.[233]

As with continuity of time and space (which are, in turn, essential tools for the creation of this form of narrative unity), the fundamental purpose of this approach to narrative is to direct the attention of the viewer specifically along the thematic trajectory selected by the director of the film. As a result, the viewer has only a limited opportunity to pause and consider the underlying conditions (such as socio-political and domestic circumstances) that provide the background to a film's narrative. In this way, as we have previously noted, the viewer is 'hailed' or

[232] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 174–75.

[233] Ibid.

‘interpellated’ as a subject into the ‘accepted’ ideology presented in the film. The countervailing theatre technique that is paired against this ideology purposely sets its sights on disrupting this effect by challenging the form of theatre itself and constantly seeking a dialectical response to the subject matter from the viewer. The most obvious form of such interruption includes the various Brechtian techniques used for alienation (*Verfremdungseffekt*). The function of film-theatre is to show how these Brechtian alienation devices can be reimagined in film to produce a similar result. Chapter 5 uses various case studies covering over one hundred years to examine how specifically *cinematic* techniques, such as Soviet montage, the jump cut, and extended tracking shots or tableaux have been crafted for this purpose.

2.4 Criteria and delimitations appliable to the film-theatre case studies

The purpose of this section is to establish a set of criteria and delimitations for the research and analysis in the following three chapters, in which the three ‘matching pairs’ of theatre technique and absorption effect are analysed in more detail by reference to specific films. Each of the case studies will examine one specific theatre technique by reference to a representative film or films with the object of understanding how the technique is adapted to the film production process, what aesthetic effects it creates, and how those effects may suggest new approaches to filmmaking and storytelling.

The history of the development of the Hollywood mode during the period 1907 to 1917 and its subsequent antitheatrical prejudice suggest a period from the late 1940s onwards as the frame of reference for selecting theatre techniques and films for the case studies. As the earlier sections of this chapter indicate, early (or ‘primitive’) film was predominantly theatrical prior to 1907; there was therefore no concept of

antitheatricality at that time in relation to film. Although writers, such as Münsterberg, proclaimed as early as 1917 that film was a new art form separate and distinct from theatre, it was not until sometime after the advent of talking pictures in 1927 that film-theatre gained political purchase as an alternative to the Hollywood mode, particularly with the arrival on the scene of a group of directors who either had backgrounds in theatre (such as Ingmar Bergman) or (like Godard, for example) were inspired by forms and techniques derived from theatre. Some of these directors – including Godard and, later, Fassbinder – were particularly influenced by the work of Brecht.[234] Many of them resisted the 'invisibility' of commercial films and sought instead to render the apparatus of film visible in order to force the viewers to engage with the object of their attention on screen.[235] Developments in film technology during the 1940s and 1950s, and in particular innovations in lenses and the capacity of cameras to run film stock for longer periods of time, allowed directors to experiment further with the use of theatrical deep focus and long shots.[236] Similar innovations also made the use of improvisation possible in films.[237]

A further delimitation is that the case studies are based largely (though not exclusively) on theatre techniques taken from Western theatre covering the period more or less from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present date – the

[234] Jan Uhde, 'The Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory of Distanciation on the Contemporary Cinema, Particularly on Jean-Luc Godard,' *Journal of the University Film Association* 26, no. 3 (1974): 28–30.

[235] Some of these directors, such as Ingmar Bergman, started to come into prominence during the 1940s and 1950s. And this trend was further developed by directors of the French New Wave, including Godard, who used a number of the techniques discussed in this chapter to overcome the 'invisibility' described by Bazin. See, for example, Peter Wollen, 'Godard and Counter Cinema: *Vent d'Est*,' *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972): 6–17. This in turn was a stimulus for theatre directors with Brechtian experience (including Rainer Werner Fassbinder), who rose to prominence in the 1960s. See H. B. Mueller, 'Fassbinder's Use of Brechtian Aesthetics,' *Jump Cut*, no. 35 (April 1990): 102–7.

[236] See, for example, *Rules of the Game* (Jean Renoir, dir., NEF, 1939); *Citizen Kane*.

[237] Not surprisingly, it was during this period that improvised films, such as John Cassavetes's *Shadows* (Lion International, 1958), began to make their appearance.

period of 'modern drama' as Raymond Williams defines it in his series of essays *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* – during which there was a shift from melodrama (the dominant theatrical and dramatic form of the nineteenth century) through 'innovation and experiment' to realism, naturalism, and symbolism.[238] Based on these delimitations, certain types of experimental theatre such as Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and its incorporation of Balinese Theatre are bracketed out of the analysis of film-theatre in the following chapters, not because they fall outside the definition of 'theatre' or even 'modern theatre' but because their relevance to film is peripheral and the likelihood of adaptation for use in films is more remote. Similar considerations weigh against the inclusion of certain forms of Japanese theatre techniques, even though an argument could be made that both principal forms of classical theatre from Japan, Noh and Kabuki, have had an influence on films.[239] It is important to note, however, that this 'bracketing out' is not intended to exclude the use of such theatre techniques from film-theatre analysis completely. My purpose here is simply to establish reasonable and practical delimitations for the purposes of selecting and analysing the films that are included in the following three chapters.

The term 'film-theatre' serves both a 'what' and a 'how' function. On a practical level, it is a shorthand description of the common ground shared by film and theatre. But it is also an analytical method for selecting and examining films that include theatre techniques of one kind or another. As with the concept of theatre discussed

[238] Raymond Williams, *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht* (London: Hogarth, 2013).

[239] It is questionable how much of an influence these forms have had even in Japan, where they originated. Donald Richie, for example, argues that, even in *Throne of Blood* (Akira Kurasawa, dir., Toho Co., 1957) utilised elements of Noh for stylistic and atmospheric effect rather than as part of an aesthetic preference for the use of traditional Japanese theatre techniques in his films. Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). Donald Richie and Joseph L. Anderson, 'Traditional Theater and the Film in Japan,' *Film Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1958): 2–9.

above, this method must serve the limited purpose and scope of the thesis. The purpose of the thesis is not to provide a taxonomy of every situation in which any aspect of theatre performance or technique is used in films. It is to understand how theatre techniques, as used in films, could provide a new set of possibilities for filmmakers as an alternative to conventional commercial films. This function therefore brackets out of the discussion films that use theatre techniques without serving the thesis' objective of interrupting absorption effects.

Numerous productions of plays are screened live for cinema viewing, and then replayed at later dates or made available online.[240] Filmed plays are more in the nature of theatre on film than film-theatre since they comprise entire stage performances that are filmed and presented to a cinema audience. Most of the aesthetics of the production are a function of the actual stage performance itself and not the filming. They offer no more guidance to filmmakers on the value of theatre techniques in film than any stage play would because nearly all the production work is done within the context of the stage play, not the film. The function of the film elements in these productions is primarily to *record* what happens on stage, and the principal aesthetic choices relate to the selection of camera angles and shots (which, in any case, have more in common with TV productions than film).[241]

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[240] An example is the burgeoning industry in 'live' productions from leading theatres and opera houses. The National Theatre, for example, presents several productions live at various cinemas around the world as well as making them available for viewing at cinemas at a later date as recorded live productions (the play was originally shown to a cinema audience contemporaneously with its live performance on stage and was recorded and 'rerun' at later dates). Similarly, the Globe Theatre, London, in addition to its similar live programme offers an online film-on-demand service.

[241] These general conclusions regarding the 'bracketing out' of 'livecasting' (live filming and broadcasting of theatre productions) will merit further evaluation and possible reconsideration at a later date. The subject of 'livecasting' is in a state of transition as new aesthetic approaches to the medium are being explored, and scholarship on the subject is developing, especially as a response to the demands for content during the Covid lockdown periods. See, for example, Martin Baker, *Live to Your Local Cinema* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2012); David Gerow, 'Understanding Livecasting: Exploring the Relationship between Theatre, Cinema and Livecasting' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2017).

A less obvious example of 'filmed plays' is plays that are adapted for the screen. By contrast with 'livecasts' of theatre productions, these are films in the full sense of the word. They include all the elements of the film apparatus. The sole connection they have with theatre is their textual or dramatic *content* – basically, a literary model of film-theatre. But, as Bazin has demonstrated, this does not absolve them from any of the consequences of the Hollywood mode. *Casablanca*, *Carnage*, *Sleuth*, and *The Ice Storm* may all be considered effective adaptations of the plays on which they were based, but none of them provide useful examples of any of the three techniques discussed in this chapter.[242] The mere fact that a play is made into a film does not, of itself, provide a logical basis for regarding it as a suitable subject for analysis in this chapter.[243]

In fact, in a number of cases, directors go to considerable lengths to make filmed plays 'cinematographic' and to use conventional techniques of the classical mode, presumably to justify the use of the film medium and to distance the film from the conditions of production (in the sense of staging techniques; rehearsal; and, for that matter, the use of any of the film-theatre techniques considered in this chapter).[244]

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[242] *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, dir., Warner Bros., 1943), based on the play 'Everyone Comes to Rick's.' *Carnage* (Roman Polanski, dir., SBS Productions, Constantin Film, SPI Film Studio, 2011). *Sleuth* (Joseph Mankiewiz, dir., Palomar Pictures International, 1972). *The Ice Storm* (Ang Lee, dir., Fox Searchlight Pictures, Good Machine, Canal+ Droits Audiovisuels, 1997).

[243] In some cases, however, elements of film-theatre may be necessary for technical reasons in an otherwise Hollywood adaptation of a play. An example is Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*, which used a series of long shots carefully connected to give the appearance of a single setup for each 'act.' *Rope* (Alfred Hitchcock, dir., Warner Bros., Transatlantic Pictures, 1948). Laurence Olivier's production of *Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, dir., Two Cities Films, 1944) provides an interesting example of a film that makes imaginative use of film-theatre techniques (in this case, using a reconstruction of the Globe Theatre for the opening scenes in the play to 'stage' a gateway into the film's reality). However, even here the effect of the film was ultimately absorption despite its origins in Shakespeare and its obvious self-referentiality.

[244] Bazin's discussion of the film version of Molière's *Le Médecin Malgré Lui* provides a particularly poignant example of this. In this film adaptation, as Bazin points out, the use of cinematic stylistic effects designed to create a sense of reality 'had, unfortunately, the opposite effect. They underlined the unreality of both the characters and the text.' Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Vol. 1,* 85-86.

More significantly, however, the principal reason for excluding the textual content of plays from the concept of film-theatre is that it confuses subject matter with technique. The aim of the thesis is to understand how various types of theatre *technique* can be usefully applied by filmmakers *for all narratives and all texts*.

The third set of limitations relates to the types of theatre technique used (which I refer to as 'variables') and their aesthetic effect (referred to here as the 'invariant'). As I have indicated above, there are two steps in the film-theatre methodology – first, identifying theatre techniques and practices that are appropriate for use in films; and second, examining how these techniques can be used to defeat the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films. Previous sections of this chapter have provided examples of some of these theatre techniques and practices, and the following three chapters provide detailed case studies of three predominant techniques –the duration image within the open frame, improvisation, and the use of Brechtian alienation approaches. This list is not exclusive, and in the final chapter of the thesis I argue that the potential for use of theatre techniques is constantly evolving along with changes in approach to the forms of film and theatre. Furthermore, use of these techniques in any given film is *variable* in the sense both that the selection of a theatre technique or practice will depend on the individual director's aesthetic objectives and that a film may combine more than one of these techniques for the desired purpose.[245]

[245] For example, *Dogville* is presented as a Brechtian drama (with captions for major elements of the narrative and a voiceover), but it also incorporates long takes with deep focus and theatre design elements (as its variables). In *Archipelago*, Joanna Hogg combines relatively fluid approaches to improvisation of dialogue on the set with a series of highly structured and mannered 'tableaux' that frame the characters in long shots. *Archipelago* (Joanna Hogg, dir., Wild Horses Film Company, 2011).

However, the aesthetic effect of these techniques is an *invariant* of the film-theatre methodology. Regardless of which technique is used, whether alone or in combination with other variable techniques, a critical requirement of film-theatre is that these techniques have the effect of defeating or at least interrupting absorption. Theatre techniques of one kind or another are frequently used in mainstream commercial films, often as a stylistic device for effect.[246] And film producers have readily appropriated unconventional, 'non-Hollywood-mode' techniques for stylistic effect when these techniques have become popular or fashionable. The most obvious example is Godard's use of the jump cut[247] in *Breathless* as part of an overall aesthetic designed to both parody and interrupt the absorption effects of Hollywood mode films. Subsequently, however, the jump cut has been adopted for stylistic purposes by mainstream film producers, particularly in action-adventure films, to create a jarring, dramatic disruption of the action.[248] The stylistic use of the jump cut in this manner does not interrupt the absorption effect of such films; if anything, it

[246] This is particularly the case with mainstream horror films. André Loiselle argues that 'scary movies often create their terrifying effects stylistically and structurally through a radical break with the realism of normality in the form of monstrous theatricality.' André Loiselle, *Theatricality in the Horror Film* (London: Anthem Press, 2019). There are many other examples in which each of the three techniques discussed in this chapter have been used in Hollywood films for stylistic effect. In *Goodfellas*, for example, an extended single take is used to present a nightclub scene, as with the opening of P. T. Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (New Line Cinema, Lawrence Gordon Productions, Ghoulardi Film Company, 1997). In the final court scene in *Goodfellas*, Ray Liotta – who has been narrating in voice-over throughout the film, swapping with his wife (Lorraine Braco) whenever her point of view is required – looks straight at us and reels off a list of the perks afforded to him due to his gangster lifestyle, which he is now losing to spend the rest of his life 'like a schnook.' The alienating device of jump cuts has been used in mainstream films such as *The Bourne Ultimatum* (Paul Greengrass, dir., Universal, 2007). In each of these examples and others, the critical question, for the purposes of the thesis, is *why* the device is being used. In most cases, these techniques are used sparingly to create stylistic effect. The other characteristics and aesthetic effects of the Hollywood mode usually remain untouched by these isolated uses of theatricality for style.

[247] A jump cut is when a single shot is broken with a cut that makes the subject appear to jump instantly forward in time. Whereas most editing techniques are designed to hide the edit, a jump cut is a stylistic choice that makes the edit completely visible. Mike Bedard, '5 Creative Ways to Use Jump Cuts', StudioBinder, 26 December 2021, https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-a-jump-cut/.

[248] David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,' *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16–28, https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2002.55.3.16.

enhances it because it reimagines a now-popular cinematic trope for mainstream film use.[249]

Another example of stylistic techniques enlisted to serve Hollywood mode films are the long shot and sometimes even the single setup. The long shot, as the name indicates, is a single shot (often a medium shot but sometimes, as in *Son of Saul*,[250] a closeup shot) that is held for a sustained period. This may be achieved by various cinematographic means, such as a fixed camera (on a tripod) that includes a relatively wide area (as in Hitchcock's *Rope*), or with a handheld camera (as in *Birdman*[251]), or with a combination of cranes and tracking devices (as in the opening shot in *The Player*[252]). As a film-theatre technique, this approach may be effective in interrupting the absorption effect in any of the three approaches examined in the following chapters. It often provides a structure for the aesthetic of duration within the open frame, discussed in chapter 3, but it may also be used in combination with other techniques as an alienation device, as in Godard's *Weekend*, discussed in chapter 5, and it is often used for improvised films, particularly if the improvisation is being done on set during the shoot (chapter 4). However, there are several examples of long shots in Hollywood mode films for stylistic effect, as in *Goodfellas*, where a single long shot portrays the main character's arrival at a nightclub; there are even Hollywood mode films where a single setup has been used for stylistic reasons. In this situation, the whole film is ostensibly shot in a single

[249] Ibid.

[250] *Son of Saul* (László Nemes, dir., Laokoon Filmgroup, Hungarian National Film Fund, 2015).

[251] *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (Alejandro Iñárrito, dir., New Regency Productions, M Productions, Le Grisbi Productions, 2014).

[252] *The Player* (Robert Altman, dir., Avenue Pictures, Spelling Entertainment, Addis Wechsler Pictures, 1992).

take (or made to appear as if it were a single take, as in *1917* and *Birdman*). But even the single setup film is not immune from the problems of absorption.[253]

2.5 Criteria for selection of case studies films

The core of the arguments in the thesis regarding film-theatre are contained within the three cases studies in chapter 3 through 5. These case studies follow the groupings of film-theatre with corresponding forms of absorption explained in the prior sections of this chapter. This section summarises the approach and methodology of the case studies and the selection of representative films examined in them. Each of the following chapters includes an introductory section that explains the applicable film-theatre technique or practice followed by a selection of films intended to demonstrate how the theatre technique is adapted by using film techniques and aesthetics to create an effect that corresponds with the experience of a theatre audience. The case study films have been selected based on various criteria. To some degree the selection has been based on my own personal preferences for directors and their films, but the selections have also sought to provide a reasonable representation of the applicable film-theatre techniques at different times and to demonstrate the diversity of approaches to adapting those techniques for film.

The subject of chapter 3 is the duration image within the open frame. This description is intended to include two primary concepts of stage performance and practice – the fact that extended scenes are presented to an audience without interruption (duration), and the open 'frame' of the stage that allows the audience's

[253] Another example is *Boiling Point*, filmed in a kitchen in a single setup. As with *1917*, the single long shot was merely an interesting (and marketable) technical device for what was essentially a melodrama. *Boiling Point* (Philip Barantini, dir., Ascendant Films, Burton Fox Films, White Hot Productions, 2022).

attention to move to any point within the stage and beyond. The films selected in chapter 3 demonstrate how film-theatre can be used not simply to adapt the stage's open frame/duration character for film but to expand its dialectical possibilities through the technical and aesthetic resources of film. Drawing on Heidegger's analysis of time, the chapter explores how the duration image within the open frame, as reimagined in film, provides opportunities to use different forms of temporality as a lens through which a viewer may enter a dialectical relationship with a film's underlying social, domestic, and political conditions.[254] Yasujirō Ozu's *Late Spring*, for example, was selected based on its use of the duration image and dramatically contrasting forms of framing (open and closed) as a commentary on the demands and constraints of domestic life in a Japanese postwar household.[255] Ozu's use of three different temporalities – 'now' time, 'world' time, and 'originary' time – as an aesthetic for examining the relationships between the film's characters, with their domestic circumstances and with the world outside, demonstrates the possibilities of using film-theatre to adapt theatre's open frame for film. The other selected films, Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* and Steve McQueen's *Hunger*,[256] provide contrasting examples of how the underlying conditions – the facticity – of characters in a film can be mediated by different temporalities.[257] In *L'Eclisse*, the same forms of

[254] The films included in chapter 3 are examined by reference to the various forms of temporality analysed by Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time*, notably 'now' time (narrative time), 'world time' (spans of social time that characters experience in their daily lives), and 'originary time' (a point at which past, present, and future times connect, allowing characters to contemplate their existence). Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Joan Stambaugh (translator), and Dennis J. Schmidt (writer of supplementary material), SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

[255] *Late Spring* (Yasujiro Ozu, dir., Shochiku, 1949).

[256] *Hunger* (Steve McQueen, dir., Film4, Channel Four Film, Northern Ireland Screen, 2008).

[257] I use the term 'facticity' in connection with the exploration of temporalities in these three films as a means of describing the conditions of existence that 'trap' the characters in a particular lifestyle or set of relationships.

temporality are used to offer a dialectic viewpoint on the social and economic conditions that constrict the characters, while in *Hunger* the prison environment is used as both an open and closed frame within which these temporalities can be used as a commentary on political and humanitarian conditions.

Chapter 4 examines theatre techniques which emphasise various aspects of the rehearsal process, including the actor/director relationship, collaborative and collective approaches to production, devised works, and improvisations. Three films, John Cassavetes's *Faces* (1968), Mike Leigh's *Life Is Sweet* (1990), and Joanna Hogg's *Archipelago* (2010) provide contrasting examples of different types of 'rehearsal-based' theatre practices. *Faces* relies primarily on improvisation in rehearsals to determine not only how actors interpret character but also how they move and even where they move to on set. Leigh's approach relies on an intense relationship with actors to develop a scenario from which dialogue is created by improvisation. Hogg, by contrast, combines improvisation with long tableau shots to create a sense of isolation and domestic tension. In each case, the films have been selected because they demonstrate how rehearsal-based techniques provide an alternative to the conventions of blocking, shooting, and continuity in Hollywood mode films to create new aesthetic effects that depend more on individual character relationships than on the concept of a single psychological character motivation.

Chapter 5 explores a variety of approaches to Brechtian alienation techniques in films, spanning a period of over a hundred years from the dawn of the Hollywood mode (and even before) to the present day. The selected films demonstrate a rich diversity both of approaches to these techniques and of the purposes for which they

are used. Eisenstein's *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*,[258] for example, turned the conventional approach to continuity editing – or *découpage* – on its head by using the basic shot as merely a starting point for creating 'montage[s] of attractions [that] resulted in a relation to the spectator entirely different from his absorption in "illusory [depictions]."'[259] Godard's film *Weekend* provides an opportunity to observe how film-theatre can be used to enlist uniquely cinematic techniques and aesthetics to adapt Brechtian techniques for film. In this case, he relies on both technical and narratological resources to penetrate the illusion of naturalism in Hollywood mode films. Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*[260] provides a different perspective in the form of a more conventional melodrama that, however, is transformed into a social commentary largely through his non-Hollywood approach to the arrangement of characters in each scene and the role of the camera as a commentator on events. A more recent example of Brechtian alienation is provided by Haneke's *Funny Games*, which is ostensibly a Hollywood mode horror genre film (in fact a sub-genre known as 'home invasion' horror). In this case, however, the alienating device is the film itself. Haneke forces the audience to reflect on their obsession with horror by *showing* a horror film while removing, at each pertinent point, their expectations (created by the Hollywood conventions for horror films) of what trajectory a horror film should follow, denying them the gratification of resolution and redemption that would otherwise make the horror acceptable, while daring them to continue to watch.[261]

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[258] *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (Sergei Eisenstein, dir., Sovkino, 1928).

[259] Gunning, 'Cinema of Attraction[s],' 384.

[260] *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, dir., Filmverlag der Autoren, Tango Film, 1974).

[261] In a sense, therefore, the spectator who leaves the film early has understood and learned from its message.

Chapter 3: Time Frames: A Film-Theatre Model for the Duration Image in an Open Frame

3.1 Framing the analysis

In contrast to the case studies in chapters 4 and 5, which relate to specific theatre techniques based on the actor-director relationship, this chapter explores aspects of theatre practice that are a function largely of the configuration of the theatre space and the audience's relationship to it. As the previous chapter argued, a defining characteristic of theatre is its power to allow for a 'sustained gaze where we can move slowly from looking to seeing.'[262] Two structures that make this experience possible are the open 'frame' of the theatre stage[263] (which is compared in this chapter to the closed frame of Hollywood mode films) and the presentation of a play's subject matter within this frame over extended periods of time (compared to continuity editing). The ability of an audience to contemplate a scene and its various components over an extended period is made possible by the open frame.

The film-theatre practice discussed in this chapter, therefore, is referred to as the *duration image within an open frame*. This section of the chapter uses the methodology of film-theatre to understand the scope and effectiveness of the duration image in theatre as a means of producing a dialectical response in the spectator, to compare it with the closed frame of the Hollywood mode, and to

[262] Kulick, *How Greek Tragedy Works*, 120–21. See supra, section 2.2.

[263] The word 'stage' is not restricted to the traditional proscenium stage but would include other configurations, such as Shakespearean thrust and in the round. For purposes of film-theatre analysis, the physical configuration of the stage is less important than how it functions as an 'open' space which the audience can view relatively freely without direction. In this context, therefore, the meanings of 'stage' and 'performance' are relatively fluid, provided they fulfil this function. A stage and a performance could therefore include even site-specific productions.

examine how it can be adapted for film. The following section demonstrates the evolution of the duration image from the silent film period through to the present day, by reference to the effects of technical innovations on the development of long shots in depth and extended single setup shots, leading to the maturity of the duration image during the Italian neorealist period. These two opening sections provide the background and context for the film-theatre analysis of three film case studies that use different forms of temporality to represent social, domestic, and political themes.

The term 'open frame' as applied to theatre practice is used as a point of reference and comparison in this chapter rather than an attempt to provide a prescriptive definition of the nature of theatre performances. Its primary function is to provide a basis for comparison between how a theatre performance is experienced by an audience and the corresponding effect of the 'closed frame' world of Hollywood mode films. Of course, arguments can be made that conventional configurations of a stage at least are not 'open' at all: in a literal sense, for example, the proscenium stage is enclosed by a proscenium arch, the wings, and the backstage area. For that matter, in many cases the 'fourth wall' creates a window separating the world of the play and the world of the audience, as does the space above the stage used for lights and various other technical devices. Indeed, at first blush, it may even appear paradoxical or fanciful to refer to this kind of stage as an open frame and Hollywood mode films as closed. While the performance space is enclosed, the frame in Hollywood mode films is constantly moving through time and space.[264] However, this approach confuses the *physical* representation of framing on stage and in film

[264] Described by Charlie Keil as 'the endlessly fluid and mobile viewer floating on the periphery of the ongoing action.' Keil, 'All the Frame's a Stage,' in Ackerman and Puchner, *Against Theatre*, 79.

with its aesthetic effect on the viewer and its relationship with narrative. For purposes of the film-theatre analysis in this chapter, the principal characteristic of an open frame, both in film and on stage, is its capacity to allow the viewer to have a dialectical response to the subject. Its 'openness' is not a function of how physically constrained the theatre space is or to how many places and times a film can transport the viewer; it is a function of the degree of *choice* the viewer has concerning their response to the narrative. A stage may be physically constrained while giving the viewer the opportunity to contemplate the world beyond (or, in Gerald Mast's words, to 'broach' the frame[265]), and by contrast a closed frame film may lead the viewer through many times and locations while giving them little or no choice to contemplate the frame itself or what lies beyond the frame.

In other words, the concept of the open frame in this chapter is defined not by the formal elements of framing – whether for film or theatre – but by a film's treatment of the frame's narratology. The films examined in this chapter are narratologically open, while, in general, Hollywood mode films are narratologically closed. As Leo Braudy explains, in a closed film the world of the film is the only thing that exists: 'everything within it has its place in the plot of the film – every object, every character, every gesture, every action.' By comparison, in an open film:

> the world of the film is a momentary frame around an ongoing reality. The objects and the characters in the film existed before the camera focused on them and they will exist after the film is over. They achieve their significance or interest within the story of the film, but, unlike the objects and the people in a closed film, the story of the open film does not exhaust the meaning of what it contains.[266]

[265] Gerald Mast, 'On Framing,' *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 1 (1984): 84.

[266] Braudy, *World in a Frame*, 44–51. Braudy uses the terms 'closed film' and 'open film' rather than open and closed frames. However, his discussion of these terms makes it clear that he is analysing how images in the two respective types of film are presented in each scene or shot.

These characteristics of the open frame are possible precisely because the meaning within the frame is not subordinate to the realisation of the film narrative's dramatic goal. The audience is invited into the world as staged by the frame and can select what objects, characters, and actions to view within it. In this sense, the open frame resembles the portrayal of events on a stage and is therefore appropriately included in the thesis as a film-theatre technique. As with the theatre, the director of an open frame film has found a space within which to tell their story, while the director of the closed frame film defines a limited space whose primary purpose is to provide a link in the chain of events covered by the film's narrative.[267] There are other similarities with the presentation of events on stage. For example, although the stage has physical boundaries, there is usually the perception of a world beyond the physical confines of the stage – a world from which characters often mysteriously materialise and into which they disappear during a play.[268]

The characteristic of the open frame that most clearly distinguishes it from the closed frame of the Hollywood mode is the role of duration within the frame. In Hollywood mode films, the narrative is produced largely through the *linking* of frames in a seamless and continuous progression of action from one shot to another. While obviously each frame or shot contains important narrative information, the relevance of that information is determined by the link between the frame of one shot and the preceding or succeeding frame, referred to in this chapter as the narrative and causal

[267] Ibid. Braudy notes that 'the open director is more interested in the possibilities of the filmmaking situation itself and the discoveries that can be made in it. Renoir's world, for example, contains many unobtrusive details that may or may not turn out to be relevant to his story. … Renoir's camera therefore explores the context of the scene, instead of ordering it.' Ibid., 48.

[268] As Braudy observes, with reference to the work of Antonioni, the open frame has similar qualities. In *L'Avventura* (Michelangelo Antonio, dir., Cino del Duca, 1960), for example, 'characters are constantly walking into the frame, undercutting any belief that the scene focused on is the only possible reality, even for the moment. … Like Renoir, Antonioni places his frames inside the visual field instead of identifying them with it.' Ibid., 51.

logic of the cut. The information contained within the frame is intended to be used solely to serve the dramatic logic of the scene.[269] In other words, the frame in a Hollywood mode film presents an image whose function and meaning are derived primarily from the movement between frames of the character (mainly) or the specific subject (such as a car in a car chase).

Consequently, duration in a Hollywood film exists solely to serve the narrative importance of events from one frame to the next and the amount of time taken to move from one 'now point' to the next (in Aristotelian terms).[270] In this approach to the frame, 'time depends on movement.'[271] The purpose of the frame – and the logic of the cut from frame to frame – is to induce the spectator to identify with the protagonist by becoming immersed in their actions and the motivation that drives them from scene to scene. Duration merely serves as a necessary condition of movement or action within the frame (or in some cases objects when they are the principal narrative content of a scene). In most Hollywood films, little screen time is needed for information that is not strictly relevant to the narrative, except to the extent that it is used to provide a stylistic background for the film. Similarly, the composition and organisation of shots in a closed frame film and the relationship of shots for any scene reflect this treatment of narrative and duration. Aesthetic decisions, such as the size of shots (wide, closeup, medium), lighting,

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[269] Deleuze observes that films that privilege montage over the image itself have a sort of reality, but this is 'a functional reality, strictly determined by the demands of the situation, even if those demands were as much poetic as dramatic.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 6.

[270] Simon Critchley, 'Being and Time, Part 8: Temporality,' *The Guardian*, 27 July, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/05/heidegger-philosophy. According to the Aristotelian model, time is presented as 'a uniform, linear and infinite series of "now points" … the future is the not-yet-now, the past is the no-longer-now, and the present is the now that flows from future to past at each passing moment.' Ibid. See also, Ursula Coope, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10–14* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[271] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 35.

cinematographic choices, and types of shot (tracking, panning, shot by shot, coverage) as well as the corresponding continuity editing that connects the shots all serve the function of absorbing the spectator in the action. Duration is relevant only to the extent that it is strictly necessary for this operation.

By contrast, in open frame films, action within the frame is subordinate to duration. As Deleuze explains:

> 'time is out of joint': it is off the hinges assigned to it by behaviour in the world, but also by movements of world. It is no longer time that depends on movement: it is aberrant movement that depends on time. The relation, *sensory-motor situation – indirect image of time* is replaced by a non-localizable relation, *pure optical and sound situation – direct time-image.*[272]

In a sense, duration is the subject of the frame. It follows that the form, structure, and composition of the open frame, as well as the logic of the cut from frame to frame, are markedly different from closed frame films. What distinguishes the open frame's treatment of the duration image is the way in which characters within the frame *experience* time in the form of different types of temporalities and, consequently, how the spectator receives and responds to this form of framing. As Kristin Thompson observes, the typical Hollywood film 'strives to minimize excess by a thorough-going motivation. Other films outside this tradition do not always try to provide an apparent motivation for everything in the film, and thus they leave their potentially excessive elements more noticeable.'[273]

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[272] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi. Deleuze continues, 'time ceases to be derived from the movement, it appears in itself and itself gives rise to *false movements*.' Ibid. Similarly, Tarkovsky talks of 'time pressure' in the open frame: 'The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm ... Rhythm is not determined by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them.' Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 117.

[273] Thompson, 'Concept of Cinematic Excess,' 54–55.

3.2 Adapting the open frame for the cinema

The second step in this chapter's analysis is determining how the qualities and aesthetic effects of theatre's open frame can be adapted for film. In this context, it is important to understand that the objective of film-theatre is not simply to locate film techniques that *replicate* the position of an audience viewing a stage play. There are certainly some precedents for such an approach, for example in the early forms of silent film made according to the 'primitive mode' (discussed in chapter 1), filmed stage productions (such as 'National Theatre Live'), and even single setup films (such as *1917* and *Victoria*). Each of these approaches would arguably be closer, morphologically, to the open frame of a theatre performance than any of the three films selected as case studies in this chapter. Ozu, for example, typically makes full use of a 360-degree axis to cover his subjects, cutting from one perspective to a completely different one to convey all the necessary perspectives of a scene. These edits of the duration image place the spectator in a privileged viewpoint that would simply be impossible for a theatre audience. Antonioni liberally uses fluid camera movements in his films, often providing the camera with its own 'opinion' on the subject matter.[274] And in *Hunger*, Steve McQueen uses a montage of short clips to 'paint' a portrait of the prison guard at the start of his day. More seriously, it may be argued, the abundant technological and aesthetic possibilities of film have provided these filmmakers the ability to create an *experience* of duration that is unique to film. While it is possible to imagine ways in which theatre could represent the duration

[274] An example is the closing shot of *La Notte*, in which the camera turns its back on the lovers and 'walks' away. Gilberto Perez notes: 'In his films of the fifties Antonioni set in motion a technique of long takes, with few cuts and fewer close-ups, his camera fluidly moving about, framing and continually reframing, the space off-screen activated, the evolving viewing point as an autonomous, searching consciousness.' Gilberto Perez, 'The Point of View of a Stranger: An Essay on Antonioni's "Eclipse,"' *Hudson Review* 44, no. 2 (1991): 245.

images at the end of *L'Eclisse*, for example, Antonioni's solution owes its efficacy more obviously to cinematic techniques than those of the stage.

However, closer examination of the nature of theatre and what distinguishes it from the Hollywood mode of film demonstrates that the forms of duration image examined in this chapter are properly considered film-theatre. The 'theatre' of film-theatre is not a reference to the physical appearance of events on stage but rather to the effect a stage performance has on a spectator. The significance of the duration image within the open frame to film-theatre, therefore, is no more dependent on a strict morphological equivalence with theatre techniques than, say, Godard's jump cuts in *Breathless* or extended dolly shots in *Weekend* are to a direct correspondence with specific techniques that Brecht used in his theatre work. What is important for purposes of this discussion of the *adaptation* of the duration image within the open frame from theatre to film is whether the open frame, in Deleuze's words, puts the viewer 'in contact with thought'[275] or whether, on the contrary, its principal function is merely to provide another stylistic device to reinforce a Hollywood mode film's absorption effect.

The use of the duration image within the open frame has undergone a continuing evolution since the early stage of film history before 1907. As chapter 2 explained, before the advent of continuity editing and advanced cinematographic techniques and technology, films were shot and presented in a mode that physically replicated a theatre performance in the sense that the spectator was placed in a position analogous to the viewpoint of a theatre audience. However, even as early as 1903 in the film *The Great Train Robbery*, filmmakers had begun to understand the

[275] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Continuum, 2005), 1.

cinematic potential of the open frame.[276] While the film has been more frequently cited as an early example of editing by connecting related sequences in the form of a story, Mast concludes that it was rather the director Edwin S. Porter's use of framing in the outdoor shots that constituted a 'masterful realization of the meaning and effects that a film frame can itself generate.'[277] One scene, in particular, demonstrates a concise and effective use of the open frame. The robbers are seen hiding behind a water tower while the train stops to take on water. While the train's drivers are at work, the robbers sneak aboard the train (Fig. 1). At first, the shot looks like a mistake since the main characters 'occupy so little of the shot's space, almost falling out of the frame at its left and bottom, dwarfed by the train, the wooden structure, the waterspout, and even the unimportant trainman who handles it.'[278] However, as Mast explains, the composition and organisation of the shot is critical to answering an important narrative question: how could the robbers sneak aboard the train without being noticed? The answer that the shot provides, 'merely by its use of the frame,' is that the train employees are too busy going about their work to notice the robbers, who are out of sight.[279]

[276] *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, dir., Edison Manufacturing Company, 1903).

[277] Mast, 'On Framing,' 88.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

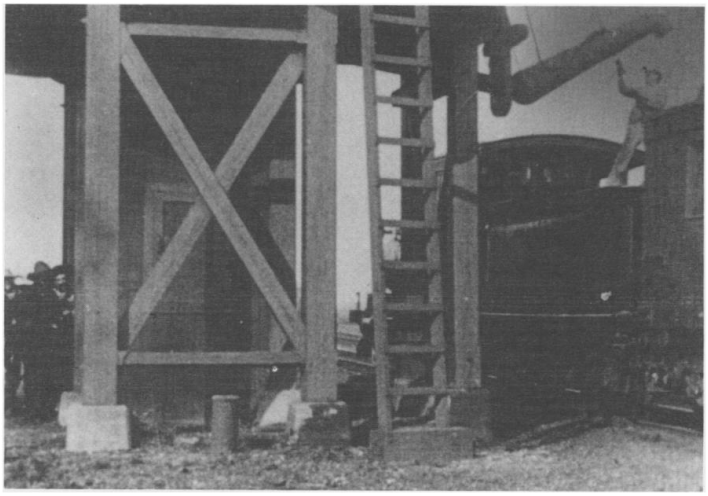


Figure 1 The Great Train Robbery

The shot is significant, first because it effectively uses the space, the dimensions, and the frame itself to convey critical narrative information; and second, because it also provides an eloquent demonstration of the use of deep focus to present a number of 'planes' of action (from the train that arrives on screen right to the engineer hauling the water spout over the tender and the robbers in hiding in two further 'depths,' one group behind the ladder and another at the back, screen left). Thirdly, this shot introduces the idea of the open frame, meaning in this sense a frame that suggests a world beyond the shot. The shot is, of course, self-contained, but both the robbers and the train suggest action, objects, or places outside the frame. In summary, this shot is an early example of theatrical framing, but one which also suggests the potential for future aesthetic developments of the open frame through cinematic resources such as depth of field. In response to the question of why this shot hasn't received serious discussion before, Mast concludes that 'because historians and theorists have been insistent on the discovery of editing as the essence of cinema art,

they simply have chosen not to pay attention to the careful conception that might underlie the framing of an early cinema shot.'[280]

The potential of the open frame as a narrative device was eclipsed by the desire of filmmakers, production companies, and theorists to claim for the new medium the primacy of a separate art form, leading them to distance themselves as much as possible from anything that smacked of theatricality and to embrace the aesthetic opportunities offered by continuity editing.[281] But filmmakers continued to use the open frame throughout the silent movie period. Murnau's *Sunrise* (1927), for example, exhibits highly sophisticated use of the long shot in depth over relatively sustained periods of time and covering large spaces (Fig. 2).



Figure 2 Sunrise

[280] Ibid., 89. To some extent, the same prejudice against the 'theatrical mentality' that Mast describes in his essay explains the failure to consider the open frame as a serious aesthetic alternative to the Hollywood mode prior to Orson Welles and the Italian neorealist movement. Even Bazin, for example, comparing the framing of Welles and Wyler with films made in 1910, concludes that the framing in a 1910 film 'is intended to all intents and purposes, as a substitute for the missing fourth wall of the theatrical stage, or at least in exterior shots, for the best vantage point to view the action.' Bazin, *What Is Cinema?Vol. 1,* 34.

[281] Of course, the claim for film as a new art form based on the effects of continuity editing was not simply a matter of status or artistic recognition. The use of continuity editing in films that had a strong narrative content became the new gold standard for marketing and sales, a standard which, with its concomitant rules and conventions, led to the rise and ultimate hegemony of the Hollywood film industry.

In other words, even before the 1930s, several directors were familiar with the long shot in depth as a mode of presenting a narrative, and many of them, including Murnau, Dreyer, and Von Stroheim, had developed sophisticated approaches to blocking the action within the frame – creating, in effect, a form of montage within the frame.

After the advent of synchronised sound in 1927 with the production of *The Jazz Singer*, the open frame came into its own. As Bazin explains, in open frame films (such as *Greed* by Von Stroheim), in which 'the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality but what it reveals of it,'[282] the absence of sound was a drawback.[283] During the decade from 1936 to 1946, the potential of the open frame evolved in a variety of directions through the works of a number of directors, including, in particular, Orson Welles, Howard Hawks, and William Wyler. Paradoxically, just as the innovations of the early period of silent film – including close-up photography, the moving camera, and continuity editing – had helped to precipitate cinema's separation from the theatre at that time, the possibilities of the open frame were facilitated by technical innovations from the 1930s and 1940s, including lightweight cameras, faster lenses that allowed interior deep focus cinematography, fast panchromatic film, and powerful incandescent lights that could permit the high f-stops which deep focus photography required. Among other things, these innovations helped filmmakers to develop a film style that aligned most obviously with theatre.[284] However, even with the use of sound and these advanced

[282] Bazin, *What Is Cinema?Vol.* 1, 28.

[283] '*Greed*, like Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc*, is already virtually a talking film. The moment that you cease to maintain that montage and the plastic composition of the image are the very essence of the language of cinema, sound is no longer the aesthetic crevasse dividing two radically different aspects of the seventh art.' Ibid.

[284] Keil in Ackerman and Puchner, *Against Theatre*, 82.

techniques of cinematography to create extensive long shots in depth, several films of this period still resulted in an absorption effect. While the use of the long shot in depth (for example, in Welles's *Citizen Kane*, Hawks's *Monkey Business* (1952),[285] and Renoir's *Rules of the Game*) tended to create a more 'ambiguous' frame that encouraged the viewer to exercise their judgment, many of the characteristics of the Hollywood mode remained, including audience identification with a strong central character; focus on plot points and action, rather than temporalities; and psychological motivation.

The work of the Italian neorealist directors during the same period brought about a more radical transformation of the open frame that challenged the fundamental aesthetics of the Hollywood mode. As Deleuze describes it, the effect of these films 'was to prevent perception being extended into action *in order to put it in contact with thought*, and gradually was to subordinate the image to the demands of new signs which would take it beyond movement.'[286] Rossellini's *Paisà* suggests something closer to a documentary film than a work of narrative fiction. It is divided into six short stories, only loosely connected with one another, relating to the liberation of Italy by allied forces during the Second World War. A succession of long shots allows the viewer to consider the consequences of war on different communities. The logic of the cut linking these images is not to create a dramatic narrative. Rather, as Bazin explains, each frame is an 'image fact,' and the combination of image facts through editing is like stones in a river.[287] The mind has

[285] *Monkey Business* (Howard Hawks, dir., 20th Century Fox, 1952).

[286] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 1 (emphasis added).

[287] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema? Volume II*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971): 1–16.

to leap from one event to another as one leaps from stone to stone in crossing a river.[288] And because there is no closure to these images, no resolution is suggested. The frame is truly 'open' in the sense that the borders of the frame suggest a world and events beyond the images shown on the screen. These effects are demonstrated in the closing images of the film (Figs. 3 and 4) as a series of elliptical, loosely connected shots that frame scenes along the Po delta. In each of them the relative position of sea and sky is more or less the same, and no particular prominence is given to any object or event on the screen. All have equal importance.



Figure 3 Paisà



Figure 4 Paisà

3.3 Case studies: the open frame under the microscope

This section examines the open frame as a film-theatre technique through a group of films spanning a period of over 70 years – Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), Antonioni's

[288] As Deleuze wrote, paraphrasing Bazin, this form of reality is 'said to be dispersive, elliptical, errant or wavering, working in blocs, with deliberately weak connections and floating events.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 1.

L'Eclisse (1962), and Steve McQueen's *Hunger* (2008). While there are major differences between these films in style and subject matter, each of them privileges the use of the duration image within the open frame. And in each film the duration image is used to convey a conflict between one form or other of mental or physical restraint, the desire to escape, and the consequences of such an escape. In *Late Spring*, this conflict is played out in a predominantly domestic setting which revolves around the relationship between a daughter and her widowed father. In *L'Eclisse*, the principal characters are anaesthetised by material objects; they seek escape for a form of personal freedom and healthy relationships, but the reification of objects and the demands of a material commercial world restrain them. And in *Hunger*, the confinement is physical – the setting is a prison in Northern Ireland – but the freedom that the prisoners seek is not from the prison walls but from political oppression. Each film relies on various kinds of temporality to present these themes. Aristotelian 'now' or clock time is limited in these films to presenting the few narrative events necessary to move the story forward. And for this purpose, a limited amount of continuity editing is required. But beyond these necessary plot points, the three films use various approaches to the remaining (i.e., non-narrative) information (visual and sonic) contained within the frame.

As I have noted earlier in this chapter, there are various theoretical approaches to analysing non-narrative information contained within the film frame. For example, Kristin Thompson discusses non-narrative time by reference to the concept of 'cinematic excess,' which Michael Moseley (referring specifically to Antonioni) describes as 'dead time.'[289] While each of these approaches provides a valuable

[289] Michael Josiah Mosely, 'Another Look at Heideggerian Cinema: Cinematic Excess, Antonioni's Dead Time and the Film-Photographic Image as Copy', *Film-Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2018): 364–83. Tarkovsky focuses on the nature of the image within the duration frame, emphasizing the 'rhythm'

perspective for exploring the aesthetic possibilities of framing, my objective in this chapter is to explore, through the three case studies, how various forms of temporality are used to represent each film's underlying social, domestic, and political themes, and how these forms of temporality are represented by the open frame. By contrast with Thompson's use of 'cinematic excess' as a basis for examining the passage of non-narrative time in these films, I propose as a starting point Heidegger's distinction in *Being and Time* between 'world time' and 'originary time.'[290] These temporalities provide an analytical approach for examining the scope, purpose, and effect of the duration image in the three films analysed below. 'World time' refers to the *worldly content* of spans of social time that the film's characters experience in their daily lives.[291] It refers to normatively ordered or 'social' time, such as the time to eat breakfast, to go to work, to relax. Such times are normative because they prescribe how and when time should be employed and how it should not. *Late Spring,* for example, features several scenes of domestic life that simply happen *in time* without any direct narratological significance. They simply *are*, in the sense that they are expanses of social time experienced by the characters,

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and 'pressure' of time within each shot. 'The distinctive time running through the shots makes the rhythm...rhythm is not determined by the length of the edited pieces, but by the pressure of the time that runs through them.' Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 117.

[290] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Joan Stambaugh (translator), and Dennis J. Schmidt (writer of supplementary material), SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

[291] 'World-time is distinguished from ordinary conceptual time in the following way. Whereas we ordinarily think of time as the indifferent and mechanical passage or flow of pure nows, running along a continuous axis, albeit in two antithetical directions—one extending behind me into a distant and ever-receding past, and the other into an infinite future which ultimately escapes me—with world-time we are dealing with time as we concretely possess and experience it.' Tony Fisher, 'Heidegger's Generative Thesis,' *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (September 2010): 367, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2009.00354.x.

although they are relevant to the narrative and provide the basis for the viewer to contemplate Ozu's themes about family life.[292]

Heidegger's concept of originary time provides a perspective for examining another form of the duration image in the three films. 'Originary time' describes an existential time in which a person projects themself into the future in order to 'be' – it 'expresses' their existence. It is a temporal manifold that can be present in any moment of sequential time. In other words, it is a mode of time where the future, past, and present are all there at every given moment. In each of the three films, moments of originary time are introduced as a contrast or alternative to the facticity of social and domestic conditions experienced by the characters. While the world time events underscore the sense that the characters are confined by their circumstances (domestic, social, or political), these moments of originary time offer a possibility of release for them by representing an existential time embodying a person's lived and combined past, present, and future that allows the characters to contemplate escape.

3.3.1 *The domestic frame: Family temporalities in Late Spring*

There are several, often disparate, theories regarding Ozu's film style. For example, while Thompson and Bordwell suggest Ozu's style is purely modernist, functioning in spite of narrative concerns,[293] Robin Wood argues that Ozu's techniques are crucial to our understanding of narrative and characters, working 'to guide our

[292] For Deleuze, this seems to equate to what he describes as 'a little time in a pure state.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi (recalling but not citing Proust).

[293] Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, 'Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu,' *Screen* 17, no. 2 (1976): 41–73.

concentration firmly upon them and define a particular way of regarding them.'[294] Other writers have Orientalised Ozu's style.[295] The central concern of this case study, however, is not to argue for any all-encompassing theory of Ozu's style but to examine how he works with different forms of temporality within the open frame to describe social and domestic themes relating to family, change, and loss.

Late Spring was made in 1949 and depicts the circumstances of a family dealing with the aftermath of the war. There are some relatively oblique references to certain painful conditions that Noriko, the main character, seems to have experienced during the war, but Ozu skims over these events (as he does with other narratological information), using them only to shine a light on certain aspects of Noriko's character without overloading them with dramatic significance. The film's narrative relates primarily to the relationship of the 27-year-old Noriko with her father, Somiya, and his attempts to steer Noriko towards marriage. Noriko is reluctant to surrender her independence and the company of her father. The film's 'plot' is relatively simple: Somiya tricks Noriko into believing that he is about to take a second wife, forcing Noriko to relent and marry. Various other characters, such as Noriko's aunt, who plays the role of matchmaker, and friends and associates of

[294] Robin Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 108.

[295] Donald Richie claims that Ozu was the most 'Japanese' of directors – pointing to a resemblance with sumi-e ink drawings and waka poetry to illustrate his 'real Japanese flavour' – whose sole subject was the 'Japanese family in dissolution.' Donald Richie, *OZU*, 8th print (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xiii, 1. Similarly, Paul Schrader's description of Ozu's 'transcendental' style argues for the 'unmistakable' influence of Zen philosophy, such that Ozu's 'personality, like that of his characters, merges with an enveloping sense of mono no aware [the pathos of things], and... becomes undistinguishable from it.' Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 38. Joshua Taylor provides a useful summary of the different attempts to document Ozu's style in his article, Joshua J. Taylor, 'Ozu's Frames: Form and Narrative in Late Spring,' *MOVIE: A Journal of Film Criticism*, no. 9 (2020): 38.

Somiya and Noriko, appear throughout the film, but their effect on the overall narrative is minimal.

Ozu repeatedly eschews any attempt to make a melodrama out of the situation, never allowing the viewer to become swept away by Noriko's psychological motivation or her father's attempts to manipulate her. Although there are fleeting suggestions in the film of a failed romance and an arranged marriage, which would provide ample material for a conventional drama, Ozu dismisses them all; he is more interested in how the domestic circumstances affect each of the characters, creating tensions between stability and change. He achieves this result through an intrinsic relationship between narrative structure and his own unique use of duration within the open frame.

His approach to narrative is characterised by frequent use of ellipsis, hindering the viewer's psychological attachment to characters and events at nearly every point in the film that would normally signal a dramatic narrative development or complication. For example, in one scene Noriko is enjoying a day out with her father's assistant, Hatori, but the film offers no context or background for this moment or any indication that either of the two are romantically connected. And when Somiya suggests that Hatori might be a suitable partner for Noriko, she laughs, pointing out that (as she knew before) Hatori is already engaged. What might have been a major dramatic incident is therefore no more than an episode in the film that provides more context to Noriko's dilemma. Similarly, although there are numerous references to Noriko's fiancé, he is never seen at any point in the film. Again, Ozu is not interested in a 'Hollywood ending' or resolution (good or bad). By eliminating dramatic beats, complications, and resolutions that are essential to conventional films, Ozu suggests that Noriko's marriage is inevitable, while redirecting the

viewer's attention to the *effect* that this change will have on Noriko and her father. The film's subject is about change, the pain of letting go of an established way of life coupled with the need to move on.[296] And the function of the open frame in the film is to direct the viewer's attention not to major dramatic events but to allow the viewer to experience and reflect upon the effect of changes on the domestic and interior life of the characters.[297]

Ozu establishes the effect of these changes by the selective use of two forms of temporality within the open frame. The everyday life of Noriko and Somiya is portrayed in a series of loosely connected spans of world time. In these scenes (examined in more detail below), Ozu meticulously portrays not only the 'world temporality' of these spans but also their *habitus* within the social, domestic, and traditional environment inhabited by Noriko and Somiya.[298] World time is used, in other words, not only to show how their lives are ordered in a normative sense by a series of discrete and almost regimented tasks, procedures, and rituals (again, domestic and social) – such as the time to eat, to make tea, to wash clothes – but that these normative times conform to the particular world, time, and location in which they live.

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[296] As Dennis Konshak points out, in a Hollywood film 'usually the narrative devours the physical space surrounding it, using space only to further its own ends.' By contrast, 'the crucial question in considering Ozu is how his space, freed from the narrative and thereby autonomous, functions within the filmic discourse.' Dennis J. Konshak, 'Space and Narrative in "Tokyo Story,"' *Film Criticism* 4, no. 3 (1980): 31–40, at 32.

[297] Ozu commented that 'Pictures with obvious plots bore me now. Naturally, a film must have some kind of structure, or else it is not a film, but I feel that a picture isn't good if it has too much drama.' Quoted in Donald Richie, 'The Later Films of Yasujiro Ozu,' *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1959): 18–25.

[298] *Habitus* refers here to Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of how individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. These dispositions are usually shared by people with similar backgrounds (such as social class, religion, nationality, education, and profession). The *habitus* represents the way group culture and personal history shape the body and the mind; as a result, it shapes the present social actions of an individual. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (R. Nice, Trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Ozu's principal aesthetic means to convey this form of temporality is 'interiority,' which is a function both of the physical location of the scenes and their composition. Nearly all the world time scenes or sequences occur indoors (in Noriko's home, or the homes of friends or relatives). The principal elements of Ozu's composition of these interiors include the frame within a frame, the positioning of his camera at 'tatami' level (representing the eye level of a person kneeling on a tatami mat) and the axis along which the camera is placed, the way in which characters enter and leave the frame, and the logic of the cut. Throughout the film, Ozu repeatedly uses parts of the mise-en-scène (such as doorways, furniture, and shoji screens) and sometimes other characters within the frame to further frame the scenes. [299]

This aesthetic is demonstrated by the opening scene of the film, the tea ceremony where Noriko makes her first appearance. The guests at the ceremony are viewed initially from a distance along a corridor, in which the horizontal slats on the screen doors direct the viewer's attention to the ceremony at the far end. The entrance to the room where the ceremony takes place frames the women gathered for the ceremony, and this is further enhanced by vertical poles and objects on the floor (Fig. 5). The setting and the composition of this and the following shots (in which the camera is repositioned to provide a side view of Noriko and her aunt) accentuate the temporality of the opening scene. It has little or no direct narratological relevance – it is simply a span of time in which more or less nothing happens. Even the dialogue contributes to the temporality of the scene. The discussion between Noriko and her aunt mainly revolves around mundane subjects such as Somiya's trousers and

[299] As Joshua Taylor has observed, the effect of these 'internal frames' is to 'focus our gaze inwards, away from the limits of the frame that border the world beyond. As such, the film's internal frames, in relation to the frame of the image, diminish our sense of off-screen space, as characters so frequently emerge from within, rather than breaking through the boundaries of, the image.' Taylor, 'Ozu's Frames,' 40.

collars. Ozu seems to be asking the audience to contemplate the setting and what happens within the frame and during the time span traversed by the frame.



Figure 5 Late Spring

Even some of the outdoor scenes follow the same aesthetic of interiority. For example, the scene on a Tokyo Street where Noriko meets her father's friend is heavily framed by a concrete wall and a shop window, leaving a relatively small space for the arrival of Noriko (Fig. 6). Again, there is no suggestion of off-screen space or any attempt to break the internal frame created by these structures.



Figure 6 Late Spring

At this point – and before examining other scenes in more detail – it may be worth pausing to consider some possible definitional concerns. If the aesthetic of these and other world time scenes in the film is interiority, there is a question of why we then refer to the aesthetic of these duration images as the 'open' frame. The answer lies in the nature of the open frame. At one level (as we shall see, for example, with the films of Antonioni), the open frame is constantly referencing or even showing a world beyond the frame. But the open frame in *Late Spring* relates not just to the formal qualities of the frame but to its *narratological* openness, in the sense that each of the duration images Ozu creates suggests a *possibility* of a world and life for Noriko beyond the domestic world represented by the frame – in contrast to the Hollywood mode 'cut,' which is narratologically 'closed.' The fundamental quality of Ozu's open 'interior' framing of the duration image is its relationship with the viewer. The subject *is* the frame, the passage of time within it and whatever else it discloses (what Tarkovsky describes as the 'rhythm' of time within the frame), not its link as a piece of 'now' time with the next frame in the narrative.

This analysis of Ozu's open frame introduces the dialectic in *Late Spring* between the two principal forms of temporality – world time and originary time. Ozu repeatedly balances the normative temporality of the 'interiority' images of world time with moments of escape, contemplation, or meditation, sometimes in spaces that often have no clear point of reference or even, in some cases, connection with other scenes and spaces. In these spaces, the characters seem – momentarily, at least – released from the narrative function of now time and the normative character of world time functions and are able to experience originary time. As Critchley observes, 'for human beings, time comes to an end with our death. Therefore, if we want to understand what it means to be an authentic human being, then it is essential that we constantly project our lives onto the horizon of our death' (referred to by Heidegger as 'being-toward-death'). He adds, 'if our being is finite, then an authentic human life can only be found by confronting finitude and trying to make a meaning out of the fact of our death.'[300] Learning to live is, in other words, learning the art of dying or, stated another way, learning that we are time and that time is finite. In moments of originary time, the characters contemplate past, present, and future to assess their place in time and attitude to their lives and prospective deaths. In so doing, they can assess the significance that they attach in their lives to world time spans. I shall illustrate this point later by reference to the famous 'vase scene' near the end of the film, but first I propose to examine two scenes – one featuring elements of originary temporality and the other a multiplicity of loosely connected interior world time events. What is remarkable about both of these scenes or sequences is an almost complete absence of narrative signposts for the spectator.

[300] Simon Critchley, 'Being and Time Part 6: Death', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jul/13/heidegger-being-time.

In the first sequence we see Noriko apparently released from the domestic interiors that shape her life. Without any narrative explanation, she is shown outdoors, on a cycling trip with Hattori, her father's assistant. This sequence is markedly different from the interior shots. Noriko is not confined by the frame within the frame; when she cycles out of the edge of the frame, the camera follows her either by tracking or cutting. The sequence comprises a series of approximately 10-second edits, showing views of Noriko and Hattori from the front, sideways (in a longer shot), and by closeups (Figs. 7–10). The sequence ends with the 'couple' relaxing on a beach. At first glance, the narrative purpose of the sequence (reinforced by glimpses of them smiling at each other and through innuendos in their brief dialogue) seems to be that Noriko and Hattori are romantically involved. However, closer examination shows that this is not the case. First, there is no prelude to this sequence in the prior scenes of the film. Noriko and Hattori only appear together in one scene prior to the bicycle ride and even then do not communicate with each other. And we learn in the next sequence after the bicycle ride that Hattori is already engaged to someone else.

If we analyse the sequence in terms of temporality within the open frame rather than narrative, it appears to provide an alternative perspective on Noriko in contrast to the 'interior' domestic view we encounter in other scenes. The object is decidedly not the relationship between Noriko and Hattori but the *possibilities* of a future for Noriko. In this scene Noriko is seen contemplating a life outside of the home; the temporality appears to be originary time, in the sense that the sequence embraces past, present, and future for Noriko. This is reinforced by some more subtle hints about the new world and way of life that Noriko embraces. In contrast to the traditional Japanese lifestyle, we see her dressed casually; there are Coca Cola and other English language signs along the road; and, in her conversation with Hattori,

she is outspoken and bold. In short, Ozu uses this scene to reveal a possible 'future Noriko.' Similarly, the viewer is provided little direction about the logic of the scene; Ozu presents the sequence as something for the viewer to reflect on and to contrast with the domestic interiority of the scenes that follow.



Figure 7 Late Spring



Figure 8 Late Spring



Figure 9 Late Spring



Figure 10 Late Spring

In the sequence (shortly after the one above) that features Noriko's return from her bicycle ride, Ozu once again rejects any narrative development in favour of a detailed study of Noriko's domestic and social circumstances, but the temporality

and framing of the duration images in this sequence shift the viewer's attention from the future possibilities for Noriko in the preceding sequence to her interior domestic conditions and the daily rituals and tensions that form the *habitus* of her life with Somiya (Figs. 11–14). This *habitus* is presented through a series of seemingly mundane spans of world time tasks and routines (or 'habits') inside her home. The open frame captures these duration images through a combination of typical Ozu techniques. The sequence opens with a tightly constructed frame-within-a-frame. A small area is framed between cupboards and a file drawer as Noriko enters on the right and promptly leaves in the same direction to enter another room. The cut then immediately violates a cardinal 'rule' of screen direction. Continuity of space would normally require her to enter the second room from the left, but the camera is turned away from the 180-degree axis to show her enter from the right.[301]

[301] Ozu's use of a 360-degree space 'frees the spectator from any suture, causing him to continually re-orient himself in relation to the spatial framework of the scene.' Konshak, 'Space and Narrative,' 34. The logic of each cut within the 360-degree axis is to offer the viewer a further understanding of the images rather than to propel them through the dramatic action.



Figure 11 Late Spring



Figure 12 Late Spring



Figure 13 Late Spring



Figure 14 Late Spring

The following sequence of shots provides a series of perspectives on Somiya and Noriko after Somiya returns, again typified by the rigid maintenance of a fixed point of view into which Somiya and Noriko enter and from which they exit. But what is remarkable about these scenes, lasting for nearly five minutes, is not only the technical framing devices that Ozu uses in them but their function. Almost the entire sequence consists of little more than a detailed observation of Somiya and Noriko performing apparently banal household activities – cooking, changing clothes, arranging towels, having dinner. The only potentially 'dramatic' plot point in the

scene is when Noriko mentions her outing with Hatori, prompting Somiya to express a hope that he could be a potential husband for her. This minor dramatic beat, however, almost immediately loses any momentum when Noriko informs Somiya that Hatori is already engaged. The function, therefore, of the sequence of household scenes and the cuts that connect them must be found beyond conventional cause and effect 'suturing.' Surely, it lies in Ozu's desire to demonstrate the conditions of the *habitus* of the social and domestic conditions relating Somiya and Noriko, how their life is carefully balanced by an intricate series of ritual and mundane tasks that they perform in sync with each other. World time temporalities are used to represent each of their domestic activities within the open frame. From the viewer's perspective, these intricately observed spans of time-content reinforce the central conflict in the film – Noriko's love for her father and contentment with domestic life, on the one hand, and the need to move on to live her own life, on the other.

In other parts of the film, Ozu extends the duration image into a series of shots of open spaces or still life subjects, usually devoid of human presence. There are various opinions about the significance of these shots, each of which has some merit.[302] For our purposes, however, these shots provide another example of how Ozu uses originary time to suggest the prospect of a world beyond the confines of Noriko's home and family life. This temporality helps to explain the enigmatic shots of the vase at the hotel in Kyoto where Noriko and Somiya are spending their last holiday together (Figs. 15–17). The vase shots perform two narrative functions: first, they interrupt the two shots of Noriko before and after the first view of the vase, during which her expression changes from contentment to concern. Ozu seems to be

[302] See Taylor, 'Ozu's Frames,' 45–50.

using the vase shot to discourage the viewer from over-dramatising these changes in mood and imposing a conventional Hollywood narrative on them. Second, the vase is also framed by a silhouette of trees reflected through the room's panelling. This suggests that the vase portends Noriko's imminent transition out of the 'frame' of the home into the world beyond. At this moment, Noriko appears to be experiencing originary time, in the sense that, confronted by her own mortality, she has a renewed sense of herself (described by Heidegger as 'authenticity') before returning to the 'factical' and everyday world. Following this moment of authenticity, the film concludes with Noriko's acceptance of a future as a wife and no longer as caretaker for her father.



Figure 15 Late Spring



Figure 16 Late Spring



Figure 17 Late Spring

3.3.2 *Trapped by the frame: The facticity of Antonioni's characters in 'L'Eclisse'*

There are some obvious similarities between *Late Spring* and the second film examined in this chapter, Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*, which was made thirteen years later. On a superficial level, *L'Eclisse* shares Ozu's rejection of the Hollywood film mode. Ostensibly, the film's 'plot' as presented in the opening scene revolves around the breakup of Vittoria and Riccardo; Vittoria's subsequent relationship with a young stockbroker, Piero; and the apparent end of that relationship as well.

Antonioni, like Ozu, is not interested in presenting a conventional love story or melodrama; however, unlike Ozu, Antonioni focuses his attention instead on the material and social conditions that prevent the characters from developing meaningful relationships rather than their domestic conditions. While Ozu examines the effects of change on domestic relationships and how characters learn to adapt to those changes, Antonioni is more concerned with the complete breakdown of those relationships as a result of the 'objectification' of the principal characters. In particular, Antonioni explores the 'facticity' of his characters, the sense that they are trapped by their circumstances, products (and victims) of their environment. There are two aspects to this theme. The first is an existential study of the effect of objects and possessions on the main characters leading to their alienation from one another. The second is concerned with the broader socio-political implications of the reification of human relations. Like Ozu, Antonioni uses duration images and a variety of temporalities to frame these themes, but in a substantially different way. Time in *L'Eclisse* is a kind of presence. While for Ozu duration images mark the domestic *habitus* of his characters, Antonioni presents a sense of time itself (almost as a character in the film) passing within empty, deserted, disconnected spaces to convey the emotional emptiness of his characters.[303]

Antonioni's framing and cinematography convey the sense that the characters are trapped by the conditions of a materialist society, represented by multiple objects, possessions, and economic conditions. In the context of the first, existential, theme, objects both affect the relationships of the characters with one another and represent

[303] 'The characters were objectively emptied: they are suffering less from the absence of another than from themselves.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 8–9.

the de-subjectification or objectification of the characters themselves. As Enzo Paci explains,

> Characters become objects, things, until they eventually disappear. One could say that *L'Eclisse* is the eclipse of the characters and therefore of the subject. This disappearance occurs gradually, through the crescendo of the figural renditions of time and the progressive foregrounding of reification.[304]

The framing in the film's opening scene meticulously establishes the existential role objects play in the relationships of the characters, providing the aesthetic and narrative structure for the treatment of the existential theme for the whole film. The first frame appears to be a complex composition made up solely of objects, including a lamp and books. An indistinct and static white object on the right of the screen, however, is revealed to be Riccardo's arm as the camera pans to the right. But even when his full image is revealed, it is framed by another group of objects, including a fan, another lamp, a marble obelisk, and some pictures. And his movements are strictly limited, continuing to add to the impression that he is just another object. He remains seated, relatively immobile throughout the scene. By contrast, Vittoria seems to be looking for an escape, constantly moving around the room. Like Ozu, Antonioni uses the device of the frame within the frame to illustrate the condition of these characters, though, unlike Ozu, this is not with the object of focusing the viewer's attention on the domestic world of the characters but to demonstrate their emotional isolation from one another. The various 'frames' around Vittoria (the curtains; the picture frame through which she places objects; the windows, which reflect more of her image than the exterior and for that matter actual mirrors) seem to draw Vittoria repeatedly back into the space (Figs. 18–19).

[304] Enzo Paci and Andrea Malaguti, 'A Debate on Antonioni's "L'Eclisse"', *Annali d'Italianistica* 29 (2011): 35–58.



Figure 18 L'Eclisse



Figure 19 L'Eclisse

In these scenes, as in most of the film, the open frame privileges the duration image over narrative. From the beginning, Antonioni repeatedly negates any suggestion of a melodramatic plot about the breakdown of Vittoria and Ricardo's relationship. For example, we learn in the opening moments that the major melodramatic event – their decision to separate – already occurred during the night. And when Riccardo suggests they decide what to do, Vittoria replies, 'I've already decided.' Instead, the scene is presented as an extended span of world time. The viewer's attention is directed not to the dramatic causes and effects of the characters' relationship but to the facticity of their circumstances.

This sense of being trapped follows Vittoria through other venues and relationships, including her affair with Piero and her brief encounters with her mother and the friends in her apartment building. And in each case Antonioni uses the duration image and similar framing techniques. However, as with *Late Spring*, there is a constant tension in *L'Eclisse* between the conditions of everyday, world time in

which Vittoria is trapped and the possibility of a release, represented by originary time, where past, present, and future coalesce. In one scene in the home of her friend Marta, for example, Antonioni playfully and graphically demonstrates Vittoria's desire for release. In a parody of Antonioni's tracking shots, she puts her finger out of the frame of one of Marta's African photographs (Fig. 20). In this way, she is already exploring the possibilities of what lies beyond the frame. In other words, she seems to be discovering that the choice of a specific framing in a photograph necessarily implies the existence of a world beyond the frame.



Figure 20 L'Eclisse

Antonioni also uses temporality to explore the second division of his theme, namely the broader social ontology that affects the characters. In a sense, the first theme relates to *how* objects overwhelm the characters and dehumanise them, depriving them of the ability to relate emotionally to each other. The second theme analyses *why* this could happen by examining the reification of human relations in objectual form.[305] This second reading of the film perhaps departs from a traditional view that sees the modernism of Antonioni's filmmaking as 'signalling the waning of arthouse

[305] See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1972), 83–110.

cinema's infatuation with the film image's indexicality and Antonioni's disinterest in politics. According to this conventional perspective, Antonioni's dynamic images are always moving away from gritty realism towards art-for-art's-sake abstraction.'[306] By contrast, this analysis of framing in *L'Eclisse* suggests a stronger link between Antonioni and the social reality reflected in Italian neorealist cinema. Throughout the film, Antonioni uses the narrative structure, editing, and the open frame to identify and critique various socio-political institutions. In this sense, *L'Eclisse* reflects to some degree the Italian neorealist films that probably influenced Antonioni in his early documentary works.

Examples of this reification of human relations abound in the film, including Piero's obsession with his car that prevents him from sympathising with a thief who died while stealing it and the way in which money motivates every reaction of Vittoria's mother (during the whole course of the film there is never any meaningful or sustained conversation between Vittoria and her mother). But it is the two scenes in the Rome Stock Exchange that provide the most effective examples of both forms of the film's social ontology – personal alienation and the reification of human relations. These sequences – the first covering a successful day on the stock market where fortunes are made; the second, a collapse where they are lost – superficially appear to add a further commentary on the theme of materialism. However, it is also possible to view them as extended studies of Vittoria's existential crisis. Throughout the film Antonioni contrasts the emotional destitution of Vittoria – through duration

[306] Karl Schoonover, in Karl Schoonover and John David Rhodes, 'Rethinking Michelangelo Antonioni's Modernism: A Conversation between Karl Schoonover and John David Rhodes,' University of Minnesota Press (website), accessed 1 September 2022, https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/theme/rethinking-antonioni.

images of world time – with occasional moments in which, as a being-toward-death confronted by her own finitude, she seems to reflect on the meaning of her life.[307]

For this reason, I propose to examine each of the Stock Exchange scenes as the central panel of a triptych of sequences, comprising a multiplicity of what appear to be 'now times' (in the Stock Exchange sequences) 'framed' by originary temporalities featuring Vittoria's contemplation before the events and a kind of revelation after them.

The first Stock Exchange triptych: Before the first stock exchange scene and shortly after her breakup with Riccardo, we see Vittoria in her apartment as she looks out onto a natural setting. Antonioni uses sharp vertical lines formed by the exterior wall of the apartment to separate the subject into two planes. In the first, on the right of the screen, Vittoria stands for an extended period contemplating trees swaying in the wind to the left of the screen. The sense of confinement is intensified by the metal shutter that is partially raised, creating another dimension to the frame, as if Vittoria is in a small, square boxed (Fig. 21). This is one of several scenes in the film in which Vittoria seems dislocated with respect to her past, present, and future and appears to be captured by the frame in an existential condition of angst, detached from the facticity of her social condition. This duration image is almost immediately shattered by the scenes in the Rome Stock Exchange.[308]

[307] Unlike the case of Noriko in *Late Spring*, however, it is less clear in *L'Eclisse* that, as a result of this confrontation, Vittoria returns to the factical world with a renewed sense of herself. The final instance of originary time in the film is ambiguous on this point.

[308] This is one of the few locations in the film that uses a classical Roman setting rather than what Deleuze would consider the 'any-space-whatever' architecture of the EUR district.



Figure 21 L'Eclisse

In both Stock Exchange sequences, Antonioni appears to abandon the duration image in favour of 'now time' narratological events as stocks rocket in the first sequence and crash in the second (resulting in the inevitable extremes of elation and despair by brokers and shareholders in attendance). The framing and editing create the impression of intense melodrama resembling Hollywood stock market films such as *Margin Call* (2011) and *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) as the images cut from one corner of the trading floor and one group of traders and onlookers to another.[309] However, the juxtaposition and aesthetics of the two sequences suggest that Antonioni is wrong-footing us by creating no more than an *impression* of narratological time, while using the frenetic activity of the traders and investors as a commentary on the pointlessness of time in the market. Although each sequence seems to comprise a multiplicity of short 'now time' incidents, in fact nothing happens in a narratological sense. Even the rise and fall of stocks have no direct

[309] *Margin Call* (J.C. Chandor, dir., Myriad Pictures, 2011); *Wolf of Wall Street* (Martin Scorsese, dir., Red Granite, 2013). This sense of melodrama occurring in a series of connected 'now' times is – paradoxically – reinforced when all trading is halted for precisely one minute to pay respects to a trader who has died. As if to underscore the presumed (but misplaced) dramatic tension of the scene, Piero whispers to Vittoria, 'one moment here costs billions.'

connection with the narrative of the rest of the film. The purpose of these scenes must be found elsewhere. Antonioni seems to be inviting the viewer to contemplate the scenes not as events but as spans of time *experienced and observed by Vittoria*. For the traders and onlookers, every minute of the day's trading is a now time event, which is the very definition of reified time, as it conceals the human time on which it depends for its existence. But for Vittoria the experience is something else. In the first sequence (when the stocks rocket), the main 'event' is not what is happening on the Stock Market floor but Vittoria's futile attempts to reach her mother (apparently to explain her separation from Riccardo). Antonioni uses the architecture of the building, the people on the trading floor, and various barriers to repeatedly obstruct Vittoria's attempts to reach her mother. In one shot she is viewed from behind, framed by two traders, her view obscured by other people and columns; and in other shots she is repeatedly trapped by either horizontal barriers, such as fences or gates, or vertical pillars (Figs. 22–24).



Figure 22 L'Eclisse



Figure 23 L'Eclisse

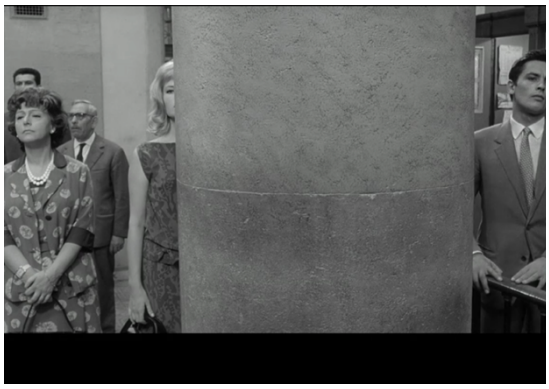


Figure 24 L'Eclisse

The third panel of the first triptych occurs when Vittoria finally catches up with her mother outside the building. This scene demonstrates the effect of the events inside the Stock Exchange on the relationship of Vittoria with her mother, who is too preoccupied with her financial gains and the price of a couple of pears she buys from a street vendor to listen to or even hear what Vittoria has to say. The framing accentuates the emotional detachment of mother and daughter. There is never a direct communication between them in the scene. At first, the mother is presented to the side of Vittoria, and when the subject of Riccardo finally comes up at the end of the conversation, we see her mother from behind and largely off-screen, still

apparently oblivious to Vittoria's need to talk (Fig. 25). Their communication (and, consequently, their relationship) is subordinated to monetary concerns. This exchange is mirrored by part of the closing scene in the second triptych, in which Vittoria's attempts to have a meaningful dialogue with Piero, her mother's broker, are repeatedly interrupted by Piero's preoccupation with business.



Figure 25 L'Eclisse

The second Stock Exchange triptych: The second triptych follows a similar pattern and is preceded by one of the film's few periods of calm – Vittoria's trip to Verona. A number of shots in this sequence occur inside a small light aircraft she is travelling in. Paradoxically, however, although the space is very confined, the framing of Vittoria is more 'open' than many of the other scenes described above. There is a sense of release in this scene as the frames alternate between well-lit closeup shots of Vittoria and images of the clouds. Time in these duration images seems to be the subject of the scene, the passage of pure time in a state of relative bliss, without restraint. Vittoria's mood continues at the airfield café where – this time – she is outside, framed from within the café (in contrast to the first part of the earlier triptych) (Figs. 26–27).



Figure 26 L'Eclisse



Figure 27 L'Eclisse

This mood is abruptly interrupted by the intervention of the second Stock Exchange sequence, introduced by a disturbing frame composed of a set of iron bars and a massive column. The scenes on the trading floor that follow are almost indistinguishable from the first Stock Exchange sequence, except that the outcome is disaster rather than success. Once again Vittoria arrives, apparently seeking to console her mother who has suffered significant losses; as before, she has to traverse a series of obstacles, only to find that her mother doesn't want to see her. As her mother leaves with a group of angry investors (who blame their losses on the Socialists), Vittoria is left alone, emotionally destitute again (Figs. 28–29).



Figure 28 L'Eclisse



Figure 29 L'Eclisse

The third part of the sequence provides another perspective on Vittoria's contemplative state. In this series of shots, we see her shadowing a man who has lost a fortune, following him out of the Stock Exchange into a pharmacy, and then watching over his shoulder as he draws what is later revealed to be a flower (Fig. 30). After a short meeting with Piero in a nearby café, Vittoria leaves (Fig. 31). When Piero asks where she is going, she replies, 'Where else? To see my mother. She's not the type to draw flowers.' These moments suggest that Vittoria has the capacity to transcend the social conditions that pull her down by simply spending time observing, contemplating others, and showing compassion.



Figure 30 L'Eclisse



Figure 31 L'Eclisse

The apogee of the film's themes occurs in the 'eclipse,' the closing seven minutes of the film in which the characters disappear completely and are replaced by a succession of world time spans that feature places and objects that were referenced in other parts of the film. In this sequence, the audience is repeatedly reminded of the absence of the main characters through a series of images of places and objects that they visited earlier in the film.[310] At first glance, this sequence appears as a series of relatively still frames of people and objects. The people are mainly static and silent, increasingly taking on the form of objects. However, the organisation of the sequence and the cuts from shot to shot indicate a more nuanced dialectical approach. In the first part of the sequence, people are filmed in continuous shots that pan to follow their movements (as for example with a passing horse drawn carriage and a nurse), while objects (particularly architectural elements) are shown in static, discontinuous shots. But as the sequence develops, this order is reversed. Humans

[310] 'Since the two subjects cannot comprehend each other to the point of feeling "one into the other" (*Ineinander*), they end up gradually dissolving into the things and no longer acting upon them.' Paci and Malaguti, 'Debate,' 35.

are shown in discontinuous shots, relatively lifeless like objects, while objects appear in continuous shots, suggesting that they are replacing the humans.

What is less clear is the relationship between Vittoria's narrative and this sequence. While this sequence seems to make a clear statement about our relationship with objects, its relevance specifically to the existential narrative about Vittoria is more obscure. In the scene immediately prior to the closing sequence, we see her once again framed by the iron grille of a shop window. But then she turns around, faces the trees swaying in the park across the road, and – in another moment of contemplation – gently smiles and then walks out of the frame (Fig. 32). Antonioni seems to be asking the viewer to decide whether this signals a new direction for her or a surrender to the objects and structures that appear in the following sequence and that previously included her and Piero or Riccardo.



Figure 32 L'Eclisse

These closing 'eclipse' scenes and Vittoria's exit from the frame immediately before it are the apogee of Antonioni's use throughout the film of the duration image within the open frame to challenge the viewer into a dialectical engagement with the subject matter, the social and economic questions raised by the film. As with Ozu's *Late Spring*, most of the scenes discussed in this study bear little morphological resemblance to scenes played out on a stage, but they all incorporate the quality of

the open stage to provide the viewer with time and space for a reflexive response. Even the frenetic, tightly edited Stock Exchange scenes disrupt the conventions of Hollywood mode continuity editing because they don't lead the viewer anywhere, either in the narrative or for character identification. While not slavishly replicating theatre staging, Antonioni's use of the time image within an open frame in *L'Eclisse* is quintessentially theatrical.

3.3.3 *An artist's approach to framing: The open frame as canvas in 'Hunger'*

Late Spring and *L'Eclisse* demonstrate how the representation of temporalities in the open frame may be used to create a meaningful dialectical reflection on social and economic conditions. In each case, this reflection is a function, in part, of the use of world time to portray relatively banal or seemingly inconsequential (meaning, non-narratological) events that contrast with moments of originary time in which the characters either find release from their facticity or *habitus* or are presented with the opportunity to contemplate such a release. Steve McQueen's film *Hunger* also makes extensive use of the duration image within the open frame to convey themes of isolation, confinement, and the search for freedom, but his objectives and the aesthetic approach he uses to achieve them are significantly different. For McQueen, the open frame in a feature film is a natural evolution from his works as a Turner Prize winning installation artist, many of whose installations explored social and political themes.[311] His installation artwork confronts the issues of identity, representation, and history, as well as politics and persecution. However, the principal focus of attention here is how McQueen has adapted the various *forms and*

[311] 'Steve McQueen,' Art Institute of Chicago, 17 October 2012–6 January 2013, https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/1613/steve-mcqueen; Peter Hogenson, 'Immersion into the Work of Steve McQueen,' Facets Blog, 12 January 2018.

structures of his installation artwork to present these themes within a feature film. I propose to examine how McQueen uses his skills and experience as an installation artist to interrogate the form of a conventional political or public interest film. McQueen doesn't simply interrupt the conventional or Hollywood film mode; he dismantles it. And a central element of this process – and the corresponding techniques that he uses – is his particular use of the duration image within the open frame. This 'dismantling' process affects various aspects of the film, including its narrative structure, the role of the duration image within the open frame, and the dialectical relationship between audience and the subject matter of the film.

At first glance, *Hunger* resembles any number of conventional political or social justice films about wrongful imprisonment and human rights abuse.[312] Its narrative and themes relate to the treatment of political prisoners in the Maze prison (previously known as Long Kesh Detention Centre) in Northern Ireland and, specifically, the events surrounding Bobby Sands, a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) who led the second IRA hunger strike and participated in the no wash protest (led by Brendan 'The Dark' Hughes) in which prisoners tried to regain political status after it had been revoked by the British government in 1976. And it appears to follow a conventional narrative structure: the first act serves as an introduction to life in the Maze, seen from the perspective of the guards and the prisoners, culminating in a prison riot that is violently suppressed; the second comprises the confrontation between Sands and a priest in which the idea of the hunger strike is debated; and the third shows the hunger strike itself, leading to Sands's death and the inevitable political repercussions.[313] The film also sets up the

[312] See, for example, the films cited in notes 169, 334, and 466.

[313] McQueen described the narrative in different terms, saying it is linked to his own perception of moments of rupture in the story: 'The structure for me was all about initially floating on your back

central conflict from the beginning with an introduction to the protagonists (the prisoners, including Sands and Davey Gillen, a new IRA inmate) and antagonists (the prison guards).

However, almost from the first frames of the film, McQueen interrupts narrative and thematic conventions and viewer expectations, creating in a sense a giant work (or a collection of works) of installation art. At each potentially dramatic 'plot' point, the film veers away from any psychological identification with the characters in the film, privileging the duration image within the open frame to challenge the viewer to contemplate the scenes rather than slip into any easy political cliches or metaphors about violence or social injustice. As one writer observed, '*Hunger* conjures much of the same experience of a gallery, like an engrossing closeness which flies in the face of the realism McQueen is known for.'[314] He produces this result through a combination of his approach to narrative and his use of the duration image within the open frame. Conventional narrative is interrupted at each potential plot point in the three 'acts' of the film – the introductory background to the events in the prison, the confrontation between Sands and the priest, and Sands's hunger strike and death. The first scenes in the film, for example, initially appear to follow narrative conventions by introducing the principal antagonist, the prison guard Raymond Lohan, who is seen in his home as he prepares to leave for work. While there are suggestions of narrative connections with later acts of violence, the overall effect of these scenes is closer to a meditation on how the crisis that is unfolding in the Maze prison affects different members of the prison community. And even though the

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down a river and taking in your surroundings. And all of a sudden there's a rupture, a fracture. Your surroundings have been distorted, you hit a rapid. The last part of course is the waterfall, a loss of gravity. And that's how I sort of structured it in my mind.' Anne Goarzin, 'Seeing "Seeing" in Steve McQueen's "Hunger,"' *Nordic Irish Studies* 13, no. 2 (2014), 79–97.

[314] Hogenson, 'Immersion.'

montage of Lohan's morning rituals is far removed from the idea of theatre as a continuous scene presented in real time, the overall effect conforms to the notion of *theatron* introduced at the beginning of the thesis, in the sense of 'the opportunity of a sustained gaze where we can move slowly from looking to seeing.'[315] This aspect of the opening scenes is reinforced by McQueen's use (as in other parts of the film) of different temporalities. Each of Lohan's morning rituals is observed as Heideggerian world time – the time for washing, getting dressed, eating breakfast, driving to work, listening to the radio (Figs. 33–34). And, as with the traditional domestic world time actions in *Late Spring*, these rituals must be considered in the context of the *habitus* of Lohan's home life. This *habitus* is informed by both the political situation and Lohan's role as an enforcer of the system of oppression against IRA prisoners. As a result, the whole scene is charged with tension and anticipated violence (underscored by, for example, the blood and bruises on his hands as he washes or his inspection of his car as he leaves home while his concerned wife glances at him through the curtains). There is a sense of a cold and insensitive home life, while the street outside the home appears hostile.[316]



Figure 33 Hunger

[315] See the first section of the introduction.

[316] As Goarzin describes these scenes, Lohan's 'solitary and silent morning ritual at home feels uncannily disturbing, much as the open environment of the street he lives on is potentially threatening.' Goarzin, 'Seeing "Seeing,"' 80.



Figure 34 Hunger

A contrasting second temporality, introduced in these opening scenes and used selectively throughout the film, is the narratological 'now' time that portrays the political background to the events in the Maze prison. These 'outside' events are presented as short diegetic[317] radio newscasts or commentaries heard by various characters (Lohan in his home and car, a prisoner through a small transistor radio in his cell). The use of this medium to inform the spectator of how Westminster and the BBC are responding to the plight of the prisoners, the dirty protest, the hunger strikes, and the prisoners' demands reverses the conventional narratological significance of such events. Rather than foregrounding the political decision-makers as central antagonists,[318] the almost inaudible sound quality of the radio clips underscores the remoteness of politicians and the BBC Radio presenters from these events, while also portraying them as insensitive and largely irrelevant to what is happening inside the Maze prison walls.

McQueen's approach to narrative 'disassembly' continues through each major 'act' of the film. After Lohan's arrival for work at the Maze, the narrative appears to shift its focus to the processing of a new inmate, David Gillen, as 'non-conforming'

[317] In some cases, the radio broadcasts are used effectively as a non-diegetic soundtrack, as in the final 'corridor' scene discussed below.

[318] See, for example, *In the Name of the Father* (Jim Sheridan, dir., Hell's Kitchen Films, 1993) and even the first instalment of McQueen's Small Axe project: *Mangrove* (Steve McQueen, dir., BBC Studios, 2020).

(because he refuses to wear prison clothing). Following the Lohan montage, this scene seems to set up Gillen as the film's protagonist, or one of them. However, the relevance of this event is only revealed much later in the film during a violent retaliation by riot police after the prisoners tear up second-hand clothes they are given, and even then, Gillen does not play a role in this encounter and is not seen again in the film. More significantly, almost immediately after Gillen's arrival, the narrative is abruptly interrupted by a series of arresting and disturbing duration images. As with the opening Lohan montage, the principal effect of these images is to encourage the spectator to gaze and contemplate rather than to be drawn into any narrative. Each of these duration images relates to the so-called 'dirty protest' of the prisoners, during which the prisoners refused to leave their cells to shower or use the toilets (for fear of being beaten by the guards).

When Gillen enters his cell (about 12 minutes into the film), the narrative comes to an abrupt halt. Instead of engaging with the other prisoner in the cell, Gillen remains silent for over a minute as he observes with horror the walls of the cell smeared with faeces. A slowly panning camera follows Gillen's point of view as he studies every corner of the cell, accompanied by no dialogue or sounds other than scraping sounds (the other inmate spreading faeces on the wall) and squelching noises (the inmate foraging into festering food leftovers for a radio transmitter) (Figs. 35–36). Only when Gillen's gaze finally rests on the other inmate after his entry into the cell does dialogue mercifully intervene. In the interim, the scene offers no closure to the viewer's gaze into the abject horror of the space. As Anne Goarzin explains, 'McQueen has progressively forced one from the white lights of the corridor and the

expected toughness of detention procedures to the dark light of a world in which language is no longer a currency.'[319]



Figure 35 Hunger



Figure 36 Hunger

As with the works of Ozu and Antonioni discussed in this chapter, temporality plays a significant role in the framing of this scene and the next two scenes in the first part of the film. Narratological 'now' time temporalities are frozen (or, rather, non-existent). After the first few seconds following Gillen's arrival in his cell, any

[319] Goarzin, 'Seeing "Seeing,"' 88. A similar effect is produced in the long hanging scene in *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, dir., Plan B Entertainment, 2013), except that in the *Hunger* scene we observe in real time, while time is elliptical in *12 Years a Slave*.

ostensible connection with the film's narrative is quickly subordinated to the duration image within the frame.[320] This scene can be observed as another instance of originary time (not unlike the vase scene in *Late Spring* or the closing segments of *L'Eclisse*). In *Late Spring* and *L'Eclisse*, the duration image is used to construct moments of originary time in which Noriko and Vittoria are given the opportunity to experience a renewed sense of themselves. This same moment of 'authenticity' undoubtedly appears as a possibility for Gillen as he takes in his surroundings in the cell. But I would argue that the framing of this scene and the two other dirty protest scenes examined below indicate that McQueen is interested in a more radical approach to this temporality than merely an examination of Gillen's point of view, however effective this point of view is in its portrayal of the abject conditions of the cell. *Hunger* is self-evidently a film about imprisonment in the literal sense, but, in common with *Late Spring* and *L'Eclisse*, McQueen uses the open frame and the duration image to take the viewer far beyond the physical confines of the Maze prison and the events that take place there to explore the meaning of personal and political freedom.

McQueen's experience and instincts as an installation artist suggest that he wants the spectator to transcend Gillen's point of view and observe the images *from their own perspective.* He achieves this by using a *mise-en-abyme* device of drawing attention not just to what Gillen is seeing but also the act of Gillen seeing it and the effect of it on him. In this way, the film spectator is now invited to become the viewer of the same images that Gillen sees. The image, however – poignant and painful – is

[320] 'In order to circumvent mythification or over-simplification of types, the film tends to visually resort to the transfer of meaning through metaphor, progressively departing from explicit or solidified perceptions of the image.' Goarzin, 'Seeing "Seeing,"' 81.

detached momentarily from its specific historical setting, alienated, displaced, and made strange. It is not unlike a situation where we enter an art gallery and notice other visitors staring at an image. While we may be interested to know what other spectators think, our instincts are – usually – to create our own impressions. McQueen wants the viewer to contemplate the image and look beyond it – and to look beyond the initial shock of the scene to explore the metaphor behind it (described by Goarzin as 'a shift from the literal (cliches) to the figurative (through metaphors)').[321]

McQueen returns to the theme of the dirty protest in two more scenes in the film's first act. In the first, a long tracking shot moves along the prison corridor to show urine flowing out of each cell (as the prisoners empty their chamber pots). The camera then shifts to a wide and deep static shot that shows the same event but now seen from the perspective of someone at the end of the corridor peering down its entire length, observing the 'rivulets' of urine as they combine to form one single stream in the middle of the corridor (Fig. 37).[322] This perspective is perhaps reinforced by the fact that the prisoners are unable to see what the viewer observes. The second scene (Figs. 38–39) begins in the same corridor but this time it is occupied by a cleaner wearing protective clothing who enters a cell to remove a wall of excrement with a spray gun. In a sense it mirrors the first scene (in Gillen's cell) but in reverse. In the first scene, the second prisoner is depicted as an artist creating an artwork out of excrement, while Gillen watches in abject horror. In this scene, McQueen again directs the viewer's attention to the expression and reaction of the

[321] Ibid., 79.

[322] Goarzin observes that 'what the shot questions is the thin line between the abject and the beautiful; between the awareness of what those liquids actually are and the acknowledgment of the aesthetic value of the composition, which triggers unexpected visual appreciation.' Ibid., 88.

worker, but this time the worker is *deconstructing* the work. On this occasion, however, the viewer's shock is refracted by the nature of the image itself and the sound design of the scene. The image appears as a work of Abstract Expressionist art, calling to mind the spiral works of Jasper Johns and the colour fields of Mark Rothko. And the scene is underscored by the diegetic sound of the spray gun, the worker's heavy breathing, and a gentle non-diegetic cello soundtrack.[323]



Figure 37 Hunger



Figure 38 Hunger

[323] 'At this stage in the film, the slight inflexion from the eye to the ear is significant since it can also be read as an attempt to dematerialise an object that is excessively present, mainly because it is literally produced by the body.' Ibid., 83.



Figure 39 Hunger

The duration image and its framing comprise a central aesthetic of each of these scenes. At a basic level, McQueen appears to be challenging his audience to endure the unbearable or leave the cinema by using long shots (fixed or tracking) that offer them no possibility of release or closure. However, he also appears to be challenging them to move beyond the horrors of the images into a self-reflexive state. In this light, the scenes provide further examples of originary time, in which the viewer is given the opportunity to experience their *own* moment of authenticity through alienation and confrontation, unmediated by the point of view of the characters in the film or the events. Narratological time plays no role in these scenes and even world time loses its relevance as the scene shifts its focus to the image on the wall.[324]

The second and third 'acts' of the film also use the duration image but in different ways. The confrontation between Sands and the priest in the middle of the film (Fig. 40) provides the only significant dramatic dialogue in the entire film, serving as a narrative link between the riots of the first act and the hunger strike of the last. It is also the most 'theatrical' of the film's scenes, but only in the sense that it literally presents the two characters in a single wide shot talking for an extended period in

[324] Arguably, the third scene begins as an example of world time – the time for the worker to clean the cell walls – but it is shortly transformed into a moment of authenticity in which world time is no longer the principal motivation for the worker.

real time, as the scene would be experienced by a theatre audience. On its surface, therefore, the scene appears to take place in narratological time or (perhaps from the point of view of the priest) in world time (the time to persuade Sands not to go on a hunger strike). In narratological terms, it can be viewed as the last major obstacle that Sands must confront before taking action – in this case, an appeal to reason and religion by the priest. However, the scene includes a minimum of narrative. Towards the end of the scene, it becomes clear that Sands had already made up his mind to go on the hunger strike. After an extended wide shot, there is a sudden and dramatic cut to a close-up of the cigarettes and lighter on the table as Sands explains his decision to the priest. But his explanation has nothing to do with Northern Ireland or IRA politics but with something that happened to him as a child which convinced him that the only acceptable solution was the hunger strike. While the scene is not an installation artwork in the same sense of the earlier scenes, its efficacy is more a function of the *nature* of the dialogue and the relationship between Sands and the priest than its narrative content.



Figure 40 Hunger

In effect, Sands's 'confrontation' with the priest bears the characteristics of a dramatic theatre scene, but this form is, I would argue, a façade used by McQueen to connect the first half of the film with the second. In this way, the three 'acts' of the

film can be thought of as a triptych of non-narratological tableaux representing a progression from abject horror to a kind of dialectic on the film's themes (beyond the horror) to moments of authenticity. According to this approach, the first act of the film can be seen as a series of scenes using multiple forms (montage, static shots, panning shots) that prompt the viewer to confront not only the conditions of the prisoners but broader political and humanitarian questions that inhere within contemporary social conditions. The second act evolves from a conventional theatre scene into a meditation on the inexorable necessity of the hunger strike as the only solution to the conditions presented in the first act.[325] And the final act is the culmination of the first two, in which the only logical conclusion is the use by Sands of his own body as a form of protest when all speech has failed.[326] While the first two acts leave little doubt about the direction, form, and purpose of this final act, McQueen provides a prelude to the final act that sets the scene. In another wide, deep static shot a worker sweeps away the urine in the corridor, accompanied by the sound of Margaret Thatcher's speech condemning the hunger strike. At one level, the intermingling of Thatcher's words and the liquids on the floor provide an almost too obvious cinematic cliché. But McQueen seems to be suggesting more – that language is exhausted and meaningless. Thatcher's voiceover in fact occurs only after the image of the worker has disappeared from the screen and all that is left is the image of the liquids on the dark floor. Just as the government in London is impervious to the prisoners' demands, there is no one left to hear the government's voice.

[325] 'By nature, the hunger strike is a public performative act which derives from the fact that under the circumstances, the limits of verbal language have been reached, making physical performance the only alternative to stifled or censored discourses and imprisonment.' Ibid., 85.

[326] These scenes represent the ultimate example of self-alienation: the transformation of Sands's own body into an object for the purposes of establishing the opposite phenomenon – freedom.

McQueen presents Sands's hunger strike in the film's final act as another installation artwork, but in form and content it contrasts significantly with the scenes of the first act. There is abjection as we both observe the emaciation and deterioration of Sands's body and learn what is happening through a voiceover of a doctor describing his condition to his parents. But in these closing scenes, the horror is balanced with a sense of release or transcendence, as images of Sands's earlier childhood (that were in part the subject of his final statements to the priest in the second act) now appear to him. The young Bobby Sands who killed a horse to put it out of its misery now seems to appear to the dying Sands with the same purpose. A series of duration images are used to convey the sense of Sands encountering the three ecstasies of temporality as described by Heidegger – enpresenting (Sands's suffering in the prison hospital), retention (the manifestation of the past through images of his younger self), and anticipation (his death).[327] In contrast to the closing scenes in *L'Eclisse*, here McQueen leaves no doubt that the images represent Sands's perspective, and he seems to underscore this perspective by discarding any possible narrative content (the words of a visitor to Sands's bedside are inaudible; a potential conflict with a hospital worker with an Ulster Defence Association (UDA) tattoo on his fingers is bypassed; a closure between Sands and his mother is interrupted by Sands's visions of his younger self).

[327] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 68:401. The ecstasies were later referred to by Heidegger as *horizons*, in the sense of what limits, surrounds, or encloses and in so doing discloses or makes available. According to Heidegger, temporality is a unity against which past, present, and future stand out as ecstasies while remaining essentially interlocked. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

3.4 Conclusions

The objective of this chapter was to apply film-theatre methodology to two structures of theatre – the open frame, represented by the various possible stage configurations, and the extended periods of time (compared to scenes in Hollywood mode films) during which a scene is played without interruption. Several films have incorporated these structures by using single setup shots without, however, defeating the absorption effect.[328] But the purpose of film-theatre is not to examine how these structures can be *replicated* for film but how they can be *adapted* in a manner that preserves the dialectical effect that they produce for theatre. The three case studies appear at times to stray far beyond the idea of a single setup that would at least, morphologically, resemble an extended scene on stage – Ozu's fragmentation of interior shots in *Late Spring*, Antonioni's short tableaux in the closing sequence of *L'Eclisse*, and McQueen's montage shots of the guard at his home in the opening scenes of *Hunger* rely extensively on editing and would be difficult to reproduce on stage. But their analysis according to the methodology of film-theatre demonstrates how film can effectively adapt these theatre structures while interrupting absorption and producing a dialectical response from the viewer. At the same time, by presenting imaginative, articulate, and versatile interpretations of the open stage and uninterrupted scene, they illustrate the potential of cinema, by using its unique aesthetic and technical apparatus, to create its own approach to defeating the Hollywood mode.

This chapter has focused on one characteristic of the Hollywood mode, the closed frame, and has examined how the *structures* of theatre can be reinterpreted through

[328] Examples include *1917*, *Victoria*, and *Boiling Point*.

film to provide an alternative aesthetic effect. The next two chapters use film-theatre methodology to explore how the *practice* of theatre – including rehearsal and performance, the actor and director relationship, and collaborative and collective processes – can be adapted for film to defeat the Hollywood mode's approach to character identification and narrative unity.

Chapter 4: A Film-Theatre Model for Improvisation Practices and Techniques

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, film-theatre is used to examine how improvisation techniques and practices disrupt the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode. By comparison with the Hollywood mode notion of the self as one of 'fixed personhood' or as implying 'one, integral and immutable'[329] subject, the three film case studies included in the chapter use different forms of improvisation to explore the complexities and contradictions of characters. But they share three defining 'theatrical' characteristics – their treatment of character, the rehearsal-based processes that they use, and their interruption of the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films.

Treatment of character, the first defining characteristic, plays a central role in each of the case study films. In *Faces*, John Cassavetes uses improvisation to enable his actors to present multiple aspects of character, however inconsistent, in the form of 'play acting' or 'performances' in different types of situation (work, marriage, sex, friendship). [330] In comparison with the Hollywood mode, which usually sets up a series of challenges and confrontations for the protagonist (through which they discover 'who they really are'), Cassavetes is interested in how his characters behave in multiple situations and encounters.

[329] Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 1–5.

[330] *Faces* (John Cassavetes, dir., 1968).

In *Life Is Sweet*,[331] Mike Leigh explores how we can learn about each other through a complex series of encounters or 'negotiations,' each of which sheds more light on his characters. By contrast with the narrative of a Hollywood mode film, where a 'hero' is required to achieve a stated goal, the narrative in Leigh's films is already happening when the film begins and will continue after the last of the credits roll. In *Archipelago*, Joanna Hogg develops our understanding of character through a variety of 'tableaux' or 'boxes,' within which her actors improvise dialogue to convey problems of communication, isolation, and entrapment. Again, this approach would be inconceivable in Hollywood mode films, in which the character's trajectory is usually conveyed through closed frame, stylised, and highly controlled continuity editing.

By contrast to the three case study films, a defining characteristic of the Hollywood mode is its concern with the protagonist's psychological motivation and objectives.[332] The protagonist's 'character' is defined almost exclusively by this motivation, and nearly all the elements of the narrative, mise-en-scène, and editing are designed to serve it. As Maria Viera explains, the Hollywood paradigm presupposes 'a central, psychologically coherent ego, usually male, often a "Hero," or, if an "Everyman," one who will be placed in extraordinary circumstances and discover inner heroic strength.'[333] A corollary of the Hollywood mode's approach to character is the expectation that the spectator 'identify with' this motivation.

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[331] *Life Is Sweet* (Mike Leigh, dir., British Screen Productions, Channel Four Films, Thin Man Films, 1990).

[332] The case study films, by comparison, are less concerned with conveying internal psychological states through external action. The only 'action' or 'event' in the three films is the exploration of the relationships between the respective characters.

[333] Maria Viera, 'The Work of John Cassavetes: Script, Performance Style, and Improvisation,' *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1990): 34–40.

As an example, Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List* takes place against the background of the Holocaust in the Płaszów concentration camp in Poland from which inmates were ultimately sent to Auschwitz to be exterminated. Scenes of the Holocaust (the conditions of Jews in the ghetto in Krakow, their treatment at the camp, the terrors of Auschwitz) are presented, often with horrific naturalism, throughout the film, but the attention of the viewer is repeatedly directed *away from* these conditions to the heroic acts of the film's protagonist, Oskar Schindler and a small group of interns at Płaszów who later become his employees (and are thereby rescued from almost certain extermination at Auschwitz). And this drama is reinforced both by the personal psychological motivation and ultimate redemption of Schindler himself and by his ongoing conflict with the film's antagonist Amon Göth, the camp commandant. As a result, the audience becomes absorbed by the human-interest drama, the classical battle of wills between protagonist and antagonist, and the tension concerning the fate of Schindler's interns. The structure of the film, in common with most other Hollywood mode films, is therefore implicitly ideological in the sense that – by means of character, understood as the heroic centre of the action – it conveys the illusion that 'human life makes sense, that social forces are comprehensible, and that "happy" endings are normal.'[334]

By contrast, the various approaches to improvisation discussed in this chapter lead to representations of character that have more to do with how people relate to one another, to themselves, and to events in ordinary, everyday circumstances than to a

[334] Green, 'Ideology and Ambiguity,' 104. Other films that have used character motivation in an ideological manner that conceals social and political realities include: *The Rainmaker* (Francis Ford Coppola, dir., Constellation Entertainment, Douglas/Reuther Productions, American Zoetrope, 1997); *The Insider* (Michael Mann, dir., Touchstone Pictures, Forward Pass, Blue Lion Entertainment, 1999); *The Ides of March* (George Clooney, dir., Columbia Pictures, Cross Creek Pictures, Exclusive Media Group, 2011). *See* also films cited in notes 169 and 466.

single defining objective or overarching motivation. In almost complete contrast to the motivation of a 'Hollywood hero,' the words and deeds of characters in films by Cassavetes, Leigh, and Hogg are often not a result of their inner motivations, and in many cases their objectives remain unfulfilled or are even irrelevant or the opposite of what they say and do.[335] In fact, frequently their motivations are variable and unpredictable from one scene and from one interaction (with other characters) to another. At the same time, while each of the approaches to improvisation discussed in this chapter is unique, they also share a rejection of the Hollywood mode's concept of narrative structure. Largely because of the effects of improvision and the approach to working with actors in each of the three films, there is the sense that the narrative started before the events shown in the film did, and that they will continue long after the end. As a result, there is little possibility of character identification or absorption by the spectator. There are no clear signposts to explain to the viewer what to think and how to react or to guide them from one plot point to another. In other words, the plot in these films does not develop according to the consistency of a character's actions, as determined by a specifiable dramatic goal.

The second defining 'theatrical' characteristic of the three case study films is the production process, which relies heavily on what I will refer to as 'rehearsal-based' approaches that are built around the actor-director relationship during rehearsals and during the film shoot itself. In each of these films preparation for the performance was a critical stage of the production process. These 'rehearsal-based' approaches involve collaborative, sometimes even collective, work that allows actors and

[335] As Raymond Carney explains, 'One of the main sources of drama in Leigh's work is the fallacy of self-knowledge. … Beverly honestly *thinks* she is the soul of kindness and consideration in *Abigail's Party*, even as she bullies and harasses her cocktail party guests.' Carney and Quart, *Films of Mike Leigh*, 19.

directors to explore several aesthetic possibilities during the rehearsal process. Inevitably, this 'improvisatory' work leads to the development of nuanced and often complex character studies as well as narrative and script changes or even (as with the work of Leigh) the creation of completely new narratives.

The three rehearsal-based approaches to improvisation studied in this chapter use a variety of processes to achieve different aesthetic results. Cassavetes uses the script as the basic structure for a series of rehearsals and improvisations on the selected film location. His work with the actors on the set can be considered a sort of 'collective' experience in which the actors, director, and film crew work together to imbue meaning and life into the text (often resulting in changes to the final version of the script). Cassavetes's aim with this approach is to create shooting conditions that give his actors the physical space and creative freedom to discover, experiment, and play with their respective characters. Leigh works with actors individually to create characters based on real life individuals and then uses improvisation to create scenes between these characters from which a scenario evolves. Hogg writes a scenario for her films but not a complete script. Instead, she talks in depth with the actors before the shoot and then allows them ample time to develop the narrative through improvisation. She also provides them with reference materials to help immerse them in the headspace of their characters.[336]

All three directors allow their actors a considerable degree of autonomy over the film's content and the nuances of the characters they portray. While of course conventional Hollywood films use rehearsals, what distinguishes the techniques discussed in this chapter is the inherent trust that directors of these films place in the

[336] Alex Heeney, 'Interview: Joanna Hogg on "The Souvenir,"' Seventh Row (website), 28 July 2019, https://seventh-row.com/2019/07/28/joanna-hogg-interview/.

collaborative rehearsal process and their reliance on the actors as a creative device. In Hollywood mode films, to the extent improvisation is used at all in rehearsals, it is no more than a tool to ensure that the actors' performance supports the narrative as presented through the central character's motivation and objectives. Leigh and Cassavetes, by comparison, use improvisation to facilitate a process of *change* that would be unthinkable in a Hollywood mode film. For Cassavetes, for example, the changes in character (expressed through gestures, movements, and often spontaneous actions, such as telling a joke, crying, or singing) produced through the rehearsal process would not be possible if his films followed the blocking and shooting conventions of Hollywood mode films, according to which each scene and setup must be structured and planned according to a predetermined combination of shots. While Leigh's films superficially bear a closer resemblance to certain Hollywood shooting conventions (using, for example, master shots, cutaways, and closeups for coverage), this type of 'structured' shooting style is only possible because, long before the shoot, Leigh works with the actors on each location to develop the scenes through improvisation. Again, this level of narrative uncertainty (not to mention the time commitment that his process involves from actors and crew) would be unthinkable in most Hollywood mode productions. In Hollywood mode films, improvisation (at least, in the manner used by Cassavetes and Leigh) serves no function, because the function of dramatic action in the script is to show the psychological transformation of the hero, whose 'character' must be pre-set as a key element of the desired narrative unity.

In the following sections of this chapter, the film-theatre analysis of improvisation for each film is divided into two parts. The first is concerned with the improvisation process used and the way it is adapted for the films. The second examines how the

specific improvisation process affects the representation of character and narrative in each film, as well as their aesthetic effects on the spectator. The final section of the chapter synthesises and compares the various processes and aesthetics used in each of the films with the object of constructing a film-theatre improvisation model that disrupts the Hollywood mode's notion of a single character motivation and the spectator's identification with it.

4.2 'All the film's a stage': Cassavetes's *Faces*

Cassavetes's career and experience before his first film, *Shadows*, provide the backdrop for the film work that followed. These early experiences included his grounding in theatre techniques and training, his rejection of the Hollywood approach to filmmaking and to actors, and the development of his own unique way of working with actors and the themes that motivated him in his own films.[337] Perhaps one of the key factors in his extensive use of theatrical techniques was his early theatre training and education. He learned his craft at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, where the teaching was predominantly structured around stage work with relatively little attention to the commercial side of the profession.[338] Cassavetes's background and experience in theatre is reflected in his use of improvisation as a rehearsal technique in his films. But a sense of theatricality permeates his work in other ways. First, in a literal sense, his films are often presented in a manner that emulates stage plays. In *Faces*, for example, most of the 'action' takes place over extended periods of time in a single room or set of rooms –

[337] Raymond Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 1–48.

[338] 'We hated Hollywood. Hated everything it stood for. Mainly because there was no chance for us to ever get there!' Ibid., 15.

resembling a stage set. And, although the spaces are small and confined, they are presented as open frames in the sense that there is always a feeling that something may be happening beyond the frame. The appearance of the scenes is therefore theatrical. In addition, throughout the film his characters are constantly engaged in role playing, putting on masks or facades, and behaving just as if they were actors on stage. In a sense, the whole film can be analysed as a series of performances in which the characters are repeatedly changing their roles to suit the situation or themselves.

In *Faces*, Cassavetes confronts a perennial theme in his work and life – the disillusionment and loss of love within the middle aged, middle class. In Cassavetes's words:

> *Faces* was a barrage of attacks on contemporary middle-class America, an expression of horror at our society in general, focusing on a married couple – old-fashioned in nature, safe in their suburban home, narrow in their thinking. The script gives them new situations to cope with, takes them out of their house, releases them from the conformity of their existence, forces them into a different context, when all barriers are down.[339]

The film depicts the events of one night in the final stages of a disintegrating marriage of a middle-aged couple, Richard and Maria Forst. The two main 'acts' of the narrative take place in parallel time. In the first, Richard leaves his wife to spend a night with a group of businessmen and prostitutes, including Jeannie Rapp; in the second – and during the same timeframe – Maria leaves home to spend the night with her friends and a playboy, Chet, they pick up at a bar. These two main acts are bookmarked at the beginning and end with shorter scenes of an argument between Richard and Maria that provokes their departure from the home and their re-

[339] Ibid., 137.

acquaintance at the end of the night after Maria has attempted to commit suicide but has been revived by Chet.

In the following two subsections, I examine how the two major characteristics of Cassavetes's approach to improvisation in *Faces* interrupt the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode. The following section focuses on Cassavetes's improvisation process both with actors and the camera crew. This process allows for considerable freedom and inventiveness for the actors and crew. By comparison, the approach to character in the Hollywood mode mandates a highly structured – even regimented – organisation of blocking, shot organisation, lighting, and editing to ensure that the viewer identifies with the main character and is guided through their narrative with little opportunity to exercise choice or judgment in each scene. Cassavetes's process interrupts this absorption by creating scenes that encourage the viewer to pause and reflect on the interaction of the characters. Section 4.2.1 analyses the aesthetics of Cassavetes's approach. It argues that *Faces* is not concerned (by comparison with Hollywood mode films) with character motivation but with character interaction in a series of encounters. The story of the film is no more than a prolonged exploration of these encounters. This aesthetic subverts the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode by directing the viewer's attention to each of the encounters and to how the characters interact by play-acting and wearing masks.

4.2.1 *Cassavetes's process: A collaborative approach by cast and crew*

With *Faces*, Cassavetes established his working method – a rehearsal-based technique formed from several elements, including the script, the collective approach to rehearsing and improvising with his actors and crew, and his unique manner of shooting the film. After *Shadows*, Cassavetes wrote complete scripts for each of his

films, but the script was merely the structure from which the characters were shaped and developed by the actors. In this sense, his relationship with the script was radically different from that of a Hollywood film director. For most directors of commercial films, the final shooting script is the basis for all creative input during the production process. Long before the first day of a shoot, numerous aesthetic choices – and financial decisions – are made based on the script, including cinematography, set design, lighting, music, casting, crew selection, and even elements of postproduction work. By contrast, Cassavetes used the script to set up a series of rehearsals in which actors were allowed to improvise their performance, ad lib elements not expressly written into the script and, in general terms, decide how and where to move within the space. If this meant from time to time changing the script, Cassavetes was open to that. More significantly, Cassavetes's original scripts were 'improvisatory' in nature in the sense that they give the impression not of a fully formed story but of a work in progress. In structure and plotting, they resemble a script devised from theatrical improvisation.[340] As with theatrical improvisations, 'Cassavetes has trouble with endings, at least conventional endings which wrap up all lines of action in a neat package.'[341] This does not mean that there is no structure to his films. On the contrary, at least superficially, *Faces* has a basic three-act structure and some sense of an ending, but the script refuses to resolve any of the conflicts in a 'Hollywood ending.'

Cassavetes's specific approach to rehearsals is perhaps best defined as a collective relationship with both his actors and crew. In the case of *Faces*, Cassavetes would

[340] As Maria Viera points out, 'a less examined connection, and maybe a more important one in giving his films an improvisatory appearance, is his use of characteristics common to improvised scenes in his scripts.' Viera, 'Work of John Cassavetes,' 36.

[341] Ibid.

start rehearsals at about 6 pm and continue until about 8 pm, when shooting would begin.[342] During the rehearsal period, the actors were given a relatively free scope to explore the space (the 'set') and were encouraged to improvise their characters' emotions and corresponding actions, which included playing tricks and games, bursting into song, making jokes, and engaging in sudden mood shifts and unpredictable actions and movements. All of this 'stage business' was designed to explore the characters and give them life.[343] These liberties with the script and space were only possible because Cassavetes did not initially prescribe any blocking for the scenes, except as was necessary to allow for the movement of the two handheld cameras that he used, and because there was no special character lighting used to highlight a character for emphasis or effect. In essence, Cassavetes turned the film set into a theatre stage and turned his actors loose on it. The crew, in turn, were part of this creative collective rehearsal process. They joined the cast for the rehearsals and followed the actors around the set as they discovered their movements and emotions.

This approach to rehearsal in turn affected the nature of the relationship between cast and crew. In *Faces*, the actors determined where they would move, when they would speak, and how they would say the lines. The role of the crew was to support them, to be ready to shoot the scenes as presented by the actors. This is fundamentally

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[342] 'The crew gathered in Cassavetes' home around five, ate supper together … and discussed that evening's scenes. The actors would show up around six and rehearse until seven-thirty or eight. While they were rehearsing, Casssavetes would be moving around them with cameraman George Sims, planning camera angles and movements. Shooting would take place from then until approximately midnight, when the older actors were too tired to continue.' Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 147.

[343] 'As far back as *Faces*, he started writing for actors who were also friends; little by little, he then built up a troupe, not to say a clan, around him. Each character was written with an actor in mind and reflected his personality and relationship to the world. During the invaluable rehearsal period, the dialogue was prepared jointly, paving the way for the second stage in the process of interpenetration between actor and character.' Gilles Mouëllic, *Improvising Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 173.

different from a Hollywood film, where the blocking, lighting, and cinematography are usually established before the actor walks onto the set. Cassavetes wanted his actors to discover their characters through the improvisations and resisted giving extensive or detailed direction.[344] As Cassavetes explains, 'the *emotion* was improvisation. The lines were written. The *attitudes* were improvised. I give somebody some lines, and the interpretation must be their own.'[345]

A considerable degree of the success of Cassavetes's improvisatory technique and his approach to rehearsals was attributable to his ability to marshal the various technical elements of his films in a way that supported his manner of working with actors. He could work this way because the crew were also a part of the collaborative rehearsal process. There were several elements to this technical approach. First, he ran extended shooting sequences to allow his actors the freedom to improvise.[346] Second, he used two handheld cameras running at the same time to allow the actors 'to remain constantly on the alert in order to respond to any unexpected solicitation.'[347] This approach is a complete reversal of the Hollywood shooting convention, in which the various camera setups are established *before* the actors come onto the set. A typical Hollywood film uses 'coverage' conventions to capture each scene through a variety of shots, including, for example, a principal establishing shot and then shot/reverse shots, point of view shots, and close-ups. Cassavetes eschewed this approach to shooting his films because it restricted the ability of the

[344] See interviews with Ben Gazzara and Peter Falk in *A Constant Forge* (Charles Kiselyak, dir., 2013); interview with Gena Rowlands in *I'm almost Not Crazy* (Michael Ventura, dir., 1984).

[345] Ibid.

[346] 'When the relinquishment of the narrative safety net means that acts must exist in their own right, actors need time.' Mouëllic, *Improvising Cinema*, 72.

[347] Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 73.

actors to work creatively on set. He would shoot entire magazine loads 'to avoid breaking up the actors' emotional rhythms.'[348] As Cassavetes explains:

> Once the improvisation began, it sometimes ran for twelve minutes of shooting. In an ordinary film, the shots are much shorter and camera directions are written into the script. We used to shoot a long overall sequence – say, in medium long-shot – and then, if I wanted a close-up, we went through the entire scene again. Often this second improvisation produced good things that hadn't been in the original improvisation.[349]

Even closeups (which are used extensively in the film, as the title suggests) serve a completely different function than in a Hollywood film. Cassavetes uses closeups in a quasi-documentary manner to register or index the various external reactions of the characters from one confrontation to the next. The closeups are not used to provide a deeper insight into any character's motivation or to influence the audience's alignment with one character or another. Each character is treated more or less equally, and the choice of which individual to follow and what judgments, if any, to make is left to the viewer.

4.2.2 *Acting out with masks: The aesthetics of 'Faces'*

The Hollywood mode's approach to character involves stripping aside the external presentation of a person's character (their 'masks' or 'faces') to discover some hidden psychological motivation (which then becomes the driving force for the film's narrative). Cassavetes took the opposite approach. He was not interested in removing the masks that people wear in their daily encounters. It is the masks that people wear, their 'faces,' that are the subject of his films. This does not, of course, mean that the subject matter of his films is superficial. On the contrary, for

[348] Ibid.

[349] Ibid.

Cassavetes, masks are the way people deal with their emotions. He was concerned with how individuals deal with their lives and loves by wearing masks, by 'acting out' or directing situations in ordinary life, and how they change the masks from one situation to another, from one moment to the next, depending on the circumstances.[350] This was one of the problems he had with the Actors Studio's concentration on the Method approach to acting. As Burt Lane commented in 1958:

> in focusing on core emotions, [the Method] removed the masks of the characters and deprived them of personalities. In real life, we rarely act directly from our emotions. Feeling is simply the first link in a chain. It is followed by an adjustment of the individual to the situation and to the other people involved in it, and this in turn leads to the projection of an attitude which initiates the involvement with other persons.[351]

Faces is very much a film about these adjustments that we make to a variety of situations. It examines the way a group of middle-aged individuals respond to others in four different kinds of situation – marriage, work, friendship, and sex. As Carney writes, 'Just as Cassavetes accepted his own imperfections, and those of his friends, he accepted his characters. He didn't ask them to clean up their acts. He respected their emotional disarray. He did not hold their failures of communication against them.'[352] And he expected the same of his actors.[353] In *Faces*, Cassavetes makes no judgments about the characters; he doesn't take a stand; he doesn't interfere with

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[350] 'At one point or another in the film the fundamental drama of each of the main characters can be described as dealing with the mask he or she wears.' Raymond Carney, *The Films of John Cassavetes: Pragmatism, Modernism, and the Movies*, Cambridge Film Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 53. In 1968, when Cassavetes was asked by an interviewer to describe *Faces* – his next major independent work – in three words or less, he answered, 'Masks and faces.' Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 53.

[351] *Ibid.*

[352] Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 146. Similarly, Cassavetes remarked, 'Say what you *are*. Not what you *would like* to be. Not what you *have to be*. Just say what you are. And what you are is good enough.' Ibid.

[353] 'I absolutely refused to judge the characters in my films and it is imperative that the [actors] neither analyse themselves nor others in the course of the filming. … I just want to record what people said, film what they did, intervening as little as possible, or, in any case, never trying to film inside them, so to speak.' Ibid., 74.

them but leaves the audience to make up their own minds at the end. His objective in *Faces* and in most of his films, therefore, is to observe how individuals *behave* when their expectations (love, career, relationships, family) are not realised. According to Carney, 'Cassavetes' fundamental cinematic effort is to hold the viewer on the turbulent perceptual surfaces of life and prevent him from diving beneath them into calmer conceptual depths.' His goal is to 'force the viewer to pay close attention to the second-by-second progress of what he actually sees and hears.'[354] It is for this reason that he rejected any kind of dramatic or cinematic approach that focused on one character's point of view.

Cassavetes's aesthetic approach is accomplished in *Faces* through various strategies, starting with the film's narrative structure, which marks a radical departure from a typical Hollywood film. First, the overall look and feel of the film is essentially theatrical. Despite the intercutting between the footage of each of the two cameras and the extensive use of closeups, *Faces* more closely resembles a modern stage play than a Hollywood film.[355] The entire action develops mainly in two locations, the homes of Richard and Maria, on the one hand, and Jeannie, on the other, over the course of one night. It resembles a conventional film only in the sense that it has a three-act structure, comprising the events leading up to Richard's argument with Maria, his night out with Jeannie, and Maria's night out culminating in an attempted

[354] 'Cassavetes keeps us in the dark conceptually in the hope that we will open our eyes wider to what is in front of us perceptually.' Carney, *Films of John Cassavetes*, 78.

[355] This resemblance to plays is not unique to *Faces.* It can be seen in a number of Cassavetes' films. *A Woman under the Influence* (John Cassavetes, dir., Faces International Films. 1974), for example, was originally conceived as a set of three plays, but Rowlands refused to perform in it on stage. 'When Gena read the plays she said, '*No one* could do this every night!' She feared they would take her to a sanatorium if she became that keyed up over a long period of time! So then I said, well, all right, let's try to make it a movie.' Nevertheless, the film is paced, staged, and produced more like a play than a conventional film. Carney, *Cassavetes on Cassavetes*, 307–8.

suicide, with an unresolved coda portraying a fractured and precarious resumption of married life at the end. However, this three-act structure does not follow the typical Hollywood approach to narrative, in which there are various dramatic 'markers' along the trajectory of the film's story line, including an inciting incident, a major turning point (end of first 'act'), a series of obstructions and reversals or complications, resulting in a third act climax and a resolution at the end. The dramatic interest in the narrative of *Faces* does not arise from the events that mark the beginning and end of each act but from the interaction of the characters in between. The only dramatic flashpoint in the film (the 'inciting incident') is Richard's unheralded announcement of his desire for a divorce, but this incident is merely a dramatic device inserted to force Richard and Maria out of the house. It is already apparent long before this event that the marriage is failing.

Faces also uses sequencing conventions of the theatre rather than the modern cinema to represent the passage of time. The two main scenes (Richard's and Maria's nights out, respectively) are presented in a predominantly theatrical sequencing arrangement. Although the film is not very specific about time, it seems reasonably clear that these two scenes occur simultaneously (late at night and during the early hours of the morning). Richard leaves home to spend the evening with Jeannie; Maria leaves home sometime later to spend the night with her friends at a bar and back at her home. The two parallel narrative tracks are connected and aligned when Richard returns home to find Maria and Chet together. A Hollywood film would almost inevitably use the device of cross-cutting or parallel editing to remind the viewer repeatedly that the two sequences are occurring at the same time. At some stage during Richard's visit to Jeannie's home, the film would cut to the bar or Maria's home to assure the viewer that the scenes are happening at the same time.

Cassavetes's approach to the problem of parallel action is fundamentally theatrical. Each sequence is performed in its entirety before the other sequence is presented. Cassavetes is not interested in continuity editing that would provide a more 'realistic' representation of time within the two sequences. He is more concerned that the viewer's attention should remain fixed on the sequence until it is played out.

Cassavetes's films are not so much about story, in the conventional sense, but about the identity crises of his characters and how they deal with them in their relationships with other characters.[356] The function of story is simply to propel his characters into a variety of situations where they are compelled to interact and react. *Faces* presents these interactions in a variety of milieus in which the characters can act out their emotions. There is a sense that we are watching the characters improvise their reactions to each situation and to each encounter. As Carney explains, 'at various moments in the film, all of the major characters convince us that they are improvising their own personal scripts as alternatives to the scripts imposed on them.'[357] *Faces*, in other words, is as much about improvisation in real life situations as it is about using improvisation to tell the story.

Richard, for example, is presented at work, with friends, in a sexual encounter, and at home at various stages of the film. In each encounter, he wears a different mask. In the opening scene at his place of work, the scenario suggests that the film's story will be driven by something that happens at work – a relationship or a business incident, for example – but by the end of the scene there is still no hint as to what the

[356] 'A Cassavetes plot is an endless series of transactions or "problems," which is what a theatrical improv is. A director or acting teacher will set up a dramatic problem which the participating actors will explore. One cannot predict where a scene will go in either an improv or a Cassavetes script.' Viera, 'Work of John Cassavetes,' 38.

[357] '…we have the impression that we are watching them improvising their lives and relationships in a process of continuous creation. The illusion they convey is that their individual expressions are being impulsively created, adjusted, and revised on the spot.' Carney, *Films of John Cassavetes*, 100.

film is 'about.' This is because what it is about is already happening in that scene. It is a demonstration of one 'mask' that he wears to deal with his emotional conflicts – in this particular case, his abusive treatment of workers.[358] The second principal scene, at Jeannie's home, has practically no narrative connection with the opening scene other than the fact that, apparently, after work Richard and a co-worker, Freddie, have met Jeannie at a bar. None of the discussions or 'events' in the work scene relate to what happens next or, for that matter, to the rest of the film, other than to provide an insight into one of Richard's masks, his sadistic side.

In Jeannie's home, Richard and Freddie are in a more relaxed environment, but Richard continues to 'play act' – except that, this time, his masks involve a series of songs, dances, jokes, memories of his and Freddie's time at college, performances of college routines, and occasional outbursts of anger, leading to Richard's return home. At the same time, both Jeannie and Freddie occupy the scene in their own way, using their own masks to express themselves, often causing each other pain (Figs. 41-43). There is a sense, as Carney observes, that all the major characters in the film 'are improvising their own personal scripts as alternatives to the scripts imposed on them,' giving the impression that the characters are improvising their lives in a process of continuous improvisation. This theatrical quality of the film is reinforced by the way Cassavetes shoots it. The two cameras provide a semi-documentary look, as if we are watching this process of improvised creation minute by minute, as it happens, and depending on what decisions the actors make. The use

[358] A theoretical approach based on similar observations about social and work interactions is the subject of an analysis by Erving Goffman. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor, 2021). Based on his view that all people involved in social interactions engage in practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others, Goffman developed his *dramaturgical analysis*, wherein he observes a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances.

of extensive closeups in the film further supports this look. It is as if the camera operator is trying to capture each reaction from each actor/character as it happens, without any preconceived notion of what, if any, role the reaction will play in the narrative.



Figure 41 Faces



Figure 42 Faces



Figure 43 Faces



Figure 44 Faces



Figure 45 Faces



Figure 46 Faces

The film progresses the same way through each of the other confrontations, but each time with a different set of responses, depending on the situation and the characters. No character's reactions and none of the events in a scene are predictable. When, for example, Richard returns home after his visit to Jeannie, both Richard and Maria 'act out' a series of performances with the object of creating (for themselves and for each other) the illusion of a successful marriage. They achieve this by engaging in extended jokes or anecdotes over dinner, punctuated by hysterical laughter and an occasional argument. Even in what would otherwise be an intimate bedroom scene, Richard continues to tell jokes, until Maria unexpectedly reverses the whole direction of the scene – and the film – by saying 'maybe you're not all that funny.' This provokes Richard to act out another 'script,' this time his demand for a divorce (Figs. 44-46).

In the two central scenes that follow, we join Richard and Maria in a series of night long encounters. The two defining characteristics of these scenes is their pacing and physicality. A myriad of confrontations occurs at an almost dizzying pace, with moods and emotions shifting, reversing themselves, retracting and advancing, and sometimes even exploding – and nearly always without any advance warning or expectation of how they will be resolved. The same play-acting that characterises the opening scenes is played out in the two central 'acts,' but at an exponentially faster and more intense rate.[359] In the first of these two scenes, for example, Jeannie and Jim (one of the two men at her home before Richard arrives) experience a range of

[359] 'Experiences are too propulsively on the move away from any one position for us to be able to put them in a mental frame. Relationships between characters develop, flourish, and decay in *Faces* at a nearly insane pace. … Experience boils over any cognitive container within which we attempt to hold it.' Carney, *Films of John Cassavetes*, 83.

emotions from tenderness to anger and violence, from laughing to crying. The relationship between Richard and Jim (who meet for the first time in this scene) is equally unpredictable and erratic. Initially, their behaviour is a function of jealousy for the attention of Jeannie, which rapidly degenerates into a sort of undisciplined and messy 'fight' (definitely not the kind of rehearsed and staged fight sequence of a Hollywood film). But this is followed by the two men discussing their work, resulting in a shift of status to Richard (revered by Jim because he is the chairman of the board of a finance company). And by the end of the scene the two men promise to meet another day for lunch.

4.3 [Re]cycling through shifts in character: Mike Leigh, *Life Is Sweet*

The opening scenes of *Life Is Sweet* suggest a domestic or social drama in common with any number of Hollywood mode films. However, like Cassavetes, Leigh is not interested in pursuing his characters' psychological motivations to a Hollywood resolution. Rather, he uses improvisation as a method for exploring the relationships between his characters and, through the process, learning about them. *Life Is Sweet* is a constantly evolving – and revolving – series of encounters between a small group of characters, each of which adds layers and colours to contour our understanding of them.

The film is not *about* any major incident that radically changes the life or circumstances of any of the characters. To the extent there is any narrative, it concerns how our understanding of the characters evolves through each set of encounters in the film. As with other Mike Leigh films, the characters in *Life Is Sweet* are always meant to be connected with each other, whether they want to be or

not.[360] Leigh is making the point, as Carney and Quart explain, that life is not about power or pre-eminence but about negotiation.[361] In this sense, *Life Is Sweet* charts a different narrative course from *Faces*, which is reflected in Leigh's approach to improvisation and aesthetics examined in the following two subsections. Cassavetes is concerned mainly with how characters defend themselves and respond to others by multiple forms of masks or facades, by 'performing' in front of others (and sometimes for their own benefit) or by directing the performances of others. The significance of any character in *Faces* is their capacity to provide an object that allows other characters to react to it. Our understanding, therefore, of Cassavetes's characters is largely a function of what we learn from this 'play acting' and these masks. By contrast, in *Life Is Sweet*, while the characters also frequently put on performances and wear masks, our understanding of characters is based on their 'connectedness' with each other (and sometimes with themselves) cycled through multiple encounters in a giddying array of random events. In other words, the film is built around a centrifugal structure that allows the spectator to observe and contemplate the characters through their ever-expanding orbit of relationships and 'negotiations' with others.

4.3.1 *Leigh's rehearsal-based approach to scriptwriting*

When Leigh starts work on a new film, at most he has only a vague idea of what it is going to be about and what he wants to say.[362] He uses improvisation to *create* the

[360] For example, one of the two twins in the family, Nicola, constantly pretends not to want to be connected with her sister or parents but *behaves* in a way that shows the opposite.

[361] Carney and Quart, *Films of Mike Leigh*, 203.

[362] Amy Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 20–24; Carney and Quart, *Films of Mike Leigh*, 11–13; Clive Hodgson, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, 6 March 1981; Michael Coveney, *The World According to Mike Leigh* (London: HarperCollins, 1997), 2–3; Paul Clements, *The Improvised Play* (Yorkshire: Methuen, 1983), 24–29.

script. The films that emerge – usually five or six months later – are rarely the result of any preconceived idea by Leigh; they are a *function* of this improvisation work.[363] And every creative decision he makes in the production of the film is, in one way or another, a function of this process.

Leigh asks each actor to bring to the rehearsals a list of 'several' (100 or more) people they know. He conducts an exhaustive interview process with the actor about these people leading to the selection of a character or combination of characters from the list. They work together to create a personal chronology for the selected character – including family, work, friends, belief systems, habits, physical and psychological characteristics – and then flesh out the character through a complex series of improvisations.[364] A key element of this work is that no actor is allowed to know more than his character knows or to discuss his or her character with other actors other than in an improvisation or at Leigh's direction.[365] At a certain stage (usually several weeks after this preparatory stage has begun), Leigh sets up a series of improvisations in which the characters start to come into contact (or conflict) with one another. The process is highly organic, in the sense that the end of each improvisation provides the circumstances that suggest the next improvisation, and so on. The question at the end of each improvisation is *what next?* From this work of character interaction, eventually a story will emerge.[366] Eventually, Leigh will create a scenario that serves as a rough outline of the narrative and then 'structures' the

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[363] 'The first thing I say … is "In five months' time … we are going to go out with a film crew on location and make up a film. What we are going to do between now and then is merely to assemble the raw materials to arrive at the premise for that investigation."' Garry Watson, *The Cinema of Mike Leigh: A Sense of the Real* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 28–31 (citing interview with Mike Leigh by John Lahr in 1996, after the release of *Secrets and Lies*).

[364] Clements, *Improvised Play*, 23–33.

[365] Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 31–32; Clements, *Improvised Play*, 30–31.

[366] Ibid., 28–31.

story by refining and fine-tuning the story through more rehearsals and improvisations, cutting and editing scenes until a script is written.[367]

Anyone watching a Mike Leigh film for the first time cannot avoid being struck by a feeling that there is something radically different going on. One major characteristic of Leigh's films is a rejection of the approach of mainstream films to narrative. 'Hollywood movies,' Carney writes, 'are basically devoted to achievement. Characters are defined in terms of their ability to do things (anything from freeing the hostage to getting the girl) – frequently by being pitted against each other in tests of wit or prowess. Hollywood understands life as essentially a matter of competition, achievement, and reward.'[368] By contrast,

> Mike Leigh's films are organized along different lines. In the first place, he rejects struggle and competition as sources of value. He is more interested in his characters' ability to interact sensitively than in pitting them against each other. … The drama is generated out of states of being more than acts of doing.[369]

This approach is an inevitable result of Leigh's use of improvisation to create characters drawn from real life. Ordinary people behave differently from Hollywood heroes. They may *intend* to achieve certain results, but more often than not those intentions are frustrated by the way they are and how they behave towards others. The characters in Leigh's films 'will still be who they are, no matter what they think or intend or attempt to do at any particular moment.'[370]

Another characteristic of Leigh's films – the spontaneity of events, meetings, and character confrontations – is a function of Leigh's willingness to allow the story to

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[367] Ibid., 53–57.

[368] Carney and Quart, *Films of Mike Leigh*, 14–15.

[369] Ibid.

[370] Ibid., 18.

develop organically through the improvisation work, what he describes as an 'exploration of the unknown': 'What's certainly true is that I'm only able "to know what to do next" or "to know where to take it" by two essential processes: using my imagination and taking from what's going on.' And he selects actors who are prepared to embark on this with him. As he explains, 'things happen because actors are being spontaneous and creating in an organic way. So it's completely unpredictable.'[371]

4.3.2 *Character evolution through connectedness*

The action in *Life Is Sweet* revolves around the relationships between Wendy and Andy; their twin daughters, Nicola and Natalie; and a small group of friends. Time and place are relatively compressed. The action takes place in a small part of suburban London over a few days. To the extent that there is a plot, the anchor for it is the struggle of these characters to make a living while trying to maintain equilibrium in their relationships with each other. Nicola, who we later learn is struggling with bulimia, appears to be unmotivated for anything other than staying at home and venting her political opinion on the other family members. This creates friction both with Wendy and Andy and with her sister, Natalie, who is trying to make a living as a plumber. Wendy and Andy struggle with Nicola as well as with each other. While Andy has a job, he also lacks commitment. He has started several jobs around the house that never get completed. His latest venture is a burger van that he has allowed his friend, Patsy, to con him into buying at an exorbitant price to start his own catering business. This creates further tension with Wendy. In their

[371] Raphael, *Mike Leigh on Mike Leigh*, 21–29.

own way, each character, other than Nicola, is trying to make a living as a solo entrepreneur.

Nothing much more than that happens in *Life Is Sweet*, but, as with most of Leigh's films, the drama is already happening when the film starts and continues long after the film is over. This contrasts sharply with the typical Hollywood narrative, in which an inciting incident that causes a change in the status quo results in a series of complications leading to a final resolution and the return of equilibrium. By contrast, in *Life Is Sweet*, while the opening scenes suggest that the action will unfold (in the Hollywood manner) around the struggle and eventual redemption of one character (or the resolution of a single plot motivation), the film proceeds in a completely opposite direction. Nicola's personal struggle provides a kind of anchor for the rest of the 'action,' and in a small sense there is a slight change in the status quo between her and the rest of her family by the end of the film; but the film is no more 'about' Nicola than it is about any of the other characters or about any theme for that matter.

There are, of course, certain apparent events in the film, such as Nicola throwing up after gorging on snacks late at night, the arguments between Andy and Wendy, the purchase of the burger van, the debacle on the opening night of their friend Aubrey's new restaurant, Andy's accident at work towards the end of the film, and Nicola's moves towards reconciliation with her sister and mother. But these are not plot points in the conventional sense of a Hollywood movie. None of them resemble the usual signposts in a three-act structure. They are not inciting events or turning points or even, for that matter, major beats that result in a material change of direction. They are merely devices that Leigh uses to allow him and his actors to provide, through another turn of the circle, additional insight into his characters and their

relationships. And they usually don't result in any major resolution, though there is perhaps a sense at the end that some change has taken place.

On the contrary, we are left with the perception that Andy will continue to flit from one project or ambition to another, getting nothing done; that Wendy and Andy will continue to fight over Andy's unaccomplished tasks but agree about Nicola; that Natalie will make her own way in life and be her own person, while supporting her family; and that Aubrey will embark on other restaurant ventures doomed to fail. If there is any resolution or redemption by the end of the film, it is a change in the attitude of Nicola towards the people who love and care for her. Again, however, there is no major third act climax, resolution, and coda that we would expect in Hollywood mode films. There is no cathartic moment that sets Nicola on a new journey of self-discovery, happiness, and success (or disaster). There is simply a shift in the relationship between her and Wendy and Natalie – enough to offer some hope for change.

There is a sense that each character is in control of their own 'story' and no single story or character is allowed to dominate the action. Andy may dream of making a lot of money through the burger van, but the other characteristics he displays (his procrastination, for example) make it clear that this will never happen. Wendy may want Nicola to change, but she knows that only through patience, listening, and love will she ever be able to help. Nicola talks of revolution against the perceived Fascism around her but takes no steps to bring about change. Only Natalie suggests affirmative action by the work she does and the personal choices she makes. But her story is not the stuff that feature films are made of. She achieves through example, by quietly living her life on her own individual terms.

Nor are even these characteristics by any means the totality of each character's personality. Rather, the film's trajectory is presented in the form of a series of concentric circles, each one comprising a sequence involving the main characters, each one adding another layer of detail to our understanding of them or peeling away our assumptions about them. With each rotation of the circle, Leigh is making the point that what characters say about themselves or how they initially are presented to the audience is often not the complete picture and is sometimes a completely flawed one. Carney offers as an example the scene in which Wendy attacks Andy for wasting money on the burger van. Prior to this scene, Andy is presented as a 'stock sitcom father: a bumbling, comically incompetent head of a household, henpecked by his wife and daughters, who never gets around to household repairs.'[372] But just as we are about to dismiss him on those grounds, his response to Wendy ('I could do with a bit of moral support') reveals how deeply hurt he is by her lack of confidence in him. This same layering of nuances over each character and each relationship through each sequence or set of sequences of the film is the principal arc of the 'plot.' Nicola appears initially as a stereotypical problem child, but layer upon layer of understanding about her are developed during the film. In addition to her bulimia, she contradicts our expectations by joining the family for meals (while sitting in another part of the room to show her sense of rebellion).

4.4 Improvisation in tableaux: Joanna Hogg, *Archipelago*

In Joanna Hogg's films the relationship between the improvisation process and the film aesthetic takes on a significantly different dimension than in the two films

[372] Carney and Quart, *Films of Mike Leigh*, 208.

examined in the previous sections. For Cassavetes and Leigh, the film's aesthetic is a function of the improvisation work. In other words, the choice of improvisation *drives and motivates* the aesthetic. In *Faces*, Cassavetes's process for allowing his actors space to move around the set and respond to actions spontaneously leads inexorably to the use of handheld cameras and a naturalistic aesthetic. Leigh uses improvisation to create a script, which he then shoots in a relatively conventional manner reminiscent of the shooting conventions that he inherited from his work for the BBC Play for Today series.

By contrast, in *Archipelago* it is the film's aesthetic that provides the basis for the use of improvisation, rather than the other way around. Hogg's films are constructed from a series of connected tableaux (or *tableaux vivants*) that frame both her characters and the drama that is played out between them. Within these tableaux the characters create dialogue that is improvised, but it is the tableaux, their framing, and the use of light and diegetic sound that relate to each tableau (predominantly natural light, settings, and soundscapes) that shape the overall structure of her films. And from the combination of these tableaux with the improvised dialogue that is created within them we can develop an understanding of the characters. In *Archipelago*, therefore, the two film-theatre techniques of the duration image within the open frame and improvisation work together to interrupt the Hollywood mode.[373]

Hogg's subject in *Archipelago* is an affluent and educated middle class family on holiday. Through a series of tableaux and improvised conversations the film explores the facticity that repeatedly – often painfully – prevents them from expressing

[373] This is not intended to suggest that the duration image within the open frame has no role in either *Faces* or *Life Is Sweet*. On the contrary, the effect of improvisation in both films is to create an aesthetic that allows for extended periods of duration image within an open frame. In *Archipelago*, by contrast, the duration image is a function of the use of improvisation within the tableau aesthetic.

themselves or communicating with each other. The isolation and often petty, seething hostilities between the three family members – Patricia, the mother, and Edward and Cynthia, Patricia's grown-up children – are contrasted throughout the film with the physical beauty of the landscape of Tresco, one of the Scilly Isles, and the vacation cottage which they occupy during their stay. The ostensible background for this family vacation is the pending departure of Edward for eleven months in Africa, where he intends to do volunteer work to promote safe sex and combat the spread of AIDS. Patricia and Cynthia have organised the holiday to see Edward off. But from the outset the atmosphere is darkened by two absences. Patricia's estranged husband has been invited and has expressed a vague intention of attending, but he never makes an appearance, except through multiple telephone conversations. And Edward's girlfriend, Chloe, has not been invited because 'she is not family,' as Cynthia repeatedly reminds Edward. At the same time, however, two outsiders – both played by non-professional actors – have been invited to join them: Rose, a live-in cook and housekeeper, and Christopher, a local artist who has been hired to teach Patricia how to paint the surrounding landscapes.

4.4.1 *A multi-faceted improvisation process*

Superficially, the principal purpose of improvisation in *Archipelago* is to create dialogue. However, the actual improvisation is merely the final step in a complex and highly structured process. Initially, Hogg creates an unconventional script, called a 'story document' which provides the basic narrative and aesthetic framework for the film. This document includes not only the film's story but notes about character psychology, Hogg's visual ideas, and various other references that inspire her, including photographs, paintings, and poems. Hogg also makes liberal use of

footnotes. These include ideas for the film stock to use for the scene or a specific reference to a film.[374]

In addition, Hogg works with actors throughout the shooting period to develop their characters and relationships, and she discusses each scene with the actors in depth before it is shot. Other factors allow her and her actors the freedom to create dialogue through improvisation. For example, the sets are prepared early to allow the actors enough time to become familiar with the spaces before shooting starts. And the costume designer builds a wardrobe with each character, often in collaboration with the actors, so that each day on set, the actor can pick out what they think their character would wear.[375] Hogg claims that she does not use rehearsals to prepare for a shoot but simply discusses the scene and the improvisation with the actors and then just lets the actors start the scene. However, this is really a semantic question. For purposes of film-theatre, her process is still fundamentally 'rehearsal-based,' in the sense that the script and the shoot are developed principally by working with the actors and entrusting to them the freedom to make aesthetic choices about their characters and the dialogue.

4.4.2 *The aesthetics of 'Archipelago': Framed improvisation*

In *Archipelago*, Hogg uses a combination of tableaux (for interior and exterior shots) to frame the characters and the improvised dialogue which takes place within these tableaux. This approach affects both the rehearsal and improvisation process and the aesthetic effect of improvision in the film. As a practical matter, the framing creates an open 'stage' in which the actors can freely improvise without being concerned

[374] Heeney, 'Interview.'

[375] Ibid.

about the organisation of shots or questions of blocking. Aesthetically, the framing adds another layer to the sense of confinement presented through the improvised dialogue. The improvisations with these tableaux effectively negate any possibility of absorption by creating distance between the viewer and the subject. As Agnès Petho explains, 'the tableau shot does not merely establish or "describe" a setting or contain a particular choreography of the characters on the screen, it is usually constructed as a standalone image, which confronts the viewer without being fragmented by intra-sequence cuts.'[376] Hogg's combined use of improvisation and tableaux in this manner defeats the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode in which 'the spectator is continually drawn into the illusory world of the screen.'[377]

Petho elaborates on this construction of tableaux in *Archipelago* by comparing the tableaux with works of Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, including Pieter de Hooch and Nicolaes Maes, which give prominence to architecture and the architectural division of space (Figs. 47–48).[378] She points to the similarities between the 'Eavesdropper' series of paintings by Maes (Fig. 47) and the use of space in *Archipelago*, noting that Hogg seems to adapt the situation of the Maes series 'with the open doorway, the empty hallway, the figure of the listener standing on the threshold, only this time without the joviality of the scene and without the scenario involving sexual indiscretion.'[379] She notes further that the tableau form in the film is closely connected to the architectural space, 'opening up through inner frames, with protagonists inhabiting these spaces who are portrayed in liminal situations. But

[376] Agnes Petho, 'Between Absorption and Theatricality: New Inflections of the Cinematic Tableau,' in *Film-Philosophy Conference 2015: The Evaluation of Form* (2015), 42–43.

[377] Ibid.

[378] See also figs. 49, 50, 51, and 53.

[379] Petho, 'Between Absorption and Theatricality,' 42–43.

instead of any dramatic action they are all caught in mostly static, painterly poses, with dialogues delivered in single takes as if being on a stage.'[380]



Figure 47 Maes, The Eavesdropper



Figure 48 De Hooch, Mother Delousing Her Child

Pethó's observations regarding the 'dramatic action' in these spaces bring us back to the discussion of the role of improvisation in the film. While the improvisation functions within the 'architectural spaces' of the tableaux, it is nevertheless an inexorable part of both the tableaux and Hogg's film language. *Archipelago* is essentially a 'chamber piece' about an English upper middle-class family on holiday suffering from emotional repression and possibly harbouring 'seething resentments beneath a patina of easygoing charm.'[381] Hogg uses the tableaux – the boxes within which the characters are confined – and the sparse, but often caustic, improvised dialogue to accentuate this sense of repression and 'seething resentments' among the

[380] Ibid.

[381] BFI, Sight & Sound, 'Film of the Month: Archipelago (2010),' accessed 14 September 2022, http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/5961.

mother and two siblings throughout the film, contrasting a sense of isolation and confinement with the beautiful open spaces of Tresco. Through each scene, and each tableau, Hogg builds an increasing sense of tension between them, which is heightened by their inability to articulate their feelings. This tension is emphasised by Hogg's use of space, which often conceals one or more characters from a discussion or results in major outbursts occurring off-screen. The form of improvisation, often halting, hesitant, incomplete, or indefinite – and sometimes unspoken – provides the limited 'dramatic action' that is possible within these spaces (Fig. 51).

Hogg's aesthetic objectives with this 'interaction' between tableaux and improvised dialogue are apparent from the beginning of the film. After Edward arrives, he is framed repeatedly in small spaces, first inside a van (while Patricia and Cynthia cycle behind him), and then in the tiny box room that he 'chooses' after Cynthia has already placed her luggage in the larger bedroom (Figs. 49–50). From the beginning, therefore, there is a sense that the family is somehow diminishing or at least defining him. This is emphasised by his tall frame within the bedroom. This diminution continues throughout the film as Cynthia repeatedly taunts him about his life, his career, and his girlfriend.



Figure 49 Archipelago



Figure 50 Archipelago



Figure 51 Archipelago

The relationships between the three family members and with the two bystanders, Rose and Christopher, evolve over the course of the holiday from one tableau and improvisation to the next, finally erupting in outbursts by each member of the family at different times. In the first of these, the family gather for lunch in an elegant restaurant overlooking the sea to which Rose and Christopher have been invited. Cynthia, it seems has selected a restaurant and invited Rose in response to Edward's insistence that they include Rose more in their meals (an invitation that we sense Rose only reluctantly goes along with). The scene provides a compelling

demonstration of Hogg's effective use of the tableau aesthetic and improvised dialogue and action within the frame. For the first two minutes of the scene, the fumbling and jerky movements and dialogue of the group focus entirely on the question of which table in the empty restaurant to use and where everyone should sit around the table. There is never a sense that this is a joyous occasion (Fig. 52).

The same atmosphere continues throughout the meal, during which the entire dialogue is an extended complaint by Cynthia about the service and food, while the other guests do their best to feign enjoying their meals. No meaningful dialogue is exchanged at all, and Cynthia aggravates the deteriorating experience by interrogating each of the others about the quality of their meal and then complaining (to Edward) for not supporting her in her complaints to the management. Eventually, Edward simply gets up and leaves, framed in a long, narrow corridor of the restaurant hallway (Fig. 53). The dark mood of the scene is emphasised by the naturalistic lighting. The only bright part of the scene is the background view of the sea and landscape, and since the scene is shot to capture the background, the main area covered by the frame – the interior and the characters – is in perpetual shadow. In one sense nothing happens in the restaurant scene, but in another it provides an intricate and detailed representation of the fractured relationships within the family. Cynthia tries so hard to make everything perfect – and, in doing so, to make sure everyone has the same motivation – that the whole purpose of the occasion is lost.



Figure 52 Archipelago



Figure 53 Archipelago

In the two later scenes, both of which take place during and after dinner in the cottage, the 'seething resentments' erupt into outbursts of anger and shouting, but on both occasions the action takes place off-screen.[382] In the first (Fig. 54), Cynthia spends most of the dinner arguing with Edward about why his girlfriend was not invited and eventually she storms off and disappears for the evening. When she returns, we barely see her running up the stairs. Instead, the tableau this time frames Edward and Patricia in a darkened living room, almost frozen, until Cynthia is heard. At that point Patricia follows Cynthia up the stairs and we only hear Cynthia's outburst (a vitriolic unravelling of her pent-up frustrations around Edward) and Patricia's responses. The improvised dialogue is heard entirely off-screen while the camera remains fixed on an immobile Edward (mirroring Cynthia's complaints about him). Similarly, in a later dinner scene, Edward and Cynthia sit eating wordlessly while Patricia, whose silhouette is barely visible in the adjoining kitchen, screams abuse over the telephone at her estranged husband, who promised to join the family but never arrives (Fig. 55).

[382] Ibid.



Figure 54 Archipelago



Figure 55 Archipelago

The film ends as it began, with the family departing by helicopter. Unlike a Hollywood mode film, nothing is resolved. Old wounds are opened, some are healed, perhaps a few steps are made towards a limited but fractured form of acceptance, nothing more. As the title suggests, the film is not just about the physical location (the Scilly Isles are an archipelago) but about the nature of the family members. Each of them is an island, trying to survive almost in isolation from the others but connecting through the lifelines of strangers (Christopher and Rose). The film demonstrates the efficacy of improvisation as a mode of film-theatre. Its carefully orchestrated juxtaposition with the tableau aesthetic throughout the film ensures that the spectator's attention is never allowed to 'identify' with any one character or seek any one resolution. Instead, the spectator is expected to reflect carefully on how each of the characters is developed during the film, what conclusions to draw, and how to participate in the film's complex dialectic of relationships.

4.5 Formulating an improvisation film-theatre model

Although there are significant differences in both the approach to improvisation and its aesthetic effects in the three case studies, they share a rejection of some of the fundamental conventions of the Hollywood mode, while demonstrating various strategies for interrupting its absorption effects. To some degree, the different approaches to improvisation in the case studies present challenges to creating a workable model for a film-theatre approach to the use of improvisation in film. But, as with the other models of film-theatre discussed in chapters 3 and 5, the starting point for analysing these forms of improvisation is to what extent they disrupt the Hollywood mode's absorption effect.

As we have seen, the defining characteristic of all forms of improvisation in the three case study films is the exploration of character, meaning in each case how the characters behave in their daily lives and how they represent themselves to others, which is often entirely different from what they intend. By contrast, the Hollywood mode's approach to character is based on 'intentionality,' meaning that the narrative is driven by 'goal-directedness,' an artificial concept that is unrelated to how individuals generally behave in ordinary everyday life. By rejecting this intentionality of goal-oriented characters as their primary motivation, the three case study films disrupt the notion of character identification that is a critical characteristic of the Hollywood mode and one of the principal sources of viewer absorption.

At the same time, the case studies demonstrate how these forms of improvisation interrupt the absorption effect produced in Hollywood mode films through character identification by placing the audience in a self-reflexive relationship with the films'

subjects. To the extent, therefore, that the various forms of improvisation used in each of the films express the complexity of individual characters, often messy, confused, or frustrating, they provide the basis for the film-theatre model I am proposing. There is no possibility in any of the three forms of improvisation discussed in this chapter for the spectator to identify with *any* of the characters. At most, in some cases, a spectator may empathise or sympathise with a character for some time or in a particular scene or context, but even then, in all three films our understanding of the characters is constantly changing; it is in a constant stage of evolution, as each scene adds further layers to the character studies or introduces new information that contradicts our prior perceptions.

This approach to character disrupts the Hollywood mode's notion of character motivation in various ways. First, of course, most of the characters in the three film studies are defined not by their motivations (to the extent we even know what they are) but by how they present themselves in daily interactions with each other. Whether they use masks (as in the case of Cassavetes), or aspects of their character are only discovered through negotiation and encounters (as with Leigh), or they are constantly trying – but failing – to communicate (as with Hogg), the story is about their personal struggles in relationships with others. At the same time, the everyday behaviour of the characters in the three films and their interactions reveal much about the social conditions that give rise to that behaviour, their *habitus*.[383] Second, the nature of the rehearsal process in the three films would be inconceivable in a

[383] The *habitus* revealed in each film is markedly different. *Faces* uses the events of a single night to reflect on character relationships that are shaped by the harsh and uncaring background of the American business milieu. In *Life Is Sweet*, the Thatcherite background is represented by the efforts of the characters to start their own businesses and the conflicts that ensue. And in *Archipelago*, the claustrophobic atmosphere and stilted conversations are signs of the characters' enclosed upper middle-class environment as well as the conventions that it dictates.

Hollywood mode film. Each of the approaches discussed in this chapter relies extensively on a collaborative relationship between director and actor that allows the narrative to unfold though the improvisation process. By contrast, Hollywood mode films are tightly scripted, blocked, and edited to ensure character identification by the viewer. Each of these characteristics of the three case studies interrupts the absorption effect of character motivation in Hollywood mode films. Instead of being directed through each scene of a Hollywood mode film to identify with the character and their final catharsis or vindication, the viewer of the three case studies is forced to reflect upon each scene, each interaction, and formulate their own judgments. There is no simple resolution and no opportunity for catharsis that the viewer can expect, only a more profound understanding of how individuals behave under certain circumstances.

A few examples will demonstrate how improvisation techniques in each of the three films disrupt absorption through character identification. In the first scene with Richard and Maria in *Faces*, for example, there is a sense that they are unhappy, but the film avoids any of the Hollywood mode conventions of a marital breakup. During the scene in the first part of the film when Richard returns from an evening with his work colleague, Freddie, and a prostitute, Jeannie, there is a suggestion that Maria already knows where he has been (she is just finishing a call with Freddie's wife before Richard abruptly grabs the telephone and hangs up; and later, as he leaves to return to Jeannie, he makes no pretence of where he is going or why). However, there is practically no reference to their marital problems during these scenes. Instead, Richard and Maria divert – or 'mask' – any confrontation by playing silly games and forcing or feigning laughter, mainly about other people. And even when they are in bed, Richard wheels out a string of silly jokes or riddles, until

Maria finally stops him by saying ‘you’re not that funny’ (Figs. 43–45). Richard’s response to this comment is to ask for a divorce, but even then it’s never clear that he is serious, and he challenges Maria to find it funny. For the rest of the film there is no further development of their marital problems as they each find other distractions. Even when Richard returns home, nothing is resolved. Their communication is ultimately reduced to a series of strange movements on the narrow staircase until each of them disappear out of the frame (Fig. 46). There is no possibility of the spectator either ‘identifying with’ any character or becoming absorbed in the narrative, because each character requires our constant attention and reflexion. The audience’s expectation of identification with the hero’s goal is disrupted, because there is no ‘hero’ and the film has no dramatic goal.

Life Is Sweet presents a different approach to character through improvisation. While the characters in *Faces* use masks and ‘acting out’ to avoid direct confrontation, in *Life Is Sweet*, we learn that characters are not usually how they initially present themselves as each ‘cycle’ of confrontations adds new layers of understanding. At the beginning of the film the characters are presented almost as stereotypes or even caricatures – Andy, the procrastinating father, full of big ideas but lacking the determination to carry through; Nicola, the ‘problem’ daughter rebelling against her family’s conventions and, it seems, everything else; Wendy, the imperious mother who is frustrated with both Andy and Nicola; and Natalie, the older daughter, who appears to be the most balanced member of the family. Each of these initial appearances suggests several potential directions for a film based on character motivation. But this is an improvised film and neither Leigh nor his actors allow their characters to be defined in terms of ‘fixed personhood’ or as ‘integral and immutable.’ We soon learn that Wendy has feelings of guilt for her treatment of

Nicola; that Andy is sensitive to Wendy's criticism, a sensitivity that Natalie understands when she defends him; that under her rebellious exterior Nicola has serious psychological problems that she hides from the others. As with *Faces*, although the approach to improvisation is different, the aesthetic effect is similar. There is no single character or motivation that provides momentum for the film. And, although Leigh uses more conventional editing, including cutting between several types of shot, the editing rarely gives the spectator any 'clues' as to what or whose perspective is prominent. As a result, the focus of the film is constantly shifting, never settled, and the spectator's role is to watch closely, to pay attention, and to reach their own, unaided and unguided, conclusions about the characters and events.

Similarly in *Archipelago*, Hogg's rejection of plot-driven dialogue, cinematographic conventions, and continuity editing in favour of improvised dialogue and a static photographic language that provides the framing conditions for an improvisatory mise-en-scène precludes any possibility of spectator identification. In most scenes, there are no signposts telling the spectator what or whom to watch and what conclusions to draw. And the dialogue repeatedly creates expectations that are later frustrated or changed. An example is a relatively low-key dinner at the cottage, during which Edward suggests that Rose should be invited to dine with them. Patricia's and Cynthia's objections to this idea at first seem to be insensitive and snobbish. However, we then see Edward taking the dishes to Rose and offering to help in the kitchen. Though it is far in the background and Rose is barely visible, it is apparent from the dialogue between Rose and Edward that Rose is embarrassed by this awkward attempt to be fair. She says, 'Well what do I do then?' – immediately validating Cynthia's comment to Patricia that 'It's actually getting quite

embarrassing now. I feel sorry for her.' In other scenes (such as Cynthia's dramatic departure from dinner and her fraught return) there are further suggestions that no character's personality or position is 'fixed,' and that the spectator needs to keep an open mind throughout.

As this analysis seeks to demonstrate, the modes of improvisation discussed in the case studies in this chapter provide the basis for a film-theatre model because, regardless of their aesthetic differences, they share the defining characteristic of 'theatricality,' in the sense that they create aesthetic effects that demand the studied attention of the spectator, rather than their absorption in the image. It is worth noting, however, that the film-theatre technique of improvisation in these films cannot be viewed in isolation. As with other films analysed in the three film-theatre case study chapters, improvisation often leads to the use of other film-theatre techniques. Each of the specific approaches to improvisation in the three films discussed in this chapter, for example, are inseparable from the use of the duration image within an open frame. *Faces*, for example, comprises predominantly extensive uninterrupted scenes in single locations, creating not just a theatrical effect but also an *appearance* of theatre. And while the physical areas – two apartments – used in the film appear confined and restricted, there is no suggestion of 'closed' framing in the Hollywood mode sense. On the contrary, the spectator is afforded ample opportunity and choice to survey the space and the various characters that move within it. Similarly, in *Life Is Sweet* the framing usually suggests a world beyond the frame for all the characters. In *Archipelago*, the whole film comprises a series of extended scenes in enclosed spaces, but again, the tableau aesthetic does not close the frame.

Similarly, each of the improvisation techniques in these films and the corresponding use of duration images within the open frame open the possibilities for exploring the

different forms of temporality discussed in more detail in chapter 3. In the staircase scene at the end of *Faces*, after all the role-playing, joking, screaming, and posturing in the rest of the film, Richard and Maria finally have nothing left to say to each other. The final scene appears as a moment of originary time in which the two characters for the first time contemplate seriously how to move on with their lives (Fig. 46). *Life Is Sweet* is largely a film structured around world time events, as the various characters navigate their lives, their work, and their multifaceted and shifting relationships with others. But the improvised approach also allows for moments of contemplation and insight, as when Natalie, almost in imitation of the vase scene in *Late Spring*, reacts to the sound of Nicola's self-inflicted nausea and towards the end of the film when Nicola and her mother share a moment of rare intimacy.

And in *Archipelago*, the stifling transaction of world time events from one pained tableau to the next is relieved by some rare moments of originary time when members of the family pause to consider their physical surroundings. The painter/instructor Christopher seems to provide a portal for the family members into another dimension that, however briefly, allows them to escape from the facticity of their middle-class *habitus* (Fig. 56). In fact, it is to Christopher that Edward finally confesses his uncertainty about his decision to go to Africa or, for that matter, what to do with his life. In response to Christopher's comment (about life) towards the end of the film that 'It's not secure, is it, it's not solid or anchored,' Edward says, 'I'm just not sure.' This exchange is followed by an extended static shot of Edward framed against a background divided horizontally both by the rocky landscape in the top half of the frame and Christopher's painting of it underneath (Fig. 57).



Figure 56 Archipelago



Figure 57 Archipelago

The three films examined in this chapter, therefore, inform the analysis of the film-theatre model for improvisation as well as other forms of film-theatre largely because each of these improvisation techniques allows for aesthetic opportunities that disrupt the absorption effect in various ways – by developing alternative approaches to character studies, by suggesting novel ideas of framing and cinematography, and by penetrating beneath the illusion of naturalism in Hollywood mode films to explore the reality that affects the lives of the films' characters.

Chapter 5: A Film-Theatre Model Based on Alienation Techniques

5.1 Introduction: From metatheatre to metafilm

The subject of this chapter is the application of film-theatre to 'alienation' techniques or, to use Brecht's terminology, *Verfremdungseffekt.* Of course, all the other film-theatre practices and techniques discussed in the thesis have 'alienating' effects in the sense that they distance the audience from the characters, enabling the spectator to observe the subject from an objective, self-reflexive perspective. And, in common with the other film-theatre techniques, alienation techniques are rarely used in isolation. So, for example, in the films of Jean-Luc Godard discussed in this chapter, it is not unusual to find examples of the duration image in an open frame (such as the long traffic jam shot in *Weekend*) and improvisation (as in much of *Breathless*).

But while there are significant areas of intersection between the three film-theatre techniques and practices discussed in the thesis, there are sound reasons for treating alienation techniques separately. As indicated in chapter 2, a defining characteristic of alienation techniques is that they interrupt the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films *by design*, in the sense that they intentionally call the viewer's attention to the artificiality of the performance and the conditions of production.[384] By

[384] Some writers, including Fried and Rushton have described this type of theatre as 'antitheatrical' in the sense that it interrogates and problematises conventional stage practices. See, for example, Rushton, 'Early, Classical and Modern Cinema,' which also summarizes Fried's use of the term. However, this is clearly a different application of the term than is used in the thesis. As Jonas Barish explains, the 'pioneers of modern drama' sought to bring theatre out of 'its long winter of Victorian discontent' by challenging and re-imagining its role and its practices. Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 450. This does not make Brechtian alienation antitheatrical; rather it is an example of a particular type of theatricality. For purposes of comparison with the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode, Brechtian alienation may be considered *meta*-antitheatrical.

contrast, the capacity of the other two forms of film-theatre, improvisation and the duration image, to disrupt the absorption effect is a function of their *inherent* aesthetic and technical characteristics (as analysed in chapters 3 and 4). Improvisation, for example, invariably produces a narrative that disrupts the Hollywood mode simply because it is constructed in a different way with a different goal (notably, the observation of character rather than identification with character motivation). Similarly, the duration image within the open frame *inherently* conflicts with the aesthetic of Hollywood mode narratives because it rejects the notion of a 'closed frame' approach to continuity editing that guides the spectator through each scene.

Alienation techniques and practices are theatrical *by design* in the sense that they use overtly theatrical techniques and practices to make the film or theatre apparatus visible to the spectator. As Davis and Postlewait explain, they have antecedents in, among other things, the concepts of *metadrama* (a play that comments on the conventions of its genre) and *metatheatre* (a performance calling attention to the presentational aspects of theatre and its conventions in the moment of its transpiring), which are hundreds of years old.[385] They include the tradition of direct address to the audience that dates back at least to the Greek chorus and dialogue between audience and actor in, for example, Shakespeare's plays. In the modernist era, the use of 'theatricality by design' took on even greater significance as one side

[385] As Davis and Postlewait point out, Lionel Abel used the term 'metadrama' to distinguish a new metaphysical drama from the tradition of tragedy. 'Beginning with *Hamlet*, he argues, a new "intellectual" theatricality shaped drama and consciousness. The character of Hamlet reveals a new kind of dramatic self-consciousness, and the plot of the play presents a set of characters who are playing roles and attempting to script the actions of the other characters.' Davis and Postlewait, *Theatricality*, 15.

of the debate between modernism and theatrical 'realism' (meaning naturalism). As Davis and Postlewait explain:

> Thus the concepts of realism and theatricality set up a binary configuration in modernism, with realism aligning itself with the idea of 'artless' art and the many alternatives to realism embracing and celebrating the explicit theatrical conditions of the stage, its genres and traditions. Unlike the opposition between melodrama and realism in nineteenth-century theatre, this new antinomy allowed the concept of theatricality to achieve a positive definition. Thus, a major reversal in the idea of theatricality occurred in modernism.[386]

Davis and Postlewait mention August Strindberg, Edward Gordon Craig, Nikolia Evreinov, Luigi Pirandello, Antonin Artaud, Bertold Brecht, and Jerzy Grotowski as examples of modernist writers 'struggling to find ways to overcome a deep, unsettling suspicion that theatre (or life) is condemned – in Jean-Paul Sartre's terms – to this condition of bad faith' (i.e., beyond the hypocrisies of modern life).[387]

This notion of 'theatricality by design,' then, is at least a plausible starting point for constructing a film-theatre model for alienation techniques that is distinct from the two film-theatre models based on improvisation and the duration image. The films examined in this chapter include a broad diversity of approaches to alienation as well as the purposes for which it is used. But at the same time, they all exhibit the defining characteristics of film-theatre. First, they are adaptations of techniques derived from theatre practices that have been appropriated in film to interrupt the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode. Second, they produce a self-reflexive, dialectical kind of cinema, a 'metacinema', in the same way that the corresponding techniques in theatre produce a metatheatre. The effect for the spectator is to 'see

[386] Ibid., 12.

[387] Ibid. Other examples would include the absurdist theatre of Ionescu and postmodern drama.

through' the illusion of naturalism created by the indexicality of the photographic image to be able to observe the reality of the subject or theme of the film.

A third film-theatre characteristic is the relationship between the alienation technique and its adapted form in film. While many of the techniques used in the case study films of this chapter originated in a theatre technique or practice, the purpose of film-theatre is not to propose 'theatre-like' correspondence in film. On the contrary, several forms of alienation technique observed in the films would not be possible in the theatre. The purpose of film-theatre is to examine approaches that *adapt* theatre techniques to enable film to disclose the theatricality of cinema itself in terms of the distancing effect it produces, in opposition to the absorption effects caused by mainstream cinema's illusion of 'reality.' One of the functions, therefore, of these case studies is to examine *how* this process of adaptation has been executed across various periods in film history and various changes in aesthetic approach and socio-political objectives.

Alienation was used by Brecht not just as an aesthetic for his own works but also as an approach to directing his plays and those of other writers. And he stressed its value as a film-theatre technique, particularly as a means for interrupting the Hollywood mode, observing that the 'lack of plasticity of film, which has such a spiritual effect, makes it unsuitable for plot in the dramatic sense.'[388] What Brecht is alluding to here is the natural tendency of film, as a photographic image, to induce in the viewer an 'impression of reality.'[389]

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[388] Roswitha Mueller, 'Brecht the Realist, and New German Cinema,' *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 25 (1984): 48. See infra note 417 and accompanying text for further discussion of the question of 'plasticity.'

[389] Mueller, 'Brecht the Realist,' 48. In this sense, 'spirituality' could be seen as the film's power to bind the viewer to the fiction.

The purpose of this chapter is to understand the extent to which alienation has been used as a film-theatre technique during the period from Eisenstein to the present and the various aesthetic approaches to adapting these techniques for film. It examines these questions in various stages. The first is an analysis of both the theoretical foundations for Brecht's project and the specific theatrical techniques he used to put his views into practice. The second is a historical examination of how the related approaches of Eisenstein and Brecht intersected in the 1920s leading to a recognition of the potential for the use of alienation techniques in film. The chapter then uses a series of case studies to identify critical periods since the 1920s when Brechtian techniques were adopted as a basis for developing an understanding of how these techniques inform the film-theatre model. These case studies focus on the work of Jean-Luc Godard in the 1960s; the movement known as New German Cinema (of the 1970s and 1980s), and in particular the appropriation of Brechtian techniques within Fassbinder's 'melodramas' during that period; and the use of Brechtian techniques in the twenty-first century.

5.2 The theoretical background to Brecht's alienation techniques

No evaluation of 'Brechtian' films can be attempted without reference to the critical system of social dialectics that was the philosophical foundation for the concept of alienation and the various techniques that Brecht devised to employ it. While this chapter does not pretend that the films examined here rigidly adhere to the principles of Brechtian alienation, they all demonstrate at a minimum a dialectical approach that has at least similar objectives to those of Brecht. The impetus for Brecht's use of theatrical forms is rooted in his approach to socio-political critique and theory, notably Marxist materialism. This materialism is manifested in the themes that his

works embrace, in his didactic method of approach, and in 'that continual concern for the spectator's understanding which distinguishes his teaching from ordinary emotional propaganda.'[390] Brecht's political views were shaped by both the events that unfolded in Germany during his formative years and, during his late twenties, his exposure to the teachings of Marx. The political and social backdrop for the development of his political views and his works included the European post-World War I culture and the political struggles between different factions within the Weimar Republic – notably the communists (Spartacist League and KPD), the Social Democrats (SPD), and then the Nazis – often culminating in violent street battles.[391] There are two aspects to Brecht's engagement with political issues: his position with regard to the issues themselves, on the one hand, and his analysis of the underlying economic and historical dialectic that gave rise to them and helped in their perpetuation, on the other. Brecht's early writings focused on the specific socio-economic conditions prevailing in Germany at the time. He wrote about the issues that concerned him, adopting an essentially Marxist position in most cases.

Later, however, from his fortieth year, he became more interested in the underlying dialectical materialism of Marxist teaching than in writing about current political and social problems. This process stressed the importance of real-world conditions, in terms of class, labour, and socio-economic interactions. Marx concluded that these material conditions contain contradictions which seek resolution in new forms of social order and organisation. According to this approach to history, the form of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, as used by Hegel, becomes the form of historical

[390] John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (New York: New Directions, 1959), 187.

[391] See, for example, G. Stewart, 'Bertolt Brecht: Collectivism and Dialectical Materialism in Practice,' Life Philosophy, 31 October 2017, at Countercurrents.org.

development in which earlier stages of history and social interactions are 'sublated' into higher developmental forms through the play of – and need to reconcile – the contradictions inherent in them. As Engels explained, 'life itself is likewise a contradiction which is present in actual things and events, continually posing and resolving itself.'[392]

Brecht's approach to social and political conditions through this form of dialectical process provided the key to his development of a new artistic aesthetic that, in turn, was to provide the structure for the dramatic presentation of these contradictions as well as a theatrical forum for bringing about constructive change, the 'sublation' of one order into a new one. Brecht was looking for an aesthetic approach that would provide the public with a 'faithful image of life' that would be 'absolutely comprehensible and profitable to them – in other words, popular.'[393] For this reason, he concluded that the terms 'popular art' and 'realism' were natural allies. However, at the same time he realised that these concepts 'must first be thoroughly cleansed before propositions are constructed in which they are employed and merged.' It was this 'cleansing' process that led to his aesthetic approach to literature. For Brecht, the first concept, the 'popular,' was nothing less than an ambitious and subversive project to change the natural order of things:

> Popular means: intelligible to the broad masses, adopting and enriching their forms of expression/assuming their standpoint, confirming and correcting it/representing the most progressive section of the people so that it can assume leadership, and therefore intelligible to other sections of the people as well/relating to traditions and developing them/communicating to that portion of the people which strives for leadership the achievements of the section that at present rules the nation.

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[392] John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertold Brecht: A Study from 8 Aspects*, rev. ed., Methuen Drama (London: Methuen, 1988), 193. As Willett explains, 'different forces will tug a man (or a family, or a society) in different directions, and out of this "contradiction" some movement will come; then new forces will come into play and so on, and on.' Ibid.

[393] Theodor Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso Books, 2020), 79–85.

Brecht had in mind 'a people who make history, change the world and themselves … a fighting people and therefore an aggressive concept of what is *popular*.'[394]

This led Brecht to his idea for the 'cleansing' of the second element of his aesthetic, realism. Two aspects of 'realism' concerned Brecht. The first was the illusion created by bourgeois theatre that events and people represented on stage are realistic simply because they are presented in a naturalistic manner. As Brecht pointed out, the mere fact that a production or work of literature allows us to 'smell, taste and feel everything' does not for that reason make it realistic. The work merely gives an appearance of realism because it uses forms, images, and text that appear normal or 'real' to the viewer. The function of Brecht's aesthetic is to reveal the truth behind this semblance of realism. In this sense, he saw the theatre's role as didactic. Its job is to entertain, to be 'enjoyable,' but it is still free to 'find enjoyment in teaching and inquiring.'[395] However, this didactic function with respect to the truth behind the veil of naturalism runs up against a major obstacle, also a function or effect of the illusion of reality. And this was the second aspect of the portrayal of realism that concerned Brecht. This is the theatre of senses, according to which the objective of the work is to reveal the spiritual life of the characters and their psychological motivation. As Brecht observed, in productions of this kind the spectators are like sleepers:

> True, their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear. They look at the stage as if in a trance: an expression which comes from the Middle Ages, the days of witches and priests.[396]

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[394] Ibid.

[395] Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre,' in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1995), 179–209, at paragraph 24.

[396] Ibid, paragraph 26.

In summary, Brecht's approach to politics in the form of dialectic materialism was formulated into an aesthetic that can best be described as a hostility to illusionism. As Martin Walsh explains, this was an aesthetic position that Brecht, Eisenstein, and Godard held in common, illusionism being a mode of artistic experience that aims to (psychologically) penetrate individual experience, appealing to the emotions rather than the intellect and desiring the audience's empathetic involvement with the events presented to them.[397]

A third element of Brecht's theory is his systematic approach to the presentation of drama on stage. As indicated above, he identified the illusion of realism, audience 'hypnosis,' and identification with the characters in a play as the primary obstacles to a meaningful presentation of the inherent contradictions underpinning human relations. His response to these obstacles provides the key to understanding how his technique can be applied to film. His name for it was '*Verfremdungseffekt*,' sometimes translated as 'alienation' in English but perhaps more appropriately meaning 'disillusion.'[398] There are two aspects to this concept: the theory (alienation), and the practical means or devices used to implement it on stage (effect). In a sense, 'alienation' means the opposite of the conventional understanding of the word. Brecht is not trying to deter or discourage an audience or to make them hostile to the play but to put into effect a series of devices that will enable them to understand the illusion of what they falsely believe to be reality. This can be described as a process of 'defamiliarisation' or 'making strange.' As Willett explains, the purpose is to 'show everything in a fresh and unfamiliar light, so that

[397] Walsh, *Brechtian Aspect*, 11–12.

[398] Willett, *Theatre of Bertold Brecht*, 177.

the spectator is brought to look critically even at what he has so far taken for granted.'[399]

The analysis of alienation as a concept inexorably leads to a discussion of the specific techniques used to disclose the illusion to the spectator, reveal the objective reality, and reanimate the spectator into a state of awareness and attention. For present purposes, this chapter focuses on two aspects of *Verfremdungseffekt*: Brecht's work with actors, and his approach to narrative. Brecht's approach to narrative is sometimes referred to by the German word *fabel* or 'story' (to be distinguished from the English 'fable'). *Fabel* refers to the approach Brecht took to understanding the text by eliciting the social contradictions in the story. The purpose of the *fabel* was to clearly establish the chain of events in the play and in the performance.[400] Brecht applied this approach not only to the play as a whole but also to individual scenes. In his own plays he frequently summarised the *fabel* of each scene in the text at the beginning of the scene.[401] The critical distinction was between *fabel* and plot (in the sense of a continuous story into which the audience becomes absorbed). As Brecht explained:

> As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that the knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment.[402]

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[399] Ibid. As Willett argues, this is what Shelley meant when he wrote that poetry 'makes familiar objects to be as if they were not familiar,' or Schopenhauer when he wrote that art must show 'common objects of experience in a light that is at once clear and unfamiliar.' Ibid.

[400] Willett, *Theatre of Bertold Brecht*, 152–53.

[401] In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, for example, the opening scene is described in the following terms: 'Spring 1624. The Swedish Commander-in-Chief Count Oxenstierna is raising troops in Dalectarlia for the Polish campaign. The canteen woman Anna Fierling, known under the name of Mother Courage, loses one son.' Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1983), 4.

[402] Brecht, 'Short Organum,' paragraph 67.

Another aspect of his approach to narrative is *historicisation*, according to which events are properly placed within their appropriate context, both historically and by reference to events. To a Marxist, events have meaning only when seen in their social and historical context. As David Barnett points out, we may – for example – find racism abhorrent, but this moral rejection does little to ask how racism arises and how it can be combatted.[403] There have been several types of racism at different points of history, each requiring separate consideration and analysis.[404] The purpose, therefore, of 'historicising' the selected material is to present the conditions in a way that an audience can consider the contrasts and similarities between the conditions at the time in question and the present day.

Both aspects of narrative – the concept of *fabel* and the need for historical context and comparison – require, in turn, a particular approach to the form of presentation in the theatre; and this introduces the other principal feature of the alienation effect: Brecht's approach to working with actors, both in rehearsal and on stage. This approach is fundamentally different from conventional acting styles seen in Hollywood films. The type of performance required to alienate the audience, as Brecht described it, 'is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar.'[405] This is necessary in order to 'free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today.'[406] In order to do this, the actor must discard whatever they have

[403] David Barnett, 'Historicisation,' Brecht in Practice (website), accessed 7 September 2022, https://www.brechtinpractice.net/theory/historicisation.

[404] As Barnett suggests, 'Is the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 the same as Apartheid in twentieth-century South Africa or racial segregation in the USA before the interventions of the civil rights movement?' Ibid.

[405] Brecht, 'Short Organum,' paragraph 42–43.

[406] Ibid.

learned for getting the audience to identify itself with the characters which they play.[407] This means that the actor appears in two roles: first, as the character they play, and, second, as the actor commenting on the character.

The *gestus* is a more specific application of Brecht's approach to working with actors. For Willett,

> it is at once gesture and gist, attitude and point: one aspect of the relation between two people, studied singly, cut to essentials and physically or verbally expressed. It excludes the psychological, the subconscious, the metaphysical unless they can be conveyed in concrete terms.'[408]

Gestus includes two elements: first, a character's social physicality, meaning the type of physicality generally represented by his or her position in society, work, and in relation to others; second, *Haltung*, meaning an attitude or posture towards a person, a thing, or any idea. A famous social *gestus* is Helene Weigel's snapping shut her leather money bag after each selling transaction in *Mother Courage*, thereby underscoring the contradictions between profiteering and survival – for Brecht the social reality of war.

5.3 Cinema's response to Brechtian theory and practice

We have now reached the point where Brecht's use of alienation techniques in theatre and their potential to interrupt the absorption effects of Hollywood mode films critically intersect. Of course, Brecht's techniques were developed primarily for use in the theatre and for this reason their characteristics are theatrical in the

[407] Ibid., paragraph 47.

[408] Willett, *Theatre of Bertold Brecht*, 175. According to Benjamin, 'making gestures quotable' is one of the essential achievements of epic theatre, adding that quoting a text 'implies interrupting its context.' By interrupting the flow of action through quotable gestures (which are therefore graspable), their social meaning is also repeatable. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, new edn (London:Verso, 2003), 19–20.

sense that they employ theatrical facilities, resources, and practices. However, the analysis in the preceding section also suggests a significant role for alienation techniques in film. This section, therefore, uses the film-theatre approach to examine both the Brechtian dialectic and Brecht's specific alienation techniques in films since the 1920s. A critical building block of this study is the work of Eisenstein with dialectical montage.[409] At first glance, Eisenstein's approach to social problems through montage may seem a questionable starting point, particularly because there is nothing to show that Eisenstein and Brecht corresponded, and silent film may appear an unlikely candidate for the cinematic successor to an overtly theatrical practice.[410] Nevertheless, it is difficult to consider the use of alienation in films without making the aesthetic connection between Eisenstein and Brecht, particularly since they share a common source of inspiration: Vsevolod Meyerhold. As Walsh observes, 'only in Russia, in the years after the Soviet Revolution, do we find an approach to cinema that matches Brecht's particular rejection of illusionism.'[411]

Regardless, however, of how tenuous or strong the historical link between Eisenstein and Brecht may be, the work of Eisenstein provides the first major aesthetic bridge from Brecht's alienation theory and the corresponding techniques to their use in film. The film *October: Ten Days that Shook the World* (1928) demonstrates how *gestus* and Brecht's approach to narrative structure in the form of *fabel* are closely aligned with Eisenstein's use of montage. Eisenstein shared with Brecht a profound belief in the importance of alienation, and, with *October*, he clearly demonstrates its potential

[409] Eisenstein, *Film Sense*.

[410] Walsh notes that Eisenstein and Brecht met but that it is difficult to say whether Brecht's ideas were influenced by Eisenstein or merely confirmed. He concludes that Brecht's encounter with Eisenstein was probably 'the discovery of a kindred spirit, which underlined the coincidence of parallel endeavours.' Walsh, *Brechtian Aspect*, 16.

[411] Ibid., 14. See also Katherine Eaton, 'Brecht's Contacts with the Theater of Meyerhold,' *Comparative Drama* 11, no. 1 (1977): 3–21.

value in film, particularly by use of montage. The overall structure of the film comprises a series of episodes, scenes, or 'attractions.'[412] As with Brecht's scenes, these episodes are loosely 'knotted together' to form the structure of the *fabel*, which in this case prompts a dialectic on oppression by the bourgeoisie. And the 'knots' that link each of the scenes are 'easily visible,' through the various titles that introduce them, such as 'Socialist … not Bourgeoisie. Five months of Bourgeoisie government. No peace. No bread. No land,' and (for the bridge raising scene discussed below) 'The bridges raised … to cut off the workers' districts from the centre.'

The elements of each shot in *October* elicit strong comparisons with the Brechtian scene and notably with the use of *gestus.* As Roland Barthes notes, 'nothing separates the scene in epic theatre from the Eisenstein shot (except that in Brecht the tableau is offered to the spectator for criticism, not for adherence).'[413] Eisenstein uses montage in *October* as an alienation technique to engage the spectator in a variety of ways. The sequence featuring the raising of the bridge is a cinematic form of *gestus*, characterised by a series of edits that present not just a view of the bridge being raised but a multi-dimensional critique of the event (Figs. 58–61). By cutting up the simple action of raising the bridge, Eisenstein establishes the socio-political context of the scene and invites the spectator to reflect on the significance and impact of the acts of oppression by the bourgeoisie against the proletariat.

The scene includes more specific examples of Brechtian *gestus*, including the image of the horse hanging from the bridge (Fig. 59) and the hair of the dead woman on the bridge being pulled away by the movement of the bridge (Fig. 58). Eisenstein then

[412] See Eisenstein, 'Montage of Attractions.'

[413] Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' *Screen* 15, no. 2 (1974): 35.

establishes the contradictions of the event by providing a conflicting *gestus* showing the bourgeois onlookers' reaction to the tragic events on the bridge. One of the most compelling aspects of this contrasting *gestus* is the view of spectators thrusting copies of *Pravda* (a Russian broadsheet newspaper that was the official newspaper of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) into the river as they laugh at the fate of the revolutionaries (Figs. 60–61).



Figure 58 October



Figure 59 October



Figure 60 October

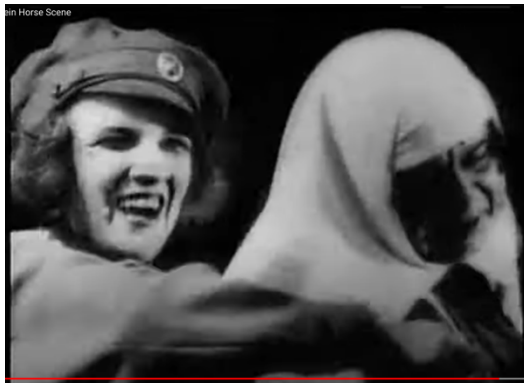


Figure 61 October

These scenes provide examples of how Brechtian concepts can be applied to understand Eisenstein's theory of montage. First, Eisenstein clearly establishes the social, political, and historical context of the bridge being raised, both in the scene itself and in the 'knot' of the intertitle that introduces it. This is not just a shot of a bridge being raised; it is a social *gestus* that incorporates the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in October 1917. Second, it is a self-contained event, an important part of the overall *fabel* of the film but nevertheless complete in itself. In the words of Barthes, it is a tableau (or, perhaps, two contrasting and conflicting tableaux) that represents: 'a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits into its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view.'[414]

And finally, although – as Barthes points out – Eisenstein's objective is 'adherence' rather than criticism, the scene presents a dialectic for the spectator to consider with the goal of presenting the objective reality hidden by the naturalist image of a bridge being raised.

Whether or not Brecht was directly influenced by Eisenstein, we can trace a discernible link between Eisenstein's montage and Brecht's use of alienation techniques as a method for eliciting a materialist dialectic with the audience through Brecht's own writings about film, his 'montage' approach to photography, and the film *Kuhle Wampe* which he co-wrote.[415] In fact, he stressed 'interruption,

[414] Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein,' 34.

[415] *Kuhle Wampe Oder: Wem Gehört Die Welt?* (Slatan Dudow, dir., Prometheus-Film-Verleih und Vertriebs-GmbH, Praesens-Film, 1933). Brecht's relation to film is discussed in Wolfgang Gersch, *Film bei Brecht: Bertolt Brechts praktische und theoretische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Film* (Munich: Hanser, 1975); John Willett, *Brecht in Context* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Mueller,

discontinuity, and the separation of individual parts' to a greater degree for film than for his plays.[416] The reason for this was his perception that film is more in the nature of visual or graphic art than the plastic art of theatre. For this reason, he concluded that film's 'character is static, and it must be treated like a sequence of tableaux. This emphatic interruption must bring about effects, or else it would be just an ordinary mistake.'[417]

In *Kuhle Wampe*, Brecht used *gestus* and *fabel* in a manner similar to Eisenstein's treatment of montage and narrative in *October*. An example is the opening scene, which comprises a series of individual shots (each one constituting a 'unit of performance' or *gestus*) that combine to create the socio-political meaning of the whole opening sequence or series of sequences. The sequence begins with a characteristic 'conspicuous knot' in the form of a title, announcing 'One unemployed worker less.' This not only establishes the subject of the opening scenes but provides the basic economic background for the *fabel* of the whole film. The following shots continue to add information on this background, providing the historical detail needed by the viewer to make informed judgments about the subject matter. So, for example, the first tableau is a series of still shots, mainly of buildings and newspaper headlines, juxtaposed to illustrate the rapidly deteriorating job market in Germany in

'Brecht the Realist.' See also Walsh, *Brechtian Aspect*; Paul Willemen, 'An Avant Garde for the Eighties,' *Framework*, no. 24 (Spring 1984): 53–73; and the special issue *Screen* 16, no. 4 (1975/6), devoted to Brecht and Douglas Sirk.

[416] Roswitha Mueller, 'Montage in Brecht,' *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 4 (1987): 473–86.

[417] Mueller, 'Brecht the Realist,'48. Brecht further explained that 'the lack of plasticity of film, which has such a spiritual effect, makes it unsuitable for plot in the dramatic sense' in film. 'Spirituality' and 'lack of plasticity' in this sense seem to refer to the hypnotic nature of film, the power of film to bind the spectator to the fiction (Brecht would refer to the processes of identification as spell-binding or hypnosis) precisely as a consequence of the 'lack of plasticity' which the theatre provides to a much greater degree. As Mueller writes, 'In the context of Brechtian drama, "lack of plasticity" and "spiritual" effect are definitely aligned with the old, dramatic, "radiant" art still carrying the aura of religion.' Ibid.

the 1930s during the Weimar Republic. Consistent with his approach to historicisation, Brecht unequivocally provides the context for the rest of the film.

The following shots are a combination of *gestus* in a montage format, connected to demonstrate the critical state of the job market. The first of these is a long shot on one street corner where the unemployed congregate to find the latest news regarding available jobs. As Roswitha Mueller points out, these are essentially 'static' frames representing concentration and dispersal (the unemployed assembling around the news stand and then leaving to chase job openings).[418] The intense concentration of these workers on the daily news sheet as they scan for possible work openings is one form of *gestus* (Figs. 62–63). Reading the news is not a social *gestus* under normal circumstances, but it takes on the character of social *gestus* in the context of the financial and employment crisis. The following sequence, by contrast, consists of a number of rapidly edited shots, similar to the bridge sequence in *October*, in which the various job seekers cycle away to pursue the few job opportunities (Figs. 64–65). While there are multiple shots and edits in this sequence, it too has the character of a tableau. The purpose is not to move the narrative forward but to elicit a reaction from the audience and a discussion of the problem. In this case the social *gestus* is the movement of the cyclists' feet on the pedals as they race to pursue job opportunities. Typical of the function of the *gestus*, the movement of the pedals and feet takes on a particularly poignant significance in light of the urgency of the cyclists' mission. The point Brecht is making here is that capital forces the worker into an antagonistic relationship with other workers as they compete for the same job.

[418] Mueller, 'Montage in Brecht.'



Figure 62 Kuhle Wampe



Figure 63 Kuhle Wampe



Figure 64 Kuhle Wampe



Figure 65 Kuhle Wampe

Similarly, as with Eisenstein, while each scene or each *gestus* within a scene has a complete 'frame-like' structure and is, in a sense, independent of the other scenes in the film, these scenes are part of the overall composition or *fabel* of the film. The *fabel* connotes not a fixed narrative but an overall purpose that is reinforced by each scene. Although the scenes do not follow a fixed plot line, they are, nevertheless, not

simply what Walter Benjamin referred to as a 'piling up of fragments' without a goal;[419] they are a 'purposeful juxtaposition to achieve certain effects.'[420]

5.4 Godard and the 'resurgence' of Brecht in cinema in the 1960s

After *Kuhle Wampe*, Brechtian techniques of alienation practically disappeared from cinema for over twenty years. In addition to Brecht's own failure to find support for his work in Hollywood, the use of montage in film had been extinguished in its place of birth. Eisenstein, Meyerhold, and other writers and filmmakers who followed the montage approach had been discredited in the USSR. And in the West, with the advent of sound (the 'talkies'), continuity editing became the benchmark for film production, leading ultimately to the hegemony of Hollywood and the studio system, whose success was built around its multiple rules and conventions.[421] No major advocates for Brechtian techniques in film appeared prior to the 1950s. Perhaps the sole significant exception during this period was the work of Charlie Chaplin, whom Brecht was known to have admired and in fact met during his time in Hollywood.[422]

The remainder of this chapter uses the film-theatre approach to examine how films from the 1950s to the present have revived, adapted, and reinterpreted Brechtian techniques. Alienation as a concept and the use of Brechtian techniques in post-1950s cinema have had an uneven history, ranging from rigorous, fierce

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[419] Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, 13th ed., Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 225 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2018), 198.

[420] Mueller, 'Montage in Brecht,' 473. 'The frame-like closure of each element in the fable is nevertheless embedded in the flow of events. This not only serves to provide the space for the audience's critical comparisons, but reflects at the same time the dialectic between the individual event and its connection to and elucidation by the context of its socio-political determinations.' Ibid.

[421] In fact, long before the rise of the US film industry and talkies, continuity editing had already largely overshadowed Eisenstein's form of montage.

[422] Angelos Koutsourakis, 'The Crisis of the Individual as a Precept of Political Cinema: "Kuhle Wampe" (1932) and "Monsieur Verdoux" (1947),' *Film Criticism* 39, no. 3 (2015): 26–47.

intellectualism in the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet (Straub-Huillet) to the melodramas of Fassbinder and even (it has been argued) Brechtian parody in the work of Lars von Trier. Although, as we shall see, these films can be analysed from several perspectives, a recurring consideration in the case studies is the shifting relationship – from one film to another – between the shot, image, tableau, or *gestus*, on the one hand, and the role of the narrative or *fabel*, on the other.

The first serious written acknowledgment of a resurgence of interest in the use of Brechtian techniques in film after 1932 was in an edition of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1960 by Bernard Dort that was dedicated to Brecht's work.[423] However, it was Godard who emerged as the champion of Brecht among the directors of the French New Wave with his first feature film, *Breathless* (1960). Godard's role in reviving *Verfremdung* for the cinema in the 1960s and 1970s cannot be understated. His work provided two principal contributions to the incorporation of Brechtian techniques into film: first, in terms of sheer volume – with few exceptions nearly all his films have relied on alienation techniques of some kind or another; he was the first director with an international reputation to use alienation techniques consistently through most of his work.[424] Second, he created his own unique techniques that adapted and expanded the possibilities of *Verfremdungseffekt* into modern cinema. They included the jump cut; his imaginative use of cinematography; a variety of approaches to the *gestus*, including *tableaux vivants*; and an episodic narrative structure.

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[423] Bernard Dort, 'Towards a Brechtian Criticism of Cinema,' *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1960–68), 252. In fact, there were strong traces of Brechtian techniques in Agnès Varda's first film, *La Pointe Court* (Agnès Varda, dir., 1955) – five years earlier – which, curiously, failed to merit even a footnote in the *Cahiers* article.

[424] Uhde, 'Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory,' 28–30, 44.

Godard's development of Brechtian theory and techniques demonstrates a gradual progression from the primacy of the narrative (*fabel*) element in his earlier films (*Breathless*, *Le Mépris*, *Vivre sa Vie*) into a greater reliance on the autonomy of the *gestus* (*Pierrot le Fou*, *Weekend*, *La Chinoise*, *Passion*).[425]

His first film, *Breathless*, appears initially as a French version of an American genre, the noir gangster film (with certain obvious references, such as a movie poster featuring Humphrey Bogart in *The Harder They Fall*[426]). But the film's aesthetic and technical approach follows Brecht rather than Hollywood. Although Godard developed his Marxist themes more overtly in later films, even in *Breathless* we can detect the seeds of political activism, in this case an 'anarchistic revolt of an isolated individual.'[427] Godard's departure from the Hollywood model is reinforced by his treatment of the relationship between the two principal characters, Michel and Patricia. Godard eschews the idea of a conventional romance between them in favour of a fractured existential study. Each character seems more concerned with their own identity than in exploring a serious relationship with the other.[428] The scene in Patricia's apartment, for example, overturns most of the Hollywood mode's tropes and conventions. The length of the sequence, playfulness of the shots, and the

[425] *Le Mépris* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Rome Paris Films, Les Films Concordia, Compagnia Cinematografica Champion, 1964); *Vivre Sa Vie: Film en Douze Tableaux* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Les Films de la Pléiade, Pathé Consortium Cinéma, 1962); *Pierrot le Fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Films Georges de Beauregard, Rome Paris Films, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC), 1969); *La Chinoise* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Anouchka Films, Les Productions de la Guéville, Athos Films, 1968); *Passion* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Sara Films, Sonimage, Films A2, 1982).

[426] *The Harder They Fall* (Mark Robson, dir., Columbia Pictures, 1956).

[427] Uhde, 'Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory,' 29. Uhde also observes that Brecht followed a similar trajectory, starting with an anarchistic figure in his first drama, *Baal* (1923), and then becoming increasingly more Marxist in later works in the 1930s.

[428] Michel, for example, is presented not only as a French version of Humphrey Bogart but as a criminal who purposely seems to model himself on Bogart or similar noir actors of that era. In one scene, we see Michel staring fixedly at a poster of the film *The Harder They Fall*, which includes an image of Bogart. The image of Bogart then occupies the whole screen while Michel stares at it and then compares his own face to Bogart's.

dissonance between the two characters suggest something closer to combativeness than romance.

Godard uses various Brechtian techniques both to interrogate the Hollywood noir gangster film and to support his themes of anarchy and estrangement. His treatment of the narrative, for example, conforms more closely to the notion of *fabel* than a Hollywood plot.[429] The beginning of the film suggests a conventional crime trajectory with plot twists, inciting incidents, and complications, but it then resolves itself into a series of episodes or chapters similar to the form of Brechtian drama. In one incident, shortly after he steals the car at the start of the film, Michel randomly kills a cop who stops him and then spends the rest of the story in Paris, mainly pursuing Patricia around the city.[430] Throughout the film, Godard uses the jump cut as a means of engaging the audience's attention by directly challenging and interrupting the 'hypnotic' effect of continuity editing – the cornerstone of the Hollywood mode – and replacing it with *dis*continuity editing.

Godard's dismantling of the conventional dramatic narrative form is further assisted by various techniques of interruption. These are used not simply to create a break in the narrative but also to advance the dialectic of the specific film. These interruptions take various forms, including textual inserts or descriptive titles and posters or other graphic work. Thus, in *Les Carabiniers*, for example, handwritten inserts are used not simply to interrupt the action but also to direct the attention of

[429] As Uhde points out, 'One of the powerful devices of distanciation used by Godard is the weakening of the continuous dramatic structure with its usual development: exposition, climax, catharsis.' Ibid., 29.

[430] Godard's dismantling of conventional plot in favour of a purely episodic structure became increasingly more apparent in his subsequent works, including *Les Carabiniers* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Cocinor, Les Films Marceau, Rome Paris Films, 1967); *Pierrot le Fou*; *Masculin Féminin* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Anouchka Films, Argos Films, Sandrews, 1966); *Sympathy for the Devil* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Connoisseur, 1968).

the audience to the general problems of war. One title reads: 'We have landed in Italy and have staked out our way with thousands of corpses.' And another one: 'What are the soldiers doing before the battle? Before the battle the soldiers are scared.' In *Pierrot le Fou*, the letters 'SS' appear on the screen at one point, but when the camera pulls back, we see that they are part of the word 'Esso' at a gas station. Another form of insert is Godard's use of static images, such as posters (as in the case of Humphrey Bogart in *Breathless*), advertisements, and comic strips.[431]

Another technique of interruption used repeatedly by Godard is referred to by Jan Uhde as 'reminders of the medium.'[432] As with Brecht's theatre productions, Godard uses this technique not simply to remind the audience that they are watching a film but to deconstruct the whole film process. *Tout Va Bien* provides a particularly effective illustration of this technique by exposing the essentials of the filmmaking process.[433] At the end of the opening credits, for example, a series of cheques are observed being signed (each one with respect to a specific film production department), to indicate to the audience that 'you need money' to make a film. An off-screen dialogue is then heard (presumably between director and producer) discussing what kind of subject is needed for a film, 'usually a love story.' And then, as we observe the two presumed lovers in the opening scene, their conversation is immediately interrupted by the 'producer' complaining that the story is too vague ('Keep going and you'll have a story about zombies. … Where do your characters live? When? What do they eat? Give us some details').

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[431] Drew Morton, 'Godard's Comic Strip Mise-en-Scène,' *Senses of Cinema* 53 (December 2009), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/feature-articles/godards-comic-strip-mise-en-scene/. In a sense, comic strips are a form of gestic tableau. Brecht used similar references to popular culture in his works. Carol Martin and Henry Bial, *Brecht Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.

[432] Uhde, 'Influence of Bertolt Brecht's Theory,' 29-30.

[433] *Tout Va Bien* (Jean-Luc Godard, dir., Anouchka Films, Vieco Films, Empire Films, 1973).

Perhaps, however, the most notable Brechtian technique used by Godard is his own version of *gestus*. His interpretation of *gestus* (and the corresponding role of *fabel* in relation to *gestus*) underwent a series of transformations from the jump cuts in *Breathless* in 1960 to the *tableaux vivants* of *Passion* in 1982. In a sense, in most of Godard's films a tableau of some kind or another fills the role of a social *gestus.* In *Passion*, this takes on a literal form as he uses *tableaux vivants* to re-interpret a series of paintings to enable the spectator to understand the social and political background to what is depicted. However, in other films – such as *Vivre Sa Vie* or *Weekend* – the tableaux are more in the nature of a particular approach to framing or cinematography and describing a scene or unit of performance.

5.4.1 *Case study 1: 'Weekend' (1967)*

Weekend is a transitional film, forming the bridge between Godard's earlier works (*Breathless*, *Le Mépris*, and *Vivre Sa Vie*, for example) and his later, more political works, including the films made under the banner of the Dziga Vertov Group and with Jean-Pierre Gorin. For our purposes, this transition was important not only for political reasons (his increased emphasis on Marxist and Maoist politics and his opposition to the Vietnam war, for example) but also because of the aesthetic shifts in Godard's use of Brechtian techniques. *Weekend* provides a compelling demonstration of Godard's move away from a narrative structure in favour of individual scenes, tableaux, or shots – a preference, in other words, for the 'frame-like' self-contained structure of individual shots (or 'units of performance') over the use of an organic plot. And in this film, the 'stitches' between each scene gradually become one of the principal narrative elements of the film.

Although the film is ostensibly a noir murder story, it becomes apparent as the film progresses that Godard's objective in *Weekend* is not to develop the story at all but to use it as a framework to create a vigorous dialectic about modern bourgeois society, and he draws from a rich palette of Brechtian techniques to achieve both results (the deconstruction of plot and the political theme). The two primary techniques analysed in this case study are his approach to narrative (corresponding to *fabel*) and his use of tableaux as his filmic interpretation of *gestus.* Godard's adaptation of *fabel* and *gestus* to serve his political and thematic objectives in *Weekend* demonstrates how film-theatre alienation techniques may effectively intervene in a film to disclose the theatricality of cinema by distancing the viewer from the illusory effects of a conventional Hollywood mode murder story. He uses *fabel* to interrupt the narrative, resolution, and audience expectations by repeatedly diverting from the main plot until eventually the plot simply disintegrates – not only without resolution but without purpose. With *gestus* he uses tableaux formations to frame farm workers and other characters in a manner that allows them to introduce a series of monologues about their condition. In other words, Godard's goal is to defeat the ideology of the Hollywood mode murder story to enable the viewer to understand the reality of the various relationships in the film.

The first of these techniques, *fabel*, involves a deconstruction of conventional narrative structure. Reviewing the film for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, Jean Collet aptly described it as 'fragments of an imaginary film.'[434] But, in fact, this 'fragmentation' was neither accidental nor an indication that the film was incomplete; rather, it was an essential component of Godard's approach to narrative in the film, which, he

[434] Jean Collet, 'Le dur silence des galaxies (*Weekend*),' *Cahiers du cinéma* no. 199 (March 1968), 60.

declared, was 'structurally entirely organised.'[435] In effect, the trajectory of the film is determined not by the narrative but by the replacement of both the content of the narrative and even the very concept of narrative as an element of film with a completely novel structure developed from the various scenes or tableaux that (we discover) comprise the main thematic fabric of the film. What starts as a noir melodrama degenerates into a dark, ultimately tragic, picaresque *fabel* that preserves almost nothing of the original plot. This dismantling of plot is apparent in the opening of the film. The plot is very simple with none of the usual twists and turns, rising action, complications, or climaxes of a conventional Hollywood film noir. Roland and Corinne are a bourgeois couple. Each has a secret lover and conspires to murder the other after obtaining Corinne's inheritance from her dying father. They drive out to Corinne's parents' home in the country to secure the money from her father, resolving to resort to murder if necessary. When they arrive at her parents' place, they discover that her father has died and her mother refuses to give them a share of the spoils. They kill her and hit the road again, only to fall into the hands of a group of hippie cannibal revolutionaries who kill Roland and cook him.

This flimsy narrative structure is derailed and repeatedly interrupted as Godard abruptly shifts his focus from the couple's greed and deception to the vapid bourgeois lifestyle that spawned it. The basic plot – the main characters, their bourgeois lifestyle, and their criminal intent – is presented with great economy in the first few minutes of the film, but then the story is abruptly interrupted by a violent scene taking place in the parking lot below the apartment where Roland and Corinne

[435] Daniel Fairfax, '"Weekend" (Jean-Luc Godard, 1967),' *Senses of Cinema* 82 (March 2017), https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/1967/weekend-jean-luc-godard-1967/. Fairfax adds that 'The film's piecemeal, disjointed character is, therefore, not the product of a chaotic filming process, but entirely pre-meditated, willed as such.'

live (Fig. 66).[436] The interrupting sequence comprises an increasingly violent fight between the owners of two cars that apparently were involved in a collision. There is no logical connection between this scene and the main plot, but in fact the motif of car crashes (presented in multiple different ways) is later to become a *gestus* used by Godard in the film as a strategy for commenting on the possessive individualism of bourgeois society, which becomes a war of all against all in a long traffic jam tracking shot (described below).[437]

[436] Their criminal intent could be understood as a kind of *grand guignol* interpretation of Marx's notion of primitive accumulation (through, for example, illegal enclosures, theft, gangsterism). David Harvey, 'Accumulation by Dispossession,' in *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 4.

[437] See Crawford Brough Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2010).



Figure 66 Weekend



Figure 67 Weekend

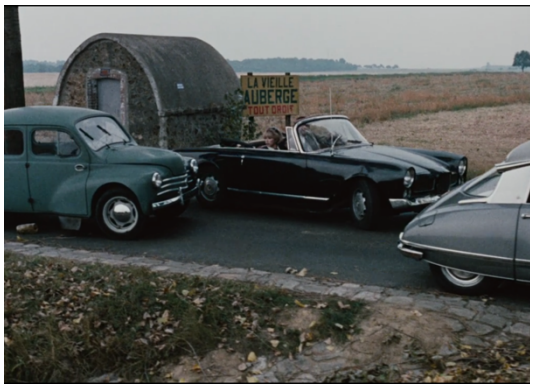


Figure 68 Weekend



Figure 69 Weekend

The main plot continues briefly with two short scenes, the first featuring Roland on a call with his lover, plotting his wife's murder, the second with Corinne and her lover, but once again Godard takes us on another detour. This detour, avowedly inspired by a similar scene in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*,[438] is an extended monologue in which Corinne relates to her lover the intimate, pornographic details of an orgy with

[438] *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, dir., AB Svensk Filmindustri, 1967).

another couple (Fig. 67). It is clear, however, that Godard is less interested in the story of the orgy related by Corinne than in the manner of its telling and its impact on the viewer and in demonstrating the moral bankruptcy, hypocrisy, and degeneracy of the bourgeoisie behind their respectable facade. Unlike the corresponding scene in *Persona*, we learn practically nothing about Corinne from this scene, and there is no attempt to connect the audience with her either emotionally or psychologically. In fact, much of the monologue is obscured by the music of Antoine Duhamel (which presents a harsh soundscape in sharp contrast to the scene). The whole scene is presented in the form of a tableau (almost in black and white, as the two lovers are in silhouette and strong shadows) shot in one single take, in which the camera remains largely fixed, except for occasional zooming in and out and some panning. At the end of the sequence, we don't even know if the event that Corinne has recalled even took place. Godard is using this intervention as another device not only to create distance from the characters but to remind the audience of the insubstantial, materialistic world of the characters.

The next 'chapter' of the plot is the departure of Corinne and Roland for the road trip to her parents' home, but this part of the story stutters before it even begins with yet another tableau, a second clash in the parking lot, but this time with Corinne and Roland as prime participants. What is striking about this scene and most of the others involving car accidents is the sheer absurdity of the argument that escalates into violence. A young boy criticises Roland's car, leading Roland to be careless as he leaves the car park, causing a minor crash. This escalates into the owner of the other car shooting at Roland and Corinne with a rifle. The argument itself comes out of nowhere and leads to nowhere. Again, Godard is reminding us of the consequences of bourgeois attachment to possessions. This scene, however, is merely a prelude to

a long tracking shot in which the camera follows Roland's car through a seemingly endless traffic jam.

Like the earlier monologue, this scene is presented more in the form of a tableau than a piece of dramatic action. The camera maintains throughout (approximately 10 minutes) a fixed distance from the scene, providing the viewer with a similar perspective as an audience at a stage play. Like the scenes before it, this 'interlude' does nothing to advance the plot (except to move the protagonists further away from their objectives), but it provides an extended commentary on bourgeois values.[439] Godard intensifies the disruption of the scene with a complex soundtrack that alternates between more of the same Duhamel music we heard in the earlier monologue scene and an almost deafening sound of car horns. Again, Godard points to the absurdity of the situation. The car horns are obviously useless since the traffic has reached a complete standstill. As David Jenkins observes, 'the banal demise of Western civilisation is signposted with a traffic jam, which cinematographer Raoul Coutard captures in a single, terrifyingly protracted take.' The point of this scene is not simply what its limited narrative reveals but the *manner* of filming it. By using a parallel tracking shot at a fixed distance from the 'action,' Godard removes the spectators from the centre of the action (which would be the Hollywood mode approach), making them dispassionate observers and putting them in a dialectical relationship with the action (Fig. 68).

As Corinne and Roland continue their quest to extract money from Corinne's parents, it becomes apparent that the film is morphing into another story, a journey

[439] These are conveyed in various ways by the extended shot of the traffic jam, highlighting bourgeois reification of possessions (their cars, of course, but also various other possessions, such as yachts), their self-absorption (no-one seems to be interested in communicating with each other), aggressive behaviour, and their insensitivity to the plight and suffering of others.

through the French countryside in which they encounter a selection of characters from history, fiction, and fantasy (or nightmares) in a series of interludes or tableaux that repeatedly disrupt the plot. Each of these interludes presents the central conflict in the film: the clash of values between Godard's Marxist politics and the vacuous priorities of the bourgeoisie. And, as Corinne and Roland continue their journey, they move increasingly backwards from their 'civilised' indulgences into a world of primitive accumulation.[440] As a contrast to the film's overt violence, associated with the greed of the protagonists, Godard uses a series of relatively static tableaux to present his political themes.[441] Two scenes provide a balanced respite from the anarchy of the other scenes in the film. In the first, a pianist performs a Mozart sonata in a farmyard while the camera makes two complete 360-degree turns, capturing the farmworkers, who listen attentively while Corinne and Roland appear impatient, frustrated, and bored by the musical interlude. The second is a tableau in which two migrant garbage workers deliver three monologues. The first two, taken from a text by Frantz Fanon and a speech by Stokely Carmichael respectively, comment on the state of revolutionary struggle in the Third World and, in particular, the right of the oppressed to use violence in furtherance of their urges for liberation. In both cases the camera remains fixed not on the speaker but on the other worker who is listening. In the case of the third monologue – which appears to be taken from a primer on Engels's *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* –

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[440] Around the same time that Godard made *Weekend*, Althusser discussed the importance of Karl Marx's theory of capital accumulation in his preface to *Capital*, volume 1. Louis Althusser, 'Preface to *Capital* Volume One' (1969), trans. Ben Brewster, transcribed by Andy Blunden, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed 13 September 2022, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1969/preface-capital.htm. There is some authority that Godard was directly influenced by the work of Althusser, particularly in connection with his 1967 film *La Chinoise.* Doug Enaa Greene and Shalon van Tine, 'A Fight on Two Fronts: On Jean-Luc Godard's La Chinoise,' *Cosmonaut* (blog), 28 August 2019, https://cosmonaut.blog/2019/08/28/a-fight-on-two-fronts-on-jean-luc-godards-la-chinoise/.

[441] See, for example, fig 69.

while it is read out, the camera remains fixed on Roland and Corinne, who appear annoyed. In both scenes Godard appears to be drawing a comparison between the relatively prosperous but aimless and ignorant lives of Roland and Corinne and the lives and ethical and cultural values of the farm workers.

The film serves as a model for film-theatre alienation techniques by demonstrating how effectively these techniques can be adapted from theatrical practices into cinematic form to create a new kind of cinema, a metacinema that repeatedly disrupts the viewers' expectations and leads in turn to a dialectical response to the subject matter. As explained above, the primary device for achieving this result is the reconfiguration of the narrative into a Brechtian *fabel*, punctuated with relatively self-contained frame-like scenes, normally in the nature of tableaux, corresponding to a large degree to Brechtian *gestus.* While the story is fragmented, it is not disorganised or illogical. Godard's purpose was to make the audience assemble the pieces through their own reasoning, not to tell them what to think.[442] Godard's approach demonstrates the value of a film-theatre approach to alienation techniques. The aesthetic source for his approach is theatrical, in the sense that it derives from metatheatre and Brechtian techniques, but his solution is cinematic, in the sense that he skilfully employs film's technical devices to create metacinema. And of course, the aesthetic effect is also theatrical in the sense that it interrupts the Hollywood mode's absorption effect.

[442] Fairfax notes that 'Weekend, then, puts the present day spectator in the position of a future archivist, who is left with the job of "recuperating the pieces of this shattered film," a piece torn asunder like the ever-present crashed cars amassed on the highway lay-bys in formations resembling a modernist sculpture.' Fairfax, '"Weekend."'

5.5 Brechtian melodrama and the New German Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s

In tandem with the work of Godard in the 1960s and encouraged perhaps by the success of the French New Wave, the movement known as New German Cinema started to experiment with new approaches to making feature films. Their impetus was the Oberhausen Manifesto (1962), which declared an:

> aspiration to create a new style of film. … Film needs to be more independent. Free from all usual conventions by the industry. Free from control of commercial partners. Free from the dictation of stakeholders. We have detailed spiritual, structural, and economic ideas about the production of new German cinema. Together we're willing to take any risk. Conventional film is dead. We believe in the new film.[443]

The principal objective of these filmmakers was to create a new kind of cinema that broke away from the conventions of mainstream films and was not dependent on commercial success. The initial emphasis of this group of filmmakers was on autonomy, on financial independence from market pressures. This led to a period (in the 1960s) marked by a proliferation of aesthetic forms with a pronounced disregard for commercial standards.[444] During the 1960s, this autonomy was to some extent supported by the Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, which channelled state funds into the financing of independent film projects.[445] However during the second decade of this movement, there was a shift towards audience expectations and

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[443] Alexander Kluge et al., 'The Oberhausen Manifesto (West Germany, 1962),' in *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 152–53.

[444] Mueller, 'Brecht the Realist.'

[445] During the 1960s, a number of directors from this group made their first feature films. Among them were Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, Alexander Kluge, Volker Schlöndorff, Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Werner Schroeter, Herbert Fleischmann, Peter Lilienthal, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, Reinhard Hauff, Uwe Brandner, Ulrich Schamoni, Edgar Reitz, Rudolf Thome, and Johannes Schaaf. In the 1970s they were joined by Helma Sanders, Christian Ziewer, Herbert Achternbusch, Lutz Eisholtz, Marianne Lüdke, Sohrab Soless, Wolf Gremm, Hark Böhm, Ulli Lommel, and Ingo Kratisch.

commercial considerations, in part a result of tighter financial resources in the seventies leading to a greater need to make commercially popular films, and in part because of a change in the political climate after 1968.

Fassbinder was a central figure in both the exploratory era of the New German Cinema (in his case, between 1969 and 1971) and the more commercial period from 1971 until 1982. He is sometimes criticised for compromising the values of Brechtian techniques with the aim of creating a 'German Hollywood' by making films that would be commercially viable while at the same time criticising the society which they reflect. It is, in fact, the impact that classical Hollywood cinema, forms, and genres had on Fassbinder's work during this second, 'commercial' period that is of particular interest and relevance to the discussion of Brechtian theory and practice in this chapter, particularly in the context of how Brechtian techniques have been adapted over time to shifts and changes in film styles, movements, and technology. Fassbinder eschewed the more ascetic and intellectual approach of Godard and Straub-Huillet, who in many ways could be considered archetypal Brechtian filmmakers (at least in terms of their dedication to Brechtian forms, aesthetics, and politics). During interviews, Fassbinder expressed his view that too strict an adherence to Brechtian principles could lead to a 'dry, cerebral cinema that has too little appeal to the emotions of non-intellectuals.'[446] On various occasions, he accused his former colleague, Straub, of making 'elitist films for bourgeois

[446] Ruth McCormick, 'Fassbinder and the Politics of Everyday Life: A Survey of His Films,' *Cineaste* 8, no. 2 (1977): 23.

intellectuals.'[447] Fassbinder's own early works such as *Katzelmacher*[448] and *Die Niklashauser Fart*[449] show the influence of Straub/Huillet and Godard, but considering the failed student movements in France and Germany, 'this counter-cinema of unpleasure came to appear elitist, dogmatic, and anti-democratic.'[450]

Fassbinder's rejection of the more ascetic forms of Brechtian cinema was the subject of articles concerning the relationship between his German 'Hollywood' films and the melodramas of Douglas Sirk, whom Fassbinder avowedly admired. A common theme in these articles is the question of whether to read Sirk as a Brechtian director or Fassbinder as Sirkian. Critics have taken opposing positions, either 'hailing Fassbinder as a high art political director in a Brechtian tradition or labelling him a Hollywood entertainer with, at most, a critical edge.'[451] While, however, a Sirkian approach to examining Fassbinder's films has some value, this does little to serve the particular purpose of the film studies in this thesis. Therefore, although the case study in the next subsection occasionally references Sirk's film *All That Heaven Allows*[452] as the model on which *Ali* was based, the more compelling question, for the purposes of this chapter, is neither the extent to which Fassbinder's work is

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[447] Gerd Gemünden, 'Re-Fusing Brecht: The Cultural Politics of Fassbinder's German Hollywood,' *New German Critique*, no. 63 (1994): 55–75. Fassbinder commented, 'films from the brain are all right, but if they don't reach the audience, it's no good. ... He [Straub] tried to be revolutionary and human in an inhuman way.' Cited in Arthur Lubow, 'Cinema's New Wunderkinder,' *New Times*, 15 May 1975, 54.

[448] *Katzelmacher* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, dir., Antiteater-X-Film, 1969).

[449] *Die Niklashauser Fart* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, dir., Janus Film und Fernsehen, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), 1970).

[450] Lubow, 'Cinema's New Wunderkinder,' 54.

[451] Brigitte Peucker, 'High Passion and Low Art: Fassbinder's Narrative Strategies,' *Ambiguities in Literature and Film*, ed. Hans Braendlin (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988), 65. See also Thomas Elsaesser, 'Primary Identification and the Historical Subject: Fassbinder and Germany,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Ph Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 538; Timothy Corrigan, *New German Film: The Displaced Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[452] *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, dir., Universal International Pictures (UI), 1955).

distinct from Sirk's or somehow represents a fusion of the two approaches, nor the degree to which *Ali* can be regarded as Brechtian, but rather the extent to which – *despite* the melodramatic façade of the film – Fassbinder's use of Brechtian techniques still interrupts the Hollywood mode.

5.5.1 *Case study 2: 'Ali: Fear Eats the Soul' (1974)*

A close examination of *Ali* demonstrates that Fassbinder has effectively and imaginatively used Brechtian strategies for alienation.[453] While *Ali* is self-evidently more commercially motivated and follows a more conventional plot structure than, for example, Godard's *Weekend*, it utilises each of the principal Brechtian forms specifically to interrupt the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films. The following sections examine how in *Ali* Fassbinder used Brechtian approaches to narrative structure and tableaux or *gestus* to both alienate the viewers and engage them in a discourse about the various social issues involved (specifically, age, race, and class). The individual scenes and each *gestus* present the social commentary on these issues, while the narrative provides a loose structure which juxtaposes these scenes in a manner that provokes discussion and analysis by the spectator.

There is no question that *Ali* fits within the genre of melodrama – it is an intense story revolving around the implications of a relationship between an elderly cleaning lady, Emmi, and an Arab immigrant to Germany, Ali. Like its Hollywood counterpart, *All That Heaven Allows*, it explores the question of how this relationship is affected and disrupted by a parochial and bigoted society. By all accounts,

[453] As H. B. Moeller observes, 'In their fascination with Fassbinder's reverence for exiled director Douglas Sirk and his Hollywood work, film scholars tend to overlook or underestimate the Brechtian elements in Fassbinder's work, regardless of whether these elements originate from Brecht of from cinematic borrowers Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet or Jean-Luc Godard.' Hans Bernhard Moeller, 'Fassbinder's Use of Brechtian Aesthetics,' *Jump Cut* 35, no. 102 (1990), 102-107.

therefore, its plot, at least superficially, appears to resemble countless Hollywood movies on similar themes. However, this should not be mistaken as a rejection of Brechtian principles or techniques. Brecht himself followed a similar trajectory in his own later works, after moving away from his earlier abolition of the concept of 'audience' in his 'Radiotheory' and his 'Lehrstück' towards the later epic plays in which the audience played a role in the performance.[454]

In his 'Short Organum for the Theatre,' Brecht insisted that theatre should 'entertain' an audience, though 'entertainment' in this sense required not audience passivity but audience participation and criticism. His *Life of Galileo* reflects this direction. While some regarded the play as a step backwards, it nevertheless aimed for an actively participating audience. The difference in approach is found in the change of emphasis in *Galileo* and other later works from *gestus* to *fabel*, 'from a close analysis of instances of social interaction to the story line.'[455] *Fabel*, however, should not be confused with the Hollywood notion of plot or the corresponding misconception of Hollywood 'realism.' The defining characteristic of *fabel* is that its respective parts and each *gestus* are separated from one another 'and then juxtaposed in such a way that contradictions result.'[456] The *fabel* is the organising story or framework that allows this dialectic of social relations to develop. While it includes

[454]The term 'Lehrstücke,' or learning-plays, describes a series of experimental works written in the 1920s and early 1930s by Bertolt Brecht and a number of collaborators, including Kurt Weill, Hanns Eisler and Elisabeth Hauptmann. As Erika Hughes observes, 'the intention behind writing and performing these experimental plays was not necessarily to culminate in a finished, final product to be replicated exactly during each performance. or, as Frederic Jameson (1998) describes it, "one continuous master class."' Hughes, Erika. 'Brecht's Lehrstücke and Drama Education,' in *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*, ed. S. Schonmann (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 197.

[455] Mueller, 'Brecht the Realist,' 45.

[456] Ibid., 46.

a sequence necessary to set up contradictions, 'there is no fixed curve of cause and effect which takes for its point of departure the inevitable fate of an individual.'[457]

This distinction between the *fabel* as 'organising framework' for the individual parts and *gestus*, on the one hand, and a plot that is dictated by the psychological motivation of individual characters, on the other, can be observed in Fassbinder's approach to the development of story in *Ali*. From the opening scenes in the film Fassbinder sets up the relationship between Emmi and Ali not as a love story but as a commentary about social relationships. While there is a very simple story that holds the film's structure together, it is this commentary and Fassbinder's multiple individual observations of how the relationship between Ali and Emmi is received by others in society that constitute its primary thematic material. Structurally, the film is divided into two principal narrative segments, bookended by a short introduction and coda. The introduction establishes the start of the relationship between Ali and Emmi. By contrast with more conventional films, this happens quickly and without any kind of dramatic romantic development. They meet, decide to dance, and end up a short while later in Emmi's apartment where they spend the night. Their relationship appears to occur almost accidentally, born out of a mutual need rather than passion. The two main sections of the film form the core of the narrative content. The first documents the multi-faceted prejudices and rejections of the relationship by a diverse collection of social groups (including friends, family, and businesses); the second is a sudden U-turn by the same groups as they come to realise how their own interests are best served by accepting Emmi and Ali rather than rejecting them. Ironically, it is this change of attitude that drives the two lovers

[457] Ibid.

apart. The film's very brief coda offers some prospect of a resumption of their relationship while suggesting Ali's illness may return.

The *fabel* character of the narrative becomes more apparent on closer examination of the two main narrative 'blocks.' Although, in a sense, each of the blocks tells a story, the story, such as it is, is more in the form of a social documentary comprising (in the case of each block) different perspectives of prejudice in daily life in 1970s Germany. The scenes in the first block demonstrate the intolerance of society for people and relationships that are different from the norm; the scenes in the second block show how individuals manipulate this intolerance for their own personal needs. Other than Emmi and Ali's holiday, which forms the link between the first and second blocks, there is very little in the way of a narrative thread between each of the scenes in either block. There is little sense of any rising action, complications, three-act structure, or resolution that would be found in a more conventional form of melodrama. Each block is episodic in nature and comprises a series of interactions between either Emmi or Ali or both together with outside characters. So, for example, in the first block, after Ali moves in with Emmi, they are observed by (i) the other inhabitants in the block of flats, (ii) Emmi's co-workers, (iii) Emmi's family, (iv) a restaurant where they celebrate their marriage, (v) a local grocery store, and (vi) Ali's friends at the bar where the film begins. In the second block, this same structure is repeated in the same settings, except that the same people now feign acceptance of Emmi and Ali because, for various reasons, they need their help. Each of these episodes provides a further level of insight into the contradictions raised by the relationship of Emmi and Ali but adds little to the melodramatic narrative of the film. This is because the purpose of the *fabel* is not to explore the relationship but to examine its effects on others. In the same way, as the following

paragraph demonstrates, the arrangement of scenes and the mise-en-scène and cinematography for each scene further create distance between the spectator and the characters in the film.

As with Brecht and Godard, Fassbinder's principal aesthetic device for emphasising the social dialectics of race, age, and class in *Ali* is the *gestus*, which takes the form of a combination of arrangement of characters, mise-en-scène, and cinematography. As the previous paragraph indicates, Fassbinder uses the two principal narrative blocks not to develop the psychological narrative between Emmi and Ali but as a springboard for Fassbinder's social commentary. And this commentary operates from the beginning of the film on three critical levels: Ali's Arabic origins, Emmi's age and social standing, and, of course, the relationship between Ali and Emmi (as seen by others). Fassbinder establishes in the opening shots of the film his strategy for engaging the audience in this commentary while distancing them from the psychological drama. From the outset, he uses *gestus* as an effective Brechtian tool for these purposes.

The primary device for this strategy in the opening scene and most other scenes is the arrangement of the characters in the scene. As David Barnett explains, in Brechtian theatre, a scene's arrangement is used to:

> tell the scene's contradictory story, noting turning points and the figures' different relationships to the events. Ideally, the *Arrangement* is a series of clear tableaux that move logically from event to event, allowing the audience to follow the clear arc of the scene.'[458]

[458] David Barnett, 'Arrangement,' Brech in Practice (website), accessed 7 September 2022, https://www.brechtinpractice.net/theory/arrangement. On the importance of scene arrangement with Brechtian stagecraft, see also Claire Gleitman, 'All in the Family: "Mother Courage" and the Ideology in the Gestus,' *Comparative Drama* 25, no. 2 (1991): 147–67.

Fassbinder arranges the opening scene to establish a clear separation between the young people in the bar and Emmi. Emmi is shown entering the bar (to seek shelter from the rain) in a long shot taken from the far end of the bar and (we later discover) from the point of view of the others in the bar (Figs. 70–71). She is isolated and is presented more as an object of curiosity for the others than as a person. Apart from Ali, who invites Emmi to dance, and the waitress who briefly serves her, this distance is maintained throughout the scene. At the same time, Fassbinder invites the audience to reflect on the scene by holding both groups of individuals in relatively still frames for extended periods of time.



Figure 70 Ali



Figure 71 Ali

Fassbinder applies this same tableau approach to the arrangement of characters in nearly all the other confrontations in the first and second blocks of the film. These arrangements and the conflicts that they suggest are emphasised by the settings and Fassbinder's use of framing and cinematography. For instance, when Emmi and Ali return to Emmi's apartment building from the bar they are immediately framed by an arch, giving the impression that they are observed from another part of the building

(Fig. 72). And as they go up the stairs, the audience views them from the perspective of another tenant seen through the mesh frame of her door (resembling a prison door) (Fig. 73). Even within the privacy of Emmi's apartment our first view of Emmi and Ali is from outside the kitchen, as if we (like the tenants) are prying in on their meeting (Fig. 74). As in most of the film, Fassbinder's camera is mainly static, moving only occasionally to follow the movements of characters or to draw closer. In fact, the entire film consists largely of relatively long scenes shot mainly in real time with a minimum use of edits and cutaway shots.



Figure 72 Ali



Figure 73 Ali



Figure 74 Ali

In addition, not only the camera but also the characters remain static for extended periods of time, suggesting that they are either observing the audience or seeking the audience's attention. In the restaurant scene (following their marriage) for example, the framing is two dimensional. We see Emmi and Ali at a distance, sitting at a table, while a supercilious waiter makes them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. The scene ends with the same distant shot of them at the table but with one important difference: in the opening shot, they are looking through the menu while the waiter stands to the side. In the closing shot, however, they turn to face the camera and continue to look at the camera (the audience) for 10 seconds. In this *gestus* they appear to be directly asking the audience to take a position on what has happened to them (Figs. 75–76).



Figure 75 Ali



Figure 76 Ali

Perhaps the most compelling example of Fassbinder's use of *gestus* and arrangement is the confrontation with Emmi's family in her flat immediately after the restaurant scene. In this scene, Fassbinder arranges the characters into two opposing groups which are maintained throughout the scene (Figs. 77–78). At one end of the room are

Emmi's family who remain more or less static, sitting at the table and staring at Emmi and Ali as Emmi explains that they are now married. As Ali is introduced, the camera slowly pans across the stunned faces of each member of the family. After the pan, for another extended period, nothing happens. We just watch the family looking at Emmi. Although the scene ends dramatically when one of the sons kicks the television set on his way out, the primary 'action' of the scene is contained within the two sets of *gestus* – the family and the married couple. The stares and stunned expressions of the family are all that is needed aesthetically to express their bigotry. We see nothing of their individual characters, motives, or inner emotions (which would confuse and complicate the scene). They are [re]presented as a societal group formed to condemn Emmi and Ali. And for almost the whole scene the living room in which it takes place is shown as two separate spheres, each occupied and used for the corresponding *gestus.* It is only in the final frames of the scene, after the family has left, that the camera pulls back to show the whole room, with Emmi and Ali on one side and the smashed television on the other.



Figure 77 Ali



Figure 78 Ali

In another scene, Emmi and Ali sit at a table in an outdoor café while a group of onlookers stare at them, judging them. At the height of the scene, after breaking down in tears, Emmi and Ali declare their love for one another. When Emmi and Ali agree to go away to a place 'where no one knows us and no one stares and everyone will be nice to us,' we are prepared to sympathise with them and become emotionally drawn into their relationship. But just at that moment, the camera turns and pulls back to assume the same position of the onlookers and we are now placed in the position of judging them as well (Figs. 79–80).[459] As one writer observes, 'Here, his moving camera pulls us out of our subjective identification, and we are literally moved from a position of empathy to a position of judgment.'[460]



Figure 79 Ali



Figure 80 Ali

[459] 'He snakes us back and around, until we are staring at Emmi and Ali alone, amidst a plenitude of empty tables, just like those café workers who stare at them. Sirk would do this sort of thing as well; he would place us in a position of judgment, a mediated sight-line that would undermine our emotional response to the content of the scene.' Chris Wiesniewski, 'Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,' *Reverse Shot*, 21 July 2006, http://reverseshot.org/symposiums/entry/119/ali_fear_eats_the_soul.

[460] Ibid.

As these examples demonstrate, while *Ali* appears to fit into the melodrama genre, this is merely a facade to enable Fassbinder to comment on the social conditions at the time and to engage the audience in a meaningful discourse around racism. *Ali* is not a German-Hollywood film that utilises some Brechtian techniques. It is a film that meaningfully deploys the primary Brechtian techniques of *gestus* and *fabel* to interrogate the Hollywood mode.

5.6 Alienation techniques in the twenty-first century and beyond

During the period following Fassbinder's last film (1982 to the present), the use of Brechtian techniques has continued to play a role in film, though its use has been sporadic. While Brechtian techniques have been used during this period in some mainstream films, this has been primarily for stylistic effects.[461] For example, direct address to the audience has almost become commonplace in Hollywood films,[462] and voiceover narration or narrative texts are frequently used to provide background, context, or history in various films.[463] Similarly, jump cuts and freeze frames have been a commonplace in Hollywood cinema since as early as 1969 with *Butch*

[461] Nenad Jovanovic, *Brechtian Cinemas: Montage and Theatricality in Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Peter Watkins, and Lars von Trier* (New York: SUNY Press, 2017), 5, citing David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 121.

[462] 'Generally speaking, direct address will be the province of a single character and that character is often the protagonist or the principal agent of the narrative; in some cases, they might be called the narrator.' Tom Brown, 'Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema,' *Screens and Stages* (blog), 31 May 2012, https://fttreading.wordpress.com/2012/05/31/breaking-the-fourth-wall-direct-address-in-the-cinema-4/. See also, *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, dir., Paramount, 1966); *Hannah and Her Sisters* (Woody Allen, dir., Orion Pictures, 1986).

[463] Examples include *Goodfellas*; *Bladerunner* (Ridley Scott, dir., the Ladd Company,1982); and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, dir., Lucasfilm Ltd., 1977).

Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.[464] In these situations, however, the so-called Brechtian device is used to *support* the Hollywood mode's absorption effects.

While political or social justice films have become a popular and commercially successful genre during this period,[465] only a few have engaged with alienation techniques to create an effective dialogue or dialectical response from the spectator. The emphasis in these films is on political *content*, which *represents* political questions, by contrast with what Angelos Koutsourakis describes as 'political cinema,' which is concerned with the *forms* of representation and which strives to make strange our perception of the world and reveal its constructedness instead of treating it as normal.[466] Their 'political content' does not immunise them from the problems of absorption effects in the absence of any alienation techniques or, for that matter, any of the other forms of film-theatre examined in this thesis.

Nevertheless, 'political cinema' and the use of Brechtian techniques as a *form* of representation has continued into the twenty-first century through the work of various directors. In addition to the films of Haneke and Von Trier (discussed below), for example, alienation techniques have been a characteristic of cinema outside Europe and the USA, including New Hong Kong cinema, in the works of Ann Hui (*Ordinary Heroes*[467]) and Evans Chan (*The Life and Times of Wu*

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[464] *Butch Cassidy and the Sunshine Kid* (George Roy Hill, dir., Campanile Productions, 1969). See also Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity Visual Style.'

[465] Examples include: *All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, dir., Wildwood Enterprises, 1976); *Mrs. America* (various directors, Shiny Penny Productions, Gowanus Projections, Federal Engineering, 2020); *The Contender* (Rod Lurie, dir., Cinerenta Medienbeteiligungs KG, Cinecontender, Battleground Productions, 2000); *Suffragette*; *Made in Dagenham*. In addition, several 'social conscience' films by Sidney Lumet and, before him, Elia Kazan fall into this category. See William "Bill" Blick, 'Lumet, Sidney,' *Senses of Cinema*, no. 98 (May 2021), http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2021/great-directors/lumet-sidney/.

[466] Angelos Koutsourakis, *Politics as Form in Lars Von Trier: A Post-Brechtian Reading* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

[467] *Qian Yan Wan Yu* (Ann Hui, dir., Class Limited, 1999).

Zhongxian[468]); the works of Palestinian director Elia Suleiman (*Divine Intervention*[469]); and those of Chilean filmmaker Raul Ruiz (*Mysteries of Lisbon*[470]). In addition, Brechtian techniques have been a feature of several twenty-first-century films that have blurred the boundaries between fiction and documentary, observation and participation or re-enacting, including *The Act of Killing*,[471] *It Happened Just Before*,[472] *Stories We Tell*,[473] and *Fire at Sea.*[474] These films – sometimes considered 'docu-memoirs' or performative documentaries – demonstrate the adaptability of narrative, documentary and hybrid forms of film in the twenty-first century to Brechtian alienation techniques.

During this period, both Michael Haneke and Lars Von Trier stand out for their work in 'political cinema,' as defined by Koutsouraki. Like Fassbinder, they have shown how *Verfremdung* can be used to create a social dialectic on a variety of social and political issues outside the specific scope of Brecht's Marxist political agendas. And, like Fassbinder, they each used the basic framework of Hollywood genres to construct their own unique dialectics, using Brechtian form. In *Dogville*, for example, Von Trier used several Brechtian techniques, including voiceover,

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[468] *The Life and Times of Wu Zhongxian* (Evans Chan, dir., Riverdrive Productions, 2003). See also Gina Marchetti, *Citing China: Politics, Postmodernism, and World Cinema* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), chapter 4.

[469] *Yadon Ilaheyya* (Elia Suleiman, dir., Arte France Cinéma, Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Gimages, 2002).

[470] *Mistérios de Lisboa* (Raul Ruiz, dir., Clap Filmes, Alfama Films, Radiotelevisão Portuguesa (RTP), 2020).

[471] *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, dir., Final Cut for Real, Piraya Film A/S, Novaya Zemlya, 2012).

[472] *Kurz Davor Ist Es Passiert* (Anja Salomonowitz, dir., Amour Fou Vienna, 2007).

[473] *Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, dir., National Film Board of Canada, 2013). See also Andrea Doucet, 'Ontological Narrativity and the Performativity of the *Stories We Tell*,' Visual Studies 30, no. 1 (2015): 98–100.

[474] *Fuocoammare* (Gianfranco Rosi, dir., Stemal Entertainment, 21 Unofilm, Istituto Luce Cinecittà, 2016).

minimalist set design, and an episodic narrative with chapter headings, to defuse audience expectations about female suffering and to deny the audience the chance to conflate suffering with virtue. In *Funny Games*, which is the subject of the final case study, Haneke turns horror and other violent film genres on their heads by using the horror genre itself to create a dialectical response to society's anaesthetisation to violence.

5.6.1 *Case study 3: 'Funny Games' (1997)*

A defining theme of Haneke's work is the privileges, hypocrisy, and cruelty of upper-class society. Each of his films involves a 'home invasion' of some sort into this world, some of them metaphorical (as in his 2012 masterpiece *Amour*,[475] where the intruder turns out to be time itself), some explicit (as in the two versions of *Funny Games*), some consisting of video surveillance technologies (as in *Caché*[476]), and some a nuanced accumulation of external events and family crises (as in *Happy End*[477]). A common critical assessment of *Funny Games* is that it is an indictment of the medium of film itself and the ways in which it is used to manipulate an audience by providing gratuitous pleasure through graphic depictions of violence and horror. While this perspective is justified by Haneke's treatment of violence in the film, it is misleading to the extent that it overlooks the broader Haneke theme relating to the privileges of the upper middle class and the forms of 'etiquette' and exaggerated politeness that they use to defend and justify their actions. As with Haneke's other

[475] *Amour* (Michael Haneke, dir., Les Films du Losange, X-Filme Creative Pool, Wega Film, 2012).

[476] *Caché* (Michael Haneke, dir., Les Films du Losange, Wega Film, Bavaria Film, 2006).

[477] *Happy End* (Michael Haneke, dir., Les Films du Losange, 2017). See Justin Chang, 'Review: Michael Haneke's "Happy End" Is a Disquieting, Blisteringly Funny Evisceration of the Bourgeoisie,' *Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 2017, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-happy-end-review-20171221-story.html.

work, the horror story in *Funny Games* is merely a device he uses for the 'home invasion,' but it must be analysed in the context of its role in relation to the socio-political issues of class that the film addresses and not as the sole justification for the film, as some writers suggest.[478] This same thematic thread underpins most of Haneke's films, regardless of the aesthetic frame he uses to represent it. In *Caché*, for example, he addresses questions of individual and collective culpability and complacency by upper middle-class French society for the continuing effects of French colonialism and the country's indifference to its immigrant population.[479] And in *Happy End*, he uses a number of connected family stories to 'chip away at an upper-class Western family whose members are ensconced in their own privilege, deaf to the guilty howls of conscience and oblivious to the suffering in their midst.'[480]These stories are played out against the backdrop of the Calais refugee crisis.

In conventional Hollywood mode home invasion films,[481] the status of the privileged upper-class or upper middle-class family is not only accepted by the audience but also ultimately vindicated by retaliation against the villains and the restoration of the victims' status quo at the end of the film. By identifying with the family as victims, the spectator becomes absorbed in the narrative or, in Althusserian terms, 'hailed' into the position of subjects supporting the privileges, status, and wealth of the

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[478] See, for example, John Wray, 'Minister of Fear,' *New York Times*, 23 September 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/magazine/23haneke-t.html.

[479] A. O. Scott, 'The Discreet Masochism of the Bourgeoisie,' *New York Times*, 9 October 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/09/movies/the-discreet-masochism-of-the-bourgeoisie.html.

[480] Chang, 'Michael Haneke's "Happy End."'

[481] Examples include *Panic Room* (David Fincher, dir., Columbia Pictures, Hofflund/Polone, Indelible Pictures, 2002); *The Silence* (John Leonetti, dir., Constantin Film, EMJAG Productions, 2019); *Once Upon a Time... in Hollywood* (Quentin Tarantino, dir., Columbia Pictures, Bona Film Group, Heyday Films, 2019); *Black Christmas* (Sophia Takal, dir., Universal Pictures, Blumhouse Productions, Divide/Conquer, 2019).

invaded family. Haneke uses various Brechtian alienation techniques to reverse these absorption effects by 'making strange' the horror story narrative and turning the spectator's critical attention towards the family or at least the social class to which they belong. He conveys these themes through three narrative perspectives: the Schober family; their tormentors, Peter and Paul; and the film's audience.

Haneke establishes the theme of class privilege at the outset of the film in the way he depicts the family (Anna, Georg, and Georgie Schober). While most mainstream home invasion films simply assume the wealth and comfort of the victims, Haneke makes a detailed study of the Schobers' assets and privileges. The first 10 minutes of the film are almost exclusively devoted to painting a portrait of their privileged existence, starting with a classical music 'game' in the Schobers' car as they make their way to their luxurious second home, interspersed with aerial views of their expensive car and yacht in tow. The following scenes add further layers to this portrait as the viewer is introduced to their wealthy neighbours and the two families plan to meet on the golf course. As the Schobers' car enters their residence, Haneke's camera remains focused on the large gate as it closes. In the next scenes it is the family dog that the camera follows as we are introduced to the various accoutrements of wealth, including antiques and a set of expensive golf clubs (Figs. 81–82). The portrait concludes with an extended view of the yacht. A point that Haneke is making here, and that the film develops, is that the very accessories of the family's wealth – the electric gate, the golf clubs, the boat, and later a rifle – become the instruments of their own torture, imprisonment, and murder.



Figure 81 Funny Games



Figure 82 Funny Games

This extended portrait provides the social and domestic context for the horror story that follows. This begins when a young, preppy-looking man, Peter, calls asking for eggs. The mood, however, quickly shifts from tranquillity as the visitor repeatedly drops the eggs and breaks Anna's cell phone. A second visitor, Paul, arrives and makes further demands on Anna, leading Georg to try to evict Peter and Paul. Paul reacts by breaking Georg's knee with a golf club, at which point it becomes clear that Peter and Paul have some agenda with the family and won't leave until it is accomplished. However, this agenda is no more than a 'funny game,' which is a bet that all the family will be dead by the following morning. The rest of the film comprises the experiences of the family during the night as each one of them tries, unsuccessfully, to escape and each is killed. The film ends with the young men going to the house of another neighbour with the same pretext for entering (asking for eggs for the family they have just tortured and killed).

The structure of the horror story is characterised by an *absence* of dramatic signposts that would be used to guide the audience in a conventional horror film. There is no recognisable three-act structure comprising complications, rising action, subplots,

climaxes, anticlimaxes, and resolutions. Once the intruders have entered the house and presented their 'game' to the family (the functional equivalent of an inciting event), there are no further major dramatic developments. In fact, the audience is aware almost from that point onwards that there is no way the family will win the game and that, inevitably, all three of them will die. There are, at most, a series of 'episodes' in which either another act of torture or murder or a futile escape attempt takes place. But none of these episodes move the story forward or suggest major or minor turning points in the film, since the end is inevitable. As Tom Brown remarks in his book *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*, '[n]o three-act structure is evident; the film does not set up a series of obstacles to be overturned; it moves "inexorably" towards a horrific conclusion.'[482]

As the story develops, it becomes clear that Haneke is using the home invasion narrative as a structure for critiquing the upper class. Peter and Paul are not simply the film's villains and the Schobers' tormentors. They also parody the cruelty and indifference of the society to which the Schobers belong. And they use upper-class manners and etiquette to mask their brutality and injustice (Figs. 83–84). In this sense, therefore, Peter and Paul become Haneke's mouthpiece, playing the role of Brechtian commentators and repeatedly preventing the spectator, through their parodying of middle-class manners and etiquette, from identifying with the family as victims. This is apparent from their first appearance as apparently civilised preppy teenagers with impeccable manners. Even after their real purpose is manifested through explicit violence, they continue to use this mask to justify their actions. Paul frequently criticises Peter while feigning concern for Anna and Georg (as when, for

[482] Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 24–30.

example, Paul insists on Georgie wearing a bag over his face ‘to preserve moral decency’ while Anna is forced to undress).



Figure 83 Funny Games



Figure 84 Funny Games

Having established the role of the torturers as the critics of the Schobers’ privileged class status, Haneke uses additional Brechtian techniques to distance the audience from any emotional or psychological attachment to the family and to dispel any conventional Hollywood mode narrative expectations. As Hari Kunzru observes, ‘*Funny Games* plays, with a certain dry relish, on our sympathies and expectations, offering *gestures at genre plotlines* (the last-ditch escape, the reversal of fortune), then unceremoniously squashing them.’[483] Nearly all the major acts of violence (the killings of the dog, the son, and the father) occur either off-screen or in the background and out of sight of the viewer. The only murder that is shown on screen is the killing of the wife, which is presented almost as an afterthought. There are no ‘set pieces’ culminating with each of the acts of violence; the killings are presented merely as a series of episodes which do nothing to move the plot forward other than the fulfilment of the ‘bet’ that the two killers make at the beginning of the film.

[483] Hari Kunzru, ‘Nowhere to Hide,’ *The Guardian*, 31 October 2009.

Another Brechtian technique in *Funny Games* is its replacement of conventional horror film plot points with moments of stasis or tableaux not unlike Godard's tableaux in *Weekend* or *Passion* or Fassbinder's mise-en-scène in various scenes of *Ali.* At various stages of *Funny Games*, when the audience would normally expect a change, an edit, or a new plot point, Haneke simply stops the action and forces the audience to endure the torture as if they were confined within the same space as the family. Haneke uses a form of *gestus* in which the viewer's attention is not on what happens on screen but on the *absence* of anything happening. Another way of stating it is that Haneke's camera focuses on what happens *between* the acts of violence, which mainly occur off-screen.

The principal strategy in the film for creating these moments of stasis is the long shot, in which the camera occupies a fixed position, replicating the experience of a theatre audience. Haneke's camera dwells on scenes of extreme agony for sometimes excruciatingly long periods. The viewer is desperate for something to 'happen,' a turn of events that will relieve the viewer from having to continue to suffer the pain experienced by the family. Perhaps the most painful of these moments of stasis is the extended scene in the living room after the killing of Georgie. Haneke builds tension before this scene by showing Paul in the kitchen preparing a sandwich while Peter holds Anna and Georgie captive in the living room. There is a sense that something is about to happen and that the kitchen scene is a carefully contrived plot point that will lead to a change of events. Haneke, however, completely disrupts this expectation. While Paul is preparing his sandwich, a shot is heard, which we later learn is Peter killing Georgie. In these few moments, Haneke violates several conventions of the genre. First, he makes the child (the most vulnerable member of

the family) the first victim. Second, he creates no sense of drama or even explanation leading to the murder. And third, the event takes place off-screen.

Two connected forms of *gestus* are used when we cut to the living room for an extended 10-minute shot of the aftermath of Georgie's death. The first is a close-up of the television set, splattered with Georgie's blood (Fig. 85). The *gestus* of the television set, which is static except for the car race shown on the screen, encapsulates the connection between the media and the public's desire for violence. It is as if Haneke is presenting cause and effect in one eloquent but devastating image. This is followed by a second tableau showing Anna's almost silent reactions after the murder (Fig. 86). For this scene, the camera pulls back to present a theatrical image of the whole living room, in which Anna struggles to find a way out while constantly forced to look at the dead body of Georgie. The living room could be any stage set for a domestic drama, and the camera substitutes for the position of the audience member. Throughout this sequence there is no dialogue (other than a brief off-screen conversation between Paul and Peter and the diegetic commentary of a car race on the television until Anna is able to switch it off). As this scene demonstrates, the long take in *Funny Games* appears as Haneke's most effective strategy for both denying the viewer the voyeuristic pleasure of watching on-screen violence while forcing the viewer to watch and think about the effects of violence. As Brown points out when describing this scene:

> This is the film's longest take, lasting almost twelve minutes, and it only pans slightly to reframe the characters – it is literal *temps-mort*. The duration of the shot overdetermines the camera's (and our) gaze and is especially disconcerting when the father begins to wail uncontrollably. While our gaze is overdetermined and we search through the image for meaning, attention is called to our lack of control. First, our voyeuristic satisfaction is denied, then

teasingly satisfied, but to the point where we are made to feel obtrusive observers.[484]



Figure 85 Funny Games



Figure 86 Funny Games

Haneke's use of Brechtian techniques to present the home invasion horror story introduces the third group of 'characters' in the film's narrative – the film's audience. Through a series of interactions between Peter and Paul and the audience, Haneke makes the spectator complicit in their continued acts of violence. In a sense, this is the most radical use in the film of alienation techniques. By contrast with a mainstream horror film that insulates its audience from the unpleasantness of violence, the direct address in *Funny Games* compels the audience to reflect on the horror while contemplating its own spectatorial position. Haneke employs a number of strategies for this purpose, breaking the fourth wall either by including direct address by the killers to the audience or by specifically referencing the apparatus of

[484] Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall*, 29.

film. In some instances, the killers simply look at the audience, inviting the audience to 'share' the game; in others, they directly confront the audience by asking whether they have had enough: 'we are not up to feature length yet. Is that enough? But you want a real ending, with plausible plot development, don't you?' In the only moment of the film when it appears that the family will be able to take control (and, paradoxically, the only moment when violence is graphically displayed in the film), the wife picks up a shotgun and kills one of the young men. However, the other killer quickly grabs the remote control and 'rewinds' the film to the moment before the shooting to enable the other killer to survive.

As the earlier sections of this chapter demonstrate, Brecht uses *Verfremdung* and its varying techniques to initiate a dialogue with the audience. Haneke's aim is different in this film. He uses the strategy of breaking the fourth wall to force us 'to acknowledge our own position with respect to violence in the media.'[485] But, unlike Brecht, he is not content simply to produce a dialectical response from the audience. He wants the spectator not only to be aware of the depiction of violence in the film but to identify themself as a guilty and complicit partner in the depiction of violence. In this sense, the spectator is not so much observing the violence on screen but observing themself in the role of spectator. And this approach to violence in *Funny Games* can be seen as one manifestation of Haneke's broader agenda 'to stir up the viewer's distrust in the reality value of mediated images.' As he points out, 'when film wants to be an art form, it has the aesthetic-moral obligation to reflect the questionability and the dangers of its means of manipulation.'[486]

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[485] Tarja Laine, 'What Are You Looking At and Why?,' *Kinoeye* 4, no. 1 (2004).

[486] Georg Seeßlen, 'Strukturen der Vereisung,' in *Michael Haneke und Seine Filme: Eine Pathologie der Konsumgesellschaft*, Christian Wessely, Gerhard Larcher, and Franz Grabner, eds, (Marburg: Schüren, 2005), 33–46.

5.6.2 *Conclusions on the film-theatre model for alienation techniques*

The case studies in this chapter provide a basis for constructing a film-theatre model for the use of Brechtian alienation techniques in film. As with the prior two case studies and film-theatre techniques, the overriding film-theatre characteristic that unites the multiple approaches examined in this chapter is their ability to disrupt the absorption effect of the Hollywood mode. Each of the three case study chapters has focused on a particular aspect of the Hollywood mode and a corresponding theatre technique or practice that disrupts it. Chapter 3 examined how the duration image within an open frame disrupts the effect of the closed frame used in Hollywood mode films to direct the viewer's attention effortlessly through a continuum of time and space. The case studies and film-theatre analysis in chapter 4 demonstrated how various approaches to improvisation interrupt what Bordwell describes as the 'psychological causality' of Hollywood mode films, presented through defined characters acting to achieve announced goals.[487]

Similarly, the film-theatre model discussed in this chapter examined how alienation techniques can be used in film to disrupt narrative unity, which the Hollywood mode uses 'to convey narrative through careful manipulation of audience attention.'[488] The approaches of the three principal case studies in this chapter seem at first to share little common ground, aesthetically or thematically, on which to base this film-theatre model. Each of the directors approaches their works from a variety of socio-political perspectives, and their respective selection and use of alienation techniques are often radically different. Godard, for example, uses certain overtly Brechtian

[487] Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, *Classical Hollywood Cinema*, 17.

[488] Ibid., 174–75.

devices – such as direct address, intertitles, and episodic structures – but he also creates a palette of alienation effects by his imaginative use of film techniques. These include the long traffic jam tracking shot; the lighting and sound effects for Corinne's monologue at the beginning of the film; and the 'Action Musicale' scene, in which a performance of a Mozart piano sonata in the courtyard of a rustic village is delivered in a masterful 360-degree shot, circling around the courtyard twice in alternating directions, while the pianist comments on his mediocre rendition of the piece and delivers a stinging attack on the development of modern music. Through these alienation techniques, Godard repeatedly interrupts the narrative, which eventually simply disintegrates.

While Fassbinder's approach appears superficially closer to a Hollywood melodrama – and certainly there is a through story that connects the various episodes in the film – his treatment of the narrative demonstrates that he is more interested in making the audience aware of the social commentary arising from the various relationships than the plot itself. Like Godard, Fassbinder does not limit himself to purely theatrical forms of alienation to convey this social commentary; on the contrary, he enlists a variety of cinematographic aesthetics to carve sharp lines between the principal characters, on the one hand, and their bigoted critics, on the other. These include meticulous arrangements of the scenes in which Ali and Emmi confront their critics. Similarly, in *Funny Games*, Haneke seemingly creates a conventional Hollywood home invasion or horror film, but he uses alienation techniques to frustrate, at every key plot point, the normal expectations of the viewer, forcing the viewer to consider their own complicity in the on-screen violence. Again, many of his techniques (such as the sound effects, the use of the remote to rewind a scene, long shots in depth,

and, for that matter, continuity editing in some parts to create the illusion that it is a conventional genre horror story) utilise the full resources of film.

The diversity of these approaches to alienation by the three case study films is entirely consistent with the objectives and methodology of the film-theatre model which they are used to illustrate, just as equally diverse approaches to improvisation and the duration image within the open frame supported the corresponding film-theatre techniques. The purpose of the model – in fact, of film-theatre itself in the broader sense – is merely to establish a theoretical and practical framework within which its principal objectives, to defeat absorption and to create a dialectic effect by reference to theatricality in the form of theatre techniques and practices, can be realised. It is irrelevant that Fassbinder criticised the approach to alienation of Godard and Straub-Huillet, for example, or for that matter how far any of the objectives of the case study films have deviated from the original political goals of Brecht. What matters for film-theatre is that the case study films are theatrical by design, in the sense that they intentionally seek to subvert specific characteristics of the absorption effect.

While the case studies in this chapter demonstrate the versatility of filmic approaches to alienation, recent developments show that this film-theatre technique is still evolving. The final chapter of the thesis argues that the Hollywood mode is facing crisis conditions that open opportunities for film-theatre. Already there are some indications of new twenty-first-century approaches to both production and distribution that have, in turn, created possibilities for new ‘spaces’ in which even the film form itself is being challenged and stretched. A number of these innovative approaches, including the works of Milo Rau, Jafar Panahi, and others, introduce

new and exciting perspectives on alienation techniques as a means for disrupting absorption.

Chapter 6: The Hollywood Mode in Crisis and Film-Theatre's Response

6.1 Introduction

The thesis opened with Sontag's question of whether there is an unbridgeable division between film and theatre. The purpose of the analysis in the preceding chapters was to build a bridge from theatre to film to serve the objectives of film-theatre. But it is a bridge with a limited function. Its purpose is not to provide an answer to Sontag's quest for a 'common animus' that would unite both art forms. It is rather to explore the possibilities for adapting for film the innate capacity of certain theatre techniques and rehearsal and performance practices to produce a dialectical response from an audience. And for the same reason film-theatre is not concerned with literal or morphological 'copying' of theatre techniques into film. The closing scene from *L'Eclisse* is not important because it *resembles* a theatre scene or stage set but because its *adaptation* of theatre techniques and practices (the duration image within an open frame) leads to a dialectical effect.[489]

Nevertheless, limited as it may be compared to the project of creating a 'common animus' for the two art forms, the conjunction of film and theatre provides the critical approach and methodology used in the thesis. The analysis of this approach in the thesis has progressed in three stages. The first was the problematisation of the Hollywood mode and its defining characteristics, the antitheatrical prejudice, and absorption effects. As chapter 1 of the thesis explained, this is not a prejudice against the theatre as an institution, theatre techniques, or stage performances as such but

[489] Conversely, films that use techniques that more closely *resemble* stage performances (such as the single setup approaches in *Victoria* and *1917*) do not serve the objectives of film-theatre because these techniques are merely tools for creating absorption effects.

against the dialectical effect that they create, which is antithetical to absorption and consequently to the economic and ideological objectives of the Hollywood film industry. It is at this juncture – the rejection by the Hollywood mode of the dialectic effects of theatre – that film-theatre enters the arena as an alternative modality. And the central conflict between the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode and film-theatre is the critical distance that theatricality places between the audience and the subject.[490]

The second stage of the argument (in chapter 2) introduced the concept of film-theatre as a theoretical and practical approach that both rejects the antitheatrical prejudice and proposes an alternative modality that disrupts the Hollywood mode's absorption effects. The methodology of film-theatre is to identify key theatre techniques and practices that have an inherent capacity to create a dialectical effect and then examine how they can be applied to the medium of film. The third stage of the thesis (chapters 3–5) used case studies to examine how various theatre techniques 'bridge' the division that Sontag refers to between film and theatre through the common objective of creating a self-reflexive, dialectical effect. While these case studies occupy a broad spectrum of aesthetic approaches to adapting theatre techniques and practices for film, they share a common sociality defined not by what the viewer is told to think but by an openness for discussion where the viewer is invited to engage in a set of concerns that are of interest to us all. And they achieve this not by slavishly following established rules and conventions for

[490] As I have indicated earlier in the thesis, there have been other critical explanations or justifications for the Hollywood mode, some based on its ability to evoke psychological states (Münsterberg, supra, section 1.4) and others on its use of technical innovations, such as continuity editing, that are unavailable to theatre (Panofsky, ibid.). However, the nature of the absorption effects and the way they have been utilised by the mainstream film industry for the last one hundred years provide the strongest testament to the function of the Hollywood mode and the meaning of the antitheatrical prejudice.

narrative, shooting, and editing but more often by a production process that relies on a collaborative enterprise between director, cast, and crew. By contrast, the Hollywood mode describes a closed sociality that dominates other film modes and 'sutures' the spectator into the film's ideology, allowing little possibility of being able to question or interrogate the film or the social conditions that it purports to portray.

These two forms of sociality – the denuded sociality of the Hollywood mode and the shared space of film-theatre's sociality – represent the polar positions for the arguments in this chapter. In the twenty-first century, new strategies for film production, marketing, and distribution have led to a new generation of the Hollywood mode resulting in an extreme form of absorption designed to permit the viewer no possibility of escape from a film's underlying ideology. The chapter examines how this absorption effect gives rise to the proliferation of monopolistic practices within the industry. And it argues that the dominance of the Hollywood mode and its successful suppression of other modes through these monopolistic practices have led to various conditions – including enculturative breakdown; the reorganisation of the public sphere through the proliferation of social media; increasing heterogeneity in models of labour; and the emergence of new aesthetic techniques, production processes, and economic models – that have created a 'crisis' for the Hollywood mode.[491]

The closing section of this chapter examines the opportunities for film-theatre presented by this crisis. There are two stages to this analysis. The first asks whether

[491] Crisis conditions for European theatre institutions are analysed in detail in Christopher Balme and Tony Fisher, *Theatre Institutions in Crisis: European Perspectives* (Oxford: Routledge, 2020), 12–16. Section 6.2.4 below examines the relevance of this analysis to the crisis being experienced by the Hollywood mode at present.

the Hollywood mode now represents a complete 'suturing' of the space of culture/film or whether counter-practices nonetheless remain possible – in other words, whether the Hollywood mode results in a 'totalisation' that allows for no remainder, precluding any escape from the dominating ideologies that it creates and perpetuates.[492] I answer this question by reference to the linguistic and pragmatic approach of Jürgen Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action*[493] and will argue that the Hollywood mode has inherent contradictions that open up the possibility of counter-practices and arguments. This section examines the various ways in which film-theatre performs the role of communicative action by encouraging a counter-discourse through its dialectical approach to a film's subject. As Habermas explains, there are forms of sociality that are not a function of instrumental reason or dominating market logics. In opposition to the Hollywood mode, which 'sutures' the spectator into becoming a consumer and subject of each film's ideology, the techniques of film-theatre described in this thesis create a dialectic of social, political, economic, and domestic conditions that are the subject of films that employ it.

The second part of this analysis examines whether film-theatre can suggest an alternative image of the human and social world distinct from the Hollywood mode and, if so, how it can accomplish this and what kind of image or 'vision' will emerge. I will argue in subsections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3 that film-theatre leads to the possibility of an alternative sociality in stark contrast to the consumer-based sociality of the Hollywood mode. This applies both to actual content and to the *process* of

[492] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[493] Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, MA: Polity, 1986).

creating new content. In contrast to the hierarchical structure of Hollywood mode films, films that follow the methodology and modality of film-theatre create spaces for collaborative and collective work, leading to the prospect of new and distinct forms of content that cannot be found in the Hollywood mode. In the context of promising new resources for funding, production, and distribution, including transnational filmmaking and new outlets for independent film streaming, this chapter concludes by proposing that the future role of film-theatre – and the direction for additional research – is as an alternative modality that rejects the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode and that is unreservedly 'pro-theatrical,' in the sense of its commitment to producing a dialectical, self-reflexive response to a film's subject by the viewer. The analysis of this argument involves two steps. The first (section 6.2) traces the most recent evolution of the Hollywood mode following major changes during the first two decades of the twenty-first century in the global film industry, both with respect to distribution and content. And the second (section 6.3) examines how changes in the independent film industry, combined with crisis conditions created by the globalisation of the Hollywood mode, present opportunities for the future development of film-theatre as an alternative modality.

6.2 The Hollywood mode: From hegemony to monopoly to crisis

From the 1920s until the end of the twentieth century, the preferred approach to managing risk and reducing uncertainty in the mainstream film business was to construct, as Michael Pokorny et al. write, 'annual portfolios of films, the objective of which is not so much to maximize the returns on each film in the portfolio but rather maximize the returns on the portfolio as a whole, with the clear expectation

that many films, if not the majority, will generate losses.'[494] In recent years, by contrast, and certainly since 2000, there has been a markedly different trend, which has largely been dominated by established movie franchises.[495] Various factors may have contributed to this trend, but one of the principal reasons was the proliferation from the 1970s onwards of alternative or 'ancillary' modes of distribution, including television, video on demand, videos, DVDs, and later, of course, streaming. This shift in marketing strategy also led the studios to concentrate film production on a smaller number of high-profile films, resulting in what J. G. March describes as 'the exploitation of successful filmic properties, at the expense of exploration or experimentation in identifying new content within diversified portfolios.'[496] Two characteristics of this model of risk protection are explored in this chapter: the change in organisational structure of the Hollywood film and TV industry, including the globalisation of the industry and the expansion of control into 'vertical' markets (including online streaming and cinema distribution); and what I will refer to as the 'Marvelisation' or 'Disneyfication' of content.

6.2.1 *Industrial restructuring*

Under normal circumstances, a production company can obtain limited rights to use high profile content (such as Marvel Comics' characters and narratives) through copyright licenses. However, these rights are often limited either territorially or by

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[494] Michael Pokorny, Peter Miskell, and John Sedgwick, 'Managing Uncertainty in Creative Industries: Film Sequels and Hollywood's Profitability, 1988–2015,' *Competition & Change* 23, no. 1 (2019): 23–46. See also John Sedgwick, 'Product Differentiation at the Movies: Hollywood, 1946 to 1965,' *Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 3 (2002): 676–705; John Sedgwick and Michael Pokorny, 'The Risk Environment of Film Making: Warner Bros in the Inter-War Years,' *Explorations in Economic History* 35, no. 2 (1998): 196–220.

[495] Ibid.

[496] James G. March, 'Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning,' *Organization Science* 2, no. 1 (1991): 71–87.

duration, subject matter, and/or degree of exclusivity, since the copyright owner may not be prepared to cede complete ownership and control to the licensee.[497] This means that the licensee is merely given the right to exhibit a film containing the copyrighted subject matter but has no ancillary rights (such as making sequels, prequels, or spinoffs; distributing by other means, such as streaming; or marketing products related to the film's subject and characters in the form of merchandise or theme parks, for example).

To control all these rights, the licensee must own the intellectual property outright (or exclusively). And often the simplest way to obtain ownership of the copyright is to acquire the company that owns it. We have seen this, for example, with Disney's acquisitions of Lucasfilm in 2012 (giving Disney exclusive ownership of the *Star Wars* franchise), Pixar in 2006 (providing ownership of all Pixar animation capabilities as well as the various narratives and characters developed by Pixar), and Marvel Entertainment in 2009.[498] Since these acquisitions involved a heavy capital investment (Disney paid approximately $4 billion each for Marvel and Lucasfilm, $7.4 billion for Pixar, and an estimated $10.5 billion for Hulu), Disney had to develop a business strategy that would protect its investment. In other words, it needed to spend more money to protect the properties that it had already bought.

Disney has adopted a two-tiered horizontal (i.e, related to geographical areas of production) and vertical (i.e., related to means of distribution) strategy for maximising its profits and protecting its rights to the various properties that it has

[497] 'Film Copyright Licensing,' Independent Cinema Office, accessed 5 December 2021, https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/advice-support/what-licences-do-i-need/film-copyright-licensing/.

[498] Brandon Katz, 'The Walt Disney Company's Major Recent Acquisitions, Ranked by Cost,' *Observer* (blog), 22 September 2020, https://observer.com/2020/09/disney-buys-star-wars-marvel-fox-hulu-pixar-cost-box-office/.

purchased. First, it has sought to globalise the distribution of its film franchises and related products and services (including both the films themselves and the collateral merchandising) in several lucrative markets around the world (the horizontal approach). The immediate impetus for a 'globalised' approach to film and collateral film product sales may have been driven by the rapid decline in DVD sales during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Faced with this loss of revenue, Hollywood production companies have turned their attention to the only other major market, international sales.[499] Second, Disney has maximised these new markets (as well as the USA home market) through vertical control of the various forms of distribution. Vertical integration and saturation of the market takes two forms: the entry of Disney into the cinema distribution business that had been prohibited by the Consent Decree until August 2020, when the Consent Decree was dissolved,[500] and its decision to create a streaming capability with the formation of Disney Plus. In 2019, the company shifted its priority to streaming by creating ESPN Plus, a platform for sports, and Disney Plus, which was to include blockbusters from the Marvel, Pixar, and Star Wars universes as well as decades of Disney classics.

[499] 'What was already happening – the organisation of the summer-release calendar around the mega-franchises such as Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings – accelerated to better exploit the only remaining source of profits on the rise: the international box office that almost tripled between 2000 and 2010.' Lynda Obst, 'Hollywood and the "New Abnormal": Why the Industry Is Scared of Risk,' interview by Phil Hoad, *The Guardian*, 31 October 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/oct/31/hollywood-new-abnormal-lynda-obst-scared-risk. Obst, a Hollywood producer, adds that 'the same digital technology that gave us downloading and destroyed the profits of the industry also started pouring in money from international, because what these markets were craving was huge special effects.' Ibid.

[500] Eriq Gardner, 'Judge Agrees to End Paramount Consent Decrees,' *The Hollywood Reporter* (blog), 7 August 2020, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/judge-agrees-end-paramount-consent-decrees-1306387/. By way of background, the Paramount Consent Decrees had been in effect since the late 1940s when the US government pursued a major antitrust action against film studios, which in those days were vertically aligned with national theater chains. As a result of the US Supreme Court's landmark 1948 decision in *United States v. Paramount Pictures*, the studios had to divest themselves of their exhibition holdings. In August 2020, in *USA v. Paramount Pictures*, the District Court for the Southern District of New York dissolved the Consent Decree, spurred on by the deregulatory fervour of the Trump-era Department of Justice. Ibid.

This shift in distribution media had two financial consequences for the company: first, it lost the revenue stream that previously was generated by the sale of films to Netflix and other streaming companies; and, second, it was forced to spend billions of dollars on developing the technical resources needed to run its own streaming services and create original programming for subscribers.[501] However, at the same time, Disney's effective control of the most lucrative forms of distribution – cinema releases and online streaming – combined with its domination of global markets has enabled it to manage its profit margins and the profitability of its films.[502]

6.2.2 *The new ideology of the Hollywood mode*

The turn of the Hollywood film industry to franchise films and online distribution has resulted in a new ideology, the purpose of which, I argue, is to 'suture' the audience to the franchise itself – its characters and narrative. This function is made possible by a dizzying variety of marketing and production strategies, including sequels, prequels, reboots, and spinoffs.[503]

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[501] 'Disney is putting a positive spin on this: It says it will sign up 60 million to 90 million subscribers for Disney+ by the end of its 2024 fiscal year (with two-thirds of those subs coming from outside the US). It also projects up to 12 million subscribers for its ESPN+ service (which sells sports programming that isn't carried on its regular ESPN cable networks) and up to 60 million Hulu subscribers.' Peter Kafka, 'Disney Used to Make Hundreds of Millions from Netflix. Now It Will Spend Billions to Fight It,' *Vox*, 12 April 2019, https://www.vox.com/2019/4/12/18307539/disney-streaming-launch-cost-billions-netflix-strategy-change.

[502] The timed and delayed release of the latest James Bond film, *No Time to Die*, (Cary Joji Fukunaga, MGM, 2021) demonstrates the power that a company controlling distribution can wield. The production company, MGM (now owned by Amazon), created an artificial supply-demand crisis by delaying the release of the film, thereby generating audience anticipation and pent up advance demand. Chris Thilk, 'No Time to Die – Marketing Recap,' *Cinematic Slant* (blog), 6 October 2021, https://cinematicslant.com/2021/10/06/no-time-to-die-marketing-recap/.

[503] There are some strong affinities between Hollywood's franchise film strategies and what is referred to as 'platform capitalism,' according to which major corporations such as Google, Facebook, Apply, Uber, and Airbnb operate as platforms whose hardware and software are used by other actors to conduct their own business. N. Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017). And interestingly, the counterpart to platform capitalism, platform cooperativism, has objectives closer to those of film-theatre, focusing on fairness and sharing instead of profits. Dariusz Jemielniak and Aleksandra Przegalinska, *Collaborative Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020).

One manifestation of this trend is the Marvel superhero franchise, which has prompted the term 'Marvelisation.'[504] In 2019, one media outlet reported that the film *Avengers: Endgame* was

> the culmination of a ground-breaking superhero movie franchise that's pushed out 22 films in 11 years, starting with the blockbuster 'Iron Man' in 2008. With this movie, the so-called Marvel Cinematic Universe is expected to easily bring in more than $20 billion in global box office earnings. Love it or hate it, this franchise has become one of the most ambitious commercial endeavors in the history of Hollywood.[505]

This strategy is in turn enhanced and supported by what Simon Reynolds describes as 'retromania,'[506] which creates added interest in these sequels and spinoffs by encouraging and stimulating the development of a strong 'fan base' that hankers after a constant repetition of the earlier films (including characters and events, themes and narratives).[507] As Richard Van Heertum explains,

> Hollywood's solution so far has not been to idealize a better future still to come as much as to romanticize the industrial changes of the past, to pin hopes on the idea that economic problems will work themselves out because, such nostalgic logic goes, "they always have."[508]

Retromania, Marvelisation, and Disneyfication are also used to exploit other new, highly lucrative commercial opportunities. One obvious market is video games. In 2019, the film industry recorded $42.5 billion in ticket sales. The video game

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[504] Film Talkies, 'The Marvelization of Movies,' *Film Talkies* (blog), 22 October 2017, https://filmtalkiesblog.wordpress.com/2017/10/22/the-marvelization-of-movies/.

[505] Money Talking, 'The Marvelization of Hollywood,' WNYC, 26 April 2019, https://www.wnyc.org/story/money-talking-marvel-movies-hollywood/.

[506] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012).

[507] Jason Sperb, 'Specters of Film: New Nostalgia Movies and Hollywood's Digital Transition,' *Jump Cut*, no. 56 (Winter 2014–15).

[508] Richard Van Heertum, 'Endless Nostalgia: Hollywood in the Hinterland, Past, Present, & Future,' *Principally Uncertain*, 3 March 2017, https://principallyuncertain.com/2017/03/07/endless-story-hollywood-hinterland/. A clue to the purpose of this strategy can be found in Hollywood's own euphemism for sequels and remakes as 'reanimation of beloved properties.' Ibid.

industry, by contrast, totalled more than $150 billion.[509] In addition, significant revenues are realised from the exploitation of the cosplay industry, which has experienced enormous growth from sales of Marvel costumes worldwide.[510] This is in turn linked to the corresponding growth in comic conventions.[511]

Another risk reduction strategy that complements 'retromania' is the use of fan bases or 'fandom' to motivate franchise fans to take 'ownership' of films by constantly yearning for the same characters, storylines, settings, and often even music that were featured in the original films. As Inku Kang explains, fandom has enormous potential monetary value and 'the studios themselves are more than happy to monetize fan enthusiasm through merchandise, conventions, theme-park rides and the like. It's a win-win for the industry and its most ardent consumers.'[512] Kang notes that another disquieting aspect of this trend is:

> the reality that the industry is essentially training us in how to be entertained. The Marvel Cinematic Universe, for example, has created a new kind of viewer: One that searches for connective narrative tissue from film to film across what is planned to be dozens of features.[513]

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[509] 'According to analyst and venture capitalist Matthew Ball, who has written extensively about Hollywood's need to embrace video games, the gaming industry is 43% larger than film and TV entertainment. More than 162 million Americans alone own a video game console, per Nielsen. That's greater than the number of Amazon Prime users worldwide.' Brandon Katz, 'Video Games Will Soon Be Hollywood's Next Great IP War', *Observer* (blog), 23 December 2020, https://observer.com/2020/12/marvel-star-wars-disney-video-game-movies-tv-shows-netflix-adaptations/.

[510] Katryn Furmston, 'The "Cosplay" Economy: How Dressing Up Grew Up,' *The Conversation*, 8 December 2017, http://theconversation.com/the-cosplay-economy-how-dressing-up-grew-up-86575.

[511] As Furmston observes, 'The most recent major events in the UK have attracted record turnouts. More than 133,000 cosplayers attended the London MCM Comic Con Event in May this year. When you consider that tickets can cost more than £20 per person, it suggests the amount of money this strange new industry is generating for the UK economy. And it's not just tickets to events – people often spend upwards of £200 on materials, paints and fixings to make their costumes.' Ibid.

[512] Inkoo Kang, 'The Fans Have Inherited the Film Industry – and It's a Problem for the Rest of Us,' *The Hollywood Reporter* (blog), 29 June 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/fans-have-inherited-film-industry-a-problem-rest-us-guest-column-1015340/. Another related strategy, that has been termed 'cultural appropriation,' involves monetising subcultures such as geekdom and disadvantaged indigenous and minority cultures. James O. Young, *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

[513] Kang, 'Fans Have Inherited.' A notable example of the effects of nostalgia filmmaking and fandom is the *Star Wars* saga. In addition to the obvious connective tissue of characters, places, and

A defining characteristic of this new Hollywood ideology is its 'reification' of the films' social subjects, their characters, and narratives (as well as the stars who perform in them). I use the term 'reification' in general to refer to the process according to which social relations are perceived as attributes of some product of the relation. But in the context of the latest evolution of the Hollywood mode through franchising and streaming, I refer specifically to the application of concepts of reification to the culture industry by Adorno and Horkheimer.[514] They argue in their chapter 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' that, for consumers, '

> the use value of art, its essence, is a fetish, and the fetish – the social valuation which they mistake for the merit of works of art – becomes its only use value, the only quality they enjoy. In this way the commodity character of art disintegrates just as it is fully realized.'[515]

Their discussion of advertising as an integral part of the culture industry's process of reification and their argument that 'every film is a preview of the next' resonate strongly with the latest franchising and what are referred to as the '360 marketing' strategies of Disney and other major companies.[516] More significantly, reification within the culture industry provides the mechanism for the operation of the

events through the films, complete films in the series often follow the same narrative plot lines as earlier films. Ibid.

[514] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94–137.

[515] Ibid., 128.

[516] Adorno and Horkheimer argue that 'every film is a preview of the next, which promises yet again to unite the same heroic couple under the same exotic sun: anyone arriving late cannot tell whether he is watching the trailer or the real thing. The montage character of the culture industry, the synthetic, controlled manner in which its products are assembled – factory-like not only in the film studio but also, virtually, in the compilation of the cheap biographies, journalistic novels, and hit songs – predisposes it to advertising: the individual moment, in being detachable, replaceable, estranged even technically from any coherence of meaning, lends itself to purposes outside the work.' Ibid., 132.

absorption effect of the Hollywood mode. The so-called 'fetish' of the commodity is made possible by the operation and effect of absorption.

The terms 'Disneyfication,' 'Marvelisation,' 'retromania,' and 'sequelmania,' as well as the use of fan bases through 'fandom,' speak volumes about the penetration of this strategy into mass culture and psyche as forms of commodity structure. Each of the various types of franchise film discussed in the last section has its own corresponding 'product,' and these 'products' are reified through a complex array of marketing and branding strategies. In this sense, reification occurs at various levels: the film, the franchise, and the industry. In the case of the film itself, audiences are encouraged not only to reify the narrative and the socio-political assumptions in the narrative but also individual components of the film, including the characters, particular elements of the narrative (especially those that are carried through prequels and sequels), special effects, and even the music. In the same way, the franchise production companies motivate reification of the franchises themselves. In this sense, the function of the marketing is to persuade the viewer to 'buy into' the franchise, to align with the franchise or one 'department' of the franchise.[517] Fans often support this form of reification by their enthusiasm for the 'same,' in the sense of a yearning for the same plot points, the same characters, and the same direction.[518]

[517] An example of this is the Disney+ marquee on their website which includes a series of banners for each of the principal Disney franchises, enabling viewers to find their favourite films immediately (Fig. 87).

[518] A notable example is *Star Wars*, which recycles its characters, narratives, and themes through several films across the franchise. See Joshua Rothman, 'Why Are All "Star Wars" Movies the Same?,' *New Yorker*, 23 December 2017; Rothman, 'The Growing Emptiness of the "Star Wars" Universe,' *New Yorker*, 13 May 2018. In Adorno's terms, this results in the appearance of freedom at the point at which the consumer is consigned to their unfreedom. According to Adorno, Lechner argues, freedom is threatened 'because of a certain trend of dehumanisation and regress, which paradoxically – or dialectically – is the unintended outcome of the progress initially associated with the Enlightenment. The main theme of *Dialectic* is "the self-destructiveness of Enlightenment."' Silviya Lechner, 'Adorno on Late Modernity and Unfreedom: Reflections in a Global Era,' *E-International Relations*, 2021, 3, citing Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xi.

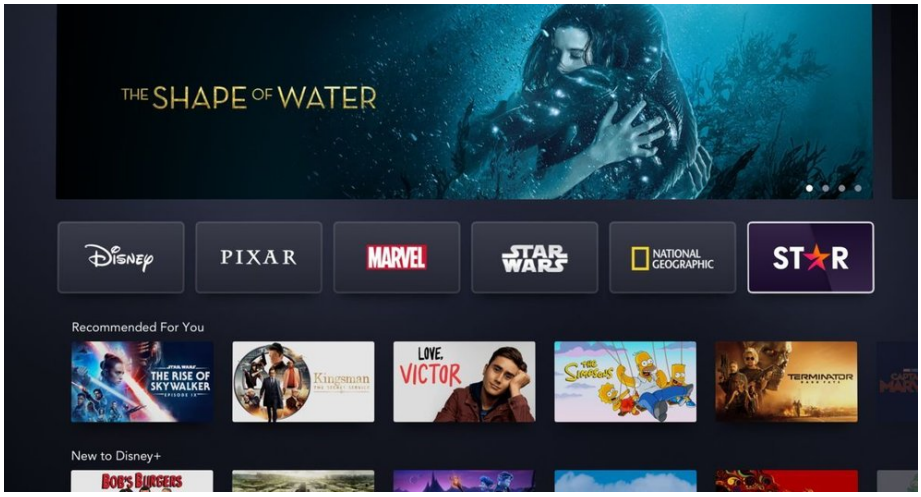


Figure 87 Disney+ marquee

I argue in section 6.2.4 that this form of reification is one of the two principal factors contributing to the 'crisis' conditions described in the rest of the chapter. In the following subsection, I discuss the second major factor, monopoly conditions, and examine how these factors are indicative of crisis conditions while opening new opportunities for film-theatre.

6.2.3 *Monopoly conditions*

The transformations in the organisation of the Hollywood film and TV industry and the latest version of the Hollywood mode described in the prior subsections are indicative of a crisis for the Hollywood mode. As I shall argue in the following subsection, the existence of such a crisis will affect and inform the analysis of film-theatre's future role. I rely on two sources to examine the scope and extent of this crisis: first, the work of David Harvey on overaccumulation – notably with reference to what he describes as the 'spatial fix' – and 'monopoly rent' as applied to

culture[519]; and, second, the factors of 'dynamic transformation' cited by Christopher Balme and Tony Fisher as signifiers of a structural crisis.[520]

The restructuring of Hollywood film companies and the concomitant change in the nature of the Hollywood mode are examples of how the film and TV industry attempts to accumulate capital by lowering its risk.[521] As we have seen, this accumulation inevitably results in contradictions. First, it is achieved at considerable cost to these companies; they must assume substantial risk to reduce risk. Second, the infrastructure created by the investments in, for example, the acquisition of other companies that own valuable franchises (e.g., Disney's acquisition of Marvel, Amazon's acquisition of MGM) and the development of technological resources needed for globalisation and streaming will eventually result in overaccumulation, which, according to Harvey, occurs when capital and labour can no longer be re-invested at the average rate of profit (or, worse, any profit) in their originating territory/space.

Harvey's analysis of how industries respond to these conditions of overaccumulation through what he calls the 'spatial fix' resonates with the globalisation strategies of the Hollywood film industry in the first part of the twenty-first century. As Harvey explains, one of the central contradictions of capital is that:

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[519] David Harvey, 'The Geopolitics of Capitalism,' in *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, ed. Derek Gregory and John Urry, Critical Human Geography (London: Macmillan Education, 1985), 128–63, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27935-7_7; Harvey, 'Globalization and the "Spatial Fix,"' *Geographische Revue*, no. 2 (2001): 23–30.

[520] Balme and Fisher, *Theatre Institutions in Crisis*, 2.

[521] 'This push to lower risk has been most apparent since the 1980s. In recent decades, major filmed entertainment has used its oligopolistic control of distribution to institute an order of cinema based on several key strategies: saturation booking, blockbuster cinema and high-concept filmmaking.' James McMahon, 'What Makes Hollywood Run? Capitalist Power, Risk and the Control of Social Creativity' (PhD thesis, York University, 2015), EconStor Theses (ZBW - Leibniz Information Centre for Economics), https://econpapers.repec.org/bookchap/zbwesthes/157994.htm.

> It has to build a fixed space (or 'landscape') necessary for its own functioning at a certain point in its history only to have to destroy that space (and devalue much of the capital invested therein) at a later point in order to make way for a new 'spatial fix' (openings for fresh accumulation in new spaces and territories) at a later point in its history.[522]

The problem with the spatial fix is that it inevitably involves further capital expenditure on infrastructures which ultimately also begin to lose their value or become outdated, leading to the search for further spatial fixes. As Harvey explains, capitalism cannot survive without being geographically expansionary 'and perpetually seeking out "spatial fixes" for its problems.' He adds that

> The effect is to allow capital accumulation on a world scale to continue its problematic temporal trajectory through continuous and sometimes disruptive geographical adjustments and reconfigurations. But *the effect is also to project and replicate the contradictions of capital onto an ever-broadening geographical terrain*.[523]

The development of international markets for the industry's franchise films provides an example of how Hollywood production companies have used globalisation as a spatial fix to ensure that the value of their investment in expensive properties (both intellectual property and corporate assets) is put to maximum profitable use.[524]

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[522] Harvey, 'Globalization,' 25. The necessity of a 'spatial fix' derives from 'capitalism's insatiable drive to resolve its inner crisis tendencies by geographical expansion and geographical restructuring.' Ibid, 24.

[523] Ibid. (emphasis added). He also notes that this was only a temporary 'fix,' one that simply 'transfers the contradictions [of accumulation] to a wider sphere and gives them greater latitude.' David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2018), 414.

[524] See supra, 519. Of course, the Hollywood film industry has also provided more literal examples in the past of these features of capitalism, including its 'frontier' initiative in the early years of film production to move the industry from New York to California and, more recently, various approaches to foreign outsourcing. Emilien Coquard, 'How Hollywood Embraced Offshoring to Produce Its Biggest Blockbusters,' Forbes, 30 September 2022, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2022/09/30/how-hollywood-embraced-offshoring-to-produce-its-biggest-blockbusters/?sh=224f7c211339. See also J.A. Aberdeen, 'The Edison Movie Monopoly: the Motion Picture Patents Company vs the Independent Outlaws', accessed 26 November 2022, https://www.cobbles.com/simpp_archive/edison_trust.htm.

Similarly, the astronomic growth of digital streaming as perhaps the primary medium for film distribution in this century has recently prompted its inclusion and examination as a unique form of spatial fix, referred to as the 'digital spatial fix.' As Daniel Greene and Daniel Joseph explain, 'communications technologies really do change the geography of capitalism, and digital spaces really do provide new sites of accumulation. This is of course not only an opportunity, but also a danger, as crises move rapidly from one site to another.'[525]

6.2.4 *The crisis of the Hollywood mode*

The problems of overaccumulation, combined with the ways in which the Hollywood mode and film industry have been transformed in the twenty-first century and the forms of reification discussed above, are indicative of an 'enculturative breakdown' in the Hollywood mode, one of the factors of 'dynamic transformation' discussed in Balme and Fisher's analysis of institutional crisis in European theatre.[526] Enculturative breakdown, which includes situations where 'patterns and practices of theatregoing are no longer passed on through inner-familial or ingroup transmission,' is particularly evident in changes in reception of Hollywood mode films by film audiences.[527] Even before the Covid pandemic there was evidence of a significant decline in cinema attendance, and the distribution practices of the major

[525] Daniel Marcus Greene and Daniel Joseph, 'The Digital Spatial Fix,' *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society* 13, no. 2 (2015): 223–47, 224https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v13i2.659. See also Robert Hassan, *The Condition of Digitality: A Post-Modern Marxism for the Practice of Digital Life*, (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020), 97–128.

[526] Balme and Fisher, *Theatre Institutions in Crisis*, 1–25, 2. These factors are analysed by Balme and Fisher specifically in the context of European theatre, but I believe that the same arguments can be applied to comparable conditions occurring at present in the Hollywood film industry, specifically with reference to the crisis of the Hollywood mode.

[527] Ibid.

production companies were already looking for 'spatial fixes' in digital territories (both in terms of streaming alternatives to distribution and developing other markets, such as video games and cosplay conventions, for their most valuable franchise assets).

But we are witnessing changes not simply in the methods of reception of Hollywood mode content but also in its underlying assumptions and raison d'être. The concept of 'story' or narrative is the foundation from which the Hollywood mode developed the aesthetic effects that resulted in absorption. It presupposes that an audience is interested in watching and relating to – and, of course, becoming absorbed by – stories that follow a certain logical narrative progression and resolution. The financial and aesthetic directions that the Hollywood film industry has taken in the twenty-first century have weakened these assumptions. While the Hollywood mode has successfully used absorption effects in the past to promote the ideologies of the Hollywood film industry, it nevertheless derived validity from relatable situations in what Habermas refers to as the 'lifeworld,' meaning the world of everyday life in which social relations and community formations occur and are coordinated via communicative rationality and language.[528] The crisis of the Hollywood mode is comparable to the legitimation crisis that occurs when the lifeworld becomes 'colonised' or reified by 'systems,' meaning governments, organisations, and corporations.[529] Habermas argues that a legitimation crisis happens when the applicable system does not succeed in maintaining the requisite level of mass loyalty. And, as a result, the system suffers a loss of support by the public. In the

[528] The 'lifeworld' is discussed in more detail in section 6.3.1 below.

[529] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 46–64.

same way, the Hollywood mode has now become a source of stultification that is losing its ability to communicate the Hollywood ideology through absorption effects.

These changes are indicative of a chronic crisis in the Hollywood mode. Overaccumulation, global expansion, and market saturation – which are perpetuated by the multiple forms of reification discussed previously – have led to a version of the Hollywood mode that is unable to sustain itself other than by creating a simulacrum of itself. Its survival depends largely on its ability to recycle, repeat, and reimagine its past achievements.[530] The question remains, what is the principal *effect* of this crisis and how does it relate to the potential opportunities for the future of film-theatre discussed in the next section and for that matter to the overall analysis of film-theatre and the Hollywood mode in the thesis? As the prior analysis indicates, Hollywood is likely to continue to seek other means for capital accumulation regardless of the state of the Hollywood mode. These strategies include saturating the market with franchise films that are repeatedly recycled through sequels, prequels, reboots, and spinoffs, such as *The Mandalorian*,[531] while expanding capital accumulation through associated games, such as PlayStation 4 (PS4). In other words, as long as Hollywood pursues these alternative – and possibly more lucrative – sources of capital accumulation, the fate of the Hollywood mode is in the balance.[532]

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[530] Ross Douthat, 'We Aren't Just Watching the Decline of the Oscars. We're Watching the End of the Movies,' *New York Times*, March 25, 2022, accessed 26 November 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/25/opinion/oscars-movies-end.html.

[531] *The Mandalorian* (Various directors, Fairview Entertainment, Golem Creations, Lucasfilm, 2019). This series is based on a character who appeared in the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

[532] This chapter can only summarise some of the crisis conditions presently affecting the Hollywood mode, including its material bases, platform capital, financialisation, and enculturative changes. However, these conditions are appropriate subjects for further inquiry and research.

6.3 The future of film-theatre: From monopoly and crisis to opportunity

The changes in the Hollywood film industry and the Hollywood mode discussed in the last section create theoretical and practical challenges for film-theatre. The theoretical challenge is how film-theatre can respond to Adorno's concept of 'totalisation' according to which there is no remainder or escape from the effects of instrumental reason in mass culture.[533] The practical challenge relates to the adverse impact on independent cinema resulting from the crisis conditions discussed earlier in this chapter, including reduced sources of funding and lack of accessibility to independent cinemas.[534] Since film-theatre functions predominantly within the sphere of independent film – and independent film distribution outlets – these signs of crisis conditions raise doubts and concerns about the future of film-theatre.

6.3.1 *Film-theatre's 'escape' from the effects of reification*

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that 'pop' or mass culture is like a factory producing standardised cultural goods – films, radio programmes, magazines, etc. – that are used to manipulate mass society into passivity.[535] Furthermore, they argue that there is no escape from this condition. Instrumental reason, they claim, has come to dominate all other forms of reason, thus precluding the ability of the Enlightenment to fulfil its promise of freedom, truth, and equality for mankind. This raises a conceptual hurdle against the argument in this chapter that film-theatre provides an alternative modality and sociality to the Hollywood mode's absorption effect. In this subsection I rely on Habermas's

[533] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

[534] See infra, note 546.

[535] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 107.

analysis of 'communicative action' to argue that there *is* an escape and that film-theatre qualifies as communicative action both in terms of the dialectical effect that is its defining characteristic and the collaborative modes and practices used in the production of film-theatre films.

Habermas departs from Adorno and Horkheimer in two ways. First, he rejects the idea of a pan-historical and all-encompassing 'anthropology' of instrumental reason; and second, he proposes a form of rationality based on the fact that language exists prior to 'discourse' in everyday communicative acts, in which our 'sociality' is expressed.[536] A central concept of Habermas's theory is 'lifeworld,' which refers to the background resources, contexts, and dimensions of social action that enable actors to cooperate on the basis of mutual understanding. These include shared cultural systems of meaning, institutional orders that stabilise patterns of action, and personality structures acquired in family, church, neighbourhood, and school. Habermas argues that the 'steering media' of money and power enable business and the state to 'colonise' lifeworlds, thus undermining democracy and the public sphere, moral and communicative interaction, and other ideals of Habermas and the Frankfurt School. In Habermas's theory of communicative action, therefore, only spontaneous actions that are beyond the influence of steering media can bring about the reconciliation of the subject. For Habermas, that meant concepts of love, creativity, and charisma. Communicative action, Habermas argues, comprises communication that is 'oriented to achieving, sustaining and reviewing consensus –

[536] Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1. See also Barbara Fultner, 'Introduction' and 'Communicative Action and Formal Pragmatics,' in Barbara Fultner, ed., *Jürgen Habermas: Key Concepts* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 1–12 and 54–57; Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978).

and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims.'[537]

Habermas includes *aesthetic discourse* as one of the three principal types of discourse through which communicative action may be achieved and, although there does not appear to be any direct analysis in Habermas's works of how communicative action applies to films, the concept of film-theatre lends itself to examination as a form of aesthetic discourse within the overall concept of communicative action.[538] As developed in the earlier chapters of this thesis, the underlying premise of film-theatre is its capacity to generate a dialectical response from an audience (rather than an absorptive one) to the various subjects portrayed in a film, including – for example – social, political, economic, and domestic conditions. The significance of film-theatre is its repeated reference to *theatre* as a means for producing, in the language of communicative action, a meaningful and productive 'intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims.' The prior analysis of the three primary techniques examined in the thesis – duration within the open frame, improvisation, and Brechtian alienation– shows how they engender an 'agonistic' approach to a subject that in turn produces such 'criticisable validity claims.' In most cases, these techniques are calculated not to provide a neat, comfortable plot resolution based on character motivation but to create a dialectic

[537] Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 1:17.

[538] Anne Berkeley has explored the application of communicative action to theatre, arguing that 'the intrinsically public, interactive, and aesthetic character of theatre and performance recommends it as a site for emancipatory communicative action,' and that 'like communicative action, theatre is capable of theoretical reflection on action. Finally, the process of making theatre "coordinates action" in face-to-face, social contexts where the possibility always exists for theatre artists and spectators to realize a collective agreement. The full process of making theatre can occasion an aesthetic dialectical continuum of action and response that *usefully* (not transcendentally) attends to the unpredictable nature of the world.' Anne Berkeley, 'Theatre in the "Engaged University": A Context for Habermas's Communicative Action,' *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 22, no. 1 (2007): 9–28, 20.

with the spectator on precisely the kind of relations that are subjected to reification in Hollywood mode films. In opposition to the absorption and reification effects of the Hollywood mode, these techniques resist easy consumption, opening the viewer to multiple interpretations and rejecting identification in favour of an agonistic 'distance' that can only resolve itself through deliberative debate about the meaning of the film.

The first examined film-theatre technique, duration within an open frame, critically interrogates reification in multiple contexts, including acquisitive possessions and the quest for money (*L'Eclisse*), domestic conventions and expectations (*Late Spring*), and political conditions (*Hunger*). By using the open frame in conjunction with different forms of temporality, these films create 'space' within which the viewer is directed to deliberate on and discuss the underlying conditions that lead to these forms of reification. In *L'Eclisse*, for example, Antonioni explores the 'facticity' of his characters, the sense that they are trapped by their circumstances, products (and victims) of their environment. He uses duration to present a sense of time itself – almost as a character in the film – passing within empty, deserted, disconnected spaces to convey the emotional emptiness of his characters.[539] Similarly, the subject of Ozu's *Late Spring* is change, the pain of letting go of an established way of life coupled with the need to move on.[540] The function of the open frame in the film is to redirect the viewer's attention from major dramatic

[539] 'The characters were objectively emptied: they are suffering less from the absence of another than from themselves.' Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 8–9.

[540] As Dennis Konshak points out, in a Hollywood film, 'usually the narrative devours the physical space surrounding it, using space only to further its own ends.' By contrast, 'the crucial question in considering Ozu is how his space, freed from the narrative and thereby autonomous, functions within the filmic discourse.' Konshak, 'Space and Narrative,' 32.

events so that they can experience and reflect upon the effect of changes on the domestic and interior lives of the characters.[541]

Improvisation creates 'communicative reason' in two senses that defined film-theatre: first, using collaborative production processes to create the narrative and/or the character studies; and second, to provide the conditions for non-reified reception by the viewer. Similarly, Brechtian techniques are explicitly used in film to create distance between the viewer and the social or economic conditions that are typically assumed in a mainstream film. Several films were analysed to show the diverse purposes that these techniques can serve as a response to the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films, including commentaries on modern bourgeois society (*Weekend*), racial intolerance (*Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*), and even the Hollywood film industry itself and its obsession with violence almost as a norm (*Funny Games*). Brechtian techniques dismantle the 'invisibility' of the film apparatus and in so doing expose the reality behind the veneer of 'naturalism' in Hollywood mode films, stimulating a dialectic on the respective themes and conditions that concern them. The viewer is challenged to participate in a dialectic that penetrates the socio-economic assumptions of each of these forms of reification.

6.3.2 *The role of film-theatre as an alternative modality to the Hollywood mode, future possibilities and directions, and further research*

I have argued in this chapter that the changes in the structure of the Hollywood film industry and the role of the Hollywood mode in the twenty-first century have resulted in crisis conditions. However, just as these conditions threaten the future of

[541] Ozu commented that 'Pictures with obvious plots bore me now. Naturally, a film must have some kind of structure, or else it is not a film, but I feel that a picture isn't good if it has too much drama.' Richie, 'Later Films,' 21.

the Hollywood mode – at least, in its present form – they also provide opportunities for film-theatre to help create an alternative image of the human and social world distinct from the etiolated sociality represented by the absorption effect of Hollywood mode films. In the introduction to *Theatre Institutions in Crisis*, Balme and Fisher argue that 'crises present institutions with unforeseen opportunities to transform themselves.'[542] Those opportunities include the potential for different forms of socialisation, 'empowering members of the institution who (under "normal" circumstances) are constrained by the hierarchical nature of steering processes.' Recalling some of the Habermasian concepts discussed earlier in this chapter, this approach examines how crises may provide the context and opportunity for releasing the '"latent force embedded in the system of institutions" once the old belief system that sustains its legitimacy is challenged'; this 'latent force' may be released in a form that creates opportunities for 'new and democratic forms of self-organisation.'[543] A compelling example of these possibilities is provided by Gigi Argyropoulou in a later chapter in the same book in which she documents and analyses the 2011 occupation of the Embros Theatre in Athens by the Mavilli Collective, a group of 'performance-makers.'[544] The avowed goals of Mavilli were to 'reconstitute Embros as a public space for exchange, research, debate, meeting and re-thinking.'[545]

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[542] Balme and Fisher, *Theatre Institutions in Crisis*, 14.

[543] Ibid, 14–15.

[544] Gigi Argyropoulou, 'Fugitive transformations of performance practice in landscapes of crisis,' in Balme and Fisher, *Theatre Institutions in Crisis*, 69–80.

[545] Ibid, 71. Argyropoulou observes that the occupied institution 'offered an alternative paradigm of a cultural/political space. Critical debates regarding the validity of artistic work and its relation to political reality were literally spatialised on the stage of Embros by participants from different generations, artists, activists, and audiences, giving rise to a wide range of practices experimenting with both theatrical and political potentialities.' Ibid. See also Georgios Makkas 'Re-Activation of Embros Theatre - Manifesto | Κίνηση Μαβίλη - Θέατρο Εμπρός – Μανιφέστο (2011) on Vimeo', https://vimeo.com/33688823.

The Embros experience was a result of both structural and aesthetic transformations – the reorganisation of the physical space of the theatre and the use in that space of innovative forms of expression. By analogy, the new opportunities for independent film presented by these crisis conditions are made possible by a combination of structural changes in the independent film industry's approach to film development, funding, production, and distribution, on the one hand, and alternative modalities of film that challenge the dominance of the Hollywood mode, on the other.

There are already various indications of significant structural changes in the global independent film industry. While the effects of the pandemic and the concentration of distribution control in the hands of a small number of Hollywood production companies have impacted film financing and distribution outlets for independent films,[546] 'new and democratic forms of self-organisation' in the form of innovative alternatives for funding, production, content, and distribution for independent film are developing. These solutions include new approaches to film financing in Argentina[547] and significant growth in Iranian, Thai, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese independent film production as well as what has been referred to as the 'second Mexican New Wave.'[548] In the United Kingdom, the development of approaches to film funding for productions outside the major cities, including by Creative England,

[546] Martin Smith, 'The Crisis Facing the Independent Film Sector in the UK,' ICCE Staff Blog, 26 January 2021, https://sites.gold.ac.uk/iccecommunication/2021/01/26/the-crisis-facing-the-independent-film-sector-in-the-uk-martin-smith/; Angelina Zahajko, 'The Death of Independent Cinemas,' *The Innis Herald* (blog), 5 February 2021, http://theinnisherald.com/the-death-of-independent-cinemas; Dalya Alberge, 'Streaming Could Kill UK Independent Film Industry, Experts Say,' *The Guardian*, 7 July 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jul/07/streaming-could-kill-uk-independent-film-industry.

[547] Tamara Falicov, 'The Many Facets of New Argentine Cinema,' MUBI (2017) accessed 6 December 2021, https://mubi.com/notebook/posts/the-many-facets-of-new-argentine-cinema.

[548] See, for example, Jeff Menne, 'A Mexican "Nouvelle Vague": The Logic of New Waves under Globalization,' Cinema Journal, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Autumn, 2007), 70–92; Swapnil Dhruv Bose ,'10 Best Films of the Taiwanese New Wave,' *Far Out*, 20 November 2020, https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/taiwanese-new-wave-10-best-films/.

has led to a new wave of 'countryside movies,' including *The Levelling* (2106) and *God's Own Country* (2014).[549] At the same time, this century has witnessed a growth of film festivals with a transnational focus (meaning, in this sense, festivals that encourage transnational films and are dedicated to facilitating their sale and distribution).[550] Finally, there is an ongoing development of the notion of independent film as a form of critical cultural movement that attempts to critique the dominant culture (represented by Hollywood) through film.[551] These opportunities are complemented by streaming services, such as Mubi, Curzon Home Cinema, IndieFlix, and BFI Player, that showcase independent and foreign language films.

While these new initiatives in independent film production and distribution (which, for convenience I refer to as 'new independent cinema') are encouraging, the labels 'indie film,' 'new wave,' 'art house' cinema, or even 'film movement' are no guarantee that the films themselves will escape the ideology of the Hollywood mode or its absorption effects.[552] And there is always the problem that is implicit in Harvey's analysis of monopoly rent that Hollywood will capitalise on new initiatives and appropriate them as its own.[553] It follows that the sustainability of these

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[549] *The Levelling* (Hope Dickson Leach, dir., Monterey Media, 2016); *God's Own Country* (Francis Lee, dir., British Film Institute, 2017).

[550] 'Trans/National Cinemas,'' Film Festival Research,' last updated 11 March 2022, accessed 26 November 2022, http://www.filmfestivalresearch.org/index.php/ffrn-bibliography/6-transnational-cinemas/.

[551] Sherry B. Ortner, 'Against Hollywood: American Independent Film as a Critical Cultural Movement,' *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 2 (2012): 1–21.

[552] Examples of 'political' or social justice independent films that nevertheless are made in the Hollywood mode, resulting in absorption effects, are included in notes 169, 334, and 466.

[553] An example is the Hollywood mode's appropriation of Godard's jump cuts, which more recently have become the basis for a new extreme form of 'intensified' continuity editing. Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity Visual Style.' As John McMullan observes, 'these days jump cuts can readily be found in even the most mainstream of films and TV series.' John McMullan, 'The Great Jump Cut (r)Evolution: A Case for Studying the Evolution of Vlogging Production Techniques,' *First Monday*, Vol. 26, No. 2, February 2021, https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v26i2.10547. And Karen Pearlman notes that the jump cut has been assimilated into the rules of continuity cutting as an element of style. Karen Pearlman, *Cutting Rhythms: Shaping the Film Edit* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 178.

alternative independent film resources as ‘new and democratic forms of self-organisation’ will depend significantly on the aesthetic approaches in the films that they produce, as well as on the kind of infrastructure developed around them. In other words, as with the Embros experience, the transformation in the ‘space’ of cinema requires a corresponding transformation in the aesthetic effects of the films presented within the ‘space.’

My position is that film-theatre is uniquely qualified, as both a theoretical and practical modality, to play a role in enabling aesthetic possibilities within this transformed space of cinema. In a theoretical sense, film-theatre is firmly anchored in the theatre, notably in theatre techniques and practices. Stated more emphatically, film-theatre unexceptionally rejects the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode, meaning of course its prejudice against the dialectical effects of these techniques and practices. But also, film-theatre provides a practical approach for examining theatre techniques and practices and suggesting methodologies for adapting them for film.

However, this is merely the first step in the work ahead for film-theatre. There is a need for further research both with respect to theatre techniques and practices and the possibilities for using them in future films. The ‘new independent cinema’ that I have discussed in this section is already producing innovative new approaches to film that have been challenging conventional notions of film form as well as providing their own unique applications of the three case study techniques. There is much scope for future research into these new, sometimes transformative, approaches to film; how they relate to film-theatre; and, in turn, how they inform the methodology of film-theatre, particularly with respect to the process of adapting theatre techniques and practices to film. And in turn, some of these films and recent

developments in theatre suggest that the boundaries between film and theatre forms are becoming more blurred and that further thought will need to be given to expanding film-theatre to 'theatre-film' – the use of film techniques and practices in theatre productions.

6.3.3 *The changing aesthetics of film in a time of crisis*

The following is a summary of some of the principal recent aesthetic and technical approaches that suggest future directions for film-theatre and areas for further research. Displacement, diaspora, and political persecution are common themes in twenty-first century independent films. Two films that use radically different technical approaches to film-theatre techniques to create a strong dialectic about their subjects are Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum* and *The New Gospel* by Milo Rau.[554] Each of these films can be read as a theatrical 're-enactment' of an earlier independent film classic – Ozu's *Late Spring* (examined in detail in chapter 3) and *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* by Pasolini.[555] Denis reimagines Ozu's *Late Spring* within a tenement building in a multicultural suburb of Paris. Unlike much of her other work, her aim here is not so much to make an overt political statement about colonialism but to examine its effects in the form of domestic, work, and social relationships – notably (as with Ozu's work) between a father and daughter and within the wider circles of their respective friends and work colleagues. Denis has crafted a chamber piece that plays out largely in the home of the father and daughter, almost in the form of a play. And she uses her own approach to the

[554] *35 Rhums* (Claire Denis, dir., Soudaine Compagnie, Pandora Filmproduktion, Arte France Cinéma, 2009); *Das Neue Evangelium* (Milo Rau, dir., Fruitmarket Kultur und Medien, Langfilm, IIPM, 2020).

[555] *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Pier Paolo, dir., Arco Film, 1964).

duration image within the open frame to underscore some of the domestic and social tensions between the characters.

By contrast, Rau, who has a background in directing for theatre, deconstructs the story of the Passion presented by Pasolini against the background of a group of immigrants to Italy from Cameroon campaigning for farm workers' rights. Rau's approach draws from several theatre techniques and practices to create a strong dialectical effect concerning the plight of the immigrants. These techniques and practices include Rau's relationship with the actors, the performative nature of the work, and its experimentation with film form. An appropriate starting point both for examining the film itself and considering the potential future directions for film-theatre is the Ghent Manifesto (2018) in which Rau, on his appointment as artistic director of NTGent, set out the principles for running a theatre.[556] The first three of its ten articles (excerpted below) resonate with the earlier work in this thesis, in particular the case studies on improvisation, while suggesting future directions for film-theatre:

> **One**: It's not just about portraying the world anymore. It's about changing it. The aim is not to depict the real, but to make the representation itself real.
>
> **Two**: Theatre is not a product, it is a production process. Research, castings, rehearsals and related debates must be publicly accessible.
>
> **Three**: The authorship is entirely up to those involved in the rehearsals and the performance, whatever their function may be – and to no one else

As the Manifesto indicates, one of the guiding principles of Rau's work is the *process* rather than just the product. In the same way, film-theatre encourages the use of collaborative and collective processes for character development, script creation, and shooting scenes as a means of avoiding the problems of character identification

[556] Milo Rau, 'Ghent Manifesto,' NTGent, 1 May 2018, https://www.ntgent.be/en/about/manifest.

in Hollywood mode films. Rau applied this approach to the filming of *The New Gospel*, working with non-professional actors who improvised their actions and dialogue. But perhaps the most subversive characteristic of Rau's approach is the *performative* nature of the film. Rather than simply using farm workers to depict the Passion, Rau brought together for the film 50 activist groups and NGOs to organise a demonstration that took place in tandem with the main part of the shoot. Rau in fact used three dramatic elements to create the film: the story of the Passion, the interviews with the actors about their experiences before shooting the scenes, and the preparation and staging of the demonstration, which was also filmed. As Rau explained:

> We call it utopian documentary: It's a documentary about something that is created through the project, and then documented by ourselves. So we create a campaign, then document the campaign. We could have cut a classical Jesus film, but then you would miss all the political layers.[557]

Rau is therefore acutely aware of the need (as reflected in the assertive first article of his Manifesto) for the film form to allow him to make a strong political statement, and for this purpose he *changes* the form of film to create a drama-documentary that is also performative. This approach opens opportunities for further research from the perspective of film-theatre. Though ostensibly making a film, Rau relies on inherently theatrical techniques, rehearsal practices, and his experience of the actor-director relationship in theatre to create a strong dialectic about the plight of the migrant farmworkers while grafting the documentary onto the Passion story (or vice versa). There are aspects of improvisation, Brechtian alienation techniques, and of course long shots within an open frame that all contribute to this result, but many of

[557] Eleanor Stanford, 'A Director Turns an Immigrant into a Modern-Day Jesus,' *New York Times*, September 10, 2020, accessed 28 November 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/10/movies/milo-rau-the-new-gospel.html.

the theatrical techniques he used extend beyond the case studies of the thesis and warrant further detailed analysis.

There are, of course, other examples of films that blur the distinctions between fact and fiction, documentary and drama, film and theatre, including the recent performative films of Jafar Panahi: *Taxi*, *This Is Not a Film*, and *No Bears*.[558] These films were made after 2010, when Panahi was convicted by Iran's Islamic republic for 'making propaganda against the system' and placed under house arrest. Panahi uses these films, in a quasi-documentary manner, to comment on the circumstances of his condition and on the regime. In *Taxi*, for example, Panahi plays himself as a taxi driver, driving through the streets of Tehran, picking up passengers who are non-actors working, apparently, from an outlined 'script.' Similarly, in *Stories We Tell*, Sarah Polley uses a combination of found footage, interviews, and newly reconstructed film clips to recall and comment on the story of her parents while demonstrating the elusive nature of narratives, memories, and truth. And the film frequently points the camera to itself to analyse its own meaning.

While each of these films merits further analysis, their inclusion in these final pages is intended to demonstrate how the concept of 'film' as a form is undergoing major transformations and how these new 'hybrid' forms of film have the potential to release new aesthetic possibilities for future films. And film-theatre has both the theoretical and practical resources to evaluate how these possibilities can be realised using theatre techniques and practices. Film-theatre research to this point has focused on certain specific types of theatre techniques and practices that have been applied to relatively established film forms. However, as film form changes, film-

[558] *Taxi* (Jafar Panahi, dir., Jafar Panahi Film Productions, Kino Lorber, 2015); *In Film Nist* (Jafar Panahi, dir., Jafar Panahi Film Productions, 2012). *No Bears* (Jafar Panahi, dir., JP Production, 2022).

theatre will also need to explore how these new approaches are used, what forms of theatre technique they use, and how they can be adapted for use in other films. At the same time, Rau's approach to filmmaking and distribution, which is both relatively cheap and independent of costly distribution networks, suggest further directions in which the 'space' of cinema may be transformed in the future.

But Rau's work in both theatre and film suggests other directions for film-theatre. Just as Rau applies theatre techniques and practices in his film work, he freely incorporates film in his plays as part of his 'research theatre' documentary work. This thesis has intentionally eschewed any analysis of the 'bridge' (using Sontag's terminology) from film to theatre, but the transformations of film form briefly alluded to in these closing paragraphs indicate that a productive direction for film-theatre would be to explore the possibilities of applying its concepts and approach to theatre – 'theatre-film' as well as film-theatre.[559] Perhaps, after all, the time has come for film-theatre to pursue Sontag's challenge to find a common animus that unites both art forms, or at least to explore how each can inform the other.

Another 'bridge segment' that I believe to be an appropriate and timely subject for future research is the examination of film pedagogy as it relates to vocational film school training. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the approach of a preponderance of vocational film schools in the UK and USA to training has assumed that their primary purpose is to provide a 'path to industry,' meaning a combination of skills

[559] There are, of course, several instances of film's use in theatre, dating back to the works of Brecht; but in recent years, the use of film elements in plays or even as the principal structure of a play has become an established practice. Examples include the works of Katie Mitchell, Robert Lepage, and Ivo van Hove. The recent exhibition 'All about Theatre about Film' at the Eye Filmmuseum Amsterdam demonstrates the multiple dimensions to 'theatre-film' and suggests how film-theatre and theatre-film may be examined interchangeably in future research. Chris Wiegan, 'All about Theatre about Film: Ivo van Hove's Big-Screen Obsessions in Focus,' *The Guardian*, December 2, 2021, accessed 27 November 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/dec/02/all-about-theatre-about-film-ivo-van-hove-jan-versweyveld-eye-filmmuseum.

that is most likely to both serve the film industry in those countries and enable the students to find work soon after graduating.[560] While the basis for this assumption will need considerable further work, there appears to be little indication (outside a few select film schools) that film schools in these countries focus much attention on providing training in the kinds of theatre techniques and practices that are the subject of film-theatre. A potential future field for research, therefore, would be both to examine the extent of film school training in theatre techniques and practices in the UK and USA by comparison with other countries, and to explore the opportunities for developing curricula that would support these skills and, in doing so, help to develop the potential of film-theatre in the future.

[560] My preliminary observations on this point are based on various sources, including the Film Policy Review Panel's Report (2012) and the supplemental report (2014); the BFI Future Film Skills Funding Programme: Funding Guidelines (2017); BFI2022 (BFI's plan for 2017–22); the BFI/Skillset Future Film Skills Action Plan; and the report 'For a European Film Education Policy' by Xavier Lardoux of Unifrance Film (2014).

Conclusion: Rebuilding the Bridge between Film and Theatre

The introduction to the thesis asked two questions concerning the relationship between film and theatre: how the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode has resulted in the logic of absorption, and to what extent the modality of film-theatre provides a theoretical and practical approach for disrupting the absorption effect. The thesis challenged the antitheatrical prejudice of the Hollywood mode and the absorption effect, which is its inevitable outcome, as theoretically flawed and socially harmful, arguing that they are based on the fallacy that antitheatricality is a necessary condition of establishing film as a unique art form. This in turn is based on equally flawed assumptions about the alleged 'realism' of film and the meaning of theatricality. The thesis has sought to refute each of these assumptions. First, it has argued that the so-called 'realism' of the Hollywood mode is no more than an illusion of naturalism that is used to conceal from the viewer the Hollywood mode's ideology, which obscures the underlying themes and socio-political circumstances of a film. Second, it has explained that the antitheatrical prejudice is not about theatre as such but about the *dialectic effects* that theatre techniques and practices produce.

These concerns about the Hollywood mode and the logic of absorption are well known and have been the subject of critical review since the time of Eisenstein and Brecht. They have been challenged in various ways by both filmmakers who reject the conventions and rules of the Hollywood mode (including the directors of the films discussed in the three sets of case studies) and by the various aesthetic, social, political, and economic theories examined in this and other chapters of the thesis.[561]

[561] These include the arguments relating to reification in this chapter as well as the various criticisms in other parts of the thesis by Bazin, Deleuze, Mulvey, Althusser, Brecht, Burch, and others.

The contribution of the thesis to existing knowledge is not to add one more theory of film to the existing literature but to propose, first, a new *modality* (or a 'counter-mode') that is based on a radical – arguably outrageous – 'pro-theatrical' (or 'anti-antitheatrical') approach to film aesthetics and effects that challenges the accepted discourse about the Hollywood mode, and, second, by reference to the examples in the case studies in chapters 3 to 5, a practical methodology that uses theatricality to examine how the dialectical effects of theatre techniques and practices can be reimagined and developed for film.

To conclude, I return to Sontag's question of whether there is an unbridgeable division or opposition between theatre and film or whether the two art forms share a common 'animus.' To answer this, I refer to the early discussion in the thesis of the origin of the film form in music halls and theatres. The objective of the thesis has been to demonstrate the substantive and continuing importance of theatricality for film. This importance was somehow lost, as the Hollywood mode evolved, partly because of enthusiasm in the period from 1907 to 1917 for the innovations of the continuity system and the work of Griffiths and others who saw its potential, and partly because of the desire by Hollywood production companies to secure a global hegemony of the film industry. At the same time the importance of theatricality was overlooked in the rush to claim for film the status of a new art form.

The position of the thesis is that there is a need to restage the debate about the role of theatricality in film. Through the problematisation of the ideologies created by the absorption effects of the Hollywood mode, the analysis of the methodology of film-theatre, and the case studies, I have sought to demonstrate the dangers of the absorption effect and the role of theatre techniques and practices in counteracting it. The need, at this moment in the history of film, for an alternative modality to the

Hollywood mode cannot be understated. While concerns about the Hollywood mode have persisted since its origins in 1909–1917, the extreme forms of reification and absorption that have been described in the last chapter are a matter of universal concern. They encapsulate the idea that social and political problems – poverty, the environment, political injustice, racial intolerance, and antisemitism, for example – can be reduced to the equation of a binary struggle between opposing forces and that, through the redemptive acts of a 'hero' with whom the audience is asked to identify, all these problems will be resolved. This 'dumbing down'[562] of matters of national and international concern is reflected in other forms of the culture industry, including social media and news media. And while the causes of these problems are not attributable exclusively to the Hollywood mode and the various spinoff industries and subcultures discussed in this chapter, they unquestionably play a major role. For these reasons, and to paraphrase Sontag, a 'bridge' between film and theatre is of critical importance. If such a bridge diminishes what Fried would refer to as the 'autonomy' of film as an art form, this merely demonstrates that it is the Hollywood mode's misplaced insistence on film's need to free itself from the 'impurities of theatre'[563] that needs to be abandoned, not the role of theatricality in film.

The final chapter presented an argument that the Hollywood mode is experiencing chronic crisis conditions. The collapse of the role of story in Hollywood mode films, the decline in cinema attendance (as well as of the cinemas themselves), and the preference of the Hollywood film industry for investment in rentier properties have created a vacuum. While film-theatre cannot realistically expect to draw audiences

[562] Simon Pegg, 'Simon Pegg Criticises "Dumbing Down" of Cinema,' *The Guardian*, 19 May 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/may/19/simon-pegg-criticises-dumbing-down-of-cinema.

[563] Sontag, 'Film and Theatre,' 24 (paraphrasing Panofsky).

that previously flocked to multiplexes to watch Hollywood mode films, the vacuum does provide an opportunity for film-theatre to propose possibilities for an alternative modality based on a sociality that encourages dialectical and self-reflexive responses to film subjects and a collaborative approach to filmmaking. The exploration and development of those possibilities will shape the future research and direction of film-theatre begun in this thesis.

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