UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities

Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Cinema

By Melenia Arouh

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SEPTEMBER 2004

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

CINEMATIC FORMALISM: AN INQUIRY INTO THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMA

By Melenia Arouh

This thesis outlines an aesthetics of cinema with special emphasis on formalist ideas. Specifically, the focus is on providing a link between philosophical discussions about artistic or aesthetic form, and cinema. Furthermore, it is argued that formalist discussions are an integral part of the study of cinema, and should be revised and reconsidered and their particular importance explicated. To this end a cinematic formalist theory is proposed that is shaped by the philosophy of art, and the philosophy of film in particular, and film theory, and succeeds in synthesising these in order to enrich our understanding of cinema in a novel and productive way. From these discussions the nature of form in cinema and the centrality it holds for our experiences of films will be delineated and explained. In this manner, the aesthetics of cinema proposed here fills a gap in the current philosophical literature about cinema and expands on the nature of this art form.

Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Cinema

LIST OF CONTENTS:

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Melenia Arouh, declare that the thesis entitled *Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry Into the Aesthetics of Cinema* and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at the University
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself
- None of this work has been published before submission

Signed:.....

Date:.....6/10/04.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis many people have helped me in a number of different ways. I wish here to thank them. I would like to thank the members of the philosophy department at the University of Southampton, who have helped me with both philosophical and administrative issues. In particular, I wish to thank my supervisor Alex Neill, who through his continuous support was patient enough to guide me these past four years, and help me develop my ideas. His insights, comments and criticisms have given real shape and substance to this thesis. For all these I am sincerely grateful. Of course, it goes without saying that, any problems or mistakes this thesis has are entirely my fault. Fellow post-graduates in this department, Graham Stevens, James Cuthbert, Martin Ladbury, Oystein Hide, Peter Winslow and Jenny Bunker in particular, have also helped me, reading my work on several occasions, and indulging with my philosophical insecurities. Other people at Southampton University, Ana Alonso-Vazquez, Elisa Lawson and Carina Buckley, who proof-read the entire thesis, have endlessly supported me through these years. Additionally, a number of people in Greece have helped me both professionally and personally, Fay Zika, Vasso Kindi, Grigoris Kafetzopoulos, Maria-Christina Tsemani, Elli Argyrou, Ina Melengoglou, Alkmini Karakosta and Maria Amaxopoulou. Also, a big thank you to my good friends and house-mates Alexandros Anastasopoulos, and especially Maria-Nefeli Tsaloglou, who have been patient with my ups and downs, my panic attacks, have shopped, cooked, cleaned and even type-written for me. They certainly deserve a place in Heaven for all their efforts. Another big thank you to my partner George Turner who's love has proved a solid basis for me to rely upon in good times and bad, and who, with his genuine scepticism about my ideas and method, has been a constant source of mayhem. I am also indebted to my (extended) family, and in particular my parents Albert Arouh and Lily Anagnostopoulou, and brother Timotheos, for providing me with the financial means to complete this thesis, but also with great emotional, psychological and intellectual support. I owe them the world for all these. My last thank you is to my good friend Melina Papamanoli who unfortunately is not here to read this. She was the one who pressured me to apply for a Ph.D., and who always believed in my academic potential. For these reasons I wish to dedicate this thesis to her memory and hope that she is happy with my results.

PREFACE

The point of origin of this thesis can be found in a recurring question throughout my postgraduate studies: what is it that makes a film good or bad? This thesis attempts to answer this question, i.e., provide some adequate explanation as to why we like films. In order to achieve this I have relied on both the philosophy of art and film theory to find my answers and, ultimately, promote a philosophically inclined cinematic analysis. The philosophy department at the University of Southampton has proved to be an ideal environment to conduct this research. Due to its emphasis on the philosophy of art, and its support of interdisciplinary work, I have found the best place to develop my ideas.

By shifting back and forth from philosophy to film theory, one of my constant concerns has been the films used as examples. I have tried to include mostly mainstream or well-known films, with the hope that these examples will indeed make sense to the reader. In some cases, however, it has been impossible to use such examples, and certain little known films are considered. Nevertheless, I always refer to films which, popular or not, are artistically interesting and, for my part, represent what is best about cinema.

University of Southampton, June 2004

INTRODUCTION

This thesis outlines an aesthetics of cinema with special emphasis on formalist ideas. Specifically, the focus is on providing a link between philosophical discussions about artistic or aesthetic form, and cinema. What is interesting about this type of inquiry is that although it was considered a fundamental aspect of the work of some early film theorists, and of the work of certain philosophers of art in the 1970s, its importance and centrality have been ignored and misunderstood ever since. This thesis argues that formalist discussions are in fact an integral part of the study of cinema, and should be revised and reconsidered and their particular importance explicated. In this manner, the aesthetics of cinema proposed here fills a gap in the current philosophical literature about cinema, through examinations of formalist ideas and arguments. From these discussions it is hoped that the nature of form in cinema, and the centrality it holds for our experiences of films, will be delineated and explained.

In order to achieve the sort of analysis required by the aesthetics of cinema three different areas need to be considered. The first is a group of philosophical writings on cinema from the 1970s that attempt to explain the artistic relevance and potential of cinema. This group of writings stands at the centre of my inquiry, since it proposes a way of thinking about cinema from a philosophical perspective, but also with a specific formalist interest. The second area is the formalist literature in the philosophy of art. It is only by understanding the ideas and shortcomings of the formalist theories outlined that the aesthetics of cinema can provide a comprehensive formalist understanding of cinema. The third area consists of certain views in early and contemporary film theory, and especially the ideas that discuss cinematic form. This thesis attempts to find a balance between this variety of influences, and synthesise a discussion that will incorporate all relevant parameters. By examining these theories I hope to benefit from their insights but also avoid their mistakes. Thus, I will present an investigation that is defined both by philosophy of art and film theory, while striving to find a middle ground for this combination to occur. Only by bringing these areas together can a more comprehensive understanding of these matters be obtained, and a proper aesthetics of cinema developed.

Structurally, this thesis consists of eight chapters. The first two provide a mapping of the particular perspective examined and attempt to establish its importance. Furthermore, a number of clarifications are made and a method of inquiry is proposed in terms of the aesthetics of cinema and the role and centrality of cinematic form. The first chapter, 'The aesthetics of cinema', outlines the origins and importance of the aesthetics of cinema, and general shape is given to the particular perspective examined. Specifically, the focus is on introducing two issues that will constitute the basis of the aesthetics of cinema, and stressing their significance for the philosophical study of cinema. The first concerns the effort to explore, describe or even somehow define cinema, through the notions of essence, medium and form. The second consists of analyses of the artistic or aesthetic importance of form in our experiences of films, and the possible uniqueness, or peculiar character, of cinema, especially as this is contrasted to other art forms.

In the second chapter, 'The Holy Trinity of the Aesthetics of Cinema: Essence-Medium-Form', in order to understand more fully the nature of the aesthetics of cinema, the three most fundamental concepts of the aesthetics of cinema are outlined. In particular, matters of cinematic essence are discussed, both in relation to the work of some of the early film theorists, and the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s and it is suggested that it is preferable to develop the aesthetics of cinema with no reference to a cinematic essence. Then, the notion of medium is considered, and it is argued that there needs to be some stable definition of what the medium of cinema is. Finally, the idea of form is introduced and a mode of inquiry is proposed for the next chapters.

The next two chapters introduce and discuss two dominant formalist perspectives in the philosophy of art, with the aim of understanding what form is and how it affects or shapes our experiences of works of art. In the third chapter, 'Strong Formalism', Clive Bell and Roger Fry's version of formalism is considered, and it is concluded that this formalist understanding is problematic in terms of the definition of art it proposes. Furthermore, it is argued that strong formalism is mostly incompatible with a study of cinema, due to the notion of disinterestedness it suggests.

In the fourth chapter, 'Weak Formalism', the discussion turns to a weaker version of formalism and, in particular, the view that artistic value is a matter of the satisfying

appropriateness of form to content, as this is developed in Richard Eldridge and Arthur Danto's work. The main points of this theory are delineated, and its exegetical contribution to our understanding of art, and cinema in particular, is discussed. However, it is concluded that even though weak formalism is more compatible with the study of cinema, certain adjustments still need to be made in order to gain a more substantive formalist understanding of cinema.

This I will achieve in the next two chapters by proposing what I will refer to as cinematic formalism. Specifically, in chapter five, 'Cinematic Form', it is argued that due to the diversity of interpretations of 'form' in the philosophy of art a common understanding of this notion is lacking. As such, there needs to be a particular examination of what *cinematic* form amounts to. In particular, in this chapter I will introduce the notions of 'film form', which refers to the form of each individual film, and 'cinema form', which refers to the form of cinema in general. Although film form is discussed in some detail, cinema form is introduced in this chapter but thoroughly examined in chapters seven and eight.

In chapter six, 'The Role of Form', I continue outlining cinematic formalism, and especially the explanation of the role and value of form in cinema that the aesthetics of cinema requires. Specifically, I propose a more narrow and flexible understanding of weak formalism, which does not aim to account for all art. Furthermore, I examine the type of relationship that exists between cinematic form and content, and outline two rival understandings of this relationship, the neoformalist one, and Noël Carroll's functionalism. Finally, a number of examples are discussed in order to understand the applicability of cinematic formalism and further delineate what the satisfying appropriateness of form to content amounts to.

The last two chapters of this thesis take the formalist exploration of cinema a step further by thoroughly examining cinema space and time. In chapter seven, 'Cinema Space', I consider four fundamental characteristics of cinema space, its duality in terms of screen and action-space, its two-dimensionality, its discontinuity and last, what is referred to as off-screen space. Through these it is argued that although cinema space seems as a unique characteristic of cinema, there are some similarities with comics that need to be considered.

In chapter eight, 'Cinema Time', the most fundamental characteristics of cinema time are considered. These are, the duality of cinema time, in terms of screen and action-time, the particular way in which films are projected and the type of temporal 'illusion' that is created, the temporal discontinuity of the cinematic image and lastly, off-screen time. Additionally, two characteristically cinematic techniques, the freeze-frame and the acceleration and slowing down of time, are discussed. From all these it is concluded that although cinema shares most of these characteristics with arts such as stage plays or comics, the peculiar nature of cinematic projection is indeed a defining characteristic, and shows the formal distinctiveness of cinema.

Through these chapters a number of issues are clarified and an aesthetics of cinema proposed and developed, with a specific focus on the role and significance of form. Specifically, a cinematic formalist theory is outlined that is shaped by the philosophy of art, the philosophy of film and film theory, and succeeds in synthesising the three in order to enrich our understanding of cinema in a productive way. From these discussions the nature of cinematic form is shown and its role in our experiences of films explicated. Furthermore, the importance and possible centrality of a formalist understanding of cinema is re-introduced, and it is argued that the aesthetics of cinema should once again be considered an important part of the study of cinema.

We've forgotten why Joan Fontaine leans over the edge of the cliff,
and what it was that Joel McCrea was going to do in Holland
We don't remember why Montgomery Cliff was maintaining eternal silence
or why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel
and why Teresa Wright is still in love with uncle Charlie
We've forgotten why Henry Fonda is not totally guilty
and for what exact reason the American government employs Ingrid Bergman

But we remember a handbag
but we remember a bus
but we remember a glass of milk
the sails of a windmill
a hairbrush
but we remember a row of bottles
a pair of spectacles
a sheet of music
a bunch of keys

Because through them and with them
Alfred Hitchcock succeeded
where Julius Caesar, Napoleon had all failed:
to take control of the universe

Perhaps there are 10000 people who haven't forgotten Cézanne's apple
but there will be 1000000000 spectators
who will remember the lighter in Strangers on a Train

The reason why Alfred Hitchcock became the only successful poete maudit
was that he was the greatest creator of forms of the 20th century
and its forms that tell us finally what lies at the bottom of things

Now what is art if not that thing through which forms become style
and what is style if not the man

So it's a blonde braless followed by a detective who is afraid of the void
who all bring us proof
that all this is why cinema is
in other words the childhood of art

Jean-Luc Godard,
Histoire(s) du Cinéma: Le Contrôle de L'Univers
(1998)

CHAPTER ONE:
THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMA

Introduction:

The philosophy of film is a flourishing area of study, characterised by a diversity of views. This diversity has become most noticeable since the early 1990s where the instances of philosophical discussion about cinema have multiplied in number and variation. For example, Noël Carroll has written about the epistemological problems of film theory, Gregory Currie about the realism of cinematic movement, Daniel Frampton about colour in film, Berys Gaut and Paisley Livingston about film authorship, Cynthia A. Freeland about feminism and horror films, Jerrold Levinson and Peter Kivy about film music, Alex Neill and Murray Smith about our emotional responses to film fiction, Paul Patton on Deleuze's writings on cinema, Deborah Knight on film genre, Andrew Kania on the 'realism' of cinematic movement, George M. Wilson about point of view in films, Jeffrey A. Bell and Kevin Sweeney about cinematic phenomenology, David Bordwell about film and cognitivism, Carl Plantinga and Trevor Ponech have discussed non-fiction films and Richard Allen has written about cinematic representation.[1] Each theorist dealing philosophically with cinema may choose a favourite angle and proceed accordingly. Currently, the most flourishing part of the philosophy of film is a group of writings referred to as 'philosophy *and* film', in which philosophers discuss philosophical themes or questions that arise from films, make philosophical interpretations of films and determine how particular films engage in philosophical argumentation themselves.[2] Among others, Stanley Cavell, Stephen Mulhall, Ian Jarvie, Kostis Kovéos and Thomas E. Wartenberg have written on this subject.

---

[1] The anthologies *Film theory and Philosophy* (Allen, Richard, and Smith, Murrey, 1999), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Bordwell, David, and Carroll, Noël, 1996) and *Philosophy and Film* (Freeland, Cynthia, and Wartenberg, Thomas E., 1995) include a good number of essays that exhibit the diversity mentioned above, as does the journal *Film and Philosophy*, and the two on-line journals, *Film-Philosophy* (www.film-philosophy.com) and *Filmosophy* (www.filmosophy.org).

[2] Deborah Knight also names this category 'philosophy and film', or alternatively, 'philosophy in film', (Knight, Deborah, 2004, p. 147). Thomas E. Wartenberg also makes references to this category, in Wartenberg, Thomas E., 2004, p. 139-1340. Furthermore, this manner of philosophical investigation is also noticed in the work of some film theorists. For instance, Cynthia Baron, Sander Lee and Jack Purcell. For an example of this variety, see http://media.ankara.edu.tr/%7Eerdogan/filmarticlesources.html (accessed 22/9/03).

It is peculiar, however, that among this array of options the topic of my thesis, that is, the development of an aesthetics of cinema with an emphasis on the artistic potential of cinematic form, is rarely encountered nowadays. Although this type of investigation was a most important aspect of film theory from the 1920s to the 1950s, and was quite central in the philosophical writings about cinema in the 1970s, it has been largely ignored ever since. Lately, it has become apparent that the current philosophical study of cinema lacks systematic research into the aesthetics of cinema.[3]

In general, the aesthetics of cinema is a sub-category of the philosophy of film.[4] This sub-category, which reached its peak in the 1970s, can be considered the legitimate heir of the aesthetics of cinema that a number of early film theorists developed. Philosophers, mostly in the 1970s, such as Alexander Sesonske, Haig Khatchadourian, F. E. Sparshott and Stanley Cavell, discussed questions concerning the artistic potential and importance of cinema by providing accounts of cinematic medium and form, and comparing and contrasting these to those of other art kinds. What unites these analyses is a common interest in understanding and describing the artistic significance of cinema in terms of form, systematically dealing with issues of cinematic ontology and striving to provide some sort of definition of cinema.

It is interesting to note that there seems to be no specific reason as to why there has been such a decline of interest in this research area. The only reason that stands out, is that the claim that cinema is artistically important seems today mostly unproblematic.[5] As Ian Jarvie has claimed, "[t]he old problematic of legitimizing film as an art is one I believe we should declare closed".[6] As such, the importance of the aesthetics of cinema became less obvious. For why should such a type of inquiry be pursued when the central concern (i.e., whether cinema is artistically significant or not) has been adequately explained? This I intend to examine throughout chapters one and two. However, before

---

[3] An exception to this is Richard Allen and Murray Smith's section on the aesthetics of cinema in their anthology *Film Theory and Philosophy*, (Allen, Richard, and Smith, Murray, 1999). See also Gaut, Berys, 2002.

[4] Berys Gaut also makes a similar kind of taxonomy of the various levels of philosophical discussion on cinema. Although there are some overlapping features, Gaut draws some different distinctions and does not isolate the aesthetics of cinema, as I propose to do (Gaut, Berys, 1997, p. 145).

[5] This is true with the notable exception of Roger Scruton's essay 'Photography and Representation'. In particular, Scruton argued that photography in its ideal form, which he understands as the fundamental basis of cinema, is not an art because it is incapable of representation (Scruton, Roger, 1983).

[6] Jarvie, Ian, 2004, p. 143

I discuss the importance of the aesthetics of cinema, I will outline its position within the general philosophical study of cinema, and present its main claims. By elaborating what exactly the aesthetics of cinema is it will become easier to explain its importance.

The place of the aesthetics of cinema in the development of film theory:

Questions concerning the aesthetics of cinema and, coincidentally, the origins of any philosophical discussion about cinema can be traced back to the beginnings of film theory *circa* 1915.[7] In particular, early film theorists devoted a significant portion of their attention to issues such as the aesthetic significance of cinema, in order to show why cinema was an art form on a par with other arts and consequently place cinema within a broader discussion about art.[8] This was needed because in the first years after the invention of cinematography cinema was not perceived as art but simply as a technological gadget, or even a fad that would eventually run out of steam.[9] The idea that a film could be considered a work of art was unimaginable. Specifically, the general opinion around 1896 was that, "living photographs are about as far from being things of beauty as anything possibly could be and they ought not to be expected to be joys forever".[10] This negative attitude was even evident in the late 1920s:

> "It has long been said of the silent cinema: 'It is art in its childhood!'. This phrase was repeated from year to year, and the child did not grow up. Until one day it was realised that this child was a dwarf".[11]

It was also becoming apparent during this period, however, that cinema was more than a technological gadget but that it had in fact an affinity with other art forms, which needed to be explicitly determined. Cinema was beginning to look like art, to resemble other art forms in terms of plot, acting, narration techniques and so on, even if it did not

---

[7] Hugo Münsterberg was the first to look at films from a philosophical perspective, focusing on the nature of the cinematic images and the conditions of film viewing. See, Münsterberg, Hugo, 1916, or Carroll, Noël, 1988 (a) and Jarvie, Ian, 1987, especially p. 76-77.

[8] This is also much discussed by Carroll: "specific [early] film theorists...set forth...philosophical theses concerning the nature of representation, expression, photography, aesthetic quality, aesthetic realism, and the like" (Carroll, Noël, 1988 (b), p. 4).

[9] For a good analysis of the initial reception of cinema, see Boltomore, Stephen, 1996, p. 136-137.

[10] Quoted in Ibid., p. 137

[11] Jacques Feyder in 1929, quoted in Abel, Richard, 1988, p. 38.

meet the expectations of the then popular art theories (such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry's). As a consequence of this theoretical incompatibility and the general negative perception of cinema, early film theory had to demonstrate through argument that cinema *was* an art, and that some films were therefore works of art.

In this way, early film theorists made the first step in the development of the aesthetics of cinema. From that point on and approximately until the 1960s, a portion of film theory systematically dealt with issues concerning the nature of cinema in terms of its distinctive formal character and medium. For example, in the 1920s Russian theorists and filmmakers, including Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Timoshenko and Kuleshov, argued that the cinematic medium had the potential through montage to be considered a legitimate art form.[12] 'Montage', especially according to Eisenstein, was understood as a fundamental cinematic tool that shapes our experience of films.[13] In the 1930s, Rudolf Arnheim tried to show that cinema was an art form and not simply a mechanical reproduction of reality. He argued that since cinematic images are two-dimensional, distort depth relations, lack colour and spatio-temporal continuity, and of all our senses engage only vision, they fail to reproduce reality as we perceive it.[14] From this conclusion he asserted that filmmakers should dwell on, if not restrict themselves to, these differences and hence create art. Later still, in the 1950s-1960s, film theorists such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer elucidated the possible aesthetic significance of films, arguing that films are aesthetically stimulating and hence works of art, by virtue of (and not despite) their photographic nature.[15] Kracauer argued that films could claim aesthetic validity only if they rely on the photographic realism of cinema.[16] Bazin argued that the aesthetic significance of films followed from the basic premise that filmic nature is essentially photographic and hence realistic. In his account, the basic feature of cinema becomes its ability to reproduce reality.[17] Furthermore, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, 'La Politique des Auteurs', as it was originally developed in the French journal *Cahiers Du Cinema*, proposed cinema to

---

[12] For a more detailed analysis of these positions see, Eisenstein, Sergei, 1998, Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 1999, Harrah, David, 1954, Newcomb, James W., 1974.
[13] Eisenstein, Sergei, 1998, p. 36
[14] Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, in Part II: 'Art and Nature'.
[15] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1997; Bazin, André, 1999
[16] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1997, p. 37
[17] Bazin, André, 1999, p. 195-199

be an art form because of the authority of the director over the creation of the *mise-en-scène*.[18] The director becomes an 'auteur', according to François Truffaut, when s/he transforms a pre-existing work (usually the script) into a product of his/her own expression, namely, a work of art that will bear his/her signature or distinctive style.[19]

These examples indicate that the origins of the aesthetics of cinema are rooted in the first decades of film theory. Yet, by the late 1960s, and early 1970s, most film theorists abandoned questions concerning the aesthetic nature of films, and the conditions of cinema as an art form. Rather, with the emergence of theories such as semiotics, Althusserian Marxism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and feminism, a different side of cinema was emphasised—usually its social and psychological importance—and the nature of film theory changed drastically. As David Bordwell argues, at that period

> "[f]lm was held to be a semiotic system, representing the world in text by means of conventional codes. As a semiotic system, cinema could be considered to engage the spectator as a split subject, initiating a process in which conscious and unconscious interact".[20]

All these ideas slowed down during the 1980s under the onslaught of new theoretical trends—many inspired by Continental philosophy—such as post-structuralism, deconstructionism and post-modernism, although leftist ideologies along with feminist and gay perspectives were preserved. One of the major issues became how spectators create meaning, given the differences that exist between them, such as race, gender and so forth.[21] The cultural, political, psychological and sociological impact of films on the individual and society became one of the most central features of film theory, and this remains the case; reception studies, cultural studies, visual culture and post-colonialism shaped the nature and character of film theory.

As such, aspects of the aesthetics of cinema came to be largely ignored, since the concern shifted to questions about film audiences rather than the films themselves. In

---

[18] Truffaut, François, 1976

[19] Ibid., p. 233. Later on, film theorist Andrew Sarris developed this position in more detail, (Sarris, Andrew, 1968). I should add that the above examples are just a sample of the work of early film theorists regarding this subject matter. Among others, Balázs, Béla, 1970 and Jean Mitry (see Lewis, Brian, 1981) have written on similar issues.

[20] Bordwell, David, 1996, p. 7

[21] Ibid., p. 10

particular, the spectator became the key ingredient of film study, and of what is generally called 'Theory', while spectator-independent descriptions of films (texts) are seen as unnecessary or even impossible. I hasten to add here that early film theorists did not limit themselves to questions of philosophical aesthetics but also engaged in discussions about cinema's other functions, as the Soviet Montagists did about the didactic potential of films through montage, and as Bazin did about the ethical responsibility of the filmmaker to opt for more active spectatorship. But early film theorists managed to find a balance between the development of the aesthetics of cinema and the various other effects of cinema on the spectator or society. For most contemporary film theorists, however, the idea of cinema as an art form with an aesthetic potential remains mostly unnoticed. Nevertheless, this shift in research focus does not signify the end of the aesthetics of cinema, since in the early 1970s certain philosophers of art undertook similar investigations. These I will outline in the next sections.

Analytical philosophers and cinema:

From the invention of cinema until the 1970s, despite the often philosophical nature of film theory, there seems to have been a significant lack of interest in cinema from professional philosophers. The few philosophers that had written on cinema did so rarely, and on different subject matters, such as Wolfgan A. Luchting's article 'Profound Banality in the Film' (1958) and William Earle's 'Revolt Against Realism in the Films' (1968). It is often argued, as Ian Jarvie has done, that philosophers of art, particularly in the analytical tradition, ignored cinema up until the 1970s, naming it a minor art, if an art at all, and not worthy of aesthetic consideration.[22] Noël Carroll in his book *A Philosophy of Mass Art* traces, and examines at lengths, the most common and popular arguments against the classification of 'mass art'—including cinema—as art proper. These arguments include Dwight MacDonald's claim that the very nature of mass art is damaging for the aesthetic life and taste of society; Clement Greenberg's view that mass art is 'inauthentic' art because it breaks away from the genuine art of the past; and R. G.

[22] Jarvie, Ian, 1999, p. 416-417. Carroll makes a similar kind of observation in Carroll, Noël, 1998 (a).

Collingwood's argument that 'amusement art' is craft rather than art, since in 'amusement art' the craftsman designs the work so as to arouse certain emotions, whereas in art proper the concern of the artist, among other things, is to manage through the work to turn a vague but original feeling into something precise.[23]

Although I agree with the assertion that philosophers of art ignored cinema until the 1970s, I disagree with both Carroll and Jarvie's claim that most, if not all, were entirely dismissive of its artistic potential. For example, Paolo Milano and Renato Poggioli in 1941, Milton S. Fox in 1944, Thomas Munro in 1949, Susanne Langer in 1953 and F. E. Sparshott in 1963, to name but a few philosophers of art working from a general analytical perspective, make positive references to cinema as a developing art, and even if some were not very enthusiastic they did not condemn cinema to the status of 'craft'.[24] Rather, as Raleigh suggests, they were mostly puzzled by its technological development, its mechanical nature and mass appeal, and therefore found it difficult to map cinema within a context of other, more traditional, arts.[25] In other words, it became more convenient for philosophers to ignore cinema as an emerging art form, and leave it to early film theorists such as Eisenstein, Bazin and Kracauer to discuss its nature philosophically, rather than find ways to fit cinema within the standard context of the philosophy of art, or deal with its mechanical or explicitly commercial nature.

In the 1970s, however, when philosophers of art of the analytical tradition took a more persistent interest in the artistic value of cinema, film theory, as I mentioned, had become largely incompatible with their research interest and methodology. As such, these philosophers had no alternative but to distance themselves from film theory and either promote their own views concerning cinema or engage in criticisms of film theory, thus creating a schism in the study of cinema.[26] One of the consequences of this situation

---

[23] Carroll, Noël, 1998 (a), p. 21-23, 30-31, 60-62

[24] Milano, Paolo, 1941, Poggioli, Renato, 1941, Fox, Milton S., 1944, Munro, Thomas, 1949, most significantly p. 141, Langer, Susanne, 1953, p. 411-415 and Sparshott, F. E., 1963, p. 148.

[25] Raleigh, Henry P., 1982, p. 72, 74-75

[26] It is interesting to note that after the 1970s most film theorists ignored the work of philosophers writing on cinema from an analytical perspective, and this is especially true for the work of Stanley Cavell (see Rothman, William, (accessed 9/26/03)). On the other hand, continental philosophers, such as Gilles Deleuze or Jean-François Lyotard, were more comfortable with issues in film theory, and as a result their work is often mentioned in film theory even today.

was that a number of these philosophers picked up the portion of early film theory dealing with the aesthetics of cinema that had been largely abandoned by film theorists around the late 1960s and early 1970s. So, in the 1970s a proliferation of writings on cinema from an analytical perspective can be seen both in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* and *The British Journal of Aesthetics*; where, parenthetically, of the eighteen articles on film published in both journals from 1944 to 1980, twelve were written after 1970.

From the 1970s to the present day, film theory and the philosophy of film have been developing side by side with little association, and, sometimes, outward hostility. It is worth quoting a comment made by Noël Carroll to show the extent of hostility and disagreement between these two areas of study. Commenting on the current status of film study, Carroll says,

> "I confess that I find the prevailing political correctness in film studies intellectually self-serving, complacent, and smug. It not only inures the doctrines of the allegedly politically correct from criticism, it represses any original thinking on any terms that are not its own. It stamps out diversity in the name of difference. It is not a policy likely to promote the growth of understanding".[27]

The harshness of this criticism is echoed in the majority of Carroll's views about contemporary film theory. Furthermore, in the late 1990s this divide and opposition became even more pronounced with the promotion of 'analytical philosophy of film', as outlined in some of Berys Gaut, Richard Allen and Murray Smith's work.[28] 'Analytical philosophy of film', which as they define it includes all the philosophical work on cinema from an analytical perspective, is mainly inspired by analytical philosophy of art, and amounts to a style of research, a 'truth tackling' approach to questions concerning cinema, which involves disambiguation of terms and scrutiny of arguments.[29] In

---

[27] Carroll, Noël, 1996, p. 259. 'Film Theory' responded bitterly to such comments with articles such as 'Critique of Poor Reason', Buckland, Warren, 1989.

[28] See for example, Gaut, Berys, 1997, and Allen, Richard, and Smith, Murray, 1999, especially their introduction to this anthology.

[29] Allen, Richard, and Smith, Murray, 1999, p. 4-5. Parenthetically, analytical aestheticians, as Richard Shusterman has argued at length, place emphasis on clarity of argument; a classificatory rather than evaluative understanding of art; a focus on our experiences derived from art rather than nature; an anti-essentialist stance; and an effort to keep the concept of art separate from a historical or political context

particular, analytical philosophers of film use the name 'analytical' simply because they apply techniques and methods which are often used by the analytical tradition.[30] By adopting the term 'analytical', however, the conflict with—often continentally inspired—aspects of film theory became even more evident.[31] As a result, one of the most notable characteristics of analytical philosophy of film is its conflict with film theory.

The aesthetics of cinema, as presented in this thesis, could be considered as being more compatible with the group of writings that belong to the analytical philosophy of film, and especially the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s, rather than contemporary film theory. This is mostly because I share an interest in cinema's formal character, and in disambiguating certain notions within film criticism. As such, it could be maintained that my thesis, at least historically, should be mapped within the context of analytical philosophy of film. However, I will refrain from explicitly presenting my work as an instance of the analytical philosophy of film, and argue in favour of a unified philosophical perspective about cinema. The main reason I will avoid presenting this thesis in such a way is because of the hostility mentioned before, between this mode of study and film theory. My own understanding is that the philosophical study of cinema should be open to all types of perspectives, and as Jarvie claims, "[m]y plea would be for a liberal and tolerant self-definition [of the philosophical study of cinema], open to all contributions that can defensibly call themselves philosophical".[32] In this manner I hope to benefit from both the analytical philosophy of film and film theory, and thus present a more complete discussion of cinema.

(Shusterman, Richard, 1989, p. 4-12). The problem with Shusterman's approach is that it fails to accommodate all aestheticians who would be considered analytical. For example, anti-essentialism in terms of definition, while it may be true for the work of Morris Weitz excludes Arthur Danto, an otherwise analytical aesthetician. Alternatively, the emphasis on art rather than nature, although characteristic of Danto, excludes the work done by David Cooper on the aesthetic appreciation of gardens (Cooper, David, E., 2002), or Terry Diffey's work on the aesthetic experience of nature (Diffey, Terry, 2003). Both of them, however, are usually considered analytical aestheticians. The origins of this problem are further rooted in the so far inadequately defined term 'analytical', as I mention in the footnote below.

[30] By borrowing the term 'analytical' from the larger field of analytical philosophy, analytical philosophy of film inherits all the problems of a lack of clear-cut definition of the term 'analytical'. As such, it is very difficult to show conclusively what exactly analytical philosophy of film should, or does, consist of. For a good account of the problematic definition of 'analytical', see Hacker, P.M.S, 1998 and Monk, Ray, 1996.

[31] See for example, Allen, Richard and Smith, Murray, 1999, Smith, Murray, (accessed 9/3/03), Jarvie, Ian, 1999, Plantinga, Carl, 1993, or Buckland, Warren, (accessed 9/3/03) and Guttenplan, Samuel, (accessed 9/3/03)

[32] Jarvie, Ian, 2004, p. 143. This is also echoed in Carl Plantinga's claim: "[i]n some academic Eden, film theorists and aestheticians ought to be learning from each other", (Plantinga, Carl, 1993, p. 445).

The aesthetics of cinema uncovered:

In this section I will outline the aesthetics of cinema as this was developed in the 1970s since it is there that the main aspects of my thesis primarily originate. Through this discussion I wish to highlight two main issues that I think constitute the most important aspects of the aesthetics of cinema, and which will be further developed in this thesis.

First, the aesthetics of cinema rest on the assumption that the aesthetics of some art have somehow to explain, describe and indeed define the art in question, mostly through the notions of essence, medium and form. For instance, Sparshott suggested that, "[t]he basic aesthetics of film as of any other art must be descriptive and analytic...And any such account must be rooted in some notion, however imprecise, of what a work of the art in question is. What, then, is film?".[33] To answer this, Sparshott specifies the nature of cinema in terms of its mechanism, technology and the illusion of reality created by the cinematic medium. He further provides an examination of the most important formal characteristics of cinema, that is, space, time, movement and sound, their interrelations, and our experience of them.[34]

A similar line of thinking is also evident in Haig Khatchadourian's work. In particular, Khatchadourian named movement a necessary characteristic of cinema: "[f]ilm in general, narrative or not, is impossible in the total absence of movement".[35] According to Khatchadourian, since cinema is essentially dynamic, it is only by understanding movement and the conditions of its possibility that we will be able to gain a complete understanding of cinema. To this end, he examined cinematic space and time, that is, the "primary organizing or structuring principles of a film", which render cinematic movement possible.[36]

Cavell also, attempted in the *World Viewed* to explain what film is and how and why it is art, by investigating, among other things, cinema's medium.[37] Parenthetically, I should note that Cavell is not the most representative figure of this group of writings, as

---

[33] Sparshott, F. E., 1985, p. 284
[34] Ibid., p. 289, 292, 295, 299
[35] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1980, p. 352
[36] Ibid.
[37] Cavell, Stanley, 1979, p. 16. See also, Bates, Stanley, 1989.

his work often relies on different principles, for example, the peculiar relationship between philosophy and cinema. As such, he can be considered as working both in the aesthetics of cinema and in philosophy and film. The parts of *The World Viewed* mentioned here, however, are more consistent with the aesthetics of cinema. Cavell, for instance, argues that the artistic significance of cinema depends on the nature of its medium, i.e., photography, and especially its ability to reproduce reality.[38] Because of this particular ability of photography, cinema has the potential to be considered an art form. For Cavell this potential was especially realised in the Hollywood movies made between 1935-60.

The second major issue of the aesthetics of cinema that I wish to concentrate on concerns the importance and aesthetic potential of cinematic form and the question of the uniqueness of cinema as an art form. The first thing that should be noted is that most accounts in the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s adhered to some version of formalism. Although there is no explicit advancement of this view, there seems to be a link between the morphological aspects of cinema and their aesthetic relevance.[39] Specifically, in order to demonstrate the aesthetic relevance of films, aestheticians of cinema turn to the formal properties of cinema they have already isolated in their descriptions, and, as a consequence, embrace some version of formalism. Hence, cinematic form is named aesthetically important. For example, Khatchadourian attempted through formal analyses to establish the differences between film art and generic films, which he named aesthetically insignificant; George W. Linden argued that the way the formal elements of a film co-operate affects our aesthetic appreciation of films.[40]

Detailed accounts of form were also used to compare and contrast cinematic form to other art kinds, especially resembling arts such as stage-plays or novels, so as to further elucidate the cinematic formal nature, and establish or deny the uniqueness of

---

[38] Cavell, Stanley, 1979, p. 68

[39] Some concern about cinematic form has survived in a few recent philosophical debates about film as well. For example, in Kivy's work, music, a formal feature, is aesthetically important, (Kivy, Peter, 1999); colour, in Flo Leibowitz' remarks on colourization of films, becomes aesthetically significant, (Leibowitz, Flo, 1995); slow-motion, especially as this is presented in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), is named aesthetically excellent in Harvey Cormier's views on the film (Cormier, Harvey, 1995). But interest in these aspects is not very widespread in current philosophical literature on cinema.

[40] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1975, Linden, George W., 1971, p. 62

cinema as an art form. Their aim was to explicate how and why cinema is an autonomous and peculiar art. This, they argued, could be established through analyses of cinema's medium. For example, Khatchadourian claimed that, "the reasons for the similarities and differences [between the art forms] lie in the nature of the mediums and in the manner in which they are presented".[41] So, by understanding the differences in the medium employed by each art, we will be able to better understand the different arts and, most significantly, explain the distinctiveness of cinema. Khatchadourian focused especially on the particularities of cinematic movement, which he held to be the essence of cinema, since it distinguishes cinema from a number of arts, such as photography and sculpture. Renato Poggioli outlined the differences between stage and screen in terms, among other things, of space, time and movement.[42] Cavell in *The World Viewed* made a number of comparisons between stage, screen and paintings, explaining the differences between photography and pictorial representation, but also between stage and screen space and even acting, and how these differences affect our experience.[43]

Sesonske, similarly, proposed to discuss the nature and character of cinema in terms of form, and differentiate it as such from other arts. As he argued, between the arts there "are differences in form and, particularly, differences in the range of formal possibilities open to an art".[44] From this he concluded that, "the aesthetics of any art must specify and describe or analyze what I will call the effective formal categories or dimensions of the art".[45] These are the spatial and temporal categories of the art. But the analysis he proposes is an in-depth one, delineating the modes of space and time, for example, present and experienced space, "which define these arts".[46] Additionally, "different arts often share one or more primary formal categories and their differences must then be made out within these categories by describing the range of forms accessible to each art".[47] In the process of exploring cinema in such a manner, Sesonske examined in detail cinema space, time, motion and sound, where the first three are considered necessary features for a film to exist, whereas sound is merely a possibility,

---

[41] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1980, p. 349
[42] Poggioli, Renato, 1941, p. 64-68
[43] Cavell, Stanley, 1979, p. 18, 26-27. See also Rothman, William, 2003, p. 207
[44] Sesonske, Alexander, 1989, p. 585
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

albeit one that, when present, affects the whole existence of the film.[48] So, his answer to 'what is film?' was: "an art form which conveys its contents within these formal modes, i.e., space, time, motion and sound as here described. As such it is quite different from any other art and reducible to none of them".[49]

Pierre Rouve, in his article 'Aesthetics of Cinema', also argued that cinema is not merely a collection of other arts but has a distinct 'aesthetic identity'. He asked,

> "is cinema really only a late-born vassal of visual art...Or, does it not, for all its reliance on visual imagery, assert its autonomy over a clearly circumscribed aesthetic territory? To answer this question satisfactorily is to take another stride towards a properly defined specificity of the Cinema".[50]

To this end he examined movement in films and its relation to cinematic space and time. He concluded that the specificity of cinema relies on "the complete autonomy and the unhindered permutability of cinematic location and duration".[51] A consequence of this duration is 'visual narration', and the reason why most films *essentially* involve some mode of story telling. He also examined the differences between cinema and literature, and specifically, between cinematic modes of communication and language.[52]

The question that arises is why should this type of investigation, that is, the discussion of cinema through the notions of essence, medium and form, be considered important in philosophical research on cinema. Why should there be a revival of interest in such subjects? What is their contribution to the study of cinema? In the section that follows I will begin to determine the significance of the aesthetics of cinema. Specifically, I will show why the aesthetics of cinema should be considered an important area of philosophical thinking about cinema, and not simply a historical or philosophical curiosity, but possibly a necessity for certain current philosophical debates about cinema. I wish to show that the aesthetics of cinema should be considered a part of a process of describing and explaining what cinema is. Although not sufficient on their own to provide an umbrella definition or complete understanding of something as complex as

---

[48] Ibid., p. 586
[49] Ibid., p. 590
[50] Rouve, Pierre, 1972, p. 150
[51] Ibid., p. 151
[52] Ibid., p. 152

cinema, they are an important part of such a discussion.[53] In the next section I will introduce and begin to explain their importance.

The importance of doing aesthetics:

The first thing to be noted is that cinema as an art form is a more recent arrival than, say, drama, music or painting, and as such it is important to examine its formal and material potential extensively. Whereas other art forms benefit (or sometimes suffer) from a varied and detailed understanding or full lexicon of such aspects, for cinema, as Sesonske has argued, there is not as yet "an adequate vocabulary available in which formal analysis can be carried out".[54] Furthermore, the study of cinema has suffered theoretically, as I mentioned in earlier sections, from both the polemical character of early film theory and contemporary film theory, where cinema has often been a vehicle for the development of theories such as feminism and post-structuralism. As there was no ready theoretical structure to discuss cinema, it allowed enough room for these theories (which were seen slightly as outcasts by traditional academia) to develop.[55] Even though a number of the results of this situation are certainly valuable and stimulating, issues concerning cinema in terms of medium or form were buried under theoretical jargon, since other issues of film theory became far more important. The aesthetics of cinema, trying somehow to remedy this neglect, concentrate mainly on formal and similar accounts, providing extra explanations about the character and nature of cinema.

Furthermore, discussing the medium and form of cinema will also help in properly establishing cinema within a context of other arts. As Max Schasler argued,

---

[53] It should be noted, however, that there is no implicit assumption in my account of an aesthetic definition of art, that is, of necessarily connecting art status with an aesthetic experience. But why is this type of inquiry named an aesthetic one? I think this is more a matter of historical coincidence, in that such types of examination, namely, examinations of the form and medium of an art form have been often named 'aesthetic'. To maintain this name in this sense becomes just a matter of keeping in line with the history of the discipline, and especially with the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s, and acknowledging the connections.

[54] Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 55

[55] This situation was especially noticed in Bordwell and Carroll's essays in Bordwell, David and Carroll, Noël, 1996.

> "the classification of the arts must be regarded as the real touchstone, the real differential test of...an aesthetic system; for on this point all theoretical questions are concentrated and crowd together to find a concrete solution".[56]

This is needed because cinema is a recent arrival to the history and philosophy of art, and it causes some instability to the already established classification. For, as Sesonske has also noticed, "the place of this newcomer in a schemata of the arts is not at all obvious" and, as a result, more elaborate discussions of the form and medium of cinema will aid this process of classification.[57]

The difficulty in classifying cinema results mainly from two issues. The first, as I mention above, has to do with cinema's 'newness'. Since cinema is a more recent art form, there is still a need for accounts that will explicate and determine its artistic potential and distinctiveness, especially in comparison to other more traditional arts.[58] The second issue has to do with the economic side of cinema. In particular, because the creation of a large number of films is directly linked to economic and marketing principles, its artistic character is often questioned.[59] It could be argued that films, especially Hollywood ones, are not made so as to satisfy some aesthetic criteria, or express the vision of the filmmaker, but simply to attract a big audience, and become marketing commodities which can be economically exploited by the studios. Consider for example the marketing paraphernalia that followed trilogies such as *Star Wars* (1980), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *The Matrix* (1999) and *The Lord of the Rings* (2002). As such, it often seems that cinema is more of a marketing commodity than an art form. In order to assist the classification of cinema as an art form it will help to examine cinema from an aesthetic point of view and place it within an art context, separate from other parameters, if possible, such as its economic importance and social position.

Discussing aspects of cinematic form and medium will further assist in explaining the way a film works and how it fails or succeeds in engaging us aesthetically (or at all),

---

[56] Quoted in Munro, Thomas, 1969, p. 15
[57] Sesonske, Alexander, 1989, p. 584
[58] Consider the following joke: "Why is film a medium? Because it is neither rare, nor well done". From the play *Fiction* Dietz, Steven, 2003.
[59] This difficulty was also observed by Henry P. Raleigh who argued that the difficulty of classifying cinema among other arts is because cinematic production is so immediately linked to economic and social considerations (Raleigh, Henry, P., 1982, p. 74-75).

and what this particular kind of art is good, or bad, at. This issue, as I have claimed, seems to have dropped out of orbit in both film theory and analytical philosophy of film. In addition, the notion of 'aesthetic' has gained a completely different meaning in a significant portion of film theory. For example, Michael Walsh, while commenting on the influence of Frederic Jameson's work on film studies, argues that Jameson's "primary critical interest is not so much in studying films as aesthetic objects but rather in locating the aesthetic as serving a function within a larger historical framework".[60]

In the current philosophical literature about cinema, discussions about why cinema is artistically important might prove to be a welcome addition. For example, in her essay, 'Aristotelians on *Speed*: Paradoxes of Genre in the Context of Cinema', Deborah Knight examines genre-movies without explicitly determining whether these are works of art.[61] Even though Knight mentions in the beginning of the essay that the question of whether generic films are works of art is important for her discussion, she makes no allusion to this matter for the rest of her discussion.[62] Rather, she proceeds to examine the question of whether it is rational for viewers to watch generic (formulaic) films since we already know how the story will develop. Although she presents a quite cogent treatment of this particular question, I think that her answers would have been further clarified if she had also addressed the first question mentioned above. For instance, the fact that we are interested in something we already know both in terms of story development and design, is largely unproblematic in several art works, for example, different paintings of the crucifixion of Christ, because the mode in which they are presented may affect us in different ways. For example, in the 2004 El Greco exhibition in the National Gallery in London, four paintings of *Christ Driving the Traders from the Temple* were put side by side, which had small formal differences from one another. Despite their similar (almost identical at times) design, colours and subject matter, these paintings attracted much attention during the exhibition. In short, they were artistically interesting and worthy of consideration. Thus, by drawing some sort of distinction between art and non-art films, Knight's discussion would have been aided by an extra

---

[60] Walsh, Michael, 1996, p. 481

[61] Knight, Deborah, 1999

[62] Ibid., p. 343. Additionally, although there are references to Carroll's work on 'junk fiction', there is no citation of the many discussions of what exactly a generic film is, and how this is distinguished from an art one, as this was elaborated, say, in the work of Haig Khatchadourian (Khatchadourian, Haig, 1975).

explanation as to why we may be quite reasonably interested in generic films, i.e., films where, among other things, we already know how they are going to develop.

Alternatively, consider the case of the 1998 remake of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) by Gus Van Sant. In the remake the dialogue and 80% of the shots remain the same. Considering that, would audiences wishing to watch the remake be regarded irrational? Especially since one of the most remarkable aspects of the original film was the surprising elements, such as Marion Crane's (Janet Leigh) murder early on, or Norman Bates' (Anthony Perkins) split personality. However, Van Sant's *Psycho* is a very interesting artistic achievement, mostly because by transferring the story to the present the formal elements gain new interpretations. For instance, the motel in the opening scene gains a more sleazy character, Marion's responses at her office become more erratic as the expectations about women's behaviour have changed and Bates' personality becomes far more sexually deviant. Furthermore, the film is so well made that even though we already know how the plot will develop, the twist of events at the end still remains peculiar and fascinating. As such, viewers are not considered irrational for wanting to watch it, even though they know the story and how it is going to develop, and the film is definitely following a kind of formula. If Knight had answered her original question, that is, if she had shown why some generic films—where the story is already familiar and follows an already known structure—can be considered valuable artistic achievements, then her explanations would be even more complete.

Although in the aesthetics of cinema proposed in this thesis there is no explicit question of whether cinema is in fact an art form, the focus has shifted to a different, but related, manner of examination; that of understanding why a film may fascinate, or how it is that we engage with some films in a similar way as we do with other forms of art, or specific works of art. This has its origin in the general wonderment regarding what it is in cinema as a narrational and representational, visual (and auditory) art that makes it different from other narrational or representational, visual (and auditory) arts. That is, the aim is to trace the quality, or qualities, that differentiate cinema from other arts, and especially arts that resemble cinema in terms of various characteristics, such as dramatic form. However, this is not pursued so as to prove the uniqueness of cinema as an art,

although this might be considered a consequence of this argument; rather, the aim is to explain why we value cinema as an art form, and admittedly one which often shares key features with other arts, such as the theatre, or relies on a number of different arts, such as music. What does cinema, over and above other arts, offer us? An aesthetics of cinema strives to explain why films fascinate and how they do so by the nature of their medium or form and not, say, because of their socio-political function within our culture. It is in this sense that it addresses the art status of films. Furthermore, aestheticians of cinema, as Sesonske has specifically articulated in his article 'Vision via Film Form', should strive to explain the 'power of movies', the distinctive character of cinema, and not reduce their explanations to ideas and conventions of other arts.[63]

Perhaps the best way to articulate this idea is through the process of adaptation. How is it that a film adapted from a novel or a short story fails or succeeds? How do the two media differ? What changes need to be made when transferring material from the one to the other? Why does a feature work in one art form but not in another? Why is it possible that we may positively value the same material in one art but disregard it in another? Why should artists, in the first place, be interested in presenting the same material through two different art forms, say a stage play and a film? It is this difference between cinema and other art forms, that the aesthetics of cinema strives to establish by comparing cinema, its form and medium, to that of other art forms. This manner of approach will constitute a first step towards revealing the 'power of movies', that is, the reason why films may be valuable works of art. As such, by examining the 'power of movies', the aesthetics of cinema will in effect start to explain, at least to a certain extent, which films we may consider significant and why. But to do so an aesthetics of cinema must describe and explain aspects of cinema regarding its formal and material nature in comparison to that of other art forms, so as to show how it differs. This will be examined in more detail in chapter two.

---

[63] Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 55. This use of the phrase 'power of movies' should not be confused with Noël Carroll's discussion of the 'power of movies' in his book *Theorizing the Moving Image*, since Carroll limits his ideas to the popular mass-entertainment cinema of Hollywood, whereas I refer to films in general. See, Carroll, Noël, 1996, p. 97

The benefits and possible priority of discussions about the formal character or potential of cinema have also been noticed in the area of film study I have referred to as philosophy and film. For example, philosophers, such as Tom Wartenberg and Stephen Mulhall, who wish to examine films as illustrating philosophical positions, end up inquiring about the nature of the cinematic medium; that is, they need to understand primarily how it is possible for films to put forth philosophical claims, or engage in visual argumentation. In this way, theorists working on 'philosophy and film', end up exactly where early film theorists and the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s began, namely, trying to answer somehow what cinema *is*, mostly in terms of its medium and formal composition. For example, Tom Wartenberg has asked how it is that cinema, as an essentially visual medium, can do philosophy, or illustrate philosophical problems.[64] To understand this link between philosophy and film, he needed beforehand, as he acknowledged, to discuss quite extensively how cinema as an art form has the capacity to engage in philosophical argumentation. For example, he examines whether the cinematic medium can visually narrate a written text.

Not having a well developed aesthetics before attempting to consider matters in philosophy and film can sometimes lead to some problematic conclusions, as for example in Stephen Mulhall's discussion of the *Alien* (1979) tetralogy in his book *On Film*. Mulhall rests his analysis on Stanley Cavell's understanding of cinematic ontology, that is, cinema as an automatic reproduction of the real world, where the images projected on the screen are real, but not in our immediate spatio-temporal presence. However, Mulhall, as Cavell before him, reaches some puzzling conclusions.[65] For example, having deemed cinema essentially photographic, Mulhall argues that since we do not share the same space or time with what is depicted on screen, the world and people on screen do not "exist *now*", that is, they are part of a different spatial and temporal world: "the viewers of a...film share neither a space nor a time with the object or person

---

[64] In particular, Wartenberg argued that "[w]hat has been lacking in this approach...is adequate reflection of what is involved in attributing philosophic insight to a film. What I mean by this is that some of those working within what I am here calling a tradition have operated under the assumption that philosophic ideas can simply be taken from a written text and displayed on the silver screen. But this idea needs to be subjected to a great deal more argumentation and defence than it has been" (Wartenberg, Thomas, 2004, p. 140).

[65] For a good analysis of Cavell's position see, Rothman, William, 2003, p. 207.

photographed".[66] Mulhall then proceeds to examine this aspect in relation to the science-fiction genre. Specifically, he asks,

> "is there not something temporally disordered and disorienting about being present at the projection of a narrative of something that has happened, when that story—being set in the future—is presented as not yet having happened?".[67]

What Mulhall fails to realise in this particular case, given the absence of a fully-fledged account of the formal and technical nature of cinema, is that cinema has the potential to 'exist now' and for viewers to share 'a time' with what is photographed. Consider the case of live transmissions of news or sport events. It may be true that the average film-viewing experience is one that shares neither spatial nor temporal unity with the characters or events of the film, but this is not a *necessary* aspect of cinema. We can very coherently think of a case where a film is screened through satellite across the world at the same time as it is filmed. This possibility has become even more tangible recently with the release of the film *Russian Arc* (2002), which was rehearsed for over a year, and then shot continuously in one take. It is not hard to imagine a live transmission of this film. Although the space may still be different, the time is certainly not. As such, in the case of the science-fiction genre the disorientation might exist because we watch something in our present that 'takes place' in the future. It might be suggested, however, that in a certain sense we do not share the same time with the characters, since a film may represent events of the past or future, i.e., my viewing time is not the same as the represented time of Katherine the Great. But there is a distinction to be made between dramatic time and photographed time, something that will be examined more closely in chapter eight. To make his point Mulhall relies on photographed time, that is, the time when the events were recorded, and then proceeds to compare this with the dramatic time of the film; it is in this respect that he is mistaken. The nature of cinematic time will be elaborately discussed in chapter eight.

In conclusion, in this section I have introduced and outlined some of the reasons why the aesthetics of cinema is an important and often fundamental aspect of our

---

[66] Mulhall, Stephen, 2002, p. 65
[67] Ibid., p. 66

philosophical thinking about cinema. Its focus on the form of films not only fills a gap in the recent philosophical literature on cinema, but elucidates important issues. Furthermore, it provides a good basis for descriptions and examinations of the nature of cinema that could be helpful in other philosophical investigations concerning cinema. By having a fully developed aesthetics of cinema, philosophical discussions, such as those of the process of film viewing or the nature of film genres, will be assisted. But most importantly, the aesthetics of cinema provides analyses that aim to answer and determine how and why films are important artistic creations and how they fascinate by their own nature. Specifically, this thesis will provide part of an explanation of what has been referred to as the 'power of movies'. The reasons why the aesthetics of cinema is thus important I hope will become much more explicit as this thesis progresses.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have first provided a historical introduction to the thesis by examining the origins of the aesthetics of cinema, its development in the history of our philosophical thinking about cinema and its place in the current philosophical study of cinema. In particular, what I have been trying to establish in this chapter, is that the aesthetics of cinema, and in particular, the two issues I outlined—first the effort to somehow explain, describe and define cinema, especially through the notions of essence, medium and form, and second, the importance and aesthetic potential of cinematic form and its uniqueness—should be reconsidered. The aesthetics of cinema is an important part of our philosophical thinking about cinema, which requires further investigation and research. This I propose to do for the rest of the thesis. More specifically, in what follows I will argue in favour of a more fully and properly developed aesthetics of cinema that will rely on the two main concerns of past aesthetics of cinema, but develop in such a way so as to propose new ideas and avoid various pitfalls. My intention in the next chapter is to examine the relationship between the aesthetics of cinema and the key notions of essence, medium and form.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE HOLY TRINITY OF THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMA:
ESSENCE-MEDIUM-FORM

In this chapter I will separately discuss three of the most central notions of the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s, those of essence, medium and form. Firstly, I will deal with matters of cinematic essence and distance my views from those of early film theorists, and further argue that referring to some cinematic essence may not be the most suitable option for the aesthetics of cinema. Secondly, I will shift my focus to examinations of the notions of medium and form. In doing so, I will further demonstrate the nature and importance of the aesthetics of cinema.

On cinematic essence:

In developing an aesthetics of cinema a number of early film theorists, such as Bazin, Arnheim, Kracauer, Jean Mitry and, to some extent, Eisenstein, frequently referred to a cinematic essence in terms of the material nature of cinema. Indeed, Brian Lewis has gone so far as to claim that, "[t]he early history of film theory is a kind of Knights of the Round Table adventure, a cycle of quests undertaken along individual paths in pursuit of a Holy Grail called the 'Essence' of cinema".[1] Some of this interest is also evident in portions of the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s, although in much milder tones.

In what follows I will question the idea of cinematic essence, as this is best articulated in Bazin and Kracauer's work especially, and suggest that the aesthetics of cinema should concentrate on matters of medium and form rather than essence. In particular, I will discuss how these early film theorists hoped to show through the essence of cinema, first that cinema is a distinct art with unique character and potential, and second how filmmakers could create aesthetically important films. My analysis will be limited in this way for two reasons. Firstly, there already is significant literature on the subject, which examines their work in detail.[2] Secondly, and most importantly, by narrowing my discussion in this a way I will be concerned only with what is of immediate interest to the aesthetics of cinema, without having to address Bazin and

[1] Lewis, Brian, 1981, p. 50
[2] See for example Carroll, Noël, 1988 (b), Perkins, V. F., 1972, Jarvie, Ian, 1987, Harrah, David, 1954, Brubaker, David, 1993.

Kracauer's more general, historical and often technical interest. My concern will be with how their understanding of cinematic essence determines the artistic importance of films and cinema's distinctiveness; in short, the 'power of movies'. This will be illustrated in what follows.

Bazin attempted to show that the essence of cinema indicates both why cinema is a distinct art form and the most appropriate direction for cinematic creation.[3] Specifically, Bazin claimed that cinema is essentially representational because it has the ability through photography to reproduce real space and time. This unique potential is what differentiates the aesthetic of cinema from most arts, and especially painting.[4] Furthermore, Bazin argued that filmmakers should create works that rely on photographic realism in order to achieve cinematic or artistic excellence. As he claims, "[t]he aesthetic qualities of photography are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities".[5] Filmmakers, like De Sica, who understand and exploit cinema's essence through their techniques, such as the long-shot and deep focus, succeed in creating true works of art.[6] Thus, according to Bazin, the essence of cinema indicates both how cinema differs from other arts, and the way films should be made in order to achieve high degrees of artistic excellence.

Kracauer similarly argued that delineating the essence of cinema will manifest the distinctiveness of cinema. Specifically, what is unique and peculiar to cinema as an art form is the capacity to reproduce reality through the medium of photography. Moreover, films should not be reminiscent of traditional arts: "[i]f film is an art at all, it certainly should not be confused with the established arts".[7] Thus for Kracauer, understanding the

---

[3] For a good analysis of Bazin's position, see Carroll, Noël, 1988 (b), especially chapter two.

[4] Bazin, André, 1999, p. 198. For Bazin representation in cinema involves the ability of the camera to copy the world. As he writes, "the photographic image is the object itself...It shares by virtue of the process of its becoming, the being of the model in which it is a reproduction.", quoted in Carroll, Noël, 1988 (b), p. 124

[5] Bazin, André, 1999, p. 199

[6] Ibid., p. 198. See also p. 203-211

[7] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1999, p. 182. Erwin Panofsky was of a similar opinion arguing that even if, due to its "narrative craving", cinema borrowed material from the theatre in the past, it should only rely on the unique and specific possibilities of its medium in the future, which are the 'dynamization of space' and 'spatialization of time', (Panofsky, Erwin, 1999, p. 281-282). So, for Panofsky, whereas in the theatre space is static and time independent of space, in cinema where the spectator's eye identifies with the lens of the camera, time is manifested through space, and space merges with time.

unique potential of cinema becomes important because it shows how cinema differs from other arts. But he further argued that "films may claim aesthetic validity if they build from their basic properties; like photographs, that is, they must record and reveal physical reality".[8] Accordingly, films that ignore the essence of cinema, i.e., its photographic nature, are not truly cinematic. Kracauer also suggested that the filmmaker's 'formative tendencies', his/her artistic imagination, must comply with "the medium's substantive concern with our visible world".[9] In this sense, the affinity with reality that cinematic images have should be the filmmaker's principal consideration. In addition, although films which do not depend on these realist principles are often considered good works of art, this is solely a consequence of "widespread social and cultural demands; [this genre of filmmaking] is and remains popular for reasons which do not involve questions of aesthetic legitimacy".[10] Hence, like Bazin, Kracauer argues that the essence of cinema both distinguishes it from other art forms, and dictates the manner in which films should be made so as to be aesthetically important.

So, these early film theorists argued that accounts of cinematic essence—as this is understood through the medium of cinema, photography—will provide both appropriate guidelines for cinematic creation, and manifest the distinctiveness of cinema as an art form. This argument, however, proves to be problematic. This I will show in what follows. Specifically, I will argue against the idea that the essence of cinema as Bazin and Kracauer understand it shows convincingly that films that rely on other features than photographic realism are not artistically important. Additionally, even the weaker claim, that films that do rely on photographic realism are more important than films that do not, remains unconvincing. Finally, I will argue against the idea that through the material basis of cinema we can determine what the essence of cinema is.

In the first case, if Bazin and Kracauer's ideas are followed through, documentaries and newsreels should be understood as being more aesthetically important

---

[8] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1997, p. 37

[9] Ibid., p. 39. As Kracauer suggests, "[i]t may be assumed that the achievements within a particular medium are all the more satisfying aesthetically if they build from the specific properties of that medium" (ibid., p. 12).

[10] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1999, p. 181

than films which do not rely so much on photography, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *The Matrix* and *Kill Bill* (2003). Indeed Kracauer argued that,

> "even films almost devoid of creative aspirations, such as newsreels, scientific or educational films, artless documentaries, etc., are tenable propositions from an aesthetic point of view—presumably more so than films which for all their artistry pay little attention to the given outer world".[11]

Usually, though, we would be more inclined to say that newsreels have less artistic significance than most regular films. Kracauer, somehow realising this, suggests that even if newsreels have the potential to be more aesthetically valuable, this potential is a minimum requirement, which depends on the capabilities of the filmmaker.[12] Photographic realism, however, should be considered the principal reason for artistic excellence. So, from Kracauer and Bazin's understanding of cinema it can be inferred that animated and computer generated films, such as *Fantasia* (1940) and *Shrek* (2001) are not aesthetically valuable. This would probably be because digital technology allows for the possibility of non-photographically created images and movement that are then added to the film, or, alternatively, because the background in cartoons is often painted on the celluloid film.[13] But it seems that films such as *Fantasia*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), *Mary Poppins* (1964) and *Waking Life* (2001), have at least some aesthetic importance.[14] For instance, consider the combinations of colour and music in *Fantasia*, which would be impossible to recreate in a realist film.[15] Moreover, through this kind of animation Disney found a way to give substance and character to objects, animals and vegetables, such as broom-sticks, mushrooms, goldfish, orchids and mice, and create mesmerising scenes. Furthermore, it could be argued that the computer-generated images in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are the most significant features of these films. By exploiting contemporary computer software technology the filmmaker was able to bring

---

[11] Ibid., p. 180
[12] Ibid.
[13] Sesonske raises a similar objection to Cavell's view in *The World Viewed* that a photographic image necessarily depicts something that has existed in the past (Sesonske, Alexander, 1974, especially p. 562-563).
[14] Funnily enough, the animated film *Waking Life* includes a scene where a theorist is explaining Bazin's understanding of the ontology of cinema. What is interesting here is that the very nature of *Waking Life* and its aesthetic appeal can be considered a counter-example to Bazin's claim that the essence of cinema is its photographic realism and that this dictates aesthetic value.
[15] In fact, in making *Fantasia* Disney instructed the animators to use as many colours as they wanted, thus creating the quite memorable images of the film.

to life Middle-Earth and beings such as Elves, Dwarfs and Hobbits. In addition, the partially computer generated image of Gollum became one of the most convincing and haunting creatures in the film, something that would have looked awkward and distorted if his appearance had depended on make-up and costume. To argue that films such as *Fantasia* or *The Lord of the Rings* are not cinematically excellent, because they do not tap into the essence of cinema, its photographic realism, seems mistaken.[16] I would contend that these films are not only artistically wonderful, but they best represent the potential of cinema.

It is important to note here, that Kracauer did make some milder claims, since he argued that the aesthetic quality of realist works always depends on how the filmmaker will use this realism. As he claims,

> "[a]ll these creative efforts are in keeping with the cinematic approach as long as they benefit, in some way or other, the medium's substantive concern with our visible world. As in photography, everything depends on the 'right' balance between the realist tendency and the formative tendency; and the two tendencies are well balanced if the latter does not try to overwhelm the former but eventually follows its lead".[17]

Thus, even though Kracauer retreats from his original position, he still maintains that realism has additional aesthetic importance. But is even this weaker claim true? For it seems that animated or computer generated films are not only artistically interesting, but many of them are of equal or even greater aesthetic importance than films that rely first and foremost on principles of photographic realism, as for example *The Blair Witch Project* (1999), *The Idiots* (1998), *Elephant* (2003) and *Tape* (2001). For example, the recent *Les Triplettes de Belleville* (2003) is a cartoon made in such magnificent detail in terms of drawing, music, character and plot, that it is a very interesting achievement. Specifically, the figures of the characters were drawn in such a way so as to emphasise and distort human and animal characteristics and add a surreal and often humorous quality to them. This would have been impossible in a realist film. Furthermore, some of the events depicted, such as the frog-eating scene, or the car-chase at the end, were done

---

[16] The same applies for films made according to expressionist, surrealist and experimentalist principles, such as the films of Peter Greenaway or Gregory Marcopoulos.
[17] Ibid., p. 180-181

in such a unique fashion that clearly surpassed, for example, the car-chase scenes of more realist-based films, such as *Ronin* (1998), *Die Another Day* (2002) and *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (2000).

The animated film *Waking Life*, which presents a world of dreams in a most captivating way, provides another example. In particular, this film manages to make scenes in which philosophical ideas are discussed artistically interesting because of the way these are animated. In these scenes we do not only see theorists explaining their ideas, we also see these ideas materialise through animation. In this manner, the film succeeds in making philosophical ideas visually fascinating, something that might be clumsy or even boring in realist films, as is the case in the film *Je Vous Salue, Marie* (1985). In this sense, *Waking Life* can be considered artistically more valuable than *Je Vous Salue, Marie*. As such, there is no good reason why cinematic essence, as Bazin and Kracauer understand it, dictates the artistically superior way of creating important films.[18] For, we can appreciate films such as *Waking Life* and *Les Triplettes de Belleville*, not because of "social and cultural demands" as Kracauer suggested, but because they are artistically stimulating and certainly worthy achievements.

In addition, it is not at all obvious why a film such as *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), which combines Kracauer's realist and formative tendencies, but where the formative follow the realist lead—by shifting between realist filmmaking of the Dogme style and dream-like sequences inspired by Hollywood musicals—is superior to films which do not, such as *Les Triplettes de Belleville*. Even worse for Kracauer's claims, most people find *Dancer in the Dark* an (aesthetically) very unpleasant film. Thus, it seems that even

---

[18] This argument, however, merely shows that Bazin and Kracauer's view is false, but does not demonstrate that cinematic essence does not dictate aesthetic value. Noël Carroll in his book *Theorizing the Moving Image* spends a lot of time arguing against what he refers to as 'medium specificity arguments', mainly the idea that cinematic essence determines the aesthetically appropriate way of creating films. Specifically, he questions how and why medium specificity arguments move from some cinematic essence, which they determine from examinations of cinema's physical properties and character of the medium, to claims about the ways in which filmmakers should create films (Carroll, Noël, 1996, p. 26). Carroll notes that medium specificity arguments depend on the implicit assumption that "one need only examine the physical structure of the medium, and the sort of effects the art form based in that medium should traffic in more or less jumps out at one" (ibid.). However, he argues, there seems to be no real reason why descriptions of cinematic essence should be considered absolute criteria for cinematic creation. According to Carroll, there is no explanation offered by the proponents of medium specificity arguments of why the essential features of cinema, if in fact there are any, are the only ones cinema can excel in. For a similar opinion also see Crawford, Donald, 1970 and Perkins, V. F., 1972, especially chapters one and two. I will come back to this point later on.

Kracauer's milder claim about finding a happy balance in filmmaking does not justify in practice how and why such films are artistically and cinematically more valuable.

So far I have suggested that an animated film such as *Fantasia* could be of equal or even of more artistic value than a film that relies on the principles of photographic realism such as *The Blair Witch Project*. Yet it could be argued that the reason why this understanding of cinema cannot explain the importance of films such as *Fantasia* is because the recording capacity of cinema does not determine the essence of cinema. If Bazin and Kracauer had looked more closely at films, they would have been able to determine more accurately what the essence of cinema is, and from there on infer correct principles for artistic value. Although this is a valid point to make, I think that there is a significant problem in attempting to determine cinematic essence through its physical character. This is because the medium of cinema is so intertwined with technology that it will always have the potential to develop and change as this technology advances, thus making it impossible both to determine cinematic essence in these terms, and show how cinema differs from other art forms. A good example of this is the recent impact of computer generated filmmaking on the way a large number of films are created. To ignore how the material basis of cinema has changed over the years, or to over-emphasise or under-estimate one of cinema's technological features, is to misunderstand the way the medium of cinema has developed through history. In this sense, to define cinema as these early film theorists proposed to do, via an essence that is reliant on physical aspects, means to ignore the rapid development of cinematic technology and the way this technology shapes both what cinema is, and its artistic potential.[19] To insist on maintaining a notion of cinematic essence in terms of its medium means that each definition may change every time cinematic technology advances and new developments occur.[20] But if this is true, then how can it be maintained that this, for instance

---

[19] Kracauer seems aware of this difficulty, since he argues that, "[t]he properties of a medium elude concise definition...What is adequate to the medium cannot be determined dogmatically in advance. Any revolutionary artist may upset all previous speculation about the 'nature' of the medium" (Kracauer, 1997, p. 12). However, he insists that there are limits to these developments, and that it is possible to determine the specific properties of photography and in fact infer some essence (ibid.).

[20] This claim can be seen in relation to Weitz's criticisms of essentialist definitions of art. In brief, Weitz argued that the essentialist definitions of art proposed by aestheticians such as Clive Bell, fail in principle as definitions of art, that is, as descriptions of necessary and sufficient conditions that would describe art

photographic realism, is the essence of cinema when computer generated images seem to be taking control of a large section of filmmaking? Additionally, the claim that by understanding cinematic essence both the distinctiveness of cinema will be established, and its aesthetic significance outlined, becomes puzzling.

To underline how the capacity of the material basis of cinema for change affects the arguments of these early film theorists, consider the following: suppose, for example, that an early film theorist, very similar to Arnheim who dismissed the introduction of sound and colour in films, argues that cinema is an important and distinct art form because the photographic images are black and white and devoid of sound. Furthermore, films are artistically significant because of the black and white quality of the images and the power of the silent, moving image. According to this view colour and sound do nothing to contribute to the value of cinema as an art form, and films that depend on them can be considered inferior to silent and black and white ones. But as the technology of cinema developed, sound and colour became fundamental aspects of filmmaking. It might even be claimed that sound and colour have become 'of essence' to the way a large number of important films are created. For example, consider the colour and black and white contrasts in *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) and *Kill Bill*, the colour instalments in *Rumble Fish* (1983) and *Schindler's List* (1993), the colour patterns and structures in some of Alfred Hitchcock's or Pedro Almodòvar's films; the soundtrack of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Barry Lyndon* (1975), the twisted sounds and distorted dialogues in *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), the play with sound and silence in Godard's *Bande à Part* (1964), or the contrast between above and under water sound in some of the opening scenes of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). By ignoring the potential of the cinematic medium for change, the argument of this early film theorist fails to accommodate how the physical character of cinema can change, and how other features, such as sound and colour, can become fundamental features of cinema and contribute to its significance.

(Weitz, Morris, 1995, p.184-5). The reason why they fail in principle is because 'art' is an open-ended concept, subject to change, creativity and development. Specifically, Weitz argues that, "[n]ew conditions (cases) have constantly arisen and will undoubtedly constantly arise; new art forms, new movements will emerge...With 'art' its conditions of application can never be exhaustively enumerated since new cases can always be envisaged or created by artists, or even nature, which would call for a decision on someone's part to extend or to close the old or to invent a new concept" (ibid., p. 189).

A similar kind of mistake is also evident in other more contemporary essentialist accounts, such as Haig Khatchadourian's. In particular, Khatchadourian in his article 'Movement and Action in Film' argued that movement in film is essential: "movement and change...are of the essence of film; indeed they help distinguish film from the plastic arts, and from still photography, as well as from literature and music".[21] But Khatchadourian in this manner fails to account for films where no movement is present, such as Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), or Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962).[22] Specifically, these examples show that movement is not an essential characteristic of cinema, since they fail to exemplify it. Again, what cinematic essence exactly is seems to elude description, since the essence Khatchadourian postulates is not sufficient to explain what cinema is and how it differs from other art forms such as paintings or comics. Additionally, it could also be argued that since films such as *La Jetée* are cinematically very interesting, what Khatchadourian names essential is not sufficient to determine which films are to be considered aesthetically important.[23]

Therefore, for all these reasons, an account of cinema must acknowledge the fact that technology may develop and that the possibilities of cinema may multiply and expand. As such, pinpointing the essence of cinema through its material basis can be problematic, since it is too closely linked with technology and thus will always have the potential for change. But what of the claim that this essence distinguishes cinema from other art forms? It seems that as long as the essence of cinema has the potential to change, then this claim will be always open to revision. For example, a contemporary film theorist might well argue that the essence of cinema results from its technological potential to record reality and then distort it in such a manner with quite striking results. Furthermore, this very ability distinguishes cinema from other art forms such as theatre. However, the difficulty in understanding what the essence of cinema is via a material basis will always persist since this material basis will always be subject to change, thus

---

[21] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1980, p. 349

[22] This point will be further elaborated in chapter five.

[23] I hasten to add, however, that nowhere does Khatchadourian make such a claim. On the contrary he claims that the exploitation of essential features of any art kind does not necessarily guarantee aesthetic excellence (Khatchadourian, Haig, 1978, p. 195).

allowing future film theorists to refute their predecessors and infer a different kind of essence every time.

I have argued so far that referring to some cinematic essence might prove problematic because there is no guarantee that artistic value is wholly determined by the essence of cinema, and the material basis of cinema will always have the potential to change, making it impossible for theorists to determine with certainty what cinematic essence is. In addition, if it is impossible to show in a conclusive manner what the essence of cinema is, then it is also impossible to explain in absolute terms how and why cinema, via its essence, is a distinct form of art.

Should it be argued then, that there is no essence in cinema? In terms of its physical character and material basis it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine some cinematic essence since the character of cinema will change as technology advances. It could be, however, that an essence in terms of other features does exist. For instance, it might be argued that the embodiment of form to content is the essential characteristic of art, and therefore cinema, and that only through this can we understand what cinema is, and which films are truly artistically significant. This explanation would not have to depend on the medium of cinema, but would rather examine the relationship between form and content so as to show why and how films are aesthetically important. My objections in this chapter, however, have been solely against the possibility of determining an essence in terms of the *material* and *physical* nature of cinema. Maybe what should be concluded is that cinema does not have some determinate essence in terms of its medium.

Yet, if the nature of cinema is technologically determined, is it futile to describe its physical or even formal nature since this may change over time? What sort of stability can such an account offer? It should be recognised that such accounts can only accommodate features that films exemplify now, and have done in the past. Failing to determine the essence of cinema in terms of its medium, however, does not mean that we are denied any clear picture of what cinema is now and has been in the past, and how it

may develop. It just becomes a matter of acknowledging that the present order is susceptible to change in the future.

To conclude, I have argued in this chapter that the strategy of some early film theorists to isolate the essence of cinema and infer how cinema is a unique art, and how filmmakers should create artistically interesting films, can be problematic. I outlined two main problems. First, films that do not depend on the essence of cinema as defined in this way, can be aesthetically very important and in some cases far more remarkable achievements than films which dwell on this cinematic essence. The second problem relates to the understanding of the essence of cinema through its material basis, its medium. If this material basis is shaped by technology, and hence has the potential to change and expand, it becomes impossible to understand how we can determine the essence of cinema through this ever-changing material basis. As long as films such as the computer generated *Antz* (1998) are created, which break the boundaries of what we understand cinema to be, and how films are, the essence of cinema cannot depend on this material basis.

Consequently, and in contrast to the ideas of early film theorists and some aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, the aesthetics of cinema I propose to develop will shift the emphasis to matters of medium and form, rather than some possible essence. As such, the aesthetics of cinema will describe cinema by carefully observing its medium and formal aspects, giving accounts that are of a general character so as to offer some kind of guidelines for appreciating and understanding films. This mode of inquiry, as I mentioned in chapter one, will help explain the 'power of the movies' and provide us with substantial tools both to comprehend the complexity of cinema better, and further aid us in watching and appreciating films. This I hope will become clearer in what follows.

<u>On medium:</u>

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, early film theorists and aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, apart from looking for the essence of cinema, were also very

interested in its medium and form. For the aestheticians of cinema especially, the notions of form and medium became tools with which they could elaborately describe and discuss the nature of cinema and determine the aesthetic potential of films. As such, it is worth examining what exactly medium and form amount to. In this section I will first outline the notion of medium.

Discussing cinema through its medium is often hindered by its use as a term in the philosophy of art. Following Thomas Munro's suggestion, there have been four dominant interpretations: in the first and most popular one, medium is the material the artist will use to create a work, for example, bronze, stone, clay, wood or metal, but also pigments, sounds and words. However, it is not always clear if 'material' refers to the physical aspects of the work, such as the metal used, or to non-physical ones, such as words or sounds.[24] In the second use, the medium of an art is the physical material and/or instruments used in order to make a work of this art, for example, paint, canvas and brush in painting, and violins and trumpets in music. In the third, medium refers to the work's presentational features, such as the sounds of a musical piece, or the colours and lines of a painting. In the fourth option, two types of medium are outlined, the primary one, that is, the physical or presentational aspects of the work, such as paint or sounds; and the secondary one, the subject matter, if there is any, which is expressed through the primary one.[25]

This variety is also reflected in the general philosophical study of cinema. For example, the film theorists I mentioned earlier understood the medium of cinema in terms of its recording and transmitting mechanism. For instance, Kracauer thought that the medium of cinema was the photographic film that records and reveals physical reality.[26] This understanding seems to be in line with Munro's first suggestion, where by the medium of cinema is the material and technological basis through which films are

---

[24] Munro suggests that philosophers of art change the meaning of medium "almost unconsciously, to fit the facts. Because the specific material seems important in the case of painting, sculpture and the crafts, we distinguish them on that basis. Because it seems less important or distinctive in the case of music and literature, we ignore the physical material and think of medium in a more psychological sense" (Munro, Thomas, 1969, p. 250).

[25] Ibid., p. 245, 247, 251, 254, 258

[26] Kracauer, Siegfried, 1997, p. 27-28

created. Alternatively, in the work of some aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s a different perspective is outlined. For instance, Khatchadourian and Sparshott often refer to the medium of cinema, and especially how this resembles or differs from other art media, but their discussion is primarily concerned with the spatial and temporal characteristics of cinema.[27] As such, they use Munro's third sense of medium, that is, medium as the presentational aspects of the art form. Other aestheticians, such as Sesonske and Rouve, however, refer to these presentational aspects as the *formal* dimensions of cinema.[28] So, in the accounts of the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, cinematic space and time are understood as both the form and medium of cinema. Why they referred to cinematic space and time as both medium and form is probably due to this variety of interpretations of medium (and form) presented above.[29] For example, Munro's third use of medium, referring to the presentational features such as the sounds and colours of a work, is quite similar to a common interpretation of form, such as Clive Bell's, that would speak of the sounds and rhythm in music, and of the colours, lines and space in painting. Here, form and medium point to the same aspects of a work: the colours or sounds. In this sense medium and form, as in the work of the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, share the same definition.

Additionally, in contemporary philosophy of film, medium is used in a variety of ways. For example, Gregory Currie argues that the cinematic medium is realistic, and Stephen Mulhall discusses the 'transformative powers' of the medium.[30] In this sense, and similarly to early film theorists, medium refers to the photographic capacity of cinema. Alternatively, Thomas Wartenberg argues that 'philosophy and film', as a field of study, has "enriched our understanding of the medium".[31] In this case, Wartenberg uses medium interchangeably with 'cinema', and seems to be referring to all of cinema's aspects, and not only to some recording mechanism or formal elements.

This variety of uses, however, may cause difficulty in discussing and examining cinema. For instance consider the following: Harvey Cormier in the cause of

---

[27] See for example, Khatchadourian, Haig, 1980, Sparshott, F. E., 1985.
[28] Rouve, Pierre, 1972, Sesonske, Alexander, 1989
[29] The variety of interpretations of form will be explained in a later section.
[30] Currie, Gregory, 1996, Mulhall, Stephen, 2002
[31] Wartenberg, Thomas E., 2004, p. 139

investigating avant-garde films, observes that these, following modernist principles of art, should aim to present us with the medium of cinema.[32] That is, their subject matter has to revolve around the nature and character of the cinematic *medium*. But this process is hindered by a lack of common and unified understanding of the term 'cinematic medium'. Cormier goes on to argue that since the definition of cinematic medium can consist of anything, from celluloid film to light projected on screen, and from shape, motion and colour to physical reality itself, what exactly avant-garde films should be about is puzzling.[33] In order to avoid such problems, for the aesthetics of cinema developed here, it is best to clarify what exactly medium refers to.

But how can it be decided what the medium of cinema is? Firstly, if medium is distinct from form, then it has to refer to some aspect other than space or time.[34] So, it is best to avoid Khatchadourian and Sparshott's use. Secondly, *contra* Wartenberg, it should not be used interchangeably with cinema in general. Perhaps the best solution would be to revert to the notion of medium that early film theorists frequently used, that is, medium as the physical and technological basis of cinema. However, this is not to argue that each art form has a medium that can be determined through its physical and technological character, since there are always going to be problems with pointing to the physical aspects of poetry, literature and even music. It is solely for the purposes of distinction from form and further clarification in the aesthetics of cinema that I will maintain that the medium of cinema should be understood in this manner.

Yet, what is the physical material of cinema? What physical material do filmmakers employ to make a film? In other words, what can be considered the equivalent of clay in cinema? The answer is not so obvious. Cinema is much more complicated than pottery, in the sense that it involves a number of materials, such as the rolls of film, the camera, the actors, the settings, the costumes or reality (staged or not) as this is being recorded. The one element that seems more fundamental than the rest is celluloid film; that is, the material that captures the images, which is then projected at a certain speed with the appropriate equipment. Hence, celluloid film can be considered

---

[32] Cormier, Harvey, 1995, p. 192
[33] Ibid.
[34] I will discuss form in terms of space and time later on.

the physical material out of which cinematic images are possible. Even the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes a definition of medium as "[a]ny physical material (as tape, disc, paper, etc) used for recording or reproducing data, images, or sound".[35] Following this principle, an account of cinematic medium should be an account in terms of celluloid film, and the chemical processes that occur when the reflected light causes a chemical change to the photographic film.

It should be noted, however, that in the past years some filmmakers, such as George Lucas, have switched from celluloid film to digital technology, using bits and bytes to record, transmit and reproduce images, rather than using chemicals on film. Although this is still a limited practice, mostly due to the (as yet) poorer quality of the image in some digital technology, it is thought that at some point in the future this technology will replace celluloid film. In this case, the medium of cinema will have the potential to be either the one or the other, or probably both. Of course, and as I mentioned in the previous section, given the way technology expands and progresses, if the medium of cinema is defined in such a way it will always have the potential to change. However, by maintaining a single conception of the way the term medium is used, the variety is only limited to the way cinema technology develops.

In conclusion, in this section I opted for a single definition of medium within this aesthetics of cinema so as to clarify the variety of uses of the term medium that can be noted both in the philosophy of art and in the philosophical literature on cinema. To avoid any possible confusion or mishaps arising from this variety, the medium of cinema in this thesis is defined as the physical and technological basis of cinema, which, for the time being, is either celluloid film or/and digital technology that filmmakers use to capture and reproduce movement and images, which are then projected onto the screen. However, the importance of discussing the medium of cinema is more technical or even chemical and technological rather than philosophical, since the emphasis will shift to, for example, how celluloid film functions and the various techniques employed. Nevertheless, defining medium in this manner will assist the aesthetics of cinema in two ways. Firstly, it will distinguish between form and medium thus allowing for a more

---

[35] *Oxford English Dictionary*, on-line edition

complete and lucid understanding of the two notions and how they function within cinema. Secondly, by knowing the technical and physical side of cinema the aesthetics of cinema could provide more thorough explanations of the nature of cinema and how this might be different from other art forms. In this sense, the descriptions provided will reach a more comprehensive level by exploring both the formal and technical side of cinema. For the purposes of this thesis, however, the emphasis will shift to matters of form and its importance in film appreciation, as these are far more important philosophically. This will become more explicit throughout chapters three, four, five and six.

On form:

Having specified the position of essence and medium in the aesthetics of cinema, I will turn now to form. In particular, I will examine how aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s used the notion of form and the centrality it had over their explanations, and determine the way I will discuss form for the rest of the thesis.

Relying on formal analyses so as to explain the 'power of movies', as I mentioned in chapter one, is a common characteristic of the work of some aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s. For example, Sesonske argued that formal analyses are relevant if we

> "wonder what makes the world of the film be what it is, be as fascinating as it is, or how the characters and actions acquire the power to engulf us as they do and have the qualities we see them as having, then, ultimately...you will find these rooted in the expressive qualities of the underlying form".[36]

For Sesonske form has an explanatory value, one that aids us in understanding the artistic significance of films and our experience of them. In other words, through form it is explained, at least partially, why films are valuable artistically, and a basis for film criticism is provided.

This is a line of thinking also evident in the work of Khatchadourian, especially in his effort to understand what it is that makes cinema art. Khatchadourian distinguishes

[36] Sesonske, Alexander, 1989 , p. 590

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Humanities

Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Cinema

By Melenia Arouh

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

SEPTEMBER 2004

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

Doctor of Philosophy

CINEMATIC FORMALISM: AN INQUIRY INTO THE AESTHETICS OF CINEMA

By Melenia Arouh

This thesis outlines an aesthetics of cinema with special emphasis on formalist ideas. Specifically, the focus is on providing a link between philosophical discussions about artistic or aesthetic form, and cinema. Furthermore, it is argued that formalist discussions are an integral part of the study of cinema, and should be revised and reconsidered and their particular importance explicated. To this end a cinematic formalist theory is proposed that is shaped by the philosophy of art, and the philosophy of film in particular, and film theory, and succeeds in synthesising these in order to enrich our understanding of cinema in a novel and productive way. From these discussions the nature of form in cinema and the centrality it holds for our experiences of films will be delineated and explained. In this manner, the aesthetics of cinema proposed here fills a gap in the current philosophical literature about cinema and expands on the nature of this art form.

Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry into the Aesthetics of Cinema

LIST OF CONTENTS:

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Melenia Arouh, declare that the thesis entitled *Cinematic Formalism: An Inquiry Into the Aesthetics of Cinema* and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly while in candidature for a research degree at the University
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help
- Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself
- None of this work has been published before submission

Signed:.....

Date:.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis many people have helped me in a number of different ways. I wish here to thank them. I would like to thank the members of the philosophy department at the University of Southampton, who have helped me with both philosophical and administrative issues. In particular, I wish to thank my supervisor Alex Neill, who through his continuous support was patient enough to guide me these past four years, and help me develop my ideas. His insights, comments and criticisms have given real shape and substance to this thesis. For all these I am sincerely grateful. Of course, it goes without saying that, any problems or mistakes this thesis has are entirely my fault. Fellow post-graduates in this department, Graham Stevens, James Cuthbert, Martin Ladbury, Oystein Hide, Peter Winslow and Jenny Bunker in particular, have also helped me, reading my work on several occasions, and indulging with my philosophical insecurities. Other people at Southampton University, Ana Alonso-Vazquez, Elisa Lawson and Carina Buckley, who proof-read the entire thesis, have endlessly supported me through these years. Additionally, a number of people in Greece have helped me both professionally and personally, Fay Zika, Vasso Kindi, Grigoris Kafetzopoulos, Maria-Christina Tsemani, Elli Argyrou, Ina Melengoglou, Alkmini Karakosta and Maria Amaxopoulou. Also, a big thank you to my good friends and house-mates Alexandros Anastasopoulos, and especially Maria-Nefeli Tsaloglou, who have been patient with my ups and downs, my panic attacks, have shopped, cooked, cleaned and even type-written for me. They certainly deserve a place in Heaven for all their efforts. Another big thank you to my partner George Turner who's love has proved a solid basis for me to rely upon in good times and bad, and who, with his genuine scepticism about my ideas and method, has been a constant source of mayhem. I am also indebted to my (extended) family, and in particular my parents Albert Arouh and Lily Anagnostopoulou, and brother Timotheos, for providing me with the financial means to complete this thesis, but also with great emotional, psychological and intellectual support. I owe them the world for all these. My last thank you is to my good friend Melina Papamanoli who unfortunately is not here to read this. She was the one who pressured me to apply for a Ph.D., and who always believed in my academic potential. For these reasons I wish to dedicate this thesis to her memory and hope that she is happy with my results.

PREFACE

The point of origin of this thesis can be found in a recurring question throughout my postgraduate studies: what is it that makes a film good or bad? This thesis attempts to answer this question, i.e., provide some adequate explanation as to why we like films. In order to achieve this I have relied on both the philosophy of art and film theory to find my answers and, ultimately, promote a philosophically inclined cinematic analysis. The philosophy department at the University of Southampton has proved to be an ideal environment to conduct this research. Due to its emphasis on the philosophy of art, and its support of interdisciplinary work, I have found the best place to develop my ideas.

By shifting back and forth from philosophy to film theory, one of my constant concerns has been the films used as examples. I have tried to include mostly mainstream or well-known films, with the hope that these examples will indeed make sense to the reader. In some cases, however, it has been impossible to use such examples, and certain little known films are considered. Nevertheless, I always refer to films which, popular or not, are artistically interesting and, for my part, represent what is best about cinema.

University of Southampton, June 2004

INTRODUCTION

This thesis outlines an aesthetics of cinema with special emphasis on formalist ideas. Specifically, the focus is on providing a link between philosophical discussions about artistic or aesthetic form, and cinema. What is interesting about this type of inquiry is that although it was considered a fundamental aspect of the work of some early film theorists, and of the work of certain philosophers of art in the 1970s, its importance and centrality have been ignored and misunderstood ever since. This thesis argues that formalist discussions are in fact an integral part of the study of cinema, and should be revised and reconsidered and their particular importance explicated. In this manner, the aesthetics of cinema proposed here fills a gap in the current philosophical literature about cinema, through examinations of formalist ideas and arguments. From these discussions it is hoped that the nature of form in cinema, and the centrality it holds for our experiences of films, will be delineated and explained.

In order to achieve the sort of analysis required by the aesthetics of cinema three different areas need to be considered. The first is a group of philosophical writings on cinema from the 1970s that attempt to explain the artistic relevance and potential of cinema. This group of writings stands at the centre of my inquiry, since it proposes a way of thinking about cinema from a philosophical perspective, but also with a specific formalist interest. The second area is the formalist literature in the philosophy of art. It is only by understanding the ideas and shortcomings of the formalist theories outlined that the aesthetics of cinema can provide a comprehensive formalist understanding of cinema. The third area consists of certain views in early and contemporary film theory, and especially the ideas that discuss cinematic form. This thesis attempts to find a balance between this variety of influences, and synthesise a discussion that will incorporate all relevant parameters. By examining these theories I hope to benefit from their insights but also avoid their mistakes. Thus, I will present an investigation that is defined both by philosophy of art and film theory, while striving to find a middle ground for this combination to occur. Only by bringing these areas together can a more comprehensive understanding of these matters be obtained, and a proper aesthetics of cinema developed.

Structurally, this thesis consists of eight chapters. The first two provide a mapping of the particular perspective examined and attempt to establish its importance. Furthermore, a number of clarifications are made and a method of inquiry is proposed in terms of the aesthetics of cinema and the role and centrality of cinematic form. The first chapter, 'The aesthetics of cinema', outlines the origins and importance of the aesthetics of cinema, and general shape is given to the particular perspective examined. Specifically, the focus is on introducing two issues that will constitute the basis of the aesthetics of cinema, and stressing their significance for the philosophical study of cinema. The first concerns the effort to explore, describe or even somehow define cinema, through the notions of essence, medium and form. The second consists of analyses of the artistic or aesthetic importance of form in our experiences of films, and the possible uniqueness, or peculiar character, of cinema, especially as this is contrasted to other art forms.

In the second chapter, 'The Holy Trinity of the Aesthetics of Cinema: Essence-Medium-Form', in order to understand more fully the nature of the aesthetics of cinema, the three most fundamental concepts of the aesthetics of cinema are outlined. In particular, matters of cinematic essence are discussed, both in relation to the work of some of the early film theorists, and the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s and it is suggested that it is preferable to develop the aesthetics of cinema with no reference to a cinematic essence. Then, the notion of medium is considered, and it is argued that there needs to be some stable definition of what the medium of cinema is. Finally, the idea of form is introduced and a mode of inquiry is proposed for the next chapters.

The next two chapters introduce and discuss two dominant formalist perspectives in the philosophy of art, with the aim of understanding what form is and how it affects or shapes our experiences of works of art. In the third chapter, 'Strong Formalism', Clive Bell and Roger Fry's version of formalism is considered, and it is concluded that this formalist understanding is problematic in terms of the definition of art it proposes. Furthermore, it is argued that strong formalism is mostly incompatible with a study of cinema, due to the notion of disinterestedness it suggests.

In the fourth chapter, 'Weak Formalism', the discussion turns to a weaker version of formalism and, in particular, the view that artistic value is a matter of the satisfying

appropriateness of form to content, as this is developed in Richard Eldridge and Arthur Danto's work. The main points of this theory are delineated, and its exegetical contribution to our understanding of art, and cinema in particular, is discussed. However, it is concluded that even though weak formalism is more compatible with the study of cinema, certain adjustments still need to be made in order to gain a more substantive formalist understanding of cinema.

This I will achieve in the next two chapters by proposing what I will refer to as cinematic formalism. Specifically, in chapter five, 'Cinematic Form', it is argued that due to the diversity of interpretations of 'form' in the philosophy of art a common understanding of this notion is lacking. As such, there needs to be a particular examination of what *cinematic* form amounts to. In particular, in this chapter I will introduce the notions of 'film form', which refers to the form of each individual film, and 'cinema form', which refers to the form of cinema in general. Although film form is discussed in some detail, cinema form is introduced in this chapter but thoroughly examined in chapters seven and eight.

In chapter six, 'The Role of Form', I continue outlining cinematic formalism, and especially the explanation of the role and value of form in cinema that the aesthetics of cinema requires. Specifically, I propose a more narrow and flexible understanding of weak formalism, which does not aim to account for all art. Furthermore, I examine the type of relationship that exists between cinematic form and content, and outline two rival understandings of this relationship, the neoformalist one, and Noël Carroll's functionalism. Finally, a number of examples are discussed in order to understand the applicability of cinematic formalism and further delineate what the satisfying appropriateness of form to content amounts to.

The last two chapters of this thesis take the formalist exploration of cinema a step further by thoroughly examining cinema space and time. In chapter seven, 'Cinema Space', I consider four fundamental characteristics of cinema space, its duality in terms of screen and action-space, its two-dimensionality, its discontinuity and last, what is referred to as off-screen space. Through these it is argued that although cinema space seems as a unique characteristic of cinema, there are some similarities with comics that need to be considered.

In chapter eight, 'Cinema Time', the most fundamental characteristics of cinema time are considered. These are, the duality of cinema time, in terms of screen and action-time, the particular way in which films are projected and the type of temporal 'illusion' that is created, the temporal discontinuity of the cinematic image and lastly, off-screen time. Additionally, two characteristically cinematic techniques, the freeze-frame and the acceleration and slowing down of time, are discussed. From all these it is concluded that although cinema shares most of these characteristics with arts such as stage plays or comics, the peculiar nature of cinematic projection is indeed a defining characteristic, and shows the formal distinctiveness of cinema.

Through these chapters a number of issues are clarified and an aesthetics of cinema proposed and developed, with a specific focus on the role and significance of form. Specifically, a cinematic formalist theory is outlined that is shaped by the philosophy of art, the philosophy of film and film theory, and succeeds in synthesising the three in order to enrich our understanding of cinema in a productive way. From these discussions the nature of cinematic form is shown and its role in our experiences of films explicated. Furthermore, the importance and possible centrality of a formalist understanding of cinema is re-introduced, and it is argued that the aesthetics of cinema should once again be considered an important part of the study of cinema.

We've forgotten why Joan Fontaine leans over the edge of the cliff,
and what it was that Joel McCrea was going to do in Holland
We don't remember why Montgomery Cliff was maintaining eternal silence
or why Janet Leigh stops at the Bates Motel
and why Teresa Wright is still in love with uncle Charlie
We've forgotten why Henry Fonda is not totally guilty
and for what exact reason the American government employs Ingrid Bergman

But we remember a handbag
but we remember a bus
but we remember a glass of milk
the sails of a windmill
a hairbrush
but we remember a row of bottles
a pair of spectacles
a sheet of music
a bunch of keys

Because through them and with them
Alfred Hitchcock succeeded
where Julius Caesar, Napoleon had all failed:
to take control of the universe

Perhaps there are 10000 people who haven't forgotten Cézanne's apple
but there will be 1000000000 spectators
who will remember the lighter in Strangers on a Train

The reason why Alfred Hitchcock became the only successful poete maudit
was that he was the greatest creator of forms of the 20th century
and its forms that tell us finally what lies at the bottom of things

Now what is art if not that thing through which forms become style
and what is style if not the man

So it's a blonde braless followed by a detective who is afraid of the void
who all bring us proof
that all this is why cinema is
in other words the childhood of art

Jean-Luc Godard,
Histoire(s) du Cinéma: Le Contrôle de L'Univers
(1998)

between generic films and art films, and argues that art films involve, among other things, an appropriate relationship between form and content.[37] In this formalist account equal importance is paid to both form and content and their particular relationship. As such, it explicitly resembles Hegel's view about the satisfying appropriateness of form to content in a work of art. I will briefly discuss this later on, and in more detail in chapter four. So, the aesthetics of cinema, especially of the 1970s, relied on formalist views.[38]

It is important to note, however, that neither Sesonske nor Khatchadourian fully specified and developed the formalist principles they relied upon. Rather, they took for granted that form in art is important and then applied this to cinematic form. As such, their claims regarding the extent and nature of form's importance were never elucidated. It seems that Khatchadourian and Sesonske, as other aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, often relied upon writings in the philosophy of art to provide them with a formalist basis that did not require elaborate demonstration. For instance, George Linden states that his understanding of form in cinema is based on D. H. Parker's views on form, and he also mentions some of D. W. Gotshalk's views.[39] Sesonske mentions that "[s]ince the time of Aristotle there has been almost universal agreement that form is one important determinant of the status and quality of a work of art".[40] As such, even though he does not advocate a specific type of formalism, as Linden does, he does rely on this "universal agreement" that seems to amount to the general view in the philosophy of art that form is somehow relevant in terms of the value we place on art. Furthermore, in Khatchadourian's work some of Herbert Read and Susanne Langer's ideas are

---

[37] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1975, p. 274

[38] As I mentioned in chapter one, although formalist views seem to have diminished in present philosophical thinking about cinema, some aspects still remain. For instance, in their views about film colourization, Levinson, Young and Leibowitz claim that colour is an expressive formal element that affects the mood of the film, and shapes our experience of it. For Leibowitz especially, it is important to recognise that film is a pictorial narrative and that expressiveness depends upon "the way the pictures look" (Leibowitz, Flo, 1995, p. 50). Although implicit in these claims, there seems to be some agreement that the formal elements of cinema, such as colour, are important aspects of our experience of films. Daniel Frampton also argues along these lines, claiming that, "what matters for filmosophers is the power and forcefulness of colour use in particular films" (Frampton, Daniel, (accessed 12/10/02)). These formalist views, however, are a minority in current philosophical literature on cinema.

[39] Linden, George W., 1971

[40] Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 55

mentioned.[41] In particular, the influence of formalist ideas from the philosophy of art is most evident where he argues that for a film to be a work of art, it must satisfy certain criteria of 'formal beauty' in terms of composition, thus echoing Bell and Fry's ideas. Furthermore, it should also exhibit appropriate fitness between form and content, which as I mentioned is true of Hegel's formalist understanding of art.[42]

But why is form particularly important for the aesthetics of cinema? Form holds a fundamental position for two key reasons: the first, which I can only claim here but will argue in detail in the next chapters, is that form does have an important role in determining the 'power of movies'. This is because it shapes the way a film is, the way we experience films and how we evaluate them. Again, this I can only introduce here, but it will be the topic of the next four chapters: in chapters five and six especially, I hope to show why and how form has such an important function in our appreciation of films.

Secondly, form will help in comparing and contrasting cinema to other art forms, which as I mentioned in chapter one is an important part of the aesthetics of cinema since it shows how cinema differs from other arts, and how films have the capacity to fascinate by their own nature. The way in which form helps elucidate these cases is especially noticed in Peter Kivy's essay 'Music in the Movies: A Philosophical Enquiry', where he examines the role of music in sound films.[43] In order to appreciate better the unique presence of music in films, he examines it in relation to stage plays in general, and to the melodrama of the 18th century in particular. By focusing on the formal differences between stage and screen, he notices a particular inability of cinema fully to express human emotion that he traces to the nature of the photographic image, and which music fills in. So, by comparing these art forms he manages to gain a far better understanding of the place of music in cinema, and the nature of cinema as a whole.

Thus, it is important in this thesis to develop the aesthetics of cinema on a formalist basis that explains in detail what form is and how it shapes our experiences and why. That is, an account that will, conclusively and comprehensively, answer: what is

---

[41] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1975, p. 273-274, 282
[42] Ibid., especially p. 274
[43] Kivy, Peter, 1999. This approach can be also noticed in Danto, Arthur C., 1979.

cinematic form? How is it that form affects our experience of films, and how does it shape our responses? How can we determine which formal features or relations are artistically significant? How does form exactly function within a film? All these I will determine throughout this thesis.

Formalism and the philosophy of art: The Kant-Hegel distinction:

In order to provide answers to these questions, in the next two chapters I will examine the question whether there is a formalist perspective in the philosophy of art that can be effectively used in the aesthetics of cinema, so as to explain what form is and its position and value in cinema. The first obstacle to be noted is that there is a plethora of formalist theses, varying from extreme suggestions, such as Clive Bell's, to more moderate claims, such as Monroe Beardsley's. As a result of this, there is no standard understanding or interpretation of what form is, and how and why form may affect, or even shape, our experiences of artworks, which the aesthetics of cinema can adopt and follow.

The approach I will take is in terms of the most common way of advancing formalist theses, which postulates form as one half of a distinction, the distinction between form and content. But even this understanding of form has been interpreted in different ways. I will explore here the two most dominant ones. In the first, form and content are understood as distinct and form is named the sole ingredient of an aesthetic experience.[44] This version of formalism—which I will refer to as strong formalism—draws on a number of ideas presented by Kant in his *Critique of Judgement*.[45] For Kant, contemplation of form is postulated as a prerequisite to judgements of taste, that is, the

[44] Parenthetically, Monroe Beardsley differentiated, 'divergence theories', where the form is distinct from the content, from 'fusion theories', where there is some fundamental relationship between form and content (Beardsley, Monroe C., 1981, p. 296-299). These two types, although named 'strong' and 'weak' formalism, I will discuss later on.

[45] Peter Kivy has suggested that Kant's *Critique of Judgement* is "the cradle of modern formalism" (Kivy, Peter, 1997, p. 91). Kivy, however, goes on to argue that Kant's formalist thesis is interwoven with his notion of 'poetic content', which is constituted by the 'aesthetic ideas' that poems arouse (Ibid., p. 93-94). But although Kant acknowledges content in this respect, he still separates content from the representational elements or the manifest meaning of, say, the poem.

judgements we make when we find something beautiful. Specifically, in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' Kant argues that two things are important for the possibility of having universally valid judgements of taste. The first has to do with what we have in common with other people when disinterestedly perceiving a thing of beauty, namely, cognitive and imaginative faculties in a unique and harmonious state of interaction. The second, and the core of Kant's formalist aesthetics, is articulated in the third Moment of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', where Kant argues that pleasure in the beautiful is dependent on the perception of the form of the object, that is, its spatial and temporal relations, rather that any charm, emotion or concept.[46] The form of the object, as Kant understands it, is important because it quickens the interaction between the faculties of Imagination and Understanding in a free and pleasurable way. If what triggers our response is the mere form of the object—rather than any content, end or concept that the object might fulfil—then this response is pure and our judgements are universally valid.

In addition, when viewing a thing of beauty we must perceive the object's purposiveness without purpose. Although interpretations of this idea vary, 'purposiveness without purpose' is usually understood as form without function, or the functionless design, or composition, of an object.[47] However, Kant's concept of form, and especially form without function, is designed mostly for objects of free beauty, such as foliage for framework or on wallpapers, music not set to words, and natural objects, such as flowers, birds and, possibly, the starry sky above.[48] What could be problematic in applying these ideas to cinema is that cinema as an art form is not sufficiently compatible with instances of free beauty. It might prove more adequate to turn the discussion of strong formalism to a view that explicitly concerns artefacts similar to films. Such an approach is more evident in Clive Bell and Roger Fry's formalist theory, which has dominated formalist discussions in the philosophy of art, is somewhat influenced by

---

[46] Kant, Immanuel, 1995, p. 283-284

[47] What exactly 'purposiveness without purpose' amounts to is discussed in great detail in Uehling, Theodore, 1971.

[48] Kant, Immanuel, 1995, p. 286-287. See also, Crawford, Donald W., 2002, p. 60-61. Parenthetically, free beauty for Kant, "presupposes no concept of what the object should be", whereas dependent beauty "presupposes a concept of the end that defines what the thing has to be" (Kant, Immanuel, 1995, p. 286, 287).

Kant's suggestions and focuses on visual art.[49] Hence, in the next chapter I will concentrate on Bell and Fry's ideas, and hope to uncover what form is and its importance in art.

In the second interpretation of the distinction between form and content, the emphasis is on establishing some essential relationship between form and content. It is even suggested that although we can distinguish between form and content we cannot really separate them, since the form is the embodiment of the content: the one is dependent on, and in some sense determines, the other. This second major understanding of form is quite interestingly elaborated in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, where he argues that artworks are not simply objects of pleasure, but ones that deserve critical contemplation. For,

> "the content of art and the work of art's means of presentation, and the appropriateness or inappropriateness of both to one another...invite us for intellectual consideration...for knowing philosophically what art is".[50]

In drama, for example, we examine whether the content, i.e., the dramatic action, is appropriate to the form, i.e., the manner in which the action develops.[51] But Hegel complicates matters: both the form and the content are bound up, determined by the Geist. Specifically, art, in the same manner as religion and philosophy, is created with the particular intention of expressing the Geist.[52]

---

[49] Another popular formalist theory concerning the visual arts is Clement Greenberg's. However, I will not examine this, since his version of formalism is of a more moderate sort, allowing the importance of content, and also his alliances are not always that clear cut, since he argues both that form may be more fundamental, especially in the process of artistic inspiration, but aesthetic value can be derived from content, and that content cannot be separated from form (Greenberg, Clement, 1971, p. 174-175). As such, it is more difficult to classify Greenberg in either of the two formalist suggestions mentioned here. But most importantly, as I mentioned in chapter one, by dismissing mass art as inauthentic art, Greenberg's views alienate cinema as an art form. Eduard Hanslick and Walter Pater's formalist ideas are also somewhat ignored, mostly because they focus their understanding on music. See, Pater, Walter, 1998, Hanslick, Eduard, 1986.

[50] Hegel, G. W. F., 1988, p. 11

[51] Ibid., p. 18

[52] Ibid., p. 75. For Hegel, in brief, the Geist has been artistically expressed in three different styles through history. The first one is the 'Symbolic' form of art. Here, artistic expression is incomplete, not because of lack of skill but of what these civilisations (Indian, Persian, and Egyptian) chose to, and were capable to, express (Inwood, Michael, 2002, p. 68). The second historical phase is the 'Classical' one, the era of the Greek civilisation, where the expression of the world view is adequate, "art has reached its own essential nature by bringing the Idea, as spiritual individuality directly into harmony with its bodily reality in such a perfect way that external existence...no longer preserves any independence in contrast with the meaning

The main problem with investigating Hegel's formalist account is that the more one tries to understand Hegel's aesthetics the more one has to explore his metaphysics; and given that trying to separate Hegel's aesthetics from his metaphysics is like trying to separate the duck from the rabbit, it should be no surprise that his aesthetic theory has been largely ignored by most contemporary aestheticians.[53] There is an aesthetic theory, however, referred to here as weak formalism, which appears to be a product of Hegel's view about the interaction of form and content, and expresses this second main trend of formalist views in a cogent manner. This view has become a 'metaphysics-free' version of Hegel's main argument, and is primarily advanced by Arthur Danto, especially in *After the End of Art* (1997), and by Richard Eldridge in his essay, 'Form and Content: An Aesthetic Theory of Art' (1995).[54] In their discussion, the focus shifts to the importance of artworks as 'embodied meanings', and the interaction between form and content becomes the focal point of an aesthetic theory. Weak formalists argue that in art we engage with two aspects of the work: its form, and its content. That is, our attention focuses on how the meaning of the work relates to its formal characteristics. We are immersed in what the work is about and how this is presented. In short, our responses towards a work of art can be explained through the relation between the form and content of this work. My intention in chapter four is to determine whether this understanding of form suits the purposes of the aesthetics of cinema, and show what problems there may be in applying it to the study of cinema.

---

which it is to express" (Hegel, G. W. F., 1988, p. 301). The third phase is the 'Romantic', placed from the Middle Ages to Hegel's own time. Here, there is too much to express, and the content becomes too 'profound' for art. For Hegel, from this moment on, philosophy and religion can better understand and express the Geist, than artistic forms (Inwood, Michael, 2002, p. 69). With this we reach the end of art; the Geist, after realising that artistic forms cannot represent it anymore, takes flight back into itself (Hegel, G. W. F., 1988, p. 301-302). The content of artworks from then on becomes the self-inwardness of the Geist.

[53] See for example, Marker, William, 2000.

[54] A different offspring of Hegel's aesthetic theory is A. C. Bradley's account of a *poetic experience*, where it is argued that when reading a poem, the form and the content, the words and their meanings, become one and we experience the one in the other, since there is an identity of form and content (Bradley, A. C., 1966, p. 316). For a good account of Bradley's theory see, Kivy, Peter, 1997. I choose, however, to examine Danto and Eldridge's version of weak formalism rather than Bradley's because it is developed more systematically in their work and they do not argue in favour of such an identity of form and content, which as I will argue in chapter four could be problematic.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, in this chapter I have separately examined the notions of essence, medium and form specifically as these were developed in the work of some of the early film theorists and aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s. Through this discussion I suggested three things. Firstly, that unlike some of these ideas it is preferable not to develop the aesthetics of cinema by referring to some cinematic essence, particularly as this might be understood through the material basis of cinema. Secondly, that it is best to maintain a single conception of medium that is here defined as the physical and technological basis of cinema, that is, celluloid film. Thirdly, I claimed, but have not as yet argued, that form is a very important factor in explaining the 'power of movies', that is, of explaining how films fail or succeed as artistic achievements. But also, form is an important tool with which to examine cinema in relation to other art forms, and through these comparisons further understand the specific nature of cinema and how it differs from other arts. This, as I mentioned in chapter one, is an important aspect of the aesthetics of cinema since through such accounts it is possible to elucidate how films fascinate by their own nature. So, the aesthetics of cinema of this thesis suggest that it is form that leads the way to a productive understanding of cinema as an art form, and films as works of art.

However, if form is to hold such an important part in the aesthetics of cinema, that is, if it is going to be the key to understanding both cinematic nature and its potential, and how films affect us, then we need to have a lucid understanding of what it is and of its relevance. As I mentioned, the problem—and benefit—of using the notion of form is that the philosophy of art offers a plethora of interpretations and suggestions of what form is and its precise role within aesthetic appreciation. For example, form can mean the structure of the work of art, that is, how the elements of the work relate to each other, or the manner in which meaning, or aboutness, is depicted. Alternatively, form may mean the 'how' of the work; the choices made from an array of options. Due to this variety it becomes imperative to determine exactly what form and its function are. My aim is to examine them first, and understand what consequences these views have and what an examination into the nature of cinematic form should be like. As such, in the

next two chapters I will discuss strong and weak formalism and try to benefit from the ideas that seem appropriate to the study of cinema. Through this investigation a more clear understanding of what the notion of form refers to must be outlined, since, having differentiated it from medium, it still remains to be shown what exactly the form of cinema is, and, of course, what is its precise function in our encounters with cinema.

CHAPTER THREE:
STRONG FORMALISM

Clive Bell and Roger Fry's theory of formalism, one of the most well-known theories of form in the philosophy of art, was outlined at the same time as the post-Impressionist movement in painting, out of a need to explain what was so magnificent in these paintings and to explore and defend them as artworks.[1] Bell advances his theory in terms of the significance of form, the role of the critic and the nature of aesthetic experience, striving in all of his work, but most importantly in *Art*, to find the essence of art. Fry shares the same passion for artistic form, and understands artistic creation, the work of art, the role of the critic and the nature of spectatorship in similar ways.[2] Although their views concentrate on works of visual art only, throughout their work they leave room for a version of strong formalism that would make sense of all art forms. In what follows I will introduce the three most fundamental aspects of strong formalism and raise a number of objections.

The Significance of Form:

At the core of strong formalism stands a definition of art in terms of the essential quality that makes a (visual) work of art, a work of art. Bell and Fry argue that we know we are in the presence of a work of art when we experience a peculiar kind of emotion, unique to art, an 'aesthetic emotion'.[3] Works of art are capable of arousing this unique type of emotion because they possess 'significant form', that is, combinations of form that affect us 'aesthetically'.[4] In Bell's work, however, how it is that significant form can move us in such a way is left unexplained for the first half of the book, and ambiguously discussed in the second half. The one thing certain, and the key to strong formalism, is that "forms arranged and combined according to certain unknown and mysterious laws do move us in a particular way, and that it is the business of an artist so to combine and

---

[1] Parenthetically, both Fry and Bell were members of the Bloomsbury circle, and, according to some Bloomsbury biographers, it was Fry who inspired Bell to become an art critic (Edel, Leon, 1979, p. 165). Furthermore, they co-curated the second Post-Impressionist exhibition in London. After the success of the exhibition, the publishers Chatto and Windus suggested that Fry should write a book on the principles of this emerging aesthetic theory; Fry, however, passed it on to Bell, claiming that he was the more capable of the two (Reed, Christopher, 1996, p. 128). The result was *Art*.

[2] In fact, Fry often complained that Bell used his ideas without giving him credit. See, Gillespie, Diane F., 1995, p. xxxi

[3] Fry, Roger, 1966, p. 305-306

[4] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 8

arrange them that they shall move us".[5] For Fry, as well, "the aesthetic emotion is an emotion about form. In certain people, purely formal relations of certain kinds arouse peculiarly profound emotions".[6] What is peculiar is that strong formalism begins with the personal experience, the felt emotion, rather than the object and, most importantly, its form.[7] In other words, the point of origin of the theory is not so much a question about what the form of art is and its position in art appreciation, but a general wonderment about the nature and causes of the emotion that is peculiar to art, and, as it turns out, that form is responsible for.

The second main claim of strong formalism concerns the appropriate manner in which works of art are to be appreciated. According to Bell, there is only one way in which we must look at works of (visual) art so as to have an aesthetic experience: focus on the form of the work and detach from the ideas and emotions of the everyday. Fry also argues that for an aesthetic emotion to occur there must be "a special orientation of the consciousness, and...a special focusing of the attention".[8] This understanding of art spectatorship is obviously influenced by Kant's notion of disinterestedness. For Kant, in brief, judgements of taste result from a feeling of delight that we obtain when we disinterestedly perceive an object of beauty. If the feeling of delight is caused by the appearance of the object and not by any interest we might have for its actual existence, then it is a disinterested response and we are able to form pure judgements of taste. For example, if we are not interested in an apple's edibility, but in its appearance or design, then our experience is disinterested in kind. As Bell argues, almost echoing Kant's claim, "[t]o appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three-dimensional space", that is, we need to become the

---

[5] Ibid., p. 11. In a later section of *Art* 'The Metaphysical Hypothesis', Bell suggests that significant form is also dependent on artistic inspiration. It is argued that at moments of artistic inspiration an artist looks at something and experiences it as 'pure form', that is, when an artist looks at something, say, his/her boots, for their own sake, s/he has an 'aesthetic experience'. Here, by disassociating everything else the artist is left with the thing in itself—Bell's conception of 'Ultimate Reality'. Afterwards, the artist tries to express this emotion, this 'disinterested' experience, through the work, and hence create significant form (ibid., p. 52-53).

[6] Fry, Roger, 1966, p. 305

[7] This has been also noticed by Weitz, Morris in, 1950, p. 2.

[8] Fry, Roger, 1968, p. 5

'pure aesthetes'.[9] This is why great art remains great through the ages, because we appreciate it in the same way, i.e., disinterestedly, in a way which is unaffected by the evolution of life, ideas and so forth.

The third central claim of strong formalism concerns the representational elements in (visual) art. According to Bell and Fry the essential importance in a work of art is its significant form, that is, the aesthetically pleasing combinations of form, which are separate from what is represented. Representations are irrelevant, of no aesthetic value. But why then do a number of important paintings involve representational elements? Principally, lesser artists will not be able to create significant form so they will have to rely on representations, and what these might suggest, to produce some kind of effect. It should be noted, however, that Bell is not always clear on the role of representation in art. For instance, in some parts of *Art*, works of art that rely on representation, i.e., 'descriptive paintings', or ones that do not have significant form, are not art, whereas in other parts they are just bad art.[10] Bell never explains whether strong formalism distinguishes between non-art objects or good art and bad art. For example, in the section 'Aesthetics and Post-Impressionism', he claims that a bad painting is one whose form is *insignificant*, i.e., it's descriptive.[11] In 'Simplification and Design' he says, "in art the only important distinction is the distinction between good art and bad art".[12] But throughout the 'Aesthetic Hypothesis' he has explicitly argued that for a work of art to be a work of art, it must by necessity have significant form. If a descriptive painting does not have significant form, then it cannot be art, since it cannot evoke an aesthetic emotion through which we will be able to identify the work as art. By necessity all works of art, since they are going to have significant form, are going to be good works of art. What is stable throughout Bell's account, however, is that we should *not* appreciate works of art through representational elements. We must not make the associations we are used to, but focus only on the formal design.

---

[9] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 27. Aldous Huxley observed, for an apparently similar kind of experience: "I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian who has to sit on chairs, to write at desks and tables, and not as the camera-man, or scientific recorder, but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space" (Huxley, Aldous, 1977, p. 18-19).
[10] This is also observed in Carroll, Noël, 1989, p. 92.
[11] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 48
[12] Ibid., p. 215

General objections and criticisms:

Bell and Fry's ideas about significant form have produced a quite substantive and rich literature. Most of it concentrates on the shortcomings of their views, and many objections have been raised, such as circularity and irrefutability. In what follows, instead of going over all these objections, firstly, I will present the most fundamental problems of strong formalism, and show how these objections hinder this view from being a proper formalist theory of visual art. Secondly, I will explain how particular features of strong formalism render this view unhelpful in studying cinema.

The most commonly noted objection is that the proposed definition of art is circular. In particular, Bell and Fry have claimed that:

a) art is defined via significant form

b) significant form is defined as the cause of an aesthetic emotion

c) an aesthetic emotion is defined as what is evoked by significant form

Here, significant form becomes the cause of an aesthetic emotion but it is only through a felt aesthetic emotion that it can be identified. The one is dependent on the other. What is needed, so as to avoid this circularity, is a definition of either 'aesthetic emotion' or 'significant form' independently of the other. But an independent definition of either of them does not exist in strong formalism. Furthermore, it has been suggested that both Bell and Fry intentionally avoided resolving this circularity because of the influence of G. E. Moore's philosophy on their work. As Ekman especially argues, if Bell and Fry had tried to explain the circularity away, by independently defining either aesthetic emotion or significant form, they would have committed Moore's Naturalistic Fallacy, i.e. they would have tried to 'define the indefinable'.[13] Significant form is for them what 'good' is for Moore: a "simple, unique, indefinable, non-natural property".[14] Consequently, for Bell and Fry there cannot be a non-circular definition of significant form.

---

[13] Ekman, Rosalind, 1970, p. 353

[14] Ibid. This is also discussed by Dean, Jeffrey T., 1996, Gould, Carol, 1994 and Lang, Berel, 1992, especially p. 403.

Another problematic feature of strong formalism is a result of Bell's understanding of art spectatorship. Bell, from the beginning of *Art*, distinguishes between people who are able to have aesthetic experiences, and those who are not.[15] For Bell, it seems, those who are not artistically sensitive, often 'men of the intellect', are unable to appreciate a work of art as they ought to, i.e., be affected by its significant form, because they have 'defective sensibilities', they are like 'deaf men in a concert'.[16] Instead of exploring any new experiences that art has to offer, "the significance of a work of art depends on what they bring to it; no new thing is added to their lives".[17] As such, their manner of appreciation is so misguided that Bell suggests that it is as if they "use a telescope for reading the news".[18] Yet, Bell's understanding of spectatorship can mean either of two things: according to his first claim, defective spectators are defective because they are unable to have an aesthetic experience, that is, they are like 'deaf men in a concert'. In this sense their inability to appreciate art correctly is a matter of some deficiency they have as human beings. According to his second claim, however, defective spectators use 'a telescope for reading the news'. In this case the deficiency of spectators is not a matter of some inherent disability, but more a matter of being misguided about the nature and character of art appreciation. So, it is not clear in Bell's account whether defective spectatorship is something that could be avoided and corrected, or an inevitable characteristic of some human beings. In other words, are defective spectators 'deaf men' or are they just 'using a telescope to read the news'? Are there two kinds of defectiveness, one acquired and one involuntary? Can all human beings be aesthetically affected, or is the experience of an aesthetic emotion available only to an elite of sensitive men? Bell does not seem to be aware that his claims produce this distinction.

Lastly, strong formalism is irrefutable. This irrefutability is a consequence of the way Bell explains spectatorship. Specifically, if someone does not experience an aesthetic emotion from a work of art, we say s/he is a defective spectator, that is, s/he is

---

[15] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 3-4
[16] Ibid., p. 29
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

either incapable of one, or is not appreciating the work as s/he ought to. In this manner, Bell has shielded his argument from refutation. If for Bell a work of art does not cause an aesthetic experience in a member of the audience, then s/he is either defective or not appreciating the work appropriately. As such, strong formalism is further hindered as a philosophical position by failing to be open to criticism and scrutiny. It is also interesting to note that Bell at the beginning of *Art*, draws a distinction between men of intellect and those with artistic sensibilities, and thus offers another shield for his theory: most men of intellect—and that would include most philosophers—are incapable of appreciating art. The following passage is indicative:

> "I have a friend blessed with an intellect as keen as a drill, who, though he takes an interest in aesthetics, has never during a life of almost forty years been guilty of an aesthetic emotion. So, having no faculty for distinguishing a work of art from a handsaw, he is apt to rear up a pyramid of irrefragable argument on the hypothesis that a handsaw is a work of art".[19]

It seems that for Bell, the better the argument that one provides, the most likely it will be irrelevant to art.

The main weakness of strong formalism:

I will turn now to some problems of strong formalism, which directly affect the aesthetics of cinema. For the rest of this chapter, first, I will explain how and why strong formalism fails adequately to explain what significant form is, and as a consequence is unable to provide the two explanations about form (what it is and its role in our cinematic experiences) that, as I mentioned in chapters one and two, the aesthetics of cinema requires. Second, I will examine some further incompatibilities between strong formalism and the nature and practice of cinema. Through this discussion I will make manifest the reasons why strong formalism is not a suitable option for the aesthetics of cinema, since it explicitly fails to provide the required explanations.

---

[19] Ibid., p. 4

The concept of significant form should have aided the aesthetics of cinema in these two ways: on the one hand, the 'lines, space and colour' should have sufficed as a definition of form, and on the other, the notion of an aesthetic experience should have explained the position of form in art appreciation. However, the explanation of what significant form that both Bell and Fry offer fails to do either. Apart from the circularity mentioned earlier, the most specific description of significant form they provide in their work is in terms of combinations and arrangements of form that can move us aesthetically. Strong formalism here relies on a possibly shared understanding of form that we may have and from which we can infer what significant form is. But form has been understood in many different ways; for example, for many aestheticians form is not just combinations of colours, lines and spaces, but also the style of the work, its structure, shape and much more.[20] For instance, whereas Bell understands colour to be a formal element, Kant excludes it from his definition, naming it a 'charm'.[21] So, it is not completely clear what form refers to, and from which we can understand what exactly *significant* form is. It seems reasonable to expect, even demand, from a formalist theory of art that it will have at least some explanation of what form is, rather than depend on a broad and supposedly common understanding of form that roughly includes lines, colours and space. In this manner, some further specification needs to be made in terms of what form is so as to understand significant form.

As a result of this, strong formalism fails to answer in a substantive manner the explanations required by the aesthetics of cinema. We still need to know what form is, the nature of these combinations, and how these combinations affect us aesthetically, whereas other combinations of form perhaps do not.[22] It seems that, although Bell provides a detailed analysis of the artistic inspiration behind the creation of significant form, or how significant form should be appreciated, how it has evolved through history—and the brilliance of Cézanne's paintings for exhibiting it—there is no real description of, again, what form is, and of what these special combinations are which

---

[20] This has also been noticed by Beardsley, Monroe C., 1958, p. 165, Weitz, Morris, 1971, p. 354 and will be thoroughly discussed in chapter five.

[21] Kant, Immanuel, 1995, p. 284

[22] Furthermore, the description of a disinterested, if not mystical, experience the artist had, and its materialisation into a work of art, which was the second version of significant form I mentioned, does not seem to provide a complete or detailed characterisation of significant form either.

constitute significant form. As such, it becomes difficult to determine how in the aesthetics of cinema the notion of form and its function, via significant form, should be understood.

Fry, aware of the shortcomings of their discussion of significant form, argued that,

> "we mean by significant form something other than agreeable arrangements of form, harmonious patterns, and the like. We feel that a work that possesses it is the outcome of an endeavour to explain an idea rather than to create a pleasing object. Personally, at least, I always feel that it implies an effort on the part of the artist to bend to our emotional understanding by means of his passionate conviction some intractable material which is alien to our spirit".[23]

Finally, he admits that, "I seem unable at present to get beyond this vague adumbration of the nature of significant form".[24] What is interesting in Fry's writings is that, through examples of actual works of art, he makes an effort to describe what 'formal combinations' are, and how some of them have the capacity to affect us aesthetically.[25] As a result, Fry provides a description of both form and significant form, which is better and more elaborately articulated. Fry's understanding of form will be further discussed in chapter five.

So, it seems that no matter how much Bell and Fry could elaborate or correct the other features of strong formalism, a fundamental explanation, and one that is demanded by the aesthetics of cinema, is still missing. This is because for the purposes of the aesthetics of cinema, we need to know both what form is (which will help in describing and comparing cinema to other art forms), and its function in our experiences (which will help in the process of explaining the significance of form in cinema). Following this analysis, however, it can be concluded that strong formalism is not sufficient as a formalist explanation to assist in the development of the aesthetics of cinema, and a different formalist theory should be considered. Whether or not strong formalism may explain other features relevant to different arts or cinematic practices becomes of

---

[23] Fry, Roger, 1929, p. 302
[24] Ibid.
[25] Jerome Stolnitz has also noted that Fry in his art criticism exhibits what is good about formalism, by trying to determine significant form through his descriptions of paintings, rather than his theory (Stolnitz, Jerome, 1960, p. 145).

secondary importance since the aesthetics of cinema, first and foremost, requires these two explanations.

A brief note:

As a final remark regarding both Bell and Fry's discussion of significant form, it should be stressed that one of the principal reasons why there is no adequate explanation of form, especially in Bell's formalist thesis, is structural rather than philosophical: in strong formalism the function of form, i.e., the ability to cause an aesthetic emotion that can then be identified as an essential condition of art, is the central claim of the theory; accordingly, determining what form is becomes of secondary concern. Thus, in strong formalism, the emphasis is more on discussing the experience that artworks evoke, i.e., the aesthetic emotion, rather than anything else. It seems that in both Bell and Fry's views, form is important because it explains what an aesthetic emotion is, in the same way that Kant suggested that contemplation of form allows for the universality of judgements of taste. But for Bell and Fry it is the aesthetic emotion that is important, and for Kant it is the universality of judgements of taste that is important. Consequently, a thorough explanation of why form is important, and how it affects or shapes our aesthetic experiences, despite, as I have argued, Bell and Fry's failure to explain this as well, seems to be of greater significance than any secondary explanation of what form is. Furthermore, as I mentioned, by relying on a common or shared understanding of form, Bell wrongly assumes that no further description of form is necessary. According to strong formalists, the potential of significant form seems most important. In order to avoid such a problem, it should be recognised in the aesthetics of cinema that an account of form should not be overshadowed by the explanation of why and how form is important in film viewing. Rather, both explanations should be fully delineated. Following this, chapter five will aim to provide a definition of cinematic form, whereas chapter six will focus on its role and artistic significance.

Disinterestedness and cinema:

In the following section I wish to present a problem of strong formalism that is especially relevant to forms of art that rely on language and narrative, such as stage plays, comics, literature and, most significantly, cinema. This problem results from the idea of a disinterested experience that Bell and Fry adopt from Kant and set as a necessary requirement for art appreciation. Even though the discussion that follows might be true for the types of art mentioned, I will focus on cinema so as to show the specific reason why this suggestion of strong formalism is incompatible with the study of cinema.

> According to Bell, in order to appreciate a work of art in an appropriate way, "we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions...For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life".[26]

Fry similarly argued that for an aesthetic emotion to occur there must be "a special orientation of the consciousness, and...a special focusing of the attention, since the act of aesthetic apprehension implies an attentive passivity".[27] But is this state of mind, this disinterestedness, possible in art appreciation? Is it possible to detach from the knowledge and ideas of life, or abandon all interests and emotions? It is difficult to understand how an art spectator can manage to detach so radically from life. What could be argued in Bell and Fry's (and Kant's) favour is that it is just a logical possibility that humans should appreciate art disinterestedly. If in fact they cannot, then they simply are not able to appreciate it in the best (and most appropriate) way. Yet, why should art—and cinematic—appreciation be restricted to a logical possibility? If we do not usually achieve this state, then there should be some other explanation as to why we value works of art (and films) at all. In addition, nowhere in his early work does Bell argue that an aesthetic experience is just a logical possibility. On the contrary, it is a common phenomenon to 'sensitive men'. But how do 'sensitive men' disassociate from the

---

[26] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 25
[27] Fry, Roger, 1968, p. 5

knowledge and ideas they already have? There has to be some explanation as to how, in art appreciation, we can achieve complete detachment.

Aware that such a detachment from life, ideas and emotions might seem impossible, Fry argued that it takes a lot of training for people to learn to disregard these associations and disinterestedly appreciate the formal design alone, and succeed in having an aesthetic experience.[28] Furthermore, because people grow accustomed to deriving a non-disinterested kind of satisfaction from art, artists strive to create art that will appeal to a majority of audiences.[29] In such cases, the truly aesthetic features of the work, the ones that depend on its form, are overshadowed.

But even if we assume that this state is tenable in art appreciation, then should this be considered the only and necessary way to appreciate art? If the answer is yes, as strong formalism suggests, then the following could be concluded: firstly, the value we place on a plethora of films—and the reasons for which we usually consider them artistically valuable—is totally misplaced, since we appreciate and value many films without this sort of detachment; secondly, it may even be argued that films (as other language-based, narrative-driven works) are not artworks, since their value depends on not having a detached experience. This I will explain in what follows.

Most films are designed in a way that seems to assume they will not be experienced disinterestedly. Three reasons for this stand out. To begin with, a disinterested experience would have to disregard the meaning of words.[30] This, even if it would not be true for all films, it would probably make the experience of watching certain films such as Woody Allen's, a very unpleasant one. In addition, it would narrow down much of the potential of a number of comedies that rely on words and their

---

[28] Fry, Roger, 1966, p. 306

[29] It should be noted, however, that Fry, in his later work, recognised the potential significance of representational elements. He finally admitted that "all works of art are more or less impure...it may be that the greatest art is not the purest, that the richest forms only emerge from a certain richness of content" (quoted in Reed, Christopher, 1996, p. 284). Had he followed this line of thought earlier on his claims would have been far more convincing.

[30] That this should be the case in disinterested experiences is confirmed by Fry's views on poetry, where he argues that we should appreciate in poetry the 'auras' of the words and their combinations, rather than any meaning. To that end, Fry experimented with poetry of different languages, so that he could totally disregard the meaning of the words (ibid., p. 283). His ideal of poetry would be something like 'wordless sound poems'.

meanings. For, according to strong formalism, we should just perceive the formal design, and disregard any contribution that dialogue might make to films.

Yet, there is a further reason why the idea of disinterestedness is incompatible with cinema: most films depend on our knowledge of the 'real' world. Not only that, but for films to be considered artistically significant, there must often be some awareness of the outside world. For example, to fully appreciate the reaction caused by the appearance of Superman, we need to know that in the world we inhabit, more often than not, human beings do not fly about in such a manner. Alternatively, part of the value of the film *Wag the Dog* (1997) relies on the fact that it was made at a time when it reflected U.S. domestic and foreign policy issues. Furthermore, *Primary Colors* (1998) is a fascinating film mostly because it can be considered a satire on the 1992 Bill Clinton campaign. So, *contra* the strong formalist suggestion, for many films, maintaining the knowledge we have of life adds to our understanding of the film, and enables us to appreciate it more fully.

Lastly, our responses to a number of films (as to most fiction) rely on our regular emotional reactions towards the characters or narrative, and the value we place on them. It has been quite extensively argued that our emotional responses, be these in terms of empathy, sympathy and even identification, constitute one of the most important reasons why we take pleasure in, or value, watching films.[31] These emotional responses (as opposed to an aesthetic emotion), however, depend on the condition that we do not detach from ourselves. For instance, if, say, I value a film because I empathise with a character, then this would mean that I share her/his feelings, I perceive the facts of the film from his/her perspective, or experience what s/he experiences. But I cannot do this if I am disinterestedly contemplating the film, since a disinterested experience, as Bell and Fry set it up, necessarily requires that I detach from emotions and ideas. In films, however, we need to bring with us something more than a sense of 'form' and 'colour' and 'knowledge of three-dimensional space'; we need to bring with us our ability for ordinary emotions. Yet, for strong formalism this is defective spectatorship. For Bell, film viewers, as defective spectators, "read into the form of the work these facts and ideas

[31] I will not proceed to argue in favour of the value of our emotional responses to films, as there is some considerable literature on the subject. For example, Neill, Alex, 1996, Smith, Murray, 1995, Plantinga, Carl and Smith, Greg M., 1999, Smith, Greg M., 2003.

for which they are capable of feeling emotion, and feel for them the emotions that they can feel—the ordinary emotion of life".[32] If, however, in order to appreciate films we need these emotions, then it is difficult to understand how cinema will fit in the strong formalist explanation of art.

It can be concluded then, that some of the most important reasons for appreciating a plethora of films so far, that is, the centrality of language either for meaning or for narrative or effect, the value of maintaining some connection with the real world and the type of emotional investment we place on characters and narratives, have to be dismissed if we are to incorporate the strong formalist thesis in the aesthetics of cinema. By naming disinterestedness the only way to appreciate art we are narrowing the ability of a film to affect us by its full, and certainly worthy, potential.

Furthermore, if it is argued that disinterestedness is a necessary requirement for artistic value, then strong formalism, by advancing a thesis that supports detachment from the world, excludes many films from being classified as art. For, if we draw the strong formalist discussion to its logical end, it can be maintained that films, which are valuable merely because of our attachment to (and knowledge of) the world and ourselves, are not artworks, since they fail to meet one of the necessary conditions that strong formalism sets for art: the possibility of valuing these works through disinterested experiences. If most films hold no value if they are experienced disinterestedly, then strong formalism concludes that these films are not *art*.

Consider the case of a film that would normally be considered a cinematic work of art, such as Kusturica's *Underground* (1995). According to Bell, we should appreciate this film only through its formal design and emotionally detach from the story and characters, and also disregard any connection it may have with the real world, in this case the political history of Yugoslavia before World War II. So, what would such an experience look like? We would only see colours, spaces and lines, and listen to meaningless sound (if we do not speak Serbo-Croatian). In short we would perceive the film as if it were an abstract painting. I think, however, that the value of such an experience would be both misplaced and minimal. For, it would do justice only to a very

---

[32] Bell, Clive, 1995, p. 107

small part of the film, its colours and sounds. In addition, it would render the process of most filmmaking, in its present sense, completely unnecessary. Rather, it would push filmmakers to become abstract painters.[33]

What could be argued instead is that a disinterested experience is more in line with certain types of works of art, for example, abstract paintings, or even films such as *Koyaanisqatsi* which are non-narrative, and their effect relies on aspects such as lines, colours, shapes and sounds. That is, it may be argued that in appreciating these works disinterestedness is a valuable, and more easily manageable, state, and that this is an appropriate manner in which these works of art ought to be appreciated. In such cases, strong formalism may be right: we only need bring with us a sense of colour and space, or of sound and rhythm, so as to truly experience them as works of art. But in other cases, as with most regular films, it seems that strong formalism completely rejects the true potential these works have, since they are designed for different ends, which strong formalism does not recognise as appropriate ones. Hence, although in many cases—if we can in fact have an aesthetic experience—it may be more appropriate or even necessary to experience the work of art disinterestedly, in 'regular' films, as with other narrative-driven artworks, it is better to avoid this. As such, the notion of a disinterested experience can be maintained, but without being necessary or appropriate for all art. To conclude, however, by demanding from an art audience to disinterestedly contemplate a work, strong formalism becomes increasingly incompatible with the study of cinema.

The issue of representation:

The last issue I wish to examine regarding the relationship between strong formalism and the study of cinema is in reference to Bell and Fry's dismissal of representation. The main problem with the strong formalist suggestion is that dismissing

[33] I should add here that it is by no means a necessary requirement for filmmakers to rely on narrative or modes of story telling. Films, such as *Koyaanisqatsi* (1983) and *Powaqqatsi* (1988) are not created according to such ends. Despite these films, however, a formalist theory that examines cinema would have to make sense of all films, and especially the most common ones, which are narrative-driven.

art that relies on representational modes, i.e., descriptive art, makes the classification of cinema as an art very difficult, if not impossible. Descriptive art, for both Fry and Bell, is mostly of no aesthetic value. In descriptive paintings, as I mentioned, "forms are not used as objects of emotion, but as means of suggesting emotion or conveying information";[34] as such, these paintings have no aesthetic value, and are not works of art. They can be interesting and stimulating, or have historical and/or psychological value, but they are not works of art.[35] In addition, Bell argued that descriptive paintings were losing their very function, i.e., that of accurately copying reality, because of the emergence of photography and cinematography. According to Bell, a photograph and a descriptive painting, such as a photograph of Paddington Station, and Frith's *Paddington Station*, share the same function.[36] Following this clarification, cinematography is as irrelevant to art as descriptive paintings. Worse: cinema's main (and possibly only) purpose becomes, according to Bell, to supply us with information, rather than any type of aesthetic experience. As such, it is very difficult to understand how this mode of formalism can aid a discussion about the aesthetics of cinema, since cinema seems, once more, to fall short of being identified as a proper art within strong formalism's aesthetic system.

Conclusion:

I have examined in this chapter the strong version of formalism, as this was developed in both Bell and Fry's work. The aim was to find a suitable explanation both of what form is and how it may affect our experiences of works of art, so as to adopt this perspective in the aesthetics of cinema. However, neither of these was sufficiently answered by strong formalism. On the contrary, this account proved irredeemably problematic at several points, and incompatible with cinematic practices. Firstly, a number of ideas supported by the strong formalist thesis, such as those of

---

[34] Bell, Clive, 1924, p. 16-17

[35] It is interesting to point out that what Bell says of representational art, that it is might be interesting, stimulating etc., is what we usually say of works of art we consider worthwhile. This may mean either of two things: either we are in constant error in our judgements, or that strong formalism is a theory that is somewhat alien to our practices.

[36] Ibid., p. 19

disinterestedness and the disregard for representation, go against the obvious nature of cinema and cinematic spectatorship. Secondly, as I argued, significant form—which would constitute an important explanation in determining the value and power of works of art, and most importantly films—remains unclear until form is specified. It seems that Bell and Fry, by beginning their explanations with the felt emotion, and not the object, failed to give a proper account of what form is. As a result, on the one hand, we have no explanation of what form is, from which we can know cinematic form, and on the other, there is no complete or adequate explanation of what the significance of form is, which the aesthetics of cinema can use in the process of explaining the 'power of movies', at least through a formalist perspective. As such, this account fails to provide sufficient answers for the aesthetics of cinema. What may be argued is that for the purposes of the aesthetics of cinema we need a weaker version of formalism that will allow for representational elements, or content in general, to share some significance, not postulate disinterested spectatorship as a necessary requirement for proper artistic appreciation, and better explain what form is. However, it should be acknowledged that the insight of strong formalism, namely that form is somehow significant in art on its own, with no reference to other elements, is, I think, a very important one. Although it may not be true to the extent that Bell and Fry assume it to be, i.e., for all artworks at the same degree, it still holds some explanatory value that needs to be spelled out. This insight will be considered again in chapter six.

CHAPTER FOUR:
WEAK FORMALISM

As I argued in the previous chapter, strong formalism is at points incompatible with the aesthetics of cinema. Specifically, the account of significant form fails to provide adequate explanations for two of the most fundamental issues in the aesthetics of cinema, that is, what form is, and its significance in art, and more specifically film appreciation. So, for the purposes of the aesthetics of cinema a different sort of formalist understanding is needed. I propose in this chapter to examine what I have referred to as weak formalism, particularly as this theory was developed in some of Richard Eldridge and Arthur Danto's work, and determine whether this understanding of the value of form in art may prove more suitable for the study of cinema. In what follows, I will outline the main claims of weak formalism, stress its exegetical advantages and also examine possible objections.[1]

The main claims of weak formalism: Eldridge's version:

Richard Eldridge begins his inquiry by drawing a distinction between aesthetics and the philosophy of art. On the one hand, aesthetics, as the name suggests, is the study of certain experiences we obtain from things that we may consider beautiful or sublime or ugly. On the other hand, philosophy of art concentrates on exploring the nature of deliberately produced works of art.[2] According to Eldridge, the emphasis nowadays has changed to the study of the philosophy of art rather than aesthetics. The most important reasons for this shift are: primarily, because most modern or conceptual artworks do not evoke, at least as this was traditionally understood, an aesthetic experience what can be thought of as the defining characteristic of art.[3] Additionally, the notion of an aesthetic experience ceased to be a matter of some inherent or even unique artistic value, after Marxists, structuralists and post-modernists finished discussing and deconstructing its nature. Instead, the value we place on art was seen wholly as a matter of social conditioning; consequently, 'aesthetic experiences' were dismissed as an urban legend.

---

[1] It should be mentioned that the manner of analysis in this chapter will differ somewhat from the previous one, simply because weak formalism, as I present it here, has not produced the rich literature that strong formalism has. As a result, in this chapter I will provide a more complete discussion of its main points.
[2] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 240
[3] Ibid.

Furthermore, a portion of contemporary philosophy of art, mostly inspired by Wittgenstein's later work, explicitly questions the possibility of having one definition (in this case through the aesthetic experience) that will effectively explain all art.[4]

But Eldridge—based on the validity of his conviction, and following a long line of aestheticians before him—insists that there must be some unique, inherent value in the experience we derive from art that differentiates this type of experience from all others. In particular, "there seems to be a special value to experiencing works of art, the experience so valued also seems to have something to do with the nature of art".[5] As he claims, listening to a physicist's account of colour is not the same thing as looking at Rothko's paintings. In addition, Eldridge argues that the whole purpose of artworks, from their creation to their appreciation, seems to revolve around this kind of experience. What then, is this peculiar kind of experience? His explanation, following Hegel's lead, is that this experience is a felt satisfaction that we derive from the appropriateness of a work's form to its content after critical investigation. As he argues,

> "art works characteristically repay critical investigation and that critical investigation is in large measure the elucidation of the meanings of objects of feeling—as though art and criticism together help us to recover and assess the engagement of various of our feelings in the experience of objects that mean things to us. Criticism seems to be inspired by a fitness between the form and content of a thing, a fitness uncovered through an audience's felt satisfaction in their relation. Criticism accounts for this satisfaction through the investigation of its occasioning, elucidating the form and content that do this work. No special aesthetic capacities or abilities not exercised elsewhere are called for here in responding to art and in finding criticism in order. All that is needed are the capacities to identify forms, to understand contents, and to have feelings of satisfaction".[6]

And later on he argues that, "the aesthetic quality possession of which is necessary and sufficient for a thing's being art is the satisfying appropriateness to one another of a

---

[4] Ibid., p. 241. Concerning this sort of anti-essentialism Eldridge distinguishes between two kinds. The first is an attack on the notion of essences as properties separate from human activities. Eldridge agrees with this type of anti-essentialism, and argues that art cannot be distinguished from our cultural life. The second kind of anti-essentialism states that we cannot really talk of absolute criteria and right or wrong ways of practice when we deal with art related activities. Eldridge argues against this, and concludes that within an artworld, there can be claims concerning our practices that are both descriptive and normative in kind. As he argues, "[t]here are criteria for the correctness of such criterial claims about what we do and say: namely, not whether an abstract essence has been correctly characterised, but rather whether a practice is made intelligibly extendible or modifiable by such claims" (ibid., p. 242).

[5] Ibid., p. 241

[6] Ibid., p. 242-243

thing's form and content".[7] This peculiar kind of satisfaction is for Eldridge what constitutes the unique kind of experience we derive from art.

Danto's version:

Danto's suggestion begins in roughly similar terms. He argues that the notion of 'aesthesis' fails to account for modern art. In particular, he argues that art, 'after the end of art', that is, not the end of art production but the end of art narratives, has rendered the notion of an aesthetic experience (and any explanatory value this notion might have had) irrelevant.[8] The 'end of art', in this Hegelian understanding, occurs when art arrives at a philosophical conception of itself, and art narratives cannot represent it sufficiently anymore.[9] In short, whereas in the past, the narrative, i.e., the art theory, would set the limits and boundaries of what art is, and, as a consequence, prevent practices set outside these limits from being considered art, now, after the 'end of art', theories no longer dictate rules of procedure; artists liberated from "the burden of history...[were] free to make art in whatever way they wished, for any purposes they wished, or for no purposes at all".[10] As such, the end of art signifies in a way that everything is possible in terms of artistic creation, that there are no prior regulations and guide-rules of what a work of art must be like.[11] Danto, however, claims that from the 'end of art' onwards, chaos followed, since everything could be considered art, everyone an artist. Art criticism as well, following the post-modern/relativist warpath, became impossible. What needs to be done, according to Danto, so as to clarify once more what is art and what not, is to

> "turn to aesthetics as a discipline for guidance out of the chaos. If aesthetics could clarify the conditions of criticism, the question of its practicality would be spectacularly established".[12]

---

[7] Ibid., p. 246
[8] Danto, Arthur C., 1997, p. 5, 89
[9] Ibid., p. 5
[10] Ibid., p. 15 (see also p. 85).
[11] Ibid., p. 198
[12] Ibid., p. 94

For Danto, the way out, i.e., the way aesthetics can clarify the conditions of art criticism, is through Hegel's idea about the satisfying appropriateness of form to content. In particular, he argues that for an object to be a work of art, there are two necessary conditions that need to be satisfied: the object has to be about something, and it has to embody its meaning, i.e., to find an appropriate mode of presentation.[13] In other words, we know something is a work of art if it has meaning and if it embodies this meaning in an appropriate way.

So, both Danto and Eldridge define art through this experience of the satisfying appropriateness of the work's form to its content. Art criticism, following this definition, becomes a matter of examining the possible satisfying appropriateness of a work through contemplation of its form and content. In this manner, in film appreciation we examine the form and the content of the film, and whether these stand in a relation of satisfying appropriateness to one another. Form is important in weak formalism because of the type of relationship it can develop with content. However, it should be noted that weak formalism, like strong formalism, begins with a description of the felt emotion rather than an account of what form is. And as I will argue later on, weak formalism also fails to provide a completely satisfactory explanation of what form is.

The explanatory value:

Both Eldridge and Danto, but also Noël Carroll in some of his work on formalism, argue that the most important element of weak formalism is its explanatory value in terms of art appreciation and criticism. Most notably in Eldridge's essay, there is an explicit effort to show how this theory truly makes sense of art. Specifically, Eldridge puts forth eleven points in order to illustrate how weak formalism effectively makes explicit what is

[13] Ibid., p. 98. It is important to note that in Danto's explanation 'forms of life' determine meaning, and consequently different 'forms of life' will ascribe different meanings and thus provide different value judgements. This historical understanding is diametrically opposed to Bell's, who, as I have shown in chapter three, argued that since art appreciation relies (or ought to rely) on formal properties alone, its value remains constant throughout the years, independently of how our understanding of content may change.

implicit in our practices. I will consider the three most significant ones, and the ones that seem most relevant to the study of cinema.

The first valuable explanation provided by weak formalism is that this account effectively explains how art evolves: as life and humanity progress new 'content' is created. Artists will strive to express this through artistic forms.[14] So, as long as humanity evolves, art will evolve and change with it, and artists will strive to capture the new content in a satisfyingly appropriate way.[15] This kind of evolution that Eldridge refers to has two parts; on the one hand we have new things to say, and on the other, our own sensibilities evolve and we may tire of certain formal repetitions and demand new alternatives.[16] For example, consider how films such as *Edtv* (1999) and *The Truman Show* (1998) tried to make sense of the increasing fascination with reality television programmes, or how westerns, musicals and film-noirs have fallen largely out of fashion.

Secondly, weak formalism proposes an explanation of why art matters to us. Both Eldridge and Carroll argue that when there is satisfying appropriateness between a certain form and content, "against the background of the history of forms and content", this matching makes new sense to us, i.e., we come to understand very clearly what is being expressed.[17] The potential of making new sense in this way is for Eldridge especially, plausibly important because it shows that there is always a possibility of making sense of the world and of one another. According to weak formalism then, the fact that form and content are related in such a manner has some psychological (and apparently comforting) significance for human beings. Furthermore, the fact that works with a satisfying appropriateness of form to content have such an emotional and psychological significance for us, explains how matters of taste are important in the way we make sense of (and relate to) one another. For instance, Eldridge suggests that

> "[t]he fact that our feelings are invested in meaningful objects, because of the forms of those objects, accounts for the sense of both deep understanding of

---

[14] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 246, Carroll, Noël, 1999, p. 129.

[15] Furthermore, apart from exploring new content, each era looks back to the past and, through art, tries to understand, learn, reconstruct, preserve and remember it. As such, the past will always provide us with new content. At any rate, some historical themes seem to intrigue us so much that Hollywood still finds ways of telling gladiator stories.

[16] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 247

[17] Ibid., p. 247-248; see also, Carroll, Noël, 1999, p. 129. Selma Kraft has also made a similar suggestion, claiming that, "when an artist introduces a new subject within the limits of a stylistic framework, he/she is adding new insight into a general area of meaning" (Kraft, Selma, 1986).

> one's interlocutors and unbridgeable alienation from them that can sometimes inhabit conversations about works of art".[18]

So, the way we respond to art will determine the way we respond to other people, and provide the potential to make sense of them and communicate.

But there is a moral and political side to art. In Eldridge's conception in particular, artistic expressiveness depends upon the following aspects: form, semantic content and the attitude that seems to be expressed towards this particular semantic content. When these three are "satisfyingly appropriate to one another, the work in which they are embodied is *artistically* expressive and a work of art".[19] For Eldridge, if in a work of art there is a certain attitude developed potently, namely, if the artist has found a satisfying match between form, content and attitude, then this attitude might influence us to such an extent that we may adopt it in our own lives. As he argues,

> "[w]orks of art, through the appropriateness to one another of their forms and contents, can bring us to feel that it is appropriate to regard certain phenomena—including such things as human actions or political systems or social policies—with horror or exultation, and such feelings can be politically important".[20]

Because art can influence people to such a degree, communities often find it necessary to restrict and censor many works of art. This is possibly the cause for the existence of the British Board of Film Classification.

However, Eldridge goes on to argue that in cases where some attitude is enforced upon the work, for example with propaganda, the attitudes expressed do not appropriately match the form and the content of the work, and this imbalance causes artistic problems.[21] In such cases, the artistic value of the work is minimised because the artist will try to fit an added attitude or worldview to the work and thus hinder his/her artistic expression,

---

[18] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 248. Although Eldridge in the paragraph where this quote is taken from discusses why art matters to us and how it affects our lives, this quote on its own could be seen as being solely about how we relate to each other regarding matters of taste, but not generally. What I think Eldridge has in mind here is that the sense of 'deep understanding' and 'unbridgeable alienation' is not restricted only to matters of taste, although it begins from there, but somehow shapes all other types of interaction as well.

[19] Ibid., p. 251

[20] Ibid. Consider, for example, cases where films were censored or banned because the content was thought to be both inappropriate and have the capacity to influence people's beliefs or even lives, such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Crash* (1996/I) in England.

[21] Ibid.

namely, the "representer declaims or harangues or panders, rather than expressing himself artistically".[22] As such, the work may fail to influence us to an extent that an artistic achievement would. But this does not seem to be true for all cases. *Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944) was produced as a propaganda film, trying to encourage the American public to make more sacrifices for the war effort. *Casablanca* (1942) was also considered a propaganda film, its main aim being to inform the American public about the causes of war and the need for action. It would be a difficult, if not impossible, enterprise to show that *Casablanca* is an artistic failure because of the attitude expressed towards the content of the film. In this case the filmmaker has found an appropriate match between form, content and attitude. So, Eldridge is probably mistaken in assuming that an external view will necessarily damage the artistic expression of a work. Rather, it seems that an external attitude can be expressed towards the content in a manner that will seem perfectly suitable with the rest of the artistic expression, and will not create this imbalance.

The third point that manifests weak formalism's explanatory value is that it effectively explains aspects of art criticism. As Carroll also suggests, it provides a comprehensive account of how critics and audiences alike try to understand the effect an artwork has on them, by going back and forth from its form to its content, from our interpretation to the work's formal structures, from what is being said to how it is being said.[23] For Eldridge as well, these kinds of interpretations and formal analyses

> "aim at accounting for a work's effect on us, its satisfyingness or its ability to give us the sense that it is true...to show that the content of a work...and its form...are appropriate to one another in such a way that it is clear that the content has been rightly captured".[24]

In short, the way we appreciate art is bound up, determined by our apprehension of the relation between form and content. So, when critics look at a film, they examine features such as what the film is about and how this is presented, or how the meaning is grasped. For instance, a critic could argue that in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1977) in the scene

---

[22] Ibid.
[23] Carroll, Noël, 1999, p. 130
[24] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 248

where Woody Allen and Diane Keaton are flirting on the terrace, the content, namely, the awkwardness and uneasiness such situations have, has been satisfyingly captured by the form, that is, the subtitles that show what the two protagonists are really thinking. Alternatively, in the film *Amen.* (2002), one of the most important themes of the film, that is, the valuable time wasted by the political indecisiveness of the Vatican during World War II, is presented in a most appropriate manner in scenes where trains are shown travelling through Europe, first full with the doors closed, and then empty with the doors open. In both cases the meaning of the film, or of the scene, is captured in a most appropriate manner. In other words, we value these films or scenes because of the appropriateness of the relationship between form and content. This point will be further elaborated in chapter six.

To conclude, the weak formalist thesis indeed offers a number of important explanations as to why art matters. Firstly, it explains how art develops and the way artists will strive to create their work. Secondly, it elucidates why content is important to art through its relationship with form, and how, through this relationship, art can play an important role in our lives, which affects our attitudes and understanding of life and the world. Lastly, it can provide the aesthetics of cinema with a quite comprehensive account that explains the role of form in films through this type of relationship. By endorsing the weak formalist claim, the aesthetics of cinema can explain why and how form is particularly significant, and its contribution to the 'power of movies'. This explanation seems to suit the demands of the aesthetics of cinema much better than the strong formalist suggestion. In chapter six I will continue outlining the way weak formalism can aid the aesthetics of cinema to explain the role and importance of form in films.

Objections and Criticisms:

I will turn now to the major problems of weak formalism. My discussion will be divided into two parts. The first concerns the way the criterion of satisfying

appropriateness is put forth as a necessary requirement for all art. The second concerns three of the most fundamental notions of the weak formalist thesis: form, content and their satisfying appropriateness.

To begin with, what seems potentially wrong in Eldridge's view especially is his claim for sufficiency. The aesthetic quality he describes is postulated as both necessary and sufficient for a thing being art. This means that any object that exhibits this quality is a work of art. It can be argued, however, that other objects that we would not normally call works of art possess this aesthetic quality. For instance, what is it that makes *Finnegan's Wake* a work of art and this text a mere thesis? One of the reasons Eldridge provides is that works of art have content. But, supposedly, so does this text. Eldridge would probably argue then, that what makes Joyce's book art is the satisfaction we derive (assuming we are patient and competent readers) from the appropriateness of its form to its content, of what it says with how it says it. Yet, what if this thesis included an argument where its meaning matched the way it was presented so well so as to produce this peculiar kind of satisfaction after critical investigation? Would it be then a work of art? In other words, a point made in a text, that we would not normally call art, might be expressed in such a way that the meaning will have been perfectly (perhaps even beautifully) captured.

Alternatively, perhaps a logical or mathematical proof might appear to a logician or a mathematician as embodying its meaning in a satisfyingly appropriate manner, as if the form, in such a case the proof, captures the content beautifully.[25] It has even been suggested that synthetic organic chemistry often resembles an art form, since when a chemist prepares a complex molecule, often the techniques used are not rule based but rather more intuitive and experience based; as such, the chemist makes a guess, based on his professional experience, as to how the molecule will behave and proceeds accordingly. But what the chemist is in fact doing is examining the structure of the molecule (its form), and determining when it will be appropriate to the function of the

[25] Carroll makes a similar kind of observation, and argues that even the real Brillo Box embodies its meaning: "[r]eal Brillo Boxes have a subject—Brillo—about which their carefully chosen iconography communicates something: that Brillo is clean, bright, modern, and then it is associated with freshness, dynamism, and liveliness" (Carroll, Noël, 1997, p. 387). So, in this case even the real Brillo Box embodies what it is about. In terms of marketing this is certainly both satisfying and appropriate.

molecule (what it is about).[26] So, the end of the preparation is determined when, for the organic chemist, the complex molecule's structure will be satisfyingly appropriate to what this molecule is about. If Eldridge's suggestion is true, then in some sense this complex molecule could be classified as art. In conclusion, it seems that the way the point, the proof and the complex molecule *are* may affect us (after critical investigation) in a way that seems somewhat similar, if not identical, to Eldridge's description of an experience of a work of art. As such, there may be a number of objects that possess this peculiar and complex aesthetic quality that Eldridge is describing, which would not usually be classified as art.

Eldridge, however, from the beginning of his essay, acknowledges the importance of context and category. He accepts that in order to have an aesthetic experience, one must be fully aware of contexts, that is, know of the relevant context and "be patient in the contextual study of things".[27] So, following Eldridge's suggestion, I know that this is a thesis and not a work of art because of the relevant contextual knowledge I have as a member of this community. But does this answer the whole objection? It answers it in terms of the way we go about identifying works of art; we know in what category-context to look at and expect aesthetic experiences. It falls short, however, of establishing that the experience of appropriateness is the identifying mark of art, what is unique to art, a sufficient condition for art.

But there are further problems. For, whereas Danto's claim about the two necessary conditions for a thing being art escapes the above criticism, there is a related problem that his, and Eldridge's, views have to address. Surprisingly enough, this objection is rooted in Danto's own early philosophy.[28] One of his main pursuits, especially in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and 'The Artworld', was to understand how it is that two identical objects can have different aesthetic qualities.[29] For, how is it that Warhol's Brillo Box is a work of art, and the real Brillo Box is not?

---

[26] Maria-Nefeli Tsaloglou and Dr. Marcus Dymond of the Chemistry Department, University of Southampton, helped me in developing this example. On the nature of organic chemistry and its 'art' status, see Rüker, Christoph, Rüker, Gerta and Steven H. Bertz, 2004.
[27] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 244
[28] Carroll discusses this in Carroll, Noël, 1997.
[29] Danto, Arthur C., 1981 and 1995

What makes Warhol's Brillo Box a work of art and the other one a mere object is, according to (early) Danto, an artworld (Warhol being part of it) that "takes the work up into the world of art and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is".[30] Hence, the one condition that allows us to distinguish something as art is an artworld. In other words, we know the Brillo Box at the supermarket is just a mere object not because it does not embody its meaning, but because Warhol did not present it at a gallery, at a certain period in time and so forth. Whether or not a work of art embodies its meaning appears as an irrelevant feature. Furthermore, if we accept Carroll's claim mentioned in footnote 25, that even the real Brillo Box embodies its meaning, then it follows that, only the idea of an artworld can explain why the one is art and the other is not. Thus, again, Danto's later claim, assuming early Danto was right, seems to be insufficient for a full-fledged definition of art, since it leaves out the condition of an 'atmosphere of art theory', which was named a necessary condition for a thing's being art.

The only thing that seems to remedy Danto's claim is that when he discusses the content of artworks, what they are about, he suggests that the difference between a work of art and its real counterpart is that the 'experts' see that the work of art has a meaning, and that it embodies this meaning.[31] In this sense, Danto finds a way of including the artworld in his understanding of content. So, the meaning of a work and our ability to understand this meaning will always be dependent on whether these 'experts' will manage to see and understand this meaning.

To conclude, it seems that in both Eldridge and Danto's accounts of weak formalism, their claims are not always sufficient to provide an umbrella definition of art. It is interesting to note that both theorists make certain claims that hinder their central views. As I argued in Danto's case, this hindrance may be a result of his early work. In Eldridge's case, this can be noticed where he states that,

> "[w]hat must be shown is that this heterogeneity is only apparent, or, better, that underlying some genuine heterogeneity there are common ways of interpreting and appreciating a great many (*though not necessarily all*) of the things called art".[32]

---

[30] Ibid., 1995, p. 210
[31] Ibid., 1997, p. 195
[32] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 243 (my emphasis).

In this manner, Eldridge weakens his original claim, i.e., that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is indeed a necessary and sufficient requirement for all art. In this sense, it is misleading to suggest that Danto and Eldridge are whole-heartedly trying to account for all art. Rather, it seems that although their suggestion has the form of an overall account of art, they are much aware of the limitations of their views.

The second criticism that can be raised against weak formalism concerns the fundamental features upon which this theory stands. These can be divided in the three conditions that weak formalism puts forth: the form, the content and their satisfying appropriateness. Firstly, there needs to be some clarification about the type of relationship that exists between form and content. As Beardsley has asked, "can there be a connection between design and subject that unifies them with each other, and if so, how is it to be analyzed?".[33] For Beardsley, and rightly so, for the subject and the design (his version of form and content) to have a relationship, such as one of appropriateness, they have to be independent of one another. That is, we must be able to understand them as independent so as to be able to judge whether they are appropriate or not. For example, Beardsley argues that it is one thing to say that a man's weight is appropriate to his height, where the notion of appropriateness would seem right, and another to say that his weight is appropriate to his mass or volume, where appropriateness would seem almost irrelevant; for their relationship cannot be inappropriate, since the one is dependent on the other; the weight of the man determines his mass.[34] Accordingly, if the relationship between form and content can have the potential to be appropriate or not, then form and content must be independent of one another. But according to weak formalism, and especially Danto's (more Hegelian) understanding, form is the embodiment of content, that is, there can be no form if there is no content, and vice versa. In this case, the one is dependent on the other; that is, the one determines the other, very much in the same way that the man's weight determines his mass. As such, the most fundamental condition of weak formalism seems to be something unattainable: the form and the content of a work cannot, by virtue of the nature of their relationship, be judged as appropriate or

[33] Beardsley, Monroe C., 1981, p. 294
[34] Ibid.

inappropriate. This is a problem that strong formalism, by fundamentally separating form from content, escapes.

This particular problem, however, is avoided in Eldridge's version of weak formalism, since he argues that, "which forms and contents are satisfyingly appropriate to one another depends upon which contents are ascribed to things and the ascribing of contents to things is *not* causally determined".[35] Hence, if contents are *ascribed* to forms, rather than determined by them, their relationship is not co-dependent but sufficiently independent so as to allow weak formalism to assert that content is or not appropriate to form. It might be preferable to maintain this understanding of the relationship between form and content so as to be able to use weak formalism in the study of cinema coherently. I will continue discussing the relationship of form and content in chapter six.

What also needs to be more explicitly determined is exactly what satisfying appropriateness amounts to. Both Danto and Eldridge remain somewhat vague at this point, relying on an implicit understanding of satisfying appropriateness that will materialise through examples or illustrations. In other words, that it will be shown rather than told by critics or philosophers. But even if we follow this principle, there seems to be a different problem. For both Danto and Eldridge the distinguishing mark of art is the experience of the satisfying appropriateness of the work's form to its content. So, if (assuming we experience the work in whatever a suitable or appropriate manner may be) we do not experience this kind of satisfaction, then the work in front of us is not a work of art. Here, similarly with Bell's theory, the distinction between good and bad art is lost, since an object can be either satisfyingly appropriate, in terms of the relationship between its form and content, and thus a work of art, or, its form and content are not satisfyingly appropriate and the object is not art.

What could be argued here to maintain this distinction is that in a bad work of art the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is simply of a lesser degree than that of a good work of art. Yet, if we accept the premise that satisfying appropriateness is a matter of degrees, then we have to question how to measure it. Eldridge's suggestion is that

---

[35] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 246-247

'degrees' is both a 'real' and a 'fuzzy' concept.[36] Furthermore, since aesthetic experiences 'are socially mediated', that is, they (and most especially content) depend on forms of life, then within a particular form of life there will be some shared understanding of what this notion of degrees is, and we will know, as members of this community, how to measure satisfying appropriateness.[37] For example, it could be said that François Truffaut's *La Nuit Américain* (1973) is better than his *Conjugal Domicile* (1970) , equal to *Jules et Jim* (1962) but inferior to *Les 400 Coups* (1959).

There seems to be, however, something problematic with this view. A bad work of art is one that has less satisfying appropriateness than a good work of art. This means that although it has satisfying appropriateness it is nevertheless bad art. But it would seem more sensible to argue that bad works of art *lack* satisfying appropriateness of any degree.[38] According to weak formalism, however, a work with no satisfying appropriateness is not art, since for something to be considered art there has to be an experience of satisfying appropriateness. It is one thing to say that a works' form and content are not as satisfyingly appropriate as another's, where the notion of degrees would seem right, and an other to say that a work is not satisfyingly appropriate and thus not art. In other words, according to this view we seem to be saying that a work with no satisfying appropriateness is not simply a bad work of art but not an art object at all. But there could be cases where the form is not satisfyingly appropriate to the content, but we would still want to insist that the object is a work of art, but simply a bad one. For instance, in examining the work *An Oak Tree* by Michael Craig-Martin, one could argue that the content of the work—according to the artist, the oak tree—has not been captured by the form of the work, the half empty glass of water on the white self, in a satisfyingly appropriate manner. In such a case it is more reasonable to argue that this work is a bad work of art rather than a non-art object (especially by following the principles of the institutional theory of art). It seems then, that weak formalism, by naming the experience of satisfying appropriateness the identifying characteristic of art, does not allow for a

---

[36] Ibid., p. 252

[37] Eldridge, so as to clarify matters more, makes an analogy with the degrees of education people have: good and bad art is analogous to well and badly educated people (ibid.).

[38] Carroll also reaches a similar conclusion concerning weak formalism in Carroll, Noël, 1999, p. 134.

distinction between good and bad art, making it impossible to classify works where no satisfying appropriateness is present as art.

The second fundamental problem that weak formalism faces concerns the way content is understood. For Danto in particular, content, i.e., meaning, theme, aboutness, is inseparable from form. This means that there can be no art without content. But it could be argued that not all art has content; that is, not all art seems to be about something. For example, it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact meaning, in terms of content, or aboutness, or theme, of some abstract paintings.[39] Furthermore, what we admire and what affects us in a Kandinsky painting might have nothing to do with a possible meaning the painting embodies, but, as strong formalists would suggest, with its design and its combination of colours and space. Art may be designed simply to delight the eye, to produce a certain effect, to be pleasurable.[40] For instance, it can be maintained that we value most of Rothko's paintings because of the combinations and intensity of their colours and not for some theme or meaning they embody, that is, if they embody any meaning.[41] If this is true, then Danto could end up arguing that Rothko's paintings are not works of art because they do not have content, which would seem as a problematic conclusion.

Danto, considering this objection, suggests that all artworks have 'aboutness' simply because we can sensibly ask what they are about, even if they are not about anything. Yet as Peter Kivy has objected, we can ask this question for a number of things, including this thesis, which is not art.[42] But Danto goes a step further and argues that what is unique in art is that the relationship between artistic form and content includes the way the medium is manipulated by the artist.[43] In this explanation, the way the medium is used becomes part of the content. So, whereas in this thesis we can only

---

[39] Kivy makes a similar point, arguing that absolute music does not have content. See, Kivy, Peter, 1997, p. 86.
[40] For a similar view, see Carroll, Noël, 1999, p. 131
[41] I hasten to add that whether or not Rothko's paintings embody any kind of meaning is a subject open to debate. See for example, Goldblatt, David, 1984 and Kraft, Selma, 1986.
[42] Kivy, Peter, 1997, p. 117
[43] Danto, Arthur C., 1981, p. 147-148. Even Kivy makes the same point in his work on profound music, claiming that the content of music, what it is about, is "the possibilities of musical sound itself" (Kivy, Peter, 1995, p. 250). In this respect, the medium of music becomes part of (or the whole of) the content.

say that this form has expressed this content, in art we have to account for the artist's use of the medium as well.

But this can also be true of other things. For example, as Gillian Rose explains, Post-Colonial theorist Homi Bhabha's opaque and obscure style of writing, his refusal to systematise or/and clarify his manner of argumentation, that is, his idiosyncratic use of the medium of language, is designed to bring to the surface how writing has the capacity to "articulate and constitute diverse subject position(s)".[44] According to Bhabha, how you write, how you use this particular medium, is also a matter of power and representation and not to be taken lightly. Bhabha through the use of his chosen medium is not only writing, but also performing his own subjectivity.[45] In order to understand and fully appreciate Bhabha's text we need to account for the use of the medium. It could be concluded then, there can be in non-art objects a preoccupation with the medium that one can, and possibly should, consider. Consequently, Danto's amendment does not seem to improve things.

Eldridge tries to answer this objection by arguing that although there are artworks that appear meaningless, their structures affect us in such a way that we are enabled to reflect upon the way we are moved, and the nature of our sensibilities. In Eldridge's account, in an abstract painting for example, there can be a matching between the structures of the work and the 'capacities of the audience'. That is,

> "[a]ttempts to produce significant works of music and abstract painting are plausibly construed as attempts to discover the structures of sound and colour capable of absorbing sensibility in its current state, and success in such attempts as making such a discovery".[46]

Thus, the content of these works becomes our own sensibilities, our own capacities for such a type of appreciation. Does this explanation make sense of all the works that seem without content? It could be maintained that an object may be created just to excite our senses, such as a piece of dance music that develops its whole structure around its rhythm

---

[44] Rose, Gillian, 1995, p. 366-7. For Bhabha's work see, Bhabha, Homi, 1990.
[45] Rose, Gillian, p. 367. It may be asked, why in the previous example of an argument within this thesis language seems to play the role of form, whereas in this example it seems to be the medium of Bhabha's work? As I mentioned in chapter two, language is often referred to as both form and medium. I rely on this double use in order to make these points.
[46] Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 247

and beat, and nowhere do we pause to contemplate our sensibilities towards this music. According to weak formalism this would not be a work of art.

What should be recognised, however, is that weak formalism, by broadening the way content is understood, i.e., by including 'what it is about', the way the medium is used and our own sensibilities as art audiences, allows for a wide variety of works of art to be included in the definition. This would not be the case if the notion of content was restricted to only one of these interpretation. As such, weak formalism manages to find some balance and not become too restrictive as an account of art.

The last problem of this theory I wish to mention here is the account of form. Firstly, form in Danto's understanding means the embodiment of meaning, the mode of presentation of content, of aboutness. But it is problematic to argue that there can be no form if there is no meaning. For example, a film that would show geometrical patterns, with no story line, or indication that these patterns mean anything, seems to have form but possibly no content. Again, it is only if we open up the notion of content that Danto's suggestion can be understood.

Yet, as with Bell's theory, there is a further problem. Although form was extensively discussed in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, in weak formalism, form, like content, seems to be a broad notion that allows for a plethora of elements to be considered formal. It appears that weak formalism, as did strong formalism in the previous chapter, begins its inquiry with the experience of art—the felt emotion—and never attempts systematically to examine what form is. For example, in Eldridge's essay the notion of form includes cadences, patterns of orchestration, rhythm, amplitude, space, narration, plot, harmony, arrangements of colours, hue, intensity, complementarities, sound, words, lines and images.[47] According to this understanding, form can be both the materials used by the artist, such as the hues used, and the presentational aspects of the work, such as the sound, but also the relations between any of the materials and the artistic style in which something is done. This broadness does not *seem* to affect the way in which weak formalism is developed, because Danto and Eldridge, as Bell did before them, rely on a possibly common understanding we may have of form, as this has been understood in the

[47] Ibid., p. 246, 247, 250, 251

philosophy of art over the years, which makes it unnecessary to develop a stable definition of form. As I mentioned in chapter three and will argue in chapter five, however, it is not at all obvious what this common understanding of form is, and unlike content, it needs to be spelled out, since this will be a key notion in the aesthetics of cinema. Weak formalism, as with any other formalist theory, must have some explanation of what form is rather than depend on this allegedly common understanding. I hope to demonstrate why this is imperative in the next chapter.

Conclusion:

The purpose of these two chapters has been to investigate formalist ideas in order to assist the aesthetics of cinema. More specifically, the aim was to find an explanation first of what form is, and second, what its role in art appreciation is. That is, how it affects or shapes our experiences of art, and to what extent it determines the value we place on artworks. The intention was to apply these ideas to the aesthetics of cinema, so that a better understanding of cinematic form, and its place and importance in film appreciation, could be developed.

To this end I examined two of the most important formalist understandings in the philosophy of art, strong and weak formalism, as these were outlined by Bell and Fry and Danto and Eldridge respectively. In examining strong formalism I concluded that, apart from the usually noted objections, this formalist perspective is mostly incompatible with cinematic practices, as demonstrated in the discussion of the nature of disinterested experiences and descriptive art. It was also argued that strong formalism fails to provide adequate explanations for the aesthetics of cinema, since it does not sufficiently determine what significant form is. However, the insight about the value form has on its own should not be so easily dismissed, and this I hope to show in chapter six.

Weak formalism, as outlined in this chapter, is, in parts, better fitted as a formalist perspective for the aesthetics of cinema. The type of explanation it provides in terms of the relationship between form and content, and whether some satisfying appropriateness is obtained, seems to make better sense of our cinematic practices, especially as

contrasted to strong formalism. Again, this point will be further elaborated in chapter six as it is an aspect I wish to explore further as an explanation of how we understand the position, significance, or even power of form in cinema. There needs to be some clarification, however, of how the criterion of satisfying appropriateness should be used in the aesthetics of cinema, since Eldridge and Danto fail to identify it successfully as the necessary and sufficient condition of all art. Furthermore, weak formalism, like strong formalism in the previous chapter, requires some further clarification of the notion of form. It becomes explicit at this point that this shared understanding of form—on which both types of formalism appear to fall back—needs to be explored. This will be the topic of the next chapter. Specifically, I will explain why it is very difficult to maintain an understanding of form common to all types of art, and furthermore suggest a possible definition of *cinematic* form.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CINEMATIC FORM

As I argued in the previous two chapters the formalist theories discussed so far are unable to provide us with a comprehensive formalist understanding of art, and consequently of cinema, which could be employed in the development of the aesthetics of cinema in this thesis. Strong formalism is mostly incompatible with the study of cinema, and is also unable to explain the central issues of the aesthetics of cinema, that is, what form is, and its artistic value. Furthermore, although weak formalism includes some very interesting suggestions, it nevertheless faces a number of problems as identified in the previous chapter. As such, I concluded that the aesthetics of cinema could not simply adopt a formalist theory from the philosophy of art. Rather, a tailor-made one is needed, but one that could rely on some of the principles of weak formalism. This, which I will refer to as cinematic formalism, will be the focus of the rest of the thesis. Specifically, in this chapter I will first show why there is no unified common understanding of form that can easily be adopted and applied in a formalist, or any other kind of, theory. Secondly, I will outline an understanding of cinematic form. So, in contrast to strong and weak formalism, I will begin the discussion of cinematic formalism with an account of form, and then proceed, in chapter six, to elaborate its function and significance in films. Outlining a lucid understanding of form will provide a good basis upon which cinematic formalism can develop.

The many sides of form:

The most common understanding of form in the philosophy of art, as I suggested in chapter two, is as half of the distinction between form and content. But, as I have also shown through the discussion of strong and weak formalism, even this type of understanding can have different interpretations depending on each theorist's perspective. In these cases the philosophical use of the term form can teach us a variety of interpretations. Yet, it could be maintained that we do have a common understanding of what form is, and the divergence is only on the significance of form in art, and how form relates to other elements of a work, and content in particular. I will show in what follows

that it is not clear what this common understanding is, since philosophers of art have used the term 'form' in very diverse ways.

What does 'form' mean? The word form, even outside the world of aesthetics, can have many different meanings; for example, in the *Oxford English Dictionary* the following definitions are included: "the visible aspect of a thing", "the shape or figure of the body as distinguished from the face", "abstractly considered as one of the elements of the plastic arts", "style of dress", "the particular character, nature, structure, or constitution of a thing; the particular mode in which a thing exists or manifests itself", "grade or degree of rank, quality, excellence, or eminence; one of the classes forming a series arranged in order of merit, official dignity, proficiency in learning", "orderly arrangement of parts, regularity, good order; also, military formation", "style of expressing the thoughts and ideas in literary or musical composition", "a formulary document with blanks for the insertion of particulars" and so forth.[1]

Despite this variety, however, it might be argued that within an aesthetic context it is perfectly clear what form refers to; we know what we mean when we speak of the form of a work of art, as we know what we mean when we refer to the form of cinema. For instance, we all know that the form of cinema has something to do with the design or appearance of a film. After all, there must be some way we make sense of each other's assertions about form. Although I agree that up to a certain point the word form can be used without any further explication, within the philosophy of art it has been used in so many different ways that a common, shared understanding should not be assumed. For example, Bell argued that *significant* form (i.e., the form that affects us aesthetically) is a matter of combinations of space, lines and colours, whereas a number of philosophers after him, such as Susanne Langer, D. W. Gotshalk and Monroe Beardsley argued that mere form (i.e., independently of its aesthetic capabilities) consists of combinations of elements such as space, lines or colours, or the web of relations that exists in any given work.[2] Other philosophers, such as Thomas Munro, have suggested that form is a matter of organisation or arrangement, the way the work is presented, while Max Rieser,

---

[1] *Oxford English Dictionary*, on-line edition,
[2] Langer, Susanne K., 1953, p. 51, Beardsley, Monroe C., 1981, p. 166-7, Gotshalk, D. W., 1953, p. 196

complicating matters, claimed that form can be a understood as a function of content, and even that content is the raw material of form.[3] Additionally, another source of confusion results from whether colour is part of the form of an object. If, for instance, form is understood as shape, then it excludes colour, but if it is understood as appearance, then colour is included. This problem even has practical dimensions. For example, in 1985 there was great debate in the Greek House of Parliament about whether colour was in fact a formal property.[4] The question arose when in a Parliament voting session for the President of the Republic, the governing party changed the voting paper from white to blue—where the blue paper was discernible through the envelope—in order to control the party members' vote, thus breaking Parliament regulations concerning the form of the ballot paper. The debate in the House turned to whether colour is included in a definition of form.

Furthermore, this variety of interpretations is an aspect that most philosophers of art working with form have noted at some point. For instance, Beardsley argues that there rarely is an adequate explanation in aesthetics of what form is; Weitz notes that form is an ambiguous term, its definition varying from shape, appearance or organisation, to mode of expression, ideal model and non-representational elements; Stolnitz claims that form as a concept resists definition; David Pole argues that form may be anything from the boundaries of content to its embodiment or the structure of the work; Roman Ingarden outlines nine possible definitions of form and content, and at the end suggests other terms so as to replace 'form' and 'content'; Reuben Abel argues that 'form' should be used in the philosophy of art as a verb rather than a noun; Arthur K. Moore suggests that even though there is such a variety of interpretations of form, the concept is rarely questioned in art criticism.[5] All these cases indicate that the common understanding of the strong and weak formalist theses is not only absent from the philosophy of art, but it is also a source of debate among philosophers of art.

---

[3] Munro, Thomas, 1943, p. 7, Rieser, Max, 1966, p. 20

[4] This example is from Zika, Fay, 1996.

[5] Beardsley, Monroe C., 1981, p. 165, Weitz, Morris, 1971, p. 354, Stolnitz, Jerome, 1960, p. 227, Pole, David, 1983, p. 81, Ingarden, Roman, 1960, p. 231-233, Abel, Reuben, 1972, p. 371, Moore, Arthur K., 1970, p. 21-22

The lack of a unified understanding of form is manifested, in modern philosophy of art, in the troubling use of the words form and style. Some philosophers, for instance Nelson Goodman, Noël Carroll and Selma Kraft, often use the word 'style' interchangeably with form, whereas others, like Arthur Danto and Peter Lamarque, do not.[6] The complication is that style, according to Carroll for example, can mean both the materials of the work and the way these materials are handled by the artist, whereas Danto, for example, distinguishes between the two and takes style to mean only the manner in which the artist will handle the material.[7] This distinction is drawn because style can mean something different from form. For example, style might be the way in which something is done, say, the abrupt editing of Eisenstein's films, while form can be understood as the appearance of something, for example the colours and sounds of a film. But how something is done, and its appearance, often seem to point to the same thing. For instance, abrupt editing can be understood as both 'how' a film is made, and the way it is, i.e., its appearance, that is, as an element of both form and style. After all, the way something is made will determine the way it is. Due to this confusion it becomes even more difficult to explain the common understanding of form, from which we can then easily infer what cinematic form is.

There is also a different problem. The reason why theses such as strong and weak formalism may avoid thoroughly explaining what form amounts to, is probably a consequence of the way these theories are constructed as umbrella explanations of all art. For example, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, weak formalists seem to be arguing that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is an essential characteristic of all art. So, form in their theory refers to the form of all arts. But it is very hard to give a single explanation of form that will make sense of so many diverse arts: from haiku poems to The Beatles, and from cave paintings to Tarkovsky films. Thus, formalists will prefer to rely on whatever a common understanding of form may be, rather than accommodate all the formal differences between the arts. Furthermore, there may be an

---

[6] Goodman, Nelson, 1978, Carroll, Noël 1997 and 1998 (b), Kraft, Selma, 1986, Danto, Arthur C., 1992, Lamarque, Peter, 1992

[7] Carroll, Noël, 1997, p. 253, Danto, Arthur C., 1981, p. 147

implicit assumption, as there is in Fry's theory, that form will be shown in art criticism rather than explained in theory. Fry's point will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Why is it so difficult to provide a single definition of form in art, however? The answer becomes clear if one considers in detail the differences between what could be named the form of each art. For example, in painting the formal properties can be the lines or shapes, whereas this needs to be qualified for novels. It may even be asked, is colour the same in paintings and in poetry or music? Is volume the same in painting and in literature? Does all visual art have the same formal features? If yes, how do we account for the obvious difference between static (painting) and moving (cinema) images? Furthermore, how is space a common formal characteristic when in the theatre it is three-dimensional and in paintings two-dimensional? Alternatively, one could argue that many modern artworks share their formal properties with a number of ordinary objects, such as bricks, cans, glasses of water, apples, Parisian air and so on. If form has the general aesthetic significance suggested by many formalist theorists, then an extra explanation is required as to how it is that Warhol's *Brillo Box* might affect/interest/intrigue us, and the one at the supermarket simply does not, when they do seem to share the same formal properties. As Danto suggests,

> "a work such as *Brillo Box* cannot obviously be distinguished, on formalist grounds, from the ordinary object it resembles: a photograph of Warhol among his boxes looks just like a photograph of a stock boy among the cartons in the stockroom...if there is to be a definition of art that fits contemporary art...it has to be consistent...with the possibility that artworks and mere objects can resemble one another to any degree whatever".[8]

Overall, this plurality and diversity between formal characteristics of different kinds of art seems to pressure philosophers to avoid clear-cut explanations of what form in art is. As Beardsley argues, in order to maintain a single concept of form for all the arts, "the concept has to be watered down to the point where you aren't saying much".[9] By using the word in such a broad manner, the differences of the form of each kind of art *seem* to dissolve.

---

[8] Danto, Arthur C., 1999, p. 8
[9] Beardsley, Monroe C., 1986, p. 200

To conclude, it is very difficult to pinpoint an exact and common interpretation of form in the philosophy of art. Not only have philosophers of art used it in a plethora of ways, the very variety of art forms that exist renders the possibility of having a single definition of form very slim. Given this variety, the idea that there is in fact a common understanding of form, through which we can understand what cinematic form is, becomes very hard to support. But, assuming that there is no common interpretation of form in the philosophy of art, what do we mean when we refer to cinematic form?

The following needs to be considered: it might be best to focus the study of form on individual arts. That is, to understand what form is in respect to each art form. In this way 'form' will not, by necessity, have to be an empty concept so as to make sense of all kinds of art. But does this deny a common meaning of form? For example, Beardsley has claimed that it may be possible to maintain some consistency of the notion of form between the arts.[10] According to Beardsley, it can be argued that unity, for him a formal property, is the same for music and painting. Despite this, he concludes that there are no absolute guidelines that show which formal properties are in fact common, and how many of them are enough to demonstrate in a conclusive manner that there is a common definition of form. In order to maintain that form is the same in two different art forms, the formal properties that exhibit this must be carefully decided upon, and the most clear-cut cases chosen.[11] As such, although there may be some room to argue that form in some cases refers to the same aspects of different arts, as with unity, more often than not it is better to assume that we are referring to different things; for example, we cannot speak of the colours of a painting and of the colours of a book as if they are the same thing. So it is preferable (if not least for clarity) to discuss cinematic form alone here without assuming that this understanding of form is true for all other art forms as well.

A question that arises, however, is whether there still is a possibility of maintaining a single aesthetic theory of form. If we have to discuss the form of each individual art separately, and form is every time something quite different, then can we still refer to a formalist 'theory of art', or do we *by necessity* have to refer to formalist

---

[10] Beardsley, Monroe C., 1986, p. 201
[11] Ibid.

'theories of arts'? That is, does the fact that the form of each art could be potentially different, mean that there can be no single formalist theory of all art? What may be argued is that there could still be a single formalist theory of art, but one that would remain noticeably empty until a specific art form was discussed. In such cases, the argument that form somehow shapes our responses in one particular kind of way, although it can still be considered true for all works of art, remains significantly empty (and maybe even vague) until we talk of the form of some specific art. Whether there are any benefits of proposing a single theory for all art, or if this is even tenable, is a different question.[12] Talking about specific forms, however, such as cinematic form, does not foreclose the possibility for a blanket formalist theory of art. The nature of cinematic formalism presented here will be more fully discussed in the next chapter.

But where is the line drawn? Is the form of each individual film so distinct that we cannot talk about the form of cinema either? Do we have to limit discussion to the form of each individual film? This seems to be the next logical step one has to take.[13] Deborah Knight also argued in her article 'Philosophy of Film, or Philosophies of Film?' that in the philosophical study of film it might be better to opt for a 'philosophy of films', or even better, for 'philosophies of films'.[14] Although it is true that the issue becomes clearer when we talk, for instance, about how a filmmaker will use the camera in a particular film, I will argue later on in this chapter that there still remains a possibility of outlining the formal properties of cinema as an art. This I intend to make further explicit in the last two chapters of the thesis, where I will provide an analysis of cinema form.

To conclude, in the aesthetics of cinema developed here, my concern is only with the form of cinema and the arguments and ideas presented from this point onwards will concern only cinema. For, as I have suggested, generalisations will only damage what good there might be in the idea of form. By applying smaller units of explanation, confusion could be avoided and the significance of form articulated. In what follows I

---

[12] See for example, Weitz, Morris, 1995.

[13] John Passmore in his essay 'The Dreariness of Aesthetics' makes a similar kind of suggestion, arguing that the study of aesthetics should be centred on "an intensive special study of the separate arts...but [with] much respect for real differences between the *works of art themselves*" (Passmore, John A., 1954, p. 55 (my emphasis)).

[14] Knight, Deborah, 2004, p. 151

will provide an account of cinematic form that will take into consideration the concerns mentioned so far, and explain what cinematic form refers to. This will be the first step in the development of cinematic formalism.

Cinematic form:

What is it we refer to when we speak of cinematic form? Two matters have been particularly noticed. The first, as Munro suggested, is that the form of cinema seems to be far more complex than that of other visual arts, so an explanation just in terms of lines, colours and space will not suffice.[15] In particular, given the temporal length of a film and the vast succession of shots, as opposed to a painting for example, its form will be comprised of a number of properties that need to be considered. As such, an explanation of cinematic form needs to go into some detail so as to do justice to this complexity.

The second, as Sesonske has observed, is that as film viewers in general we seem to lack an awareness of cinematic form,

> "[w]hat we lack, largely, is a sense of form in our film viewing, an awareness of the way characters and events that hold our attention are sustained and strengthened, or weakened, by the underlying formal structures of the film".[16]

This for Sesonske is mostly because we do not as yet have an adequate vocabulary with which we can discuss and understand the form of cinema.[17] Of course this lack of vocabulary has been somewhat remedied since 1971, mostly because of the work done by philosophers of cinema such as Sparshott, Sesonske and Khatchadourian, but also film theorists like Noël Burch. However, because most of these pursuits have been neglected since the early 1980s (with the exception of some of Carroll's work), there is still room for improvement and further articulation of what form in cinema amounts to.

Thus, in beginning a discussion of cinematic form, these two things will need to be considered: the length and complexity of most films which demands a notion of form

---

[15] Munro, Thomas, 1943, p. 16. Sesonske is also of a similar opinion, arguing that cinematic form has many levels and that a variety of distinctions can, and should, be made (Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 55-56).
[16] Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 55
[17] Ibid.

that will do justice to their nature; and the need to elaborate a vocabulary of form that will help explain what form is, and increase our awareness of its role in films. To do justice to these, it might prove best to break down the concept of form in cinema into the following: 'film form', which refers to the form of each individual film; 'cinema form', which refers to the form of cinema in general; 'cinematic form', which refers to both film form and cinema form. These will be explained in what follows.

My intention in this part of the thesis is *not* to find out why and how form is artistically valuable, how it contributes to the 'power of movies' and even its role in film appreciation. This will be the subject of chapter six. The sole purpose of the rest of this chapter is to understand what cinematic form *is*, what constitutes the form of a film or of cinema in general. It is not my goal here to determine how this might affect us and why. I will continue discussing this point later on in this chapter.

Film form:

In his article 'Film Form: an Argument for a Functional Theory of Style in the Individual Film', Noël Carroll makes a very interesting suggestion concerning what we mean by film form. He argues that the most common characterisation of the form of a film is that it is either unified or complex. This, according to Carroll, means that film form consists of parts and relations, which are "are basic ingredients of film form. When we make statements about the form of a film, we are speaking of relations between parts of the film".[18] From this he concludes that all the parts of a film—be these colours, sounds, volumes, characters, scenes or even representational elements, such as good or bad characters—and their relations, constitute the form of the film. Thus an account of film form would examine each film individually and provide a list of all the relations of the parts.

Carroll, however, is more interested in explaining the difficulties of defining form in the philosophy of art, and exploring the function of film form within films, than really

[18] Carroll, Noël, 1998 (b)

explaining what this list would look like. Although he provides a more thorough analysis of the role of form in cinema, discussed in later sections of this chapter and in chapter six, I will attempt to understand, by pushing Carroll's views forward, what exactly these parts and their relations amount to. So, what exactly should a list of film form include? This would of course depend on the film. For example, in a film such as *The Lord of the Rings* the list would have to include a vast number of elements and their relations, such as settings, costumes, editing, camera movements, actors, lighting, scene composition, make-up, computer animation, music, special effects and so forth. Derek Jarman's *Blue*, by contrast, would include just colour. Breaking down a film in sequences or even scenes, and examining them one by one so as to provide a more detailed and careful description, is the best way to conduct such an analysis. As a result, the exact nature of film form will depend on each individual film.

Hence, if Carroll's claim is endorsed, film form consists of the relations of the parts that make up the film. For example, if we apply this understanding of film form to the opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), a list of film form would, more or less, include the following: camera placed outside a group of actors sitting at a diner table, and moving circularly; description of the diner, in terms of actors, the clock and menu on the wall, windows, door, flowers, white board and the table the main characters are sitting at, of the costumes and colours worn by the actors: black suit, white shirt, black thin tie, blue sweatpants, rings and so on. What is interesting here is that through this manner of description, and this is something that Carroll does not seem to notice, it is possible to maintain a distinction between the formal elements, like the ones mentioned above, and content, for instance, whether these characters hold some moral integrity or not, or what the film is about, its meaning, theme or the ideas presented. If cinematic formalism—following some of the weak formalist principles—does endorse this understanding of film form, it needs to maintain this distinction in order to determine the kind of relationship that exists between the form and the content of a film. All these will be discussed in much more detail in chapter six.

An aspect of this understanding of film form that is important for the aesthetics of cinema is that by discussing the form of each individual film separately the aesthetics of

cinema can adopt a more practical perspective concerning form, since the nature of the form of a film will be mostly determined in the practice of film criticism and appreciation. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter and in chapter three, this type of approach is also apparent in Roger Fry's work who, by keeping his aesthetics a practical one, attempted to define form through his art criticism, that is, through practice. Fry best discusses this in his essay 'Some Questions in Esthetics'. What is intriguing in Fry's attempt is not the explanation he provides of either the 'aesthetic state of mind' or 'significant form' so much, but his effort to understand what form is through each painting he examines. To begin with, Fry argues that the form of a painting consists of its plastic relations that express the vision of the artist. He then develops two ways of talking about form; an account of what there is in each particular painting, other than what is represented, for example: shapes, lines, masses, figures, volumes, hollows, the relations of the main volumes to the whole space or how the space is divided, notions of wideness and narrowness, the contrast of light and shade, the possible accented contours, movements and their relations, the flowing rhythm and notions of symmetry and asymmetry. The other way is to examine these plastic relations; for example, "the striking silhouette", the "salience of the central figure firmly planted on his feet" or the "gloomy space on the left".[19] What is interesting in Fry's writings is that he discusses form principally through actual examples. A similar type of analysis could be achieved if film form is defined in the manner suggested above, that is, by putting emphasis on the actual examples, the films themselves, and thus gaining a more comprehensive understanding of form. So, by developing this sort of understanding of film form, a more practical perspective is adopted.

Points of Concern:

Two aspects of Carroll's understanding of film form appear somewhat puzzling. In particular, in what follows, first I will examine Carroll's interchangeable use of the

[19] Fry, Roger, 1968, p. 16-20

terms 'form' and 'style', and second I will determine the explanatory value of this type of understanding.

In the first case, it is noticed that Carroll uses the words form and style interchangeably.[20] For instance, he argues that we may "approach the style or form of the individual film as that which is expressive of its filmmaker's personality".[21] Here form and style point to the same aspect of the film. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, however, it is very difficult to distinguish between form and style. For instance, the style of a work, if understood as the type, sort or appearance of the work, is also the form, whereas if it is understood as the technique or approach used, or even in terms of fashion, it is plausibly different from form. Carroll in his work, however, does not seem to notice that there may be a difference, since he uses form and style interchangeably.

So, why does Carroll maintain a single definition of form and style? This is probably because of the definition of film form that he outlines, i.e., in terms of parts and relations. For example, he argues that in "the descriptive account, a formal or stylistic element of a film is anything that stands in some relation to another element".[22] But discussing relations, such as the relation of one colour to another, or one scene to another, means that we are also discussing the manner in which something is done, or even the technique used; this, however, would be the style of the work, as opposed to its form which could be defined in terms of the appearance of the work, such as the colours of the work, but with no reference to any sort of relations they hold. Again, as I mentioned before, it is very hard to maintain an absolute distinction between the two terms. It seems that Carroll's understanding of film form, in terms of the relations of the parts, must also include matters of style.

Yet, can there be no distinction? Can we not draw a line between the form and style of a film within this definition of film form/style, and, most importantly, do we need to draw a line? One way that seems possible, assuming that what binds form and style

---

[20] This kind of understanding is also evident in Selma Kraft's work. Specifically, she argues that, style in art consists of "the formal elements of line, colour, shape, texture, space, light...and the system of relationships...The style of a work of art is its form; the meaning is its content" (Kraft, Selma, 1986, p. 407).

[21] Carroll, Noël, 1998 (b), p. 4

[22] Ibid., p. 10

together is this understanding of the relations of the parts, is to isolate the parts from their relations. After all, a work with parts but no relations would be something conceivable in, say, a monochromatic painting, although Carroll argues that even in such a case the relation would be between the colour and the size of the canvas.[23] But if we focus this understanding of form only on cinema, what could count as an element with no relation? It appears that a film is indeed such a complex formal entity, even if it is of a minimalist tendency like *Blue*, that there are bound to be relations. For example, the editing process, one of the most characteristic aspects of cinema, is a matter of relations, of relating one scene with another. In a film like *Blue*, the relations would be between the colour and soundtrack.

If the parts are isolated from their relations, however, then, on the one hand, when referring to the form of the film we mean its parts, such as colours, the garments worn and the music. On the other hand, style refers to the relations that hold between these parts, such as the relations of colours, the relation between sound and image, or the kind of editing that exists between two scenes. According to this understanding the form of the film is the parts, and the style of the film the way these parts are related to each other. For instance, in the opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs* mentioned earlier, an analysis of film form would include the actors, objects and colours, but without specifying, for example, what spatial relations they hold, or in what relation they are to the camera. In this sense, the parts (actors, colours and objects) would be distinct from their relations. It should be noted, however, that in drawing such a distinction, caution must be taken when referring to the 'parts' of a film, since what constitutes these parts might be complex relations such as costumes, scenes and make-up. What is important in this type of analysis is to try and isolate, as much possible, parts that include no relations, for example, individual colours or objects.

Apart from plausibly separating the two in this manner, however, does this distinction make better sense of film form? It is noticed that by examining the relations as well we get a more complete picture of how the film is, since there is a description of both the parts and their relations. Thus, this suggestion does much justice to the complexity of films mentioned before. For this reason I think it is best to maintain the

---

[23] Ibid., 1999, p. 141

original conception discussed earlier, that is, that an examination of film form consists of an examination of both the parts and their relations. In this manner we gain the advantage of a more comprehensive account. However, this should be done with the acknowledgement that within this discussion of form the notion of style is also somewhat included. So, although this acknowledges the intertwined relationship of form and style, it does not ignore the fact that there can be a distinction, as the one proposed above, which should be recognised when possible.

The explanatory value of film form:

I turn now to the second point of concern I wish to discuss. According to Carroll this account of film form mentioned above is incomplete. As he argues, providing exhaustive lists of a film's formal properties, as it has been suggested, seems hardly necessary and is rarely the way we discuss form.[24] For example, there may be no reason to enumerate the windows of the house on the screen, or to describe the colour of a passer-by's hat. Carroll's solution to this is to suggest that there is in fact a principle of selection in our discussions of form in cinema. He argues that in film criticism, we select which formal properties to focus upon depending on their function, that is, on whether they serve or realise some point or purpose in the film.[25] It is this explanatory account of form, according to Carroll, that is important. As he claims, a film is a work that is designed to make points and have purposes, and where 'point' and 'purpose' include aspects, such as theme, point of view or feelings.[26] Thus, for Carroll, in our accounts of form in film criticism we discuss the sum of the formal choices in a film that function in a certain kind of way. He also argues that this understanding of film form is more complete because it helps us "explain why the individual film is the way it is", rather than

[24] Ibid., 1998 (b), p. 10
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p. 10, 11

simply provide an exhaustive list which does not really help in film criticism and appreciation.[27]

However, *contra* Carroll, I wish to maintain a conception of form in the sense discussed so far, and then proceed to understand why form is important and how. For, the original understanding of film form allows for a discussion of form that will not solely concentrate on how form functions within cinema and what its aesthetic potential is, as in the cases of strong and weak formalism outlined earlier. Rather, it provides a discussion of what form in a film *is*, providing a list of all formal properties of a film, which can then be used in any further analysis.[28] Beginning the analysis of form in this manner, however, will provide the aesthetics of cinema with a clear understanding of what form in film is, before beginning to explain why it matters, and whether form shapes in any way the 'power of movies'. By developing such an understanding of form, cinematic formalism, unlike strong and weak formalism, is allowed a thorough basis from which to conduct any further analysis and examination.

Film form, in terms of parts and relations that make up the film, is a tool that can be effectively used in discussing the nature of films, and cinema in general. Any explanatory value in terms of the role of form in film appreciation will depend on an extra explanation, which will be presented in the next chapter. Again, it should be stressed that film form as outlined here is nothing more than a list of parts and their relations. Although it provides us with an excellent and detailed basis on which we can construct any further analysis and discussion of the value, function or even significance of the form of a film, on its own it consists only of a list of the parts of a film and their relations. Thus, this account of film form simply, but fundamentally, allows us a primary understanding of form, which is needed for elaborating the nature and character of films,

---

[27] Carroll, Noël, 1998 (b), p. 12. Carroll's suggestion about the way form functions within a film will be discussed in chapter six.

[28] In addition, an analysis of film form in this manner does not include only formal properties that may illustrate some specific style or attitude, for example, the editing of Eisenstein's films, or the violent images of Sam Peckinpah's films. Carroll also questions this (ibid.). So, this understanding of film form does not propose to explain how a filmmaker will use the formal elements of a film so as to express his/her vision, how and why this use of film form is a valuable aesthetic contribution and the way it affects our appreciation of the film. This understanding of film form is simply a list of all the formal elements of the film, and permits a more incisive examination of what the form of the film is, without giving only one-sided accounts. Any further explanation and analysis will depend on what the person conducting this analysis chooses to concentrate upon.

and which can be effectively used in the discussion and application of cinematic formalism. But on its own it does not constitute a philosophical or explanatory position. It merely provides a basis for one.

In addition, by maintaining this original conception of film form some distinction is drawn between 'artistic' and 'aesthetic' form, that is, the general form of an object, and the potential of the form of the object to affect us aesthetically.[29] In general, formalist theories tend to fuse these two, arguing that if an object is a work of art, then by necessity its form will be aesthetic. For the aesthetics of cinema, as I suggested, there should be some distinction, and the understanding of film form outlined seems capable of maintaining this. This is very similar to a point made by Munro, who argued that 'artistic' form could be understood as a non-evaluative way of describing form. According to Munro, all works have 'artistic' form, but whether it is 'aesthetic' or not depends on each work.[30] As such, film form, as discussed so far, could be considered the 'artistic' form of cinema. In this way, form is first considered on its own, without being overshadowed by its function within the theory, i.e., irrespective of the function that it has in the film, or the way it realises points and purposes; form is considered for its own sake.

To conclude this discussion about film form, relying primarily on Carroll's original idea, I have sketched an explanation of what film form is. I have also suggested that there could be some—albeit rough—distinction between form and style, and that it is preferable to examine film form as 'artistic' form rather than 'aesthetic', i.e., separately from its aesthetic potential and the contribution it makes to the 'power of movies'. In this manner, film form will be sufficiently descriptive to allow for an explanation of form that does not rely on some function or relation to content as its embodiment, which as I have argued in the previous chapter can be problematic. In what follows I will examine whether there is some overall form of cinema. To this end I will introduce cinema form, that is, the basic form, if there is in fact any, of cinema. By developing such an understanding, the notion of form in cinema will become far more comprehensive by involving both film form and cinema form.

---

[29] This is also discussed in Dziemidok, Bohdan, 1993, especially in p. 189.
[30] Munro, Thomas, 1954, p. 322

Cinema form:

What is the form of cinema, that is, the form of this particular art, which holds true for all instances of this art? Sesonske provides a very helpful suggestion: cinema form should be thought of in terms of the "elemental stuff of the film, the flow of images...that fill our senses when we experience the film", that is, "the basic perceptual material", the "basic dimensions of our experience" of films.[31] According to Sesonske, and other aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s such as Sparshott and Khatchadourian, cinema form constitutes the formal framework of the film, the fundamental formal 'stuff', and the basis out of which films are constructed. But what is this elemental stuff of cinema? As it was suggested in chapter two: space and time, namely, the space and time of the cinematic image, the projected space and time.[32] Thus, apart from film form, the parts and their relations in a film, there are the basic formal properties of a film, in terms of its spatial and temporal categories.

What is interesting to note is that, as it was suggested in chapters one and two, in the work of the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s it is argued that, not only do space and time constitute the necessary formal characteristics of cinema, they are in fact unique to cinema, and thus differentiate cinema from other art forms.[33] This claim needs to be especially considered, since it outlines an explanation of what is formally distinctive in cinema, which the aesthetics of cinema requires. As I argued in the beginning of the thesis, the aesthetics of cinema aim to trace the specific formal nature of cinema, as this compares to other arts, determine what is peculiar about films and how they function through their form. As it was suggested in chapter one, the aesthetics of cinema should strive to explain if there is a distinct cinematic formal nature, and how this might contribute to their appeal. The aim is to understand the artistic difference between cinema and other arts, and explain the 'power of movies'. If cinema space and time are

---

[31] Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, p. 56

[32] The idea of space and time as a sort of underlying cinema form seems to echo Kant's claim, that space and time constitute the frame wherein we perceive and experience the world. Kant argued that it is only through them that we can perceive the world, and maybe it is only through cinematic space and time that we can perceive and understand cinema. See, Kant, Immanuel, 1970, especially the 'Transcendental Aesthetic'.

[33] I have elaborated this in chapter one.

indeed unique to cinema, and differentiate cinema, at least formally, from other arts, then it is important to examine them in detail.

Furthermore, comparing and contrasting arts in terms of their spatial and temporal categories is important because it's a process that explicates the differences between resembling arts, for example, any stage-based performance, such as theatre and opera, or comic strips and novels. Because these arts usually share the kind of dramatic form they present, such as narrative, action and character, the formal categories of space and time allow the possibility to compare these art forms in a more fundamental way, and better explain the artistic differences between them. For example, in comparing theatre and cinema, we can argue that the immediacy of the actors in the theatre creates a different kind of intensity than with the screen. This may be a reason why, in films, scenes of a more explicit sexual or violent nature are more tolerated, whereas this might be, more often than not, avoided in the theatre. Alternatively, as Peter Kivy has suggested, this difference between the spatial character of stage and screen is the reason why music is a very dominant feature in cinema. According to Kivy, the spatial absence of the actors makes their presence seem more 'ghost-like' and as a result this 'presence-absence' needs to be filled in by music.[34] Since cinema form holds such an important function for the aesthetics of cinema it needs to be examined separately and in some detail. So, what exactly are cinema space and time? Are they peculiar and necessary to films? All these require further elaboration.

What should be noted, however, is that in contrast to the ideas of most aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, my account of cinema form does not include movement. But why is this so? After all, the word 'cinema' originates from the Greek word *κίνησις*, meaning movement. Most aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s had extensively argued that movement, along with space and time, is a necessary formal aspect of cinema. As Carroll has observed, however, there are films where no movement is present;[35] for example, Oshima's *Band of Ninjas* (1967), Michael Snow's *One Second in Montreal* (1969) and *So is This* (1982), Hollis Frampton's *Hapax Legomena II: Poetic*

[34] Kivy, Peter, 1999, p. 318-319
[35] Carroll, Noël, 1995, p. 72-74

Justice (1972), Godard and Gorin's *Letter to Jane* (1972), Chris Marker's *La Jetée* and Derek Jarman's *Blue*.[36]

Given this observation, it can be concluded that since not all films exemplify movement, then unlike space and time, is not a necessary characteristic of cinema. As such, it could be argued that cinema simply has the potential for movement; i.e., it is just a technical possibility, and therefore should not be included in the account of cinema form. That it is just a potential, rather than a necessary characteristic, becomes manifest in the use of the freeze frame. When a filmmaker decides to use a freeze frame during a film (*Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997), *About a Boy* (2002)) we realise that the images need not be moving. Confusion may arise from the fact that most freeze-frames occur at the very end of films, e.g. *Les 400 Coups*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969). This suggests that in these cases the end of movement signifies the end of the film. That much is true. But this falls short of placing movement in the same category as space and time. Whether the images will be moving is just an artistic choice, whereas space and time, as I have claimed here but not as yet argued, seem to escape this characterisation.

Due to the extent of the analysis required for cinema form, which will be made clear in chapters seven and eight, in chapter six I will shift the discussion to the fundamental explanation of the role of form in our experiences of films. After this, in chapters seven and eight I will continue elaborating cinema form with the in-depth analysis required. Having concluded in chapter six the discussion of cinematic formalism, I will turn to a detailed examination of what cinema space and time are, and their role in cinema. In particular, my intention in chapters seven and eight is to examine the spatio-temporal matrix of films, in terms of the peculiarities of cinema space and time, i.e., the screened space and time. In these chapters it will become clear why cinema space and time constitute cinema form, the underlying form of cinema, and will help in beginning to explain the nature and distinctive character of cinema. From there on, a cinematic formal analysis in the aesthetics of cinema becomes a matter of each individual film.

---

[36] Some of these examples are taken from ibid., p. 73

To conclude, cinema space and time as I have claimed, but not as yet shown, constitute cinema form, that is, the underlying form of cinema that is true for all instances of this art form. Despite the arguments of the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, however, cinema form does not include movement. As I have mentioned, how and why cinema space and time constitute cinema form and what their nature is will be discussed in chapters seven and eight.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have discussed three things. The first concerned the possibility of a shared understanding of form in the philosophy of art, from which we can infer what cinematic form is. I argued that it is very difficult to support this idea given the diversity of opinions in the philosophy of art, the particular difficulty of the word 'form' and the variety of formal properties that exist between different art forms. For all these reasons, I suggested that it is best to provide a discussion of cinematic form alone, which would explain what form in cinema is without necessarily assuming that this understanding of form could be true for all other arts. Furthermore, what cinematic form is should be determined separately from the discussion of the function of form in cinema or an explanation of its potential value.

The second and third issues discussed concerned the question 'what is cinematic form?'. In particular, I argued that cinematic form consists of two 'sorts' of form. First, there is film form that involves the form of each individual film separately, that is, a descriptive discussion of its parts and their relations. Second, there is cinema form that consists of the fundamental formal framework of cinema. That is, the 'elemental stuff', the 'basic or fundamental formal dimensions' of cinema. These, I have suggested, are space and time. As such, formal analyses of cinema would be of two, supplementary, kinds; one that would concern cinema form, that is, cinematic space and time, and one discussing film form, that is, the form of each individual film, in the descriptive manner explained before. By endorsing this distinction, the formal discussion of cinema will be of a much richer and comprehensive nature.

Two things still need to be discussed: the discussion of weak formalism needs to be concluded, and the position and value of cinematic form determined. Furthermore, there needs to be a more detailed explication of cinema form, which will explain both the contribution of this notion to the aesthetics of cinema, and the peculiar nature of cinema space and time. By more fully understanding cinema form one of the most important aspects of the aesthetics of cinema, that is, that of describing and explaining what cinema is in terms of form will have been explained. Additionally, by more fully discussing cinema form, the complexity of cinema will be further explicated and there will be an even richer vocabulary with which to explain the importance and nature of form in cinema, and increase our awareness of it. These I intend to do in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER SIX:
THE ROLE OF FORM

This chapter continues outlining cinematic formalism. Having determined what cinematic form is in the previous chapter, the discussion will now turn to the position and value of cinematic form in films, which, as I mentioned in earlier chapters, is one of the most central claims in the aesthetics of cinema. Specifically, in this chapter I will attempt the following: first, I will re-examine the weak formalist claim of the experience of satisfying appropriateness of form to content and make a number of suggestions. Second, I will discuss two alternative understandings of the role and value of form in cinema, the neoformalist one, as proposed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, and Carroll's functionalist one, which was mentioned in chapter five. Finally, I will present some examples in order to demonstrate the applicability of cinematic formalism to the study of cinema.

Cinematic formalism and the role of form in cinema:

Two things determine how the role and value of form should be understood within cinematic formalism. The first has to do with the demands of the aesthetics of cinema. As I suggested in the first two chapters, form had a very important position in the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s: that of revealing the aesthetic significance of films, and elucidating the status of cinema as an art form. However, the way in which form contributes to the 'power of movies' was never satisfactorily explained in these accounts. This explanation I tried to provide through strong and weak formalism in order to develop a more comprehensive aesthetics of cinema. I concluded that strong formalism is incompatible as a formalist theory with the study of cinema, and that although weak formalism offers some interesting suggestions, it is nevertheless incomplete.

It needs to be stressed here that my aim throughout this thesis has not been to understand what an aesthetic experience is, as was the purpose of both strong and weak formalism. Furthermore, I have not supported the view that form should be understood as the sole feature of artistic value, as the strong formalists claimed. My aim has been to examine and understand the position of form in our encounters with films, and its function and possible significance in film appreciation, rather than explain the whole

value of art through an account of form. As such, even though the explanation I have provided so far—and will continue to outline in this chapter—will not prove to be sufficient for a complete understanding of the value and importance of films or works of art in general, the explanation I have been considering is a very central one that needs to be to be elucidated as fully possible. Furthermore, the account of cinematic formalism I have been suggesting is not structured in the same manner as the formalist theories discussed so far. That is, it does not begin with questions like, 'why is a film a work of art?' or, 'what is the artistic value of a film?' and answering them in terms of form. Rather, it begins with an explanation of what cinematic form is, and continues by asking, 'what is the importance or relevance of form in films?' and 'how does form shape our experiences of films?'.

The second issue regarding the understanding of the value and role of form in cinematic formalism is in terms of finding a way of accommodating some of the explanatory ideas of weak formalism mentioned in chapter four, in cinematic formalism. That is, to exploit somehow the insight of weak formalism about the peculiar relationship between form and content, and the way it explains how critics and audiences try to make sense of films, by examining both the form and the content and understanding their relation and its significance. Specifically, it was maintained in chapter four that weak formalism is an interesting philosophical position concerning the value and function of form in works of art, and might provide, with certain modifications, appropriate exegetical schemes for the aesthetics of cinema.

If the weak formalist principles are incorporated, then the importance and relevance of form results from the relation it develops with content and its potential to affect us in such a way that we come to value the film. In this manner, form is important because it has the potential to be satisfyingly appropriate to the content of the film. Weak formalism, however, was not designed to settle the question of the value of form. The task was to define art through this type of experience and, as I argued, it failed to do so successfully. So, how can this incompatibility between the goals of weak formalism and cinematic formalism be explicated? Furthermore, what of the problems of weak

formalism that remained unresolved in chapter four? These I will discuss in what follows, further outlining cinematic formalism.

Appropriating weak formalism:

The weak formalist argument that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is what makes a work of art a work of art does not seem to hold, since it fails to set this criterion as the essential characteristic of all art. Apart from weak formalism's particular failure, however, there seems to be an underlying difficulty in establishing a theory that will be able to hold true for all art. For, it seems significantly difficult to provide a single explanation of a cultural practice such as art that has developed and flourished through history. It appears to be almost impossible to provide a theory that postulates a *single* type of experience, however inclusive this might be, that can account for the variety and complexity of different kinds of art, and all the different ways we value art. In order to accomplish this, a theory needs to allow enough room—in a sense remain somewhat empty—to explain such a variety of art forms and responses. If, however, the theory becomes more detailed and proposes a more specific explanation, as weak formalism does, then at some point there will be a work of art, or even an art form, that cannot be included in the description; alternatively, some other object, which we would not normally call art might satisfy these criteria. In order to provide these all-explanatory theories, philosophers of art have often chosen to blur important distinctions, ignore the differences between the arts and attempt to synthesise theories of heterogeneous things.[1] It seems that weak formalism falls prey to this tradition by attempting to define the whole of art through the experience of satisfying appropriateness of form to content.

Despite the general problems of constructing such a theory, weak formalism does propose to define the whole of art with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions and apparently fails to do so successfully. Given this specific failure, is there no way that the

[1] Passmore has referred to this as the 'dreariness' of aesthetics. See, Passmore, John A., 1954, p. 49-55

criterion of satisfying appropriateness of form to content can be used in this thesis? It is important to state once more that the type of explanation that the aesthetics of cinema requires is not in terms of determining form as a special aspect of an aesthetic experience, or even providing a definition of all art. Rather, the task is to understand the position of form within our experiences of films; namely, to determine what form is and how it affects our appreciation of films, and not to explain the value or distinct character of art through form. If this is all that is required by the aesthetics of cinema maybe the solution is to disregard the weak formalist claim that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is the essential characteristic of all art, and settle for a much narrower claim.[2] Therefore, it is maintained that the role of form in our experiences of films has something to do with the kind of relationship it develops with content, without, however, further arguing that this criterion is the identifying characteristic of art. It is suggested then, that the way weak formalism outlines the relationship of form to content and the centrality that it can have in our experiences is particularly true for films. That is, even if this view does not make sense of all works of art and all art practices it does manage, as I suggested in chapter four and will continue elaborating in this chapter, to make sense of films.

By modifying weak formalism in this manner, however, what exactly is cinematic formalism suggesting in terms of the role and value of form in films? Since this criterion ceases to be the one condition that defines a work of art, it becomes an explanation of why form is important in cinema, why we value cinematic form and why it is important to examine form in cinema. As such, it provides the explanation that the aesthetics of cinema sets out to answer: why form is valuable, and why it should be a central aspect of the study of cinema, in other words, the reason why form is important, why form has such a substantial role in our appreciation of films and its contribution to the 'power of movies'. All these may be explained by the kind of relationship that form can develop with content, and its potential to affect us in the way it does. Thus, this modified version of weak formalism, along with the understanding of cinematic form that I have suggested in chapter five, constitute an appropriate basis for cinematic formalism, which explains

[2] After all, and as I mention in chapter four, Danto and Eldridge never whole-heartedly argue that weak formalism is an explanation that can hold true for all art.

both what form is and its role and value in film appreciation, thus providing a proper—and tailor-made—formalist theory for the aesthetics of cinema to rely upon and develop.

Cinematic formalism continued:

By modifying the weak formalist claim in such a manner, and accommodating it to the purposes of the aesthetics of cinema, two aspects of weak formalism that appeared problematic in chapter four are resolved. Firstly, because no definition of art is proposed, it is no longer necessary for all works of art to exhibit form and content which are satisfyingly appropriate to one another in order for this claim to work. Without this parameter, problems such as that not all works of art may have content, are dismissed. The notion of the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is examined here only in relation to cinema, and in particular relation to cinematic form. How cinematic form relates to content and whether it holds other functions will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Secondly, by arguing that this type of experience is not the distinguishing characteristic of all art, the good/bad art distinction, which was lost in the weak formalist theory as I argued in chapter four, is restored. For, it is not maintained anymore that if we do *not* experience satisfying appropriateness of form and content, then the work is not a work of art. As I suggested in chapter four, according to Eldridge's claims in particular it seems that weak formalism states that if a work has satisfying appropriateness, then it is a work of art, if it does not, it is not a work of art. I maintained, however, that it seems more plausible to argue that if a work exhibits this appropriateness it is a good work of art, but if it does not, as in the case of *An Oak Tree* that I mentioned there, then it is a bad work of art, rather than a non-art object. In this way, cinematic formalism states that the criterion of satisfying appropriateness has the *potential* to distinguish between good films and bad ones, not to distinguish art from non-art.

Apart from these positive changes, one problem of weak formalism that seems to carry over into cinematic formalism, is that the experience of satisfying appropriateness

of form to content can be considered true for other things as well, since, as I mentioned in chapter four, things such as logical proofs or chemical reactions might also be responsible for an experience of this type. Although by modifying the main weak formalist claim in this manner it is no longer maintained that this experience has to be a unique characteristic of art, it could still be asked why it is that we may come to value films specifically because of this appropriateness, when this could be true for other art forms as well? In other words, is there something specific in this type of cinematic experience that renders it different from the ones we may acquire from other art forms? This can be answered in terms of the nature and peculiarities of cinematic form. If it could be proved that cinema form is in fact something peculiar to cinema, then it could be concluded that the peculiarity of cinematic value results from the nature of cinema form. As I claimed in chapter five, but have not as yet shown, cinema form is indeed unique to cinema. In this sense, if in the next two chapters this is conclusively shown, then it could still be maintained that this type of experience is in fact something quite unique. Of course this is not to argue that other arts might not exhibit this, but simply that this type of relationship bears a certain distinctiveness in cinema which should be illustrated. As a result, this problem of cinematic formalism will have to wait until the discussion of chapters seven and eight is completed.

So, cinematic formalism offers an account of what cinematic form is—in terms of film form and cinema form—and also uses the criterion of satisfying appropriateness of form to content that weak formalism outlines, but within a different context. That is, rather than supporting a definition of all art, this criterion here explains the role of form in films, and why cinematic form is important in our experiences of films. Following this change, it is interesting to explain how cinematic formalism makes sense of films, and the role of form within them. In order to do this it will be useful to consider an example, for instance, the very memorable scene from *The Third Man* (1949), where Martins (Joseph Cotten) and Harry Lime (Orson Welles) are talking at the top of the ferris wheel. The content of this scene is in terms of Lime's point of view concerning the value of human life. For the narrative's purposes it is important in this scene to present Lime's point of view convincingly, that is, his misanthropic, cruel and opportunistic perspective, in order

for us to sympathise somehow with his character. To this end, the filmmaker (which here includes the screenwriter, the director and Orson Welles who wrote parts of the script) has to realise through form the content of the scene—that the value of human life can be disregarded—in a convincing kind of way. The manner in which the filmmaker chooses to do this is the following: he places the actors at the top of the ferris wheel, and shows us the spatial distance that exists between them and the people on the ground who appear as nothing more than dots. Aiding this shot is the dialogue, where Martins asks Lime whether he feels any sympathy for his victims, and Lime replies that if one of the dots on the ground ceased to exist, would he really mind?[3] With the appropriate distance you can become so detached that these dots do not represent people any more. This detachment materialises through the camera shot, and we in fact see the people as dots. Later on in the scene Lime gives the famous monologue about the cuckoo clock, concluding his point. In this instance, the filmmaker captures the content (Lime's disrespect for human life) through the form (here the spatial distance exhibited by the position of the camera) in a most appropriate way, by placing the characters on top of the ferris wheel and showing us the people on the ground as dots, thus grasping the meaning of Orson Welles' words in a most striking way, which may convince the audience of his point of view. Having done this, the cuckoo clock monologue about how strife and war have benefited humanity and contributed to the progress of civilisation, may seem to the audience as profound rather than just crude and harsh. Hence, this example shows how cinematic formalism makes sense of such instances, and by knowing what cinematic form is, and how and why it may be valuable in its relation with content, it succeeds in explaining the power of this scene, and why it has remained a classic in the history of cinema. I will continue discussing the application of cinematic formalism, and especially what this appropriateness means, later on in this chapter.

---

[3] This is the exact dialogue: Martins (Joseph Cotten): Have you ever seen any of your victims?
Harry Lime (Orson Welles): You know, I never feel comfortable on these sort of things. Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Tell me. Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I offered you twenty thousand pounds for every dot that stopped, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax - the only way you can save money nowadays.

Form without content:

Cinematic formalism goes a step further than the much appropriated version of weak formalism, particularly the claim that form is valued because of its relation to content, namely that form gains its relevance through the kind of relationship it develops with content. It is necessary to go beyond this claim because it could be argued that sometimes form in cinema is important on its own with no necessary reference to content. For example, in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* the relations that develop between music, colours and camera shots (i.e., its film form as previously defined) are artistically excellent, but they are so without any reference to content. Alternatively, in *Pulp Fiction* (1994) the chronological and spatial fragmentation and confusion of the film (i.e., its form in terms of space and time) is what makes it a cinematic achievement. But form here is important with no relation to content. For instance, if the scenes were taken out of this order and reconstructed in a chronologically linear fashion, then the film would prove far less interesting since the plot is trivial at points, and many scenes seem without any important content or profound subject matter. What makes these scenes fascinating is their temporal confusion, and the ability we gain as spectators to travel back and forth in the time of the narrative and try and make sense of the story.[4] In this sense, it could be objected that form might be important for other reasons than its particular relation to content.

If this is true, then what is cinematic formalism suggesting? One of the benefits of having included a discussion of strong formalism in this thesis is that a more complete understanding of the role of form has been acquired. In particular, it seems important to recognise the value of the strong formalists' insight, namely, that form can be important for its own sake. As Meager observed, Bell's theory

> "has been shot at with pretty well all the bolts in the philosophical locker: charges of subjectivity, vicious circularity and even—last and worst of philosophical insults—of irrefutability, have hurtled at it, have seemed to pass through it and emerge harmlessly on the other side...Such vitality must mean,

[4] The same applies for the film *Memento* (2000), where similar formal composition exists. In fact, in the DVD edition of *Memento* we are given the option to see the film in the correct chronological order. In comparison to the original film, this version proves to be extremely dull.

> not of course that there is a philosophically respectable theory hidden in the book...but at least that it says something that someone wants to hear".[5]

This 'something right' about Bell and Fry's views is that form—independently of other features such as content—is in fact a significant factor in works of art, and this should be recognised and understood. In cinema in particular, this significance can often be determined and appreciated independently of all other elements, especially content. To use an extreme example, I (as a non-Japanese speaking spectator) might watch a Japanese film with no subtitles, but still be awed by it, that is, by its form, by the way it looks, although I may not be able to understand how this form possibly affects or embodies its content.[6] But even in more moderate examples, a film may be fascinating simply because of its form. In Krzysztof Kieslowski's colour trilogy, for example, the most beautiful aspects of the films are the colours used that define and dominate each scene. In these films the form, in terms of its colours, is certainly valuable on its own, with no reference to the content. In this way, even though it may be true that form is valuable because of its relation to content—and in these films it certainly is—it should be recognised that form is also important in its own right.

What I am suggesting then, is that the weak formalist claim alone does not suffice for a complete explanation of why form is important in films. But why maintain solely this understanding of the position and value of form, when it seems that form is valued independently as well? In order for the aesthetics of cinema to present an adequate explanation of the role of form in cinema, the value of form with no reference to content should be acknowledged. It is argued then, that although the relationship form develops with content is indeed a very important and central one, the importance form has on its own should not be underestimated. Yet, and for all the reasons mentioned in the discussion about the explanatory value of weak formalism, I still want to maintain that the particular relationship between form and content is fundamental to the value we place on form in films. The way in which the relationship of cinematic form and content affects us will be discussed later on in this chapter.

---

[5] Meager, R., 1965, p. 123

[6] Of course, by acknowledging this aspect of form's value, it is not maintained that all cinematic appreciation should be restricted to this, or that this is the best, or most appropriate, way, of watching films. As I argued in chapter three, this type of claim is incompatible with the process of filmmaking, and the study of cinema.

In conclusion, although by narrowing the weak formalist claim the aesthetics of cinema is offered an explanation of how and why form is important, it should still be recognised that this explanation is not complete on its own. Rather, the 'something right' aspect of strong formalism, namely, the insight that form may be valuable independently of other factors, such as content, should be maintained without, however, embracing any of the other strong formalist claims about aesthetic emotion and significant form, or arguing that this is the only appropriate way to appreciate films. In this way, the explanation that cinematic formalism provides should be far more substantive, both in terms of what form in cinema is, and its role and function within films. Why the discussion of cinematic formalism provides a good explanation of the role of form in cinema will continue in the next section.

The role of form in cinema:

By adopting part of the weak formalist understanding of form, it is argued that form should not be understood as the embodiment of content, because form and content need to be sufficiently independent for us to be able to consider their relation as appropriate or not. Specifically, as Eldridge suggested, content is ascribed to form, content is captured by form. According to this, in the process of artistic creation an artist will try to find the appropriate form for the content. However, this is not the only way to understand the role of form in films and especially its relation to content. In particular, there are two, somewhat rival, explanations of the role of form that have been put forth specifically in relation to cinema, and which I wish to discuss here so as to elaborate cinematic formalism further, and illustrate its advantages over these two views. The first is neoformalism and the second is Carroll's functionalist account mentioned in the previous chapter. These I will introduce in the next section, outline my concerns and argue in favour of cinematic formalism, further considering its nature and significance.

Neoformalism:

Neoformalism, as proposed by film theorists David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, is presented mostly as an approach, rather than a fully-fledged theory, which offers "a series of broad assumptions about how artworks are constructed and how they operate in cueing audience response".[7] The central argument of neoformalism is that meaning, which is very broadly construed, is not to be found *in* a film; rather, it is something that the audiences make while watching the film.[8] To begin with, neoformalists dismiss the form-content distinction, as it is traditionally understood and argue that a film's meaning "result[s] from the interaction between the work's formal structures and the mental operations we perform in response to them".[9] So, audiences respond to the form—which is understood more or less in the same manner as the one proposed in the previous chapter—and make the meaning, rather than just interpret it from the form and subject matter of the film. As Berys Gaut has also observed regarding neoformalism, this is a constructivist account, which strives to establish that form is important because of its place in the process of 'meaning-making'.[10] Thus, although cinematic formalism suggests (by adopting the weak formalist claim) that through the actions of the artist—here the filmmaker—content is ascribed to form and we are able to determine this in film appreciation, neoformalism suggests that the 'ascribing' of content is solely dependent on the audience. According to neoformalism, the intention of the filmmaker about the content is irrelevant in terms of our 'meaning-making' activity.

The main problem with this position is the claim that meaning is wholly created by spectators rather than found in a film. For, it seems true that as audiences we are able to trace the content of a film as this has been decided to some extent by the filmmaker, and further understand how the form has captured this. In other words, it seems that, at least to a certain extent, the content is given to us by the filmmaker rather than be completely dependent on our 'meaning-making' capabilities. But why is this a valid

---

[7] Thompson, Kristin, 1988, p. 6

[8] To argue so neoformalists rely heavily on some of the ideas of Russian Formalists, especially the notions of *fabula* and *suzhet*, see for example, Thompson, Kristin, 1981, and also on some of the ideas of Stanley Fish, where he argues that meaning is made, not found (Fish, Stanley, 1995).

[9] David Bordwell, quoted in Gaut, Berys, 1995, p. 9

[10] Ibid., p. 15

claim? After all, it may be true that in some cases we do ascribe meaning ourselves. A neoformalist could argue, that in open-ended films, the meaning of these scenes, or of the whole film, depends solely on our own understanding and meaning making, since there is—purposively—no 'clue' in the film to guide our interpretation. This might hold true for films such as *eXistenZ* (1999) or *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where a plethora of interpretations could be supported for the films' endings. Nevertheless, there are certain limitations that need to be considered. For, audiences do not determine which aspects of the films they should imagine and create meaning for. So, in the examples mentioned above we are not to infer that at the end of *eXistenZ* a huge meteorite collides with Earth and ends all existence as we know it; or else, in the ending of *Lost in Translation* (2003) we are not meant to understand that Bill Murray tells Scarlet Johanson how to make a nuclear device. Rather, there are constraints to the meanings we are supposed to make that the films, and the filmmaker responsible, impose on us. As Gaut insists, such

> "examples merely prove that film spectators ought to imagine things which they know they do not see, but do not show that spectators play a role in determining what ought to be imagined: they do not prove that the audience makes the meaning of films".[11]

Of course, these restrictions are by no means absolute or even necessary. Someone in support of neoformalism could argue that imagining such an ending in *eXistenZ* and *Lost in Translation* make the films far more interesting. However, one of the benefits of maintaining the understanding of cinematic formalism is that it can sustain a narrower claim than neoformalism, without losing the insight that in many cases content is solely dependent on us. For, cinematic formalism suggests that, although there may be cases where we do construct the meaning of the film from the form, this activity will vary from film to film. In other words, although it is true that we do make the meaning in some cases, this is not necessarily true for all cases *and to the same degree.* So, whereas in films such as *Tout Va Bien* (1972), *Le Confessionnal* (1995) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), we can make most of the meaning, what the film is about, in films like *Frenzy* (1972) and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003) most of the meaning is there to be found. That is, it is easier in these cases to point to the formal properties or events of the film that exhibit a certain meaning. Thus, cinematic formalism claims that

[11] Ibid., p. 16

even though the ending of *2001: A Space Odyssey* is almost completely open to our meaning-making, we cannot, in the same sense, infer the same for the ending of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001). According to this, although in many cases the meaning is to be found *in* the film, this is by no means an absolute principle, since many films or scenes are open to our meaning-making capabilities. As such, although cinematic formalism suggests that filmmakers will determine (up to a certain extent) the relationship between meaning and form, film viewers in many cases are called upon to make the meaning.[12]

In conclusion, it seems that cinematic formalism is a much more comprehensive view than neoformalism. Although we may be free to infer any sort of meaning from a film, as the neoformalists suggest, there are restrictions that need to be considered. This does not necessarily imply that cinematic formalism argues that there are always intentions in a film that we should investigate and understand. It might be, for example, that a meaning could be related to form in a satisfyingly appropriate way without the filmmaker having intended this. I will refer to intentionality in filmmaking later on. But this does not mean that we make up all meaning in the manner suggested by neoformalism. Again, how meaning is determined will vary in degree from film to film. As such, cinematic formalism should be preferred to neoformalism, since it holds a better understanding of meaning in film and the way the audience makes sense of the relation between this and form.

---

[12] At this point it should be observed that cinematic formalism accepts that our ability either to make or understand the meaning of a film is dependent on our being part of a form of life. Meaning in films is dependent on our ability as members of a certain form of life to understand this, to grasp how it applies to the world and be able to use it on our own accord. As Eldridge suggests, "[t]hings have contents to be interpreted only in the context of a form of life. Membership in a form of life, which can be acquired either naturally through birth and upbringing or artificially through explicit study, is necessary in order to know a thing's content...there cannot be meanings except where there is social life" (Eldridge, Richard, 1995, p. 251). In this sense, cinematic formalism is not arguing that the meaning of a film is completely independent of audiences. Rather, it is always dependent on our membership of a form of life.

Noël Carroll and the function of form:

In this section I will outline Carroll's functionalist understanding of form because it suggests an alternative version of how and why form is important in films. I hope that by the end of this section it will be clear why cinematic formalism provides a much more extensive understanding than the one Carroll proposes.

Carroll, as I mentioned in chapter five, disregards the relationship of form to content and argues that what is important is the relationship between form and points and purposes. In particular, Carroll argues that form is important because it realises or manifests points or purposes in the film.[13] Film criticism begins by tracing these and examining how they have been materialised.

Could there be formal elements that do not function in this way? For instance, the colours of a scene might serve no function or materialise any point. They may be random selections of colours. This might be especially true for films made in the Dogme style of filmmaking, where there is no exact and predetermined setting of scenes, and the filmmaker often chooses at random what to record. In these cases, the form—the colours used in the scenes—are not materialising any purpose. Carroll, however, broadens his interpretation of 'points and purposes' to include almost any aspect of the film, for example, theme, point of view, communication of ideas, arousal of feelings, visual pleasure, engendering some sort of experience such as repose, excitement, suspense, perceptual delight and so forth.[14] In this manner, the purpose of the colours in the above example may be to question the way films are made. Thus, for Carroll, all form functions according to his explanation.

The exegetical value of Carroll's idea is that it seems to provide an account of the way the filmmaker chooses from an array of options how to construct a film. For example, in the opening scene from *Reservoir Dogs* discussed in the previous chapter, if Tarantino's point was to introduce the characters to us, and give us some indication of the

[13] Carroll, Noël, 1998 (b), p. 11-12
[14] Ibid., p. 10-11

story that will follow, then he realised this in terms of, for example, the identical costumes worn by the actors, the black suit with white shirt and thin black tie which are often used in the crime/gangster genre. Additionally, the circular movement of the camera around the characters, stopping at each character speaking and then moving on, serves this purpose of introducing the characters and beginning to reveal their interaction. So, according to Carroll's understanding, form is important because by examining it we come to terms with how well or how badly a filmmaker has expressed his or her point, or has communicated a certain idea. Why this explanation is consistent with our practices becomes evident in cases where, not having understood a certain aspect of a film, we may do some detective work, either by trying to grasp what the point is and backing it up with the given formal properties, or the other way around, by examining the formal properties, examining the clues as it were, and then trying to decide what the point or purpose is.

Carroll's suggestion, however, faces a number of problems. I will outline here the three most important ones. In the first case, according to Carroll, the filmmaker has set out through form to realise or manifest some points or purposes, and film viewers are able to judge whether these have been manifested or realised well or not. Yet, and here the problem is noticed, if this is a necessary aspect of filmmaking, how do we evaluate a point or purpose that has failed to be materialised? For instance, if Tarantino had chosen to introduce the characters to us by including a two second shot of the seven characters as seen from a very long distance, then we would not be able to recognise that this shot was intended as an introduction to the characters. In this case he would have failed to realise the point, and, most significantly, as viewers we would not have been able to recognise this failure, since we would not have been able to recognise the scene's purpose. Therefore, even though the filmmaker intended to realise this introduction, we are not able to recognise either the purpose of the scene, or the possible failure. In other words, if a filmmaker attempts to get his/her point or idea across but fails, we might be unable to interpret the function of the formal elements, because we would not be able to understand the point or purpose. Carroll's claim seems misleading, since in such cases we are not always able to appreciate the form, or to grasp the point or purpose.

Secondly, in Carroll's account it is necessary for the formal properties of a film, which make points and have purposes, to be the intended decisions of the filmmaker. There can be no formal aspect in a film that promotes or manifests a point or idea and was not intended by the filmmaker. This can be concluded from the following claims that Carroll makes: "the *form* of the individual film is made up of all its formal choices" and furthermore, "[a] formal choice has the *intended* function to advance the point or purpose of the individual film".[15] Yet, there are accidents in filmmaking. To continue using the example of *Reservoir Dogs*, since in this film the characters are given names of colours, when an orange balloon is seen drifting behind the car of the head gangster it has been suggested that this is an elaborate clue that Mr. Orange is the police informer. It could be concluded then that we have a clear instance of the form, the colour of the balloon, possibly realising some point the filmmaker intended. But the truth is that the presence of the balloon in that scene was an accident, as it escaped from a party happening next to the shooting location. In this case, the intention of the filmmaker is absent. This shows that Carroll's claim for intentionality in all formal elements that manifest points and have purposes seems mistaken.

Thirdly, Carroll's idea falls short of really explaining why form may be important in our encounters with cinema. For, although it may outline part of the creative process and describe a possible kind of interaction between the form and purposes of the film, it does not on its own explain why this kind of interaction is valuable in our viewing experiences, or even why some of these instances may be artistically important. For example, a filmmaker might have successfully realised a point or purpose but this may not be artistically important, or even remotely interesting. There must be an extra explanation in order for this account to elucidate properly how and why form may affect us. Cinematic formalism, however, can explain why form may be artistically important both on its own and in relation to content.

It can be concluded, that cinematic formalism is exegetically preferable to Carroll's functionalism. It avoids the first problem mentioned above by allowing

---

[15] Ibid., p. 11 (my emphasis).

cinematic form to be examined on its own without an explanation of how it functions within a film. As such, it is not maintained that form *necessarily* manifests points or purposes. There is room in this conception of form to allow for an aspect of form that may not realise or manifest some point or purpose, or simply that we fail to understand what this point or purpose is. It also recognises that it is not an absolutely necessary aspect of the finished film, for a point manifested to be an intentional decision of the filmmaker. Although I do not wish to argue that intentionality is absent from filmmaking, it would be preferable to preserve some space both for accidents, such as the one mentioned above, and our liberty as viewers to interpret things differently from what was intended. Finally, Carroll's account falls short of establishing that this is the reason why we appreciate form in films.

What I wish to suggest, however, is that it might be useful to maintain an—albeit much modified—aspect of Carroll's functionalism as a supplementary kind of explanation to cinematic formalism. It is argued then that the function of form in films is often to materialise points and purposes in terms *of the narrative of the film*, and not in terms of Carroll's broader understanding which can include content or communication of ideas and so on. Cinematic form is named important, however, when it appropriately captures the content. In this manner, the explanation that is added to cinematic formalism is in terms of the function of form in relation to the narrative.

What should be mentioned is that, by incorporating this view, it becomes clear that form does not relate only to content. In fact, it can be maintained that a scene, for example, may have form but no meaning. For instance, it could be argued that if a scene shows a car driving down the road, then some particular content might be lacking. With the introduction of Carroll's modified idea, form is not considered strictly in terms of meaning, but also in reference to points or purposes involving the narrative and story structure. If form is related to purpose or function in this sense, then in a scene where a car is driving down the road, the function might be to help the narrative move forward, or explain some other aspect of the film. It might be objected, again, that there could be scenes, for example, of the sun setting, where function is also lacking. Cinematic formalism, however, suggests that the point and purpose of each scene will depend on the

film. For instance, the function of a scene where the sun is setting will have an indicative function in a vampire film. In other films, the purpose may be just to show the transition of time.[16]

Thus, cinematic formalism offers two explanations. The first is that we gain a clear picture of how form is used in cinema; that is, form holds a very important function in filmmaking: that of manifesting or bringing about narrative points and purposes. For instance, in *Jaws* (1975), the shark music theme, a formal element, is always used to signify the presence of the shark. In this case, the form serves some narrative purpose. The second, and most central, explanation is in terms of the value we place on form in film. For, although by realising points and purposes form may be valued (because the points and purposes are important, or because they were achieved in some profound or interesting way, as, some might argue, with the music theme from *Jaws*), there is also an extra level of explanation which is provided by cinematic formalism. Namely, that form is important either on its own, or more significantly, when it captures content in a satisfyingly appropriate manner. So, when this occurs, it could be maintained that we come to value and appreciate this film, or a particular scene, in a very distinct kind of way.

In conclusion, by incorporating a modified aspect of Carroll's ideas, a clearer understanding of the position of form in cinema is gained, since we know both how it may function within a film and its role in the process of cinematic creation, but we also know why it is important, that is, why form may become significant. However, how exactly does this claim work in cinema? As I have described it here, cinematic formalism elaborates the role of form in cinematic appreciation; that is, it explains why and how both film and cinema form may affect our experiences of films. This position illustrates a central way in which form affects us in our cinematic experiences, and also how it is that we may come to value a film because of this particular kind of relationship. The application of cinematic formalism will be discussed in the next section.

---

[16] Of course, this is not to restrict the account and claim that there necessarily has to be a point or purpose. It could be argued that in Lynch's films there are scenes where function seems to be also missing. Although I think that this is something debatable, and all scenes in Lynch's films have in fact meaning or function, it could be also argued that the function of some of Lynch's scenes is to question the very relationship of meaning and cinema.

Understanding appropriateness:

The last aspect of cinematic formalism I will discuss in this chapter is in terms of the exegetical value of this view and how this applies to practice. Through this discussion I also hope to elucidate satisfying appropriateness more fully. The best way to discuss all these is through a variety of examples, which will outline exactly what this appropriateness means, and its possible value. Furthermore, by explicating this type of experience, I hope to show why it is so central to our understanding of cinema. My examples will be limited to various scenes of certain films, rather to complete films, so as to have the advantage of some sort of variety.

The first example I will consider, since I have been using it throughout the thesis, is from *Reservoir Dogs*, and especially the infamous ear-cutting scene of the film. The content of the scene is in terms of the potential of cinematic violence, and its effect on the audience.[17] In the beginning of this scene we see Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen) contemplating torturing the police officer he has taken hostage. The scene continues with Mr. Blonde turning up the volume of the radio to a very up-beat song, while he does a little dance to the rhythm. Here, the form, i.e., the music and the movement of the actor, lighten up the atmosphere, putting us into a more relaxed state. When he finally begins to cut the officer's ear, the camera turns to the left to reveal a sign in the warehouse that reads 'Mind your head'. After cutting the officer's ear, Mr. Blonde tries to speak to the officer through the dismembered ear. The way this scene is structured, moving from humour to violence, creates enormous tension. What is interesting is that this structure materialises the content very appropriately, since we move from the up-beat scene of Mr. Blonde's dancing to the cruel act of violence, which because it is not shown becomes even more threatening, as it is left completely to our imagination.[18] Humorous aspects circle the unseen horrible act, and capture Tarantino's point appropriately: as film viewers we are caught between the humour and the horror of the scene, guilty of

[17] Tarantino expresses this view in his introduction to the British DVD edition of *Reservoir Dogs*.
[18] As film critic Richard Edward writes about this scene, "there's subliminal power to the imagery that tricks you into feeling repulsed at things that don't really exist outside your mind" (Edward, Richard, 2004, p. 128).

humming the tune, or moving our foot to the rhythm and disgusted by a scene we did not actually see. Thus, in this scene the form, which here includes aspects such as music, actor movement and camera movements, manages to capture the content of the scene, the peculiarities of cinematic violence and its potential, and manipulate our responses. This scene has remained infamous, and the cause of many cinema walkouts, because the form manifests the content, this manipulation of our emotions, so well that it becomes unbearable to watch. If, for example, the violent act had not been circled by these humorous elements, it would have been unmemorable, even if it *was* shown, and far less effective—as a plethora of violent scenes in cinema are—since the appropriate mood would not have been created and then overthrown by this shift. In this case it can be concluded that cinematic formalism provides a very good explanation of why this scene is so effective. By examining both the form and the content of the film and outlining their relationship, we gain an excellent understanding of how this scene works and succeeds in affecting us.

The second example I will consider is the final sequence of Truffaut's film *Les 400 Coups*. This last sequence (as with most of the film) is about freedom, its appeal and the responsibility that comes with it, namely, the consequences that a free and authentic existence entails. The scene consists of 15-year old Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud) who, having escaped from the juvenile detention centre, runs towards the sea and to the freedom he has desired throughout the film. When he finally arrives at the sea and stops running, there is a zoom and then a freeze-frame on his face, revealing a troubled rather than happy look, i.e., Doinel's realisation of what this freedom entails. The form of this scene consists of the following: the running movement of the actor, which is full of energy, and the camera which follows him in a continuous manner thus reflecting this energy, and the abrupt freeze-frame at the end on a quite troubled and anxious look. The contrast between these scenes, the quick movement and its abrupt finish, express the content in a most appropriate manner: the desire to be free and the energy to achieve this, and the painful realisation of what this freedom means. Here, the filmmaker has found a satisfyingly appropriate way to express through form (i.e., the type of movement depicted) this content. If the scene ended while Doinel was running, i.e., without

including this freeze-frame, the effect it has on the audiences—of empathising first with Doinel's desire for freedom and then with his realisation—would have been minimal. Its form matches the shift of emotions that can occur in the pursuit of freedom, which is the content of the scene, brilliantly. Again, by paying equal and critical attention to both the content and the form, cinematic formalism manages to provide a good explanation of why this scene has remained important in the history of cinema.

The third example is Steven Spielberg's use of colour in the otherwise black and white *Schindler's List*. Other than the beginning and ending sequences, which are in colour, and serve some narrative purpose, the rest of the film is shot in black and white, with the exception of two scenes where the red colour of a little girl's coat is visible. The first is in a scene depicting a ghetto liquidation, where the main character Schindler (Liam Neeson) notices amongst the shootings and general violence a little girl who, unseen by all the Germans, is running to save her life. Later on in the film we see Schindler visiting a concentration camp, and noticing in a pile of dead bodies the little girl with the red coat. The content of the scene, and of the film in general, is in terms of Schindler's realisation of the violence that is surrounding him and his duty to prevent it. Through their form, i.e., the colours, these two scenes best represent this content because they articulate the exact moment of the occurrence of this realisation. The filmmaker takes advantage of the fact that in a black and white film the presence of any colour—and especially red—is striking and memorable, and in this case puts the emphasis on this little girl, making Schindler, and through him the audience, take notice of her.[19] When we see this colour again it is among a pile of bodies. The realisation that this is the same girl, and the pressure to imagine what has happened to her and how she ended up there, articulate most clearly—and most appropriately—the content, i.e., the recognition of the duty to act. Had it not been for this red colour the presence of the little girl would have gone unnoticed, thus failing to realise the content. So, the content of these scenes is materialised through form, the red colour in a wholly black and white context, in a most appropriate way. Once more, the explanatory potential of cinematic formalism is

[19] The same use of colour occurs in *Rumble Fish*, where, apart from the rumble fish, everything else is in black and white.

illustrated, since by investigating the form and content of a film, and the type of relationship that exists between them, we get a clear picture of why these scenes might influence us and how we may come to value them.

My fourth example is from the film *The Thin Red Line* (1998). The main content of this film is in terms of the violence, irrationality and destruction of war as this was manifested in the American attack on the South Pacific Island of Guadalcanal. This theme is presented most clearly in the series of scenes where the fight for a key-positioned airfield starts, and we see the heroes of this narrative march towards this airfield. The series of scenes begins with some extensive long shots of the surrounding landscape that is very peaceful and tranquil. In these scenes—shot in the countryside of Australia and the Solomon Islands—sound is minimal, and there is an abundance of light making the colours, especially green, very clear. From these scenes there is an abrupt cut to a very low shot of soldiers ready to attack. The soldiers represent the end of this peace. When the fighting begins, the colours change to dampened versions of red and yellow, coming from the smoke and the blood, and there is tremendous noise. Movement becomes intense, with bombs exploding, and the bodies of soldiers flying about. When, at the end of this series of scenes, the camera is lifted above the soldiers' level again, nature is destroyed, the peace and tranquillity gone and the scenery completely ruined. The change from one scene to the other, that is, from the peace of nature to the attack of the soldiers, and back to nature that is now destroyed, creates a feeling of uneasiness, making us condemn this ruin. In this case, the form, which here includes types of camera-shots, camera angles, editing, sound, light, colours and movement, manifests the content very appropriately. That is, it expresses the way war destroys the 'natural' order of things, and the way the progress of soldiers ends the peace that prevails. In these scenes, the director Terrence Mallick manages to convey this content clearly by alternating between the different shots and angles of the camera and playing with the light, colour and sound, thus managing through form to illustrate this meaning. It is by working through both the form and the content that Mallick succeeds in making this film truly memorable and the content very convincing. If this contrast of shots, colours and light had not occurred, the content would not have been so strikingly captured. To

conclude, it becomes clear through this example how cinematic formalism makes sense of films and our responses to them, namely, by outlining the way form and content interact and their appeal and significance.

To conclude, there are numerous similar instances I may provide. For example, the song 'Daisy-Daisy' sung by HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, captures the meaning of the scene perfectly, that is, the somehow human emotion of fear that HAL exhibits, and the need to comfort himself while 'dying'. In *Spellbound* (1945), the disturbed nightmares of Gregory Peck are materialised most appropriately through Dali's images. The camera movements and spatial articulation in *The Rules of the Game* (1939) reveal very appropriately the vibrancy and interaction of the characters. Finally, in *Requiem for a Dream* (2002) the extreme editing and soundtrack of the scenes manifests appropriately the horrifying aspect of pill addiction. These examples show what this satisfying appropriateness implies, and how this relationship between the form and content of a film (or of a scene in these examples) can have a powerful effect on our film viewing experiences. The importance and role of form is revealed in these scenes, since it affects our experience and shapes our responses.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have further outlined cinematic formalism. The first thing I noted was that the understanding of the role and value of form in cinematic formalism will be shaped by the demands of the aesthetics of cinema. That is, it was suggested that the formalist theory used for the aesthetics of cinema should not begin as strong and weak formalism, that is, with the aim of defining art through some type of experience. Rather, cinematic formalism should begin by asking what cinematic form is and continue with an explanation of the role of form in cinema. Having settled the first question in chapter five, in this chapter I inquired whether the main weak formalist claim could be somehow modified for the purposes of the second explanation. It was noted, however, that weak formalism was designed to settle a different issue and, moreover, failed to do so

successfully. Thus, it was suggested that it might be preferable to modify the main claim and show that it is not necessary to argue that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is the defining characteristic of all art. Rather, it is best to maintain that this is a way of understanding the importance and position of form in cinema. In particular, it is argued that form is important because of the type of relationship that it develops with content and the potential to affect us in this kind of way. However, it was also suggested that the aesthetic importance that form can have on its own should also be recognised.

My second concern was to outline two alternative views of the role of form in films, the neoformalist one and Carroll's functionalism. In the first case, I argued that cinematic formalism offers a better understanding of cinema than neoformalism, and especially in reference to the way the 'meaning-making' activities of spectators are described. Regarding Carroll's perspective, although it was shown how his idea is at points problematic, it was suggested that a slightly modified aspect of this view, namely the way form relates to the narrative's points and purposes, could be incorporated into cinematic formalism, thus presenting a more complete theory of how form functions in films.

In the last section of this chapter, I examined certain scenes from a number of films with the aim of understanding how cinematic formalism does in fact make sense of our cinematic experiences, but also what exactly this satisfying appropriateness refers to. I hope that through these examples it was made explicit that by critically investigating both the form and content of a film, and analysing their relationship and interaction, cinematic formalism succeeds in understanding these films and how they can affect us. With these examples the second fundamental aspect of the aesthetics of cinema—how and why cinematic form affects us—is settled. Having explained the way form functions in films, and their contribution to the 'power of movies', I will turn now to the last aspect of the aesthetics of cinema that still requires elaboration, cinema form. My aim in the next two chapters is to describe in some detail cinema form, show why cinematic space and time are indeed part of the underlying form of cinema and their distinctiveness. As such, in what follows I will not be concerned with the application of cinematic formalism or the significance of form. Rather, my focus will be in determining cinema form and

thus concluding my presentation of cinematic formalism with a completed account of cinematic form.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
CINEMA SPACE: THE FINAL FRONTIER

Introduction:

Having determined the role and value of cinematic form in films, in this chapter I will concentrate on how cinema is formally distinct from other arts. As I suggested in the first chapter, the aesthetics of cinema should centre on finding how cinema is different from other arts. To this end, in this and the next chapter I will elaborate what I have referred to as the fundamental form of cinema and its possible uniqueness. I shall be particularly concerned with cinema space and time and whether these are indeed unique formal characteristics of cinema.

It should be noted that cinema space has been discussed by the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, first as part of a developing aesthetics of cinema that needs to explore the nature of this specific art, and explain why it is different from other art forms; and secondly, as an explanation of why and how cinema differs from the real world, since, as I will suggest later on, there are significant spatial differences. Cinema space has also received attention from film theorists, most significantly David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, Stephen Heath, Mary Ann Doane, Ralph Stephenson, and in his book with J. R. Debrix, Barbara Bowman and Noël Burch.[1] Because my focus is more on the philosophical aspects of cinema space, I choose not to elaborate their views.[2] Some of their insights and comments, however, especially Burch's, are considered in what follows.

In particular, in this chapter I shall give an account of cinema space, which draws on ideas developed so far and attempts to synthesise and elaborate these, in a way that will illuminate cinema space and assist in the development of the aesthetics of cinema. Primarily, this account will explore cinema space as a formal category of cinema and

---

[1] Bordwell, David, Thompson, Kristin and Janet Staiger, 1999, Heath, Stephen, 1986, Doane, Mary Ann, 1985, Stephenson, Ralph, 1962, Stephenson, Ralph, Debrix, J. R., 1976, Bowman, Barbara, 1992, Burch, Noël, 1981

[2] There are two reasons why I wish to distance myself from Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger's work, despite the fact that sometimes their perspective is philosophical. The first is that my aim is to understand cinematic space at a more fundamental level, and not in relation to specific kinds of filmmaking, as they often do. That is a step forward from the main aim of this chapter. Secondly, throughout their book they never clarify what they understand cinematic space to be. For example, sometimes they seem to regard space as one of the formal or structural elements of cinema; but in other cases, they refer to it as simply a stylistic device, for example, "the avant-garde typically takes as its task the creation of film form out of the spatial and temporal possibilities of the medium", which seems to suggest that there can be films where space is not a necessary characteristic of cinema (Bordwell, David, *et al*, 1999, p. 6, 50, 381).

outline its four main characteristics. In doing so, I will also discuss whether these characteristics of cinema space are peculiar to cinema, or also true for other art forms, particularly comics. By determining the nature of cinema space in such detail, I will also benefit from contrasts with other art forms, so as to understand, explain and describe the nature of cinema better.

In space no one can hear you scream:

What is cinema space? One of the most fundamental characteristics of cinema space, as Sesonske has noted, is that it has a certain logical, although not phenomenological, duality.[3] On the one hand, there is the actual space of the screen, 'screen-space', which consists of shadows and light on the surface of the screen, and on the other, the apparently three-dimensional, 'action-space', i.e., the space of the recorded performance. Why is this duality a necessary characteristic of cinema space? When an image is projected on a screen, or any surface for that matter, a duality is created: of the space of the surface and of the space within the image. So, assuming that films have to be projected, cinema space will always hold this sort of duality and hence it can be considered as a necessary characteristic of cinema space. In addition, by outlining this dual nature of cinema we can understand why it is a necessary characteristic of cinema in general. For, as long as an image is projected in the manner suggested above, it will create this kind of dual space. That is, films are spatial in this particular way. As such, the spatial character of cinema will depend on a film being projected, but since contemporary technology requires some sort of projection, cinema by necessity will be spatial, and spatial in this particular kind of way. So, cinema space is a necessary formal aspect of cinema, and indeed part of the underlying form of cinema.

But is this spatial character unique to films? The aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s often argued that the duality of cinema space is a characteristic peculiar to cinema, and, specifically, is what distinguishes it from stage space. For example, Sesonske

[3] Sesonske, Alexander, 1973, p. 402

suggested that in the theatre there is no such duality: the space of the stage *is* the space of the action; consequently, theatre space is much more limited.[4] Panofsky raised a similar point, arguing that cinematic action-space, is wider than stage space, since the camera can shift from one place to the other.[5] But is cinematic action-space really so different from stage action-space? For instance, Khatchadourian argued that the duality of theatre space is between the actual stage space where the drama takes place—the equivalent of cinematic screen-space—and the space of the narrative that is represented (or reconstructed)—the equivalent of cinematic action-space.[6] In this way, I cannot step from my seat in the theatre to Never-Never Land (the stage action-space), as the one is in real space and the other in represented space. This sort of duality is present in paintings and comics as well, since we can distinguish between the space of the drawing or the painting, that is, their location in real space, and the space that is created or represented in the drawing or painting. I conclude, then, that although the duality discussed so far is in fact a necessary characteristic of cinema space, it is not one that is unique to cinema, and hence does not in itself do anything to establish the uniqueness of cinema as an art form. Later on in this chapter I will examine whether it could be maintained that the uniqueness of cinema is demonstrated if all the fundamental characteristics of cinema space I will discuss in this chapter are considered.

The second characteristic of cinema space concerns the two-dimensionality of the cinematic image. Since the recorded three-dimensional space will be projected on a two-dimensional surface, it will be two-dimensional, although it will appear as three-dimensional. As a result of this distortion, it sometimes seems quite peculiar and distinctive, as for example, when in the opening credits of many films the two-dimensional titles are projected on the same plane with action-space, which appears three-dimensional. Alternatively, it may be confusing when we try to look 'in the picture', trying to see what is behind, say, an object, by stretching our heads either to the left or right.

---

[4] Ibid., p. 408-409
[5] Panofsky, Erwin, 1999, p. 282
[6] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1987, p. 175-176

The two-dimensional nature of action-space has led some film theorists, for example, Arnheim, and later on Stephenson and Debrix, to consider it as a counter-example to the claim that cinema is an essentially realistic medium.[7] The realist's main claim is that what is unique and peculiar to cinema as an art form is its capacity to reproduce realistic images. For example, and as discussed more extensively in the second chapter, Kracauer argued that the photographic realism of the cinematic images should be the filmmaker's principal consideration. But it seems that the two-dimensional nature of action-space puts into question the degree of resemblance that cinematic images have with the real world. We become aware that although the images may resemble reality, important differences, such as shape or depth distortions, cannot be ignored. Although these distortions can be 'corrected' in post-production, certain films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and some of Orson Welles' films, especially *The Trial* (1962), deliberately put two-dimensional distortions to artistic use, and as a result heighten our awareness of them. Although cinema has the potential to 'copy' reality to some extent, differences such as the two-dimensionality of action-space suggest that 'cinematic reality' is not completely reducible to reality as we perceive it. Of course the same principle applies to slides, comics and paintings, where three-dimensionality is reproduced two-dimensionally. So, although the two-dimensionality of cinematic images is a necessary characteristic of cinema space, it is not peculiar to it, and therefore not sufficient to establish the uniqueness of cinema as an art form. It still remains to be seen whether the necessary characteristics of cinema space will collectively establish the uniqueness of cinema.

Before I proceed on to the last two characteristics of cinema space, a note should be made on how the frame of the screen functions in relation to cinematic space since it is an element that shapes its nature and presentation. As Sesonske has argued, the frame seems to hold a double role; on the one hand it is a constant reminder of screen-space, on the other, it is a container for the action-space. He hastens to add, however, that although

---

[7] Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, especially Part II, and Stephenson, Ralph and Debrix, J. R., 1976, especially chapters two and three.

contained, action-space is also unlimited, as it spreads beyond what the camera captures.[8] So, in terms of formal composition, spatial relations on the screen are seen both within action-space, say, the relation of the actor to the door, and in relation to the frame. In this sense, the frame becomes a criterion of symmetry and composition. As Sesonske claims, "we see the pattern of shapes on the two-dimensional screen as a lighted rectangle framed by darkness, with sharp edges and a clear and regular shape".[9] It might be objected, however, that the frame seems unimportant when watching a movie.[10] But this is a mistaken claim. After all, we often say, "I looked at it without seeing it".[11] The presence of the frame might strike us or not and this is a formal possibility that the filmmaker can utilise. We become aware of the frame, however, when it is artistically put to use. For instance, in Robert Altman's film *Vincent and Theo* (1990) where there is an obvious effort to bring Vincent van Gogh's paintings to screen, in many scenes the camera has a fixed position, and any kind of movement is minimal; in these scenes the viewer becomes suddenly aware of the presence of the frame. Even if it is true that these scenes perhaps resemble paintings or photographs more than cinematic images, this is a cinematic possibility not to be ignored only because convention and habit dictate otherwise.

Discontinuity:

The third characteristic of cinema space that I wish to discuss is discontinuity. Two types of discontinuity are usually noticed.[12] Action-space is discontinuous from our normal world, and also it is discontinuous in itself; that is, the spatial locations between scenes and shots can be as far apart (both spatially and temporally) as the narrative

---

[8] Sesonske, Alexander, 1973, p. 405

[9] Ibid.

[10] This seems true for classical Hollywood cinema, where, as Bordwell *et al* have pointed out, filmmakers strive to make the frame invisible. In particular, the frame in most classical Hollywood films is used simply as a bridge to the next shot. When for example an actor goes near the frame, thus bringing it to the viewers' attention, there is a cut to the next shot, where the actor continues his/her movement but this time the specific location s/he is in is more central to the composition and the frame becomes 'invisible' again (Bordwell, David, *et al*, 1999, p. 51).

[11] Wittgenstein in Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations* makes a similar observation when he talks about space awareness (Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1976, p. 211).

[12] Sesonske elaborates this in Sesonske, Alexander, 1973, p. 403.

demands. Of these two types of discontinuity, the former is a necessary characteristic, as it is a necessary aspect of action-space, while the latter is a potential. This I will make more explicit below.

Concerning the first kind of discontinuity, we are physically outside the action-space, since we do not occupy the same space as the characters on screen.[13] So, although in normal life, one can direct his or her body towards what one is looking at, cinematic action-space is phenomenologically disconnected from the space we exist in and only visually available. In other words, there is no continuity between the space I occupy as a human being and action-space. If I attempt to step into the world of the narrative, namely, action-space, I will probably collide with a wall. This is a necessary characteristic of cinema since the action-space will always be thus removed from the spectator's space.

Is this phenomenological discontinuity a unique characteristic of cinema? If we consider Khatchadourian's claim mentioned before, it seems that it is not. For, in the same manner that cinematic action-space is different from screen-space, stage-space is different from represented drama-space. As I mentioned earlier, I cannot step from my seat to Never-Never Land, although I can step from my seat to where the actors are. But there seems to be a difference in the way these two kinds of space are discontinuous from our real one; the discontinuity, in the case of cinema, is between the recorded narrative and us, and in the case of stage plays between what is represented and us. That is, the nature of cinema in terms of its recording and transmitting mechanism becomes an extra barrier between the action of a film and us. Specifically, whereas the discontinuity in cinema is between three-dimensionality and two-dimensionality, in theatre, where this difference in dimensions is lacking, what separates us from the world of the narrative is more in terms of common sense, imagination and convention. Thus, this kind of discontinuity differentiates cinematic action-space from theatre action-space, although, again, cinema shares it with painting, photography and comics.

Apart from being phenomenologically discontinuous from our normal space, action-space is discontinuous in itself. From one scene to the other, spatial or temporal

---

[13] Carroll has named this 'disembodied viewpoints', in Carroll, Noël, 1995, p. 70-71.

relations can change and these changes need not follow the rules of our ordinary world.[14] Of course, how these relations evolve is a matter of narrative structure and, furthermore, the manner in which this discontinuity will be, for instance smooth or abrupt, will depend on the filmmaker. We usually become vividly aware of the potential of cinematic discontinuity when a filmmaker such as Bertolucci or Godard plays with our spatio-temporal expectations.

As I mentioned, spatial discontinuity within action space depends on the structure and unfolding of the narrative. Usually there are two kinds of discontinuity. In the first case, two completely unrelated places may be shown. Overall, we have no problem following these changes when watching most films, since filmmakers find ways of hinting at what and where these places are, for example, with titles, voice-over, lines in the dialogue or even by showing places already established within the narrative. These devices might not even be needed if the narrative is constructed so as to explain everything to the audience.

The second kind of discontinuity is when there is some spatial proximity; for example when there is a change of camera view but still in the same room. This technique is most evident in the film *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966). It is interesting to note that this kind of discontinuity brings to the surface matters of spatial orientation. As Burch suggests, for realistic purposes, filmmakers (mostly Hollywood ones) maintain sufficient spatial orientation with the use of eye-line matching, the same use of props, say, the actor wearing the same clothes and so forth.[15] Yet, it might be wondered, is spatial orientation really that important when watching a film? In battle scenes, for example, the changes from one spatial position to another can often be very fast. In such cases spatial orientation is minimal, even non-existent. A good illustration is *Pearl Harbor* (2001), where during the air-fighting sequences each shot lasts an average of 2.5 seconds, and the *Star Wars* trilogy, where shots in battle scenes last an average of 4 seconds. There, spatial orientation is lost; we are just aware of which character we are viewing (and sometimes not even that) but where s/he is remains

[14] Sesonske, Alexander, 1973, p. 404
[15] Burch, Noël, 1981, p. 9

significantly vague.[16]

The cinematic potential of discontinuity should not be considered a necessary aspect of filmmaking, since there are films where no such discontinuity takes place, for instance *Rope* (1948) and *Russian Arc*. Furthermore, it is not a unique aspect of cinema. After all, comics (and novels although in a non-visual way) can present this sort of spatial discontinuity. This can also be true for stage performances as well, since the represented space can vary according to narrative demands. As such, it can be concluded that this sort of discontinuity is merely a cinematic potential, and not a necessary or unique aspect of filmmaking.

Off-screen space:

The last fundamental characteristic of cinema space I shall consider is off-screen space. I will examine off-screen space in some detail because, apart from Burch no one else has extensively elaborated its nature. Off-screen space is a necessary characteristic of cinema space because of the presence of the frame. As Burch has highlighted, the presence of the frame amplifies action-space, forming off-screen space. We have six imaginary spatial segments,

> "the immediate confines of the first four of these areas are determined by the four borders of the frame, and correspond to the four faces of an imaginary truncated pyramid projected into the surrounding space".[17]

The fifth segment is the space 'behind' the camera, and the sixth where the actors 'go' after, for instance, exiting from a door, which is the 'space behind the set', 'beyond the horizon'.[18] So, if we follow Burch's idea through, action-space has a duality as well, what we perceive on the screen and what we do not perceive that has the potential to affect our experience of the film. This I will explain later on.

---

[16] I think this observation can be also seen as a criticism of the realist claim. Whereas in real life spatial orientation is of immense importance and loss of it may even require medical attention, somehow, when watching a film we do not have such strict expectations.
[17] Ibid., p. 17
[18] Ibid.

Typically, on screen we see what the filmmaker wants us to see, which is usually relevant to the story at a given time. As such, we seem to consider what is off-screen as being secondary to the action. There seems to be a common, underlying assumption that filmmakers will show us only what is somehow relevant to what we have already seen, or will see in the film, and additionally, that it will somehow make sense. As a result, spectators will watch David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) again and again so as to try to find something *in* the film that will explain the narrative's ending. Of course that 'something' might not be there. However, the expectation we form as spectators that what we see (and hear) will make sense is true for most art forms. For example, audiences may examine Pieter Bruegel's painting *The Fall of Icarus* until the title makes sense.

It is interesting to note here that our attitude towards cinematic off-screen space can be considered a defining difference from our attitude towards video games off-screen space. In video games such as *Tomb Raider*, we have the potential to explore what is off-screen by taking Lara Croft where we want, or moving her head up and down. Thus, whereas in films we tend to ignore what is off-screen as irrelevant to the action, in video games we strive to explore off-screen space, because ultimately it is there that all the action waits.[19]

How is the existence of off-screen space determined in cinema, however? The most usual ways are by actors entering and exiting from action-space, camera movements, actors looking or pointing off-screen and even by seeing only part of an actor's body.[20] Specifically, when an actor enters, say, from the door, the space behind the door takes some sort of shape in the viewers' imagination, although a precise delineation of how this off-screen space might be does not occur. It is only when the action-space becomes empty of any action or movement that we become more aware of off-screen space. Crudely put, there might be something more interesting happening there, as for example, in the ear-cutting scene in *Reservoir Dogs* mentioned in the previous chapter. In such cases, our attention is diverted to off-screen space (often aided

[19] Billy Vermillion provides a good analysis of the nature of video games space, Vermillion, Billy, (accessed 15/06/01).
[20] This is also discussed in much detail in Burch, Noël, 1981, p. 21-25.

by off-screen sound), because the camera is not where the action is. Alternatively, when the frame is left empty of any action, we become uncertain from where the next segment of action will occur. This is a common feature of some of Yasujiro Ozu and Takeshi Kitano's films, where we become intensely aware of off-screen space, since in certain shots there is nothing happening on-screen. There is one more possibility of off-screen space awareness, when camera or actor movement is continuous.[21] In these cases there is no sharp distinction between on and off-screen space, as the one constantly converts into the other.

The assumption we form as audiences that what we need to know is on screen, along with the use of off-screen space, can become a unique cinematic tool. The play with our conventional expectations and our inability to know what is off-screen space can be used either as an element of shock or surprise or for comic effect. To use a classic example, in a scene of Chaplin's *The Immigrant* (1917), we see Chaplin leaning over the railing of the boat and we assume that he, like the rest of the passengers, is seasick, whereas he is in fact trying to catch a fish. The assumption we have that what we need to know is on screen and the revealing of what is off-screen, produce a comic effect. Another instance is when off-screen space is used for shock or suspense. Frequently, in thrillers or horror films, while the desperate heroine is trying to save her life the camera will follow her movements from a very close distance, so we are unable to see where the killer/demon/psychopath is in relation to her. Characteristically, horror filmmakers will lead us to form an assumption as to where the attacker is, and then bring him/her/it in from a completely different off-screen place that catches us off-guard. Alternatively, filmmakers will manipulate off-screen space by keeping the threat to the heroes of the narrative off-screen, for example, the shark in *Jaws* or the alien monster in *Predator* (1987). There, what is off-screen and (almost) never seen becomes, for whatever psychological reasons, more frightening.

Is off-screen space a unique characteristic of cinema? It is definitely different from painting and photography, since there we do not have the option of *seeing* what is beyond the frame. There seems to be a similarity with comics, since we can see what is

---

[21] Burch argues so in ibid., p. 18-19

outside the frame on the next frame. Additionally, the use of off-screen space in cinema seems to be different from that of the stage, but interestingly enough, not too much. If we consider the use of lighting in the theatre (where the lights mimic the actions of the camera), then the same characterisations with cinema off-screen space can be applied. What we see under the spotlight can be considered similar to what we see on screen, and what remains in the dark is analogous to off-screen space. Again, we make the assumption in stage plays that, what remains in the dark is not as important as what is illuminated. It can be concluded that off-screen space is necessarily present whenever a segment of space is framed, as, for instance, in comics or paintings. But this shows that this is not a characteristic unique to cinema.

Sparshott makes an interesting observation regarding the differences between cinema and theatre off-screen space. He argues that when in the theatre an actor exits from the stage, s/he loses his/her 'existence' in the mind of the viewer, since theatre off-screen space is not acknowledged: "[t]he stage world is a closed world; an actor who goes offstage loses all determinate existence for the audience".[22] In cinema, however, we attribute 'infinite continuity', we feel like we 'glimpse only part of the world'.[23] So, when a character exits from on screen his/her fictional existence is just transferred off-screen. Sparshott, when discussing 'infinite continuity', seems to be making the same mistake that, as I mentioned earlier, Panofsky and Sesonske do, namely, failing to recognise the duality of stage space. These theorists assume that what we see on stage ends where the wing curtains begin. But as was already suggested, this is mistaken. The space of the narrative in theatre is as infinitely continuous as the cinematic one. Furthermore, there seems to be something misleading in the suggestion that when actors exit from the stage, they cease to exist for the audience. Does that mean that we are surprised whenever they re-enter? Since nothing of the sort happens, I assume that Sparshott is mistaken in arguing so. Actors that are out of sight are *not* out of mind, either in the theatre or the cinema.

---

[22] Sparshott, F. E., 1985, p. 295
[23] Ibid.

The uniqueness of cinema space:

So far I have argued that space is a necessary formal characteristic of cinema. That is, whenever a film is screened its nature will necessarily be spatial. Furthermore, I outlined four fundamental characteristics that determine the nature of cinema space: duality, two-dimensionality, discontinuity and the distinction between on and off-screen space. On their own, however, they are unable to show that cinema space is a unique formal characteristic of cinema. For instance, two-dimensionality is also evident in paintings, and off-screen space is the same in stage plays and comics. But could it be argued that these four together are unique to cinema? Consider the usual counter instances: theatre is not two-dimensional, and painting does not have the potential to show off-screen space. The only art form that seems to share all four is comics. Comics (and in this thesis I have been referring to comics drawn on paper) involve a duality of space, the same sort of spatial discontinuity, are two-dimensional and can utilise off-screen space in the same manner. Two differences are usually mentioned, however. The first is in terms of movement and the second in terms of the nature of action-space. I have argued in chapter five, however, that movement is not necessary to cinema. As such, films that involve no movement do not differ from comics in that respect. In the second case, the usual claim is that what we see on screen is recorded 'reality', whereas in comics it is merely a drawing of something. But as I have suggested in chapter two, animated and computer generated films do not rely on the recording performance of a real event. Thus, it could be maintained that an animated film where no movement is present has the same spatial nature as comics. From this it can be concluded that cinema space is not peculiar to cinema, since it has the same spatial nature as comics. What could be thought of as a crucial difference, however, between cinema and comics space, is that cinema space has the *potential* to be otherwise. That is, even though films and comics can have the same spatial nature, cinema will always be different in the sense that it has the potential to exhibit a different kind of space as well. Comics, however, do not; they are limited in this particular type of space. Therefore, it could be concluded that cinema space is indeed unique because of both the nature and potential of its spatial nature. Unlike comics, it has a much wider potential.

Conclusion:

Throughout this chapter, I have been examining the nature of cinema space in some detail so as to gain a more substantial understanding of the nature of cinema form. In particular, I outlined four necessary characteristics of cinema space: its duality in terms of action and screen space, its two-dimensionality, its discontinuity and the presence of off-screen space. Specifically, I compared each characteristic of cinema space to other art forms, such as stage-based performances, paintings and comics, in order to determine whether cinema could in fact be named unique in terms of its form, i.e., in this case, cinematic space. I concluded, however, that although there are some differences, there are also a number of similarities, and this is especially true for comics, that should be acknowledged. Thus, to argue, as Sesonske, Sparshott and Pierre Rouve have done, that cinema is a distinct kind of art because of its uniqueness in terms of form cannot be done convincingly if one considers cinema space alone, since comics seem quite similar. What may be true, however, is that, if cinematic uniqueness in terms of form is to be pursued as a claim, cinema time needs to be examined as well in order to gain a more complete understanding of cinema form. This I intend to do in the following chapter, where I will conclude the discussion of cinema form.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
CINEMA TIME

Introduction:

This chapter concludes the discussion of cinema form mentioned in chapter five by examining cinematic time. In particular, I will outline four of its fundamental characteristics in order to show through these that cinema time is part of the underlying form of cinema. Furthermore, as with cinema space, I will consider some aspects of cinematic time that affect its nature and presentation, and are truly 'cinematic'. Through these discussions I will determine the formal distinctiveness of cinema, but also outline some similarities with other art forms. In this manner, I will complete the discussion of cinematic formalism by fully outlining cinema form and illustrating its distinct nature. Finally, I will consider the debate about cinema time and the use of tenses, which, as I will show, has certain philosophical parameters.

As with cinema space, both film theorists and philosophers working on cinema have discussed cinema time. In early film theory, the Russian filmmakers and theorists, and also Rudolf Arnheim, examined cinematic time with the aim of achieving a more comprehensive understanding of cinema. Contemporary film theorists have also considered cinema time, in particular Burch, Stephenson and Debrix, Bordwell and Thompson, and Andrey Tarkovsky.[1] From a more philosophical perspective, a number of aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s have been concerned with cinema time. Furthermore, Gilles Deleuze's two volumes on cinema, *The Movement-Image* and the *Time-Image*, deal extensively with cinema time.[2] Although the account of cinema time I

---

[1] Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 1999, Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, Burch, Noël, 1981, Stephenson, Ralph, and Debrix, J. R., 1976, Bordwell *et all*, 1999, Tarkovsky, Andrey, 1986. Furthermore, in 2000 the Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art hosted an exhibition entitled 'Making Time: Considering Time as a Material in Contemporary Video and Film', where a number of film theorists such as Adriano Pedrosa and Peter Wollen discussed cinematic time.

[2] Deleuze, Gilles, 1986 and 1989. I will not be focusing much on Deleuze's views, however, since his work on cinema is shaped by his interest in the nature and development of human thought. Deleuze, partly relying on Henri Bergson's ideas about thought and memory, examined cinema as a developing cultural practice that manifests the historical shifts in our ways of thinking and imaging the world. Time and movement, so central in Bergson's philosophy, became for Deleuze the two principal features of his examination of cinema. In particular, he understood cinema as a concrete manifestation of thought in relation to time and movement. Because of this difficult, and often enigmatic perspective, philosophers working on film, especially of the analytical tradition, have often ignored Deleuze's work. Yet it is interesting to note that since the 1990s contemporary film theorists have also ignored his work, mainly because of Deleuze's reliance on auteurism, which has become unfashionable in film theory. Due to all

will present here is influenced by some of these ideas, it develops in a more comprehensive way, illuminating the subject further and avoiding certain mistakes.

Cinema time: Time's on my side:

The first characteristic of cinema time I will consider is its dual nature. In particular, Sesonske distinguishes between screen and action-time: screen-time (the equivalent of screen-space) is the regular viewing time, which depends on the actual duration of the film.[3] In this case the images are considered as objects of our ordinary world: for example, a scene is three minutes long and it comes before or after another; or, the duration of a film is 100 minutes. Action-time (the equivalent of action-space) is the time of the narrative; that is, the segments of time (recorded or not) we watch on screen. This kind of time is wholly determined, in terms of rate, duration and direction, by the filmmaker; the filmmaker becomes the temporal deity of the film-world, manipulating the temporal order to suit the purposes of the narrative. It is because the cinematic temporal nature is wholly created that filmmakers can claim to show us the present, the past and the future, justify freeze frames or time travelling, to slow down or accelerate time and go boldly from the Cro-Magnon age to 'where no one has gone before'.[4]

Furthermore, Haig Khatchadourian outlines two more aspects of cinema time, 'points of time' in the narrative, which are the fictional dates "which are imagined to make the beginning, middle and end of the film" and constitute part of the action-time, and also 'lived or felt time', which consists of the subjective experience of time each

---

these problems, but also because his perspective differs at a fundamental level from the one discussed here, this chapter is not concerned with his views. For a good discussion of Deleuze's work on cinema see, Rodowick, D. N., 1997, Mark, John, 1998, especially chapter eight. For Deleuze's relationship with film theory see Cook, Pam and Bernink, Mieke, 1999, especially p. 340.

[3] Sesonske, Alexander, 1989, p. 588

[4] It is interesting to note that although action and screen-time are usually of distinct duration, this is just a cinematic possibility and not a limitation of cinema in general, since their duration can coincide, as for example in the film *Cleo from 5 to 7* (1961), where action-time is two hours long, exactly as is screen-time. As Eric Rohmer's has claimed, however, " we all know that cinematic time is not the same as time in real life. Films that have tried to show in an hour and a half action supposed to last an hour and a half, *Rope* or *Cleo from 5 to 7*, seem to run much longer", quoted in Rassos, Effie, (accessed 30/07/02). Sesonske discusses the potential of cinema screen and action-time in Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, p. 421.

viewer has.[5] In this case, a boring film might seem to last for five hours, and an interesting one for twenty minutes. This last observation, however, has more to do with psychology and human nature than cinematic form.

Is this duality between action and screen-time a necessary characteristic of cinema time? When a film is screened it will necessarily have screen-time, since the projection will be of some duration. As such, screen-time is indeed a necessary aspect and shows why cinema time is part of the underlying form of cinema. Yet, is action-time necessary? It is, in the sense that, as long as images are shown in some order, a sort of action-time will be created. According to Sesonske, however, for a film to have action-time the images shown must have some temporal similarity to ordinary time: "we must be able to perceive in the flow of screen-space images discrete events between which the relations of before and after hold".[6] It follows for Sesonske that in films where what is shown on screen bears no resemblance to ordinary time, such as abstract films or films where the narrative is very fragmented or incoherent, there is no action-time; in this sense, action-time is not a necessary characteristic of cinema time. Sesonske in this case, however, is applying a very strict definition of action-time. For, we can construct action-time even if we do not perceive events in the temporally conventionally way; for instance in *La Jetée*, where the story is told in a succession of still images, action time becomes the time internal to this narrative. We may also determine 'points in time', that is, the span of the story. Specifically, in cases like *La Jetée*, we are able to reconstruct action-time because we are told enough from the narration to understand most, if not all, the temporal relations that hold. In other cases, such as Jarman's *Blue*, the people talking and discussing their experiences determine action-time, although here time seems to be of less importance. Alternatively, although films such as *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with me*, *Lost Highway* and *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996) are temporally confusing and fragmented, we do manage to reconstruct the time of the narrative to a certain extent and to determine action-time.

---

[5] Khatchadourian, Haig, 1987, p. 173. Bordwell *et al* also make a distinction between plot-time, the segments of time we watch in a film, and story-time, which is the 'would-be' duration of the narrative (Bordwell, David, *et al*, 1999, p. 181).

[6] Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, p. 421

The only way that action-time might not exist is if an abstract painting is screened, preferably in silence. In this case the only thing that could count as action-time is the recorded time of the abstract painting. The intuitive urge here is to argue that such a screening would not be a film, in more or less the same way one might argue that *4'33''* is not music.[7] However, bearing in mind that future developments in cinematic style may allow for such possibilities—as for example Peter Greenaway's films suggest a non-narrative cinema—I will assume that screenings of abstract paintings may someday be considered films. In cases such as these, action-time is not a necessary requirement for cinema but just a possibility. For the present, however, and despite Sesonske's objection, action-time seems to be a key characteristic of films.

Can this duality of cinema time show cinema to be a distinct art, as Sesonske and other aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s maintained? It seems not, for such temporal duality exists in other art forms, such as any stage-based performance. In the theatre for example, there is the equivalent of screen-time (the duration of the play), and action-time, (the time of the narrative that varies depending on the story). So, it seems that the duality of cinematic time cannot on its own determine the distinctiveness of cinema.

However, some features of action-time do seem to be truly cinematic. For example, the slowing down and acceleration of time show that cinematic action-time has different potential from other arts, and these are worth examining briefly. The acceleration and slowing down of time occurs when a filmmaker runs the film through the camera either at a speed slower than 24 frames per second, for acceleration, or faster than 24 frames per second, to slow it down, and in both cases projects it at the speed of 24 frames per second. In general, filmmakers will often use the acceleration of time to show the passage of time, for example by showing the sun rise and set in a matter of seconds. Alternatively, to produce a humorous effect, for example in comic chase scenes. The slowing down of time, on the other hand, is more often used for dramatic effect, to express pain, agony, grief or death; for example the shooting down of Marlon Brando in *The Godfather* (1972) or the endings of *Bonny and Clyde* (1967) and *Twelve*

---

[7] As Thomas Mann wrote, "[t]hat would surely be an absurd undertaking...It would be as though one held a single note or chord for a whole hour, and called it music" (Mann, Thomas, 1973, p. 541).

Monkeys (1995). As Armand Cauliez argues, "[s]low motion is tragic because slowing down time makes...[the scene] interminable, unbearable".[8] However, filmmakers often slow down time for other purposes, for example in dream sequences or love scenes, and alter the presentation of time so as to intensify a scene. Slowing down or speeding up time is a characteristic that should be considered truly cinematic. Although it can be reproduced in some way in the theatre through movement it will not have the effect that it has in the cinema. For, one of the peculiarities of cinematic action-time is that it can 'mimic' real time so well that any distortion has a unique effect on the audience.

The 'illusion':

The second characteristic of cinema time results from the way films are screened. In cinema we see people moving in time and events happening in time, mostly as we do in 'real life'. The temporal world of the film, however, should be considered a type of 'illusion' caused by the mechanics of film screening and the morphology of the human eye. In film screenings the projector creates the impression of time by progressing the film in such a way that each frame pauses for a 48^{th} of a second in front of a light source. In between the frames there is a 48^{th} of a second interval where nothing is screened. The human eye, however, because of the speed with which the frames are screened, does not acknowledge these intervals. In this way, we see the recorded action, whereas what we are watching is a succession of still images brought together by editing and screened by a cinema projector.[9] This type of projection shapes the nature of action-time, and should be considered the defining difference between cinema and photography. A still image, such as a photograph, has its own time, internal to it. It can be argued that it captures an individual moment in time. In cinema, however, we seem to be watching recorded time. Since no other art depends on this type of projection, it can be concluded that this

[8] Quoted in Stephenson, Ralph and Debrix, J. R., 1976, p. 108.
[9] In VCR tapes and DVDs, the film's frames are stored in the magnetic tape of the former, while a MPEG programme encodes each frame in the latter. Then the VCR reads the signals from the tape, and the DVD decodes the data stored and both convert them to signals suitable for a television or a computer. For more information see, www.howstuffworks.com/cassete.htm and www.howstuffworks.com/dvd.htm (both accessed 21/08/02)

characteristic makes the nature of action-time formally unique. Therefore, it could be maintained that the mechanism upon which cinema time depends, shows why there is something peculiar about cinema form.

Yet it must be noted that the nature of film projection does not affect our experience of films as such, since we are mostly unaware of it. It is only if the filmmaker chooses to extend the 48th of a second interval that we become aware of this peculiarity of cinema time. For example, in freeze frames the 'illusion' of movement is interrupted and it seems as if time stands still in the world of the narrative. In particular, a freeze frame occurs when one single frame is 'frozen', i.e., one shot stops the regular progression of the film and appears as the screening of a single photograph. Freeze frames may be used during a film, as in *Welcome to Sarajevo*, *Trainspotting* (1996) and *Go Now* (1995). In such cases, the use of the freeze frame varies: for instance, a filmmaker may use it for comic effect, for example freezing the frame just before a tomato hits the lead singer, or to create tension or suspense by freezing the frame just as something dramatic is going to happen.[10] Freeze frames, however, are typically used at the end of films. In these cases the use of the freeze frame not only signifies the end of the film, but also ends the world of the narrative and of action-time, and in a sense highlights its artificiality. Most importantly, however, the freeze frame manifests in full measure the created nature of action-time by suggesting something that is impossible in the real world, that is, the 'pausing' of the regular flow of time. The freeze frame is a technique unique to films. For, even though it can be mimicked in the theatre it fails to have the same effect that the freezing of time has in a film.

If films had tenses:

In this section I will outline the main reason why philosophers have considered cinema time. Philosophical discussions about cinema time usually follow from the claim that cinema functions more or less as a language does, with syntactical and grammatical

[10] Often, the freezing of a frame during a film will be accompanied by a voice-over that takes the opportunity to explain to the audience various aspects of the narrative, which would be more difficult to do while the action progresses.

rules where tenses are required to determine temporal relations such as that of before or after an event. Unlike language, however, it is maintained that cinema is incapable of articulating either past or future tenses. As Bluestone argues, cinematic images "unfolding in a perceptual present, like visual perception itself...cannot express either a past or a future".[11] That is, we always perceive cinematic images in our present and, consequently, the images will necessarily express a present tense. This claim relies on the premise that when in (normal) life we perceive something in our present, i.e., when we have immediate perception of, or involvement with, an event, we linguistically express it in the present tense: 'I am playing Monopoly', 'I am testing your patience by writing this sentence'. Accordingly, films, even if depicting the past of a character's life, will express the events in a 'present tense'.[12] As Kolker and Ousley explain,

> "our perception of these scenes is in the present, as is all direct perception. The only syntactic equivalent of a past tense in film is some variation of a cut or a dissolve. But once a character indicates he is about to tell a story from the past, and once the cut or dissolve has been made, the effect of what we are seeing is essentially the same as the events of the film occurring in the present".[13]

But is our perception of a 'recorded' event the same as our ordinary perception of it?[14] According to Sesonske, the idea of cinematic direct perception often results from comparisons of cinema with literature.[15] Theorists may claim that when reading a book, the pages and the written words act as mediators between the reader and the world of the narrative. In cinema, however, there is transparency, i.e., there is no such intervention; we watch the events unfold 'in front of our eyes'.

This claim has received much attention in the philosophy of art, especially in relation to photography. Kendall Walton, in particular, has explicitly stated that "photographs are *transparent*. We *see* through them"; "we *see* quite literally, our dead

---

[11] Bluestone, George, 1961, p. 314
[12] Kolker, R. P. and Ousley, Douglas J., 1973, p. 391-393
[13] Ibid., p. 393
[14] For the purposes of this discussion I will not examine whether cinema does functions as a language, which filmmakers master in order to express themselves. Instead of going over this claim, I will narrow my discussion and focus on the issue of past tenses. My reason for focusing on this is because it directly affects the understanding of the nature of action-space and time, and is of much philosophical interest. For a thorough examination of why and how cinema has been considered a 'language', see the first section of Braudy, Leo and Cohen, Marshall, 1999.
[15] Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, p. 424

relatives themselves when we look at photographs of them".[16] The fact that cinema and photography seem transparent, however, does not mean that the events are right there in front of us, that we directly perceive *them*.[17] Rather, we perceive recordings of them. To illustrate, there is a difference between being present in a scene that is being recorded, and watching the screening of that scene. Alternatively, there is a difference between having watched the American Airlines aeroplane crash into the World Trade Center live on CNN, and having watched it from New York City. The type of immediacy in the former case is different from the latter.

Walton, however, objects that, when we see things through glasses, telescopes, mirrors and so on we do not question the transparency of our perception. Why should we do so in photography? The camera acts in the same way that spectacles and telescopes do. In this sense, do we actually *see* Ingrid Bergman when watching *Casablanca*? Nigel Warburton makes a number of observations regarding Walton's insistence. The most important one, and the one which illustrates most clearly the difference between seeing a photograph of Ingrid Bergman and seeing her in person, is that what and how the camera *sees* does not depend on us.[18] That is, the photographer will always be responsible for what we see, how this is recorded, how the film is processed and so forth. Walton, however, aware of this objection, mentions cases where we are shown things by others, or something is pointed out to us, or the lights are turned on or off for some effect and so forth. But Warburton rightly insists that,

> "[w]hen the director of the camera...has the capacity to change the lens and focus according to whim, show me fleeting glimpses...delay the presentation of the image on the screen, select from among a wide variety of screen materials and textures, alter the relative concentration of light on different parts of the image, crop off selected bits of the image, and make many other choices affecting how I will interpret it, it becomes clear that most important resemblances with ordinary seeing are lost".[19]

Given this, it might be concluded that there are significant differences between meeting Ingrid Bergman in person and watching *Casablanca*. In the first case we have a wider

---

[16] Walton, Kendall, L., 1984, p. 251, 252. Walton's claim has been challenged especially by Martin, Edwin, 1986 and Warburton, Nigel, 1988.
[17] Sesonske argues against the claim that cinema is transparent in Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, p. 425.
[18] Warburton, Nigel, 1988, p. 71
[19] Ibid., p. 72

option of choosing what to see and how, whereas in the second case we are shown only what the director decides. It is in this sense that the claim for transparency in cinema, seems misleading. The actions of the filmmaker obscure this transparency.

Even if Warburton is right, however, it must be pointed out that in cinema we do have immediate perception of the *recorded action* (or live transmission) on the screen. Yet, what does this actually imply for tenses? As was already noted, in the 'real world', linguistically, immediacy implies a present tense. However, this is why it is important to acknowledge the duality of cinema time. Action-time should not be confused with screen-time. As far as screen-time is concerned, the images we see at a given moment are always in what we call our 'present', since the film is an object of our ordinary world and we watch each successive image in our 'here and now'.[20] Hence, we can say, "I am now watching Mildred Pierce's past". Action-time, however, has nothing to do with this. Action-time is created and wholly depends on the narrative. As Sesonske argues, there is a logical difference between describing the face of Orson Welles speaking a line of the script of the film *Citizen Kane* (1941) and describing Charles Foster Kane saying "Rosebud" just before he dies.[21] In action-time, assuming that cinema does express tenses, there can be past and future ones signifying relations of before and after, which are usually indicated by fades, dissolves, titles, crosscutting, super-imposition or even split screens. It follows that, at least for clarity's sake, the time of the narrative should be considered on its own, as an independent realm of temporality where although similar laws with ordinary time may apply, these could be twisted, distorted or even fail to hold at all. To conclude, although film scholars have maintained that cinema is limited to expressing only a present tense, after careful consideration it seems that what they refer to may be true only for one aspect of cinema time, which seems more as a remark about objects of our real world and not about cinema in particular.

---

[20] Sparshott, F. E., 1985, p. 292
[21] Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, p. 425

Matters of discontinuity:

I will now turn to the last two fundamental characteristics of cinema time: discontinuity and off-screen time. Matters of temporal discontinuity are quite complex, so I will discuss them in some detail and provide an analysis that is more in-depth than the one concerning the discontinuity of cinema space. Through this discussion the nature of cinema time will be further illustrated and the distinctive character of cinema better explained.

As Sesonske suggests, like cinema space, cinema time is discontinuous in two distinct ways.[22] Firstly, it is discontinuous from our real world; we are outside the temporal world of films, and have no access—other than visual—to it. This sort of discontinuity is a necessary aspect of cinema since we are always going to be outside the world of the narrative. In the case of the as yet fictional example of the live transmission of *Russian Arc* mentioned in chapter one, although we may share the time of the recording, we are still outside the temporal world of the narrative, the time of Katharine the Great.

Secondly, action-time is itself discontinuous, since two successive images can be temporally discontinuous.[23] It should be noted that this kind of discontinuity is not a necessary characteristic of action-time, since there can be films with only one continuous shot, like Hitchcock's *Rope*.[24] Rather, it is a narrative device that most filmmakers use, and one that has become characteristically cinematic. What is fascinating about this kind of discontinuity is that it lacks any kind of restriction. A shot can be from one second to one million years apart from the next one, or they might even be simultaneous. The fact that there are no restrictions usually goes unnoticed in most films, especially Classical Hollywood ones, because filmmakers choose to narrate stories in some sort of ordinary temporal order either by moving from the present to the future, or using devices such as

---

[22] Sesonske, Alexander, 1989, p. 588
[23] Ibid.
[24] Although, as Stephenson and Debrix suggest, Hitchcock's use of the camera in *Rope* is mischievous, since "there are breaks caused by the camera moving to a dark surface and the screen blacking out", (Stephenson, R., Debrix, J. R., 1976, p. 133).

the dissolve and the fade-out, which have become well known cinematic conventions. As Bordwell *et al* argue, "time in the classical film is a vehicle for causality, not a process to be investigated on its own".[25] This of course does not mean that action-time in Hollywood films is continuous; simply, that it is constructed in a way which often reflects the temporal rules of our world, or relies on well-established cinematic conventions, such as the use of flashbacks in film-noir films.

Is cinematic discontinuity, as Sesonske maintains, a unique characteristic of cinema? As with cinema's spatial discontinuity, temporal discontinuity seems to hold for most art forms, such as novels and comics. Although in the theatre we see the events happen in front of us, we should keep in mind that there is an equivalent of action-time (as there is of action-space) the time of the narrative, which we cannot access: I cannot step from my seat in the theatre to the time of Hamlet. So, this mode of discontinuity is not a unique characteristic of cinema time. Furthermore, even the potential of the film's narrative to be either continuous or discontinuous is not a unique aspect of cinema, since it is borrowed from other arts, such as novels and plays.

Discontinuity continued:

One issue that requires some elaboration is the way discontinuity is articulated in films. Firstly, as was mentioned before, most mainstream films rely on cinematic conventions to present the narrative in a seemingly linear fashion. Although contemporary Hollywood films are far less conventional in terms of temporal continuity than their predecessors, it is more often the case that 'art' films, independent productions or even early films, will break away from the restrictions of the regular temporal order, and thus with linearity and continuity. It is interesting to note that in the early stages of cinema, filmmakers followed quite different temporal conventions. As Tom Gunning argues, the treatment of time in early films is quite alien to modern day cinema practices, and early cinema audiences tolerated greater temporal ambiguity.[26] For example, in the

[25] Bordwell, David *et al*, 1999, p. 47
[26] Gunning, Tom, 1989, p. 96

1903 film *Life of an American Fireman*—the story of a fireman saving a family from their burning house—we see the action from within the house where the family is trapped in a burning room and the fireman comes in from the window to rescue them; then we watch the same event but from outside the house, the camera following the actions of the fireman this time.[27] It is further noted that modern audiences have learned to overlook the discontinuous patterns of cinematic narration. With the aid of various conventions and a temporally linear narrative, filmmakers de-emphasise the discontinuous nature of the film. As Kolker and Ousley explain, "even though we experience most film narratives as ongoing wholes, this is not how the narratives are made, nor how they are seen, as opposed to how they are perceived".[28] The construction of most films as continuous wholes makes those where temporal continuity is broken, such as *Citizen Kane*, *Betrayal* (1983) and *Pulp Fiction*, important cinematic achievements, since they break away from conventions, exploring and extending the artistic possibilities of cinema.

Furthermore, one of the most common ways of making the narrative discontinuous is through flashbacks and forwards. As their name suggests, these are breaks in the regular flow of the story that narrate events that happened either in the past or future of the 'present' of the film. The very fact that we call them flashbacks or forwards suggests that we perceive films to have a temporal logic that is similar, if not identical, to that of our ordinary world. As Sparshott argues, flashbacks and forwards exist only as a product of this sort of linearity.[29] That is, we assume that a story unfolds in a linear way, where breaks from this orderly structure are clearly indicated and justified, usually by a line in the dialogue, a change in clothing or hair style, by seeing the hero as either a child or an old man, the screening of a calendar, by music which is characteristic of a different temporal era or in more modern films by changing from colour into black and white or vice versa.[30]

---

[27] Gunning provides a good discussion of this film in, ibid., p. 97.
[28] Kolker, R. P., and Ousley, Douglas J., 1973, p. 391
[29] Sparshott, F. E., 1985, p. 293
[30] Stephenson and Debrix discuss the use of flashbacks and forwards in some detail, in Stephenson, Ralph and Debrix, J. R., 1976, p. 116.

In films where continuity is not an issue, scenes can have little or very peculiar temporal relations between them. Sometimes, as Arnheim has indicated, a filmmaker may choose to show us shots or scenes that are temporally independent from the action.[31] For example, in films such as *Fight Club* (1999) or *Insomnia* (2002), there are various single shots interfering with the ordinary course of the narrative. These shots flash for as little as a fraction of a second and are temporally, and sometimes even thematically, irrelevant to the narrative. But there may be cases where single shots or whole scenes are shown which, although temporally irrelevant, are related through the subject matter. A typical instance is at the end of Eisenstein's film *Strike* (1925), where we see some workmen being shot and then a bull being slaughtered at a stockyard.[32] Here, the juxtaposition of the images is temporally irrelevant, but indicative of the filmmaker's point. A different case is when the story involves parallel worlds. For example, in films such as *Run Lola Run* (1998) and *Smoking/No Smoking* (1993), we see the story repeated a number of times, each time beginning from the same temporal moment, but following a different path of events. Time between the last shot of one version of the events and the first of the next version becomes, if not irrelevant, somehow independent. Another example is when there is some time reversal, for instance the ending of Paul Auster's *Lulu on the Bridge* (1998), where the story goes back to the beginning of the narrative, this time showing us that the main character is dead and nothing of what we saw happened. In such a case discontinuity between images is of a different kind, involving concepts of parallel worlds.

---

[31] Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, p. 102-103. A different type of discontinuity that Arnheim indicated is when the scenes or shots are temporally simultaneous. This is a very common technique in cinema, novels and comics, which is often used to create rhythm or suspense. D. W. Griffith was the first one to use this technique in 1908 in his film *After Many Years* (1908), structuring the story back and forth from the castaway sailor to his wife back at home. Gunning argues that the intensity created between these images was so effective that it became one of the most important cinematic techniques (Gunning, Tom, 1989, p. 110).

[32] Also see Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 1999, p. 14.

Off-screen time:

The last characteristic of cinema time I will discuss is off-screen time, that is, the time of the narrative that is not shown. Since films have some finite duration the segments we watch will necessarily be restricted to this duration; in other words, action-time is always limited in this sense. In the same manner as off-screen space, the filmmaker chooses which time segments of the narrative to show us.[33] In some films when there is a short temporal ellipsis, such as seeing an actor going to bed at night and waking up at the next morning, we understand that his sleeping has been omitted for lack of interest, and that the next scene is the morning after where the action continues. Fade-ins and outs, wipes and iris-ins and outs usually indicate temporal omissions that are considered unimportant to the narrative, such as a person's visits to the toilet. It has become a convention that filmmakers will compress time in order to show only the interesting or relevant parts.[34] So, if the action of the narrative develops over the period of a week, the filmmaker shows us only the parts of the week in which something important for the narrative occurs. Of course filmmakers may choose either to omit events that are important to the narrative for suspense or for other structural reasons; or even show segments that have little effect on the narrative. The fragments of time that contribute nothing to our understanding of narrative, action and character are often referred to as 'dead time'.[35] There seems to be an underlying assumption that in story-telling art forms, such as cinema, literature, plays and comics, anything that does not contribute to the purposes of story telling is, for lack of a better description, dead.

How is off-screen time determined? In most films we can understand how much time has been omitted with no explicit indication. In films where some indication needs to be given, filmmakers will use devices such as a title, a voice-over or a line in the dialogue, so that we can understand the scene's temporal relation to its previous or next

---

[33] Arnheim discusses off-screen time in Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, p. 102.
[34] Tarkovsky in his work objects to this convention, arguing that what is unique and peculiar in cinema is its ability to reproduce, somehow both preserve and explore, real time (Tarkovsky, Andrey, 1986, p. 62-65).
[35] Rassos, Effie, (accessed 30/07/02)

one. If the ellipses are indefinite, there may be hints or evidence that are external to the story, for example the progression of Picasso's paintings in *Jules et Jim*. In cases where the change is obvious but still indefinite, such as the temporal leap in *2001: A Space Odyssey* from the 'dawn of men' to the trans-galactic shuttle, we simply follow the story to find out how the scenes relate to each other. If the indefiniteness is of a greater extent, then we assume that it will be explained later in the narrative. If, however, the indefiniteness is never specified, like with various scenes from *Memento*, we just accept them as either peculiarities of the narrative, or adding to the possible mystery of the film, as is the case with many of Lynch's films.

Is this a peculiar characteristic of cinema? Possibly not, since off-screen time exists for most types of narrative arts. For example, in a play we will see the temporal segments of the story that, say, the director chooses. The same principles can apply to literature, any stage-based performance or comics. It is the manner in which the 'artist' will present the narrative that dictates how off-screen time will be used, and not the limitations of these art forms.

The uniqueness of cinema time:

In this chapter I have presented the four most fundamental characteristics of cinema time. As with cinema space there are a number of similarities with other art forms that need to be considered. For instance, comics involve discontinuity and off-screen time, whereas stage performances have the temporal duality suggested, i.e., between the duration of the performance and the time of the narrative. Yet, the type of projection required, seems to be peculiar to cinema, as does the potential of action time in terms of the freeze frame and the acceleration and slowing down of time. Thus, by arguing that cinema time is shaped, to a certain degree, by the way films are screened—namely, that what we actually see is still images projected in a way that it makes it impossible for the human eye to understand these intervals—it can be concluded that cinema is formally distinct. So, it seems that if we take into account the peculiar

potential of cinema space and time and also the uniqueness of cinema time, it could be concluded that cinema form is indeed distinct from other arts.

In this manner, the aesthetics of cinema, by providing in-depth formal accounts manage to show what is distinctive about cinema, and how this distinctiveness shapes the way films are, but also how cinema compares and contrasts to other arts. Furthermore, by outlining this distinctiveness, the problem of cinematic formalism mentioned in chapter six, that the satisfying appropriateness of form to content may be true of other art forms, is here resolved. For, if cinema is formally unlike other arts, then it can be maintained that the experience of satisfying appropriateness of cinematic form to content has the potential to be different from that which may occur in other arts.

Conclusion:

In this chapter I have been concerned with three things. Firstly, in order to examine and describe the nature of cinema time and show why it is part of the underlying form of cinema, I discussed at length its most fundamental characteristics. These included the dual nature of cinema time, in terms of screen and action-time, the particular manner in which time in cinema is screened and the 'illusion' created, its discontinuous nature, both in terms of our world and in itself, and off-screen time. Secondly, I outlined one of the most important philosophical discussions about cinema time concerning the use of past tenses. In particular, I examined why it has been claimed that cinema is transparent and how this affects the use of tenses, and argued that by examining in detail the nature of cinema time certain aspects of this debate are clarified. Finally, I have described certain cinematic techniques, the freeze frame and the acceleration and slowing down of time, which affect the nature of action-time, and can be considered truly cinematic. From all these I concluded that cinema time is part of the underlying form of cinema, but also formally particular. In this way, the aesthetics of cinema present a complete picture of cinema form and show why and how it is distinct, and thus cinema formally unique.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to develop an aesthetics of cinema through a formalist perspective that would elaborate the nature of cinema, its artistic significance and possible distinctiveness as an art form. This type of inquiry has proven to be historically interesting, in that although it was a dominant part of early film theory and of the work of certain philosophers of cinema in the 1970s, its value and philosophical contribution have been largely disregarded ever since. The aesthetics of cinema, however, is an integral part of our philosophical thinking about cinema because it addresses the art status of cinema, and provides an excellent basis—through comprehensive analyses of cinematic form—for further discussions. The analysis presented should be considered a fundamental step towards that goal. In this conclusion I wish to recapitulate certain central aspects of this thesis, and reiterate their role and significance.

Although the aesthetics of cinema of this thesis is influenced by a number of ideas and pursuits of early film theory and of the aesthetics of cinema of the 1970s, it nevertheless develops in different ways. Two things are particularly different and should be outlined. The first is the disregard of the notion of 'essence', which was a central aspect in the work of some early film theorists. Specifically, I have chosen to develop this aesthetics of cinema with no reference to cinematic essence, particularly as this may be understood through the material basis of cinema. Instead I have concentrated on cinematic form, its role, possible distinctiveness and contribution to the 'power of movies'. My concern with determining a cinematic essence, as was fully elaborated in chapter two, was that cinema is shaped so much by technology that it becomes impossible to pinpoint such an essence accurately, and, from this essence, dictate appropriate guidelines for filmmaking. Yet, this observation does not only affect the quest for some cinematic essence, but also the whole of this thesis, and, ultimately, any kind of discussion involving the formal or material nature of cinema. For, if technology is one of the determinant aspects of cinema, and if this technology, at least as understood today, has the potential to change the manner in which films are made, then cinema will always be subject to these changes and, as a consequence, its study will be as well. So, in discussing the form of cinema and its significance and contribution to cinematic

appreciation, it should always be remembered that all these remarks hold true for what we at present know cinema to be. In this sense—even if the account of cinematic form I have presented does justice to the formal nature of cinema now and in the past—this should *not* be considered an absolute understanding. Rather, it should be understood as 'work-in-progress', that is, with the potential for change which can accommodate any future developments. Thus, this cinematic account has to be necessarily open-ended and allow for revision and further consideration. This observation, however, does not mean that my account is false or unimportant. In contrast, apart from offering a way of making sense of existing films, it provides a solid basis for cinematic discussions, since the very definitions and descriptions of cinematic form, as opposed to those of a cinematic essence, allow change and further interpretation. For instance, by naming film form the parts of the films as these are contrasted to the content, there is enough room for a wider understanding that would accommodate computer software technology that is unavailable today to being included in such a discussion. However, it should be noted that whether or not cinematic space and time will remain the necessary formal aspects of cinema is open to debate and future revision. But in order for my claims to be completely rejected, the character and type of projection that occurs, but also the way films are made, will have to change in a very radical manner. Thus, it is safe to say that the account of cinema form I have presented is a reliable one, with the potential to stand the test of time.

The second main difference with earlier aesthetics of cinema is the scope of the formalist analysis I pursue. In particular, while investigating the ideas of the aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, it was noted that their ideas often depended on various formalist views borrowed from the philosophy of art; however, the formalist perspectives they adopted were never fully elucidated but relied on certain broad assumptions. It was maintained, however, that a fully-fledged formalist theory is required in order to illustrate and expand the character and role of form in films. To this end, I examined two of the most common formalist understandings in the philosophy of art, that of strong and weak formalism. My main aim was to find the explanation that the aesthetics of cinema required: what form is, and why and how it shapes our experience of films. Parenthetically, if this could be shown, then the centrality and importance of

developing an aesthetics of cinema would be established, since such a claim would make manifest the artistic potential of cinema. It was concluded from these discussions, however, that these theories are inadequate at places, and insufficient on their own to provide the aesthetics of cinema with a proper formalist understanding. In particular, both theories failed to go beyond a vague description of form, relying on an allegedly common understanding of form in the philosophy of art. In order to remedy this situation I proposed a tailor-made formalist theory—which I have referred to as cinematic formalism—that would explain in detail what cinema form is, and its role and importance. As such, the cinematic formalism developed here does not strive to explain all arts and practices or illustrate what an aesthetic experience is. Rather, it is solely a view about cinema.

Specifically, cinematic formalism suggests that one of the reasons we value films is because of the peculiar relationship that may develop between cinematic form and content. That is, if the filmmaker has found an appropriate way to capture the content through its form, then this may affect us to such a degree that we may come to value the film. According to this understanding, the potential of films—and this, as I claimed, does not necessarily mean all of its potential—will somehow rely on this type of relationship. Furthermore, by emphasising this side of cinema, it is also shown why it is still important to discuss the artistic relevance of cinema through its form, despite the fact that most film theorists (and philosophers of cinema) have moved away from such concerns. It is suggested that only by including this type of discussion can the study of cinema be complete. For, although aspects such as the impact of cinema on society or the individual, its cultural and political role, and its economic and even marketing potential are certainly valuable and offer great insights about cinema, its artistic importance should not be disregarded. This thesis makes explicit why this type of discussion is so central to our understanding of films.

Another important part of this thesis has been the descriptions and analyses of cinematic form. In particular, I have distinguished between two 'sorts' of form with the aim of providing a more comprehensive explanation, but also an adequate vocabulary with which to discuss the form of cinema, since, and as I mentioned in chapter five, there

seems to be a lack of vocabulary—and even awareness—of cinematic form. This is due to the plethora of interpretations of form that exists in the philosophy of art, but also because contemporary film theory, with the notable exception of neoformalism, often disregards the formal nature of cinema, because of different methodological and critical concerns. This analysis shows a way of acknowledging and understanding cinematic form when watching films. This was done by articulating film form in terms of the parts of a film, as these are separate from content, and the way these relate, and also cinema form, that is, the spatial and temporal dimensions of cinema. Additionally, the examples I have been discussing throughout the thesis show that cinematic formalism is a theory that can be applied in practice, and that it does makes sense of films. By fully understanding the formal, and often technical, nature of cinema we gain a lucid picture of how cinema works and, furthermore, avoid mistakes resulting from incomplete ideas about what cinema is and how it functions. The aesthetics of cinema in this sense should be considered an important aspect of the study of cinema, and its nature and significance are here re-introduced.

Finally, to achieve a complete understanding of cinematic form I have discussed cinema form, the fundamental form of cinema, in much detail. The main aim was to determine whether cinema space and time are the necessary formal aspects of cinema, but also to show that their peculiar nature distinguishes cinema from other arts. By determining this it was shown that the 'power of movies' should not be reduced to that of other art forms but that it is also a product of this distinct formal nature. Furthermore, by clearly articulating what cinema form is and explicating the differences (but also similarities) with other art forms, any possible classification of cinema within an art context will be assisted, since there will be some indication of how cinema compares to other arts, and what is unique about it. Additionally, it was suggested in chapter six that there needs to be some explanation of why and how the claim of the satisfying appropriateness of form to content has indeed some distinctiveness in cinema. Specifically, it was argued that if cinema form is unique to cinema, then the satisfying appropriateness of form to content is an experience that has its own unique character in the case of cinema because of this distinctiveness of cinema form. In this manner, it is

maintained that since the spatial and temporal categories of cinema seem unlike those of other art form, the type of relationship that cinematic form develops with content will always have the potential to be distinct.

This thesis has presented an aesthetics of cinema that explains what cinematic form is and its contribution to the power of movies. Although it resembles the work of some early film theorists and aestheticians of cinema of the 1970s, it is structured and developed in different ways, elaborating important concerns in a systematic way that is currently missing from the philosophical literature about cinema, but also film theory. Furthermore, there is a particular effort to understand, through formalist ideas in the philosophy of art, what cinematic form is and its artistic relevance. Through these examinations it is concluded that the study of cinema requires a type of formalist theory that would both elucidate what cinematic form is, and outline an explanation that would indeed make sense of cinema. To this end, it was proposed that a central way form contributes to the 'power of movies' is in virtue of the type of relationship it can develop with content. One of my main concerns throughout this thesis has been to understand exactly what this satisfying appropriateness of form to content amounts to, and its significance in film appreciation. Additionally, a thorough examination of form in cinema was provided with special emphasis on cinematic space and time. It is hoped that through my discussion of the aesthetics of cinema its role and relevance in philosophical and film discussions can be acknowledged and reconsidered. It is only by having a properly developed aesthetics of cinema that we can begin to understand cinema, its nature, impact and value. For all these reasons this thesis proves to be an indispensable part of the philosophy of film, and succeeds in thoroughly articulating and explicating cinematic nature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abel, Reuben, 1972, 'On "Form" in Art', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 32, n. 3; March: 371-376
2. Abel, Richard, 1988, *French Film Theory and Criticism: 1907-1929*, vol. 1, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)
3. Allen, Richard, and Smith, Murray (eds.), 1999, *Film Theory and Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York)
4. Arnheim, Rudolf, 1933, *Film*, trans. L. M. Sieveking and Ian F. D. Morrow, (Faber & Faber: London)
5. Balázs, Béla, 1970, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone, (Dover Publications, Inc: New York)
6. Bates, Stanley, 1989, 'Movies Viewed: Cavell on Medium and Motion Pictures', in George Dickie, Richard Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (eds.), *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, (St. Martin's Press: New York; (second edition)): 576-581
7. Bazin, André, 1999, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York; (fifth edition)): 195-199
8. Beardsley, Monroe C., 1958, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, (Harcourt, Brace and Co.: New York)
9. Beardsley, Monroe C., 1981, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, (Hacket Publishing Company, Inc.: Indianapolis and Cambridge; (second edition))
10. Bell, Clive, 1924, *Art*, (Chatto & Windus: London)
11. Bell, Clive, 1995, 'The Aesthetic Hypothesis', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art*, (McGraw-Hill: New York): 99-110
12. Bhabha, Homi, 1990, *Nation and Narration*, (Routledge: London and New York)
13. Bluestone, George, 1961, 'Time in Film and Fiction', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 19, n. 3, Spring: 311-315
14. Boltomore, Stephen, 1996, 'Nine Days Wonder': Early Cinema and its Sceptics', in Christopher Williams (ed.), *Cinema: The Beginnings and the Future: Essays Marking the Centenary of the First Film Show Projected to a Paying Audience in Britain*, (University of Westminster Press: London): 135-149

15. Bordwell, David, 1996, 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London): 3-36
16. Bordwell, David, and Carroll, Noël (eds.), 1996, *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London;)
17. Bordwell, David, Staiger, Janet and Kristin Thompson, 1999, *Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, (Routledge: London and New York)
18. Bowman, Barbara, 1992, *Master Space: Film Images of Capra, Lubitsch, Sternberg and Wyler*, (Greenwood Press: New York)
19. Bradley, A. C., 1966, 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake', in Melvin Rader (ed.), *A Modern Book Of Esthetics*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York; (third edition)): 562-577
20. Braudy, Leo, and Cohen, Marshall (eds.), 1999, *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York; (fifth edition))
21. Brubaker, David, 1993, 'André Bazin on Automatically Made Images', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 51, Winter: 59-67
22. Buckland, Warren, 'Problem Formation in the Analytic Philosophy of Film', www.film-philosophy.com/vol5-2001/n26buckland, (accessed 9/3/03)
23. Buckland, Warren, 1989, 'Critique of Poor Reason', *Screen*, 30: 4, Autumn: 80-103
24. Burch, Noël, 1981, *Theory of Film Practice*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)
25. Carroll, Noël, 1988 (a), 'Film/Mind Analogies: the Case of Hugo Münsterberg', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 46, n. 4, Summer: 489-499
26. Carroll, Noël, 1988 (b), *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)
27. Carroll, Noël, 1989, 'Clive Bell's Aesthetic Hypothesis', in George Dickie, Richard Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (eds.), *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, (St. Martin's Press: New York; (second edition)): 84-95

28. Carroll, Noël, 1995, 'Towards an Ontology of the Moving Image', in Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas Wartenberg (eds.), *Philosophy and Film*, (Routledge: London and New York): 68-85
29. Carroll, Noël, 1996, *Theorizing the Moving Image*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York)
30. Carroll, Noël, 1997, 'Danto's New Definition of Art and the Problem of Art Theories', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 37, n. 4, October: 386-392
31. Carroll, Noël, 1998 (a), *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, (Calendron Press: Oxford)
32. Carroll, Noël, 1998 (b), 'Film Form: An Argument for a Functional Theory of Style in the Individual Film (Style in Cinema)', reprinted in http://www.findarticle.com/cf_0/m2342/3_32/55082380/print.jhtml, (accessed 27/06/01)
33. Carroll, Noël, 1999, *Philosophy of Art: A Contemporary Introduction*, (Routledge: London and New York)
34. Cavell, Stanley, 1979, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass. and London, (reprinted))
35. Cook, Pam and Bernink, Mieke, 1999, *The Cinema Book*, (bfi Publishing: London; (second edition))
36. Cooper, David E., 2002, 'The Aesthetic Appreciation of Gardens', paper presented at the British Society of Aesthetics Annual Conference at Oxford
37. Cormier, Harvey, 1995, '*2001*: Modern Art, and Modern Philosophy', in Cynthia A. Freeland and Thomas Wartenberg (eds.), *Philosophy and Film*, (Routledge: London and New York): 183-200
38. Crawford, Donald W., 1970, 'The Uniqueness of the Medium', *The Personalist*, 51, Autumn: 447-469
39. Crawford, Donald W., 2002, 'Kant', in Berys Gaut and McIver Lopes (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (Routledge: London and New York): 51-64
40. Currie, Gregory, 1996, 'Film, Reality, and Illusion', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London): 325-344

41. Danto, Arthur C., 1979, 'Moving Pictures', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 4: 1-21
42. Danto, Arthur C., 1981, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A philosophy of Art*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass)
43. Danto, Arthur C., 1995, 'The Artworld', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art*, (McGraw-Hill: New York): 202-212
44. Danto, Arthur C., 1999, *Philosophizing Art: Selected Essays*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles)
45. Danto, Arthur, C., 1992, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux: New York)
46. Danto, Arthur, C., 1997, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton)
47. Dean, Jeffrey T., 1996, 'Clive Bell and G. E. Moore: The Good of Art', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 36, n. 2, April: 135-143
48. Deleuze, Gilles, 1986, *Cinema 1 : The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (University of Minnesota Press : Minneapolis)
49. Deleuze, Gilles, 1989, *Cinema 2 : The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (Athlone: London)
50. Dietz, Steven, 2003, *Fiction*, Princeton's McCarter Theater
51. Diffey, Terry, 2003, 'Experiencing Nature and Experiencing Art', in Ananta Ch. Sukla (ed.), *Art and Experience: Studies in Art, Culture, and Communities*, (Praeger: Westport, Connecticut): 42-56
52. Doane, Mary Ann, 1980, 'The Voice in the Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space', *Yale French Studies*, vol. 0, issue 60: 35-50
53. Dziemidok, Bohdan, 1993, 'Artistic Formalism: Its Achievements and Weaknesses', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 51:2, Spring: 185-193
54. Earle, William, 1968, 'Revolt Against Realism in the Films', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 27, n. 2, Winter: 145-151
55. Edel, Leon, 1979, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, (The Hogarth Press: London)
56. Edward, Richard, 2004, 'Review of *Reservoir Dogs*', *Hotdog*, issue 50, June: 251

57. Eisenstein, Sergei, 1998, 'The Montage of Film Attractions' (1924), in Richard Taylor (ed.), *The Eisenstein Reader*, (bfi Publishing: London): 35-52
58. Ekman, Rosalind, 1970, 'The Paradoxes of Formalism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 10: 350-358
59. Eldridge, Richard, 1995, 'Form and Content: An Aesthetic Theory of Art', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art*, (McGraw-Hill: New York): 240-253
60. Fish, Stanley, 1995, 'Is There a Text in this Class?', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art*, (McGraw-Hill: New York): 446-457
61. Fox, Milton S., 1944, 'The Art of the Movies in American Life', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 3, n. 9-10, Fall: 39-52
62. Frampton, Daniel, 'Filmosophy: Colour', in www.filmosophy.org/articles/colour, (accessed 12/10/02)
63. Freeland, Cynthia A. and Wartenberg, Thomas E. (eds.), 1995, *Philosophy and Film*, (Routledge: London and New York)
64. Fry, Roger, 1929, *Vision and Design*, (Chatto and Windus, London; (reprinted))
65. Fry, Roger, 1966, 'Pure and Impure Art', in Melvin Rader (ed.), *A Modern Book of Esthetics*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York; (third edition)): 304-309
66. Fry, Roger, 1968, *Transformations: Critical and Speculative Essays on Art*, (Chatto and Windus: New York; (reprinted))
67. Gaut, Berys, 1995, 'Making Sense of Films: Neoformalism and its Limits', *Forum for Modern Languages*, vol. 31: 8-23
68. Gaut, Berys, 1997, 'Analytical Philosophy of Film: History, Issues, Prospects', *Philosophical Books*, vol. 38, n. 3, July: 145-156
69. Gaut, Berys, 2002, 'Cinematic Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 60, n. 4, Fall: 299-312
70. Gillespie, Diane F., 1995, 'Introduction', *Roger Fry: A Biography*, by Virginia Woolf, (Blackwell Publishers: Oxford; (reprinted))
71. Goldblatt, David, 1984, 'Self-Plagiarism', Journal of Aesthetics and Art criticism, 43, n. 1, Fall: 71-77
72. Goodman, Nelson, 1978, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Harvester Press: Hassocks)

73. Gotshalk, D. W., 1953, 'Form', in Eliseo Vivas, and Murray Krieger (eds.), *The Problems of Aesthetics: A Book of Readings*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston: New York): 194-208

74. Gould, Carol, 1994, 'Clive Bell on Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Truth', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 34, n. 2, April: 124-135

75. Greenberg, Clement, 1971, 'Necessity of "Formalism"', *New Literary History*, vol. 3, n. 1, Autumn: 171-175

76. Gunning, Tom, 1989, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana)

77. Guttenplan, Samuel, 'Analytic Philosophy and Film', www.film-philosophy.com/vol2-1998/n.36guttenplan, (accessed 9/3/03)

78. Hacker, P. M. S, 1998, 'Analytic Philosophy: What, Whence, and Whither?', in Anat Biletzk and Anat Marat (eds.), *The Story of Analytic Philosophy: Plots and Heroes*, (Routledge: London and New York): 3-33

79. Hanslick, Eduard, 1986, *On the Musically Beautiful: A Contribution Towards the Revision of the Aesthetics of Music*, trans. Geoffrey Payzant, (Hackett: Indianapolis)

80. Harrah, David, 1954, 'Aesthetics of the Film: The Pudovkin-Arnheim-Eisenstein Theory', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 13, n. 2, December: 163-174

81. Heath, Stephen, 1986, 'Narrative Space' in P. Rosen (ed.), *A Film Theory Reader: Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, (Columbia University Press: New York): 379-420

82. Hegel, G. W. F., 1988, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, trans. T. M. Knox, (Calendron Press: Oxford)

83. Huxley, Aldous, 1977, *The Doors of Perceptions*, (Grafton (an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers): London; (reprinted))

84. Ingarden, Roman, 1960, 'The General Question of the Essence of Form and Content', *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 57, n. 7, March: 222-233

85. Inwood, Michael, 2002, 'Hegel', in Berys Gaut and Dominic Mclver Lopes (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, (Routledge: London and New York): 65-74

86. Jarvie, Ian, 1987, 'Philosophers at the Movies: Metaphysics, Aesthetics, and Popularization', *Persistence of Vision*, 5: 74-112

87. Jarvie, Ian, 1999, 'Is Analytic Philosophy the Cure for Film Theory?', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 29:3, September: 416-440

88. Jarvie, Ian, 2004, 'The Present State of the Philosophy of Film', *Film and Philosophy*, vol. 8, Special Interest Edition: 142-145

89. Kant, Immanuel, 1970, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (MacMillan, St Martin's press: London)

90. Kant, Immanuel, 1995, 'Analytic of the Beautiful', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley, (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art: Reading Ancient and Modern* (McGraw-Hill: New York): 269-296

91. Khatchadourian, Haig , 1980, 'Movement and Action in Film', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 20: 349-355

92. Khatchadourian, Haig, 1975, 'Film as Art', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 33, n. 3, Spring: 271-284

93. Khatchadourian, Haig, 1978, 'Remarks on the Cinematic/Uncinematic Distinction in the Film Art', *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol. 3: 193-198

94. Khatchadourian, Haig, 1987, 'Space and Time in Film', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 27, n. 2, Spring: 169-177

95. Kivy, Peter, 1995, 'The Profundity of Music', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates*, (McGraw-Hill, Inc.: New York; (first edition)): 245-255

96. Kivy, Peter, 1997, *Philosophies of Art: An Essay in Differences*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge)

97. Kivy, Peter, 1999, 'Music in the Movies: A Philosophical Enquiry', in Richard Allen and Murray Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York): 308-328

98. Knight, Deborah, 1999, 'Aristotelians on *Speed*: Paradoxes of Genre in the Context of Cinema', in Richard Allen and Murray Smith (eds.), *Film Theory and Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York): 343-365

99. Knight, Deborah, 2004, 'Philosophy of Film, or Philosophies of Films?', *Film and Philosophy*, vol. 8, Special Interest Edition: 146-153

100. Kolker, Robert P., and Ousley, Douglas J., 1973, 'A Phenomenology of Cinematic Time and Space', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 13: 388-396

101. Kracauer, Siegfried, 1997, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)

102. Kracauer, Siegfried, 1999, 'Basic Concepts', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York; (fifth edition))

103. Kraft, Selma, 1986, 'Content, Form, Originality', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 44, n. 4, Summer: 406-409

104. Lamarque, Peter, 1992, 'Style and Thought', *Journal of Literary Semantics*, vol. 21: 45-54

105. Lang, Berel, 1992, 'Intuition in Bloomsbury', in Peter Kivy (ed.), *Essays on the History of Aesthetics* (University of Rochester Press: New York): 403-410

106. Langer, Susanne, 1953, *Feeling and Form* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

107. Leibowitz, Flo, 1995, 'Movie Colorization and the Expression of Mood', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *Arguing About Art: Contemporary Philosophical Debates*, (McGraw-Hill, Inc.: New York; (first edition)): 48-52

108. Lewis, Brian, 1981, 'The Question of Cinematic Essence', *Wide Angle*, 4(4): 50-54

109. Linden, George W., 1971, 'Ten Questions about Film Form', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 5: 61-73

110. Luchting, Wolfgang A., 1958, 'Profound Banality in the Film', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 17, n. 2, December: 208-213

111. 'Making Time: Considering Time as a Material in contemporary Video and Film', 2000, *Catalogue of the inaugural exhibition of Palm Beach Institute*, (Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art: Florida)

112. Mann, Thomas, 1973, *The Magic Mountain*, (Penguin: Middlesex)

113. Mark, John, 1998, *Gilles Deleuze: Vitalism and Multiplicity*, (Pluto Press: London and Sterling, Virginia).

114. Marker, William, 2000, *Hegel and Aesthetics*, (State University of New York Press: Albany)

115. Martin, Edwin, 1986, 'On Seeing Walton's Great-Grandfather', *Critical Inquiry*, 12; Summer: 796-800

116. Meager, R., 1965, 'Clive Bell and Aesthetic Emotion', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 5: 123-131

117. Milano, Paolo, 1941, 'Music in the Film: Notes for a Morphology', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, n. 1, Spring: 89-94

118. Monk, Ray, 1996, 'What is Analytical Philosophy?', in Anthony Palmer and Ray Monk (eds.), *Bertrand Russell and the Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, (Thoemmes Press: Bristol): 1-22

119. Moore, Arthur K., 1970, 'Formalist Criticism and Literary Form', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 29, n. 1, Fall: 21-31

120. Mulhall, Stephen, 2002, *On Film*, (Routledge: London and New York)

121. Munro, Thomas, 1943, 'Form in the Arts', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 2.8: 5-26

122. Munro, Thomas, 1949, *The Arts and their Interrelations*, (Liberal Arts Press: New York)

123. Munro, Thomas, 1954, 'Form and Value in the Arts: A Functional Approach', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism,* vol. 13, n. 3, March: 316-341

124. Munro, Thomas, 1969, *The Arts and their Interrelations*, (The Press of Case Western Reserve University: Cleveland and London)

125. Münsterberg, Hugo, 1916, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, (Dover: New York)

126. Neill, Alex, 1996, 'Empathy and (Film) Fiction', David Bordwell, and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London): 175-194

127. Newcomb, James W., 1974, 'Eisenstein's Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 32, n. 4, Summer: 471-476

128. *Oxford English Dictionary*, on-line Edition, www.oed.com

129. Panofsky, Erwin, 1999, 'Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, (Oxford University Press: New York and Oxford; (fifth edition)): 279-292

130. Passmore, John A., 1954, 'The Dreariness of Aesthetics', in William Elton (ed.), *Aesthetics and Language*, (Blackwell: Oxford): 36-55

131. Pater, Walter, 1998, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York)

132. Perkins, V. F., 1972, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*, (Penguin Books: Middlesex)

133. Plantinga, Carl and Smith, Greg M. (eds.), 1999, *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, (John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London)

134. Plantinga, Carl, 1993, 'Film Theory and Aesthetics: Notes on a Schism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 51, n. 3: 475-454

135. Poggioli, Renato, 1941, 'Aesthetics of Stage and Screen', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1.2:3, Fall: 63-69

136. Pole, David, 1983, *Aesthetics, Form and Emotion*, (Duckworth: London)

137. Pudovkin, Vsevolod, 1999, from 'Film Technique', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, fifth edition, (Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York): 9-14

138. Raleigh, Henry P., 1982, 'Film the Ambiguous Art', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 16: 71-75

139. Rassos, Effie, 'Performing the Everyday: Time and Affect in John Cassavetes' *Faces*', http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/16/cassavetes_faces.html, (accessed 30/07/02)

140. Reed, Christopher, 1996, *A Roger Fry Reader*, (The University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London)

141. Rieser, Max, 1966, 'Problems of Artistic Form: The Concept of Form', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 25, n. 1, Fall: 17-26

142. Rodowick, D. N., 1997, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, (Duke University Press: Durham and London)

143. Rose, Gillian, 1995, 'The Interstitial Perspective: A Review essay on Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*', *Environment and Planning Development: Society and Space*, v.13: 365-373

144. Rothman, William, 'Cavell's Philosophy and what Film Studies Calls "Theory": Must the Field of Film Studies Speak in one Voice?', www.hanover.edu/philos/film/vol_2/rothman.htm, (accessed 9/26/03)

145. Rothman, William, 2003, 'Cavell on Film, Television, and Opera', in Richard Eldridge (ed.), *Stanley Cavell*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York): 206-238

146. Rouve, Pierre, 1972, 'Aesthetics of the Cinema', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 12: 148-157

147. Rüker, Christoph, Rüker, Gerta and Steven H. Bertz, 2004, 'Organic Synthesis—Art or Science?', *Journal of Chemical Information and Computer Sciences*, vol. 44: 378-386

148. Sarris, Andrew, 1968, *The American Cinema*, (Dutton & Co., Inc: New York)

149. Scruton, Roger, 1983, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture*, (Carcanet Press; Manchester)

150. Sesonske, Alexander, 1971, 'Vision via Film Form', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 5: 53-59

151. Sesonske, Alexander, 1973, 'Cinema Space', in David Carr, Edward S. Casey, and Martin Nijhhoff (eds.), *Explorations in Phenomenology*, (The Hague: Netherlands): 399-409

152. Sesonske, Alexander, 1974, 'The World Viewed', *Georgia Review*, Winter: 561-570

153. Sesonske, Alexander, 1980, 'Time and Tense in Cinema', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 38, n. 4, Summer: 419-426

154. Sesonske, Alexander, 1989, 'Aesthetics of Film, or A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Movies', in George Dickie, Richard Sclafani and Ronald Roblin (eds.), *Aesthetics: A Critical Anthology*, (St. Martin's Press: New York; (second edition)): 583-590

155. Shusterman, Richard, 1989, 'Introduction: Analysing Analytic Aesthetics', in his *Analytic Aesthetics*, (Basil Blackwell: Oxford and New York;): 1-19

156. Smith, Greg M, 2003, *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge and New York)

157. Smith, Murray, 'Film Theory Meets Analytic Philosophy; Or, Film Studies and L' Affair Sokal', www.kent.ac.uk/sdfva/staff%20writing/mss%sokal.htm, (accessed 9/3/03)

158. Smith, Murray, 1995, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford)

159. Sparshott, F. E., 1963, *The Structure of Aesthetics*, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto & Routledge and Kegan Paul: London)

160. Sparshott, F. E., 1985, 'Basic Film Aesthetics', in Leo Braudy, Marshall Cohen and Gerald Mast (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York): 284-304

161. Stephenson, Ralph, 1962, 'Space, Time and Montage', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 2: 249-259

162. Stephenson, Ralph, and Debrix, J. R., 1976, *The Cinema as Art*, (Penguin Books: Middlesex)

163. Stolnitz, Jerome, 1960, *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art Criticism: A Critical Introduction*, (Houghton Mifflin Co.: Boston & The Riverside Press: Cambridge)

164. Tarkovsky, Andrey, 1986, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair, (University of Texas Press: Austin)

165. Thompson, Kristin, 1981, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: A Neoformalist Analysis*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)

166. Thompson, Kristin, 1988, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalism Film Analysis*, (Princeton University Press: New Jersey)

167. Truffaut, François, 1976, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 1, (University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles): 224-237

168. Uehling, Theodore, 1971, *The Notion of Form in Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, (Mouton: the Hague, Paris)

169. Vermillion, Billy, 'Bringing it to the Screen: Off-screen Space in Film and Video Games', http://www.english.uiuc.edu/newmedia/verillion.htm, (accessed 15/06/01)

170. Walsh, Michael, 1996, 'Jameson and "Global Aesthetics"', in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, (University of Wisconsin Press: Wisconsin and London): 481-500

171. Walton, Kendall L., 1984, 'Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism', *Critical Inquiry*, 11; December: 246-277

172. Warburton, Nigel, 1988, 'Seeing Through "Seeing Through Photographs"', *Ratio* (New Series), I 1; June: 64-74

173. Wartenberg, Thomas E., 2004, 'Looking Backward: Philosophy and Film Reconsidered', *Film and Philosophy*, vol. 8, Special Interest Edition: 138-141

174. Weitz, Morris, 1950, *Philosophy of the Arts*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge)

175. Weitz, Morris, 1971, 'The Content of Form: A Commentary', *New Literary History*, vol. 2, n. 2, Winter: 351-356

176. Weitz, Morris, 1995, 'The Role of Theory in Aesthetics', in Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (eds.), *The Philosophy of Art*, (McGraw-Hill: New York): 183-193

177. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1976, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, (Blackwell: Oxford; (reprinted))

178. Zika, Fay, 1996, 'Colour and Form: The Case of the Coloured Ballot', unpublished paper presented at the Second European Conference of Analytic Philosophy at Leeds

FILMOGRAPHY

94. *The Truman Show*, Peter Weir, 1998
95. *Tout Va Bien*, Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, 1972
96. *Trainspotting*, Danny Boyle, 1996
97. *Twelve Monkeys*, Terry Gilliam, 1995
98. *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*, David Lynch, 1992
99. *Underground*, Emir Kusturica, 1995
100. *Vincent and Theo*, Robert Altman, 1990
101. *Wag the Dog*, Barry Levinson, 1997
102. *Waking Life*, Richard Linklater, 2001
103. *Welcome to Sarajevo*, Michael Winterbottom, 1997
104. *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, Robert Zemeckis, 1988
105. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, Mike Nichols, 1966

All information taken from the Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com