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Time sculpture on film

The nature of the time skips' representations.

Theses of the Dissertation

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Nowadays, both spoken language and the moving image play a key role in the development of the human personality, and we must be aware of their importance.

When, as a filmmaker, I first found myself facing a story spanning a larger time span, I was confronted with my creative inexperience with time-skip depictions. I wanted to find a clever way to make time jumps seem real, but mostly I could only think of somewhat conventional solutions. To overcome this creative obstacle, I decided to take a closer look at time-skip gestures. I delved into various films, specifically looking at how other filmmakers have dealt with time-out references and cues. I have found that the gap between two scenes reveals a kind of invisible bridge, which is in fact a chain of missing time and events in the viewer's imagination. I have tried to explore the complex process by which the viewer reconstructs the film narratives through the interpretation of what he or she sees, as a result of the different time jump representations. I have tried to look at the phenomenon from both the creative and the receptive side. My intention was not only to explore what time jump representations 'look like', but also to understand the phenomenon from both the creative perspective of the filmmaker and the viewer's position as a recipient. I have observed the cognitive processes that organise the composition of time-skip representations.

In my thesis, I explore how viewers interpret and reconstruct stories as a result of temporal omissions.

When the viewer is patching together the time-out gap, there are two possibilities. One is when they notice the gap and become aware of it, the other is when they do not perceive that the continuity has been broken. In my thesis, I mainly focus on the latter case. Through examples, I have studied the signs along which the viewer's reconstruction takes place, and the considerations along which the storyteller or creator of the story organises these.

My aim is to investigate the criteria for a successfully interpreted representation, i.e., when a time jump representation fulfils its optimally designed function. On the other hand, I am also seeking answers as to when and why the interpretation of a representation is not successful, and how the viewer accommodates to innovative representations: what cognitive effort they are willing to make in connection with an unusual representation, what sometimes causes confusion or boredom.

By observing the relationship between spoken language and the development of abstract thinking, I have discovered connections between the intentional attitude and the ability and practice of mind-reading, which are inherently necessary preconditions for the creation and reception of a story. As mankind have become capable of verbalising fictional events, time and space, we have been creating, and still create coherent, shareable stories.

In studying narrative as a phenomenon, I have observed its inevitable fragmentary nature, which shows that storytelling as a construction is inevitably compressed. And its construction is a collaborative action: the creator forms content by linguistic means, while the receiver sets expectations, which are sometimes confirmed, sometimes overruled, based upon their prior knowledge.

Approaching the study of receptive work from the point of view of signals and clues, I will also examine passages of literature written in a highly visual, cinematic way, and through a stage-adaptation of a story written for film I will describe my own directorial experience of the creative assumptions involved in the spectator's hypothesis-making.

In order to analyse cinematic time-skip representations more effectively, I have seen fit to set up a kind of typology to frame my investigations. Based on the nature of the spectator's receptive work, which is organised/formed along the lines of the creative cues, I distinguished three types of time-jump representations: purely informative representations, those that affect the intellect, which I called associative time-skip representations, and sensual time-out representations that stimulate the spectator's personal stance and emotional involvement. These require different degrees and qualities of cognitive effort from the viewer.

With regard to the question of the forces that organise cinematic time, I want to examine the subjective and objective nature of narrative time. I will review the extent to which cinematic time jumps are able to move away from concrete representation, as I hypothesise that if based on physiological perceptions, the transmission of information mobilises the subjective experience of the recipient, it increases the degree of their involvement. Taking this idea further, I have explored the importance of subjective time perception and focalization for the possibilities of time jump representations.

By examining different time jump representation schemes and patterns, I observed that over the past one hundred and twenty years filmic time jump representations have moved away from the functional use of time-measuring devices on the screen. My hypothesis in this respect is that representations that evoke perceptual memories activate the viewer's predictive work in a different way than representations that act on the intellect, the associative or the informative. In support of this, I will try to show that cinematic representation can more or less successfully model visually mental events such as confusion, panic or apathy.

By observing the creative side, my thesis highlights the role of the representation of change in temporal leaps. I study whether the passage of time always involves a change of state. Through examples, I observe how redundant elements serve as support, carrying with them the contrast of change, the difference in permanence, such as traces of passing.

I also point out that in a time-skip illustration, rhyming motifs can be placed on top of each other, prompting the viewer to make associations. These are cases in which a kind of "rhyme", for example emotional, pictorial or intellectual, is formed between the two ends of the "time bridge", i.e., between the motifs at the end of the preceding scene and the beginning of the next.

I will also demonstrate with a few examples that the cognitive effort of the viewer in the reception of time-skip representations is not necessarily directed only at the interpretation of what is seen, since certain gestures in film language can also have emotional effects, as the filmmaker intended.

From the viewer's point of view, I will also try to investigate some errors of interpretation and confusing representations – and their impact on the viewer – by monitoring the estimation of the time missed. As the film does not stop after an inaccurate representation, the viewer is bombarded with more and more information. The effect of an incomplete or confused segment can be corrected retrospectively in most cases, the error can be overridden by the viewer, as the chain of connections and the information allowing for new hypotheses can help them to overcome the interpretative confusion that has been created.

I will also point out that the technique of omission not only can conceal events that are irrelevant to the story, but also dramaturgically significant events can be veiled, which may thus appear

with an even greater force in the viewer's imagination. The film can also 'narrate' dramaturgically important events by means of omission, and this is also possible through a shared construction with the viewer.

Finally, I will turn to an examination of the temporal representation schemata, observing their possible obsolescence through examples. I will also observe the causes and effects that create innovations in time representation schemes and through a few examples I analyse, what makes these successful.

I conclude my dissertation with what I was most curious about during my research, namely, what determines our understanding of representations that deviate from the usual schemata and how such deviations shape the viewer's efforts to understand them. How do novel stimuli affect the viewer's attitude to a particular representation of time?

In my thesis, I explored variations in the representation of time jumps in film, influenced by my creative dilemmas. At the forefront of my research is a thesis that best connects the various questions I have asked, all of which revolve around how viewers interpret and reconstruct stories created with time skips. I have sought to explore the criteria for successful interpretation and the optimal degree of creative innovation that, despite the more difficult interpretive work and fewer conventional supports that viewers may have to rely on, is still sufficient to keep the viewer's ambition to understand the intent of the representation in question alive.

In any case, the viewer makes a cognitive effort to piece together and understand the narrative. The filmmaker's task is to create a representation that best serves the narrative, while reflecting their own intentions at the same time.