

# **A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles**

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## Abstract

*A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles* is a durational fiction film, a three-hour work of self-positioning, a film about an abstract me. However, I do not find it of substance to discuss the faculties of the film itself, but rather the context through which the film was made. Outlining a thesis for which the film can speak — this is of importance. I will not speak for the subjectivity of others, and the film, itself, speaks for my own. Therefore, I ask questions: Can we study formalism through a historical materialist analysis? Can this study open up manners of seeing a dialectical materialist survey of image-linguistics through our era of the cinema? When we speak of affect in the cinema, are we speaking of the narratological relations between diegesis and spectator; or are we speaking of the psychoanalytical evocations that the form of an image holds, as, then, extrapolated by the spectator? What is narrative in the cinema? What can it be? What is performance in the cinema? How has the apparatus of a camera shaped its form? What is time in the cinema? Is it not the foundation upon which all else comes? I, here, have a matrix of thoughts and theories and observations that embolden the filmmaker to scrutinize their positionality as an artist and as a labour organizer. A filmmaker's imagination is more closely tied to the ethics of production than ever before. The responsibility of an artist is that of history, of people, and of temperateness: a respect for oneself, the filmworkers here to help create the work, and the audiences it will be exhibited to. The film, *A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles* cannot be the endpoint of the politic and philosophy present here, but merely a gesture towards a people, the beginning of a process that will unfurl over a lifetime.

## **Dedications**

For the workers, the labourers, all under the boot of a bourgeois state — may we come together and rid ourselves of antagonism, both internalized and systemic.

## **Acknowledgements**

To the crew of this film, whose labour is of first priority and of greater importance than the film itself: Nicole Cipriani, Luísa Cruz, Ethan Godel, Robin Gruszczynski, Ibrahim Issa, Hazel Lee, Nathan MacKinnon, Mivan Makia, Gabriella Mandato, Michael Petruzzelli, Vito Petruzzelli, Joel Rodriguez, Tony Rosenberg, and Aman Samra.

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## Preface

This paper is, as I would like to think of it, an invitation. It is an argumentative, bifurcated jumble of ideology, ideas, and wishes. It is split in two parts: (I) a collection of manifestos, and (II) a recollection of my intentions going into the project and the failures coming out. The manifestos are a progression of thought, a conjectural discourse wherein I am able to chart a decision making process and the dogma that is my mortar. They are present to offer you, dear reader, further opportunity for intervention. I wish for you to intervene in my ideas, and use my ideas to intervene in the film. I list out my intentions and failures so that you might have access to the material process involved in production and development. Too often is there only discussion about meaning, textual matters, without the proper context of production. If a film boasting progressive mantras were privately financed by institutions historical in their mistreatment of marginalized peoples, would that not be integral context to reading the project? Too often are these faculties abstracted, and this is a matter of culture that greatly lends to the declining media literacy of our population. Such is also why I ensure to denote the budget of the film in the credits, alongside where the money came from. An audience should be privy to this information.

I hope that this document can help to illuminate the work in manners idiosyncratic to each distinct reader. Subjectivity is a gift — it's the core of the film, in fact — and I wish for anyone engaging in this paper to bring themselves to it. It is a construct of my principles and pedagogical inclinations, and so it must be you, reader, who intervenes in such with an agency that can only be of your own. That is, as you will learn, why the film was made in the first place. It is a work reaching out, yearning that someone lean forward to reach back. If you happen to be

that spectator, dear reader, then thank you. If not, thank you anyway, for you allowed me your time, something deeply precious, something that, again, should be entirely your own. Time is to the body what the body is to life: it is ours to exist through, ours to take back autonomy over.

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## **Part 1 - Manifestos**

## On a Durational Cinema ——— July 20th, 2021 (revised: May 9, 2022)

The cinema cannot breathe. The pulse of an image, its whisk through projection, is a blink, not a breath. It is often appreciated to find an anatomical analogy for the cinema, for the purposes of, I can only assume, the reappropriation of the senses. We recognize a bodily kindling and to set it ablaze takes the act of abstracting it into the imagination, where it shall exist within ourselves: our bodies. This is a process of reconciliation. The cinema, as an innately disembodied form of ‘realism,’ is stuck in a space of dissonance, increasingly problematized via the contemporary estrangements of dual identities fostered by our online spheres.<sup>1</sup> Within this schism of experience, we are confronted by another abstracter: Late Capitalism, and its polliwogs of bandits. What they steal is aplenty, certainly, and mainly, material comforts and stability. But, through this process of thievery, what is also swept neatly away from us is, in truth, our own time. The seconds that we do feel, those tangible ticks and tocks that our metabolisms process through, enabling a sensorium of growth and latitude — yes, that, too, is absconded with.

I wish not to wield such heavy criticism against the melodrama, for there are many I love, many, too, that are quite culturally lasting and have lived as expressions far prior to late capitalism’s rise. However, the cinema, as it has consolidated under Hollywoodism and Western hegemony (accelerated under globalism), infuses these languages of ellipses and the temporally flattened into the narratives we intake, into the core of those images that we often internalize, as to feel. Now, this is a process of linguistic conditioning, much the fault of interventionist

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<sup>1</sup> This is no knock against the virtual, simply a recognition that our corporeal performance and cognitive capacity to embody such has yet to evolve towards a position where such a dualism, where a half exists outside of ourselves, can be physiologically reckoned with. It is an alienation embedded into our contemporary, it is one we live with, whether we like it or not.

Hollywood, which has co-opted structures, the avant-garde, symbols, and more in successful campaigns of whitewashing visual histories, and acclimatizing international audiences to their own codes. What this has reaped is a culture dominated by normalization and the appropriation of radical acts (I speak here of gleaning and organizing oneself within autonomy) within the hyper-contained framework of, ultimately, a denunciation of the self into interpassive cooperation with what I label the ‘non-threatening image.’

Such an image, in my own definition, relies on the transparency of its signifiers. This image correlates to the one that has just past and, invariably, the one that shall follow. It is a linearity of logic whose emphasis lies not on the theses of juxtaposition but the internal logics of narrativization (more precisely, the machinations of plot within narrative) and thematic redundancy. In short, the image is not a provocation, it is not a threat. As I see it, a film that utilizes these forms to tell the story of radical figures, histories, or myths — these are the images as weapons of consolidated power, co-opting and co-opting until your entire framework for rebellion has been eaten away and transformed into the logical codes of narrativity as we have come to understand it, through the stage-play model that the USA and early European cinema had directly adapted from. The languages of revolution, if not dealt with through the languages of the form, are reduced to pliant and emaciated conditions. There are perhaps an infinite number of manners to go about agitating the decorum of hegemony, and 50 years ago a multitude of methodologies were explicated through the manifestos of Third Cinemas<sup>2</sup> and the avant-garde. Eisenstein and Vertov, even earlier than this, wrote of how the cinema might enliven our imaginations.

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<sup>2</sup> Solanas & Getino, “Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World”, and Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema” in “Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures, 1st ed.”, 230-256 and 220-230.

My interests, and it must be stated that these are my interests (maybe yours, too!?), lie less in the kineticism of the former thinkers, less in the brazen and beautiful ontologies of the former movements. I look to time in my concerns, that time stripped from us, that severance we are subjugated and increasingly defined by. Hence, the Durational Cinema, a cinema of time and the senses that course through. Structural filmmakers and Warhol experimented with this notion through the 60s, and many filmmakers from across the globe have latched on to the sensibilities through their celebrated oeuvres. It can, for now, be noted that these bodies of work never find their aesthetics co-opted, for time is the one thing, should success persist for the industry, that must be commodified and sold back in the forms of productivity, efficiency and immediacy. These three words, their ideological frameworks, are antithetical to the durational cinema.<sup>3</sup>

It should be first noted that durational works distinctly differ from those of the so-called ‘Slow Cinema.’ The slow cinema, as I have come to understand it, is an aestheticism *of* time, a reappropriation of its endurance into the very fabric of imagined realities. Figures move, speak, exist, images linger and cut to further images at a pace motivated by the internal logics of narrativity. These are films still dependent on their own manifestations of linearity, only here is the continuity cut replaced by either an awesome orchestration of movement or a sensorially attuned rhythm of montage. The durational cinema can, in contrast, be reasoned with in its stasis. We watch the seconds materialize, we return to our senses, our awareness of the dimensionality we exist through: we do not have our senses invaded. The durational cinema is one where we centre ourselves as spectators, where our bodies, our presence, becomes its own enduring facet in the act of engaging with art. In this cinema, we can describe it quite pithily as ‘the persistence of

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<sup>3</sup> See the following Manifesto “On Time and its Ancillaries” for an expansion of these sentiments.



image.’ In tandem, what is required from spectators is the persistence of embodiment, of a reflexivity that positions the self within the flowing course of time as experienced.

This is a form of motion picture artisanship that cannot be quite so easily co-opted. The structures of commercial cinema are irreconcilable to this modality of temporal fermentation. These films are long, often very long, and if not by their length they become determined via the stasis of what must then be a very limited number of set-ups.<sup>4</sup> The lingering textures will remove themselves from cerebral consideration, forcing us to balance our analysis of diegesis with an analysis of positionality — the roughness of a theatre seat, the blackness of an auditorium invaded upon by the emergency lights, the way your feet touch the ground, the idea of comfort as you wrestle with your chair, the screen’s light reflecting off of the contours of your neighbour, their breath, yours.

A durational cinema enables the embodiment sought in that analogizing we initiated our discussion with above. It is an organization of images where your breath is most prevalent. Yes, the movies can take our breath away, indeed it can instil in us a sense of wonderment, imagination, and there is a beauty to that which we cannot so easily reject as responses to a Mass cinema. To deal with the mass cinema requires far more room for debate and far more voices represented than just mine. My voice is here to represent my breath, the tactility of its ebb and flow through my body. It is in the durational cinema where I have felt this the most, and so it is in a durational cinema I ask of you faith, patience, and the willingness of nothing and everything. What will make up these durational movies, I cannot be the one to determine — I have my own films in this manner, but I am merely one artist who vies for a relationship between spectator and

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<sup>4</sup> Again, see “On Time and its Ancillaries” for discussion of the dialectics of time and cinema under commercial hegemony.

image, where the affirmation of the physical exists in between gazes exchanged. Time is ours, I shout impassioned. It must be.

## On Time and its Ancillaries ——— May 9th, 2022

The Commercialist cinema is organized as a timetable. Studio films are produced with an understanding that they are to be screened in multiplexes, typically through the habitation of one (1) or more theatre screens. A film will, ideally, have the opportunity to play throughout the day at least four (4) times on a single screen. Two (2) hour runtimes have been normalized to accommodate this orchestration of Western exhibition. Such a schema is understood to prioritize profit. Ensuring the most amount of screenings, giving audiences enough *time* so that their money's worth appears well spent — this is the sublimation of art to capital surplus.

Normalization via industrialization has, therefore, not only effected the infrastructure through which we can generally access the medium, but it has simultaneously conditioned a cultural response to the art. We have, collectively, through this waged economic campaign, internalized the idealized properties of capital and project that back onto the art which we create.

Prior to the inventions of railways, time as measurement was a hyper-local phenomenon, dictated via sundials or empirical sun position. Clocks, themselves, were set to noon dependent on a locality's observation of the Sun reaching its highest point. It is with the introduction of wide-reaching industrial development, defined by the railways themselves, where standardized time, as we contemporarily understand it globally, began to develop. Our capacities to exist through time, to measure and denote it, have in the past two-hundred (200) years been systematized under the universalizing orientation of burgeoning capitalism. Naturally, our methods of expression would soon mould to these measurements and causality would ensue, rendering *time* as formalized apparatus, upon which late-capitalism would eventually, and invariably now does, commodify.

Film festivals, themselves, have become designed around limitation; limitation designated via these historical definitions of the hegemony of capital (railway -> standard) time. Short films are valued for their efficiency: programmers are able to show more work if the variety of films are of less runtime. Short film programmes run, on average, seventy (70) to one-hundred and twenty (120) minutes. This is the average runtime of a feature film. This is the average runtime of a commercial block for screening. Film festivals, however, on rare occasion, do find themselves confronted with a durational film, or even works simply of protracted runtime. Naturally, in the case of an International Film Festival [IFF], where resources allow for multifaceted exhibition experiences, such films can find room for presentation. But, and this is logic extended from the short film programmes of today, a programmer might ask: is this longer film worth the blocks that could be given to two (2) or three (3) other works of equal or greater subjective quality? In response, I will ask: why is that of the matter? Why must our normalized modalities of cinema's length constantly be at the forefront of the questions asked? Are these spaces not here to offer challenge? And is not *time*, in its elusive material, the bedrock of this art form, not the very fabric with which we should pose challenge? To worry about *time* within the supposed institutional ethos of festival mores (which I will assume here is to be a public sphere for the cultivation of critical societal and aesthetic perspective) is to reify the commodification of these most intimate of resources back into our shared cultural neoliberal myopia.

In a wave of corporate monopolism, our past decade has seen the re-emergence of the roadshow under very new design. Blockbuster cinema, through the past few decades, once prevailed as amorphous glutton: exorbitant capital financing at times ludicrous, at times imaginative, at times wondrous, at times bombastic, at times nauseating spectacle. The implacable variety enabled a consistent onslaught of ballooning budgets and heterogeneous

aesthetics, even as a homogeneity patiently encroached as oligopoly strengthened in Hollywood. This last decade has seen that patience decorated, a swift procurement of said aesthetic erraticism undertaken by monopolistic producers, shifting these unstable grounds towards a type of oversight often witnessed within the realm of television, under the ideologue labeled ‘show runner.’ With this reigning in of resources, a re-emergence of serialism now facilitated through MNC industrialism, we now have over our heads the “culture” of consumption as orchestrated by these handful of corporate functionaries. Said “culture” has crystallized into runtimes averaging one-hundred and fifty (150) minutes and over. And you may ask: How, then, have these greedy moguls of our “cultural industry” reconciled with their loss of a showtime on a single screen? A good question, you have. To answer, I point you towards the following image:



Image 1. A screen capture of AMC Empire 25's showtimes for standard screenings of *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*.

This is a screen capture of showtimes to Disney's newest instalment in their Marvel Cinematic Universe. This cinema is an AMC, located close to Times Square in New York City. The film being shown, however, is merely one-hundred and twenty-six (126) minutes. You can imagine what this screen capture might look like for a film one (1) hour longer. If we assess the image, we understand that the film is playing, simultaneously, on at least ten (10) screens. Ten (10) screens! The cinema itself hosts twenty-five (25) screens. What should be noted, as well, is that this screen capture only reflects 'standard' screenings of the film, taking into account neither IMAX screenings, Standard 3D screenings, or Dolby Cinema screening options. The apparatus of *time* as a faculty of standardized artistic objects for the benefit of profit, in our contemporary, seems increasingly of little interest within the folds on monopoly. And so what is the role of duration under these new contexts?

To speak of a form of cinema that challenges these commercial systems now requires an almost masochistic desire to inundate oneself in hours of a work within a theatre. If the three (3) hour epic that sought to climax Disney's franchise found such overwhelming success and access via these infrastructures, do we not need to directly challenge this length? After all, Warhol's *Sleep* is five (5) hours in length, *Empire* is eight (8); Lav Diaz's filmography averages six (6) hours per film! Certainly these works are irreconcilable to the commercial theatrical exhibition format. Is length, however, as a facet of *time*, to be prioritized in a discussion of Duration? Length presents the opportunity to directly confront these systems we speak of above, enabling a provocation directed towards the institutionalization of *time* as commodity. I do not think there is doubt about this point. But, must Durational films be defined by their length or by their utility of *time*'s faculty by which we know its name as 'experiential.'

*Time*'s role to play within the Durational cinema is of a dominion in similitude with that of the protagonist's role to play within Fiction. *Time* materializes from its abstract fourth (4th) dimension into the second (2nd). Naturally, I believe we can say this of all *time*-based art forms (objects made of, fundamentally, the passing of *time*), but it is in this Durational mode of cinema where *time*'s role becomes one not of requisite passivity or plotted contrivance, but of predominate affect. The action, the narrative momentum, the characterized empathy — all of these normative particulars that have been shared with the cinema, they are of secondary nature, telegraphed by the *time* through which they take place, a *time* which is articulated in stasis and reflexivity. You, the viewer, stranded in the cinema seat for however long the object before you, projected larger than life, might be. You, the viewer, sharing this direct experience of *time* with all those other spectators around you: friends and strangers, subjectivities digesting this shared happening in a plethora of manners alien only to you. You, the viewer, confronted with your own experience: *time* passing, *time* spanning, *time* enduring. And once the lights come on, what might you, the viewer, have to say about this *time* we've spent together?

## On Narrative and Definitions ——— March 13th, 2022 (revised July 6th, 2022)

Narrative is not Plot//Plot is not Story//Story is not Narrative//Narrative is not Story//Story is not Plot//Plot is not Narrative. Often used interchangeably, these three concepts recurrently — and with invariable reductiveness — commingle into amorphous signifiers, ordinarily with the intention of simply discerning the *Plot* machinations of a given work. Integral to understanding the differences in these concepts is the simultaneous need to perceive the dialogism orchestrated of these three distinct levels of structural construction. In my estimation: Narrative exists within Story and Plot exists within Narrative: Story -> Narrative -> Plot.

Prior to defining our terms, I wish to mark my positionality and intentions with what is to follow. Below is my interpretation and attempt at wrestling with the limited Narratological writings I have read. The definitions given are those calculations that have informed the manners in which I wish to articulate, seek, and scrutinize narrativity within the cinema I create.

Narratology is a wide-ranging, dialectic area of study. I am not suggesting my formulations below are an addition to this study, only that they are inspired by it and have resulted in my capacity to greater cohere percolating concepts regarding mass discourses surrounding Narrative, as well as manners of articulating narrative through cinematic means. My two points of reference to Narratology are Seymour Chatman and Rick Altman. Those I have yet to initiate myself with are the likes of Roland Barthes, Peter Brooks, David Herman, M. M. Bakhtin, Tzvetan Todorov, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Gérard Genette and Mieke Bal. Irrespective of my ignorances, the following ideas are, I believe, integral to a total context of the work I seek to develop. And so first...



*Story:*

Seymour Chatman’s understanding and definition of Story is a notion that I would be more comfortable to discern as Narrative. Story, defined neatly by Chatman, is one of two furcations within Narrative. Chatman suggests that Story, this first part of Narrative “consist[s] of the content, the chain of events (actions and happenings), and what may be called extents (characters and settings, the objects and persons performing, undergoing, or acting as a background for them;”<sup>5</sup> My disagreement with Chatman can just as neatly be apprehended by his second furcation underneath the umbrella of Narrative, which he describes as, “a discourse, that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated, the set of actual narrative statements”<sup>6</sup>

The diagram pictured to the right is an illustration of this theoretical Narrative construct. Story is determined as, should we use familiar terms, ‘diegesis,’ where, in addition, his “Discourse” can be determined as, under Formalist denotations of the term, simply ‘form.’

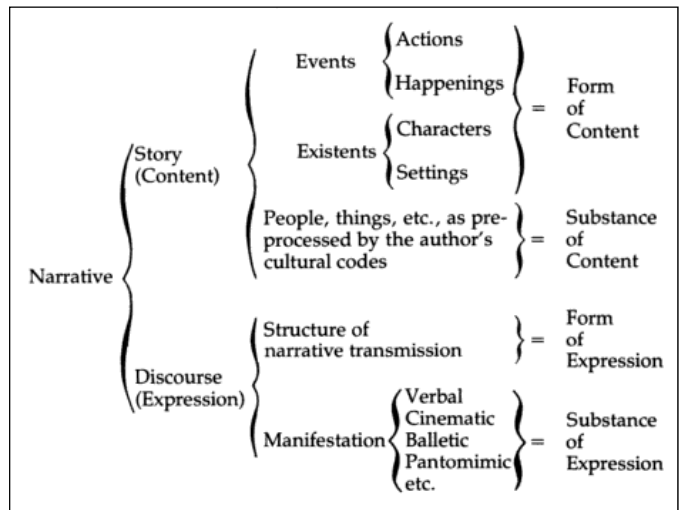


Image 2. A diagram breakdown of the faculties belonging to Narrative, organized by Seymour Chatman in his *Towards a Theory of Narrative*, 1975.

My disagreement here is in the suggestion that Narrative exists as a receptacle, wherein both the apparatus through which the narrative is unfurled and the content

<sup>5</sup> Chatman, “Towards a Theory of Narrative”, *New Literary History* 6 no. 2 (Winter 1975), 295

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

communicated through its unfolding exist. Mediums of narrative dissemination, be they stage, cinema, dance, pantomime, literature, orality, and so on, enable certain, respective capacities through which the information/details of each distinct narrative can manifest/realize/crystallize. Narrative is an amorphous, cardinal structure, given shape **through** an apparatus of medium. It is the form you wish to partake in that should determine the manner in which your Story is moulded, rendering a Narrative structure. And so, to develop our above schema of Story, we draw it anew:

Story -> Apparatus (Artistic Medium) -> Narrative -> Plot.

Where Chatman sees a Binary Tree, I seek to imagine a Timeline. Story (to Chatman: Narrative) is not SOMETHING MADE of a complex of faculties, but is SOMETHING TO BE MADE as it traverses through a process of linear intervention. What it is, exactly, that will intervene is to follow.

If Story, then, is not going to be considered as the “content” of given Narratives, our definition can be the following: Story is an account, a telling. Story is an act, a happening. Story is a substratum upon which subjectivity can cultivate. Story, I believe, is less productive as an object of structure than as the action towards structure, shaped by apparatus, culminating in a unique condition of Narrative structures. For Story exists everywhere. In every mode of expression, regardless of how non-representational, Story remains.

We can take the abstract impressionist short films of Stan Brakhage, say something as immediate and ephemeral as *Eye Myth* (1977), a ten-second piece of briefly discernible silhouettes caught in a cacophony of in-between states: motion, light, the transitory spectrum of colour. This is a film embodying perspective, its Narrative content perhaps too fleeting to describe any function of following, but undoubtedly formed as a kernel as its Story content is so

recognizably rich and full of perspective. It is a work that crux pertains to the fabric of seeing, the textures of illusion, perpetual mirage. It is not, I think, impossible to begin constructing a Narrative assembly from the piece, understanding the subjectivity of this film to be from light, itself. I certainly believe this to be true, though there is assuredly more substance to be found in the process of Story into Apparatus than from Apparatus into Narrative. It is Brakhage's communion with the camera where inferences of Narrative begin to occur, but the Story is already fully formed: an anomaly of light unveiled through the medium of cinema, as it only can be, thereby gesturing towards what Narrative might soon be able to take shape.

Story is the composition of our interaction with both public and private spheres, which will, in expression, be siphoned through a medium of choice, adapted into a structure of Narrative.

### *Narrative:*

Narrative is a callous object, a manipulative blend of the empathic and estranged. It is the most exciting and awesome structure that the human being has built. Through orality, it takes on the tonalities of the environs which embolden the storyteller; through music it is incited by aural composition, the arrangement of sonic formations as an affective momentum; through dance it becomes embodied by physique, spoken in gesticulation, an affect of flesh; in painting narrative reveals itself in invisible processes, the patient elapsing of time in which an artist manifests still life, and from that a plastic tableau offers to us a directionless agency over how we will guide ourselves through this purely two-dimensional plain of narrative. Music, Dance, Orality — these are mediums still part of the fourth dimension in their narrative performance, but their abstract representation of material reality enables distancing, in a similar manner that the still-life of the

visual arts distances via its obfuscation of time. The novel, even, literature, while fermented in a logic of often familiar linearity, has its narrative structures realized within our minds, details and characters enacting their trials and plights and catharses through an imagery of electricity. I wish not to be reductive here in my descriptors, but this is all the room I will be offering for contemplation on Narrative in these other mediums.

So we land on the stage and the cinema. These two mediums are so closely related due to the evolutionary systems of Narrative dissemination that causally transferred from one distinct medium into another. When dealing with Narrative in the cinema, we must first reconcile with the structure of classical narrative as extrinsic. Popular cinematic representations of Narrative have been smuggled into the medium based not on a process of medium-centric adaptation, but based on culturally specific orientations of performance in relation to a yet-as-to-be-understood apparatus of modernity. A substantial number of the first group of narrative filmmakers in Europe were stage directors, who would take the scripts of their novel-to-stage adaptations and simply film them. In Japan, as well, Kabuki and Shinpa Theatre were the ideological groundworks for the genesis of Narrative stimulation in the cinema. Additionally, in India, where Masala film is heavily influenced by Sanskrit Dramas, or *natya*, and traditional folk theatre.<sup>7</sup> With this history, therein, I propose the argument that cinema had only begun to develop its own Narrative structures via the Soviet Montage era of Eisenstein and Vertov, but Griffith's model of temporal continuity won out, the stage narrative structure adapted into the capacities of both a

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<sup>7</sup> The utility of montage in Masala film is its own dialectic to distinguish, similarly the early cinema of Japan, where filmmakers like Mizoguchi, clearly influenced by the theatre he worked in prior, realized cinematic modes of representation that only this medium was capable of. I put this note here as to assert that I have no intention to reduce the idiosyncrasies of tradition as it has informed the culturally intertwined cinemas of the ages. My argument is not that these cinemas are not a pure cinema, nor a corrupted cinema, but simply that due to these systems of narrative being informed by mediums of the past, the cinema, itself, has not been given the opportunity to fully cultivate its own autonomous modal of Narrative.

cut and the non-restrictive location necessities that a stage defined its aesthetics through (though, as we all know, the stage transformed into a soundstage under mass industrialization).

Certainly, I have no wish to wag fingers towards this form of Narrative as co-opted into cinema. From Griffith onwards, hundreds of beautiful works only the cinema can represent have been made under these contexts. But, what if we were to seek an ontologically cinematic structure of Narrative? What could that be? In my estimations, it would be determined as resulting in the following:

- A ridding of preconditioned expectations of “narrative” — no longer prescribed through images of continuity, through a realism that signifies the transmutability of cause and effect.
- An apprehension of time as an experience through which the text within and structure of narrative becomes supplanted — our continuity of diegesis is usurped via approximations of subjectivity, where spectator engages not through the passivity of one’s automated narrative drive, but insists on the spectator disrobing themselves of the interpassive<sup>8</sup> normalizations incurred through a Mass Industrialism that has verifiably tainted Popular image linguistics.
- An active discontinuity, which enables time to be as primary a faculty as the fixtures of Plot — an image as solitary configuration is only given its momentum through the infinite logics of montage, and that montage should be further elucidated upon in a psychoanalytic manner within the extended contraption that becomes an audience’s reflexive confrontation with *felt* time: time as the tactile propensities of cinematic Narrative.

In addition to the above, what can be added is a hyper-focus on the texture and affect of both light (light is to the image what choreography is to dance) and composition (composition is to the image what syntax is to the novel). Dialogue replaced with light. Plot replaced with

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<sup>8</sup> This concept will be expanded upon in part 2 of this paper.

composition. The Image is your mode of expression, an image ensnared in looping time. Rick Altman, Narrative theorist, came to wonderfully dilute what exactly Narrative is into a succinctly uncomplicated definition, decluttered and malleable. Altman suggests, and I vehemently agree, that Narrative is, like Story, an act. If Story is the act of information organization to be siphoned through a certain shaped hole, then Narrative is the act of following **through** that shape, witnessing a structure realize/materialize/crystallize into a following of the subjective. It is that basic, that open. Its complications seethe when we dive further into Plot.

*Plot:*

“Plot is defined as ‘the arrangement of incidents...’ We have turned from action, which is the thing imitated, to plot, which is the artistic objectification of action. Notice, too, that plot is defined (like diction) in active terms. It is not “the story” but the way that the poet arranges the incidents that make up the story.”

- O.B. Hardison<sup>9</sup>

The above quote continues from a logic that I have troubled regarding what we consider “Story” to be. However, its description of Plot is as concise an explication of the notion as I’ve ever come across. Plot is a collection of however many ‘beats’ or ‘decisions,’ existing either external of characters’ functionality or internal as expository justification for the momentum of character arcs, thematic realizations, et cetera. The word “arrangement” is of specific necessity in comprehending what, exactly, Plot is. Should I detail it further, I recognize Plot to be a series of events that, even under conditions of discontinuity, are organized to inform an administration of logical progression so as to rationalize the theses of an artist. Plot, succinctly, is the process of

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<sup>9</sup> Hardison, “Aristotle’s Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature”, 123, as cited by Chatman, “Towards a Theory of Narrative”, 311.

assembling a transparency of the Narrative it operates through. I term Plot's process a 'transparency of Narrative' due to the incisive directions that any given Plotted event would enable a Narrative to move towards. If we are to discern Narrative as a following, then Plot is a cartographic orchestration of said following, revealing its contours and shape so as to offer an increased visibility. This visibility, however, comes with its own problematics.

Plot is the epidermis of Narrative structure, though I use that word only to offer an analogy that is indicative towards ways of seeing. We see people and immediately we see their skin. We see Narrative and immediately we see its Plot. This is not to say that Plot is as essential to Narrative as skin is to the individual, but as an optic this analogue certainly ignites an insight into contemporary mass conditioning regarding how an audiences' 'common sense' is to commit their Narrative Drive to the stratagems of Plot.<sup>10</sup> Now, before I return to the problematics mentioned above, I wish to just briefly discuss Narrative Drive. This concept is one of modern identifications that exists in the relationship between image and spectator. One's Narrative Drive sees anything that is placed before them and incites the impulse to find structural orchestration. History, Narrative, Ephemera — irregardless of whatever medium it exists through, irregardless of however information is disseminated, our Narrative Drives seek to mould edifice. I speak in this section of Narrative Drive because, in fact, this drive exists less towards postulations of Narrative as a structure but to Plot as building blocks of said structure. This can be reasoned with in the understanding this manifesto opened with: that perceptions of Story, Narrative, and Plot are muddied with indistinctness. Narrative as a province of culture has substantially lost its most

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<sup>10</sup> Altman, "A Theory of Narrative", New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, 18-21.

provocative capacity to be illegible (re: the visibility of Narrative through Plot), aroused via the hyper-reductive hegemony of accessibility discourses.<sup>11</sup>

Plot has superseded the particulars of narrative and story, transmuting their definitions into the hegemony discerned above, that of a plot-first mentality most effectively observed within the neoliberalizing of identity politics. For what I hope is meant in the desire to see marginalized stories told is the agitation to see that new aesthetics of narrative need be developed. Whereas, inside the current industrial co-option of political progressiveness, arbiters of power simply see the foundational and very white aesthetic formations of plotted momentum and copy-paste such screeds onto the narratives of others. Visibility, as I mentioned above, becomes the only faculty of change. The more visible, the better — so says this neoliberalism. But, like the very ideological turret it is shot from, a clear contradiction unfurls. Under increased visibility, what should simultaneously balloon are representations of intersectional experiences, especially considerations of class position. Class is, after all, so deeply rooted in the process of racialization. Sadly anticipated, this intersectionality is not present, leading only to a visibility of the epidermis. Power remains where power remained (white and rich), and with increased visibility comes increased ability for surveillance. This surveillance takes place within those hegemonic plotted machinations, now, however, populated by the marginalized, whitewashing the stories of revolutionaries, for example, into schemas: digestible and immediately accessible. What the mass abstraction of Plot — tied into performative progressiveness from a 1% — has

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<sup>11</sup> My use of the term “accessibility” must be differentiated from discourses surrounding accessibility in “critical disability theory,” which studies a plethora of theories including those of accessibility in the context of disability (eg. the material dimensions undertaken to enable a spectrum of environments to be literally accessible by differently abled peoples). My denotation of “accessibility” considers ideas of difficulty/abstraction/obfuscation in the handling of information (for an immediate example, I point to discourses surrounding “academic languages.” Further, I will be unable to discuss accessibility as it relates to cultural concessions to monopoly in the age of SVOD/Studio consolidation, but these ideas, I hope, circulate in your mind, dear reader.



enabled is the commodification of marginality. And so I scream for the illegible, where people are not objectified and flattened through the epidermis of structure nor the epidermis of body — but where the Narrative as structure and the epidermis as body can find its idiosyncrasy, its potential to be illegible, to be of a subjectivity rooted in the experiential. Plot, while certainly very often present, regardless of attempts to shirk it, must, at the very least, not be the mediator between the time of a Narrative and the time of the spectator.

Plot is now the tool of idiosyncratic abstraction, used like a cudgel to desaturate the experiences of those now in a position to take hold of the apparatus so long gate kept. You can tell your story, but only as long as it abides by OUR structures. You can tell your story, but only as long as it abides by OUR Plot. Plot, an elliptical arrangement of events within a Narrative, that is now authority. This ellipsis present in Plot becomes normative in assessing time within the history our fictions are made up of. And thus the spectator's relationship to these histories becomes siphoned through upkept systemic violences, now dressed as diversity initiatives: the revisionism of histories through white monopoly.

We must combat Plot and its deviances towards ascendancy. The act of following, its subjective adeptness, must supersede the act of schematizing. In doing so, we can realize a form of cinematic arts that culminates in a medium autonomy. Images can speak for themselves, Images can be the material of Narrative. The requisite of Plot is the internalization of a work's Narrative, but the requisite of Narrative is simply the propensities of form. While it is not necessary that we shed Plot in order to realize the potential of cinema on its own Narrative terms, we can invariably use more of this curiosity in our fictions, even in our Documentaries as they have also appropriated the predisposition for Plotting out the Narratives' of their subjects. And is not that process of constructing such an aestheticized object of life, itself an ethically dubious

territory, where the complexes of experience are reduced to elliptical, immediately digestible inferences of linear momentum and event? Why can we not ask the same of our fictions, where normative plot systems are rooted in violent ideological histories?

## On the Body and Sex and the Cinematic Image ——— April 3rd, 2022

We find ourselves at the intersections of alienation. A multitude of forms, dissociation enveloping our perspective, invoke an age-old repression of self and feeling: affect wanes into apathy, into the secession of ideology, into a domineering spiritual resignation. We exist in a dysmorphic condition, where bodies and their tactility and their sensuality and sexuality and perverseness are estranged under postmodern propagations of neoliberal idealism. The self is a forgotten entity amidst failed governance, and our image culture projects this stagnation back onto us as normative. Neo-Conservatism sews the substratum of our cultural mandates. Media literacy exists as a manufactured failure. Aestheticism has, at once, disengaged people from their reality, from their own bodies, and reaffirmed an orthodox guilt. We are scared of our own skin. Late capitalism, in its commodification of our time, has not excluded the reification of our bodies in this process. Hence, a dysmorphia, a bodily alienation that concedes our autonomy to the fascism that seethes under our feet. Take off your shoes, you'll feel it too.

And a man once asked: What is to be done? As liberalism rapidly morphs into the firm grip of right-wing ideology, and aesthetics are increasingly propped up as utilitarian, how can a conversation rooted in dialectical materialism take shape? When image culture is a hegemony under the ruling thumb of bourgeois oligopoly and opportunism sees all viable options reified back into the very structures we attempt to subvert, what is to be done? There is incontestably no reform that might fix, nor even tend to this ailment. A confrontation, I believe, is required; a reconvening with the body and its stimuli. Openness and healthiness: a discourse of autonomies all intertwined through the socio-politic.

Sexlessness is to be found at the foundation of our culturo-monolithic images. In coupling with the advent of Plot-above-all, there comes a censorship of how the body can be represented, as well. Sex has no role in those elliptical structures. The body has no autonomy, it is only a tool for the plot — characters churned into pawns of larger schema, rather than that schema being built through character. These are sentiments floundering in confusion, but so loud as to become a hegemony in themselves. And we propagate these ideologies within ourselves now, no longer do those who govern unjustly need to weigh in with their heavy hand. Our self-perpetuated cowering to the beauty and sensuality of our bodies has rendered a supremacy of distance, but exactly where that distance should never be.

I am embodied. I am skin, muscle, electricity. I am flesh and sex and sensuality. I am perverse and that is good. I am perverse and sensual and sexy and that is great. As an image, I will offer bareness and presence in such a form, I will offer an antagonist to the disunity of ideology and tactility. Materialism is at its core the body, and so the body must be in its fullness as a faculty of the image, and the image must be called an image, and the image cannot be a body, but the image is a representation, a re-presentation, and we must always know this. We sit with the body on screen as we sit in our own. We are a body. We are embodied and must fight for that. What we fight for is our embodiment, is against our alienation, is against guilt and repression. The Image is our culture now, and so we must fight for what it can be.

## On Performance and Acting ——— October 21, 2020

Walter Benjamin's discourse that proclaims the "actor's" role has changed in the cinema is incontrovertible.<sup>12</sup> But, the common arrangement of philosophies around this change are misguided interpretations of what said change is. Benjamin is right when he notes that the "actor" is no longer performing for an audience, but for an apparatus which will mediate the drama between "actor" and spectator. An audience, Benjamin says, will only receive the affective elements of a performance that the camera allows for.<sup>13</sup> He is, again, correct. Where a performance on stage can find analogue in the sonic wave of a blast that radiates towards you, a performance on screen can find analogue in the study of, say, a pterosaurs femur uncovered with great excitement and passion. Screen performances are objects of study, much like the image they are deeply a part of themselves. For an "actor" on screen is transmuted into an object. In short, an "actor" is a *prop*. But this can only be said when considering the image in its form as rendered pixels or processed light — an "actor" is, simply, a part of that algorithm or alchemy.<sup>14</sup>

The act of embodiment is integral to a process of acting, but I would argue that said embodiment is often misinterpreted and projected upon idealist, dissociative means rather than what's most important. "Actors" are often celebrated for their transformation, their, in fact, disembodiment and plasticity. Said transformations are elucidated as an embodiment of character, but with an embodiment of character comes the disembodiment of the self. "Actors" who are spoken of with such institutional vigour due to their callous bodily treatment regarding

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<sup>12</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", London: Penguin, 2008, VIII;IX, 17-21

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> I state that this idea of "actor" as prop exists only in the image for good reason. The first and foremost concern of any film director or producer, in the process of production, should be that of ethical production practices. "Actors" are labourers and therefore must be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. Like all labourers on set, this is their job. A job pays for livelihoods and no job exists above its labourers. I will discuss production ethic in more detail in Part 2 of this paper.

weight or general haleness — this can be considered a psyop, perhaps not of intention but certainly of influence. When celebrities are lathered in accolades because of their physical and psychological dissociation of the self — this is systemic wrought, indebted to the neoliberalized dysphoria.

An “actor,” and their performance, should be concerned with the self. The self in dialogue with adaptation. A character is nothing more than a mechanical cog, a piece of structure. People should not be idealizing transformations into cogs. A great “actor” understands that, like any expression of art, the key is a process of adaptation. This is not an infusion but a performance. It is an individual performing the optics of a character, a contrivance, a design. This performance should, by all means, be an expression of the self, not a usurping of it. An “actor” is in closest proximity to the aestheticism of culture, for it is their bodies that become facets of objects. And so an “actor” should be the first to take responsibility for their representation, their self. Despairingly, it is the “actor” in Western cinematic arts who is the first to concede themselves to an abstracted opportunism. It is the “actor” who giddily and ignorantly sells their body to the undiscerning image, the aesthetic that will fragment them. We must not abstract ourselves, we cannot allow for this dehumanization.

The durational cinema offers the performance its most honest representation: for the performance within duration exists in simultaneity as endurance and as the stripped down object of the spectacle of image. The performance of an “actor” becomes wholly inscribed by our persistence of witnessing, our unceasing gaze, our stare. This is not how we, as spectators of life, look to people and this is not how they respond. In the normative industrial cinema, where narrative codes are familiar, the performance is something we are, in reference, made to be a voyeur onto, a voyeur of the plasticity. In the durational cinema, however, we are made to be an

equal: stagnant and in singular action. When these two equals meet, a levelling of relationship occurs. This new equilibrium offers to the performance that of its most honest representation. For we now are seeing them in the exact way through which they perform: we are both enduring.

In the Durational cinema a performance is the body of a self, an “actor” and their personhood. They are not an abstraction, but a solidity. Though they might be called by another name and exist within a narrative confine, an objecthood, they remain, shot by shot, in shared time and in shared physical capacity. In the Durational cinema a performance is that of presence, is the explicit expression of certain ideas, less a process of characterization. In fact, characterization is not the job of a performance in Durational cinema, but the job of form: light and composition. The camera is as still as the “actor,” who is as still as the spectator. All that moves is time. For an “actor” in the Durational cinema should exist in their own head. They should be existing as no one else but themselves in conversation with what this character (this figment) they are portraying on screen — through the apparatus of a lens and its glass and the camera body it is attached to, through the pixels or chemicals, through the digital rendering or chemical processing, through the digital files or celluloid prints, through the hard drives or tin cans, through projection — might mean.

For the “Actors” I ever work with, the following is for us to discuss:

This is an experiment. This is a reconfiguration of the norm. This film, in all its stages, will not abide by a commonly prescribed-to form of performance -- there will be no outward expression of the internalized, no stoicism, no dimensionality. One cannot think of character as an implicit consequence of characterization. Character, for our purposes, denotes a type of representation. As in: YOU are a character if you resemble the likeness of a human. It's that

simple. It's that superficial. I say this to ensure a common understanding, wherein everything will exist on the surface. In this film, it is not the job of an "actor" to pronounce interiority, it is the job of the camera, the lighting. Here, the "actor" is as much a part of the environment as the china stacked up in the drawer against the wall. This is the "actor's" positionality.

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Performance cannot be thought of in a traditional manner. In total, the very mannerism of performance must, here, dissipate from the "actor's" mind. To use terminology in an attempt to articulate this, I look to French filmmaker Robert Bresson, whom in his *Notes on Cinematography* writes: "An actor in cinematography might as well be a foreign country. [They] do not speak its language."<sup>15</sup> He prefers to use the phrase "Human Model" as opposed to "actor." I mostly agree with this stance, however I can understand the diminutive value this creates. In such a case, this is where I will veer from the philosophy of Bresson and adopt notions of the theatre. This analogy is often the butt of commercial jokes, often the underhanded mocking of the pretension of the stage -- I will use it anyhow. Think of yourself as a *stage player*, and your role is that of the *tree*. Of course, on stage, such a role exists within the blurring of forgivability, as an audience's suspension of disbelief allows you, on stage, to fully adopt said role. You camouflage into the rooted rigidity of a tree planted into the soil. That is your role on stage, that is all you are... But we are not on stage, we are on screen. On screen, that blur has been conditioned to play a non-entity within the inscription of photo-realism, and its heady, human drama that the cultural industries have enforced through. And so now I ask you, the "model," to play a tree on screen, but interpolate within yourself the shedding of humanity as an autumn chill rubs against your skin. That is the secret you keep from me. I tell you to be a tree, and you exhibit that tree

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<sup>15</sup> Bresson, "Notes on the Cinematography", New York: New York Review Books. 2016, 7



but under the sheer force to become realized as a feeling creature. It is in that contradiction, which shall go unspoken between us, where your performance will live -- and this is not something I can touch, nor manipulate, nor alter. This is you. I only ask for the tree. You must provide yourself. But that is all, that is the performance to take place.

## **Part 2 - Intentions & Failures**

## Intentions

### Theory: A Pillow for the Brain

I sought this project to be an amalgam of the theoretical discourses which I've been involved in over the past few years. I had naively hoped that the film would be a crystallization proper of the many ideations I had been sitting with. My utmost hope in approaching this film was that I might begin to find answers to a question I have been formulating and reconfiguring for around four years now:

In assessing the formal qualities of the motion picture image through 'Hollywoodism' post-WWII — understanding these globalized sensibilities of image making to stem from Griffith's racist, ideologically infused formal discoveries — can we, through a historical materialist analysis of formalism, enact an image-language that can contest normalized modes of narrativity and visual literacy?

Further, I had been interested in the affective qualities of image-linguistics, and so hoped to both understand and formally articulate image affect in relation to image's very faculty as an amorphous language structure. I surmised that such investigation into the marriage of theory and production could come to the beginnings of revealing itself in the informed construction of a film that actively sought to re-conceive temporality in the confines of continuity-informed linearity. Naturally, I found myself in a position during pre-production, production and post where all of these questions and initial intentions eluded me, and I persuaded myself to leave theoretical

gesticulation to the side in favour of constructing a cogent assembly of narrative experiment under duration.

Before I go further in assessing my initial intentions for the project, I wish to break down the above paragraph...

### *The Question*

My theory, and certainly the theory of many others — take, for example, Christian Metz, who's ideas on cinematic syntax inform me, where, for example, he discerns “the existence of a ‘logic of implication,’ thanks to which the image becomes language, and which is inseparable from the film's narrativity.”<sup>16</sup> or where he simply states that “it seems appropriate to look at the cinema as a language without a system... the image (at least in the cinema) corresponds to one or more sentences, and the sequence is a complex segment of *discourse*.”<sup>17</sup>— is that our image culture came to the foreground not only out of a process of capital accumulation and technocracy, but in tandem there was an orchestrated campaign to create hegemony in the image, itself. In collaboration with the early establishment of Hollywood, US policy sought to (I) spread the image of Americana, but (II) infuse these images with an essentialist ideal of United States value. *Global Hollywood II*, a collaborative effort by researchers Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, Richard Maxwell, and Tina Wang, offer us some insight into this:

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<sup>16</sup> Metz, “Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema”, University of Chicago Press ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 47

<sup>17</sup> Metz, “Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema”, 65

“Cinema technology and narrative emerged around the same time, at the turn of the twentieth century, when the US invented and appropriated a vast array of culturally significant machines — the airplane, the typewriter, electric light and the telephone... There were also transformations in colonial politics: the US seized the Philippines and Cuba, the European powers ran Africa, and Native American resistance was crushed. While First Peoples’ rights were being trampled under foot, commercial cultural export and sovereign authority were synchronizing (with an array of genocidal stories enacted on-screen).”<sup>18</sup>

Miller goes on:

“The link between military might and Hollywood was clarified in 1947 when an MPAA mazel referred to the peoples freed in Europe by the Allies as showing ‘*pathetic zeal*’ in their attendance at US movies, a pathos matched only by their welcome of ‘*our advancing armies*’ [these self-italicized partial-quotations are taken from Gerald M. Mayer’s 1947 Article ‘American Motion Pictures in World Trade’]”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Miller cites the Department of Commerce, this quotation serving as just one example of the fundamental relationship between the movies and ties between cultural imperialism and culture, writ large:

“In addition to serving as one of our most lucrative exports, the entertainment industry provided the world’s population with a clear understanding of a democratic society... Many of these American films and television programs have helped promote freedom and democratic values, the same values that encouraged throngs of people throughout the world to rise up and challenge repressive governments, contributing to the end of the Cold War, the destruction of the Berlin Wall, and the events in Tianamen Square before the crackdown.”<sup>20</sup>

Such ideologically fuelled images, often constructed through conventional compositional tactics and uniform compositional affectations, cultivated a manner of seeing, much in the same ways that reading and speaking languages as a child cultivates codes of communication. It should be a given that learning how to see and digest codes of images can find its analogue in

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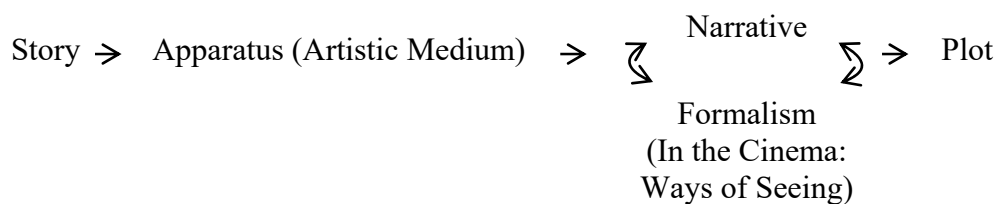
<sup>18</sup> Miller, “Global Hollywood II”, Rev ed. London: BFI, 2004 53

<sup>19</sup> Miller, “Global Hollywood II”, 64

<sup>20</sup> Department of Commerce, “The Migration of U.S. Film and Television Production”, as cited by Miller, “Global Hollywood II”, 83

learning how to speak and digest codes of dialect. And if this is the case and hegemony dictates that the image we are most familiar with and learned through is that of a Hollywood aesthetic, then I return to the question above. I ask: how might we offer transparency to this education and images to struggle against this normalized modality, in simultaneity? Visual literacy, like media literacy and literacy, itself, is state sanctioned and organized. We cannot trust the state with our institutionalized education, so how can we trust it with our image education?

With reference to narrativity, as it has been discussed above in its eponymous Manifesto, I would like to emphasize here how closely informed our structures of narrative are by a visual literacy. If we accept Narrative as defined above, as a structure of following, an act of subjectivity construction, then is not how we understand seeing innately tied to how Narrative will unfurl in the cinema? Though, I do think this logic exists in oscillation. Thinking about new ways of seeing can render new structures of Narrative and thinking about new structures of Narrative can render new ways of seeing. If we return to the illustration I offered in *On Narrative and Definitions*, perhaps we can add to it this logic:



Classical Narrativity, then, gives way to hegemonic form. That's not to suggest dissonance never rears its head and films don't exist that rebuke this generalization, but having seen thousands of works by burgeoning artists, this relationship always presents itself at the forefront of analysis. Filmmaker Mamoru Oshii, known for his animated projects *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Angel's Egg* (1985), had a substantial base of live action projects that, upon

review, articulate and have been central to my theorizations around Narrative utility and the functionalities of Plot. His unofficial trilogy, including the films *The Red Spectacles* (1987), *Stray Dog: Kerberos Panzer Cops* (1991), and *Talking Head* (1992), are a collection of experimental Narrative works that estrange our capacity to recognize reality in its naturalized photo-realism whilst enacting structures of Narrative that obscure the temporal and causal momentum of the consequentially obtusely plotted action. Through my own analysis of his live action filmography — less interpolating these to-come ideas than extrapolating them from texts very headily engulfed in discourses of autonomy under capitalism and its spectre of fascism — I have discerned that the films, themselves, are about the oppressiveness of Plot. We, as artists, build Narratives in our cinema. Those characters, rendered into human representations by humans in the flesh, who are a part of that Narrative, become a pawn of mechanical domineering: dictated by us, the artist, enforced by us, the artist. In short, he suggests that one cannot build representation in the Cinema without also flirting with fascism, for our codes of Narrative have, since Aristotle described them in generality, been an act of dictatorship. Oshii wonders if he can craft a cinema that allows for this pressure to ease up.

Mussolini writes:

To fascism the world is not this material world which appears on the surface, in which man is an individual separated from all other men, standing by himself and subject to a natural law which instinctively impels him to lead a life of momentary and egoistic pleasure. In Fascism man is an individual who is the nation and the country. He is this by moral law which embraces and binds together individuals and generations in an established tradition and mission.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mussolini, Benito, *The Doctrine of Fascism*, Zhingoor Books, 2018.

As artists, our Narratives are constructs through which we undermine the autonomy of the characters we create. This is invariable in fiction. Our plethora of characters are simply an amalgam of the one (or few) who have created their role within any specific temporality being presented in a work. Fiction, like Fascism, is an attempted distancing through the construct of ideology. Where Fascism seeks to look back at the total state and homogeneity of man, Fiction seeks to look back at a variety of morals and ethics. Oshii sought in his live-action cinema to look back and imagine the utopia of his characters, where they only know to wander and thereby leave us, the spectators, to wander similarly. We are not driven towards any single ethic or moral in Oshii's work, but an openness through which a dialectic can emerge. The question then being asked is: Can we imagine a form of Narrative wherein characters gain a semblance of autonomy? Is that possible? Can the artist problematize the temporalities and conditions of fiction to any great degree as to rebuke the autocracy of creation? Such are the questions I have adopted in my approach to Narrativity.

### *The Affect*

If Images can be understood as a structure of linguistics, then affect must inherently be a competency of its existence. And I am not suggesting that the represented material, the substance (content) of the image is affective in itself, for that we have already dissuaded as a manner in critical study when I recall the above ideas of how, exactly, we, as spectators, receive a performance from an "actor." If performance is mediated, so too is the rest. Therefore, the affect of an image lies in how the apparatus allows us to perceive, how it allows us to manage its gaze. I sought the affective qualities of an image as a tool in actually helping to build towards what Kracauer understood as a 'psychoanalytic film.' Kracauer was mildly misguided in the



terminology, understanding this type of cinema as a socially connective tissue that could be tracked, under incisive enough study, to its encounter with Nazism. He suggests that Nazi propaganda ultimately embroiled the emotional state of the German people, seeking fascism in both the image and the imagination:

Totalitarian propaganda endeavoured to supplant a reality based upon the acknowledgement of individual values. Since the Nazis aimed at totality, they could not be content with simply superseding this reality — the only reality deserving the name — by institutions of their own. If they had done so, the image of reality would not have been destroyed but merely banished; it might have continued to work in the subconscious mind, imperilling the principle of absolute leadership. To attain their aim, the Nazi rulers had to outdo those obsolete despots who suppressed freedom without annihilating its memory. These modern rulers knew that it is not sufficient to impose upon the people a “new order” and let the old ideas escape. Instead of tolerating such remnants, they persistently traced each independent opinion and dragged it out from the remotest hiding place — with the obvious intention of blocking all individual impulses. They tried to sterilize the mind... In plain language, Goebbels’ propaganda, not content with forcing the Nazi system upon the people, endeavoured to force the heart of the people into this system — and to keep it there.<sup>22</sup>

I am of the belief that most all forms of ideological based art can be denoted as ‘propaganda,’ as the term, itself, carries no real moral or ethical connotation. I am of the opinion that what Kracauer is describing here pertains to the very machinations of American image-making, and therefore any counter-image-making, too. Though his historical analysis has been rebuked by many, his analysis of the psycho-affective faculties of images is potent. In fact, I find the term ‘psychoanalytic film’ to be of more use as a descriptor of a cinema that understands its affective properties and utilizes them to shirk normative modalities in favour of something in line with how I sought my film to be. A type of propaganda? Most certainly. Agitprop, if you will.

A common, pithy logline I’ve utilized to communicate what I wish for my film to do is: Light as Dialogue; Composition as Plot. My thoughts here are to hypothesize that understanding

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<sup>22</sup> Kracauer, “From Calgary to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film”, NED - New edition. Vol. 43. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 298-299.

the patterns and structures of light in any given shot can render an affective reading of the characters upon which the lighting is sown. Lighting, the paint of a canvas for the frame, characterizes insofar as a spectator is willing to engage in a process of constant extra-interpolation. What I mean by this assumes that via realizing a kind of psychoanalytic cinema, I am reorienting both form and Narrative to suit my needs. Therefore, conventional processes of characterization through diegetic development are replaced with how light will colour and shape the frame, thereby bringing the aesthetic object that is the cinematic frame to the forefront. This, then, allowing the frame (light, insofar as we have currently discussed) to speak for the characters, rather than internalized mechanics of characterizations or plotted contrivances enforcing situational decisions that we can then project back onto characters as indicative of development or dimensionality.

Before developing on the process of extra-interpolation, which is really just a more precise term to distinguish active processes between film and spectator, we turn to the second half of my tenet. Composition, the second part of the frame, similarly works to evoke affective readings of image. The plethora of near cartographic orchestrations to describe the infinite sort of orientations one can take within a frame is of little use here, but that infinite capacity is exactly what should be latched onto, both to elicit excitement in the endless possibilities for imagination and to begin reflecting on how the utility of axes might organize textual or affective readings, in the context of logical continuities and Narrative Drive. Say an extreme wide shot, where two characters are framed at equal distance in the far background of the shot, and a cityscape overpowers their presence, is cut in to a medium-wide, where one of these characters is now seen rising over the other, the very overwhelming city now composed as a dimensionless backdrop in this z axis formation. We cannot discount the substance (material content) of shots, but they must

be siphoned through their formal presentation first. In this example, it would not be difficult to read that the city, whilst in one perspective seems to be the great equalizer, in the next then rebukes this logic with a development in compositional method. The second shot connects this city and its stature to the figure now overseeing the other, the city their weapon, perhaps, or even their accomplice. Further Narrative information would need to be discerned before such conclusions can be made, but these are two possible readings of this juxtaposition, this logical continuity made, simply, by the cut. *A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles* organizes this type of discourse, as well. Each cut is very purposeful in its design to suggest a development of compositional orientation, and the place the film's protagonist holds in these, more often than not, wide or medium wide shots.

The spectator's Narrative Drive might further inundate this cut existing in our example just above by then insinuating a clear relationship that must exist between them. We don't know this yet; perhaps the relationship might be that of nothing more than arbitrariness. Perhaps we never see this character being looked over ever again, for they were simply used to illustrate the position of the character we might be able to tie closer to the cityscape. Narrative Drive, in its immediacy, however, will suggest a relationship, nonetheless. I utilize this expectation when cutting between Eva, *Knuckles*' protagonist, and The Man, an unknown yet perversely and permeating presence. The cut between the two, their anonymity as indicated through composition, suggest a close relationship, one that, due to the purposeful lack of plotted narrative momentum, is up to the spectator to bring judgement upon, of course through that process of extra-inter-polation. And with all this said, and the introduction of extra-inter-polation as a term, we move on from the dissection of the first paragraph of this Part 2, and continue on.

## Theory: Bells that Ring — a Marriage of Many

It is Robert Pfaller's idea of Interpassivity that instigates the term extra-interpolation. Interpassivity quickly came to be the bedrock atop of which all of my intentions percolate. Pfaller's concept must first be understood not as dichotomic to interactivity, a term we are all very familiar with, but as its own theoretical conception of an audience's relationship to art/media/academia/etc... Interpassivity discloses an age of political engagement where the neoliberal individualization has reaped a sociality designed around non-active activation. To quote Pfaller directly, "Interpassivity is... a strategy of escaping identification and consequently subjectivisation. Precisely there, where it is suggested that they become self-conscious subjects (through 'interpolation' in the sense of Althusser [1971]) people seize interpassive means to flee into self-forgetfulness. Interpassivity is therefore either an anti-ideological behaviour, or it is a second, and entirely different, type of ideology that does not rest on becoming a subject."<sup>23</sup>

To distill, I can offer an example:

You've just watched a movie. It wasn't very good, but its central thematics were concerned with unchecked economic excess being the reason behind the existential threat of climate change and environmental destabilization. You agree with the ideas of this film. The ideas make you angry, make you sad — you are impassioned. You return home from the theatre and carry on with the quotidian, with the labour enshrined with a promise of daily bread. Your anger stagnates and transfigures into the pervasive mundanities of regimen, and so does the affirmation of the film, and so your days carry on.

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<sup>23</sup> Pfaller, "Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment", Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 8

Pfaller isn't trying to condescend or insinuate that the people have no sense of action to them, but that their autonomy for even beginning to imagine a reality in which they are active fighters for the rights they care deeply about has been stolen. Interpassivity is a diagnostic in how information in so many forms has been weaponized by the capitalist state and malformed into objects that masses can project onto, consider that projection enough done, and then return to their alienated living. "[The] cultural capitalist goods are dispatchers of vicarious life; they are interpassive media."<sup>24</sup> Interpassivity is, in another extrapolation, the isolationism of ideology and segregation of that politic from the activity of labour. Like Jameson offers the concept of Postmodernity to not be a thing in itself but a condition of the contemporary,<sup>25</sup> so too is Interpassivity. Though, we can argue that it is an act in itself, as well, for Interpassivity must also take place within a relationship of engagement between a spectator and the spectated, and, therefore, I surmise that it can be intervened upon. Such an intervention is the very motivation of the film. *A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles* was made to see the Interpassive and confront its fermented modalities, its conditioning and normalization.

I conclude this interrogation of Interpassivity's place within my process of ideology with the following:

As Richard Sennett noted in 1974, [the] narcissistic formula can be summed up in the formula 'Be yourself! And do not tolerate anything that appears foreign to your precious self.' Today, under neoliberal conditions, it can be seen how this categorical imperative of our culture leads to most affirmative forms of pseudo-emancipatory politics, and even self-exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pfaller, "Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment", 14.

<sup>25</sup> Jameson, "Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism", Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Pfaller, "Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment", 79.

Extra-interpolation is that very process of intervention I hope to take place in audiences during their viewing of the film. Due to the durational nature, and therefore a stagnant plotted momentum, leaving audiences to their own devices for the majority of their time in the darkened theatre<sup>27</sup>, this bidirectional methodology of engaging with the cinematic object is that of necessitating recognition of positionality and necessitating the projection of meaning, in all its plausible, dubious forms. The only extrapolation I am comfortable to suggest must occur is that of stasis, which an audience will then recognize in themselves. Their position as a static spectator, caught in the confines of a chair as they gaze up at a large screen. The only interpolation I am comfortable to suggest must occur is that of reaction, wherein an audience will take that positionality they are more than aware of and question and discern what the stasis they observe is constructed for. I am perfectly okay if audiences only get to the point of recognizing their stasis and then decide to leave or opt out for that is, of course, an act of agency (which was the ultimate goal to begin with). But, I believe that once these two acts occur, and the extra-interpolative process can take place once again, new ideas, whether concerning the film itself, or peripheral to it, or even entirely outside of it, will begin forming and allow for an audience to take hold of the work on their own terms, not the terms of the object through which they are given information. My role, then, is to ensure the interpassive does not supersede these processes. My role is to intervene again and engage in conversation with audiences, inquiring in them what exactly they think they might be able to do with whatever they think has just been

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<sup>27</sup> It has been asked of me to what degree my desires for this project are predicated on the factor of an in-cinema spectatorship, as opposed to an at-home viewing via streaming or other means. I consider my sentiments on this film, my priority for direct interaction with the spectator, to be determined via an in-cinema experience. It does go further than that, however, for even the viewing experience of this film outside of a cinema is corrupted by compression rates, artifacting the image's details: its shadows, which are core to the compositions of the work. I am not antagonistic to home-viewing for reasons of accessibility and the disparities of opportunity between a wide spectrum of communities. However, with an at-home viewing, or any viewing where I cannot be present to intervene with an audience, we are losing important processes in this discourse. This is also why this paper will be distributed alongside the film's dissemination.

presented before them. My only goal, really, is that I might make audiences more aware of this hegemony and enable a curiosity that might invoke the desire towards education in media and/or visual literacy. Art will not change things, art will not change people, so we must use our art to intervene, if just for a moment of time, and be sure to take that opportunity; for people can most assuredly change people. I know this first hand.

### Production: Praxis and Creation

My friends are exploited. They are made interchangeable, anonymous, and crude. Industrial Film Production in Canada has sought to create automatons of a working class, much in the echo of any orchestration of capital-first labour. They are gig-workers, helping to very literally craft the cultural artifact that our cultural industries utilize as encompassing distillations of the contemporary. They are unprotected, abused, condescended towards, gaslit, and alienated. Their time is wrung into a blackhole of total abstraction. But, if this is all true, then do not these labour conditions of a work evidently so integral to our interlacing spheres of culture not indicate the very values of said culture? And, if the answer to this question is yes, as I would purport it is, for these cultural artifacts all live within and without their ethos as displays of — due to these conditions of labour exploitation — masqueraded sovereignty, then are these cultural artifacts not corrupted, therefore reproducing that corruption into culture, itself? Certainly this ties right into Adorno and Horkheimer's mapping of the boom in cultural industries,<sup>28</sup> and so we can comfortably situate our plight in the continuity I wish to describe as A Century of Concern. One

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<sup>28</sup> Horkheimer & Adorno, "Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments" *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, 94-136

Hundred years (plus) of knowing where we were headed, but unable to stop it as capital consolidated and cultural imperialism enforced its reign.

I return to Lenin's words once again, for these are words of assuredness and indignation and hope: What is to be Done?<sup>29</sup> He asks this not like a child does after their parents' dog is put down, not with that aloof unknowability seeking answers in an abyss. He asks this with vigour, impassioned by an anger fuelled with a longing for people. I echo this sensibility, one to be cultivated in each proletariat, one to awaken the sheer strength of the popular, no longer hexed by generations of internalized antagonisms. And so I turn to myself, I ask myself what is the responsibility of a film director, and it is from there I begin to articulate.

Canadian production methodology is a whimpering echo of American supremacy. Often describing itself as "Hollywood North," Toby Miller instead cites a more apt moniker: "Mexico North."<sup>30</sup> Such a provocation is to suggest that the Canadian landscape, both physical and industrial, has been siphoned from under our feet. We are emboldened by an industry that spreads the virus of a lie, wherein we have any autonomy of our own, whilst simultaneously demoralized as our infrastructures prove time and time again that truth in which we have little to no authority of our own. Culturally, therefore, we are stagnant and emaciated. We can only properly address this, then, by recognizing the limits of our resources and ensuring they are responsibly channeled through newfound visions of ethic and aesthetic.

First I will briefly expound on the newfound vision of aesthetic, and then I will detail my ideations around labour ethic. My discourse surrounds, it should be noted, our national industry

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<sup>29</sup> Lenin, "What is to be Done?", London: Panther, 1970.

<sup>30</sup> Gasher, "The Audiovisual Locations Industry in Canada: Considering British Columbia as Hollywood North", as cited by Miller, "Global Hollywood II", 139.



of fiction-based media creation, which includes the markets of television, independent and commercial feature filmmaking, as well as web series production. The Canadian Industry gorges upon and spews up an anonymity in likeness, a hive mind and homogeneity of photocopies. Artists have no imagination, for the world they exist in has had it excavated for decades. Where can an Artist go to seek inspiration? How can an Artist learn how to articulate themselves? These spaces, these resources, they are absent. The Canadian cinema is as attenuated as it is because all that exists in the minds of our young artists is the hegemony of 'Hollywoodism.' They seek to recreate its corrupted neoliberalism, malforming identity politics into commodity, rendering out objects of jejune aesthetic. American classicalism is co-opted without even a fraction of the budget to do so. What results is vacancy, normalization, and visual orthodoxy. Such orthodoxy contradicts the liberal progressiveness these artists so wish to platform, further realizing the churn of liberalism as oscillating between centre-left and centre into its true neoliberal centre-right position. These artists who seek to express the personal, seek the emancipatory, but through the drab classicalism of a hegemonic image linguistic, they are, in fact, crystallizing a conservatism that will both define their work and, soon after, themselves. Conclusively — and this is what I do firmly believe, as we regard those within the imperial core — the artist, certainly the cinema artist, has little to no autonomy over their imagination. It has been commodified, organized to be reified, diluted to be industrially amicable.

The imagination, however, is only of secondary concern. While a necessary tool, it remains existing in idealism and must first and foremost be filtered through and engaged in a materialism. Here, we come to production and its problematics: the exploitation of a filmworker, their labour and time. I will preface the following by positioning myself. I am a director. I edit my films, I sound design and mix my films. I co-produce my films. My labour is directed solely

towards my own art. I do not crew. The experiences of filmworkers, upon which these theories are based, stem from friends and acquaintances and public calls. It is their stories of exploitation and mistreatment from which these concepts derive. My concern lies with those who are frustrated and angry, those who are hoping for a more accessible, respectful and humanizing sphere of work. And while those sentiments might be shared with filmworkers who would read the below and disagree with my assessment and suggestions, I, nonetheless, wish only for their engagement in these ideas, as to cultivate an environment for everyone. We mustn't forget that labour specialization is a complex schema where processes in the internalization of class antagonisms and careerism interplay with self-actualization and identity. This is a knot not easily untied (I am unsure how to loosen it, even, in myself) and so sensitivity, perspective, and respect must be invariably applied along the way.

In understanding my positionality, I therefore speak to and for filmmakers, and though that may be assumptive of myself, I believe these ideas to be of both import and urgency. Filmmakers, while their imagination is conceivably stifled, face a far greater threat in their failure to reconcile with the material reality before them. Their budgets are seen not as their resource, but that from which their resources can spring. Their budgets are not seen as the crux of their possibilities, but the crux of their restraints. This mentality breeds exploitation. This mindset exemplifies art before people. And at the nucleus of these systemics I discuss, such ideology oozes. A film needs to be made from that acute awareness of financial capacity. Such a methodology would, as stated above, shift the *kinds* of film that artists would make (ideally, veering away from that American classicalism and into what might come to be a Canadian new-garde of ingenuity in image linguistics), but furthermore address first the vitality of a crew. One

need pay people first (and pay them well!) and only then can you design your intentions. As with everything else, this is a process.

I discuss with the Cinematographer, Actors, Production Designer, Gaffer and Key Grip, etc... what it is they need to do their job. This is a small crew, of no more than ten, and so we must all understand each other: understand the time and resources required for labour to occur outside of the industrial methods we only know to imagine. I tell them about the film, about what they will have their name on, what will be something that exists that will, ultimately, represent them as it unfurls on the world stage. The crew, the people who help to make this, deserve to have a say in what they are attached to. Art as a job and nothing more is a viral disposition of industrial alienation. Labourers have the agency and power to pick and choose how they are represented by their work. This is a dialogue. Issues are brought up, discourses engaged in. Their expertise is consulted and the budget is organized around THE WORKER'S NEEDS, NOT THE ARTIST'S DESIRES. Therefore, filmmakers must be acquainted with the very tools and processes that filmworkers specialize in. Dialogue can only occur upon and after experience. This mixture of ideology and knowledge is essential. Without it, a director should not be endeavouring into this territory, for one does not go out into the mountains without the required tools and proficiencies. This is where I come to what is undoubtedly my most controversial opinion on the matter: most artists should not be artists. Their individualism, opportunism, neoliberalism, idealism, ignorance — it will hurt labourers, it will reify their exploitation. An artist is more than someone who can express themselves through a medium of choice. An artist must be held to a higher standard. If an artist cannot dialectically address the material world (its conditions as a living, historical politic) from which their expression siphons information, what is their use to a people oppressed under the capitalist state?

An artist, incontestably a film director, must be the individual through whom entire spheres of interaction are strained. If you are not engaging with the contradictions and normalizations of socialization, if you are not engaging with the historicity of the image and its relationship to state and imperial/colonial objectives, if you are not engaging with the workers of your medium of choice (its unions, its industrial segregations, its plethora of circuitry) — I ask what do you have to bring? And I understand how confrontational and antagonistic I am being. I am both apologetic but insistent about that. I have, for only a few years now, witnessed the increased privatization of this art in the country, the apathy and opportunism that engulfs its faculties and strangles its ambitions. If we care about this art — which essentially extends into a care for our social construct; our culture being one, now, of the image, itself — than we must be antagonistic: fight against a neoliberal codification, resist the empty signifiers of liberal progressiveness and its image.

This is my ethic. This is my polemic. These are my intentions.

## Failures

### Theory: A Whole World Out There

My question was too big; my Intentions too expansive. The work I seek to venture through is impossible to grapple with in merely one film. It will take a life of filmmaking to begin to consider if my question can be answered. Experimentation and failure must come first. I don't know what the reception/reaction of this film is, let alone am I able to discern its results. More importantly, I remain entirely too ignorant. My intended reading list was the following:

***What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin, 1902**

*Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Bergson, 1913

***Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin, 1917**

***The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin, 1936**

***Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Stalin, 1938**

*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer & Adorno, 1940-1950

*Film Sense & Film Form*, Eisenstein, 1942 & 1949

***Syntactic Structures*, Chomsky, 1957**

***Brecht on Theatre*, Brecht, 1964**

*Theory of Film Practice*, Burch & Lane, 1969

*Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno, 1970

*The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Todorov, 1970

***On Ideology*, Althusser, 1971**

*How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, Dorfman & Mattelart, 1971

*Of Grammatology*, Derrida, 1974

*Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, Metz, 1974

***The Aesthetic Dimension: Towards a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Marcuse, 1977**

*The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Metz, 1977

*Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard, 1981

***Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, Flusser, 1983**

*Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Bürger, 1984

*Into the Universe of Technical Images*, Flusser, 1985

*Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, Bal, 1985

*Cinema 1: The Movement-image & Cinema 2:*

*The Time-image*, Deleuze, 1986 & 1989

*Visual and Other Pleasures*, Mulvey, 1989

*False Promises: The Shaping of American*

*Working Class Consciousness*, Aronowitz, 1992

***The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord, 1994**

*Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift;*  
Charney; 1998  
*Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde,  
1943-2000;* Stiney; 2002  
*Constructing a Language: A Usage-Based Theory  
of Language Acquisition,* Tomasello, 2003  
***A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* Harvey, 2005**  
*Global Hollywood II,* Miller, Govil, McMurria,  
Mazwell, Wang, 2005  
***A Theory of Narrative,* Altman, 2008**  
***Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?,*  
Fisher, 2008**

*The Emancipated Spectator,* Rancière, 2008  
*Cruel Optimism,* Berlant, 2011  
*The Forms of the Affects,* Brinkema, 2014  
***The Intervals of Cinema,* Rancière, 2014**  
*Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century  
Avant-Garde Movements,* Erjavec, 2016  
***Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated  
Enjoyment,* Pfaller, 2018**  
*Punctuations: How the Arts Think the Political,*  
Shapiro, 2019

I wished for these texts to illuminate my route down a specific ideology, ascertaining along the way if I am clouded in arrogance or fuelled by rightful conviction. I must believe that the latter can be true, but I am not stubborn enough to know that the former isn't always present. The texts that are bolded in the above list are those I have completed. The texts I am still working through at the time of writing this paper are underlined. My knowledge of the study that has come before me, if I am to endeavour and answer my questions with earnestness and intersectional respect, must take me on decades more of education and research. I am 24 years old. This is my first masters degree. I know nothing, and yet already does my blood boil with rage and hope. This is true of many people and I must seek them out. I have done my masters alone, and what I strive towards is an impossibility for the individual, both physically and ideologically.

As can be discerned from the list of readings finished, I'm particularly biased in cultural theory. These are historical analyses of civilization through an often Marxist lens. Whatmore, they are white, male, Western perspectives. I have failed to indulge in Spivak, in Nkrumah,

Diawara, Hall, in Bhabha, Gilroy, or Cabral. There are so many I am still ignorant of, such a plethora of perspective I must take responsibility to seek out. This is an abject failure on my part and more than enough of one that can and should justify all of what I have outlined above to be disregarded. While most of these ideas are certainly my own, they are informed by the very hegemony I wish to usurp, bringing about an irreconcilable contradiction in my theoretical position. All I have to offer in contest is Marxism and that is not enough. I have failed to engage with affect theory beyond superficial understandings. I have failed to deepen my comprehension of linguistics and how they cultivate syntactic structures in the heterogeneity of humanity and its dialects, beyond the rudimentary. My theory, therefore, stems primarily of ignorance and I will hold myself accountable to that for the remainder of my life as I continue to read and to learn. I am sure I will come to disagree with, over time, what has been said through this paper. I hope not that I will cultivate a disunity with its core ideas, but one can never know what the future has in store.

The film, itself, is also an object of contention for me. I think it is a good film, but I see all of its cracks as plain as day. Firstly, it is not long enough. In an above manifesto, I question the utility of Length in the Durational Cinema. I come to no conclusions, because I don't think there is one. It is not only conceivable to produce a durational short film, but it has, in fact, been done. *Fog Line* (1970), *Lemon* (1969), *Wavelength* (1969), *The Night* (2021) — all films of a length under fifty minutes. But, my intentions were to make a film that challenged contemporary commercial exhibition, to bring alternative perspectives onto popular discourses of narrative, to have a work that I could use as a platform for provoking dialogue that surrounds image-culture machinations. My intentions are still to do so. And while Length might not be an integral facet of Duration, the genre through which I articulate my cinema, it is unquestionably a particular in this

sort of defiance. *A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles* is simply not long enough to do so. The film I have conceived, the film that we made, does not lend itself to any additional minutes. That is my failure. Further, compositionally, my intentions to find “new image-linguistics” have also not come to be. While slightly derivative of the artists I admire, the work is, itself, strong and the film’s cinematographer should be extremely proud of her work in rendering out our dialogues and ideas. It is a beautiful and affective film, rich in texture and specificity. But each image is very immediate: the compositions hardly unfamiliar, let alone radical. It is the time that gives them a life of their own. It is duration that enables new meaning, not composition. Perhaps this interaction of time and composition is a faculty I needed to be more concerned with, less the composition as one particular and time as another. And if this is the case, my failures in recognizing this dialectic synthetic are present and clear. So, if I am to be frank, this is a matter of both my limited imagination, but simultaneously one of budget constraint. This, the film I have made that this paper is to supplement, is the exact *kind* of film I want to be making. But, with more resources, more time to allow myself self-scrutiny and inspiration — perhaps something else could have been possible, something initially indiscernible yet, overtime, evocative, much in the same way as those great works of visual art. This is a good, even great film — if I can allow myself that — though not whole, not enough. I am interested in stillness. I am interested in cinematic narratives of stillness. And I have failed partially with *A Sad, Sad Ghost Picking at the Hairs of Their Knuckles*, for it is a film that requires mobility to finally elicit its thematic desires. I did not make the film I theoretically wanted to, but made the film I could with the ideas I had. I know now that my next film needs to be that of the immobile, in some form or another.



## Production: Time is Money, Money is the 5th Dimension

I will only ever work with a small crew again. No more than 10-15 people are needed to make a feature film. It's the *kind* of film you make, knowingly seeking to reimagine normative production ethic and process, where you can begin to redesign what is expected. I have no regrets about how I went about producing this work. However, more money and, therein, more time would have been invariably welcomed. I had hoped to facilitate a space where crew could come together and discuss and engage with the work from their positions of expertise. Such a small crew needs transparent communication. Hosting space for this is imperative. This space, though, must be considered a part of labour and therefore be compensated. These are prep days organized as, essentially, a type of day camp. We collect, discuss, converge. And everyone is paid to be there, to collaborate and ready themselves and have full agency over what their role is and will be. This was my goal and it proved impossible under such a constraint of twenty-thousand dollars. The film itself would not have changed much, but the community of it would have, and I think for the better. We had a wonderful time, and many of the crew addressed this directly. In that moment, I realized this was the only way to make a film. I had succeeded, but not nearly to a degree that was substantial enough.

If we are destined to continue under capitalism in my lifetime, then I will ensure that money is rightfully disseminated, with the utmost priority to labour. Filmmakers must ensure their budgets go to workers first, then to the art. If art is for people, we should be proving this throughout the production. My failure in production was my limitation. We ensured to pay crew what they should be getting on budgets of ten times ours. Still, we made a feature length film in four days. My failure was that I was not more proactive in seeking out more financing so that

each friend, the filmworkers on set, could be better compensated for their time and work. I wanted to offer something and was not able to. The future will prove different.

Perhaps my only regret concerning the film as object is that I existed in post-production as one of three workers. There was a patient, wonderful colourist; a dedicated compositing artist; and myself. I cut picture, designed sound, and mixed — in a small booth, alone, for nearly eight months. This is something I will never do again. It was gruelling and discouraging. For the collaboration on set, even those brief times of collaboration in post, were the peak of my work as an artist, and the solitary of an editing suite is truly the nadir. Art is not about individualism, nor an individualized process. Its creation should not rest on the shoulders of a single person at any point during its materialization. Even in my independently created experimental work, I now plan on ensuring a creative partner is present, in any form possible, on agreeable terms. I see no point to creation if it is not a process of collectivization. These films should not be a director's, they should be a crew's. I want to make these films with people; in fact, these films could not be made without them. And I know I am sounding off in a platitudinous manner, but if the politic I have outlined above does not give you, reader, a sense that I mean to put the money for these projects where my mouth is, then certainly that is another failure to note down.

I believe — and I am optimistic for this to be true — that in coupling with the above, you, reader, might offer me the benefit of your doubt and approach me to engage earnestly in dialogue, even discourse. I have written this paper, divulged my ramblings, desires, and reflections, for you to contextualize this film you have either seen or are soon to see. I wished not to talk about the film, itself, for that does not matter. What matters to me is where it came from, where it's going. You and I; you and your friends, acquaintances, family; you and strangers, you and yourself — that is where I wish for the film to be discussed and then let go of. I want the

film to be a transience, evoking ideas from which you can wander off into considerations of your positionality. I wish not to tell you what it is about, only the conditions through which it was made. I have my ideas, you have your own. Perhaps, if I am lucky enough to meet you, you would be kind enough to allow for me to ask you some questions. I have many, and only you have the answers.

**Conclusion**



Image 3. Paintings a part of Conclusion Collage.

Why then does the artist feel the need to justify themselves as a “worker,” as an “intellectual,” as a “professional,” as a disciplined and organized person, like any other individual who performs a productive task? Why do they feel the need to exaggerate the importance of their activity? Why do they feel the need to have critics (mediators) to justify them, to defend them, to interpret them? Why do they speak proudly of “my critics”? Why do they find it necessary to make transcendental decelerations, as if they were the true interpreter of society and of mankind? Why do they pretend to consider themselves critic and conscience of society when (although these objectives can be implicit or even explicit in certain circumstances) in a truly revolutionary society all of us — that is to say, the people as a whole — should exercise those functions? And why, on the other hand, does the artist see themselves forced to limit these objectives, these attitudes, these characteristics? Why do they at the same time set up these limitations as necessary to prevent their work from being transformed into a tract or a sociological essay? What is behind such pharisee-ism? Why protect oneself and seek recognition as a (revolutionary, it must be understood) political and scientific worker, yet not be prepared to run the same risks?

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But what can be done so that the audience stops being an object and transforms itself into the subject?

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Man must not fulfil themselves as an artist but fully; the artist must not seek fulfilment as an artist but as a human being.

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We cannot develop the taste of the masses as long as the division between the two cultures continues to exist, nor as long as the masses are not the real masters of the means of artistic production. The revolution has liberated us as an artistic sector. It is only logical that we contribute to the liberation of the private means of artistic production.

— Julio García Espinosa, For an Imperfect Cinema

In the future there will no longer be painters, but rather men who, among other things, dedicate themselves to painting.

— Karl Marx, The German Ideology

The placing of the cinema within US models, even in the formal aspect, in language, leads to the adoption of the ideological forms that *gave rise to precisely that language and no other*. Even the appropriation of models which appear to be only technical, industrial, scientific, etc., leads to a conceptual dependency, due to the fact that the cinema is an industry, but differs from other industries in that it has been created and organized in order to *generate certain ideologies*. The 35mm camera, 24 frames per second, arc lights, and a commercial place of exhibition for audiences were conceived not to gratuitously transmit an ideology, but to satisfy, in the

first place, the cultural and surplus value needs *of a specific ideology, of a specific world-view: that of US-finance capital.*

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Imperialism and capitalism, whether in the consumer society or in the neocolonialized country, veil everything behind a screen of images and appearances. The *image of reality* is more important than reality itself. It is a world peopled with fantasies and phantoms in which what is hideous is clothed in beauty, while beauty is disguised as the hideous.

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The most daring attempts of those filmmakers who strove to conquer the fortress of official cinema ended, as Jean-Luc Godard eloquently put it, with the filmmakers themselves “trapped inside the fortress.”

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The battle begins without, against the enemy who attacks us, but also within, *against the ideas and models of the enemy to be found inside each one of us.*

— Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, *Towards a third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World*



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