

Henry Bacon:
Synthesizing approaches in film theory

Film addresses us and involves us on all levels of perception and consciousness. Thus it has to be studied in a variety of ways and using a whole range of methods and approaches. Like the academic world in general, film studies is divided into competing factions which struggle to get their own paradigm accepted as widely as possible. It has not been sufficiently appreciated that as a rule different approaches address different aspects of film experience or the institution of cinema, and that for the most part all these aspects are worthy of scholarly attention.

As one of the most fundamental debates in the humanities has been that between universalizing and particularizing approaches, a fairly obvious question begs to be examined: could the key approaches be dialectically related with one another so that they would form a hierarchy where different levels of inquiry would relate to the different levels on which conscious human existence is structured? In such a scheme any lower level enables and conditions but does not determine an upper level. As for film studies, with such a scheme we could gain a better insight into the role and explanatory domain of different film theories in our attempts to better understand the multiple functions film has in our lives and our culture in general. We might even be able to overcome certain antagonisms which have marred and hindered attempts at accounting at least in principle for all the factors that influence film as a phenomenon based on certain perceptual and cognitive faculties on the one hand as well as historical, social and cultural determinants on the other

The basic assumption of this article is that the various aspects of the cinematic experience roughly correspond to different levels of being-in-the-world and living in a given society. It may be risky to suggest something like this in a context where something labelled as “grand theory” has been condemned as a total failure, an over ambitious attempt to explain everything about film and the institution of cinema within a single theoretical framework. However, what is being proposed here is distinctly not an attempt at a totalizing explanation: the said levels are seen as autonomous, grounded and conditioned but not determined by the lower levels. This kind of synthesis is both an institutional requirement and sober disciplinary evolution. The task of cognitive film studies could be broadly defined as the examination of how the perception and understanding of audiovisual representation relates to natural perception. The task of historical poetics in turn has then been the study of films, genres and stylistic movements within the framework of economic, technical and practical conditions and norms. All this must be further complemented by an account of how our historical, social and cultural background enables and conditions us to produce and enjoy audiovisual fiction and relate it to our engagement with the real world. Our appreciation of films and most television programmes on all levels is based on the interest we take in our environment, beginning from the perceptual level and our own being-in-the-world in a given environment and amidst other creatures more or less like us, all the way to the roles each of us can assume in various patterns of social configuration. Between these there are several structuring levels at each of which we may find correspondences between the structures of our being-in-the-world or in a given society and the structures of film/cinema.

The way the relevant fields of study are organized is probably more or less similar at most universities. Typical organization of disciplines is often thought in terms of the following pairs, which all too often have been set in opposition to one another.

Humanities / sociology
 art studies / cultural studies
 film studies / media studies¹

Clearly, these pairs should be seen as complementary rather than oppositional. After all, the major difference is that they focus on different aspects of the same group of phenomena. Similarly, there are certain approaches which can be coupled with others in ways which might help in bridging these ostensible gaps between humanities and sociology on one level, art studies and cultural studies on another. Among these are

- phenomenology and cognitivism
- semiotics and ecological film theory
- poetics and hermeneutics, or, formal analysis and interpretation
- text orientated approaches and explorations of reception

At times some of these couples have been rather fruitlessly seen as mutually exclusive. Yet, they should be put into a constructive and dynamic dialogue with one another. Arguably, each of the terms of these pairs can function as a truly powerful conceptual tool only in respect of the term which it complements and with which it is in creative tension.

One possible way of setting the coordinates for synthesizing different approaches and dealing with these couples derives from combining the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty with the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. Together they can furnish us with conceptual tools for appropriating the discoveries and insights of cognitivism, ecological film theory, neoformalism, historical poetics for the use, first of a *phenomenology of film* which relates crucial features of our perception and understanding of cinema to the way we relate to the world we live in, and secondly of a *critical hermeneutics* which seeks to appreciate the social, cultural, psychological and spiritual significance of films as ways of recognizing, exploring and dealing with various human concerns by means of audiovisual narratives. Phenomenology should be understood here in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty as the exploration of what in a human being allows for the emergence of the spiritual from a bodily being-in-the-world. Hermeneutics in turn is the study of the historical determinants that condition this emergence as well as the practice of interpreting texts in terms of certain horizons of expectation. Obviously, the phenomenological and the hermeneutical cannot be clearly separated. While on the one hand our peculiar human way of being-in-the-world makes us through and through bodily as well as spiritual creatures endowed with a tremendous potential to develop our mental faculties, this can only take place within certain historical communities and given social configurations which produce a culture which allows individuals to develop their potential. From the point of view of cognitivist film studies the task is explore how a formalist account of film narration must be related to an understanding of how various features of filmic representation arise from our need to make sense of the wider scheme of things in our lives, our concerns as individual and social beings. This follows Ricoeur=s aim in his Areflective philosophy≡, which is to incorporate all Athe results, methods, and presumptions of all the sciences that try to decipher and interpret the signs of man.≡²

Relating levels

According to an approach which can be broadly defined as emergent materialism human existence is structured into levels so that a higher level emerges from a lower one, which serves as its basis. Various schemes to account for these levels have been proposed, most of them with three or four levels. The Finnish philosopher Lauri Rauhala proposes four levels:

- physical
- biological
- psychological
- spiritual

At least the first three should be fairly uncontroversial. The word *Aspirit* in the context of modern film theory is likely to lift quite a few eyebrows, but Rauhala defines it in a way which should be acceptable to most people irrespective of their philosophical or analytical orientation, not to speak of their religious persuasions or lack thereof. Spirit is not to be understood here as a substance of any sort, hence no ontological dualism is implied. Rauhala defines spirit as cogito which has become conscious and capable of experiencing meanings, i.e., having mental representations of the external world as well as of one's own organic being *and* finding them charged with value which goes beyond considerations such as practical use or pleasure. It has its origin in situatedness, which Rauhala defines as everything to which a bodily existence and cogito happen to be in relation to at a given time including geographical, historical, social and cultural conditions, as well as intricate patterns of social configuration.³ Meanings here are not limited to symbolization and language but include faculties such as intuition, fantasy, ability to experience feelings and to appreciate beauty, art and the holy. Individual subjectivity is a form of spirituality as manifested in faculties such as the sheer ability to enjoy existence without the pressures of responsibility and activity, or sensitivity cultivated in peace and tranquillity. In Rauhala's scheme between the biological and the spiritual levels there is the psychic level, on which we experience such basic reactions as fear, anxiety, dissatisfaction, happiness etc. In many of the accounts referred to below the concept of spiritual is not employed, but in these cases what is referred to as phenomenological is sufficiently analogous as regards the issues at hand. In the scheme presented below, however, the term "phenomenological" is used in a much more limited sense.

Rauhala's approach comes close to and partly derives from the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. He emphasized that the foundation of all that can be achieved culturally rests on our mode of being-in-the world. Merleau-Ponty writes about three levels, the vital, the psychological, and the spiritual orders of behaviour, each of which is related to the higher as a part to the total. The development of an individual is a process of constant dialectic in which the primary structures are incorporated into and transformed by the developing of higher orders of structure each of which eliminates part of the autonomy of the previous level while acquiring its own. This process gives new significance to the phenomena on the lower levels. When, for example, sexual desire is transformed into love and caring, a new order is introduced which articulates and governs that desire and related behaviour. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that it is not a question of two de facto orders external to each other, but of two types of relations, the second of which integrates the first.⁴

But what is the nature of this integration? How can these levels be related to one another? As Jean-Michel Roy et al. point out in their introduction to an enormously interesting collection of essays *Naturalizing Phenomenology*, AIIt is ... not enough to pile up levels of explanation; they have to be integrated into a single hierarchized explanatory framework that demonstrates their mutual compatibility.⁵ The crucial question is, of course, to what extent can a lower level explain a higher one. Can a higher level be reduced to a lower one, as extreme physicalism contends? Arguably consciousness is by nature something that can not satisfactorily be explained in functional terms – although whether one agrees with this seems to be a matter of scholarly temperament or scholarly persuasion at best. In any case, even embracing a basically materialist approach does not automatically do away with what has been referred to as the explanatory gap between natural sciences and phenomenology. In his *The Conscious Mind* David J. Chalmers writes:

reductive explanation is not the be-all and end-all of explanation. Its chief role is to remove any deep sense of mystery surrounding a high-level phenomenon. It does this by reducing the bruteness and arbitrariness of lower-level processes. Insofar as the low-level processes may themselves be quite brute and arbitrary, a reductive explanation may not give us a deep understanding of a phenomenon, but it at least eliminates any sense that there is something “extra” going on.⁶

Even if it is assumed that a reductive explanation would be possible in principle, some domains “are so far removed from the simplicity of low-level processes that illuminating reductive explanation is impossible”.⁷ In practice this has been the underlying assumption in recent cognitivist studies. For example, the Neural Theory of Language Group at Berkeley (the NTL paradigm) is based on the assumption that human behaviour should be analysed on different levels, and that each level must be seen as contributing something necessary to the overall explanation, something which cannot be stated adequately at the other levels. In this research paradigm the levels are the cognitive, the neurocomputational and the neurobiological.

Cognitive science has traditionally seen as its calling to remain a natural science and withhold from making any objectively non-verifiable assumptions. In their introduction to *Naturalizing Phenomenology* Jean-Michel Roy et al. mention as one of the presuppositions in this field that: ACognitive Science makes the crucial assumption that the processes sustaining cognitive behaviour can be explained at different levels and varying degrees of abstraction, each one corresponding to a specific discipline or set of disciplines. At the most concrete level the explanation is biological, whereas at the most abstract level, the explanation is only functional in the sense that ‘information’ processes are characterized in terms of abstract entities, functionally defined.⁸ Furthermore, ACognitive Science maintains that there is no substantial difference between giving a functional explanation of the information processing activity responsible for the cognitive behaviour of an organism and explaining this behaviour in mental terms.⁹ At its extreme ACognitive Science claims to have discovered a non-controversial materialist solution to the mind-body problem.¹⁰ Against all this the explanatory gap argument emphasizes the difference between the sciences of nature and the sciences of mind. Roy et al. seek to close this gap by means of Husserlian phenomenology and with the assistance of recent developments in cognitive science and mathematics. They point out, that ANeurobiologists have to interpret some of their results in mental terms, and in doing so they frequently allude to mental data of phenomenological kind.¹¹ There has even been a AConsciousness

Boom≡, which can be seen Apart as an attempt to demonstrate that the principles on which the Cognitive Revolution was based do not rule out a systematic investigation of phenomenological data.≡⁹ Also this notion in a way justifies the present attempt at creating a hierarchy of levels to explain the experience of film. However, for various reasons which will become apparent in the sequel, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology rather than Husserl's offers a firmer basis to pursue these questions within the present framework

Over the past decade certain tendencies of convergence have appeared which invite exploring similarities between various fields of study. Within a basically cognitivist framework George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have ended up discussing the concept of Aembodied spirituality≡, which, they emphasize, A requires an aesthetic attitude to the world that is central to self-nurturance, to the nurturance of others, and to the nurturance of the world itself.≡ On the whole, whereas phenomenology and cognitive science at a certain stage used to be thought of as competitors the two are now increasingly seen as complementary. For example, Lakoff and Johnson suggest in their *Philosophy in the Flesh* that much of what we take to be conscious categorization and conceptualization, are actually based on what they call Aembodied experience≡. We instinctively categorize the various phenomena we encounter on a certain basic level in the wake of our interaction with our environment given the kinds of bodies and brains we have. Thus Aour conceptual systems are not totally relative and not *merely* a matter of historical contingency, even though a degree of conceptual relativity does exist and even though historical contingency does matter a great deal.≡ This is in line with the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, to whom being-in-the-world as lived experience features as the ground from which all meaning emerges. This is what structures our reflective consciousness rather than any abstract theoretical source. In the words of Richard C. McCleary, AIn Merleau-Ponty's thought, logical objectivity and carnal intersubjectivity are related as the founded and the founding.≡

Thus Lakoff and Johnson=s account of unconscious categorization adds to the notion of schemata the important point of also our conceptual systems being grounded AIn shared embodiment and bodily experience≡. Our built-in capacity for conceptual abstraction allows us not only to grasp and to respond flexibly to various situations we may encounter in our daily lives, but also to build consciously ways of representation which further extend our possibilities of understanding by the more extended use of metaphors as a way of relating ostensibly different but in some meaningful way similar phenomena with one another. All this requires symbolic systems which are formed within various social configurations. This is where disciplines such as semiotics, sociology and hermeneutics come in. How do various kinds of signs function as the basis of all conscious activity? How are signs and conceptual systems, ideas and beliefs circulated and constrained by all sorts of social configurations? And how do these issues relate to questions of film and the cinema?

In what follows a sequence of five levels is proposed to account for how the study of film/cinema can be related to the structures of being-in-the-world and living in a given society. As material existence is taken for granted there are actually two or three more levels than in the accounts related above. This is because the scheme proposed takes account also of the emergence of meaning, first in terms of being-in-the-world, secondly as a semiotic and social process. Thus the five levels proposed are labelled: 1) biological, 2) primary phenomenological, 3) semiotic & narrative, 4) social& psychological, 5) spiritual. These levels are defined in terms of levels of perception and consciousness on the one hand, the engagement with the

corresponding kind of environment on the other. The levels are then related to levels of filmic experience and finally to theories of film/cinema that are likely to be the most suitable for the study of each level and the correspondences between them. The approaches mentioned should be taken as suggestions or indications of what the present writer has found to offer the most pertinent ways to tackle each level - other approaches are obviously feasible. Also, on some levels approaches are combined somewhat provocatively to suggest how different aspects of the filmic experience should be taken into account in order to gain a more comprehensive view of what goes on on that level. The discussion of the levels that may be expected to be relatively uncontroversially defined in the present context is left brief; discussion of levels which involve more specific theoretical basis is slightly more extended.

The five levels

1 The biological level

On the biological level we focus on human perceptual apparatus and cognitive potential which have developed over the course of our biological evolution. The actual perceptual and cognitive processes serve as the substrata of consciousness. They are also the faculties that make the perception and understanding of cinema possible in the first place. Because of film's indexical relationship to physical world we perceive the image as well as the soundtrack to a great extent on the basis of the same perceptual schemata that we employ when perceiving the real world. Normally this level in both of these processes – relating to the real world and following a film – remains under the lower threshold of consciousness. The exceptions are the odd occasions when we become acutely aware of reflexive responses to sudden perceptual stimuli. This is the field of cognitive psychology and, as regards the perception of film, of ecological film theory.

2 The primary phenomenological level

The primary phenomenological level is about relating to the lived environment which human beings inhabit. This involves a pre-reflective awareness of one's self and the environment one inhabits – with its dangers and its affordances, as James Gibson put it in his ecological theory of vision. Merleau-Ponty's account of this level – to which he referred to as the vital level – explains how our bodily orientation in the world functions as the basis of all meaning. Our rootedness in the world is absolutely preliminary to our conscious existence, not only the necessary condition of possibility but also the source of all perception and hence meaning. Before meaning is, or even could be articulated in systems of expression and communication such as natural languages, we are immersed in something much more primordial, namely our embodied existence. Furthermore, living in the world, moving in it, perceiving and expressing it, we are as if Acondemned to meaning \cong .

In her *The Address of the Eye - A Phenomenology of Film Experience* Vivian Sobchack suggests how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy can also be used to explain how we relate to the cinematic image. Being-in-the-world is by nature participation in the synthesis of perceiving and expressing as two significant and signifying modalities of existence. The two are inextricably intertwined, a feature referred to as *reversibility*. It

is something *Agiven* with existence in the simultaneity of subjective embodiment and objective enworldedness.¹⁰ Subjectivity emerges from our bodily engagement with the world and that engagement in turn constantly expresses our subjectivity. Sobchack argues that cinema differs from all other forms of human communication in that it *Auses modes of embodied existence* (seeing, hearing, physical and reflective movement) as the vehicle, the =stuff,= the substance of its language. It also uses the *structures of direct experience* (the =centering= and bodily situating of existence in relation to the word of objects and others) as the basis for the structures of its language.¹¹ In this sense the primary level of meaning in film, the moving image with its indexical relationship to a profilmic event, particularly as regards Classical Hollywood style, emerges analogously with the way we experience our environment meaningful.¹²

It should be mentioned in passing that this connects almost directly with some of key ideas that George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have put forward in their *Philosophy in the Flesh*, in which Merleau-Ponty emerges almost as the single philosopher who has been able to appreciate embodiment as the source of all our mental life, including all forms of cognition. This is somewhat excessive to say the least, but their point about embodiment as the source of all our perception and understanding of the world is very important. Interestingly enough, it is also compatible with ecological film theory.

Sobchack's idea about the foundation of cinematic expression, her notion of *Athe lived logic of signification in the cinema*¹³ is very apt. Perhaps even more crucial is the way she accounts for the difference between how we might hypothetically perceive things ourselves, and the way something is rendered by cinematic means, by assigning cinematic perception to the personality and style of the film as a subject, an *Aanonymous other*,¹⁴ whose lived intrasubjective and intentional experience in the form of certain "visible behaviour" we as spectators in the cinema get to witness. Style can then be thought of expressing a certain way of relating to the phenomenal world, a bit like Pasolini suggested in his theory of cinema as "the written manifestation of reality".¹⁴ Sobchack's anonymous other should not be thought of in excessively anthropomorphic terms, it is not the notorious invisible observe in a new guise. Rather, it should be thought of as a heuristic device that can be used to explain how the cinematic image is meaningful even before any semiotic functions come into the picture.

It must be noted that Sobchack's theory is not really about narratives or narration at all - although some of her remarks might lead one into thinking so. It is much more limited in scope, and its explanatory power can be appreciated only by taking into account the fact that Sobchack addresses only one aspect of cinematic experience. She explores the *Aprimary structures*, founded in existence and constitutive of conscious experience¹⁵ and leaves a rhetoric or poetics of cinema to which these structures may give rise for future research. However, her theory has implications which make it possible to incorporate certain observations made within cognitivist theory into a phenomenology of cinema. After all, cognitivism has set as its task the explaining of how narrative and aesthetics effects are enabled by our perceptual and cognitive apparatus. Several features of classical narration relate to our bodily orientation in the natural world, the way our attention is focused on what is of primary interest in a given situation, say, by the attention given to it by other people. Furthermore, as David Bordwell, Per Persson and certain others have pointed out, filmic devices in classical film style are not based on conventions but rather operate

on the basis of perceptual and cognitive schemata which guide our perception and understanding of our environment. This relates to bodily behaviour such as turning around in response to perceptual cues, which the classical film style in certain respects mimics. This is in perfect accord with Sobchack's discoveries.

3 Semiotic & narrative level

This level is referred to first of all as semiotic in order to emphasize that this (an only this) is the level where more or less conventional sign functions and symbolic systems come in. Symbolic systems make it possible for reflective awareness and intersubjective communication to emerge. An individual becomes herself through her simultaneous interaction with the physical and biological world on the one hand, and the social and cultural environment on the other. The former amounts up to the very definition of life itself, the latter is a matter of the social construction of reality. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their already classic study *The Social Construction of Reality* (1964) launched a project of sociology of knowledge, the aim of which was to cope with *Any* body of =knowledge= [that] comes to be socially established as =reality=." Berger & Luckmann present three dialectical moments, *externalization*, *objectification* and *internalization* as the foundation of the process by which reality is constructed and maintained as a social process. Socialization is the *internalization* of the understanding of the world and the values of the community. *Externalization* of one's own self is directing oneself towards one's fellow men and the community at large.¹⁵

The concept of *objectification* in turn covers the manifestations of human action in various kinds of products which become a part of the reality of its makers and their fellow men. The three moments of externalization, objectification and internalization correspond respectively to three statements about social reality: *A Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.* ≅ The existential situation of an individual emerges from a social reality, which is the product of a certain historical process which is both subjective and objective and must be understood as an ongoing dialectical process composed of these three moments.

While taking into account this entire circle of the moments of the social construction of reality, objectification is of particular relevance to our present concerns. It is a wide concept and covers phenomena such as gestures and facial expressions. It is what enables the birth of culture and consciousness as systems of shared symbols. Culture and truly human life in the full sense of the word are possible only when objectification reaches this level. Here something enters the circle of perception and expressiveness as they appear in the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty. Objectification brings in a momentum which breaks this duality by connecting the individual to his fellow men also as a cultural being. Only when this happens can perception serve as the root of internalization and expressiveness truly becomes externalization. This is why phenomenology must be complemented by an appropriate hermeneutics.

Narratives are one of the most fundamental forms of objectification. In Paul Ricoeur's words mimesis should be understood not as the imitation of but as a way of modelling reality. Narratives employ in this modelling understanding of the motivations, conditions and consequences of human action, which are more or less shared within certain communities and other social configurations. Thus narratives are

one of the principal ways in which the various questions concerning action are articulated

All this we must take into consideration also in studying narration in film. Even if we take cinematic expression as being based on the natural expressiveness of the world as we humans perceive it, at some point filmmakers resort to norms which in one way or the other guide the decisions they make, as well as the way the film is eventually seen. As Sobchack's phenomenological theory is not a theory of narration and her application of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology must be complemented by an account which explains how it is possible that from audiovisual material there emerges something recognizable as a narrative with all the significance producing and organizing power of mimesis. One possible way of accomplishing this is Edward Branigan's brand of cognitive theory which he presents in his *Narrative Comprehension and Cinema*.

Branigan proposes a scheme to account for nested levels of narration ranging from the historical author through various aspects of narrational agency and the centrality of character to the various levels of character focalization. Interestingly enough, Branigan defines one level of filmic narration almost as if he were writing about Sobchack's anonymous other: (*Implied*) *diegetic narrator*: As if a bystander had been present, she *would have seen ... and would have heard ...* A¹⁶ Whereas the diegetic narrator conveys perceptual information from the diegetic world *as if* he were an on-line connection to the immediate narrative moment as such, the implied author is in charge of the narrative implications of that information, the retrospective and prospective meanings which emerge from the immediate situation as a part of the narrative whole and the various satisfactions and expectations to which it gives rise.

The Sobchack-Branigan duality corresponds roughly to how we relate to narratives in two complementary ways. On the one hand, inasmuch as we are attached to the immediate concerns of the characters at each narrative moment, we follow the story as if from the inside. On the other hand, we simultaneously view the story as if from the outside: we are aware of its composition, how the story is organized to produce certain effects, how it relies on certain conventions, how the plot is more or less expectable, how it conforms to this or that ideological position, how it is used to define moral positions etc. The former is the more subjective, engaged view, the latter the more objective and detached - but the polarization should not be thought of as absolute. Both are aspects of cinematic experience and optimally they function seamlessly together. The same inside/outside effect can be encountered in all temporal arts or representations, and a constant interplay of involvement and detachment characterizes all artistic observation. However, in the cinema these dual engagements may be at their strongest because of the perceptual directness of the address - the address of the eye, indeed.

All this is merely about certain possibilities for expression which the film medium offers. What it amounts up to is an understanding of cinema as an expressive system which allows for a powerful integration of the primarily phenomenological and the semiotic, the latter understood here as the sphere of socially constructed understanding of culture, including the limiting conditions, motivations, consequences and significance of human action. The way this actually works out in various historical circumstances belongs to the level of the social and the psychological.

4 Social and psychological level

This is the level where culture is studied in all its historical heterogeneity and variance. As a question of consciousness the self is seen as a unique social configuration and a certain orientation, an individual way of inhabiting the world. Cultural and reception studies have the task of sorting out what kind of meanings have been attached to various cinematic products in different historical and social circumstances.

Cultural studies was first established very much in the spirit of opposition against traditional art studies. There was some oedipal fervour involved in that. Yet, also these two should be seen as complementary: We cannot understand the functioning of a work of art outside the various social contexts to which it might relate (or be related), and we cannot understand its meaning in various context without being able to appreciate it as a work of art - or of entertainment, for that matter. Just like we humans must be understood both in terms of being-in-the-world and being-in-a-given-culture, we may on a certain level of description view film as a medium which mimics our way of being-in-the-world, but must also analyse it as a historically contextualised discourse. Furthermore, we must also take into account the form of the film as a whole, the film as an artefact which is an objectification of a historically situated agent or agents, the filmmakers, however they are conceived in connection with a given film.

The study of film/ cinema in respect of cultural traditions and social formations may include both an analysis of the production, distribution and exhibition as well as of reception. All this involves sociology, cultural studies and hermeneutics. Furthermore, sociology and communication studies have the task of explaining the role of cinema in the society and people's lives and patterns of behaviour. We must study also the functions and significance of art in general and cinematic art in particular as parts of the overall process of the social construction of the cultural world. This engages both our cognition and our emotions, it relates both to our bodily and intellectual orientation into the world. While sociological study may be mainly quantitative, cultural studies seeks to explore the actual qualitative aspects of how film is integrated into the patterns of people's everyday life. The latter is in a sense a hermeneutical exercise, which involves taking into account certain interpretative possibilities that the film offers. This might be seen as going somewhat against the 'official' line of poetics. However, this need not be the case.

The hermeneutic aim, pace Bordwell, is not to try and find Aa *scheme* for producing valid or valuable interpretations \equiv (italics added), but rather the assessing of the relevance of a work in terms of ever new concerns and contexts. At its most systematic hermeneutics is the practice of setting horizons of expectation into dialogue with one another with the aim of finding non-definitive answers to the twin questions of Awhat was meant by this? \equiv , and Awhat does this mean to me? \equiv A difference between the two emerges from the very fact that texts of any complexity can give rise to much more meanings than was ever consciously intended. Hermeneutics on the lines of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur is quite compatible with Bordwell's definition of poetics as Aa conceptual framework within which particular questions about films= composition and effects can be posed. \equiv ¹⁷ After all, the very understanding of a narrative is tied to the spectators understanding of the world, society, life (i.e. what in neoformalist theory is referred to as realistic motivation¹⁸) and above all of the motivations, conditions, consequences and meaning of human action - which is what narration is all about.

Understanding a film involves having an idea of the world view and values that either explicitly or implicitly are expounded in the film and relating those to one's

own ideas about these issues. While historical and formal analysis of films is a *sine qua non* of any self-respecting film studies, it does not suffice when seeking to understand how people relate to a film, why and how they find it important, in what ways it communicates with their lived experience of the real world. A hermeneutical analysis might also have as its task the exploration of the potential meanings that a work of art may have in ever new historical, interpretative situations. To quote and elaborate on an ingenious formulation by Thompson: "Each analysis should tell us something not only about the film in question, but about the possibilities of film as an art."¹⁹ In the same spirit one might state that: "Each interpretation of a film that has any resonance should tell us something about the possibilities of film and relating to a film as a way of exploring the human condition, the way we perceive and understand the world and the possible roles we might play in it."²⁰ This should also include ideological criticism as one of the main responsibilities of film studies is to analyse the ideological views and values that films either explicitly, implicitly or symptomatically propagate.

5 *Spiritual level*

Also the study of the aesthetic and ethical values that films as works of art are seen to embody belongs to the field of film studies. On what, following Rauhala, could be termed the spiritual level, these aspects of film - as well as selfhood - are accepted at their face value even though it is acknowledged that the self is a social construction and that films are artefacts produced in such and such historical and social conditions, under commercial and ideological pressures, following or going against certain norms etc. This kind of study was made distinctly unfashionable at the time of the breakthrough of screen theory and cultural studies. In cultural studies as opposed to traditionally conceived art studies the object of research is only the bare fact that people have actually found such values in what they think of as works of art - a difference somewhat similar to that between theology and comparative religion. On a more mundane level it is also analogous to whether one finds that consciousness can be explained sufficiently in terms of psychology or whether something more is needed. David Chalmers in his *The Conscious Mind*, comes to the conclusion that the debate between those who hold a purely functionalist view of consciousness and those who hold that consciousness can not be reductively explained "is a bridge that argument cannot cross." It is as if the participants in this dispute were "'cognitively closed' to the insights of the other." Or, more likely, one or the other "is confused or in the grip of a dogma."²⁰

Perhaps in our day and age accepting this level as an intellectually respectable field of study requires something of a leap faith. What must be admitted whatever one's stand on these issues is that films like any other works of art may be meaningful for people in ways which transcend such purely functional significance as can be analysed in terms of reductive social and psychological theories - or formal analysis of films, for that matter. As a question of aesthetic experience this may be a question of transcending acute private concerns and establishing a sphere of values which allows for the experience and maintenance of life itself as something meaningful. From a scholarly point of view the question of whether this level is found to be relevant at all depends on whether one feels that there really is an explanatory gap between reductive accounts and accounts which take into consideration the experience of consciousness. For some film scholars there simply is nothing to be explained, for

others there is something that by its very nature eludes and perhaps is fundamentally beyond rational explanation. This does not mean, however, that these things could not be clarified, elaborated or made more approachable. Following the aesthetics of Andrei Tarkovsky Juhani Pallasmaa writes: "Poetic images strengthen our existential sense and sensitize the boundary between ourselves and the world. They are invigorating images which emancipate human imagination."²¹ The task is, then, to investigate how something like this actually works out. It is an interpretative task, and is no doubt best done by a critical mind aware of all the levels on which such spiritual effects are based.

Summary: a diagram

This brief essay has been extremely far-ranging yet tightly packed. Hopefully the following diagram will clarify the key-issues involved. It summarises first of all how consciousness is structured beginning from our embodied being-in-the-world, reaching through pre-reflective and reflective layers of consciousness to the notion of self as a social construction and ending up in the phenomenological experience of selfhood. All of these correspond to the ways we relate to our biological, primary phenomenological, semiotic, social and spiritual environment.

The third column shows how film relates and even mimics the structures of our being at various levels. These relations should not be thought of as one-to-one correspondences, but rather as loose analogies. The main point here is that they are significant enough to enhance our understanding of how film/cinema addresses us on all the levels that structure our being. Finally, the column on the far right contains suggestions of relevant film theories for each level.

Formally this diagram presents the conclusions of this essay in that it can be taken as a theory of how certain major trends in contemporary film theories relate to different aspects of film/cinema, all of which must be taken into account if we accept the challenge of accounting for the basis, all the various functions and the significance of this extremely complex and heterogeneous phenomenon – the film.

[DIAGRAM]

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Notes

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- ¹ The way I approach this task derives partly from the present situation at the University of Helsinki, where as of 1st of August 2004 I have been in charge of creating an expanded film and Television studies programme. The programme has been shaped partly in view of institutional factors, but mainly on the basis of my understanding of the present state of film scholarship.
- ² Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, p. 46.
- ³ Rauhala, Henkinen ihmisessä, p. 114. Translations by the present author.
- ⁴ Merleau-Ponty, The Structure of Behaviour, p. 180-181.
- ⁵ Petitot et al., Naturalizing Phenomenology p. 45.
- ⁶ Chalmers, The Conscious Mind, p. 49.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Petitot et al., Naturalizing Phenomenology p. 5.
- ⁹ Petitot et al., Naturalizing Phenomenology, p. 13.
- ¹⁰ Sobchack, The Address of the Eye, p. 13-14.
- ¹¹ Sobchack, The Address of The Eye, p. 4-5.
- ¹² Needless to say, there are cinematic styles which do not fit this notion so easily, many styles of animation for example. On the other hand, some styles of animation go out of their way to mimic the Classical Hollywood style with tracs, framings, zooms and all.
- ¹³ Sobchack, The Address of The Eye, p. 4.
- ¹⁴ Pasolini, Quips on the Cinema Published in Pasolini, Heretical Empiricism, p. 224-225.
- ¹⁵ Berger & Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, p. 70-71, 74.
- ¹⁶ Branigan, Narrative Comprehension and Film, p. 111-2.
- ¹⁷ Bordwell, Making Meaning, p. 273.
- ¹⁸ Bordwell and Thompson have introduced and adapted this extremely useful conceptual tool for accounting for types of textual motivation that guide the formation as well as comprehending of films. This absolutely brilliant formulation captures admirably the twin aspects of mimetic art, namely how it functions simultaneously as an aesthetic system and how it refers to the real world. To look at it from the spectator=s point of view, there are four categories of motivation to account

for how she might justify any given textual element in a film. These are: *realistic*, *compositional*, *transtextual* and *artistic* motivation. Compositional motivation includes everything that is needed to organize a story into a more or less coherent discourse, realistic motivation the verisimilitude and psychological plausibility of the film, transtextual the expectations and conventions associated with a given genre while artistic motivation as the realm of artistic expression covers everything else. The categories overlap, or blend rather, and in some sense they are all always present and co-influence one another. The crucial aspect from the present point of view is that realistic motivation is not only defined according to what the spectator takes to be verisimilar, it is also modified by its interplay of the three other motivations. Terms such as psychological motivation (of the characters in the story) and diegetic motivation (to what extent can a feature of the *mise-en-scène* be explained by the way things can be expected to be in the fictional world, though related to the question of textual motivations, should not be confused conceptually with them.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour*, p. 6.

²⁰ Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, p. 167.

²¹ Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image*, p. 9.