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THE ACT OF VIEWING: INDETERMINACY AND
INTERPRETATION IN NARRATIVE FILM

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This thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for a degree.

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SUMMARY

This thesis argues that the presentation of narrative in film involves a fundamental indeterminacy, derived from the status of the event in film. I elaborate this idea of indeterminacy through Gilles Deleuze's ontology of the filmic image and Daniel Frampton's phenomenology of film-thinking. I analyse various manifestations of narrative indeterminacy, looking at examples from silent-era, classical and contemporary cinema from around the world, both within the studio model and outside of it. I look at how we may theorise narrative agency in light of this indeterminacy and its various forms, proposing an alternative to previous models of filmic narration, as well as examining the implications of indeterminacy for a viewer's activity in understanding narrative and how this relates to narrative agency. Here I use Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory and his theory of literary indeterminacy to propose that this act of viewing is fundamentally interpretive, exploring the extent to which a filmic equivalent to Iser's implied reader may be identified, and the implications of this for conceptions of the relationship between the various types of viewer proposed throughout film theory.

What emerges from this is a theory of the act of viewing that attends to the particular status of the event in the moving image of film and the indeterminacy that follows from this in a manner that previous theories do not, proposing an alternative to David Bordwell's theory of narrative comprehension and the related dismissal of interpretation. I suggest how viewer activity can be theorised alongside – rather than instead of – the 'passive' spectators of ideologically oriented film theory, and that what is required is attention to this intersection of viewing positions in film theory.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 – Classical Film Theory	9
Film as Art	9
Münsterberg	12
Arnheim	17
Eisenstein	20
Bazin	25
Chapter 2 – Contemporary Film Theory	32
Metz and the Structuralist Turn	32
The Language of Cinema	34
Critiquing Metz	37
Post-Structuralism and the Ideological Turn	43
Metz and the Imaginary Signifier	46
Mulvey and the Gaze	49
MacCabe and Theories of Discourse	51
Heath and the Subject	53
Fantasy Theory and the Mobile Spectator	54
Beyond the Mobile Spectator	58
Chapter 3 – Interpreting Narrators	62
The Cognitivist Turn	62
Narrativity versus Narratology	64
Narrative Communication and Point of View	67
Filmic Narrators	69
Narrator Alternatives	71
Non-Linguistic Narrative Agency	74
Intentional Film-Being	78
Film-Thinking and Agency	83
Chapter 4 – Theorising Narrative Indeterminacy	88
Defining the Narrative Event	88
Bordwell and Narrative Comprehension	90
Deleuze on Movement, Image and Duration	92
Theorising the Event in Film	98
Iser's Act of Reading	101
Chapter 5 – Indeterminate Events and <i>The Last Laugh</i>	107
Narrative Events and Horizons	108
Narrative Networks and Immanent Events	113
Character Expression and Causation	120
Chapter 6 – Unreliable Narrators and Narration	123
Transsubjective Points of View in <i>Letter from an Unknown Woman</i>	123

Lying Flashbacks and Transsubjective Indeterminacy	131
<i>Rashomon</i> and Indeterminate Framings	136
Unreliability, Transsubjectivity and Agency	145
Chapter 7 – Indeterminate Film Thinking and Narrative Agency	147
Indeterminacy in <i>Last Year in Marienbad</i>	147
Narrative Indeterminacy, Immanent Fabula and the Time-Image	157
Indeterminate Diegeses in <i>Inland Empire</i>	164
<i>The Seventh Continent</i> and Indeterminate Narrative	
Film-Thinking	174
Significance and Scale of Events in <i>Uzak</i>	178
Chapter 8 – Theorising Filmic Agency and Viewer Activity	189
Immanency and Indeterminacy	189
Interpretive Horizons in Film	193
Indeterminacy and Unreliability in Film	195
Horizons of Reception	198
Narrative Agency and Implied Viewers	203
Conclusion	210
Bibliography	213
Filmography	228

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Introduction

The cinema finds itself obliged to obey two contradictory necessities: split, it seems, between the world and narrative. *Photography* draws it towards things with the weight of its essential truth, while the *narrative* pulls it toward the signifier.

(Albert Laffay, 1964: 82)

Considering the potential mimetic quality of film, showing moving images of the world, film seems a form well suited to presenting stories within this world, the world in movement being the substance of narrative. However, in being understood as narrative this movement is closed down into discrete events, and therefore a diegetic quality of film can be detected in the manner in which it assists the viewer in such a determination of narrative, such that a film appears to tell a story as well as show it.

Throughout this thesis I interpret this balance between mimesis and diegesis in terms of indeterminacy and determinacy, exploring the kind of agency that can be allocated to these specific qualities of film, the act of viewing that responds to this, and the interaction of these agencies. I do so by first of all looking at how some of these issues have been theorised within the classical period of film theory, and then consider, in light of the radical reorientation of film theory in its contemporary period, how we should proceed to address both the neglect and – where attended to – the shortcomings of narratological concepts, such as agency, activity and interpretation in their application to film. I then demonstrate this through an analysis of various examples of film narrative, from silent-era narrative cinema to classical Hollywood and contemporary art cinema, exploring the indeterminacy of film narrative as it occurs throughout film history and across national cinemas. What emerges from this is a model of viewer activity and narrative agency attentive to the unique ontology of narrative in film, moving beyond the conventional wisdom of looking at the presentation of narrative as fragments of a greater whole to focus on the extent to which narrative is presented *within* the greater whole of these fragments, and the role of hermeneutic horizons in the determination of narrative.

It is first of all necessary to look at some of the fundamental concepts of narratology before looking at how these may then be applied to film. A good place to start is with the definition of narrative. There is common agreement on the fact that a

necessary feature of narrative is a sequence of events. This can be traced back to Aristotle's identification of plot (*'mythos'*) as an underlying feature of the Greek Tragedy, which he defined in terms of 'the organisation of events' (1996: 11). The event is also central to narrative as defined by the Russian Formalists, who extended the prescriptive and evaluative treatment of dramatic sequences of events in tragic drama by Aristotle to focus on the underlying formal features of narrative in general. Central to the Formalist conception of narrative is the distinction between *fabula* (commonly translated as plot) and *syuzhet* (commonly translated as story), with the *syuzhet* conveying the events of the *fabula* through the medium of the text and the *fabula* consisting of the story itself. This is typically deformed through its presentation in the *syuzhet* (for example, the events being presented out of their natural cause and effect story sequence), such that *syuzhet* is central to the Formalist concept of defamiliarisation (Shklovsky, 1965a: 12-18) as it defamiliarises the perception of real events in their causal sequence: 'The idea of *plot* is too often confused with the description of events – with what I propose provisionally to call the *story*. The story is, in fact, only material for plot formulation' (1965b: 57). Boris Tomashevsky states that '[p]lot is distinct from story. Both include the same events, but in the plot the events *are arranged* and connected according to the orderly sequence in which they were presented in the work' (1965: 67).

As David Herman recognises (2008: 24), the Formalists' attention to the underlying structures of narrative was influential on the later emergence of French structuralism, and it is with this rigorous, systematic employment of linguistic models by the French structuralists that the formal study of narrative develops into a fully-fledge 'narratology,' with Tzvetan Todorov coining the term to denote 'the science of narrative' (1969: 10). And it is here that we can find more rigorous and systematic definitions of narrative in terms of events.

The distinction between *syuzhet* and *fabula* introduces the idea that narrative can be split into different levels – in this context, between the story itself and the particular expression of this story – and thus be analysed vertically as well as horizontally, such that the horizontal axis of sequences of events that constitute a narrative can be analysed both as a story represented by its particular manifestation within a text and in terms of this representation itself. What the structuralist narratologists added to this (from Vladimir Propp onwards) was a thorough consideration of the content of narrative – the story – in terms of its formal features (distinct from its material form in a text). This

leads to the idea of narrative as a structure of meaning independent from a particular manifestation (expression) in a text.

Like the Russian Formalists I have cited, Propp emphasises the importance of the event as a feature of narrative, but his concern is with extracting a specific arrangement of these events as the smallest units of narrative that form the underlying structure of various instances of narrative. He identifies thirty-one key 'functions,' which he defines as 'an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action' (1968: 21), which, although carried out by different characters, are found throughout Russian folk-tales and always in the same order: 'The sequence of functions is always identical . . . an action cannot be defined apart from its place in the course of narration' (21-22). These actions are causally related in a sequence: '[O]ne function develops out of another with logical and artistic necessity' (63). For Propp these sequences of events constitute the invariant structure of the Russian folk-tale. This prioritisation of the event continues into the French structuralist conceptions of narrative, which build on Propp's syntagmatic analysis, developing the idea of plot grammar and deep narrative structure, and analysing narrative in terms of distinct hierarchical levels.

Todorov – translating the Formalist distinction of *fabula* and *syuzhet* – proposes that narrative works on the level of story and discourse and that the articulation of narrative can be analysed in equivalent terms to the articulation of meaning through language, such that the discourse of narrative – as narrative *parole* (speech) – is understood on the basis of a wider *langue* (language system) of narrative. Accordingly, narrative can be examined as a grammar distinct from the material of its expression, with recurrent structural features which enable the articulation of narrative – of story through discourse.

Like Propp, Todorov identifies sequences of related events (functions) as the central structure of narrative, but Todorov treats these events as 'clauses.' He defines the clauses as actions carried out by agents in situations, with these different elements here corresponding to the grammatical construction of a sentence clause, consisting of subject and predicate/s, the agent of the action being the former and their situation and action constituting the respective adjective and verb predicated of this subject (Todorov, 1981: 49). Todorov thus treats Propp's functions as propositions, which consist of relations between agents and predicates, and it is these that Todorov identifies as a constituent structure of narrative in general, as opposed to the particular instances of

these that Propp identifies in the folk-tale: 'The recurrence of relations is necessary if one is to identify a narrative structure' (Todorov, 1969: 11).

Todorov describes the sequences of causally related events formed from these clauses as essential to narrative structure, such that it is its defining feature, opposing non-narrative description of states in continuous time to a narrative sequence of segmented actions:

Both description and narrative presuppose temporality that differs in nature. The initial description was certainly situated in time, but this time was continuous; whereas the changes, characteristic of narrative, cut time into discontinuous unities; the time of pure duration is opposed to the sequential time of events.¹

(Todorov, 1971: 38)

This idea of a sequence of causally related events forming the central structural feature and minimal unit of the story and its presentation in the plot is found throughout narratology, to such an extent that it can be regarded as the defining feature of narrative (although different models propose other structural features and employ and refine different terminology around this).

Another essential feature of the structure of narrative is the presence of agents. These can be described as characters who are responsible for the key actions (or 'functions' as Propp refers to them) which constitute the narrative events. Roland Barthes, in his hierarchical description of narrative (1977: 79-124), locates events at the fundamental level of narrative discourse, as the minimal unit of narrative on the level of functions. He places actions (whereby these functions are carried out by agents) on the level above this, with narration – by the narrator – organising these lower levels of articulation and thus responsible for the communication of narrative. In relation to the horizontal arrangement of functions, and related to the structuralist project of identifying the underlying structures of narrative in general (the *langue* of narrative), is the idea that certain aspects of the plot are inessential to the underlying story that it articulates. Barthes says of functions (events involving actions of agents reported through the narration) that

¹ It is this relationship between continuous duration and discontinuous events in film that I will be examining.

its units are not all of the same 'importance': some constitute real hinge-points of the narrative (or of a fragment of the narrative); others merely 'fill in' the narrative space separating the hinge functions. Let us call the former *cardinal functions* (or *nuclei*) and the latter, having regard to their complementary nature, *catalysers*.

(93)

The key feature of a cardinal function is that it opens up a potential decision for an agent and through this will have a resultant effect on the course of the story (becoming part of a causally related sequence of effects). Barthes gives the example of a phone call ringing: 'If, in a fragment of narrative, *the telephone rings*, it is equally possible to answer or not answer, two acts which will unfailingly carry the narrative along different paths' (94). Barthes differentiates between consequential and consecutive functions here, with the former referring to the causal relationship of sequential functions which follow logically, and the latter to functions that follow chronologically: 'Catalysers are only consecutive units, cardinal functions are both consecutive and consequential' (*ibid.*).

Cardinal/kernal² events can therefore be identified as those aspects of the plot essential to the story, and without which the story would be different: as Herman puts it, '[d]elete or add to the kernal events of a story and you no longer have the same story; delete or add to the satellites and you have the same story told in a different way' (2008: 25), which echoes Tomashevsky's distinction between 'bound' and 'free' motifs: 'The motifs which cannot be omitted are *bound motifs*; those which may be omitted without disturbing the whole causal-chronological course of events are *free motifs*' (1965: 68) (Propp labels these 'bound motifs' of the folk-tale as 'functions'). The story, then, consists of those events which are retained in its various manifestations across different media (as the content to the structural form of narrative), and which can also be presented through various plots, distinct from the material of its presentation (written text, images, etc.), which includes embellishments and other description in the form of satellite events.

Chatman (1978: 22-27) accordingly sums up the structural conception of narrative with the splitting of the categories of expression (discourse) and content

2 Chatman translates Barthes' cardinal and catalysing functions as kernal and satellite events respectively, referring to the former as 'nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths' (1978: 53), with satellite events 'always logically expendable' (54) in terms of their relation to past and future events.

(story) into substance and form, such that there is both a substance and form of discourse and a substance and form of story. This issue of narrative levels and their hierarchical arrangement replaces the concern with plot analysis in early structuralist theories of narrative, exhibiting an emphasis on the vertical as opposed to horizontal axis of narrative (see Fludernik, 2008: 43, and Prince and Noble, 1991: 543), as well as providing some theoretical models which have been applied outside the bounds of structuralism's linguistic heritage, as we shall see in relation to film. The central issue being probed in these vertical analyses is the transmission of an abstract story through the material of a particular narrative, and how this movement from one to the other (from signifier to signified, from representing to represented) can be subdivided into distinct, hierarchical levels, with a lower level containing within it the potential – and therefore the responsibility for – the communication of a higher level.

David Bordwell applies this idea of a split between the narrative manifest in its presentation and the narrative as an imaginary construct inferred from this manifestation to film, although he rejects the structuralist vocabulary of discourse and enunciation in favour of a return to Formalist concepts of *fabula* and *syuzhet*, as I will discuss in more detail later. Bordwell, with his neo-formalist approach, is less concerned with the underlying syntagmatic structures of narrative (as derived from Propp's model) than with the historical emergence and specificity of narrative forms, the cognitive activity they prompt in the minds of the audience, and the dialectical relationship between the two. Bordwell wishes to study narrative representation as opposed to narrative structure (1985b: xi-xii). Nonetheless, he recognises the centrality of the event in narrative, with the *fabula* 'embod[ying] the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field' (49), and the *syuzhet* consisting of the presentation of these events within the film. However, Bordwell's account retains the central narratological conception of story (*fabula*) as an abstract construct, distinct from the narrative as presented in the text. But, as I will demonstrate, the specific presentation of events in film calls for a revision of this idea, with implications for the conception of both narrative indeterminacy in film and a viewer's activity in responding to this. It is this need that I will be addressing throughout this thesis.

More specifically, as I will demonstrate, the event in narrative film is a concept that has been presumed – as a segmentation of action – by narratological analyses of film, but without sufficient attention to this segmentation of narrative action by a viewer in their understanding of narrative as a series of causally linked events. Indeed, the

exact nature of and requirement for this segmenting activity is specific to film, in its use of sequences of action (movement in time) to present narrative. It is this segmenting of determinate events from indeterminate action that I examine in this thesis.

Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck recognise that in defining narrative in terms of the sequence of events that it consists of requires that a narrative event can be clearly defined, and following this they emphasise that '[j]ust like the sequence of events, the event turns out to be dependent on the reader's input' (2001: 12). And although they argue that the interpretation of causality is not the only means of determining narrative events,³ they do recognise the role of the reader in determining the narrative of a text, stating that 'meaning in meaningfully related events . . . results from the interaction between reader and text' (13). This interaction between viewer and film in the act of viewing is the subject of this thesis.

I begin in chapter one by looking at some early theorisations of film, starting with debates about the essential qualities of film, including those regarding its status as art, as language and as thought. I then examine in chapter two how the conception of film as language was systematised in the later structuralist turn of contemporary film theory and the narratological concerns that grew out of this, before examining the implications of the ideological critiques that challenged these structuralist foundations, including theories of the subject and spectatorship and the attention to narrativity. Here I discuss the different conceptions of the viewer and the influence of cultural studies, looking at possibilities for a consolidation of these conceptions, the implications of which I follow through later in the thesis with regards to my conception of the act of viewing. In chapter three I elaborate the cognitivist turn in film theory and the challenge to '*Screen Theory*' by such approaches, returning to narratological concerns and the suitability of literary models of narration to film-narratology. What emerges from this is the value of ontological conceptions of film as thought for theorising narrational agency. In chapter four I set out in more detail the underlying concepts in narratology regarding the event and causation, before introducing the implications of film's ontological foundation for an application of such concepts. This leads me into a discussion of reader-response and how this enables us to theorise the specific indeterminacy of narrative in film and the consequences of this for the act of viewing.

3 My concern is with narrative as a causally related series of events, as I discuss in detail in chapter four.

It is in chapter five that I demonstrate this indeterminacy through an analysis of an example of silent-era narrative cinema and how a viewer may respond to this in their interpretation of the narrative. In chapter six I proceed to explore the relationship between the word and the image in film and the consequences of the ontological conception I have elaborated for a theorisation of unreliability in film and narrative agency, looking at variously indeterminate and misleading narratives and how such effects are produced. I then follow these examples in chapter seven with an analysis of particularly indeterminate narratives and how the model of narrative agency and ontology that I have proposed enables us to theorise this indeterminacy and its consequences for the act of viewing. Chapter 8 then brings together my interventions and emphasises the implications of the image-ontology I have elaborated for an understanding of the relationship between narrative agency and viewer activity, and the extent to which the figure of an 'implied viewer' enables us to tie together the central threads of this thesis. I then conclude with some discussion of the medium-specific ontology of narrative in film that I have developed, and how this relates to other conceptions of narrative and film.

Chapter 1

Classical Film Theory

In this chapter I will look at early theorisations of the essential qualities of film and introduce the ideas of film as language and thought, respectively, before indicating how these inform my theory of the act of viewing.

Film as Art

As is perhaps inevitable for any emergent art form, early advocates of film as art were engaged in debates as to how and why film could and should be considered an art form, producing arguments in favour of certain tendencies of film above others, thus producing a prescriptive theory of filmic practice that would lead film toward its essence and thus maintain its integrity as a medium with specific aesthetic qualities, serving specific functions and able to achieve unique aesthetic effects; a project perhaps more pertinent in the case of film, due to the plurality of (pre-established) aesthetic media, forms and techniques that it draws upon, such as music and theatre.⁴ It is to this end that film theory emerges during the era of silent film, responding to the fact that 'film had to legitimize its place in our culture' (Carroll, 1988a: 4). Much of this theory was proposed by film-makers themselves, such that there was a unification of theory and practice in this period, again emphasising that film was a medium with something to prove; theory reinforcing the legitimacy of practice. Examples of this early theory/practice symbiosis include figures such as Jean Epstein, Germaine Dullac, Abel Gance, Dziga Vertov, Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein. Common across these theories is the notion that film has the potential to manipulate reality, rather than simply

4 Indeed, some regard this aesthetic plurality of cinema as its essential quality, such that it is as 'a formal system synthesising all the arts' (Abel, 1988: 21): Vachel Lindsay describes the cinema as 'sculpture in motion,' 'painting in motion,' and 'architecture in motion' (Lindsay in Stam, 2000: 28); Georges Méliès outlines the various techniques involved in cinema: '[D]ramatic techniques, drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, mechanical skills, manual labor of all sorts – all are employed in equal measure in this extraordinary profession' (Méliès, 1988: 38); and in 1911 Ricciotto Canudo referred to cinema as a 'Plastic Art in Motion,' with the potential for a 'superb conciliation of the Rhythms of Space (the Plastic Arts) and the Rhythms of Time' (Music and Poetry)' (Canudo, 1988: 58).

reflect it, and that it is here that its essence lies, although these theories differ in their ideas of how exactly this deformation should proceed and of what exactly it consists (hence the different styles of film they produced).

As demonstrated in Vachel Lindsay's and Riccioto Canudo's legitimisation of film through the diversity of aesthetic forms that it draws upon, initial theories of film – perhaps inevitably – could not help but make comparisons with other art forms when marking out the legitimate territory of film. However, this was often tied up with a desire to differentiate film from the other arts in an attempt to ensure its emergence as a new art form. This tendency is exemplified in the French avant-garde movement, who 'not only wanted to see cinema regarded as an ... independent art' but also 'incessantly compared film to music, concentrating on its ability to shape the flow and look of reality' (Andrew, 1976: 12). Richard Abel (1988: 21) cites Canudo as laying the groundwork for the central tenet of the French avant-garde that cinema's essence as an independent form of art lies in its potential to recreate, and not simply reflect reality. For Canudo, the mechanism of cinema, the 'cinematograph,' aligns cinema with photography because of its ability to copy the world, but its potential as an art form lies in its ability to affect this copy with a new reality. Cinema, then, for Canudo, is not inherently artistic, but requires a 'cinematographic theatre' to accompany its photographic mechanism (Canudo, 1988: 61-62). But how might this cinematic theatre differ from traditional theatre? It is here that we can identify what cinema does other than copy some external reality, as photography seems to: film can give us subjective impressions of reality, as against objective representations, and this idea – suggested by Canudo and developed by subsequent theorists – formed the central thread of what Noël Carroll refers to as 'the silent-film paradigm' (Carroll, 1988a: 7) as well as informing the practice of French avant-garde cinema.⁵

The advocacy of this tendency of film – towards subjective impressionism – can be regarded as an attempt to set cinema apart from traditional theatre, a point of comparison that was frequently made.⁶ As Dudley Andrew notes,

5 This is not, however, to suggest that other theoretical positions did not exist in France during this period: Richard Abel identifies three other prescriptive theories of cinematic narrative articulation (1988: 102-107). However, the subjectivist position in many ways has more in common with the influential idea of the *photogénie*, a concept which Abel describes as 'essentially pre-narrative or a-narrative' (107) – see below.

6 Of course, it is also possible to take the debate in the other direction and advocate the photographic tendency of film as situating cinema closer to reality than theatre, as André Bazin does most famously. This argument will be explored below, as will more systematic analyses of cinema's relation to theatre, through figures such as Rudolf Arnheim.

[i]numerable essays of this period (1912-25) loudly differentiate cinema from theater. Most suggest that because cinema in its infancy was economically obliged to record theatrical performances, it had never looked beyond the theater for its own essence.

(1976)

Abel also describes how 'the French cinema, perhaps more than any other national cinema of the period, was seen as closely allied with the theatre' (18), to the extent even that legal measures were required to set them apart and deal with issues of copyright and royalties, but '[w]hereas the legal differences between the two seem to have been resolved rather quickly, the aesthetic differences took a good deal of time to work out' (19). This is a situation that many early French film theorists and practitioners sought to remedy. Georges Méliès distinguished cinema from theatre in terms of the various 'cinematographic views' that cinema enables, and their relationship with both theatre and photography. Here (and in practice) Méliès privileged what he refers to as 'transformation views': those fantastic views and trick shots combining many different techniques and processes to create new worlds simply not possible in theatre. Gance has a similar desire for cinema to go beyond theatrical performance, drawing on Canudo to point the way forward toward cinema taking its place as 'a sixth art' and 'be innovative instead of following either a maudlin sentimentality or the mechanical comic film which seems in fashion, because the true way has yet to be marked out' (Gance, 1988: 66). For many French film theorists of this early (silent) period the concept of the *photogénie* encapsulated this essence – this 'true way' – and provided a criterion of value specific to cinema. Related to the subjectivist conception of film suggested in Canudo and others, such as Yhcam (1988: 69), *photogénie* was coined by Louis Delluc to describe the effect of the mechanism of cinema on the reality that it captured; as Abel paraphrases:

It assumed that the real of the 'real' (the factual, the natural) was the basis of film representation and signification. But it also assumed that the 'real' was transformed by the camera screen, which, without eliminating that 'realness,' changed it into something radically new.

(1988: 110)

The term was also used by Jean Epstein, who called it 'the purest expression of cinema' (Epstein in Stam, 2000: 34). In its capacity as *photogénie*, cinema's innovation was manifest as an art form beyond theatrical performance and photographic representation, making us '*see ordinary things* as they had never been seen before' (Abel, 1988: 110).

This early period of French film theory has been criticised for lacking the theoretical rigour of later film theory (Andrew, 1976: 12). Abel concedes that '[m]ost of the texts address only a limited range of the questions that Dudley Andrew suggests any theory of film worth its salt must address' (1988: 23). However, many of the ideas first expressed here are developed – albeit more systematically – in later film theory, shaping the terms of these debates, and making 'seminal contributions to the discipline of film theory' (Liebman in Abel, 1988: xiii), and with continued relevance despite the intervening paradigmatic trends of anti-essentialist doctrines (post-1968), and the more recent emphasis on 'middle-level' research, as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. But before proceeding to a discussion of these more recent interventions, it is first of all necessary to continue an analysis of what Andrew refers to as 'the Formative tradition,' looking at how the American and Soviet theorists of the classical era express many of the same essentialist ideas, yet theorise them within different – and more rigorous – intellectual and academic contexts.

Münsterberg

In contrast to the interdependent relationship between theory and practice during the French avant-garde period, two of the first American film theorists and key theorists of the silent era – Hugo Münsterberg and Rudolf Arnheim⁷ – did not direct films, and rather than straddling creative and academic arenas they instead established links between film and another emergent field of study: psychology.⁸

Like the French theorists, Münsterberg was concerned with distinguishing cinema from theatre, and in doing so identifying the essential qualities constituting it as

7 Arnheim's is a theory of the silent-film and accords with the central thread of what Noël Carroll refers to as the 'silent-film paradigm' – according to which 'the most aesthetically significant feature of the film medium is its capacity to manipulate reality, that is to rearrange and thereby reconstitute the profilmic event' (Carroll, 1988c: 7) – despite the fact that he was writing after the advent of the sound-film.

8 Carroll (1988c: 4) notes the parallel here between film's need to validate itself as an art form and psychology's need to prove itself as a science.

an independent art form. But Münsterberg, writing in 1916, was able to support the claim that film is art by recourse to a general aesthetic theory, according to which art does not merely reflect or imitate reality: 'To imitate the world is a mechanical process; to transform the world so that it becomes a thing of beauty is the purpose of art. The highest art may be furthest removed from reality' (Münsterberg, 1970: 62). And this transformation into beauty necessarily involves isolation, such that the work of art loses all connection with the outside world and is experienced through contemplation as an end in-itself.⁹ In the case of cinema, despite its photographic basis (and the mechanical replication that this involves), the medium is considered an art form because of the fact that it is able to reconstitute the world 'by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time, and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination, and emotion' (74): cinema's transformation of the world lies in its replication of the actions and processes of the human mind; this inner world overcoming the laws of the outer world. The essence of cinema therefore lies in the transformation of a photographed reality in accordance with the mind (a transformation not possible through other media), and therefore according to Münsterberg cinema must do more than imitate reality or replicate theatre.

As indicated above in the discussion of the advocacy of the subjective qualities of cinema by the early French film theorists, there are precedents for the film/mind analogy, but Münsterberg utilises psychological theories of the mind to provide a more systematic theory of this equivalence between film and the mind, to the extent that for him the experience of cinema and subjective mental states are phenomenologically equivalent, with actions of film as 'material analogues' (Andrew, 1976: 19) or 'functional equivalent[s]' (Carroll: 1988b: 491) of mental operations, such as the close-up being an equivalent of the act of attention and the flash-back as analogous to memory. As Carroll points out, these are occasions where 'the selecting is something that is done for us' (1988b: 491), whereas according to Münsterberg's theory of the perception of depth and motion, these qualities of the film experience '*are present and yet they are not in the things*' [italics in original] (Münsterberg, 1976: 30): they are in the mind of – and therefore provided by – the viewer: '[W]e create the motion of motion pictures, or rather our mind so creates it' (Andrew, 1989: 2). What we have here is an

9 Andrew (1976: 20-25) and Carroll (1988b: 492-495) outline the philosophical heritage of Münsterberg's aesthetic theory in the work of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer (not explicitly referenced in Münsterberg's work on film).

example of the dichotomy of activity/passivity that, with the related issues of the film/mind relationship and the question of meaning, has formed the nexus of film theory, to the extent that Münsterberg could be said to have anticipated (if not necessarily precipitated¹⁰) contemporary theoretical debates: the attention he paid to the mental processes involved in cinematic perception foreshadows recent cognitivist approaches to film (see Andrew, 1989: 2-3), and the issue of activity/passivity is central to debates on spectatorship from the 1970s onwards, as well as his idea of film as 'minded' having echoes in more recent theories of filmic agency, all of which I will examine later. It is useful now, however, to look at some of the criticisms aimed at Münsterberg – in particular the film/mind analogy – in order to ascertain what might be retained from his ideas in order to inform later debates, for the relationship between film and mind – crystallised in the issue of meaning – could be regarded as the central concern of film theory, from the early French film theory discussed above and through the rest of what is now referred to as 'classical' film theory, to the structuralist/semiotic/psychoanalytic intervention that followed in contemporary film theory, and into the cognitivist approaches of more recent times; after all, what more fundamental issue – the project of theory *par excellence* – can there be than that elusive interaction of celluloid and subject in the act of viewing?

Carroll challenges both the aesthetic and psychological dimensions of Münsterberg's theory by taking him to task over his separation of the experience of film – outside the forms of space, time and causality – from some other form of experience, thus challenging Münsterberg's claim for film as art *qua* isolated object of contemplation, and over the analogy between mind and film that may still stand in light of this last challenge.

Carroll recognises that, as with many other arts, it is somewhat problematic to regard film as overcoming the forms of space, time and causality, due to the fact that 'so much art is involved with exploiting these very forms,' especially in the case of plot, which is 'parasitic upon the forms of causality' (1988b: 495). However, for Münsterberg narrative epitomises the true essence of cinema: 'For him, cinema is indeed mere gadgetry without narrativity' (Andrew, 1976: 16). It is through narrative that

10 His major work on film – *The Film* [originally titled *The Photoplay*]: *A Psychological Study* – remained largely unnoticed until its republication in 1970 (see the foreword to this edition by Richard Griffith for an account of the historical reasons for this). Dudley Andrew quotes Jean Mitry as having asked 'How could we have not known him all these years? In 1916 this man understood cinema about as well as anyone ever will' (1976: 26).

cinema is able to achieve its essential goal of picturing emotions by providing 'a view of dramatic events which was completely shaped by the inner movements of the mind' (Münsterberg, 1970: 74), such that the viewer experiences emotion through narrative, regarding this narrative in the act of viewing as a product of his/her own mind: mind and film truly come together in narrative. This view can seem somewhat idiosyncratic for a theory that so valorises subjectivity, for in many ways narrative is a structure dependent on standards of objective diegetic realism. The attitudes of the French avant-garde (and later avant-gardes) are illustrative here.

As the label 'avant-garde' suggests, this movement was concerned with distinguishing a certain role and essence of cinema contrary to the dominant trend of theatre adaptations and the emphasis on narrative; on cinema as an art of narrative,¹¹ and this meant prioritising the medium-specific visual dimension of cinema – articulated through the concept of *photogénie* – and so 'the object of attention shifted from action and narration to description or representation' (Abel, 1988: 107), with plot and other such things not exclusive to the medium of film being downplayed – removed, even – in favour of a style of film-making which emphasised what is unique in this new, artistic medium. And this was to the extent that

some shifted from a broad programme of minimising or eliminating elements not specific to cinema – such as the verbal language of intertitles, dramatic narrative, theatrical space – towards an interest in the supposedly unique visual and kinetic aspects of cinema.

(Christie, 1979: 38)

So we can see that, despite the overlap in their conception of the essential and medium-specific qualities of cinema, Münsterberg's unification of this recreative/subjective essentialist doctrine with a valorisation of narrative form is at odds with the Impressionistic stance of the early French avant-garde. These contrasting positions indicate the duality of subjectivity and objectivity at work in film narrative, a duality with which subsequent theories of narrative have grappled and which finds potential consolidation in the concept of the 'filmind' proposed by Daniel Frampton (2006). Frampton's work builds on previous film/mind analogies, but with significant

¹¹ Abel (1988: 102-106) charts the various attitudes to narrative evident in early French cinema and criticism, and the influence of the emerging American style of narrative articulation.

adjustments, enabling it to avoid many of the criticisms aimed at Münsterberg's film/mind analogy by Carroll and Mark Wicclair, as I will demonstrate.

As Carroll recognises, there has been a strong tendency throughout film theory to 'characterize cinematic processes as if they were modeled upon mental processes' (1988b: 489), however, this tendency is not unproblematic. Wicclair challenges Münsterberg on the idea that there is a phenomenological equivalence between mental processes and filmic devices. One example he gives is that of the supposed equivalence between the close-up and attention in Münsterberg's account. Wicclair points out that these two processes are distinct due to the fact that the close-up brings the object closer to the viewer, whereas attending to something in the distance does not have the same effect, meaning that 'seeing objects shot close-up has a different "feel" from attending to objects at a considerable distance' (Wicclair, 1978: 39). Wicclair then proposes that Münsterberg's analogy could be taken in a weaker sense as a functional one (despite the fact that he doubts this 'represents an accurate interpretation of Münsterberg's position' (43)), with the close-up bringing a certain object to a viewer's attention, rather than mimicking this actual act of attention (although he does note that this would undermine Münsterberg's other claim that film – by nature of its equivalence with the actions of the mind – overcomes space, time and causality, and is an art-form by nature of this ability (*ibid.*)). Carroll rejects this interpretation of the analogy as a functional one on the basis that we do not know enough about the mental processes that the cinematic devices are said to functionally replicate for the analogy to tell us about the function of this operation in film, or indeed to enable us to judge whether this analogy is accurate in the first place, because '[i]n order to be instructive theoretically, an analogy must be such that one knows more about the term in the analogy that is supposed to be elucidating than the term that is supposed to be elucidated' (Carroll, 1988b: 497).

However, Robert Sinnerbrink argues that the mind/film analogy is nonetheless useful as an *aesthetic* one, able to describe the way that we experience and encounter film in a unique aesthetic experience: 'It is a way of drawing attention to new aspects of film by way of a powerful metaphor: one that draws on ordinary experience but also refers to our experience of film' (Sinnerbrink, 2009: 29). As Sinnerbrink recognises, it is this line of thinking that Frampton follows with his idea of a unique type of film-mind (a 'filmind,' as he calls it), attempting to side-step problems of the film/mind analogy by recasting the film as a unique type of mind with specifically filmic qualities. As I will demonstrate, there is indeed this attempt to describe the film experience in terms of the

poetic figure that Sinnerbrink advocates, but this exists alongside a theoretical argument for this 'filmind' in Frampton's work, although he does not fully explore the consequences that this theoretical argument has for an understanding of narrative and its relation to the act of viewing, as I do in this thesis.

Frampton's intervention is significant because it suggests a theoretically viable middle way between what may – perhaps crudely – be termed the apparently opposing poles of subjective idealism and objective realism in film. Classical film theory tends to favour one extreme over the other as the essential quality of film, to the extent that Carroll divides it into two camps, with 'silent-film theorists' having a 'creationist' ethos – regarding film as 'a means for creating rather than copying; a means of manipulating rather than merely recording' (Carroll, 1988a: 27) – and 'sound-film theorists' who, ascribing to a realist ethos, conversely 'find the art of film precisely in its capacity to mechanically record' (26). Each of these perspectives has implications for and makes important contributions towards how we understand the act of viewing in terms of both activity and agency. The theorists I have looked at so far, in their advocacy of the subjective tendencies of film, fall into the former 'creationist' group (which, as I have demonstrated, is not to suggest that these theories are unified in every way). Before proceeding to an analysis of realist theories of film, and showing that Carroll's division of classical film theory threatens to obfuscate some of the subtlety of these theories and their common ground (with implications for a reconsideration of classical film theory), it is necessary to look at another key figure within Carroll's 'silent-film paradigm': Rudolf Arnheim.

Arnheim

Writing later than Münsterberg, and sharing a background in the emergent field of psychology (with both coming from the Gestalt school), Arnheim was also concerned with the artistic function of film, locating an essential quality that fulfilled this function. But for Arnheim this potential quality was to be found in the medium itself, rather than in a relationship between cinema and psychological processes. This follows from Arnheim's formalist view that the defining criterion of art is that it focuses attention on the medium itself, and therefore in order for film to be art it must not simply reflect or represent the world but must do so in such a way that some kind of manipulation is

evident in this representation; it is this manipulation – enacted by the intervention of the film-maker – that is the essential medium of film: as Andrew paraphrases, 'film can be an art only insofar as the medium differs from a true rendering of reality' (1976: 29). Arnheim proceeds to demonstrate how the apparatus of cinematic representation has a natural tendency towards the distortion of the reality which it captures, and how the film-artist can utilise and enhance these tendencies for specific (artistic) effects. For example, with regards to the first point, he describes 'the effect of film [as] neither that of an absolutely two-dimensional picture nor absolutely three-dimensional, but something between the two' (Arnheim, 1933: 20), such that the perception of motion and spatial relations is different on screen than in reality: 'Thus, in a film picture, if one man is twice as far from the camera as another, the one in front looks very considerably the taller and broader' (22), whereas in reality the mind is able to compensate for the difference in distance and judge them the same size; film is not able to do this. Arnheim demonstrates similar cases for other aspects of perception and experience, such as the perception of space and time that cinema can distort, appearing – through use of editing – to jump within these (Arnheim makes a similar point to Münsterberg here), as well as explaining the difference between framed cinematic vision and 'unbounded' optical vision: 'Fresh objects are continually appearing within the frame of the picture and then disappearing again, while for the eyes there is an unbroken space continuum through which the gaze wanders at will' (36). Film also differs from reality in the fact that it excludes all other senses apart from the visual and is restricted (at this point in time) to black and white.¹²

It is therefore clear to Arnheim that filmic representation deviates from our perceptual experience of reality in various ways, and – although Andrew notes that 'Arnheim's position here is close to Münsterberg's' (1976: 28) – Arnheim moves further than Münsterberg away from the idea of film as representational (of mental processes, in Münsterberg's case) towards the idea of film as *expressive*. It is the distorting and 'unreal' effects of film that enable it to be expressive, with the film-maker as artist drawing attention to this manipulation of and intervention in the representation of reality by the cinema so as to express more abstract qualities – by depicting the familiar world in an unfamiliar and expressive way – than if reality were merely mechanically replicated: cinema's particular representation of reality can imbue this reality with

12 In favour of these limitations on the representation of reality, Arnheim argued against the use of sound and (eventually) colour in film and the realism that they contributed (see below).

expressive qualities (Arnheim, 1958: 167). But what exactly is film expressive *of*? As with Münsterberg, Carroll (1988a: 58-59) reveals inconsistencies in Arnheim's terminology, including his theory and definition of expression. However, it is apparent – again, as with Münsterberg – that although Arnheim's essentialist tendencies are problematic, he does recognise that film is capable of doing more than reflecting reality, seeming able to inflect this representation with abstract qualities, and that at the very least cinema may indeed be experienced as expressive in some way, however theoretically suspect his theory of cinematic expression may be.¹³

The value of Arnheim's approach is that it focussed attention on this communicative aspect of film, identifying the potential for film – as a new medium – to communicate new impressions, ideas, feelings and qualities, though it may fall down in its attempt to squeeze these into a unified theory of film as art, as Carroll carefully demonstrates. By describing the devices that film can use to communicate these messages Arnheim was in many important respects treating film as a language, and a further analysis of this will enable us to see him as a significant precursor to two defining – and in many ways competing – tendencies of later film theory.

So in general terms we can see that for Arnheim, as for Münsterberg, film as art must by definition *recreate* the world rather than merely reflect or imitate it, and that the medium of film enables it to do so in a specific manner, unavailable to other art forms, thus constituting film as an art form in its own right and with essential qualities. The silent-film theorists' belief in film as a 'creationist' form, with its essence residing in its ability to express an interpretation of the world specific to the form of film was shared by the Soviet film theorists during the 1920s, who – like the theorists of the French avant-garde – also developed these ideas through practice, creating films in accordance with the theories they advanced, the central one being the idea of 'montage' editing as the most expressive of all the variables of the filmic form. Where for Arnheim this was just one of the many tools available for film to deform reality, for the Russian theorists of this period – informed by Marxist theories of history and teleology – it was the defining one. This can most clearly be seen in the work of Sergei Eisenstein.

¹³ Again, this can articulated in terms of subjective qualities as against objective realism, although I will be challenging this distinction as it applies to film throughout this thesis.

Eisenstein

Eisenstein was interested in cinema as a process of contrasting elements, with these elements – or 'attractions' as he referred to them – arranged in accordance with an overall form which gives them meaning, and it is montage editing that brings these elements into meaningful relationships by arranging and sequencing shots in certain formations. Eisenstein was not concerned with capturing pieces of reality in the shot and then stitching these pieces back together to form a coherent sense of space and time,¹⁴ but instead wanted to create a new meaning by forcing the shot to collide with other shots which contain contrasting elements, such that the formal interaction of these elements synthesises – through montage – a meaning that transcends anything within the shots themselves. It is through this relational process that cinematic meaning is produced:

Just as cells in their division form a phenomenon of another order, the organism or embryo, so, on the other side of the dialectical leap from the shot, there is montage. By what, then, is montage characterised and, consequently, its cell – the shot? By collision. By the conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. By conflict. By collision.

(Eisenstein, 1949: 37)

In arranging shots in this way, giving an impression of collision and contrast rather than connection, the shots lose their referential meaning – as a representation of reality – and reciprocally 'neutralise' each other, clearing the way for new relational meanings to arise between shots.¹⁵ Eisenstein identifies various different types of contrast that can be created between shots, depending on the type of attractions that interact. These 'methods of montage' include: metric montage, where conflict – and an effect of tension – is created by varying the duration of shots, independent of the content of the shots; rhythmic montage, where the conflict is between the duration of the shots, but with the content of the shot – i.e. the movement within the frame – having an influence on the

14 As was the dominant practice in Hollywood film-making, which was itself influenced by another Soviet theorist of editing, Vsevolod Pudovkin, as I will discuss in later chapters.

15 We can see a link here with both Arnheim – in the idea of a deformed reality as the material of cinema – and also with the Formalist idea of 'defamiliarisation' that Eisenstein was influenced by, as I discuss below.

pace and rhythm of the editing;¹⁶ and tonal montage, where the tone, or '*emotional sound*' of the shots, contrasts with the 'spatial-rhythmic characteristics' (76) of the shot, with the tones of the shot potentially clashing to produce overtone montage.

What emerges here is that montage – and the creation of cinematic meaning – becomes increasingly sophisticated at each new level, with the higher level entering into a dialectical relationship with the one below it, in a sense growing out of it:

Within a scene of mutual relations, echoing and conflicting with one another, they move to a more and more strongly defined type of montage, each one organically growing from the other. Thus the transition from metrics to rhythmic came about in the conflict between the length of the shot and the movement within the frame. Tonal montage grows out of the conflict between the rhythmic and tonal principles of the piece. And finally – overtone montage, from the conflict between the principle tone of the piece (its dominant) and the overtone.

(79)

Each informs the lower, and used correctly, contributes to the higher level of montage, culminating in the highest level: intellectual montage, which is different from the other levels in that it enables the expression of concepts and intellectual ideas, which overlay the other montage constructions, such that 'the fifth category is the intellectual overtone' (82): '[T]he intellectual process is the same agitation, but in the dominion of the higher nerve-centers' (*ibid.*).

Eisenstein describes these relational levels individually as 'methods of montage,' but it is clear that '[t]hey become montage *constructions* proper when they enter into relations of conflict with each other' (78), and this is because it is this conflict that enables cinema to do more than merely represent a realistic scene, constructing a coherent illusion for a viewer: the use of montage in film creates a deeper truth than is apparent in visual representation alone, and it is this truth, which Eisenstein refers to as a 'theme,' that the film-maker must use to guide the process of montage: '[E]ach montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates *all* the shot-pieces'

16 Eisenstein gives the example of the marching soldiers' feet in the famous 'Odessa Steps' sequence in his own *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), where the editing rhythm is out of step with the soldiers' steps, and with the marching steps then clashing with the rolling action of the tram down the stairs: 'The carriage functions as a directly progressing accelerator of the advancing feet. The stepping descent passes into a rolling descent' (74).

(Eisenstein, 1942: 11). This theme, for Eisenstein, is the guiding essence of film, and montage is the only way to create this theme because it is not something simply found in appearances of reality: as Andrew paraphrases,

Eisenstein had always held that to attain 'reality' one must destroy 'realism,' break up the appearances of a phenomenon and reconstruct them according to a 'reality principle' The filmmaker must see behind the surface realism of an event until its dialectical form becomes clear to him; only then is he able to 'thematicize' his subject.¹⁷

(1976: 66)

A major concern of Eisenstein's was the mind of the viewer and the mental reactions to the various attractions of cinema, and how best a film could be organised and arranged as a machine-like instrument, able to elicit certain responses so as to reconstruct the theme in the mind of the viewer. It is to this function that I shall now turn, highlighting some significant and influential precedents in Eisenstein's work.

For Eisenstein, '[s]hot and montage are the basic elements of cinema' (Eisenstein, 1949: 48), with the arrangement of these shots into montage sequences consisting of a series of attractions which produce a series of shocks in the mind of the viewer. In synthesising the relation between these shocks the mind of the viewer is active in constructing the meaning of the film, through which they reach an understanding of the theme that motivates the film-maker's selection and arrangement of shots. As Eisenstein puts it in *The Film Sense*,

[t]he task that confronts [the film-maker] is to transform this image into a few basic *partial representations* which, in their combination and juxtaposition, shall evoke in the consciousness and feelings of the spectator . . . that same initial general image which originally hovered before the creative artist.

(1942: 31)

Eisenstein emphasises that a viewer should not just passively absorb the meaning of images or the illusion of some reality passing before them on screen, but that the film-

17 Despite the obvious and famous divergence, there is also a parallel here with Bazin in terms of their essentialist and medium-specific conceptions of film, which I will explore in more detail once Bazin's significant contribution to classical debates on realism has been set out.

maker should craft the film in such a way that the mind of the viewer is shocked into synthesising the many relationships of attractions that make up the intended meaning of the film:

Eisenstein, in forcing the spectator to create the image by putting together all the relationships between attractions (relationships existing because of the interpenetrating theme), gives to the spectator not a completed image, but 'the experience of completing an image.'

(Andrew, 1976: 73)

Two important points arise from this which set Eisenstein apart from both other film-makers and theorists. Firstly, as I have discussed, in order to bring about these responses in the mind of the viewer Eisenstein proposes a very particular style of film-making and editing, based around discontinuity and conflict. This puts him at odds with other styles of editing at the time, such as that pioneered by D. W. Griffith in the United States, where the concern is with arranging shots so as to construct a spatially and temporally coherent world within which the film-maker can direct the viewer's attention towards certain events and facilitate his/her construction of the narrative. Here editing is more about linkage than opposition, and this is a preference shared by two other significant Soviet film theorists, Lev Kuleshov and Vsevolod Pudovkin. It is perhaps only natural that a style of film-making that prioritises narrative would favour this style of editing,¹⁸ but for Eisenstein the dominant function and intention of film is to reveal a deeper truth not apparent on the visual surface of reality, and so narrative becomes merely one mode among others in this revelation.¹⁹ And the fact that Eisenstein demands that this truth – or theme – be (re)constructed by the relational activity of the viewer's thought processes means that he calls for a much more active viewer and has higher expectations of him/her, for his film does not lead the viewer so much as call for him/her to discover and (re)construct the meaning for him/herself. Again there is an interesting parallel with Bazin here, and one involving an issue which in many ways forms the core of this thesis – the balance and relationship between guidance and

¹⁸ This issue will be explored in more detail below.

¹⁹ Indeed, Eisenstein's use of montage editing often problematises the determination of coherent diegetic events necessary to the construction of narrative, to the extent that 'the action becomes "quasi-diegetic," hovering between the story world and a realm of abstract, emblematic significance' (Bordwell, 1993: 47). This issue of indeterminacy thought becomes particularly pertinent later on in this thesis, where I propose it as a more general feature of film narrative than Bordwell credits.

discovery in the depiction and understanding of narrative in film.²⁰ Indeed, what I will be exploring throughout this thesis is the idea that the presentation of narrative in film involves events being discovered by a viewer within the actions of agents, as well as the film seeming to guide the viewer toward this discovery and the connection of these events in causal relationships. It is for this reason that I propose that the act of viewing involves both the agency of the viewer in determining the narrative and the agency of the film in guiding them toward this determination. However, the exact manner and extent of this guidance varies, as I will demonstrate.

So for Eisenstein the essence of film resides in its affective and ideational qualities; its ability – through careful manipulation of its form – to trigger shocks, emotions and ideas in the mind of a viewer. Film, therefore, in its essential form, does more than 'tell' the viewer stories and depict scenes of reality. It is not merely a relay of information, but is in fact – in its dialectical synthesis of emotion and concepts – closer to abstract thought than any kind of referential or linguistic (denotative) communication; it is expressive of thought: 'Rather than *tell* stories through images, Eisensteinian cinema *thinks* through images, using the clash of shots to set off ideational sparks in the mind of the spectator, product of a dialectic of precept and concept, idea and emotion' (Stam, 2000: 41). Indeed, Eisenstein employs the concept of 'inner speech' to describe the way in which film parallels pre-linguistic mental faculties in the way that it is able to think through images: 'Inner speech is precisely at the stage of image-sensual structure, not having yet attained that logical formulation with which speech clothes itself before stepping out into the open' (Eisenstein, 1949: 130). Though similar objections could be made towards this equivalence of the processes of film and thought as were aimed at Münsterberg's film/mind analogy by Carroll, Eisenstein does not make the same kind of reductive analogies between film and thought as Münsterberg does; Eisenstein conceives of film as thought on account of the creative and affective capacities of film, with cinema as art by nature of the fact that it 'is first of all directed at the emotions and only secondly at the reason. It delivers an effect which is not available to ordinary language' (Andrew, 1976: 70). And this has a legacy for contemporary approaches to filmic meaning, such as those of Gilles Deleuze and Frampton, which reject the linguistic orientation of contemporary film theory, post-

20 As Carroll observes: '[I]t is interesting to note that the Soviets prized active spectatorship and audience participation in constructing the meaning of a film as much as Bazinians do' (163). However, the two approaches diverge over the means of soliciting such activity.

Christian Metz.²¹

Bazin

The montage theory of Eisenstein and his idea of cinematic creation is often contrasted with the realist position of André Bazin, and much as Eisenstein's theory advocates a specific filmic practice – montage editing – Bazin's views on the essence of cinema lead him to favour the use of the long-take and deep-focus photography over the style of interventionist editing that Eisenstein utilises. This is because for Bazin the essence of cinema lies in its propensity for realism, and although his conception of this supposedly inherent realistic nature of film has been critiqued by later schools of criticism as naïve in certain respects, Bazin's theory of realism in cinema – and particularly its relation to viewer activity – does engage with some of the fundamental issues of cinematic representation that up until his work had simply not been entertained, let alone in such a thorough and nuanced fashion.²² And it is apparent that despite the dismissal of Bazin's 'naïve realism' – part and parcel of the ideological suspicion with which realism, as an aesthetic and theoretical position, was held post-1968, and that underlies the general attitudes of what I refer to here as 'contemporary film theory',²³ it is nonetheless the case that Bazin's ideas have a continuing legacy and resonance in film theory, with some of the central issues of this thesis echoing those with which Bazin was concerned.

So, to return to Bazin's conception of the essential qualities of film, it is useful to first of all historicise his advocacy of a particular 'realist' style of film-making, before looking at how this relates to his ontology of cinema and his consideration of narrative and viewer activity.

21 There is, however, also a lineage from Eisenstein to Metz and semiotics, as I will discuss more explicitly in a later discussion of the Formalist influence on Eisenstein's work.

22 Victor Perkins acknowledges that whilst Bazin was not the first to claim that cinema had a unique relationship with reality to which it was obliged to adhere, citing Marcel L'Herbier's description of cinema as '*l'art du réel*', and nor the last (Siegfried Kracauer is another advocate of realism, who I will discuss later), he 'stated it more systematically and with a greater awareness of its implications than anyone else' (1976: 415).

23 The significance and particular definition of this label will become clear in light of its divergences from the mode of classical film theorising – of which Bazin is a central proponent – that I am discussing here. In this respect, 'contemporary film theory' is used not only to indicate temporality but to refer to the semiotic orientation of film theory that arose in the wake of the classical concerns that I have been outlining here. It is also referred to as '*Screen Theory*,' as will become clear in the next chapter.

Bazin was writing after the development of sound in film, with this new technology enabling a dimension of realism not previously possible in films of the silent era, with these films tending towards a more abstract and expressionistic style, supported by the formalist 'silent-film theory' that I have discussed above. The turn towards realism in film, spurred on by the advent of sound, was therefore – along with the theoretical advocacy provided by Bazin – a 'progressive' development, away from the dominant formalist theories and practice and towards the refinement of the recording capabilities of film. It is against this background of an emergent realism that Bazin's theories must be placed, for contextualising him in this manner emphasises the fact that, as Andrew recognises (1976: 134), Bazin was driven not by established aesthetic theories, by which the essence and function of cinema as art could be determined *a priori* in accordance with a theory of art as the deformation of reality, for example, but by the developments of cinema itself: the advancement in cinematic realism enabled by developments such as sound, colour and deep-focus were seen by Bazin as means by which film was able to attain its essential capacity for realistic representation, rather than as an obstacle leading film away from an essential deformation of reality: '[T]hese inventions were demanded, Bazin claimed, by the underlying spirit of what cinema is, by the desire for perfect representation of reality' (Andrew, 1976: 139).

Bazin believes that film – as a medium – holds a unique relationship with reality by nature of the photochemical processes on which it depends: film – like photography – is able to visually capture the image of reality through a mechanical process of reproduction. For Bazin the novelty and significance of this is twofold: firstly, there is an indexical relationship between reality and the image – material reality (or more specifically, how light reacts to matter) determines the chemical composition, and therefore appearance, of the photographic image, such that

[t]he objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making. In spite of any objections our critical spirit may offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually *re-presented*, set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.

(Bazin, 1967:13-14)

And secondly, this reproduction is a mechanical one: reality is visually imprinted on a flat surface without the mediation of a human mind: 'For the first time, between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man' (13). But with cinema, as opposed to photography, the flow of time is retained along with the presentation of the image, leading Bazin to declare that 'cinema is objectivity in time' (14). However, despite these somewhat hyperbolic declarations, Bazin was careful to stress that the image of reality produced by cinema was not the *same* as reality (such that he used the figure of an 'asymptote' to describe the neorealist films of Vittorio De Sica and Cesare Zavattini (1969: 82)). Bazin advocated reality as a guiding principle of cinema, something that it is in a unique position to reveal and explore through various forms of realism.²⁴ Cinema is able to explore the world in a way that other arts, such as theatre, are not, and so, unlike Eisenstein who saw in cinema the potential for the development and advancement of certain features of theatre, Bazin regarded as of value those forms of film that enable reality to reveal itself, with these film-makers, as Andrew eloquently summarises, 'more interested in discovering the world through cinema than in creating a new cinematic world . . . in images taken from reality' (1976: 170). Whereas Arnheim's cinema deforms the world, in a fashion more extreme than the theatre, Bazin's cinema *reforms* the world, in a fashion more realistic than the theatre.

Bazin sees in these realist forms 'a technique which proceeds from an aesthetic of reality' (Bazin, 1980: 43), the key components of this being the use of deep-focus and the long-take, which he regards as according more closely with the respective spatial and temporal dimensions of reality, creating a 'unity of image in space and time' (Bazin, 1967: 35). Bazin contrasts these techniques with montage editing, where several images are presented in sequence to create a certain effect, and which create an abstract impression of space and time, secondary to the intended psychological impact of the sequence (as we saw with Eisenstein). There is also the type of montage used in classical editing, which creates an impression of psychological realism, with the cuts dictated not by a realistic representation of events but by the demands and logic of the

24 Bazin declaring that '[t]here is not one, but several realisms. Each era looks for its own, that is to say the technique and the aesthetic which can best capture it, arrest and restore whatever one wishes to capture of reality' (Bazin, 1980: 41).

narrative, with editing guiding the viewer's attention towards significant action and events. This is often referred to as the 'invisible' style of editing as '[t]he American filmmakers in this era found that if space were broken up according to the logic of the narrative, it would pass unnoticed as integral or real space' (Andrew, 1976: 160). Both types of montage editing to fragment space and time to various extents, with the unity of these dimensions in the image and the event secondary to a certain presentation of an event, designed to solicit a certain reaction or shift of attention in the mind of the viewer; Bazin is critical of the fact that '[m]ontage as used by Kuleshov, Eisenstein, or Gance did not give us the event; it alluded to it' (Bazin, 1967: 25), and of the manner in which classical editing dictates certain events as meaningful in advance, with their presentation determined by the relationship between them that the film-maker has intended to create through their presentation of the narrative. In both instances it can be seen that '[i]n analyzing reality, montage presupposes of its very nature the unity of meaning of the dramatic event In short, montage by its very nature rules out ambiguity of expression' (36).

Bazin values ambiguity of expression because he believes that it is in keeping with the ambiguity of reality: meaning is not imposed by or inherent within reality and a person is free to attend to any aspect of it and interpret their own meanings, and therefore the lack of cuts that deep-focus allows (by nature of the fact that action can clearly be shown on several focal planes at once) enables this ambiguity of reality to be imparted to cinematic representation:

The event, in its entirety, is there all the time, demanding to be looked at; it is we who decide to choose such and such aspect, to pick this rather than that one according to the demands of the action, of feeling or of reflection, but someone else would perhaps choose differently.

(Bazin, 1980: 42)

Deep-focus therefore allows the viewer more freedom in attending to the various aspects of and relationships within the represented reality of the film, which has implications for both viewer and filmic agency, in terms of activity and passivity, which remain central concerns within film theory. According to Bazin, this freedom allowed by deep-focus and prevented by classical editing enables a more active viewer, as they have to make the selections within the *mise en scène* rather than having the action

segmented for them through editing: Bazin writes of deep-focus 'impl[ying] . . . both a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress' (1967: 35-36). Bazin values the fact that such a technique calls for a more active viewer, and holds in high esteem those directors whose use of depth of focus enables such intellectual activity, balancing the demands of story-telling with a realistic recording of these events, as is the case with Orson Welles, whose '*découpage* in deep-focus ultimately tends to absorb the concept of "shots" in a *découpage* unit which might be called the sequence shot' (Bazin, 1978: 80), which, compared to the use of classical editing to convey the same scene, is

[m]ore realistic and at the same time more intellectual, for in a way it forces the spectator to participate in the meaning of the film by distinguishing the implicit relations, which the *découpage* no longer displays on the screen like the pieces of a dismantled engine.

(*Ibid.*)

Though as much as Bazin valorises ambiguity and the interpretive activity of the viewer, he is aware that these qualities must be balanced with the demands of narrative and the requirement that the film be presented in such a way that the viewer can deduce some form of causal relationship between events and the agents of these actions (these being necessary features of narrative, as will be discussed in detail in chapter four). Bazin valorises William Wyler, in particular his film *Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), as an example of the perfect balance between the demands of narrative and of cinematic realism, crafting a clear story and yet retaining a sense of spatial and temporal realism: presenting necessary narrative information but allowing the viewer to discover it for him/herself, or at least giving this impression of discovery. The paradoxical nature of this manipulation/freedom of the viewer's activity is apparent in Bazin's comment on a scene from *Best Years of Our Lives*:

On the real action is superimposed the appropriate action of the *mise en scène* which lies in dividing the spectator's attention against his will, in directing it where it's necessary, and thus in making the spectator participate for himself in the drama created by the director.

(1980: 49)

This apparent paradox may well demonstrate a problem with Bazin's theory, as Christopher Williams recognises; namely that the techniques he describes Wyler as using to clarify the narrative to the viewer 'such as depth of field, minimal editing, or the "geometry of looks" . . . are quite as limiting, constraining and directorial as the montage style he was concerned to reject and the classical style he was concerned to transcend' (Williams, 1980: 53). However, Williams' criticisms here are somewhat overzealous, for while Wyler's techniques do indeed curtail absolute freedom of interpretation (whatever this might consist of), this curtailment is a necessity of the articulation of narrative through film, and so Bazin is simply arguing in favour of *more* and not *absolute* indeterminacy in and interpretation of narrative, bringing it closer (as an asymptote) to the ambiguity of reality, and closer than allowed by the discrete yet more severe manipulation by classical film editing.

Williams' criticism of Bazin is in keeping with a tendency of contemporary film theory to condemn what it regards as the ideologically complicit illusion of reality and passive viewing positions created by classical cinema, in favour of a Brechtian interruption of the viewing process and a related increase in viewer activity through this distanciation. The associated criticism of Bazin is that the realist cinema he proposes (indeed, even the very idea of realism) is in fact an ideological construct, and is therefore an illusion to be disrupted and not maintained. However, it is possible to identify a similarity between these approaches regarding their shared advocacy of an increase in viewer activity and the possibility for interpretation, with the difference between them being regarding the solicitation of this activity and the underlying theoretical reasons for this (as I will explore in the next chapter). What I wish to demonstrate through this thesis is that ambiguity – and the interpretive activity that it solicits – is an inherent feature of narrative in film, with certain modes of articulation serving to increase/reduce this inherent ambiguity, with a related impact on the interpretive activity required by a viewer to segment the action of the film into a narrative of causally related events.

What Bazin demonstrates, then, is an awareness of the interplay in narrative film between the film's 'telling' of a story (showing and segmenting certain series of actions and events and guiding a viewer's attention through this) and the relative freedom of a viewer to make their own segmentations, interpretations and judgements within this presentation, with Bazin himself favouring a relatively large amount of freedom here. It

is this interplay between guidance and freedom in the presentation of narrative in film, which I discuss in terms of determinacy and indeterminacy, that I will be exploring and demonstrating throughout this thesis. I will use Frampton's theory of filmic agency and phenomenological intentionality, Deleuze's thoughts on the ontology of film, and Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader-response and indeterminacy to propose an alternative to previous narratological theories of film. What will emerge from this is an alternative model of narrative agency and viewer activity, and the interaction between the two. But it is first of all necessary to look at the development of contemporary film theory, marked as it is by stern opposition to many of the tenets of the classical theory that I have been discussing. The more rigorous theorisation of the linguistic basis of film in contemporary film theory and the concern with ideology that follows this has implications for the theory of viewer activity and narrative agency that I am proposing here.

Chapter 2

Contemporary Film Theory

One of the key features defining the transition from classical to contemporary film theory is the move away from a concern with defining the essence of film and with setting cinema on the path towards the fulfilment of this essential potential, as we have seen with the theorists in the previous chapter. But before looking at some of the ideological reasons for this rejection of filmic essences – which emerged slightly later – it is first of all necessary to look at the theoretical developments that preceded this.

Metz and the Structuralist Turn

The most notable reason for film theory's shift away from essentialist and aesthetic concerns was the application of structural linguistics to the study of film. Drawing on the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, Christian Metz set out to use theories of linguistic signification (semiotics) to examine the systems of meaning operative in enabling film to communicate a message to a viewer and thus function as an expressive medium. Broadly, his concern was with examining the language of film, but through using the conceptual tools of structuralist theory Metz wanted to specify how film functioned as a language by comparing its means of communication to the formal system of linguistic communication proposed by Saussure. As I discussed in the previous chapter, there is a legacy of analogies made between film and language to explain the communicative quality of film. However, before Metz these analogies have been employed metaphorically, stating that film is *like* language, whereas Metz wanted to set out systematically – scientifically, even – what exactly the two forms of communication have in common.

The significance of Metz's structuralist intervention is that he is not concerned with underlying and ideal essences or ontological foundations. Metz instead approaches film with a narrower focus, grounding film theory in specific questions about the material operation of filmic communication – not about what film ought to do, but what

it actually does.²⁵

The early work of Metz was part of a trend within the social sciences and humanities to attempt to provide a scientific base for the study of communication as a formal system. The roots of this can be found in the work of Saussure and his theory of signs (semiotics). According to Saussure the relation between signifier and signified (constituting the sign) is an arbitrary one; the meaning (signification) of a word (signifier) is produced not by any essential relationship between a word and the object that it refers to in the world – the word is merely a linguistic representation of this object, liable to change over time and between different languages. The meaning of a sign is a result of its difference from other signs within the language system (*langue*) (which Saussure differentiates from speech (*parole*)): 'In language there are only differences, and no positive terms' (1986: 118). This opens up the possibility of studying particular languages as independent and complete formal systems of signifier/signified relationships, unified in the sign, with rules governing the selection and combination of these differential terms, emphasising that language (as an independent structure) is a social product that determines and constructs meaning by dividing the world up into referents, rather than reflecting some pre-existing and universal categorisation: '[T]he language includes neither ideas nor sounds existing prior to the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences arising out of that system' (*ibid.*).

Saussure conceived of linguistics as part of a wider science of signs (semiology), however Roland Barthes inverts this relationship, declaring that 'linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics' (Barthes, 1968: 11). For Barthes, Saussure's theory of linguistic signification (and later developments of this) are essential to an understanding of the signifying practices of modern communication: '[I]t is far from certain that in the social life of today there are to be found any extensive systems of signs outside human language' (9). This entails that any signifying media can be analysed in order to reveal the linguistic rules (or codes) governing the arrangement of the signifying elements, enabling them to express a specific message – it is the semiotician's task to uncover these codes and show not *what* texts mean but *how*. Metz applies this semiotic analysis

25 However, ontological considerations of film do resurface, in later film theory and in this thesis, particularly in light of their neglect (foreclosure, even) throughout semiotically inclined contemporary film theory, as do other issues that Bazin was concerned with, such as agency and interpretation in relation to narrative.

to film with the intention of constructing a system of cinematic codes operative in communicating narrative.

For Metz it is the emergence of narrative in film that leads to the emergence of film as language, with the former determining the development of the latter: 'It is not because the cinema is language that that it can tell stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories' (Metz, 1974a: 47). But how does this language of cinema, as an instance of narrative discourse, differ from verbal language?

The Language of Cinema

Metz notes that '[i]n every narrative whose vehicle is articulated language (written or oral), the properly narrative unit, as we know, is neither the phoneme nor the moneme – which are the units of idiom and not of narrative – but, rather, the sentence' (25). The sentence (one or more of which form a statement) can be reduced further into separate words, and these words into individual phonemes (which form the smallest unit of individual sounds). The combination of phonemes to form a word is the first articulation of language, and the combination of words to form sentences and statements is the second articulation. It is at this level that signification occurs, with words as signifiers. Metz considers the language of film in relation to these foundational units of 'natural' language and concludes that the structure of film language is different to that of natural language. In the case of film narrative 'the image is the vehicle' (26), and unlike sentences and statements the image cannot be broken down further, into smaller units, equivalent to either phonemes or words: the image always signifies and always signifies more than a word does, such that the image cannot be divided into separate signifiers, meaning that 'the image (at least in the cinema) corresponds to one or more sentences' (65). Even shots containing relatively little information (Metz gives the example of a close-up of a revolver) still function as sentences, and not only by nature of the fact that they cannot be broken down into the non-signifying elements of the first articulation, but also because even if the image does correspond in some way with a word it nonetheless has an unavoidable assertive function, expressing more than a single word can: 'A close-up of a revolver does not mean “revolver” (a purely virtual lexical unit), but at the very least, and without speaking of the connotations, it signifies “Here is a

revolver!’” (67).²⁶ It is for this reason that Metz believes that '[t]he image is therefore always speech, never a unit of language' (*ibid.*); having these assertive qualities of speech but lacking the formal structure of spoken language, Metz declares that 'it seems appropriate to look at the cinema as a language without a system' (65).

Part of the reason for the unique character of the signification of film is its proximity to reality, produced by 'the fidelity of the photographic process' (62). This fidelity means that the filmic image is less arbitrary and conventional than natural language, therefore meaning that film is naturally expressive whereas natural language is conventionally signifiatory:

There are many characteristics of the filmic image that distinguish it from the preferred form of signs – which is arbitrary, conventional, and codified. These are the consequences of the fact that from the very first an image is not the indication of something other than itself, but the psuedopresence of the thing it contains.

(76)

The fact that the image therefore has immanent meaning leads Metz to describe it as naturally expressive, as opposed to the separation inherent in Saussure's theory of a sign (78). The denotation of the film image – like that of the photographic image – is expressive (denotative meaning 'is directly released from it' (*ibid.*)), compared to the signified denotation of literature, for example. However, Metz believes film to be different from the photographic image because '[i]n photography, as Roland Barthes has clearly shown, the denoted meaning is secured entirely through the automatic process of photochemical reproduction, denotation is a visual transfer, which is not codified and has not inherent organization' (98), whereas the images of film – phenomenologically speaking – move forward in time, giving 'a sense of “There it is”' (6). This means that 'a whole semiotics of denotation is possible and necessary' (98) because images move and alternate, introducing the question of how their denotative (not to mention connotative)

26 Although it seems problematic that, aside from this declarative function, a close-up of a revolver could be considered as a word in terms of 'its quantity of meaning' (which Metz acknowledges is 'a concept too difficult to handle, especially in film' before going on to use the case of the revolver as an example of an 'image – fairly rare, incidentally – that might, because of its content, correspond to a “word”' (1974a: 67)) – surely the revolver could be 'reduced' further, to its constituent parts (trigger, etc.) and qualities (black, shiny, etc.) (a point that Umberto Eco takes up later). As we shall see, this issue expresses one of the fundamental problems inherent in constructing a structuralist semiotics of film: the problem of segmentation and the relation between parts and wholes in determining units of meaning, which is something I develop with regards to the articulation of narrative.

meaning is affected by their relationship in a sequence: 'It is the denotation itself that is being constructed, organized, and to a certain extent codified' (99). This question is at the core of Metz's early structuralist endeavours, and, again, we can see here the two tendencies of narrative film: that towards realism (by nature of its photographic basis) and the use (that is, manipulation) of these realistic images to construct a narrative. The former can be witnessed in Metz's ideas of film as a motivated analogy of reality, as expressive and not mediated by codes, the latter in his attempt to construct a semiotics of the denotation of narrative by these analogical images.

Having an iconic relationship with reality, film images are not mediated by a finite number of mediating signs (as natural language consists of), introducing more variety, and without these images acquiring meaning in relation to one another: '[T]heir number is, if not limitless, at least more "open" than the "most open" linguistic inventory' (69). However, Metz observes that the manner in which these images are arranged sequentially does tend to be less varied and therefore more susceptible to systematic analysis. This is the opposite of verbal language, where – in linguistic terms – signs acquire meaning through their paradigmatic relationship with (i.e. difference from) a limited number other signs, yet – on the other axis – have a large degree of flexibility in terms of their syntactic arrangement in a sentence, and the meaning thus acquired. So for Metz the syntagmatic relationship between images is the key determinant of filmic meaning (in terms of narrative denotation): 'One can speak of "paradigmatic poverty" in relation to the *image* and of "syntagmatic richness" in relation to the *structuring of images*' (68). It is to this extent that Metz regards cinema as a *language* (language in general) but not a *langue* (language system):

Contrary to what many of the theoreticians of the silent film declared or suggested ("Ciné langue," "visual Esperanto," etc.), the cinema is certainly not a language system (*langue*). It can, however, be considered as a *language*, to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms – and to the extent that these elements are not traced on the perceptual configurations of reality itself (which does not tell stories). Filmic manipulation transforms what might have been a visual transfer of reality into discourse.

Metz therefore proposes the structure of a *grande syntagmatique* (the large syntagmatic category of the image-track) which categorises the variety of possible syntactical relationships between and within various segments of shot sequences in order to determine the code that enables the denotation of narrative through specific shot arrangements: 'Iconic analogy alone cannot account for the intelligibility of the co-occurrences in filmic discourse' (145).

A variety of criticisms have been aimed at these early structuralist theories of Metz's, and indeed, in light of the general fate of these early semiotic systems, his subsequent work was considerably different in both aims and methodology, as will become clear. But for now I wish to explore some of the criticisms of this early period in order to consider their implications for a future theory of narrative articulation (an area that was largely neglected during the period of ideological critiques of structuralism, which on the whole came to supersede Metz's initial project, dividing his work between a 'first' and 'second semiology,' as I will demonstrate). These critiques of Metz can be divided into those concerned with Metz's theory of the signifiatory status of the image and those concerned with the formal system of the *grande syntagmatique* itself and the possibility of other cinematic codes (there is unavoidably some overlap between the two, but I will tackle these criticisms in this order).

Critiquing Metz

One aspect of Metz's theory that has proved particularly vulnerable is the analogical relationship that he proposes between the filmic image and reality. Umberto Eco makes a significant intervention here, claiming that the iconic resemblance between an image and reality is itself coded, such that the relationship between the filmic image and reality is mediated by a system of codes. Some of these iconic codes are similar to the ones operative in our perception of reality (Eco uses the example of the zebra, where black and white stripes function as a 'code of recognition' enabling us to identify an animal as a zebra (Eco, 1976: 594)), but invariably other codes will enable us to recognise iconicity in an image: '[I]t is necessary to be trained to recognise the photographic image' (*ibid.*).

According to Eco, the impression of reality through the image is conventional and can be broken down into three different articulations. At the first level of articulation

are what Eco refers to as 'semes,' which together – as in Metz – correspond to a verbal utterance within the frame of the image: 'The image of a horse does not mean “horse” but as a minimum “a white horse stands here in profile”' (Eco, 1976: 596). These semes can then be broken down into constituent signs at a second level of articulation; for example, 'tail,' 'eyes' and other constituent features that enable the denotation of 'horse,' which can then be broken down further 'into visual figures: “angles,” “light contrasts,” “curves,” “subject-background relationships”' (602). We can see here, then, that Eco locates two further articulations within the cinematic code than Metz does.

Eco therefore attends more to the conventional systems of codes involved in visual communication than Metz does. However, Metz does acknowledge the role of conventional codes in communicating the connoted qualities of the image:

Wherever analogy takes over filmic signification (that is, notably the meaning of each visual element taken separately), there is a lack of specifically cinematographic codification. That is why I believe filmic codes must be sought on other levels: the codes particular to connotation . . . or the codes of denotation-connotation related to the discursive organization of image groups.

(Metz, 1974a: 111)

This emphasis on and acknowledgement of conventionally coded signification becomes more pronounced throughout Metz's work, as he moves away from the analogical and motivated status of filmic denotation and allows for a multiplicity of cinematic codes (as I examine in more detail below). Indeed, this is part of a general movement within semiotics, towards an analysis of connotation, in which signifieds are less fixed, such that denotation comes to be regarded in similar terms. For example, Barthes, after initially believing that only the connotation of the photographic image is coded (1977: 16) – sharing a similar position to Metz on this point – later comes to regard denotation as itself coded:

[D]enotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the *last* of the connotations (the one which seems both to establish and to close the reading), the superior myth by which the text pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature.

(Barthes, 1974: 9)

In the next section I will look more closely at the significance of this movement as a critique of structuralist approaches to meaning, signalling the emergence of the 'post-structuralist' tendencies that come to dominate film theory throughout the 1970s and beyond. But for now I would like to return to Metz's *grande syntagmatique* in order to demonstrate some of the problems with Metz's structuralist conception of narrative, how these perhaps inevitably lead toward the later post-structuralist critiques that Metz himself comes to advocate, and whether some of the criticisms of the *grande syntagmatique* – by Henderson in particular – indicate the possibility of retaining some of the focus and achieving some of the objectives of Metz's initial project (which becomes lost in later theoretical interventions) whilst avoiding its fatal vulnerabilities. And it is this idea that I'm going to build on throughout this thesis.

Metz constructed the *grande syntagmatique* (GS) as a formal classification of the system of rules governing the segmentation of narrative, such that this code 'would permit any film's narrative syntax to be formalised' (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 40). Metz (1974a: 149-177) applies this formal system to an analysis of *Adieu Philippine* (Jacques Rozier, 1962), and several others have also employed the GS in this manner (see John Ellis (1975), for example²⁷). However, there are two significant – and interrelated – sets of problems with the GS, one of which prompts Metz to adjust his later work and eventually abandon the GS and its structuralist legacy, thus rendering the other set of problems redundant. However, considering the implications of this second set of objections it is possible to suggest another way forward for Metz's early work – 'the aim of the analysis being the elucidation of the system of the organisation of the spatio-temporal logic within the area of the sequence in narrative cinema' (Heath, 1973a: 11).²⁸

The first issue is regarding the GS as *the* code of narrative cinema, the criticism being that Metz does not allow for the role of other codes in generating meaning outside of the spatio-temporal relationships of shot sequences. Metz's later work comes to deal with the GS as one code among many others, as one 'which organises the most usual spatio-temporal logic within the sequence' (Metz, 1974b: 189). Metz now regards the

27 Although this application was not unproblematic, with Ellis recognising that certain sequences didn't seem to fit with Metz's syntagmas (Ellis, 1975: 110). I elaborate related problems with the *grande syntagmatique* throughout this section.

28 Indeed, this early objective of Metz's has been taken up in various ways by subsequent narratological studies of film, including Bordwell (1985b) (who refers to the GS as 'the outstanding achievement' of the study of narrative structure in film (xvii)), Burch (1990), Branigan (1992), and Buckland (1995 and 2000), though not necessarily addressing some of the problematic issues brought up by Henderson's critique of the GS, as I will demonstrate.

language of cinema as consisting of a multiplicity of interacting codes, which he proceeds to systematise in terms of their specificity as cinematic codes and their particularity as sub-codes in *Language and Cinema* (1974b), with different codes combined in syntagmatic relationships (editing *plus* lighting, for example), alongside each other, and sub-codes of the same general code related paradigmatically (montage *or* classical editing, for example). In this later work Metz develops a more rigorous and sophisticated conception of film as a textual system, by which he means to describe film as the site of the convergence of multiple codes:

[I]t is a configuration which results from diverse choices of elements, as well as from a certain combination of the chosen elements. These choices have been made from among the resources provided by diverse (general *or particular*) cinematic codes – but also by non-cinematic codes.

(Metz, 1974b: 63)

Stephen Heath expresses concern that Metz, although having moved away from the idea of the GS as *the* code of cinema and avoiding 'the limitation of that semiology to the area of narrative' (Heath, 1973a: 11), remains fixated on the specificity of cinematic language (and with this is in danger of regressing to an essentialist conception of cinema) at the expense of a proper engagement with the cultural (that is, ideological) construction of meaning, accusing him of 'an "inability" to think the relations of the signifying practice of film and ideology and the question of the role of semiology in ideology' (26).²⁹ However, Heath, though critical of the equivalences Metz – in his early work in particular – establishes between specificity, narrative and denotation and of the primacy of narrative in his semiotic analysis, does believe that his focus on the codes employed by film to communicate narrative opens up narrative to an analysis in terms of its dominant historical position (as 'that which organises the most usual spatio-temporal logic within the sequence') and the means by which this particular version of reality is articulated, i.e. the GS as itself an ideological code: 'In some sense, the development of Metz's semiology, its shifts of emphasis, is the beginning of an answer' (24). However, what I identify in this emergent critique of narrative and the 'deconstructive' readings of film that emerge in its wake is a neglect and avoidance of

²⁹ Metz does proceed to focus on issues of subjectivity, ideology and representation in his later work, and the wider socio-psychological system in which these sign systems operate, as I shall examine.

some of the other initial problems involved in Metz's GS, such as the issue of segmentation itself, especially with regards to the event. Henderson provides an insightful analysis here, returning to this central problem and pointing towards an alternative conception of segmentation that is useful for my theory of the indeterminacy of the event, my intention being to examine the articulation of narrative through segments of movement and how we might conceptualise this presentation, considering the unique ontology of film.

Henderson's main criticism is that Metz only looks at cinematic expression, which in the case of the GS is the expression of parts of the narrative by the visual segments of the GS, but without sufficient attention to how these parts relate to the narrative as a whole and to the visual whole of the film. Rather than exploring the filmic application of narratological theories which are 'concerned with analyzing the relations between narrative parts and wholes within a system that generates both' (Henderson, 1975: 27), Metz instead presumes the expression of the event in film ('the basic unit of the narrative' (Metz, 1974a: 24)) as a given, without explaining how this segmentation of the event takes place and why it should be regarded as a coherent fundamental unit. Henderson notes a refusal to engage properly with structuralist narratology – and the theories of part/whole relations that emerge here (this is an area I cover in the fourth chapter) – instead settling for the proposal that a viewer experiences a film narrative in terms of events (without looking at how this narrative is understood *as* a series of related events), and then proceeding to describe the various patterns of events expressed by a film, presupposing their segmentation into event units:

The taxonomy that results identifies certain patterns and gives various labels to these, but it says little or nothing about them, neither why these patterns exist nor what is important about them. Metz clearly does not know what to do with the regularities he finds at the segment level.

(Henderson, 1975: 31)

Henderson attributes this last state of affairs to the fact that Metz 'has no theoretical model to fit [these facts] into, so as to make use of them, interpret them, declare their importance' (32), employing only a phenomenological empiricism which presupposes facts about the experience of narrative in film without being able to theoretically justify these segmentations.

Henderson claims that 'the *grand syntagmatique* does not differ fundamentally from classical film theory itself' (*ibid.*) because of the fact that neither of them sufficiently explores the relation between visual and narrative parts and wholes in film:

Like Eisenstein and Bazin, Metz takes from ordinary experience or from previous discourse a basic unit – the shot – and defines several modes of its combination into the next larger unit, the sequence (which Metz calls the segment). In neither classical film theory nor Metz is there an overall model or economy of sequences within the whole. Like them also, he does not analyze narrative parts and wholes nor the system of narrative and image-track relations.

(*ibid.*)

Henderson does acknowledge that Metz at least attempts to deal with narratological issues such as 'the time-and-space relations signified by various shot groupings' (*ibid.*). But the fact remains that 'Metz's phenomenological base assumes that segments are given, i.e. that they come already identified in viewer experience of the film' (33). What is needed, then, is a theory of the segmentation of events in film that attends to these part-whole relations. Such a theory is elemental to any narratology of film, but the specifics of which have been neglected within film theory, both by those properly concerned with the understanding of narrative in film, as well as by those who – with the advent of a post-structuralist conception of meaning – move away from narrativity and towards an ideological critique of narrative itself. Henderson's criticisms here point the way forward in terms of a consideration of the relationship between narrative and visual parts and wholes, but he himself does not put forward such a theory in any comprehensive fashion, indicating that the various structuralist narratological theories that Metz ignores provide such a model (Henderson, 1975: 27).

In the next two chapters I will look in more detail at these narratological theories, examining the extent to which they are applicable to film and whether they are indeed able to provide this model that Henderson recognises the need for, and what they may need to be supplemented with. But before doing so it is necessary to look at the key theoretical conceptions of spectatorship and representation that came to dominate film theory following this early structuralist phase, and which arose out of problems inherent within this 'scientific' structuralism, as they have important implications for considerations of viewer activity, spectatorial positions and the role of interpretation,

issues which I am exploring throughout this thesis.

Post-Structuralism and the Ideological Turn

The movement from structuralism to post-structuralism is neither smooth nor clearly defined, with the latter arising out of problems inherent within the general approach of the former rather than as a distinct, coherent or unified movement. Nonetheless, it is possible to see within this emergent post-structuralism the continuation of a semiotic conception of meaning, albeit with certain important revisions regarding the scientific aspirations and supposed neutrality of structuralism, with significant implications for the 1970s film theory that followed in its wake.

Henderson identifies an empiricist epistemology as the central problem of structuralism, the avoidance of which typifies subsequent post-structuralist approaches to meaning. In accordance with this epistemology, the structuralist critic reveals the structure that he/she finds hidden in the text, such that this empiricist approach 'takes for its object the text as given' and in so doing '[t]he structuralist work represents or reproduces the structures of the object' (Henderson, 1973: 32) that it assumes lies unified and coherent before it, with an underlying, stable structure of meaning ready to be discovered. This involves the presumption that the subject is distinct from the object of study and that 'both the subject and object are already constituted' (Caughie, 1981: 128). The question then arises, if they are not constituted in advance, *prior* to the text, of how subject and object are constituted *through* the text, with the text emerging as a site of meaning production – 'as a collection of mechanisms for the production of meaning' (Henderson, 1973: 32) – rather than as a product itself. Indeed, the production of both the narrative as object and the implied narrative viewer as subject through the film text is what I am examining in this thesis. However, I will attend to narratological concerns that were neglected in the post-structuralist turn to ideology that I am outlining here. In this way we can see the potential value of this turn to the spectator and to wider issues of signification in this 'second semiology,' a potential lost on some of the reductive cognitivist critiques of this theory, as I will demonstrate.

It is necessary here to explore the influence of the post-Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, and the post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, as these two figures have particular consequences for post-structuralist conceptions of film, with

Althusser's theory of ideology paving the way for a political engagement with film, lacking in the earlier structuralist approaches, as we have seen. Althusser carried out a more systematic analysis of the structure and function of ideology than Karl Marx did, proposing that it is not a distinct set of beliefs determined by the material economic conditions of society, but is itself a relatively autonomous material 'system (possessing its own logic and rigor) of representation (images, myths, ideas or concepts as the case may be) existing and having a historical role within a given society' (Althusser in Stam 2000: 134). According to Althusser, this ideology represents 'not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live' (Althusser, 1971: 155), with these relationships being determined through the operation of 'Ideological State Apparatuses,' which include educational systems, religious institutions, the family and the media. Each of these contributes toward what Althusser refers to as the 'interpellation' of individuals within society, constituting subjects: 'All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as subjects' (162).

Althusser's theory that material ISAs produce – rather than simply reflect – ideology through the imaginary relations created and the resultant constituted subjects is significant because he extends ideology as a determinant of social existence to those domains not previously regarded as determinant of ideology: 'What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it' (163). This opens up these domains to an analysis in order to reveal their particular role in the determination – interpellation – of individuals as subjects in accordance with a 'master' Subject, uncovering the controlling forces that constitute an individual's sense of self and their material relations to others within society:

[T]he individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself.'

(169)

In the climate of post-1968 critical thought, following the leftist political uprisings of that year – in which 'the “political” was diasporized, spreading out into theory and everyday life' (Stam, 2000: 131) – Althusser provides a theoretical basis for

the ideological analysis of media texts such as film in order to reveal their political functioning. According to this analysis films do not simply reflect some given reality but are complicit in the construction of an ideological 'reality' by positioning spectators accordingly: 'Thus conceived, cinema's power lay in its ability to so position the subject that its representations were taken to be reality' (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 12). Textual analysis could thus intervene to uncover this work of the text and in doing so produce a 'symptomatic' reading of the text. Althusser uses this term, with its Freudian connotations, to describe the way in which a reading 'divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same moment relates it to a *different text*, present as a necessary absence in the first' (Althusser, 1970: 28). 'John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*,' written collectively by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1970, was the first significant symptomatic reading of a film in this manner, and was hugely influential on what came to be labelled as the 'Screen Theory' which followed, such was its influence on the *Screen* journal that published the first English translation in 1972.

This reading of *Young Mr Lincoln* is an example of self-consciously engaging in the production of a new text through a process of actively reading films in order 'to make them say what they have to say *within* what they leave unsaid, to reveal their constituent lacks . . . , to double their writing with active reading to reveal what is already there' (Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1972: 8). This activity is necessary for a symptomatic reading of a film, which they – and much film theory that followed throughout the 70s – now regard as the proper function of film criticism. But such a reading is not to be confused with the classical mode of interpretation, according to which meaning is found hidden within a text, which in the context of film – according to the above article – would be

the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (metalanguage) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext.

(6)

The article instead problematises such a task by 'abolish[ing] the distance between the text studied and the discourse which studies' (Henderson, 1973-4: 41), which Henderson identifies as the central feature differentiating this article from the empirically-oriented

structuralist analyses that came before and enabling it to 'be read as a critique of structuralism and a realization of the theoretical critique of structuralism within the field of film criticism' (*ibid.*).³⁰

A more explicit formulation of cinema as an apparatus positioning a spectator, such that he/she takes (ideological) representations as reality, emerges with the 'apparatus theory' of Jean-Louis Comolli (1980), Jean-Louis Baudry (1986) and the later-period Metz (1982). These theories are part of a wider suspicion of realism fostered by the combination of semiotics and post-Marxist philosophy, according to which reality is itself coded, a claim which Metz himself makes following the development of his 'second semiology':

What is called reality – that is, the sundry pro-filmic elements – is nothing other than a set of codes: the set of codes without which that reality would not be accessible or not be intelligible, so that one would not be able to say anything about it, not even that it is reality.

(in Heath, 1973b: 11)

Cinema is then regarded as both determined by and in turn itself perpetuating ideological representations of reality; 'a whole ideology of the “visual” which needs to be carefully and continually questioned' (Heath, 1973b: 11). This is a role which contemporary film theory subsequently takes on, using psychoanalysis to uncover the ideological work of cinema.

Metz and the Imaginary Signifier

Psychoanalytic theory enables Metz to move from a concern with cinema as a signifying system to the process of the construction of meaning by a spectator that takes place in the experience of film, integrating the symbolic order of language and discourse into the filmic experience in order to tackle the issue of 'the *psychoanalytic constitution of the cinematic signifier*' (Metz, 1982: 151).

Metz states that cinema is unique in that it 'mobilises a large number of the axes

³⁰ However, for Bordwell this distinction between interpretation and 'symptomatic reading' is not so clear, although it could be argued that he does not give enough credit to the reflexive nature of this process of reading (at least as it occurs in the *Young Mr Lincoln* article), as I will elaborate later.

of perception' (43) and does so through the use of recorded sound and image, such that its signifier is absent, leading Metz to refer to cinema as an 'imaginary signifier': 'The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of the signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but at the same time stamped with unreality to an unusual degree, and from the very outset' (45). Thus, for Metz cinema is in the realm of the imaginary, which takes on a specifically Lacanian dimension when considered in light of how a spectator responds to and interacts with this imaginary scenario. In contrast to Baudry's (1986) earlier theorisation of the cinematic apparatus, Metz recognises that the cinema (as a mirror-screen) does not lead to the imaginary formation of self-hood as some mirror proxy,³¹ for the spectator – in order to comprehend the filmic representation before them – is already a viewing *subject*; that is, has already passed through the mirror-stage and entered the realm of the symbolic (of language and discourse). For Metz, this means that the spectator is able to indulge in a particularly pleasurable (and unique) scenario in which they can enjoy seeing without being seen, such that they identify with this act of looking: '[T]he spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness): as the condition of possibility of the perceived and hence as a kind of transcendental subject, which comes before every *there* is' (Metz, 1982: 49). The cinematic apparatus therefore creates a duality of absence – of the signifier from the spectator and of the spectator from the signifier, prompting imaginary identifications (primarily with the act of looking, and secondarily with characters within the diegesis) and imaginary presences, such that the cinematic signifier is 'made present in the mode of absence' (44). Metz relates this absence built into the institutional apparatus of the cinema to the psychoanalytic concept of lack. Sigmund Freud claimed that lack is the very basis of sexual desire, the desire here being for the maternal love-object which can never be attained – will always be lacking. Therefore desire – as opposed to a drive (like hunger) – can never be satisfied, as Metz paraphrases:

[T]he lack is what it wishes to fill, and at the same time what it is always careful to leave gaping, in order to survive as desire [I]t pursues an imaginary object (a

31 Baudry proposes that the experience of watching a film effectively repeats the mirror-stage of childhood development, during which – according to Lacan – a child develops a sense self by imagining themselves as other, as a unified body reflected in a mirror. But with cinema, which does not reflect the body back, the spectator identifies with the transcendental 'self' created by the looking of the camera (Baudry, 1986: 295).

“lost object”) which is its truest object, an object that has always been lost and is always desired as such.

(59)

A sexual fascination with looking, voyeurism is an over-investment in maintaining the distance that is at the heart of desire *qua* lack, with cinema – according to Metz – indulging this sexual inclination to keep objects at a distance through the spatial distance that it creates between subject and object of perception (of desire). But this lack, as well as creating the possibility of a voyeuristic pleasure in the experience of film – of being separate from a world present before the spectator – also necessitates that a spectator disavow the absence of the cinematic signifier, thus making it present before them as a reality from which they are absent, simultaneously covering over this lack (of reality) to create an illusion of reality that the spectator participates in. Metz links this process of disavowal to Freud's theory of the fetish, according to which a child avoids the anxiety that comes with the awareness, through observation, that its mother does not have a penis – is lacking – by covering over this lack, disavowing the observation and belief that has followed it:

[T]he child, terrified by what it has seen or glimpsed, will have tried more or less successfully in different cases, to *arrest* its look, for all its life, at what will subsequently become the fetish: at a piece of clothing, for example, which masks the frightening, discovery, or else precedes it (underwear, stockings, boots, etc.).

(70)

In this way, then, cinema becomes the object of the fetish, with pleasure experienced through a process of disavowal which effaces lack; a presence which depends on absence for the satisfaction that it brings. We can see here that the ground is prepared for the interaction between text and spectator necessary for the functioning of the apparatus of cinema by early childhood experience and the formation of adult identity, such that the signification of cinema can also be explained in these terms – as a source of pleasure.

Metz's intervention is significant because his engagement with psychoanalytic theories of pleasure enables him to account for the pleasure of looking that cinema indulges, with the whole apparatus of cinema determined by the satisfaction that it

offers here. Feminist film theory subsequently develops this conception of the cinematic apparatus, arguing that it only serves a particular gendered pleasure in looking, being primarily determined by male desire. Laura Mulvey's work is formative in this reformulation of apparatus theory, turning away from an analysis of the material conditions of viewing and instead analysing cinematic signifieds within the diegesis of a film (representations) to demonstrate the gendered gaze constructed by film, such that 'one might say that Mulvey's concern was with the cinematic signified and Metz's was with the cinematic signifier' (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 84).

Mulvey and the Gaze

Mulvey argues that classical Hollywood cinema constructs a masculine look for the viewer (such that the spectator is gendered) through its representation of women within the narrative. She notes that in Hollywood films of the classical era the female characters are subjected to either sadistic voyeurism or fetishistic scopophilia. The first assigns guilt to these characters within the narrative and then either saves or punishes them, and the second 'builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself' (Mulvey, 1986: 205). This representation of women is pleasurable for men, according to Mulvey's employment of Freudian theory, because it enables them to escape the castration anxiety that women pose through their apparent lacking of a penis and the traumatic lack and indirect threat of castration that they signify because of this: '[T]he woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified' (*ibid.*). Women are therefore represented as passive objects of a controlling male gaze that the film sets up in order to overcome the anxiety of sexual difference, an avoidance experienced as pleasurable in itself (as in disavowal).

The role of male characters within the film is also determined by masculine pleasure, with males being the protagonists who forward the story and make things happen, compared to the passivity of female characters, such that Mulvey argues that the only real identificatory position offered to a viewer is that of the male protagonist, with the film offering a double pleasure to a male viewer:³² pleasure in the identification

32 Although in a later article (1993) Mulvey does allow for the possibility of masculine pleasure for female spectators through the male point of view (see below).

with a powerful controlling male figure, which coincides with the erotic pleasure of looking:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.

(204)

The issue of sexual difference is absent from Metz's theory of the 'imaginary signifier,' to the extent that feminist critics have criticised it as perpetuating the repression of sexual difference that is found within the representational strategies of mainstream narrative film, with Constance Penley referring to Metz's model of the apparatus as a 'bachelor machine' and describing how feminist film theorists

have found it more productive to ask whether this description, with its own bacheloresque emphasis on homogeneity and closure, does not itself subscribe to a theoretical systematicity, one that would close off those same questions of sexual difference that it claims are denied or disavowed in the narrative system of classical film.

(1989: 58)

In Mulvey's account disavowal offers a particularly gendered pleasure in its overcoming of the anxiety of sexual difference. Mulvey therefore reads classical Hollywood symptomatically as part of an unconscious system of patriarchal representation within which women exist only as pleasurable objects for male desire:

The image of a woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of a man takes the argument a step further into the structure of representation, adding a further layer demanded by the ideology of the patriarchal order as it is worked out in its favourite cinematic form – illusionistic narrative film.

(Mulvey, 1986: 208)

Mulvey's intention is to interrupt and offer alternatives to this 'smooth' and phallogocentric functioning of the Hollywood system of narrative representation, famously calling for

the disruption of this masculine, oppressive pleasure offered by Hollywood in order to allow for a representation of femininity in more positive and self-sufficient terms than that of a lack to be disavowed. In doing so, Mulvey wishes to create a 'new language of desire' (200) to articulate femininity in these terms.

MacCabe and Theories of Discourse

We can see here an indication of the use of semiotics in collaboration with psychoanalytic theory for an explicit and specific political intervention (the liberation of women), which is continued throughout feminist film theory, although with significant variations, and with implications for the central role of interpretation in the practice of film theory, as I will demonstrate. Colin MacCabe mounts a slightly different, though no less political, theoretical challenge to mainstream narrative cinema.

MacCabe draws a parallel between the classic realist novel and the realist film, arguing that both consist of a certain arrangement of discourses, producing a coherent and non-contradictory sense of reality. In the novel the discourse of characters – the 'object language' – is contained within the master discourse – the 'metalanguage' – of the narration. This metalanguage functions to frame these discourses within it, commenting on them and explaining 'the relation of this object language to the real' (MacCabe, 1993: 54). The metalanguage is able to resolve contradictions between the object languages, functioning as a wider guarantor of an overriding reality within which these other discourses take place. In order to do this it must have an effect of transparency, such that it does not itself come across as an instance of articulated discourse: 'Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as material which are open to re-interpretation, the narrative discourse simply allows reality to appear and denies its own status as articulation' (55).

MacCabe locates an equivalent hierarchy of discourses in realist narrative film, with the camera functioning as a metalanguage which shows us the narrative of events, with this visual discourse being the authoritative one: 'The camera shows us what happens – it tells the truth against which we can measure the discourses' (56). A parallel can be identified here with Metz's analysis of the enunciative character of Hollywood films in which he uses Emile Benveniste's distinction between *histoire* (story), in which 'events seem to recount themselves,' and *discours* (discourse), which

'presumes the presence of both a speaker and a listener' (Benveniste, 1971: 241), the significance of this being that story effaces the enunciative act that articulates it. Metz, in attempting to answer the question of how spectators are positioned to accept ideological 'reality,' describes how 'the very principle of its effectiveness as discourse, is precisely that it obliterates all traces of the enunciation, and masquerades as story' (1982: 91) (thus functioning as a source of pleasure and satisfaction of desire through the processes outlined in the above discussion of Metz). The narration of reality in film provided by the camera does not acknowledge itself as such, creating the position of an omniscient and invisible observer for the viewer, the effect of this effacement being that the representation on screen appears to the viewer as unmediated reality rather than a point of view: 'The real is not articulated – it is' (MacCabe, 1993: 58). Through this visual metalanguage the realist narrative film gives an omniscient impression of a transparent and non-contradictory reality and in doing so 'ensures the position of the subject in a position of dominant specularly' (*ibid.*). The absence of the source of narration means that the spectator effectively takes the place of the absent subject (source) of enunciation, such that they experience the film as their reality, constituted by their experience, when in fact the opposite is the case: '[I]n occupying the position of invisible enunciator he or she is constituted by the film' (Lapsley and Westlake, 1988: 51).

The ideological implications of this linguistic critique are significant – narrative realism, as identified by MacCabe, is a mediated interpretation of the world and the relations within it, which effaces this fact through the subtle manipulation, or 'positioning,' of the spectator, such that a misleading impression of neutral reality is produced, masking the fact that the spectator-subject is constituted by the text rather than constituting it as their own reality. Similarly, in Mulvey's account, Hollywood's narrative conventions constitute a certain type of desiring *male* subject.

MacCabe's central concern is to reveal the ideological functioning of realist film and how it 'fixes the subject in a point of view from which everything becomes obvious' (62); i.e. how the text (through its structuring of discourses) determines the 'position' of the spectator in the act of viewing, rather than with how the spectator determines the meaning of the text in the act of viewing. And this is the central problem with this 'subject positioning' theory: it seems to reduce the spectator to a passive position within which there is no possibility for the subversion of the ideological illusion that fixes them in this manner. For example, Bordwell (1985b: 29) objects that this passive

conception of a spectator doesn't allow for the cognitive activity involved in the comprehension of narrative. I will, however, explore arguments against this reductive appraisal of passivity below.

What emerges in later contemporary film theory (including the later work of MacCabe (1985: 58-82) and feminist interventions post-Mulvey) is a more fluid and less fixed conception of subjectivity, enabling the possibility of mobile and active spectatorial positions. This development can be seen over the course of a number of different theoretical approaches spanning a number of years, the key moments in which I shall outline here, before looking at the consequences of this for the role of the film theorist and the critical responses to this, which I shall position my theory of the act of viewing in relation to.

Heath and the Subject

One of the most significant revisions of the Althusserian model of subjectivity and its relation to ideology (i.e. interpellation) is provided by the later work of Stephen Heath. In this work Heath – in a movement that typifies the trajectory of contemporary film theory – moves away from Althusser and toward Lacan in order to provide a more complex, nuanced and accurate model of the subject in a continual process of formation, rather than being fixed in place by a text. Heath argues that not only is the subject constituted through language, but that the subject him/herself constitutes language, such that, as paraphrased by Lapsley and Westlake, '[m]eaning and subjectivity come into being together, each engendering the other in a process of endless dialectic' (1988: 53). For Heath, it is therefore not a question of subjects being fixed by texts through a process of interpellation but of the *processes* through which subjectivity is continually emerging:

[I]t is not . . . that there is first of all the construction of a subject for social/ideological formations and then the placing of that constructed subject-support in those formations, it is that the two processes are one in a kind of necessary simultaneity – like the recto and verso of a piece of paper. The individual is always entering, emerging, as subject in language.

(Heath, in Lapsley and Westlake: 52-53)

Heath's semiotic theory of spectatorship is more sensitive to the dynamic and divided subject proposed by Lacan, recognising that – through the operation of discourse – a subject is always 'in process,' with cinema functioning as a specific signifying *practice*, emphasising that it is a dynamic, discursive process rather than a stable system of meaning: '[I]t takes film as a work of production of meanings and in so doing brings into the analysis the question of the positionings of the subject within that work' (Heath, 1981: 8). These pluralised 'positionings' are significant as in Heath's conception the various (heterogeneous) specific codes of cinema each function to position the spectator as a subject but the individual always exceeds its representation as a subject: 'The individual is always a subject of ideology but is always more than simply the figure of that representation' (*ibid.*). These codes – in their positioning function – therefore serve to contain and centre the individual as a subject, but this happens continually, such is the processual nature of discourse, and without ever *holding* the spectator in a subject position, only able to continually contain its excess through the inscription of subject positions within the text: 'Frame, narrative placing, subject inscription cut short the interminable movement of the signifier' (13).

Despite criticisms to the contrary (which I will discuss below), Heath's theory avoids the textual determinacy of some of the more Althusserian-inflected criticism through his conception of the Lacanian subject, leading to a more active spectator as both constituted by and constituting meaning, such that Heath refers to a 'dialectic of the subject' (Heath, 1975/76: 50). In keeping with this movement away from what was regarded as too rigid a textual determinism, contemporary film theory – particularly in its employment of Lacan to theorise the intersection of fantasy, desire and film – increasingly emphasises the fluidity of subject positions and the meaning thereby constituted, with consequences for the interpretive activity that contemporary film theory partakes in, as I will demonstrate.

Fantasy Theory and the Mobile Spectator

Initial responses to Mulvey focus on the fact that there seems no place for female pleasure in her analysis of cinema as being determined by a patriarchal unconscious, therefore problematising the very idea of female spectatorship; as D. N. Rodowick asks,

'where is the female subject?' (1982: 8). As I have mentioned, Mulvey herself addresses this problem in a later article (1993), proposing that the female spectator, unlike the male, can identify with both masculine and feminine positions due to the fact that female sexuality is less fixed, consisting of an 'oscillation between "passive" femininity and regressive "masculinity"' (131). Femininity (defined oppositionally as passivity) involves a repression of masculine activity, with film, it is argued, offering this repressed desire to a female spectator:

Hollywood genre films structured around masculine pleasure, offering an identification with the *active* point of view, allow a woman spectator to rediscover that lost aspect of her sexual identity, the never fully repressed bed-rock of feminine neurosis.

(127-128)

Nonetheless, despite the fact that Mulvey allows for mobile identification, active desire is still equated with masculinity, leading Jackie Stacey to ask: 'How . . . might we conceptualise the identity of the female spectator who actively desires – is masculinity really the only option?' (1994: 25-26).

It is through the application of the psychoanalytic concept of fantasy to the analysis of spectatorship that an alternative model of activity/passivity and identification emerges. In her influential article *Fantasia* (1997), Elizabeth Cowie, drawing on the central role assigned to fantasy in the formation of identity *qua* sexuality by Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis' reading of Freud and Lacan (1986), proposes that film is more than just a fantasy of wish fulfilment, with the protagonist fulfilling the wishes of a spectator in some distorted form (in accordance with Freud's theory of dreams). She emphasises instead the significance of setting out a scenario which stages the very emergence of desire through lack, with lack here, rather than the fulfilment of a wish or the attainment of an object, being the source of pleasure: the pleasure is in this staging of fantasy itself:

Fantasy as a *mise en scène* of desire is more a setting out of a lack, of what is absent, than a presentation of a having, being present. Desire itself coming into existence in the representation of lack, in the production of a fantasy of its becoming present.

(Cowie, 1997: 133)

At the heart of the fantastical scenario Laplace and Pontalis locate an 'original fantasy' which concerns fantasies of origin: 'Like myths, they claim to provide a representation of, and a solution to, the major enigmas which confront the child' (Laplace and Pontalis, 1986: 19).³³ It is through staging these primary fantasies – which organise and originate subsequent fantasy – that the subject explains and thus affirms the identity of him/herself as a desiring subject, and this is done so by effectively staging the emergence of this subject through a scenario which – as an originary fantasy – pre-exists the subject, such that the position of the subject and the relationships of desire within it are multiple and mobile:

The fantasy scenario always involves multiple points of entry which are also mutually exclusive positions, but these are taken up not sequentially – as in a narrative – but simultaneously or rather, since the unconscious does not know time in this way, to take up any one position is always to be implicated in the position of the other(s).

(135)

Cowie's spectator is therefore more mobile than previously proposed within psychoanalytic film theory, not determined by time, space or gaze: on one level the narrative, as a secondary elaboration (revision) of an original fantasy, 'seeks to *find* (that is, produce) a proper place for the subject' (162) at the same time as necessarily allowing multiple and mobile subject-positions (both active and passive).

There is an optimistic slant to Cowie's theory in that it enables female spectators to escape passive, masochistic positions of identification and avoid gendered positioning, and therefore is potentially liberating in terms of viewing pleasures. The implications of this are that positions of active desire are no longer tied to masculinity (and conversely, nor passive ones to femininity), and nor is this dichotomy to be conceived sequentially as a switching; both sexual identities can exist simultaneously within each gender, such that sexual difference can no longer be aligned along the biological binary of male/female and therefore active female desire can be conceived on its own terms. The employment of the fantasy scenario also allows for interpretations outside of phallogentric fetishistic and Oedipal scenarios, such that as textual positions

³³ These enigmas being the origin of the subject, of sexuality and of sexual difference.

become more mobile and fluid so do textual meanings. However, it also – by mobilising desire and identification to such an extent – makes it difficult to assign determinate positions of desire and identification within any scenario, thus problematising the symptomatic interpretation of films in terms of underlying psychoanalytic scenarios and ideological functions; this result seeming to negate the possibility – necessity, even – of any challenge to filmic representation of gender. Fantasy theory therefore seems to offer liberation through a denial of a secure ideological function of film, at least in terms of sexual identity (the very terms of the feminist resistance to Hollywood), a problem that Mary Anne Doane recognises:

Fantasy theory's desire is to annihilate an identity which has been oppressive – but to annihilate it by fiat, simply declaring it nonoperational at the level of an indisputable psychical reality of slippage, splitting and failure. However, if this is indeed the case, and texts do operate in this manner vis à vis their spectators, there is no need for feminist criticism.

(Doane, 1989: 145)

And if it is not to be presumed that filmic representation plays no part in the formation of sexual identity, then the issue arises of those other (extra-textual) factors that contribute to this determination, and also of the other axes of identity that the ideological function of film might be conceived along – race and class, for example. It is for this reason that film studies begins to shift attention away from purely textual and gender-oriented approaches – with the function of the critic here having been undermined – towards the social determinates of textual meaning: how are films made to mean in the contexts within which they are viewed and by the audiences who view them? This movement can be conceived as one away from the activity of interpretation by the critic – the audience by proxy *qua* 'spectator' – towards the conditions of interpretation and the interpretations carried out by the actual audience. Film studies here takes up concepts from cultural studies and post-colonial theory, as well as employing a more empirical ethnographic methodology to address these issues. However, this is not to suggest that there is a clean break here, that there is no overlap in theoretical outlook or that a consolidation of these approaches is not possible, as I will now explore, in order to set out the terrain on which my theory of the act of viewing will be developed and indicate the possibility of consolidating these various

conceptions of the viewer that have emerged throughout film theory.

Beyond the Mobile Spectator

Stacey responds to the perceived shortcomings that arise in the wake of fantasy theory with her claim that 'feminist film criticism needs to develop a theorisation of how identities are fixed through particular social and historical discourses and representational practices, outside, as well as inside, the cinema' (1994: 31-32). This entailed an engagement with the theories developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies during the 1980s, with their emphasis on the social production of meaning and the role of agency in this process. This approach provides an alternative to textual determinism and the interpretative readings that follow from this by proposing that a text does not fix meaning and thus the position of the audience in relation to the text, but can be contested depending on the historical, racial, sexual, class and subcultural identity of the audience. Therefore dominant ideological meanings can be contested through an active process of meaning production: texts don't determine their meaning, nor their use (Hall, 1992). It is for this reason that more emphasis is placed on the context and identity of the audience and their use of texts, with ethnographic research used to gather information about these factors.

It is apparent then that there is a split between the spectator as conventionally conceived by psychoanalytic film theory and the spectator that appears through the ethnographic research of cultural studies, with the former determined textually and the latter socially as the audience. Some critics, such as Doane, seek to maintain the distinction and separation between the two, regarding the female spectator 'as a concept, not a person' (Doane, 1989: 142), and question the compatibility of the two approaches due to a (theoretically-grounded) suspicion of the empirical methods employed and of the theoretical foundation of the cultural studies approach, as outlined here by Doane and Bergstrom:

The difference between a semiotic/psychoanalytic methodology and ethnography in media studies is not simply a difference between text based and audience based analysis, but a profound divergence in epistemological premises and theories of subjectivity. For the ethnographer, the unconscious is not a pertinent factor.

Attempts have since been made to incorporate both spectators and audiences within a theoretical model, but one which still addresses the issues motivating the earlier developments of feminist psychoanalytic film theory, as well as incorporating the insights and possibilities of cultural studies for research potential. For example, Christine Gledhill calls for textual criticism to be sensitive to the social negotiation of meaning as well as its unconscious determination, such that films can be seen as both the site of unconscious ideological meanings, as well as sites of struggle over these meanings. This retains the post-structuralist conception of texts as 'meaning in process' and the psychoanalytic theories of the role of this meaning in constituting subjectivity through identification and other unconscious processes, but combines these with the cultural studies notion of agency, with both text and reading involved in a negotiation of meaning:

Aesthetic constraints intersect with the institutional in conscious or unconscious effort to contain or to open out the possibilities of negotiation. By studying the history and forms of aesthetic practices, codes and traditions as they operate within institutions, by studying narrative forms and genres, or the interpretative frameworks and viewing habits suggested by ethnographic research, the textual critic analyses the *conditions and possibilities of reading*.

(Gledhill, 1999: 174)

Similarly, Annette Kuhn analyses the coincidence of audience and spectator and their relationship in the viewing of 'women's films' such as soap operas and melodramas, arguing that both are addressed through these films, such that 'women – as well as being already formed *for* such representations – are in a sense also formed by them' (Kuhn, 1999: 151). Kuhn calls attention to the fact that both audiences and spectators are constructed by discourses, both within and outside of the film, and for consideration of how these operate in tandem: 'Representations, contexts, audiences and spectators would then be seen as a series of interconnected social discourses, certain discourses possessing greater constitutive authority at specific moments than others' (154).

The distinction between and the potential for the consolidation of the two modes of conceiving and approaching the issue of spectatorship offered here shows up the

shortcomings of some of the more explicit and forthright criticisms of *Screen* Theory, the most influential of which have been those made by both Bordwell and Carroll, who challenge the Althusserian-Lacanian model of subjectivity and spectatorship.³⁴ Though the disconnect here is a fundamental one, regarding underlying philosophical positions, as will become clear, it is apparent that Bordwell's criticisms of 'subject-positioning' theory are wide of the mark: he is critical of the fact that a 'passivity of the spectator ... is suggested ... by the use of the terms like "position" or the "place" of the subject' (1985b: 29), however the spectator-subject 'positioned' by the text is not necessarily the same as the historical spectator (audience) that he is concerned with, who is therefore perfectly able to be an active agent without contradicting the 'passive' textual spectator-subject. Similar to Doane, Judith Mayne recognises that the subject posited by *Screen* Theory 'is a discursive position and not a real person' (Mayne, 1993: 17), referring to this 'real person' as 'the viewer' and using 'spectator' to conceptualise the complex and varied relation between the two, which she believes is an issue that contemporary film theory has avoided at its peril. This has led to an opposing, extremist misconception of spectatorship – as in Bordwell – which forecloses the possibility of an analysis of this relationship, an analysis pursued in the work Mayne, Gledhill and Kuhn:

Bordwell's critique of film theory in the name of cognitivism ignores the attempt to separate the subject and the viewer, and proceeds as if psychoanalytic theories of the subject and cognitive theories of perception, mapping and knowledge start from the same point of departure.

(Mayne, 1993: 56)

Later in this thesis, I will explore the extent to which these attempts to consolidate reception-oriented and text-centred approaches are useful in addressing some of the shortcomings of Bordwell's theory of narrative comprehension, and how the figure of an 'implied viewer' is useful in drawing together these different conceptions of a viewer.

We can witness in Bordwell's attention to the cognitive aspects of film viewing a return to narratological considerations, a focus largely lost in the project of contemporary film theory, with its concern with uncovering unconscious textual meanings, meanings which 'are there in the text, but appear in disguise – betraying

³⁴ In the next chapter I will outline what they both propose instead of this as well as the value of this alternative.

themselves only in certain cues or clues, which have to be interpreted' (Kuhn, 1990: 92). However, in discarding Theory and interpretation in favour of scientific approaches and historical analysis, I will argue that Bordwell has thrown the baby out with the bathwater, as his theory of narrative comprehension demonstrates in its bracketing of interpretation as irrelevant not only as a legitimate theoretical endeavour, but also as a constituent part of narrative comprehension.

It is this bracketing of interpretation from comprehension that I am challenging throughout this thesis, and in the next chapter I will explore in more detail the reasons for this exclusion following its prominence in contemporary film theory. I will then address the shortcomings inherent in Bordwell's rejection of interpretation by revealing the indeterminacy of the event in film. I instead propose the act of viewing – in terms of narrative understanding – as fundamentally interpretive due to the specific presentation of events in film. In doing so I will return to some of the issues that concerned both the early structuralist theory of Metz as well as the classical film theory that preceded this, using the theories of Frampton and Deleuze to resolve some of the problems involved in theorising the specificity of film narrative and its presentation of the narrative event, exploring the implications of this for the act of viewing narrative.

Chapter 3

Interpreting Narrators

In this chapter I examine the cognitivist approach to theorising film and the return to issues of narratology in film theory, before examining how best to theorise narrative agency in film in light of Frampton's phenomenological intervention and the ontological foundation of this.

The Cognitivist Turn

With the cultural studies approach turning to conditions of reception, attention turns to the extent to which audiences partake in the activity of the symptomatic interpretation of meaning, which was previously regarded as the domain of the critic. As Mayne states, '[E]thnography becomes a means to situate in the realm of real readers and viewers the possibility of "reading against the grain" as a strategy not limited to textual analysis, but rather part of the reception context itself' (Mayne, 1993: 61). It is therefore the case that notions of the subject, the unconscious and symptomatic meanings are not entirely discarded by the cultural studies-influenced turn to ethnography, motivated as it is by ideological concerns.³⁵

The cognitivist approach does, however, shed this preoccupation with ideology, instead using cognitive psychology to refocus film theory on those areas that both Bordwell and Carroll – the two most vociferous critics of *Screen* Theory and pioneers of the cognitivist approach to film – believe contemporary film theory has tended to overlook: psychological processes such as perception and understanding. One of the central motivating factors in the emergence of cognitive film theory, as I mentioned in the last chapter, was the perceived passivity of the spectator as posited by *Screen*

³⁵ Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake note the similarities between *Screen* Theory and cultural studies here: 'The broad project of CCCS [the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies] was not dissimilar to *Screen*'s, in that they were using Marxist theories of ideology, pre-eminently Althusser's theory of relative autonomy and ideological state apparatuses, to analyse various cultural phenomena' (1988: 57).

Theory, which both Bordwell and Carroll believe does not square with the actual activity of a viewer during the viewing process, activity which cognitive psychology is apparently better able to explain (and more scientifically) than psychoanalysis.

Indeed, the hallmark of the cognitivist approach to film is that it refuses to resort to what it regards as overly complex, convoluted, logically suspect and ultimately unfalsifiable explanations of theoretical problems in film, in terms of unconscious processes, subject formation and ideological positioning, when there are explanations available that don't rely on these concepts and which start from the 'bottom up' to address localised problems that contemporary film theory is perceived to tackle insufficiently (due to its aspirations toward a unified 'Grand Theory,' operating 'top down'). Cognitivism employs a parsimonious 'piecemeal' approach which rejects a recourse to unconscious processes when conscious ones have sufficient explanatory power and are empirically verifiable (hence the appeals to cognitive psychology), with the resultant theories content to remain fragmentary ('piecemeal') – theories rather than Theory:

The contemporary film theorist can, of course, rebuke the piecemeal theorist by noting that his or her system has more theoretical elegance than a series of disjunct, small-scale theories. But that putative elegance is bought at the cost of extravagant ambiguity and vacuous abstraction.

(Carroll, 1988c: 8)

This attitude – the desire to replace the ambiguity and abstraction of contemporary film theory with something more scientific and verifiable – can be found throughout the work of cognitive film theorists.³⁶ These cognitive film theories do not form a unified theory of film viewing (by definition this is precisely something they do not strive for, wishing to avoid Grand Theory), but their aims can be summed up in the following declaration by Bordwell and Carroll in their most comprehensive attack on contemporary film theory and clearest formulation of the project of cognitivism, *Post-Theory* (1996) (the title expressing their belief that Theory is something to be discarded entirely), where they differentiate the stance of cognitivism from a unified theory: '[Cognitivism] seeks to understand human thought, emotion and action by appeal to

³⁶ See also Edward Branigan (1992), Gregory Currie (1995), Joseph Anderson (1996) and Torben Grodal (1997), for example.

processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency' (xvi).

However, this guiding principle of cognitive film theory and the self-conscious theoretical stance in opposition to contemporary film theory as its *raison d'être* makes it vulnerable to the opposite charges that it has too readily dismissed some of the gains of contemporary film theory, in particular the potential value of 'grand' theories of filmic specificity, including those of film-thinking and ontology that I elaborate throughout this thesis.³⁷ I will demonstrate through this thesis that such theories of film enable us to attend to the specific presentation of narrative in film, providing a more accurate conception of the act of viewing and the role of interpretation in this. As Warren Buckland recognises: 'To recognise and break down general theoretical problems into smaller, piecemeal theoretical problems does not involve a rejection of theory, as Bordwell and Carroll suggest, but represents its next stage in development' (144). And in the sense that I am looking at the theoretical problem of the status of the event in film's presentation of narrative and using Frampton's theory of film-thought and Deleuze's ontological conception of the image to do so, this thesis can be regarded in similar terms.

Narrativity versus Narratology

The value of cognitive film theory – for my purposes here – is that it has refocussed analysis away from symptomatic interpretations and toward other meanings involved in the understanding of film. Bordwell's work (1985b) is particularly significant here, providing a cognitive theory of the comprehension of narrative in film, analysing the types of mental processes at work in enabling a viewer to actively piece together the narrative, and the formal and stylistic organisation of the film which cues this activity. Bordwell's focus on narrative comprehension serves as a necessary

37 Frampton (2008: 371-372) rejects Brian Price's (2008: 97-98) accusation that his theory of film as thought constitutes a return of 'Grand Theory,' primarily on the basis that he is interested in descriptions of film as opposed to interpretations. However, aside from the fact Frampton does indeed carry out interpretations in elaborating his theory of film-thinking, as I will look at later in the thesis, I would agree with Price that in many ways the idea of a 'filmind' does constitute a significant movement away from the 'piecemeal' theorising that typifies the Post-Theoretical approach and toward the concern with underlying, unified theories of the nature of film that typifies these grand theories. This quality, which I see as of value in this context, can be found in Deleuze's theory of film too, as I discuss in detail in the next chapter.

corrective to the lack of attention paid to narratology by contemporary film theory, with its emphasis instead on narrativity, which Teresa de Lauretis describes as 'the effect of narrative on the reader/spectator to produce a subject of reading or a subject of vision' (1989: 187), as I described in the last chapter.

Narratology – the study of narrative itself, in terms of formal structure and organisation, as opposed to its subject-effects – was the initial concern of Metz's semiology of film, believing that '*[i]t was precisely to the extent that the cinema confronted the problems of narration that it . . . came to produce a body of specific signifying practices*' (Metz, 1974a: 95), and that he would be able to define the specificity of film in terms of this narrative language and its coding according to the *grande syntagmatique*. As I demonstrated, Metz later came to abandon this project, recognising a multiplicity of codes at work in film, other than just a single narrative code, and that questions of ideology and the psychoanalytic constitution of subjectivity could be explored through the semiotic/linguistic paradigm.

At this juncture narrative was by and large theorised in terms of its positioning of the subject in order to produce an ideological illusion of an unmediated reality and a satisfactory sense of closure, unity and coherence: as Lapsley and Westlake put it, 'narrative cinema offers the illusion of contradiction resolved when in reality it yields nothing of the sort' (1988: 155). However, what tended to be insufficiently attended to in this movement was how narrative was communicated by the film and understood by the viewer on the basis of the on-screen information, the focus instead being on how a film effaces its act of narration and positions the spectator as the enunciator, such that considerations of narrative seem to disappear along with this act of narration. Symptomatic readings sought to expose this process and the ideological consequences of narration masquerading as reality, but did so without consideration of how this masquerade communicates and is understood as a story. De Lauretis summarises this shift that took place following the encounter between semiotic/structuralist film theory and psychoanalysis:

The nexus narrative/subjectivity . . . came to the forefront of film theory, displacing the problematic of a cinematic language or narrative syntax The object of narrative and of film-narrative theory, redefined accordingly, would not be narrative but narrativity, not so much the structure of narrative (its component units and their relations) as its work and effects.

Bordwell articulates this distinction between the study of narrative organisation and understanding (narratology) and its ideological effects (narrativity) in terms of a differentiation between the meaning-making strategies and practices of each (such that we can see a shift in meaning taking place between Metz's first and second semiologies here). Bordwell distinguishes between four different types of meaning that a viewer constructs when they make sense of a film: referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic. Referential meaning is produced when a viewer makes sense of the narrative, when 'the spectator builds up some version of the *diegesis*, or spatio-temporal world, and creates an ongoing story (*fabula*) occurring within it' (Bordwell, 1989: 8). Explicit meaning is more abstract than referential meaning and consists of a 'point' that the story is taken to be explicitly 'stating,' and when this is taken to be 'spoken indirectly' then this meaning moves up a further level of abstraction to implicit meaning: 'Units of implicit meaning are commonly called "themes," though they may also be identified as "problems," "issues," or "questions"' (8-9). Bordwell then isolates symptomatic meaning as something constructed by the viewer 'against' the other meanings, 'meanings that the work divulges "involuntarily" [S]uch meanings are assumed to be at odds with referential, explicit, or implicit ones' (9). He then assigns one of two meaning-making strategies – comprehension or interpretation – to each of these types of meaning: '[T]he activity of comprehension constructs referential and explicit meanings, while the process of interpretation constructs implicit and symptomatic meanings' (*ibid.*), with these strategies involving quite different cognitive processes.

We can see here that Bordwell equates the understanding of narrative in terms of story events with the activity of comprehension, thus excluding the process of interpretation from the understanding of narrative in these terms. I will proceed to demonstrate that this neglects the hermeneutic character of the act of understanding narrative, which follows from the indeterminate status of the event presented by the film.

It is now useful to look at prior theorisations of narrative communication and organisation in film, examining their precedents in literary theory and the extent to which these are applicable to a narratology of film, leading to a discussion of how we might allow for the narrative specificity of film, and thus overcome some of the

shortcomings in Bordwell's approach.

Narrative Communication and Point of View

As I have discussed, it is through a specific engagement with the question of meaning in film that early conceptions of film language in classical film theory become properly interrogated and systematised within Saussurian linguistics, with Metz declaring that '*[t]he fact that must be understood is that films are understood*' (1974a: 145). And with this question of meaning – of how it is produced and how it is understood – comes the question of the origin of meaning, which in the context of narrative film leads to the question of the place (or not, as the case may be) of a narrator and to what extent they are manifest in the film. It is to these questions that any narratology of film must attend, and which we can find an early theorisation of in Metz.

Related to the fact that classical film theory was concerned with representation more than the communication of meaning (Nowell-Smith, 2000: 9), these theories tend to discuss the scene constructed for a viewer in terms of observers rather than narrators. Bordwell labels these early theories 'mimetic' theories of narration in order to emphasise that they 'conceive of narration as the presentation of a spectacle: a showing' (Bordwell, 1985b: 3) which is articulated in terms of an 'invisible observer,' an idea most clearly elaborated by Pudovkin and according to which the viewpoint of the camera mimics that of an invisible observer of the scene, with actions of editing representing shifts of attention (as we have seen with Münsterberg, for example): Pudovkin states that the sequence of images through editing should 'correspond to the natural transference of attention of an imaginary observer' (1958: 71). As Bordwell remarks, this model 'provided classical film theory with a rudimentary conception of narrative representation' (12), but it is not until later theories of film introduce the concept of enunciation that a more sophisticated and explicit theory of narrative communication is developed, with filmic 'showing' reconceptualised as filmic 'telling,' and the mediation that this posits leading to a greater concern with the narrating agent – the one who tells.

Bordwell makes the distinction between diegetic and mimetic theories on the basis that the former 'conceive of narration as consisting either literally or analogically

of verbal activity: a telling' (3).³⁸ As is often the case, Metz's work straddles both periods, with his first semiology – despite his systematic analysis of the structure and process of narrative meaning and his theorisation of film in terms of narrative language – retaining a mimetic basis in that he conceives of the filmic image as a 'pseudopresence' of reality. Metz's significant intervention at this point is that he proposes that it is the arrangement of these images to form a narrative that is coded, thus also introducing a diegetic element in that the analogical images of reality are arranged to tell a story, with the narrative being the signified content (denotation) of the coded segments (signifiers). The narrative is the diegesis 'told' by this arrangement of the signifiers:

[T]he sum of a film's denotation: the narration itself, but also the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative, and consequently the characters, the landscapes, the events, and other narrative elements, in so far as they are considered in their denoted aspect.

(Metz, 1974a: 98)

The question then arises of who is responsible for this narrative discourse – who is its source? In other words, where is the narrator? This is a position necessarily introduced by Metz's theory of narrative as discourse, as he acknowledges:

The impression that *someone is speaking* is bound not to the empirical presence of definite, known, or knowable speaker but to the listener's spontaneous perception of the linguistic nature of the object to which he is listening: because it is speech, someone must be speaking.

(20-21)

Metz identifies this 'speaker' as a '*grand imagier*'³⁹ (grand image-maker) who is responsible for the selection and ordering of the film images, which Metz locates as 'situated somewhere behind the film, and representing the basis that makes the film possible' (21). We have here an early conception of narratorial filmic agency, positing

38 Bordwell references Aristotle in this separation of terms to describe different narrational modes. However, it also has a precedent in narratology – through the work of Gerard Genette – as well as, more specifically, film narratology through Metz (via Étienne Souriau), both of which I will come back to on this point.

39 Metz adopts this term from Albert Laffay (1964: 81).

an external agent responsible for the film, and this is a function which is explored with increasing sophistication throughout subsequent film theory.

Theories of point of view in film form the fulcrum point for many of the subsequent – and often directly competing – theories of film narration, with the question of point of view in film leading 'to a more specific and defined field of endeavour for film narrative theory' (Stam *et al*, 1992: 83) in the wake of the dominance of textual analysis and the shift away from narratology that followed this (narratology returning here with questions of point of view). It is under this banner of the question of point of view in film that enunciative theories are considered in the context of more general narratological concepts, such as narrators, authors and characters, with various theories of narrative agency and definitions of point of view emerging from this. I will now set out these various narratological theories and examine the extent to which they allow for the specificity of film's presentation of narrative, and what may be required in place of them.

Filmic Narrators

What is evident within these studies of filmic point of view is greater attention to the structural and formal organisation of the narrative discourse which controls a viewer's access to the story, revealing 'the different roles and levels involved in transmitting narrative messages' (84), with many of these analyses employing concepts derived from the structural analysis of literary narratives, such as the figure of the narrator. One of the most comprehensive arguments for the necessity of a filmic narrator is provided by Seymour Chatman, elaborating the narratological ideas of Metz. He describes this figure as

the transmitting agency, immanent to the film, which presents the images we see and the sounds we hear. It is not the filmmaker or production team but bears the same relation to those real people as does the narrator to the real author of a novel. Neither is it a voice-over that introduces the action, though that voice-over may be one its devices.

(Chatman, 1990: 211n)

For Chatman a narrator is responsible for the communication of narrative in film, although despite the employment of literary categories here, Chatman does allow for the specificity of a filmic 'showing' (depiction) which he distinguishes from literary 'telling' (description) (1980: 128), but this is not to suggest that this overcomes the problems with his conception of filmic narrators, as will become clear.⁴⁰

A parallel between Chatman's narrator and Metz's *grand imagier* can be identified here, in that both conceptions posit a narrating agent, external to the diegesis, responsible for the presentation of the film.⁴¹ This is a figure proposed by other theories of filmic agency, with Sarah Kozloff echoing Metz with her use of the term

'[I]mage-maker' [which] clearly captures the activity of the off-screen presence – making images – where 'making' is broad enough to encompass all the selecting, organising, shading, and even passive recording processes that go into the creation of a narrative sequence of images and sounds.

(Kozloff, 1988: 44)

For Tom Gunning the filmic narrator organises the different mimetic aspects of narrative discourse in order to tell a story, 'creating a hierarchy of narratively important elements within a mass of contingent details . . . , thus carving a story out of photographed reality' (Gunning, 2004: 474). Gunning's analysis of this narrating agency is more considered and systematic in terms of its treatment of the specificity of film, identifying the different levels on which the cinematic narrator can exert an influence in order to communicate a narrative to the viewer: the selection of objects to be filmed, the arrangement of these objects within the frame, and the ordering of these framed images through the process of editing: 'These three aspects of filmic discourse – the pro-filmic, the enframed image, and editing – almost always work in concert and represent the medication [*sic*] between story and spectator in film. They are how films "tell" stories.

40 Chatman draws on a further distinction within the text here between the narrator ('a *presenter* of the story, . . . a component of the discourse'), and an implied author ('the *inventor* of both the story and the discourse (including the narrator)' (Chatman, 1990: 133)), in order to explain the possibility of unreliable narration in film. I will discuss this in more detail in chapter six, on unreliable narration.

41 Although Chatman claims that his narrator is 'immanent to the film,' he does not, however, sufficiently follow through the consequences of positing an immanent agency, and how this can be reconciled with the 'showing' of film, instead retaining the literary concept of a narrator who does this showing. As will be shown below with Frampton, the former does not necessarily entail the latter, and in fact this 'showing' activity of an agent is incompatible with immanency (involving as it does an extradiegetic showing by an immanent agent), leading Frampton (and others) to reject filmic narrators in favour of a more appropriate model of filmic agency (or 'film-being,' as Frampton puts it).

Taken together, they constitute the filmic narrator' (477).

These accounts of filmic narrators all draw on the work of Gerard Genette, who not only distinguished between discourse and story within narrative, but also introduced a third aspect of narrative, emphasising the importance of narrative agency: '[S]omeone recounting something: the act of narrating in itself' (Genette, 1980: 26). Genette's systematic theorisation of the levels on which this act of narrating can take place has provided a model for the theorisation of narrative agency in film and the various levels of narration, with the filmic narrator regarded as narrating the diegesis of the film, functioning, to use Genette's terminology, as an 'extradiegetic' (228) narrator, the agency of which the various theories claim to locate.

However, this introduction of a narrator – traditionally a literary role – into a theory of point of view is not unproblematic, for 'the narrator does not “see” the events of the fictional world, but recounts them; he or she does not observe from a post within the fictional world, but recalls events from a position outside the fictional universe' (Stam *et al*, 1992: 86). And it is this discrepancy between the visual point of view that film seems to show and the traditional activity of a narrator as an extradiegetic figure, telling a story from a position external to it, that occupies the narratological study of filmic point of view, leading some theorists to dispense with talk of narrators altogether, offering reconceptualisations of point of view and narrative agency in the process, as we shall see.

The central problem of narration in film is therefore to theorise a model of agency – explaining how film seems to be organised to 'tell' a story – compatible with the 'showing' of film (which seems to grant more direct access to the events which constitute the narrative), and how we can conceive of this mediation. Some theorists advocate the limitation, as opposed to the abandonment, of the application of a narrator – with its discursive connotations – to film's mode of address, proposing a different model of filmic agency and mediation.

Narrator Alternatives

In order to account for the fact that film seems to directly show events without the mediation of a narrator, André Gaudreault identifies various levels of narrativity, making a distinction between 'monstration' and narration, with monstration referring to

the mimetic capacity of film to depict events as if they are happening in the present. According to Gaudreault, the narrator is manifest in the editing together of these images, which brings about a temporal manipulation of the natural 'presentness' of the image, such that the narrator creates a narrative in this way:

Only the narrator (= the editor) can inscribe between two shots (by means of cuts and articulation) the mark of its viewpoint, can introduce a guided reading and thereby transcend the temporal oneness which unavoidably constrains the discourse of narration.

(Gaudreault, 1987: 33)

Both of these activities are regulated by a 'meganarrator' which, as a grand image-maker, is 'responsible for the meganarrative – the film itself' (Gaudreault and Jost, 2004: 58). Gaudreault's theory allows for the diegetic activity of the narrator and the mimetic expression of the film image, distinguishing between the communicative mode of each (in a way which Gunning doesn't, for example). However, as Stam *et al* recognise (1992: 116-117), this distinction is problematic in that it allocates monstration to camera-work and narration to editing when in fact many different variables (including camera-work, lighting, sound, etc.) can be utilised in order to guide the viewer, thus constituting narration.

A different conception of narration can be found in the work of Franco Casetti, who draws upon pragmatic theories of language to reconceptualise the narrator as an 'enunciator.' Casetti emphasises that a film does not simply 'tell' a viewer a story (from a position of 'I') but also addresses a viewer as 'you' and refers diegetically to characters as 'he,' with certain shots drawing attention to certain deictic locations in this tripartite structure of address. The enunciator organises these looks and therefore doesn't simply communicate the narrative from an extradiegetic narratorial position but also involves the viewer as an interlocutor within the deictic positions, such that a film is not a closed text to be decoded but, as Buckland paraphrases, 'is necessarily bounded to – or oriented toward – the outside world, and therefore is necessarily open and incomplete' (Buckland, 2000: 60). Casetti's account opens up the agency of the text to the multiple deictic locations involved in enunciation, relating it to the context of viewing and the activity of the viewer (issues which I grant primary importance in my theory of the act of viewing, as will emerge):

At every moment, the film indicates a point where it can anchor its own moves and find a response; it directs its looks and voices, beyond the limits of the scene, toward someone who presumably (or rather, pretendingly) has to collect them and to answer back. Briefly stated, the film *offers itself* for viewing – instituting its own destination as a goal to be reached, or a backboard on which to rebound again.

(Casetti, 1983: 24)

Casetti's theory, however, is firmly rooted within an anthropomorphic model of narrative agency, which Metz, in his most recent work, rejects. In place of this Metz proposes a theory of 'impersonal enunciation,' according to which enunciation in film does not involve personal pronouns, with Metz claiming that '[p]ersonal pronouns can only lead toward *deictic conception of enunciation in cinema*, which in my opinion is not suitable to the realities of film' (Metz, 1995: 141). Instead, Metz claims that film – in its communicative function – does not refer to any deictic position ('I,' 'he,' or 'you') within or outside of the text but only refers internally as a reflexive assertion: 'Reflexive, rather than deictic, it does not give us any information about the outside of the text, but about a text that carries in itself its source and its destination' (Metz, 1991: 762). Metz's account therefore incorporates the enunciator (the narrating agent) within the enunciated text itself, positing the agent as immanent in this manner:

[T]he body of the text, that is, a *thing*, which will never be an I, which is not in charge of any exchange with some You, but which is a source of images and sounds, and nothing else. *The film is the enunciator*, the film as source, acting as such, *oriented* as such, the film as activity.

(150)

Metz's theory of impersonal enunciation has the advantage of negating the need to place an agent outside of the text, but it remains within a linguistic paradigm, the key difference being Metz's application of the linguistic concept of anaphora (referring within the text) as opposed to deixis (referring to external sources and origins). The value of this immanency and the limitations of this linguistic paradigm will become clear below, in my discussion of other theories of immanent film narration. But for now it is appropriate to look at some approaches which offer alternatives to the use of linguistic categories in theorising narrative agency in film, in order that we can see what

they have to offer and how any shortcomings may be overcome with theories of immanency, which will in turn help us to theorise the indeterminacy of film narrative that I locate.

Non-Linguistic Narrative Agency

Non-linguistic theories of narrative agency explore alternative conceptions of the manner in which film presents itself as narrative and the agency involved in this, avoiding reference to both narrators and linguistics as a whole, arguing that these categories are inappropriate to film and that film narration is better theorised in other terms in order to avoid some of the aforementioned problems. Genette himself argued against conceiving film in such linguistic terms, going as far as to claim that 'film could not, properly speaking, be a narration, because it is not a linguistic being' (paraphrased by Metz, 1995: 145). But how then to conceive of the relationship between cinematic showing and narrative agency?

George Wilson states that '[s]ince verbal telling [in literature] and cinematic showing are such very different narrational procedures, the issues that get raised in each case are not at all identical' (1986: 100). He instead approaches point of view in terms of the access to narrative information that it enables and the manner in which viewers judge this information, paying attention to both the guiding agency of the narration, which constructs a certain viewpoint on the narrative, and the psychological processes involved in responding to this information in order to construct the narrative: '[F]ilm guides us to a way of seeing its fictional constituents, and the meaning a spectator discovers in these constituents is not detachable from the determinate point of view from which they have been shown' (6), with the viewer judging what is shown – the knowledgeability of this information – in terms of epistemic distance, reliability and authority (4-5). Point of view therefore provides an epistemic base, which in the novel would be provided by a narrator, but for Wilson 'it is dubious that fiction film generates any comparably general and central concept of a narrating figure' (8), mainly due to the mimetic characteristic of the filmic image and the viewer's perception of this. Wilson refers to 'an almost perfect transparency between the audience and the fictional events and objects they see' (53) and the fact that 'it is to be make-believe for them that they see the items of the world directly' (54).

Wilson then attributes the feeling of being guided by the narration to the actions of an implied author, rather than to a narrator, describing how a viewer has recourse to this figure of 'a *version* – an implicit projection – of the actual film maker *implied* by the work' (136) when 'we often wish to describe our impression of how we have been guided, played upon, and moved by a craftsman of the type we infer' (134), such that for Wilson agency is only at issue when it is felt by a viewer, and then it can be attributed to an implied creator. But this substitution of terms, whilst avoiding discursive connotations, is unable to avoid the problems that come with anthropomorphising an external figure responsible for the narration (which I set out below). Wilson, however, does later offer a more nuanced account of the mimetic element of filmic narration and how this should be conceived in relation to narrative agency and viewers' understanding of this showing, leading him toward the immanent theories of filmic narration that I locate as significant in conceptualising the issue of narrative presentation in a manner which avoid the problems of narrative agency that I am outlining here, with implications for theorising the act of viewing, as I will explore.

Bordwell offers a different theory of narrative agency, rejecting the communications model – according to which narrative is communicated from a sender to a receiver – in favour of the idea that cues within the plot of the film (*syuzhet*) prompt viewers to make certain inferences in their construction of the story (*fabula*), such that '[t]he fabula is not an unmarked enunciative act; it is not a speech act at all but a set of inferences' (Bordwell, 1985b: 51).⁴² Instead of regarding narration as the product of a narrator, Bordwell argues that narration is a process which does not require such an anthropomorphic agent as its source; through the combination and organisation of *syuzhet* and style (i.e. what story information is revealed and how) the viewer is cued to construct the fabula, which Bordwell believes 'presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message' (62).

Bordwell rejects the need to posit an external, anthropomorphic figure responsible for the narration (such as an implied author or narrator) because for him the functions of these figures can be attributed to the narration itself, such that Bordwell's text-immanent theory sees agency as immanent within the process of narration, which

42 There is a similarity here with the distinction between discourse and story, although Bordwell's adoption of alternative terms indicates his desire to escape the linguistic dimension of these concepts and return to Formalist concerns of deformation, style and narrative logic, believing that, contrary to Chatman and Genette, 'the fabula/syuzhet distinction does not replicate the *histoire/discours* distinction held by enunciation theories' (1985b: 51).

'sometimes suppresses information, it often restricts our knowledge, it generates curiosity, it creates a tone, and so on. To give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in an anthropomorphic fiction' (*ibid.*). Bordwell does recognise that occasionally the narration will signal a narrator, for example, in art cinema narration, where the narration tends to appear self-conscious and '[t]he “invisible witness” canonized by Hollywood precept becomes overt' (210). According to Bordwell, this effect of agency and intention is felt when the narration draws attention to itself by deviating from the norms of classical narration to such an extent that it is felt as if the narration itself is commenting on the story and drawing the viewer's attention to 'processes of fabula construction' (212). It is in these instances that the viewer feels the influence and presence of a narrator as 'an overriding consciousness' (225). And even in these cases 'this sort of narrator does not create the narration; the narration, appealing to historical norms of viewing, creates the narrator' (62). But this commitment to the placing of narration before narrator commits Bordwell to granting anthropomorphic functions to narration, in which case why the distinction? As Gunning remarks, '[w]hat he has excluded in theory re-emerges in his practice' (Gunning, 2004: 480). A similar point is made by Gaudreault and Jost, who criticise Bordwell's attribution of human characteristics to an abstract process of narration, asking

[w]hat use is it to emphasize further the abstraction of narration, by naming it “narration” rather than “narrator,” in a first movement, and thus distance it even more from the authorial instance, the manifest empirical author, the concrete author, if it is only, with a swing back of the pendulum, to grant this abstract instance with some concrete characteristics, which could only apply to a concrete author?

(2004: 62)

Chatman also objects to this theory of agency without an agent (narration without narrator), pointing out the semantic problems involved in such an assertion:

[I]t is one thing to argue that 'gracefulness' is a property of an aesthetic object and quite another to make the object, 'narration' (rather than the agent, 'narrator'), the subject of the thing that *performs* things. Such verbs, by definition, presuppose agency. Objects and processes may have qualities, but only agents can do things.

(1990: 127)

He also points out that Bordwell attributes features to narration – to a process – that only agents can have, such as knowledge: 'To say that it is “knowledgeable” is to say that it *knows* something, but if it knows something it must be more than an object or a process – it must be an agent' (128).

However, Katherine Thomson-Jones (2007) counters this criticism, objecting to Chatman's view that narration necessarily involves a narrating agent. She argues that it does not make sense to conceive of a filmic narrator as fictional, a supposition that leads to Chatman's distinction between a (fictional) narrator and a (real) implied author, as this leads to the idea that this 'showing' itself is also a fiction and thus not accepted as real by a viewer. Thomson instead follows Wilson's argument against fictional showing here, to conclude that 'the actual showing of a fictional story does not automatically invoke a fictional showing' and so 'the narration of a fictional story does not automatically entail a fictional narration of the story' (91), such that the narration can be attributed to a real author, and occasionally involving the mediation of a fictional narrator, believing – with Bordwell on this point – that 'the presence of the cinematic narrator can be as much dependent on a particular film narrative as is the presence of a character or omniscient voiceover narrator' (*ibid.*). Wilson's argument will be elaborated in more detail below, as it is particularly relevant in relation to immanent theories of filmic agency. Unlike Thomson-Jones (although acknowledged within her article), Wilson explores the other side of the argument against fictional showing: a fictional agent (the narrator) presenting the fictional as actual (i.e. the fictional showing of an actual story, as opposed to the actual showing of a fictional story), and how this agent can be conceptualised. And this is precisely what is required: a more comprehensive and considered account of immanent filmic agency if it is to be accepted as a credible alternative to 'anthropomorphic fictions' and discursive figures.

Frampton's model of a 'filmind' helps us to overcome some of the problems and questions that have arisen in these debates of cinematic 'showing' and agency, able to account for the guiding agency of a film without recourse to either linguistic models or mimetic/diegetic conceptions of film narrative, incorporating the agent within the film itself as an immanent 'film-being.' This has consequences for a conceptualisation of narrative articulation and the activity of a viewer in understanding narrative.

Like Bordwell, Frampton is critical of the employment of anthropomorphic figures in the theorisation of narration in film, regarding the communication model of

narrative – with its assumption of sender and receiver – as unnecessary in theorising filmic narrative agency, in that it postulates an external figure responsible for the narrative. Frampton regards this as a remnant of the linguistic heritage of narratology, proposing an altogether different of filmic articulation in its place, one which avoids the problems of Bordwell's 'agency without agent' theory, and which has the potential to also address some of the shortcomings of Bordwell's model of narrative comprehension. However, this potential is not explored by Frampton, but is an area I explore throughout this thesis.

Indicating his frustration with the tendency to fall back on literary models of narration, with their increasingly stretched formulations of narrating figures, Frampton states that '[w]hen narratology is moving towards impersonal invisible “voices” it is time to replace the narrational path laid down for film by literary theory with something more suitable' (2006: 36). However, narrational concerns are only really a starting point for Frampton, to the extent that he fails to follow through the implications of his model of 'film-thinking' for theorising narrative; it is this task that my thesis takes up, elaborating a theory of 'narrative film-thinking.'

This is Frampton's point of departure, along with previous attempts to provide a phenomenology of film experience and theorise filmic agency through this. He recognises a tendency toward conceptualising the unique phenomenology of filmic agency in the phenomenological film theory of Vivian Sobchack.

Intentional Film-Being

Sobchack draws on the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to conceptualise film as 'the expression of experience by experience' (Sobchack, 1992: 3), by which she means to describe how film manifests the intentionality of consciousness, providing the viewer with a unique experience of this intentionality. The fundamental premise of phenomenology is that consciousness is intentional – it is always conscious *of* something – and therefore consciousness is constituted by the phenomenal states that it experiences: the subject is 'always intending toward and in relation to an object' (18). Consciousness therefore involves the mediation of its activity – intending – toward its object: 'The invariant correlational structure of consciousness thus necessarily entails the *mediation* of an *activity* and an *object*' (*ibid.*). For example, the experience of

perception consists of an activity which mediates the object of this perception, which in being perceived becomes an object of consciousness. This object then becomes an expression of consciousness, for this is how consciousness is manifest. There is always an act of consciousness that mediates its relation to its object: this is the experience that constitutes consciousness. However, this experience can also be expressed, such that this expression (of experience) becomes the act of consciousness, with perception as the object of consciousness, rather than its mediation. This reversal of perceptual experience takes place through language, for example, enabling experience to be communicated. For Sobchack this reversal also takes place through film, although using a much more direct language, for it

uses the *structure of direct experience* (the 'centering' and bodily situating of existence in relation to the world of objects and others) as the basis for the structures of its language. Thus as a form of human communication, the cinema is like no other.

(5)

According to Sobchack the experience of film is twofold: the viewer both sees the scene before them as a visible object for vision, which 'addresses us as the expressed perception of an anonymous, yet present, "other"' (9), such that '[w]e ... perceive a world *within* the immediate experience of an "other"' (10), and also sees this view as a viewing view; as a viewing subject of vision which the viewer experiences as a world '*without*' 'the immediate experience of an "other" ... as immediate experience mediated by an "other"' (*ibid.*):

For [Sobchack] ... film is both presentational and representational, both a viewing subject and a visible object for the filmgoer.... In both seeing and expressing its seeing, film is not just a view (an image or a scene) for Sobchack, it is a 'viewing view'. The viewing view *presents* (the body-subject of vision), the moving sound-image *represents* (the visible objective body for vision).

(Frampton, 2006: 41)

Frampton describes this 'viewing view' of film as 'a new *mode of attention*' (*ibid.*), for it opens up new experiences for the viewer: 'Watching a film, we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as the moved' (Sobchack, 1992: 10).

The duality of the experience of film can be related to the reversible structure of perception and its relationship with expression: the represented object for vision through '*the perception* (act of consciousness) *of* (mediation) *expression* (object of consciousness)' (18-19), and the presented viewing subject of vision through '*the expression* (act of consciousness) *of* (mediation) *perception* (object of consciousness)' (19). Sobchack endeavours to account for the complex interplay between these relations as they function in film, offering a theory of how they are negotiated in the act of viewing, where previous theories have 'assumed as given the act of viewing in its totality' (*ibid.*). By Sobchack's account, film theory has tended to neglect various parts of the relationship that exists between expression and perception in film:

[F]ormalist theory can be linked to a focus on the cinematic *expression* (of perception) – perception here represented as the suppressed part of the entire relation; realist theory to a focus on the cinematic *perception* (of expression) – expression here represented as the suppressed part of the entire relation; and contemporary theory to a focus on the mediating copula (perception) *of* (expression) – with perception and expression represented as the suppressed part of the entire relation.

(*ibid.*)

Sobchack's approach is significant because it consolidates the many facets of film's addressing of the viewer by organising them into a reversible structure of expression and perception in order to account for how the viewer experiences film, an experience that, according to Sobchack, previous film theory has only presupposed: '[F]ilm theory has assumed rather than accounted for the film experience's intrasubjective and intersubjective nature and its transitive function or performance' (20). For Sobchack, film theory 'has assumed *the fundamental intelligibility of the film experience*' (*ibid.*), but has not explained *how* the film experience is intelligible as experience. Addressing us through the language of (embodied) experience, film is intelligible as an expression of experience by experience; not told or shown to us – the viewer – but experienced by us as both a perception of expression and an expression of perception. Film is more than an object of consciousness (which, according to Sobchack, 'is a possibility that has not been entertained' (*ibid.*)): Sobchack regards the film itself as a viewing subject, as a certain type of film-being. This film-being seems

to have the potential to provide an alternative to the narratorial figures discussed above, theorising film-being on its own terms, but as Frampton makes clear this phenomenological conception of film as a viewing subject is not entirely coherent, nor adequate for the type of being that film manifests.

Regarding film as having subjectivity (like Sobchack does), as 'a film-subject which "experiences" a "world" from a subjective viewpoint' (Frampton, 2006: 41), goes some way toward theorising film narrative as issuing from the film(-subject) itself and not shown or narrated by some external figure: '[F]ilm images . . . representing the visible as originating in and organised by an individual, centred subject' (42). However, this conception of film-being as subjective remains problematically anthropomorphic for Frampton.

Sobchack refers to the film-subject as having a body – as a film-body. She does this to emphasise that movement is a part of its intentionality: 'Its viewing-view is always in motion' (Sobchack, 1992: 206). For Sobchack, following Merleau-Ponty, this physicality is part of the (perceptual) intentionality of consciousness, because the body is present to perception as perception is to the body: '[T]he film's "body" is always implicated in its vision, just as our whole being as embodied informs what we see and makes us present to the visible even as the visible appears present to us' (133). The perception of film is embodied according to Sobchack. This embodiment involves the presence of a body 'off screen,' out of the frame, that intends the experience on screen: viewers 'see intentional images and sounds and so presume or feel a "presence" that provides them' (Frampton, 2006: 44), yet they do not see it and can never do so. It is this separation between body and the film-world in Sobchack's account, which follows from regarding film-being as embodied, that Frampton is critical of: '[C]onceptualizing film as a body *separates* it from the film world – *this is the main problem with translating phenomenology to film*. We are separate yet mingled with our world, but film "*is*" its world' (43). By giving film a body – a result of the anthropomorphic application of phenomenological categories to film – immediately the film-being is separated from its world, and this separation makes it impossible to account for film's creation of its world: '[Sobchack's] film-other intends toward its own conscious creation or the world – even though the "world" is its own conscious creation' (44).

Conceptualizing this film-being as an anthropomorphised intentional subject in the manner that Sobchack does involves positing 'an autonomous, anonymous, embodied subject which "experiences" a world' (*ibid.*), and this 'experience' is hard to

square with a film's world being its own creation. According to Frampton what is required in place of this intentional film-being that experiences a world is an intentional film-being that *is* its world. So although Sobchack gives film the status of an intentional thinking subject that can be said to experience – as opposed to merely represent – reality, this thinking remains problematically human-like for Frampton: 'Phenomenology concerns human engagement with reality. Film-being is not human, and the film-world is not real' (Frampton, 2006: 46). Conceiving of the thinking of film as human-like does not adequately reflect the (uniquely filmic) ability and tendency of film to immanently 'think' its world:

Film cannot show us human thinking, it shows us 'film thinking.' Film is not a human-like mind, it is, uniquely, a 'filmind.' Sobchack's film subject 'experiences' a 'world' from a subjective viewpoint; filosophy's filmind *is* the film-world, though from a transsubjective no-place.

(47)

'Filosophy' is the title that Frampton gives this 'study of film as thinking,' and the 'filmind' is the film-being that 'thinks,' manifest in this film-thinking:

Filosophy is a study of film as thinking, and contains a theory of both film-being and film form. The 'filmind' is filosophy's concept of film-being, the theoretical originator of the images and sounds we experience, and 'film-thinking' is its theory of film form, whereby an action of form is seen as the dramatic thinking of the filmind.

(6)

This idea of the filmind and film-thinking is one that will figure prominently in my future elaboration of the act of viewing, due to the fact that, together with Deleuze's ontology of the film image (which I elaborate in the next chapter), it enables us to avoid the above problems in theorising narrative agency and allow for the specific presentation and agency of narrative in film, both with significant consequences for a theorisation of viewer agency in the act of viewing. It is therefore appropriate to look in more detail at the thinking that underlies this concept.

Film-Thinking and Agency

Frampton emphasises that the filmind is not some intentional mind behind, outside of or external to the film, invisibly observing, manipulating, showing, telling, or experiencing the film-world, because 'filmosophy wishes to place the origin of film-thinking "in" the film itself. There is no "external" force, no mystical being or invisible other. It is the film that is steering its own (dis)course' (*ibid.*). There is no separation between the filmind and the world that it thinks:

In filmosophy the film does not have experience of things, it just has film-experience, or not even that, just film-thoughts. We might say that the filmind has a 'film-experience' of the objects and characters – it can never be separated from the images and sounds it shows. The filmind thinks an image which includes its attention and 'objects' as one.

(89)

The film-world that is represented therefore cannot be separated from its presentation by this thinking of the filmind – it exists only as this thinking: as the intentionality of the filmind: '[T]he filmind simultaneously creates and *refigures* the film-world' (80). And as the film-world is inseparable from the thinking of the filmind, so the filmind exists only in its thinking of the film-world, and is immanent within this: '[I]t both intends towards and "is" the film-world' (90).

Frampton recognises a previous attempt to conceptualise the immanent agency of film (an issue which Bordwell does not concern himself with) in the later work of Wilson, who considers film as a fictional showing of actual events. Wilson (2005) reconfigures Metz's *grand imagier* as a '*perceptual enabler*.' He takes this latter term from Levinson's theory of narrative agency (1996) and uses it to describe the role of the great image-maker, drawing on Levinson's description of the distinction between a 'fictional showing of fictional events in movies, on the one hand, and actual showings of the movie images, on the other' (189). According to Levinson, the perceptual enabler 'presents, or gives perceptual access to, the story's sights and sounds' (1996: 252), presenting 'the movie itself' (Frampton, 2006: 37), as distinct from a fictional showing of fictional events. Wilson develops Levinson's 'Fictional Showing Hypothesis' (Wilson, 2005: 189) to take into consideration the fact that a viewer – according to

Wilson – does *not* imagine themselves to be at the place from which a certain perspective is offered (by the perceptual enabler), a supposition Wilson finds implicit within Levinson's hypothesis, although they do imagine seeing it from this perspective.

At this point the distinction between these two imaginary positions may not seem too obvious, however, a look at the type of imaginary position that the viewer adopts in relation to the images before them should help to clarify this. Wilson describes the simultaneous yet effectively mutually exclusive “content” of shots in fiction film. Let us signal the rough distinction by saying that a shot is a *motion picture shot* of the actual objects and events before the camera and that the same shot is a *movie story shot* of the fictional characters and their fictional behaviour' (194). Using this distinction Wilson is able to explain how the viewer regards the events before them as real without actually imagining themselves as a real witness of events:

Although an image track actually consists, as we well know, of a selection of motion picture shots of actors and actresses acting, we imagine and are intended to imagine that we are shown a selection of motion picture shots of fictional characters and their deeds.

(*ibid.*)

That is, the viewer imagines that the images before them are motion picture shots – and therefore 'naturally iconic images' (195) – 'but as motion picture shots for which the fictions they construct are real' (197). This means the viewer does not imagine themselves to be an actual witness to the scenes on screen before them, but imagines that they are seeing these scenes 'photographically': '*through or by means of the* [*transparent*]' motion picture photographs' (195), although – significantly – 'without dramatic mediation' (194).

The important point here for Frampton is that Wilson does not believe that regarding 'movie story shots' as 'motion picture shots' of fictional events (by which these fictional events become real for the viewer) necessarily entails an awareness – or even concern for – the *origin* of these images: '[The viewer does] not imagine anything in particular about what makes their existence possible' (195). Wilson means to describe how the viewer does not regard these imagined motion picture shots as actually filmed – this evocation of motion picture shots is only meant to account for the exact way in which 'viewers imagine the motion picture shots in fiction films “as naturally iconic

images” (*ibid.*); this implication Wilson identifies as a terminological side-effect:

If 'being a motion picture shot' is taken to entail 'photographed by a motion picture camera,' then perhaps we should say something like this: viewers imagine the motion picture shots in fiction films 'as naturally iconic images,' where this new concept is explained in terms of aesthetically salient attributes of motion picture shots that do not directly implicate the property of being made by a particular kind of picture-generating device.

(*ibid.*)

How these images came about, and for what reason, remains indeterminate for the viewer. It is enough for the viewer that 'the presentation and ordering of actual motion picture shots in a fiction film have the function of fictionally enabling [them] to see the progression of the fictional narrative, albeit to see this “photographically” (*ibid.*). It is therefore the case that, as Frampton puts it, 'filmgoers do not need to imagine an agent who shows us the film' (2006: 38).

Wilson's theory of a fictional showing of actual events is significant, as Frampton recognises, because

Wilson argues that, philosophically, we *can* imagine scenes without a determinate 'place' of perspective, and uses this argument to forward the idea that film can issue images without needing a *narrational location or body*. This is a very important step – *to bring the conceptualisation of film-being back 'into' the film, and not suggest an external perspective*. For Wilson this enabling-being should be seen as part of the film work; he thus returns the intention of film-being to the 'film' itself.

(*ibid.*)

This 'very important step' is only implicit within Wilson's later theory, one which Frampton locates as significant and builds upon, enabling him to allow for a filmic agency without recourse to an external perspective. The type of film-being that Frampton crafts from this initial starting point departs significantly from previous conceptions of implied authors and filmic narrators, as I have already indicated, and therefore offers a different take on related issues such as narrative organisation and unreliable narration because of the manner in which this agency operates and the ontology of the filmic image within which this agency is immanent, as will become

clear.

Frampton takes further the idea of a film-being effectively having an indeterminate perspective, with 'film issuing from itself' (*ibid.*), proposing that not only can the film 'think' subjectively, as if⁴³ from the perspective of one of the characters, via a point of view shot for example, but that film (or the 'filmind' to use Frampton's terminology) can also think '*from itself*' (85). This grants an autonomy to film-being itself that Frampton believes has not been recognised, or at least fully developed, in the work of previous film theorists: 'Many authors cannot make the leap to autonomous film. Even George Wilson, who gets close, cannot see that film may just be thinking *from itself*, and, only if it feels like it, through or "as" characters' (*ibid.*). And more drastically than this might suggest, this film-thinking (from itself) is always primary: 'the filmind *always* thinks its *own* thoughts, whether they look like the thoughts of a character or not' (*ibid.*) (the first emphasis in this quote is mine). This 'double authoring, where personal narratives are enclosed by the larger filmind' (*ibid.*) has consequences for how we are to regard the distinction between objective and subjective perspectives and shots in film, reconfiguring them as both transsubjective, a term which Frampton uses to describe how the filmind can be both objective and subjective. But properly speaking, it is neither: it does not depict the film-world from the subjective perspective of one of the characters within it, with its thinking belonging to a character-subject, because 'the filmind always thinks its *own* thoughts, whether they look like the thoughts of a character or not' (85). And nor does it depict it 'objectively' from outside of this world, for '[t]he filmind is not outside the film, it is the film' (86).

The filmind is able to think in relation to the character on various levels, from a more 'objective' position ('the film thinking about or towards the character'), to a more 'subjective' position, with the film 'thinking for the character, and the film thinking as the character (point of view)' (86). It can also combine these positions: it 'can be both itself and the character, objective and subjective – such as when we see a drunk character *through* a drunken swaying defocused haze that would be their point of view' (87). But ultimately it is always the case that the filmind 'filters this point of view through its own intention' (*ibid.*): it is never purely objective or subjective, and therefore 'it will always remain transsubjective' (*ibid.*).

This transsubjective film-being provides an alternative to the problematic

43 This being an important qualification here, as will become clear.

models of narration discussed above, because as a concept it does not posit a determinate narratorial location outside of the diegesis, but reintegrates and reconceptualises this source of the film-world as an agent which 'operates from a uniquely transsubjective *non-place*' (*ibid.*), immanent within this film-world. The result of this conceptualisation is that 'all narrational agents are grounded in the film itself, in a singular intention that gives us scene-settings and character thoughts, objective viewpoints and character experience' (99), and all from the perspective of the filmind, for 'every image in film is intended from a certain perspective' (137). Frampton's theory of a 'filmind' has the potential to free film theory from the entanglements involved in theorising the place of subjectivity and agency in narration by offering a new concept of film-being and of film-thought, which can usefully be combined with Deleuze's filmic image-ontology to reveal a fundamental narrative indeterminacy within this narrative agency.

Before examining in more detail this narrative agency of film-thinking, which I propose as 'narrative film-thinking,' and a viewer's response to this, it is first of all necessary to look at how narrative is defined in terms of events and how these are presented in film. I will then examine the consequences of the indeterminacy of the event that I locate here for a consideration of narrative film-thinking and the interpretive activity that it prompts in the act of viewing.

Chapter 4

Theorising Narrative Indeterminacy

In this chapter I will outline the importance of the event in constituting narrative before looking more specifically at how we may theorise the presentation of events in film, using Deleuze's ontology of the film image to demonstrate how events are indeterminate within this presentation. I will then examine the extent to which Iser's idea of literary indeterminacy may be useful in conceptualising the act of viewing and the determination of narrative by a viewer.

Defining the Narrative Event

As I mentioned in the introduction, it is commonly regarded that a sequence of events is an invariant and defining feature of narrative, such that it is this feature that enables us to recognise narrative, although different definitions emphasise various aspects of this sequence: Gerald Prince locates the temporal ordering of events as a constituent feature of narrative, claiming that 'any narrative is the representation of real or fictive situations and events in a time sequence' (1982: 179), as do Willie van Peer and Chatman: 'Narratives are *texts* about events structured in time' (2001: 2). Jakob Lothe stresses the situatedness of these events in space as well as time, and the linking of these events in space and time to form a chain: 'A narrative presents a chain of events which is situated in time and space' (2000: 3). Others emphasise the necessity of causation in linking events in a chain, such that mere succession is not enough to constitute a sequence of events as a narrative. Onega and Landa make a similar point with their claim that '[a] narrative is a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way' (1996: 3), and in relation to film John Ellis states that narration 'moves forward by a succession of events linked in a causal chain' (1989: 74). I follow these latter definitions in that I am exploring how the inference of causality enables viewers to determine narrative events within actions through a process of segmentation, overcoming the indeterminacy of the event in film.

Indeed, I believe that the status and constitution of the event is an area that has been under-theorised in film narratology. As Michael Toolan recognises, “‘event itself is really a complex term, presupposing that there is some recognized state or set of conditions, and that something happens, causing a change to that state’ (2001: 6), and as we shall see, this determination is particularly complex when it comes to film.

It is worth looking at some more detailed narratological definitions of the event before looking at how the event has been theorised within narratological approaches to film and to what extent these take into account the unique status of the event in filmic representation. Mieke Bal defines a narrative event as ‘the transition from one state to another state’ with these events being actions performed (caused or experienced) by agents, who are thus constituted as actors as a result of their involvement in events (1997: 5). And Chatman states that ‘[e]vents are either *actions (acts)* or *happenings*. Both are changes of state. An action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects [an agent]’ (1978: 44). Lothe also employs a similar definition of the event in relation to transition and characters: ‘An event is an integral part of the action: it involves a change or a transition from one situation to another, . . . and this transition is usually caused or experienced by one or more characters’ (2000: 72). Lothe then claims that ‘[t]o insist on any absolute distinction between state (as something static) and action (as part of a process) is difficult, for a process is usually composed of many complementary states and moments’ (*ibid.*), and it is here that we can begin to see a potential indeterminacy of the event, with this problematic distinction between states and process (transition) becoming particularly significant when looking at film’s depiction of narrative, especially in light of Deleuze’s theorisation of the film image in terms of duration and movement. This therefore has important implications for the indeterminacy of narrative in film.

We can see, then, that the event is somewhat fluid in that it is not a state but is defined precisely in opposition to this: as a process (as Bal notes, ‘[t]he word “transition” stresses the fact that an event is a process, an alteration’ (1997: 182)). However, at the same time this process must be segmented in order to constitute a recognisable and definable narrative event. As Todorov puts it, ‘the changes, characteristic of narrative, cut time into discontinuous unities; the time of pure duration is opposed to the sequential time of events’ (1971: 38). I argue in this thesis that film – consisting of sequences of this ‘pure duration’ – partially cuts time into discontinuous unities of action (as segments of duration), such that there is no neat opposition between

events (unities of action) and duration in film. I propose that a viewer enacts a further segmentation of these sequences into narrative events, with the organisation of sequences in a film affecting a viewer's determination of the narrative. I will demonstrate that this presentation of the event, which I elaborate as narrative film-thinking, and the viewer activity that it prompts is medium-specific and that previous theories do not attend to this fact. An example of this can be seen in Bordwell's theory of narrative comprehension.

Bordwell and Narrative Comprehension

Bordwell utilises theories from constructivist psychology and aesthetic theories of perception to conceptualise an active viewer. According to this conceptualisation, a viewer is active because they receive incomplete sensory stimuli and so construct a more complete experience from these cues: perception is active because it involves inferences: 'The organism *constructs* a perceptual judgement on the basis of nonconscious *inferences*' (Bordwell, 1985b: 31). Bordwell applies these psychological theories of perception to the perception of film, regarding his work as a continuation of E. H. Gombrich's (1977) theory of aesthetic perception, according to which the possession of a mental schemata of aesthetic convention enables a painting to be understood as representational. Schemata are formed through experience and act as background patterns or templates which condition the mind to form certain hypotheses about the information that it is receiving, thus 'filling the gaps' to construct a complete perception from incomplete stimuli. Both hypotheses and schemata are subject to revision as new experience is acquired: 'Cognitive processes help frame and fix perceptual hypotheses by reckoning in probabilities weighted to the situation and to prior knowledge' (Bordwell, 1985b: 31). Bordwell applies this theory of perception to the full range of cognitive processes that are involved in the comprehension of narrative, from the relatively automatic perception of colour and motion to the more considered understanding of the causal relationships between the events of the narrative. Each of these processes involves inference through hypothesis formation and schemata application, with Bordwell differentiating between them on the basis of the activity required in making these inferences:

Bottom-up perceptual processes, such as seeing a moving object, operate in a fast, involuntary way, but they remain similar to other inferential processes. Top-down processes are more overtly based on assumptions, expectations and hypotheses.

(*ibid.*)

Narrative comprehension for Bordwell involves an interaction between 'perceptual capacities' (with some of these involving top-down as well as bottom-up processes), 'prior knowledge and experience' and 'the material and structure of the film itself' (32-33), with the first two factors involving the application of a variety of schemata, some specific to film, others not, and the last consisting of the arrangement of the various elements of the film: 'The narrative film is so made as to encourage the spectator to execute story-constructing activities. The film presents cues, patterns, and gaps that shape the viewer's application of schemata and the testing of hypotheses' (33). There is thus a kind of feedback between the information that the viewer receives from the film, the hypotheses that they form in response to this, and the subsequent confirmation or modification of hypotheses and the schemata which they accord with, as more information is revealed in the course of the narrative.

One of the schemata that Bordwell locates as key to narrative comprehension is the template structure of the 'canonical' story format. Bordwell describes this as a common temporal and causal patterning of scenarios and events in a narrative, and is therefore employed by a viewer when forming hypotheses about the significance of events and scenarios. Bordwell describes the canonical story format as consisting of 'introduction of setting and characters – explanation of a state of affairs – complicating action – ensuing events – outcome – ending' (34). Bordwell explains how this template, along with others, enables a viewer to group together various cues in the narrative to infer a certain event and its temporal and causal relationship with other events in the narrative: 'Guided by something like the canonic story, the perceiver “chunks” the film into more or less structurally significant episodes' (35). This 'chunking' Bordwell elsewhere refers to as the process of fabula construction, which 'embodies the action as a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field' (49).

Following the Russian Formalists, as I explained in the introduction, Bordwell distinguishes this fabula from the film's *syuzhet*, which consists of these events as they are presented in the film. The *syuzhet* is, according to Bordwell, distinct from the

material of the filmic presentation, which Bordwell labels 'style,' and thus 'the same syuzhet patterns could be embodied in a novel, a play, or a film' (50). The fabula should therefore be regarded as at one further remove from the syuzhet; it is a series of causally related, discrete events abstracted from the information provided in the syuzhet, which is itself distinct from the phenomenological experience of the film itself – the stylistic articulation of syuzhet. Bordwell follows Yury Tynianov's assertion that the fabula 'can only be guessed at, but it is not given' (in *ibid.*). It may be that the fabula and syuzhet seem to coincide, and at other times diverge, with the fabula involving events outside of those shown by the syuzhet (via style), but on the whole the presentation – deformation – of the fabula by the syuzhet requires that the viewer fill gaps and make causal inferences to form the fabula, which the syuzhet presents in an incomplete form.

Bordwell separates the narrative event – causally related to form the fabula – from its presentation in the film's syuzhet, which itself consists of events abstracted from the perceptual data of the film. However, what I wish to argue is that, in their visual presentation, events are in the film itself, rather than being 'added' to it; film consists of durational flows of actions, taking place on screen before a viewer, which in the act of viewing are segmented into discrete events to form a narrative of causally related events, with this inference of causality aiding in the determination of events in this manner. It is this durational flow of action in film that leads to what I describe as an indeterminacy of the event, with implications for a specific narratology of film. Before looking at the implications that this has for viewer activity and the various ways in which this indeterminacy can be both contained and exploited by the film it is first of all necessary to look in more detail at the presentation of action and events in the moving image, and how this leads to indeterminacy.⁴⁴

Deleuze on Movement, Image and Narration

Deleuze proposes a theory that attends to the specificity of cinematic signs, something which he claims Metz's linguistic conception of film narrative does not allow

⁴⁴ I also propose another indeterminate quality of the event in film, due to the status of film-thought that presents it, and which I will elaborate in chapter six, before bringing together these indeterminacies in a discussion of narrative agency and film-thinking.

for. He is critical of Metz on two related counts: for reducing the filmic image to the status of linguistic signification, to utterances grouped into syntagmatic categories, and as a result of this subtracting movement from the filmic image. Deleuze is critical of the fact that reducing the image to an utterance involves treating this image as a resemblance of an object, as an analogical sign which in the act of narration is codified according to an underlying linguistic structure, with the image narrativised as a statement. For Deleuze, the reason that this linguistic reduction of the filmic images is inadequate is that it reduces the movement of the image to the status of a static enunciation, and thus completely misses what is unique to cinematic signification: mobility:

[A]t the very point that the image is replaced by an utterance, the image is given a false appearance, and its most authentically visible characteristic, movement, is taken away from it. For the movement-image is not analogical in the sense of resemblance: it does not resemble an object that it would represent.

(Deleuze, 2005b: 26)

Deleuze argues that it is this movement of the image in cinema that necessitates an entirely new (and processual) theory of signification. This is because with a moving image 'there is no longer any distinction between image and object, because the distinction is only valid through immobilization of the object' (*ibid.*). The moving image is therefore the object in movement, with the object immanent within this movement: 'The movement-image is the object; the thing itself caught in movement as a continuous function. The movement-image is the modulation of the object itself' (*ibid.*). It follows from this that narration is derived from these moving images, as opposed to being a result of an underlying structure:

Narration is never an evident [*apparent*] given of the images, or the effect of a structure which underlies them; it is a consequence of the visible [*apparent*] images themselves, of the perceptible images in themselves, as they are defined for themselves.

(*ibid.*)

So we can see here that Deleuze is allowing for the particular presentation of narrative

in film, rather than reducing it to a universal structure or grammar, underlying its articulation through various media, as structuralist narratology has been inclined to do. Deleuze reverses the relationship between image and narration here, such that the image does not proceed from the narration, but narration from the image. This leads to a certain indeterminacy of the event,⁴⁵ as it is unclear where the transition between states is to be located within the movement, with consequences for the act of viewing in relation to the understanding of narrative that Deleuze does not fully explore, but which has the potential to address some of the problems with both the linguistic and cognitivist conception of narrative in film that I discussed above.

An explanation of the relationship between time and movement in the image and the duality of openness and closure in the moving image of film will now better enable us to understand this indeterminacy and the ontology from which it proceeds; how '[n]arration is grounded in the image itself, but . . . is not given' (28), how this effect of narration is provided, and how a viewer responds to the image of movement (movement-image) in their understanding of narrative.

Deleuze draws on Henry Bergson's theory of movement and duration in order to propose that cinema presents movement in itself and to elaborate the philosophical significance of this image-ontology. What Deleuze takes from Bergson is the idea that movement cannot be reduced to spatial orientation or divided into discrete instances which chart this movement through space. To do so is to miss real movement and to derive an abstract idea of time from movement in space. Instead, Bergson argues that we should derive movement from time, as it is only in relation to duration that movement can express change, because reducing and dividing movement into static sections immobilises time and thus prevents real movement: '[Y]ou can bring two instants together to infinity; but movement will always occur in the interval between the two, in other words behind your back' (Deleuze, 2005a: 1). Real movement therefore involves qualitative change in duration as opposed to quantitative additions in space.

Bergson equates this mis-perception of the spatial and temporal elements of movement with the recent development of cinema, regarding both as an illusion (Bergson, 1911: 324). However, Deleuze on the other hand sees cinema as precisely enabling us to perceive mobile sections of duration; to perceive movement in itself, and

45 The other related aspect of the indeterminacy of the event that I will elaborate later involves the ontological status of the action shown. This conception emerges from the idea of film as thought that Frampton develops, influenced in part by Deleuze's image-ontology, to which he adds a phenomenological slant, as I will demonstrate.

to derive indirect, and eventually, direct images of time from this:⁴⁶ '[C]inema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image. It does give us a section, but a section which is mobile, not an immobile section + abstract movement' (Deleuze, 1995a: 2-3).

The movement-image provided by the shot is a mobile section of duration, which is to say that there is both movement and spatial containment, and so it can be regarded in terms of both quantitative, homogeneous and divisible spatial sections and qualitative, heterogeneous and indivisible duration. The moving image therefore consists of distinct elements within the frame, but which change in relation to each other as the image moves, and so there is an interplay between closed sets – divisible in space – and open wholes in the moving image: it is this openness – the continual opening out of time – that makes any kind of change possible, and thus is intuited indirectly through the movement-image. It is the whole that is changing in duration. Closed sets are related to the open whole through movement: 'By movement in space, the objects of a set change their respective positions. But, through relations, the whole is transformed or changes qualitatively. We can say of duration itself or of time, that it is the whole of relations' (10). It follows then that there are two aspects of movement: on the local level the movement between closed sets of objects in space (the first aspect), which simultaneously 'expresses the duration of the whole' (11) (the second aspect). Movement relates closed sets to open wholes, expressing one in the other: 'Movement relates the objects between which it is established to the changing whole which it expresses, and vice versa' (*ibid.*). And according to Deleuze it is through cinema that we can clearly see this relationship in the mobile section of duration constituted by the shot (which Deleuze equates with the movement-image), as well as the potential for a new image of time itself (the time-image).

Deleuze elaborates the shot as an intermediary between the relative movement of closed sets and the absolute movement of the open whole; on the one hand the shot involves the framing of objects in space, producing closed sets, but at the same time there is relative movement between these sets as the shot moves, with editing serving to further segment shots into mobile sections, thus limiting and dividing movement at the

46 It is also because of this that Deleuze regards film as constituting perception and thought in itself, but in a manner distinct from Frampton's phenomenological conception of film as thought, with Deleuze – following Bergson – positioning himself against the phenomenological conception of consciousness. I will propose a means of avoiding this apparent contradiction between Deleuze's ontology and Frampton's phenomenology in the final chapter, with implications for a conception of viewer activity.

same time as uniting it through montage, opening out shots to the movement of the whole:

Hence the situation of the shot, which can be defined abstractly as the intermediary between the framing of the set and the montage of the whole The shot is movement considered from this dual point of view: the translation of the parts of a set which spreads out in space, the change of a whole which is transformed in duration.

(21)

Movement in film can then always be divided into closed sets but which continually open out into the open whole of duration through this movement, and so the closure of the sets is therefore artificial, as they always relate to an open whole, which can never itself be given but is defined precisely as that which changes; it is the very possibility of change itself:

[The whole] is not a set and does not have parts. It is rather that which prevents each set, however big it is, from closing in on itself, and that which forces it to extend itself into a larger set A closed system is never absolutely closed; but on the one hand it is connected in space to other systems by a more or less 'fine' thread, and on the other hand it is integrated or reintegrated into a whole which transmits a duration along this thread.

(18)

The whole, then, is duration itself, and is therefore temporal and virtual, compared to the spatial sets. The movement of cinema – of sets in space – can therefore only give an indirect image of time, derived from movement: 'The movement-image only gives an indirect image of time, because time and change are always measured as the division or addition of spatial segments' (Rodowick, 1997: 48).

Deleuze describes the classical Hollywood narrative as defined by a certain image of movement, one in which actions dictate movement both within the shot and across shots through continuity editing, with these images of action, motivated by protagonists, creating new situations, with sections of movement arranged through rational cuts to create an image of action and reaction. These actions involve the two facets of the movement-image: the local contraction of the movement of the set in

relation to the centre of action – the protagonist – and the opening out of movement into new situations: 'In the set . . . it can be said that there are, as it were, two inverse spirals, of which one narrows towards action and the other broadens towards the new situation' (Deleuze, 2005a: 146); or, as Rodowick puts it, '[o]ne spiral contracts focalizing the action as its relational centre; the other dilates out from the action, opening onto a new situation' (1997: 69).

As well as segmenting movement, the cut introduces an interval between two shots. In the movement-image which typifies classical Hollywood (which Deleuze refers to as an 'action-image'⁴⁷ (Deleuze, 2005a: 66)) this interval serves as a rational cut which is motivated by the movement of actions within the shots, and so unites the shots as well as dividing them: 'The interval here is the sign of differentiation that is continually retotalized in the image of the organic whole expanding through rational divisions' (Rodowick, 1997: 11). These cuts thus create an effect of continuity between the mobile sections: 'Here movement appears as an organized set of actions segmented in space and time' (68).

Here, as Rodowick recognises (68), Deleuze parallels other theorists of classical Hollywood with the idea that editing (which Deleuze subsumes within a general category of 'montage') is dictated by the linking of actions and reactions in cause and effect relationships to give the impression of a continual unfolding of space and time, such that it provides an impression of continuity rather than interruption: 'The movement image is based on classic continuity montage and linear narrative, which tries to overcome the cuts and gaps inherent to montage by creating a fluid movement from one image to the other' (Huygens, 2007). However, Deleuze emphasises that it is not narration that creates these linkages of movement, but the other way around: 'American montage is organico-active. It is wrong to criticise it as being subordinate to narration; it is the reverse, for the narrativity flows from this conception of montage' (Deleuze, 2005a: 32). Cinema does not give us movement and time through narration but presents us with movement-images (and through these, time indirectly), from which narrative is derived: 'Narrative in cinema is like the imaginary: it's a very indirect product of motion and time, rather than the other way around. Cinema always narrates what the image's movements and times make it narrate' (Deleuze, 1995: 59). This is

⁴⁷ I am avoiding Deleuze's extensive taxonomy of cinematic signs as my central concern here is with Deleuze's fundamental ontology of the moving image, rather than the elaboration of this in terms of Peircian semiotics.

because in the images of movement we do not have a representation of movement but movement itself, and so narrative – as a series of causally related actions and events – is presented through this movement; it is a product of moving images, rather than vice versa (which I elaborate in terms of narrative indeterminacy, as will become clear).

But Deleuze is less concerned with narratological concerns of how a viewer derives narrative from movement, and the implications of his theory of the movement-image for conceptions of the narrative event, than with the wider project of the philosophical implications of the time-image that arises through post-war cinema and the breakdown of narrative (as I explore in chapter seven), and the taxonomy of the various image-signs that he exhaustively identifies. This is a position posed to him in an interview by Pascal Bonitzer and Jean Narboni in *Negotiations* (1995), after summarising his concern with the vertical and virtual notion of the open whole expressed through the time-image, 'You don't seem to be interested in horizontal motion, in the linking of actions, in American cinema for example' (50). But it is here that I believe Deleuze can inform narratological debates on film, demonstrating the potential to address the issue of the relationship between movement and events which has so far been neglected in narratological approaches to film, which has implications for considerations of viewer activity and the indeterminate presentation of narrative in film. I will now examine the terminological distinctions between movement, actions and events, in order that we can specify with more accuracy how and why events can be described as indeterminate when they are shown in film, as I will demonstrate with my film analyses in the next chapter.

Theorising the Event in Film

As I have described, the event is a transformation from one state to another, but movement involves the open whole of duration, therefore in order to be determined within movement an event must be isolated (segmented) as a discrete section within a flow of movement. A narrative consists of a causally related series of events and therefore understanding narrative in film depends on the segmentation of movement in this manner, and containing the duration, as closed sets, that constitutes the filmic image. Film does this partially and to varying extents, through framing of action in time and space, but it cannot state what an event is, nor how they are to be connected, and so

also requires that a viewer do this. It is because of this that I identify an inherent indeterminacy of the event in film, with various devices employed to contain this indeterminacy, as well as exploit it in certain circumstances, in order to facilitate/frustrate narrative understanding. The understanding of film narrative – as a series of causally related events – therefore becomes a fundamentally interpretative act, as I will demonstrate.

It is first of all worth looking at how events are related through language in order to demonstrate that such a determination of action as an event is not possible in film. Zelda and Julian Boyd make the familiar distinction between states and events, with events involving 'a change from one state to another' (1977: 22). As I have indicated, the movement of the object in the filmic image means that there is (relatively) continual movement between states, such that events tend to flow into one another. Chatman tackles the issue of whether film can be said to be describing states, as language does, concluding that the filmic image depicts as opposed to describes; the scenario isn't mediated by or reported through language but is shown, by Chatman's account, with the consequence that

[f]ilm gives us plenitude without specificity. Its descriptive offerings are at once visually rich and verbally impoverished. Unless supplemented by redundancies in dialogue or voice-over narration, cinematic images cannot guarantee our ability to name bits of descriptive information. Contrarily, literary narrative *can* be precise, but always within a relatively narrow scope Verbal description could, but never does, encompass the multitude of detail available in a photograph.

(Chatman, 1990: 40)

So for Chatman, description in film is more complete but less specific than description in literature, which he describes as 'an excessive particularity compared to the verbal version' (1980: 126), such that 'film cannot avoid a cornucopia of visual details, some of which are inevitably "irrelevant" from the strict plot point of view' (1990: 40). Chatman's points here are significant for this thesis, as I am making a similar case for the indeterminacy of the event in film, but one which involves not only the visual wealth of the filmic image compared to language but also the movement of this depiction *in time*, with the determination of the event in the understanding of narrative as a segmentation within a plenitude of movement. The Boyd article helps to identify

why exactly the event is indeterminate in film by showing how it is determinate through language.

Within the category of events the Boyds make a further distinction between 'happenings' and 'doings (action),' with the latter distinct from the former in that they involve agency: 'Happenings are events without agency' (23). What we see in narrative film is agents acting (and reacting), which introduces the question of 'why?' (something that wouldn't be asked of a happening – such as the rain – for instance, at least in a narrative context).⁴⁸ Boyd and Boyd then make the important distinction between activities and acts: 'Acts take time; activities are unbounded spans that go on in time. Acts are marked for goal, they are completed, whereas activities have no necessary end' (*ibid.*). And it is here that we can specify the indeterminacy of the event in film, for there is nothing in the presentation of movement in film – consisting of mobile sections of duration – to differentiate between activities, which Boyd and Boyd describe as durative, and acts, which they label 'punctual.' Cinema itself is, in this respect, durative as opposed to punctual. Language is able to mark this distinction by describing an act as having happened, and an activity as an act in process, but this function is absent from film, as Henderson recognises with his observation that '[c]inema has no built-in tense system as language does. One cannot write a sentence without indicating tense but one can apparently make a shot, and therefore perhaps a film, without indicating tense' (1983: 6): cinema is always 'happening,' rather than 'having happened.'⁴⁹ A consequence of this is that it is down to the viewer to transform durative activity into punctual acts, segmenting activity into acts in the act of viewing. However, this is not to claim that somehow movement in film does not end, such that cinema does not show acts that end as well, but that it is down to a viewer to determine what activity is coming to an end here (and hence where exactly), thus interpreting movement as an act (and the same can be said for the commencement of acts).⁵⁰ I will demonstrate this with

48 D. N. Rodowick makes the point that 'most human action is ill served by causal explanation, for agents have the capacity to justify their behaviours with reasons' (2007: 99). Although, indeed, happenings could be interpreted in terms of agency, and thus as actions with reasons, such that they become part of a narrative. This is a point I will develop later.

49 The significance of tense has been explored – following Genette – in relation to ordering of events (by both Bordwell (1985b: 77-79) and Henderson (1983: 5-8)), but not in relation to the determination of an event, as I am looking at here. (I look in more detail at the issue of temporal ordering in relation to the determination of events in chapter seven.)

50 Equally, of course, movement, and thus acts and events, extend beyond the frame of film too, but here the segmenting activity is not the same as if the movement is shown on screen, and it is here that Bordwell's model of gap-filling is most useful. And whilst I will return to this idea in my discussion of interpretive horizons, my main focus is on the indeterminacy of events within the movement

examples in the next chapter, once I have related my notion of indeterminacy to that of Iser's, which will indicate the hermeneutic element of this act of viewing.

Iser's Act of Reading

The literary theorist Wolfgang Iser is useful here, in that he proposes the idea that the act of reading involves interpretive horizons within the text, and therefore provides an important rejoinder to Bordwell's claim that interpretation is distinct from the understanding of narrative as a series of causally related events (which he defines as comprehension). It is this hermeneutic aspect of narrative understanding that Bordwell neglects, and which proceeds from the indeterminacy of the event in film.

It is significant that Iser and Bordwell were responding to similar issues in their respective disciplines: the predominant use of interpretation in order to uncover hidden meanings. Or at least this is the situation that Bordwell depicts; Iser is explicitly responding to the classical norm of interpretation and its 'referential reduction of fictional texts to a single "hidden" meaning' (Iser, 1978: 10), whereas Bordwell is responding to the predominance of symptomatic interpretation.⁵¹ However, as I indicated in chapter two, Bordwell does not distinguish sufficiently between these two interpretive activities, seeing the latter as a continuation of the former. It is therefore the case that it becomes possible to use some of the theoretical points from the act of reading that Iser proposes as (albeit necessary) supplements to symptomatic interpretation in film,⁵² rather than alternatives, and as helping to rethink some of the narratological issues that Bordwell neglects in his theory of narrative comprehension. It is therefore the case that both – reader-response theory and symptomatic interpretation – emerge as correctives to the classical mode of interpretation, with the former addressing

presented on screen.

51 Indeed, Iser's argument – in response to the classical mode of interpretation which locates meaning within the text – that '[a]s meaning arises out of the process of actualization, the interpreter should perhaps pay more attention to the process than to the product. His object should therefore be, not to explain a work, but to reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects' (1978: 18) seems in accordance with the criticisms of the classical mode of interpretation set out in the pioneering symptomatic interpretation of *Young Mr Lincoln* by the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, describing classical interpretation as 'the translation of what is supposed to be already in the film into a critical system (metalanguage) where the interpreter has the kind of absolute knowledge of the exegetist blind to the (historical) ideological determination of his practice and his object-pretext' (1972: 6).

52 I develop this point in the final chapter.

problems in Bordwell's solution to the latter, which he incorrectly conceives as equivalent to classical interpretation.

Iser is significant in that he reincorporates interpretation into the act of reading itself to reveal how a reader interacts with and participates in the text in their understanding of it. Indeterminacy is the hermeneutic prompt in both mine and Iser's account, as I will now demonstrate.

For Iser the literary text is necessarily indeterminate in that it presents a fictional world to the reader: 'Fictional texts constitute their own objects and do not copy something already in existence. For this reason they cannot have the total determinacy of real objects' (Iser, 1989: 24). Therefore the fictional world of the literary text can only be presented by the author in the form of perspectives within that world. Each of these perspectives – which Iser refers to as 'schematised views' (1971: 10) – is only able to present one aspect – one viewpoint – of the fictional world. The author therefore creates multiple schematised views. Each of these schematised views can be said to determine the literary object, as Iser calls it, but does so only partially and therefore 'at the same time it raises the need for a new determination' (*ibid.*). Because each view is determinate in its own specific and limited manner, gaps exist between each of the various perspectives, which mean that 'between the “schematised views” there is a no-man's-land of indeterminacy, which results precisely from the determinacy of each individual view in its sequence' (Iser, 1989: 9).

By connecting and combining these different views, so as to build up a more complete picture of the fictional world, the reader removes the indeterminacy that exists between them – they now relate to each other in a manner determined by the imagination of the reader, yet on the basis of the incomplete information provided to them: 'It is only when the schemata of the text are related to one another that the imaginary object can begin to be formed, and it is the blanks that get this connecting operation under way' (Iser, 1978: 182). How they are to be related is not at any specific point inscribed in the text but is left up to the reader, who uses the necessarily limited information provided to them (which forms the shifting 'horizon' of the text (111)), together with their own personal experience, to form judgements and expectations which are then either confirmed or modified by the text.

These perspectives are four-fold, consisting of 'the narrator, that of the characters, that of the plot, and that marked out for the reader' (96). In reading, the reader combines and relates these various perspectives so that they 'all converge on a general

meeting place. We call this meeting place the meaning of the text' (35). The reader constructs this meaning in the process of the act of reading as 'a generally evolving pattern' (*ibid.*) from a standpoint outside of the text from where they are able to join these perspectives together. Therefore 'the reader's role is prestructured by three basic components: the different perspectives represented in the text, the vantage point from which he joins them together, and the meeting point where they converge' (36).⁵³ The vantage point continually shifts as the reader is given more information by the text – regarding either character, plot, setting or action, for example – which alters the horizon against which the reader's judgements of past events or aspects and expectations of future ones are made. Iser terms this shifting vantage point the 'wandering viewpoint':

[E]very moment of reading is a dialectic of protension and retention, conveying a future horizon yet to be occupied, along with a past (and continually fading) horizon already filled; the wandering viewpoint carves its passage through both at the same time and leaves them to merge together in its wake.

(112)

So for Iser there is no fixed meaning that can be extracted from the text, as the classical mode of interpretation would have it; meaning is something that is produced in the act of reading. It is not hidden in the text, waiting to be drawn out in this process, but is created in and through this process, such that Iser describes how the meaning of a literary text is not 'a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening' (1978: 22). The reader participates in the creation of this meaning by filling in the gaps that necessarily occur between the perspectives of the text: the imagination of the reader determines how the different elements are to be arranged and related so as to establish a coherent whole. But this determination – this projection of meaning – is guided by the text itself, the reader's projections being modified as the text unfolds and reveals itself: '[A]s the blank gives rise to the reader's projection, but the text itself cannot change, it follows that a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections' (167). It can therefore be said that the reader interacts with the text to the extent that he/she brings to the text his/her own personal experience and frame of reference which helps them fill the blanks within the

⁵³ Iser describes this prestructuring of the reader's role as an 'implied reader,' actualised in the act of reading (1978: 36). In the final chapter I will discuss this figure in more detail, exploring the extent to which a similar 'implied viewer' can be located as a potential viewing position.

text. This filling is in turn guided by the subsequent information provided by the text. Thus the text and reader are involved in a type of dialogue, with meaning being constantly projected and modified against the shifting horizon of the text.

Bordwell also proposes that a viewer must partake in an activity of 'gap-filling' in order to construct the fabula, for '[n]o story tells all' (Bordwell, 1985a: 8). He derives this conception of 'gap-filling' from Meir Sternberg, with his idea that 'every literary work opens up a number of gaps that have to be filled in by the reader through the construction of hypotheses' (Sternberg, 1978: 50). Iser also locates gaps in the literary text, but sees them as much more prevalent and occurring on more (and also completely different) levels than does Sternberg.⁵⁴ As Karin Littau puts it,

Iser argues that it is the text's 'incompleteness' which 'necessitates syntheses' (1978: 109) on the part of the reader, who is therefore compelled to make the text whole. Whether it is gaps in the plot, or whether a lack of connection at the word-by-word or sentence-by-sentence level, or between paragraphs or even entire narrative viewpoints [...]

(2006: 109)

Iser's textual perspectives are fragmented throughout the text, with the reader's attention moving between them from their position as a 'wandering viewpoint': 'In each articulated reading moment only segments of textual perspectives are present within the reader's wandering viewpoint' (Iser, 1989: 35). This process of switching between and combining segments operates according to a 'theme and horizon' structure, which 'organize[s] the *internal* network of references' (Iser, 1978: 96), regulating their combination.

Iser uses this idea of 'theme and horizon' to describe how segmented perspectives are connected in the act of reading: 'In the time flow of reading, segments of the various perspectives move into focus' (Iser, 1989: 36), and the reader's wandering viewpoint moves from one of these segments to another, establishing determinate relationships between them. By establishing this determinate relationship the reader

⁵⁴ Sternberg is dismissive of what he regards as too general a conception of these gaps in Iser (see Sternberg, 1978: 311, fn. 29), but bases this criticism on *The Implied Reader* (1974), and not the more comprehensively developed study of gaps in *The Act of Reading* (1978 – published that same year as the Sternberg book), thus neglecting the importance of the 'theme and horizon' principle in the reader's gap-filling activity, which is something I develop here with regards to the indeterminacy of narrative in film.

forms 'a referential field of interacting textual segments projecting themselves one upon another' (*ibid.*). This referential field, which 'is always formed when there are at least two positions related to and influencing one another' (*ibid.*), forms a background against which subsequent determinate relationships between segments are established: as the reader's viewpoint switches to the next perspective segment – such that the segment, in being the focus of the viewpoint, 'becomes the theme' – the previous theme becomes vacant, and it is from this position – of a vacant theme – that the reader 'focus[es] on the new thematic segment' (37), bringing this new theme into a determinate relationship with previous themes:

[T]hese vacancies enable the reader to combine segments into a field by reciprocal modification, to form positions from these fields, and then to adapt each position to its successor and predecessors in a progress that ultimately transforms the textual perspectives, through a whole range of alternating themes and background relationships, into the aesthetic object of the text.

(*ibid.*)

Iser uses various terms to describe this network of related segments: namely 'referential field,' 'background' and 'field' (36 & 37). However, in *The Act of Reading* (1978) he consolidates these terms under the more coherent concept of a 'horizon':

[I]t is made up of all those segments which had supplied the themes of previous phases of reading. For instance, if the reader is at present concerned with the conduct of the hero – which is therefore the theme of the moment – his attitude will be conditioned by the horizon of past attitudes toward the hero, from the point of view of the narrator, of the other characters, the plot, the hero himself, etc.

(97)

This concept of a horizon – taken from Hans Georg Gadamer, who describes it as 'the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (1979: 269) – introduces an explicitly hermeneutic element to the act of reading, and is applicable, with some modification, to the act of viewing and the overcoming of the indeterminacy of the event in the understanding of narrative, with the horizon of the film playing a role in the determination of narrative events. I will demonstrate how Gadamer's idea that 'the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also

determine this whole' (Gadamer, 1979: 258), applicable to Iser's act of reading, is also applicable to the determination of narrative events in film. To emphasise, what I take from Iser is the idea of indeterminacy as a hermeneutic prompt, and the role of horizons in responding to this. This helps us to describe the manner in which events are determined within the durational of movement in film as a response to this indeterminacy, such that the indeterminacy I locate in this manner is not derived from gaps or segmented perspectives, but from the presentation of events in movement.⁵⁵

We can now start to see why events, and therefore narrative in film is indeterminate and how this leads to interpretive activity, but it is now necessary to demonstrate with examples how exactly this takes place, how interpretive horizons function and what factors affect the indeterminacy of events.

⁵⁵ However, I do look at the interpretation of character's claims (their reliability, for example) in relation to Iser's notion of schematised views and interpretive horizons, and the effect of these on the indeterminacy of the event.

Chapter 5

Indeterminate Events and *The Last Laugh*

As Frampton recognises (2006: 15-16), and as I discussed in the first chapter, the idea of film as thought has a legacy stretching back to classical film theory, but it is those theories (such as Frampton's and Deleuze's) that develop this idea beyond mere analogy (film as like human thinking), beyond anthropomorphisations, that theorise film on its own terms. These theories therefore also offer the opportunity to theorise the articulation of narrative without falling back on narrator-figures, offering an alternative to linguistic, diegetic/mimetic and anthropomorphic conceptions of narration: 'Locating intention within the film is one step towards seeing film-being as it's [*sic*] own particular and new kind of thinking' (49).

As I have previously demonstrated, Frampton proposes a viable alternative to these narrator-figures, but does not fully explore the consequences of this film-being for issues such as the articulation of narrative. He refers to narrative as 'one result of film-thinking, a certain type of thinking, one which lines-up plot and characters to tell a story' (113), but does not take this idea of narrative film-thinking any further, being more concerned with either outlining the other ways in which film can be said to think, so as to describe more fully his idea of film-being, or with criticising the inability of previous theories of film narration to account for a viewer's experience of film as a uniquely filmic type of thinking. Indeed, Frampton is wary of focussing on narrative in film, believing that 'the concept of narration does not *exhaust* the event of the film' (2006: 10). But ironically it is the *inexhaustibility* – the excess – of events *in* film that is key to my conception of narrative film-thinking and the implications that this has for viewer activity.

I am arguing for a fundamental indeterminacy of the event in narrative film-thinking, which derives from the movement of the image and the status of the image as thought, such that the understanding of narrative as a series of causally related events involves a hermeneutic segmenting of durative movement (activities) into events (punctual acts) and an interpretation of their ontological status. I will demonstrate that this is facilitated to varying extents by the different elements of narrative film-thinking,

producing various degrees of indeterminacy, and therefore requires various degrees of interpretation by the viewer in their understanding of narrative.

I will examine various example of this indeterminacy, from silent-era narrative cinema to films of the classical and contemporary Hollywood periods, and including Asian and European art cinema from over the past 50 years. I propose that my theory of indeterminacy is medium-specific and thus applicable to various forms of narrative cinema, which I demonstrate through my attention to a variety of styles and periods, however I do not intend this thesis as a cross-cultural or historical study of narrative forms. I am more interested in providing a philosophical basis for the indeterminacy of narrative in film. In later chapters, however, I do turn to issues of context, convention and cultural-specificity, and the influence of these factors upon indeterminacy and interpretation, concluding with some discussion of how these concerns may be balanced and consolidated.

I will now look at some examples of the indeterminacy of the event in action, introducing the variables of film-thinking that influence this indeterminacy. A good place to start with this is with a relatively early example of narrative film which relies almost exclusively upon the moving image to articulate narrative: F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924).

Narrative Events and Horizons

As Kozloff remarks, '[a]t the very end of the silent era, film grammar and audience familiarity with that grammar had developed to the point where a film as satisfying as F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) could eschew titles' (1988: 26), by which she means that the 'grammar' (the rules governing composition) of the film alone ensured that a viewer could understand the images and their arrangement as an expression of narrative, thus satisfying their expectation of a coherent story. So let's look at how the film facilitates the viewer in overcoming the indeterminacy of the event in order to determine the narrative – how does the film create the impression of a narrative?

The film opens with a long shot of a hotel foyer, busy with people, taken from inside a descending lift. The camera tracks forward out of the lift and up to the revolving doors of the hotel entrance, where it looks out on to a rainy street as a

doorman helps people to their taxis. This nameless character, played by Emil Jannings, is the only character present throughout each of the next three shots, which alternate between the view out over the awaiting cars and the view back onto the hotel from the position of the awaiting cars, indicating his role as the protagonist of the narrative. This sequence of alternating shots is broken by a medium tilt shot looking down upon the doorman, who looks up, past the camera. The next shot is of a large piece of luggage strapped to the top of a car (the relative angle of this indicating a point of view shot). There is then a repeat shot looking down at the doorman, who signals for help from inside the hotel. The next four shots alternate between a man (presumably the driver) trying to manoeuvre the bag from the roof of the car and the doorman, summoning help. In the fourth shot the driver beckons to the doorman, who, realising that no one is responding to his calls, goes to help. The doorman is shot again from above, apparently struggling to receive the case of the car and then carry it on his back into the hotel reception. A reverse shot looking out from behind the desk sees him enter the hotel and two workers coming to his aid as he sets down the case, with the doorman now apparently exhausted. He then sits down and mops his brow. As he's sitting down we see from the entrance looking out that two guests are led out by what looks like a senior member of staff, who, failing to locate a doorman summons a taxi himself. He then returns through the revolving doors, hesitating as if surprised as he looks right, out of shot in the direction the doorman is resting. The next shot matches this man's point of view, with the doorman seen sharing a drink with a bellboy, oblivious to having just been spotted by this man, who appears to be his boss. The boss, looking annoyed, pulls out a notepad and starts to write, the shot cutting back to the doorman, struggling to get up, assisted by the bellboy. The boss continues to write, still unseen. The doorman then returns to work, out of the revolving doors, as the boss walks to his office across the lobby.

Returning to work the next morning the doorman stands in his boss's office and reads a letter. The camera tracks from outside the office, into the room and up to the doorman as he's hunched over reading the letter. The letter is then shown in close up, at which point the viewer learns from reading it that he is to be transferred to a different role at the hotel, one previously held by the oldest member of staff at the company, due to his 'infirmity.' The doorman is mortified at reading this news, and is ignored by his boss who sits writing at his desk. Turning his head away from his boss, who is sitting with his back to him, the doorman's gaze seems arrested by something. The next shot is

of a case in the corner of the room, suggesting a point of view shot. There is then a cut back to the doorman, in a repeat of the previous shot, who looks intently at the case and then rolls up his sleeves. He then strides over to the case, picks it up and begins to lift it over his head, followed by a cut to a close-up of this as he struggles under the weight and the case slips out of his grasp. The next series of rapid cuts show the case tumbling to the floor, the doorman falling over, and the boss getting up with a start. The next sequence of shots inter-cuts a new doorman working outside with the old doorman being stripped of his uniform.

What I have done with this description of these scenes is describe what seems to be the significant action (acts and activities of agents) that takes place on screen, although I have not at this stage indicated the narrative that can be formed from and within this (i.e. what prevents these from constituting a series of unrelated actions), which would involve an interpretation (and thus further segmentation) of these actions in terms of their causal relationships with each other and thus linking them as narrative events: causally related punctual acts (i.e. transitions from one state to another carried out or experienced by agents). Indeed, in relation to Chatman's distinction between description and depiction (1980: 128) and my elaboration of this to include duration, there is a sense in which no verbal description can match the plenitude of information given by the image of movement, and in which no summary, in its description, can avoid interpretation, picking out certain aspects above others. Indeed, the above summary has already made certain assumptions of goals and interpretations of actions: the driver trying to manoeuvre the case from the roof of the car, for example; this making the first steps along the way to identifying a narrative. It is apparent that in making these judgements, essential to the comprehension of narrative, a viewer is drawing upon their own experience, which Bordwell theorises under the constructivist concept of schemata (1985b: 29-40, 2008: 111-114). And these also play a role in the establishment of cause and effect relationships between events,⁵⁶ but at this point I wish to look at what is involved in the determination of these cause and effect relationships within the film, the role that these have in the determination of narrative events, and the function of interpretive horizons within a film.

My focus here is not so much on what is brought to the film in the understanding of narrative – although this is of course important, as I will discuss later – as on what is

⁵⁶ I will examine the effect of conventions and experience on narrative indeterminacy in the final two chapters and conclusion.

excluded *within* the film, for example in the segmenting of movement into action and action into causally related acts, thus forming narrative events. For example, the opening scenes of *The Last Laugh* described above contain (and with the 'restricting' connotations of this term significant here) many movements of bodies in space, including that of the mobile camera/frame, which inherently involves transitions between states, such that (recalling our definitions from the previous chapter here) movement itself manifests many events, which can then be interpreted as actions if they involve agents (and 'happenings' if they do not), including both acts (punctual) and activities (durative). A close analysis of the opening mobile shot will help to illustrate this.

As the camera descends in the lift (the bars passing in front of it indicating this) 15-20 people walk back and forth across the foyer; there are customers at the reception desk and a doorman revolving the doors, a couple walk past the camera and up the stairs followed by a uniformed hotel worker, and then as the lift comes to a halt the operator opens the doors and ushers people out. Such is the wealth of movements in this first shot. It is therefore apparent that there are numerous potential events taking place in this shot, with an event consisting of movement segmented accordingly into isolated transitions between states. Indeed it is difficult to talk about this movement without carrying out such a segmentation, as in my descriptions, which illustrates exactly my point about the durational quality of the moving image compared to the punctual quality of language, and the indeterminacy of the event that this leads to – the movement of the image problematises the marking of events. A catalogue of potential action-events (i.e. transformations from one state to another involving – caused or experienced by – agents) in this shot will help to clarify this: people walking, moving through space, can be subdivided into a series of smaller segmented events (steps forward in space), which can then be further divided into a series of smaller movement events, of agents through space, such that events can be subdivided into smaller events as well as being grouped together to form a larger event.⁵⁷

It is apparent, then, that the determination of an event involves the segmentation of a movement on the basis of a transformation of states. The question then arises – if there is a relative amount of freedom as to what movement can be segmented as an event within the movement of agents – of what factors influence this determination of a

⁵⁷ I will discuss in more detail the issue of scale and recursivity in chapter seven.

narrative event – an act of an agent – by a viewer. What I wish to focus on is how the flow of movement and action captured by the film forms a horizon which – through this movement – is durative (in the Deleuzian sense outlined in the last chapter), with the determination of an event by a viewer serving in essence to close down this open mobility by segmenting movement as an event; as a closed set within the open(ing) whole. This horizon of movement serves as a background against which segmentations of events are made, and with the formation of cause and effect relationships between actions within this horizon leading to such a segmentation of narrative events. For example, the movement of the doorman struggling to unload the case from the top of the car – the strained actions of the arms as the case is handed down to him, the unsteady and laboured walk to the entrance – can be retrospectively segmented together as a significant causal event in light of the doorman's later actions as he stumbles to sit down, breathes heavily and rubs at his legs before mopping his brow, and then, two shots later, takes a drink offered by the bellboy. A viewer can segment these actions as causally related events (acts): the doorman has become exhausted, caused by the prior act of carrying the case. And these events can of course be segmented into smaller action-events, but the possibility of such a causal relationship – the doorman has become tired as a result of carrying a heavy case – enables the movements within these shots – constituting actions through the involvement of an agent – to be potentially grouped and segmented in this manner. Thus the identification of causal relationships enables actions to be reciprocally segmented as narrative events (causally related acts of agents), both united through and segmented as cause and effect. And it is here that we can see a parallel with Iser's concept of the relationship between theme and horizon in the act of reading.

The concepts of theme and horizon can be usefully applied to film to illustrate the interpretive activity involved in the determination of causally related events, although with some modification because, as I have demonstrated, the indeterminacy of the event in film is medium-specific and thus different from the indeterminacy that Iser describes. Rather than giving a series of reactions to the world (divided amongst schematised views), mediated through language, film gives us the moving world itself, as thought,⁵⁸ and therefore the horizon of the mobile image exists independently of a viewer's interpretation, unlike Iser's horizon, which is formed by the connecting activity

58 I will distinguish this ontology from realist conceptions of film in the conclusion.

of a reader. I identify a secondary horizon within the primary horizon of the moving images as an equivalent horizon to Iser's, in that this network of causally related events consists of action segmented in this manner by a viewer and forms a referential background against which other events can be segmented – other action can be segmented by being connected to this causal network. For example, on the basis of the causal relationship established between the two events outlined above (the carrying of the case and the sitting down to rest) the viewer can segment the boss's action of writing in his notebook as an effect of having seen the doorman sitting down on the job (his witnessing of this suggested by the *mise en scène* and editing), which the viewer can then link with the later event of the doorman reading a letter and finding out that he is being demoted. The prior action – writing in the notebook – can be interpreted as an expression of the boss's intentions (that he is going to demote him), an event caused by the witnessing of the doorman's actions, and which leads to the later event of the doorman reading the letter: seeing him causes him to write in his pad and to then give the letter to the doorman. Thus the doorman's sitting down to rest is both caused by (and therefore an effect of) a prior event (the carrying of the case) as well causing subsequent events (the actions of his boss). Such is the relationship of a events in these early scenes, forming a secondary horizon of causally connected events.⁵⁹ The subsequent action of picking up the case in the corner of the boss's office can then, in light of the (secondary) horizon formed by the linking of causally related events, be interpreted as an effect of finding out he is to be demoted due to his infirmity: he lifts the case above his head in an effort to prove his strength and fitness to continue his work, with the goal of bringing about a future event – that he is given his job back, with this horizon of connected events also explaining his future action of trying to get his uniform back (which I discuss below).

Narrative Networks and Immanent Events

I wish to emphasise the role of this secondary horizon of causally related events – i.e. the emerging narrative itself – in guiding a viewer's segmentation of movement as action-events. This is not something that is given due consideration in Bordwell's

⁵⁹ I will discuss this secondary horizon in terms of a network – as opposed to chain – of causally related events below.

theory of narrative comprehension, where his focus is on the role of external horizons of knowledge (acquired experience forming cognitive schemata) in hypothesis testing, with these schemata forming a context within which a viewer is able to process the incomplete data – cues – of the film by making inferences and testing hypotheses against the information provided by the film. Bordwell does describe how '[i]n constructing a fabula, the perceiver defines some phenomena as events while constructing relations among them' and state that '[w]hat counts as an event, a cause, an effect, a similarity, or a difference – all will be determined within the context of the individual film' (1985b: 51), but he does not tackle the issue of how an event is segmented from movement, preferring instead to see the event as an abstraction. Indeed, as I elaborated in the last chapter, Bordwell regards narrative events – both *syuzhet* and *fabula* – as removed from the action of the moving image, with the viewer constructing events such that they are added as an abstract construct:

It would be an error to take the fabula, or story, as the profilmic event. A film's fabula is never materially present on the screen or soundtrack. When we see a shot of Jeff [in *Rear Window*] looking out his window, his action is a representation which signals us to infer a story event (Jeff looks out his window). The same piece of information might have been conveyed many other ways, many of them requiring no sight or sound of Jeff at all.

(59)

However, considering Deleuze's argument that the moving image presents – rather than represents – movement itself and similarly the object through this, we can follow through the implications of this for the narrative event: the moving image of film presents the narrative event itself (when shown) within a flow of movement, such that the event is segmented within (rather than added to) the flow of movement in the act of viewing.⁶⁰

Attending to the internal horizon of movement, events and action within a film enables us to explore more fully the relationship between movement and the event and the activity of the viewer in deriving the latter from the former in their determination of narrative, revealing this as an hermeneutic enterprise.⁶¹ Theorists such as Victor Perkins

⁶⁰ I will consider this ontological conception in relation to the profilmic event and mimetic conceptions of this in the final chapter.

⁶¹ Bordwell does refer to a film's 'intrinsic norms': 'These are the standards attained within the text itself'

call for greater attention to the world of the film when discussing issues of cause and effect in narrative: 'An event becomes a cause only in its relation to webs of circumstance, together with, say, desires and fears. Why a cause should be understood as a cause, and why an effect should count as an effect, are matters that can be assessed only within a world' (2005: 22).⁶² Perkins also stresses here the limitations of conceiving narrative only in terms of a cause and effect chain, claiming that 'we should see the processes of narrative in more rewarding lights once we break from the narrowness of a concentration on the "cause and effect chain"' (*ibid.*). This is a recommendation that can be usefully heeded in light of Bordwell's conception of narration in these terms, referring to a fabula as 'a chronological, cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field' (1985b: 49). Indeed, the figure of a causal chain is inadequate to the relationship between events that constitutes a narrative. An analysis of the causal relationships that constitute this effect of narrative will demonstrate this point, with implications for the model of the segmentation of narrative events in the act of viewing that I am proposing.

Carroll identifies a certain type of connection between events as the defining feature of narrative, such that 'the possession of these connections is an essential feature of anything that we would want to call a narrative' (Carroll, 2001: 22). He takes as the starting point the familiar condition that narrative consists of causally related events, but notes that '[m]ost narratives are not strings of causal entailments; instead, the earlier events in a sequence of events underdetermine later events' (26); the earlier events make possible later events but do not (always) guarantee them, such that a prior event may function as a necessary but insufficient condition of the subsequent event. What emerges then is a causal network of variously connected events, with the weakest narrative connection (but perhaps the most common, according to Carroll) being that of the necessary but insufficient condition (30). The result of this is that narrative outcomes (that is, the causal outcome of previous events) tend to be indeterminate as they are not necessarily entailed by prior events: these previous events open up the possibility of future events as a consequence of them rather than determine them, such

(1985b: 150), as opposed to 'extrinsic norms' which would include such schematic standards as '[t]he canonic story format (exposition, state of affairs, introduction of protagonist, and so forth)' (149), such that these 'intrinsic norms' establish a film-specific schema against which inferences are made.

However, he does not propose how they function as hermeneutic horizons guiding the interpretation of event, as I do here.

62 But Perkins' conception of the significance of this world of the film here is distinct from mine, attending to what is not seen; I look instead at the horizon of the presented movement that constitutes this world. (Although I will consider the issue of what remains unseen later.)

that various outcomes of a single event are possible with various events coming together to form the necessary and sufficient conditions for a subsequent event to occur: '[C]ausally necessary conditions can branch in many different directions. Many subsequent itineraries are possible. One causally necessary condition will support an indeterminate range of consequences' (38).

Carroll's model emphasises the dynamic of narrative as an opening up of possibilities, with the comprehension of narrative involving the recognition 'that the earlier events presented conditions for the realization of the later events' (*ibid.*), and thus determining later events as actualisations of possible though indeterminate outcomes of prior events. Carroll does recognise the retrospective nature of this process, describing how

when later episodes are added to the story they reveal the relevance and importance of earlier events in terms of the causally necessary roles they play – something that may not be evident when these events and/or states of affairs are first mentioned.

(33)

However, like Bordwell, he fails to sufficiently acknowledge the hermeneutic element of this retrospective arrangement of emergent events into a network of various causal connections, favouring instead – again, like Bordwell – the forward-looking aspect of narrative comprehension, proposing anticipation (as opposed to the more determinate 'prediction') as a central activity of narrative comprehension (37).

Carroll offers this model of narrative connections as applicable to narrative in general and therefore does not attend to its manifestation in particular forms (his examples are all of linguistic narratives, a bias indicated in his above reference to narrative events being 'mentioned'). It is apparent, however, that this model is able to contribute to an analysis of the arrangement and segmentation of events in the understanding of narrative in film and the role of this in overcoming indeterminacy, as well as having implications for the definition of narrative in film and therefore the definition of narrative film also, which I return to later. It is therefore necessary to see how a network of narrative connections is articulated through film.

In the opening scenes of *The Last Laugh* discussed above we can see that the doorman's being demoted is – to use Carroll's term – underdetermined by the prior events of him struggling to carry the case and then sitting to rest as a result of this.

However, these events were necessary for the later event of him being fired. The event which combines with these prior necessary events to create a necessary and sufficient condition for the event of his demotion is the doorman being seen resting by his boss. The fact that the doorman has been fired opens up the possibility that he may try to get his job back, although this event alone doesn't determine this. Thus we have near the start of the film what Todorov identifies as one of the stages of the 'minimal complete plot' (1977): the disturbance of an equilibrium as an event which sets off a series of related events, caused by this initial transformative event, with the protagonist taking action to restore the equilibrium disturbed at the outset, with this goal thus motivating action. However, the location of this structure of events depends on certain interpretations. For example, an initial event can only be regarded as transformative if it does indeed motivate further character actions; the event of the doorman being demoted is only to be regarded as a significant transformative event in the narrative if it contributes to later events as a necessary condition of these.

It has transformative potential once it has taken place but it is conceivable to imagine a subsequent and causally unrelated event occurring that overrides it as a transformative event, such as the arrival of an invading army for example; in this situation this event is more likely to have a causal effect on later events than his being fired previously. However, as it is, the demotion of the doorman – with the carrying of the case as a necessary condition of this later event – does indeed emerge as a significant transformative event through its impact on other events, such that it is retrospectively regarded as a necessary condition of subsequent events, but without entailing them without the intervention of other events.

For example,⁶³ after the doorman has found out about his demotion and then been stripped of his uniform as a result of this, his boss leaves the room because a new guest has arrived. In his absence the doorman reaches into the closet for his confiscated uniform, however he is then disturbed by another member of staff coming towards the room (he is shown backing out of the cupboard, as if startled, followed by a shot of the woman approaching the room) and so puts the uniform back. She then comes in and locks the door to the closet. This event – her approaching – can be segmented as a cause of his subsequent act: the event of shutting the door before she arrives and sees

63 Again, what we have here in this summary is a segmentation of movement in terms of events (or more specifically, actions involving agents), with what I interpret as the significant events here segmented through an interpretation of their causal relationships.

him getting his uniform back. The result of this is that the desired event – retrieving his uniform – has not occurred: other events have intervened instead.

But why does he want it? Is this event of trying to get his uniform caused by the event of his losing his job, with the boss's leaving intervening to enable this? i.e., do these form necessary and sufficient conditions? The event of losing his job is indeed a necessary condition, and his boss leaving facilitates the event, but are these events alone enough to cause his retrieval attempt? As I have demonstrated, by Carroll's account we already have a narrative due to the connection between the events outlined above, and a viewer can segment these accordingly. However, it is possible to identify another cause of this attempt at retrieval, as indeed the narrative film-thinking seems to encourage us to.

Before the doorman is fired he is shown the night before, returning home to his family. We see him being admired and greeted deferentially as he walks through his neighbourhood in his work uniform, and the next morning at home his family are shown carrying out various acts in preparation for the wedding of his daughter: she takes a cake out of the oven and writes 'for the wedding guests' in icing on the top, and the doorman admires her wedding dress and hugs her. These events can be related to the doorman's attempt to retrieve his uniform, not as directly causal events but as contributory ones – the individual events of being greeted can be segmented together to show the event of general admiration by his neighbourhood, opening up the possibility in the mind of the viewer that if he no longer has his uniform he will not receive the same respect. And the activities of preparing for the wedding can be segmented as smaller, individual events (acts of agents), but also as part of a wider event, and perhaps it is this that the doorman wants to retrieve the uniform for. We can see here that a variety of events can be segmented individually as well as grouped together to form one event, and with different events combining together to cause one subsequent event. It is these kind of possible connections that mark an event as of particular narrative significance – it seems to be the event which several other events combined cause, and thus a network of events can be segmented in this manner to form a secondary horizon of connected events within a primary horizon of segmented movement, with this horizon of connected events – segmented by a viewer – determining the relative significance of events.

Indeed, the force of these causal factors in driving the doorman's desire (and thus establishing his goal) to get his uniform back is such that he tries again after failing to

carry out this act the first time, with various events (happenings and acts) intervening to allow him to carry out this act with a greater likelihood of success: daylight has turned to darkness and people have gone home. He now creeps through the building in the dark, with this activity as an ongoing event – a durative activity – which will be retrospectively segmented as a punctual act when it is deemed to have taken place, through either succeeding or failing in this case, which is determined in relation to the previous events that have caused it and thus established it as an event in relation to what caused it. Equally, it can be segmented into smaller constituent parts – activities that are segmented as having come to an end quicker, and thus segmented as acts within an ongoing activity, such is the freedom of the viewer (proceeding from the indeterminacy of the event in movement).

In this way we can see that there are events within events, arising from the action of movement through space. It is the hermeneutic horizon of possible causal relations between actions that enables a viewer to segment events on certain scales in the act of viewing, which is also assisted by the scale at which (narrative) film-thinking operates.⁶⁴ For example, it is conceivable to imagine a situation in which one of the deferential greetings to the doorman by his neighbour alone brought about a certain event later in the story that none of the others could, or that one of the greetings alone was caused by a previous event, such that this event – one greeting: someone removing their hat – would be segmented accordingly within the primary segmentation of film-thinking, which segments the shots into first six people greeting him and then two people in the next shot, by variously bowing their heads and doffing their caps. Or perhaps this act of greeting could also be segmented further into distinct events which together make up the individual greeting.

However, as it stands there seems no reason on the basis of previous events, or retrospectively, following future events, to make such a segmentation. Indeed, the horizon of possible causal relations set up by the film leads toward the segmentation that I have suggested above (grouping these actions as an act of respect from his neighbours). Equally, had one person alone been shown greeting the doorman this primary segmentation (having a tighter focus and thinking on a smaller scale than the above situation, which shows many people greeting him) might have led the viewer toward a different causal network – if it was a woman, perhaps he was trying to impress

⁶⁴ I examine the scale of narrative film-thinking in more detail in chapter seven.

her by wearing the uniform, with a background cause of this being that he is unhappily married and wants to have or is already having an affair. It is these kind of possible causal relationships between events – a symptom of the indeterminacy of the event in film – that film-thinking contains in order to lead a viewer toward interpreting the primary segmentation of events (through a further, secondary segmentation) in terms of determinate narrative connections. I will explore the manner and the extent to which film-thinking is able to do this – so as to constitute narrative film-thinking – and the activity of a viewer in responding to these actions of narrative film-thinking throughout the rest of this thesis.

Character Expression and Causation

It is important to state that it is not just any movement that has narrative potential, because narrative involves the actions of *agents*, such that the cause and effect relation between events in narrative is not a mechanistic series of guaranteed actions and reactions; indeed, narrative is constituted precisely by the presence of agents who *choose* how to react and what to react to.⁶⁵ Agents therefore introduce a gap between cause and effect, between an event that affects them and an event that they bring about in response to this, and so the determination of narrative events involves filling this gap with an interpretation of character motivation in order to make causal connections between actions of agents in terms of reasons.⁶⁶

One of the ways in which film-thinking can assist in this interpretation is by expressing the internal states and intentions of characters. Lacking the option of sound to express these, through speech for example, and also forgoing (on the whole) the use of inter-titles, we can see that *The Last Laugh* employs a series of expressive techniques to assist the viewer in their understanding of the narrative. For example, after having had his uniform taken from him and just before he attempts to get it back there is a shot of the doorman looking down and feeling at his clothes, which can be interpreted in

65 Recall here Rodowick's distinction between causes and reasons.

66 Though I don't fully subscribe here to Deleuze's Bergsonian conception of consciousness – as evident in my employment of phenomenological concepts, a point I will return to later – it is interesting to note the parallel here with Ronald Bogue's description of Bergson's 'deduction' of consciousness as 'a special kind of image, a "centre of indeterminacy," which introduces a gap in the interconnected cause-and-effect networks of acting-reacting images' (2003: 68). For my purposes here, I am more interested in this gap between action and reaction as the choice of an agent.

light of previous segmentations as an event caused by him no longer wearing his old uniform – he acts as if his clothes are foreign to him and as if to familiarise himself with this new situation. And then before he reaches into the closet for his uniform there is a shot of the uniform and the cupboard in which it is, as if from where the doorman is standing (thus establishing it as a point of view shot). The shot is initially out of focus but then pulls into focus and zooms in to the uniform, such that it takes up the whole frame. The soundtrack escalates to a dramatic crescendo as the image cuts to a high angle close up of the doorman's face, as if looking back on him from the closet. He has a startled look on his face, as if a great idea has just occurred to him. He then proceeds to try to retrieve the uniform, as I have described. The zoom-in and focus-pull in the above shot, in light of the horizon of events that preceded and follow it, can be interpreted as a depiction of a realisation in the mind of the doorman: that he has a chance to get his uniform back. This expressive technique serves to 'put'⁶⁷ the viewer in the mindset of the doorman and thus more easily understand the subsequent action as an event related to previous events. Unable to use speech to express characters' reactions to events – which events they are reacting to and how – as well as their intentions to bring about future events, *The Last Laugh* employs expressive devices to present the mental states of characters which can in this manner facilitate the segmentation of action into a causal network of events.

In the next chapter I will look at the expression of characters' thoughts through voice-over narration and the role of this in facilitating the determination of narrative events, as well as the variety of possible relationships that can occur between voice and image in film, which need to be considered in light of Frampton's concept of film-thinking and its ontological status. I will demonstrate that the indeterminate ontological status of the film-thinking and the events that it presents has implications for our conception of unreliable narration in film and how we theorise viewer activity in response to this. However, it is first of all useful to consider my analysis of *The Last Laugh* in relation to my wider theoretical interventions, before proceeding to elaborate this ontological indeterminacy of the event in relation to these ideas in this next chapter and throughout the rest of this thesis.

What we have with *The Last Laugh* is a narrative presented through moving images. Characters are shown in movement, with this durative flow of activity

67 I use this term figuratively in order to avoid the problems of the film/mind analogy that I discussed in chapter one, preferring Frampton's notion of transsubjectivity, as will become clearer.

segmented into punctual acts when connected with other acts – enacting a mutual segmentation in this manner – such that a network of causally related events emerges to form a narrative. The movement image presents variously continuous segments of events – changes from one state to another – which take on narrative significance when they are connected with other events by a viewer, thus enacting a further segmentation within the primary segmentation of film-thinking. In presenting events through movement, film-thinking gives us the events themselves, in this movement, and thus events are not mediated through language but are presented directly in the image of movements, such that the events are immanent within movement objects.

Frampton's concept of a *filmind* allows us to regard these images as the phenomenological intention of an agent but, significantly, without regarding this agency in terms of mediation or an external agent, and thus we can consolidate the guiding agency of a narrator-figure with an agent responsible for the images, but without positing an external agent, as other accounts have been inclined to do. It is not the case that the *filmind* mediates the images, as if representing movement and the narrative that is derived from this, but that the image (including the movement and events within this) *is* the intention of the *filmind*: film thinks through and as the image, such that this thinking agency is immanent within the image.

We can now see that Deleuze's theory of the filmic image allows us to theorise the ontological dimension of the indeterminacy of the event within movement, such that we can regard narrative as immanent yet indeterminate within the images of movement presented. In addition to this, Frampton's phenomenological conception of film-thinking provides us with a means of theorising this presentation of narrative in terms of agency and narrative articulation, as well as drawing attention toward the indeterminate ontological *status* of the event in film (which I elaborate in the following chapter), such that he lays out some useful concepts for discussing narrative agency and indeterminacy, but without fully developing this potential. In combining these ideas with Deleuze's image-ontology and Iser's theory of the act of reading we can draw out the implications of film-thinking for an ontology of narrative in film, the indeterminacy that proceeds from this and the activity of a viewer in response to this indeterminacy.

Chapter 6

Unreliable Narrators and Narration

In this chapter I will examine the relationship between voice-over narration and the image in narrative film-thinking, in particular how the former can guide a viewer toward a certain interpretation of events and thus assist in overcoming the indeterminacy of the event as well as mislead to provide an effect of unreliable narration. In light of the indeterminacy of the event that I have been outlining I will argue for an alternative conception of this idea of unreliable narration in film.

Transsubjective Points of View in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*

With reference to film, Sarah Kozloff states that

'voice-over narration' can be formally defined as 'oral statements', conveying any portion of narrative, spoken by an unseen speaker situated in a space and time other than that simultaneously being presented by the images on screen.

(1988: 5)

Being situated in another 'space and time,' seemingly outside of the story they are narrating, can give the impression that the voice-over frames the story presented on screen, sometimes as if it were indeed created by this voice-over: '[I]n many cases the voice-over narrator is so inscribed in the film as to seem as if he or she has generated not only what he is saying but also what we are seeing' (45). Kozloff describes certain features that can encourage the viewer to experience the voice-over as such a dominant and creative voice, but it is nonetheless the case that this only occurs if 'the viewer suspends disbelief' (*ibid.*), for, as Kozloff puts it, 'voice-over narrators . . . are always embedded within the image-maker's discourse' (*ibid.*). However, this 'image-maker's discourse' – as I have discussed – is better conceptualised as film-thinking, this being the creative intention of the filmind, the agent of the filmind being 'responsible for the

primary diegesis' (*ibid.*). Because of the confluence of words and images in film, the voice of the narrator in film does not possess the same level of authority as the narrator in literature (which, as Wayne Booth (1983: 158-159) and Iser (1978: 204) show, is not itself a constantly authoritative perspective).

The image is a continuous counterpart to the voice-over in film, such that voice-over narration will always exist in a certain relationship to the image, but not vice versa. This omnipresence of the image in film acts as a constant frame of reference, framing any voice-over narration, such that the narrator in film is not – as it normally is in literature – the 'definitive frame of reference by which to judge the events of the narrative' (Iser, 1978: 205); the voice of the narrator is judged against the events on screen. As Kozloff puts it, 'a first-person voice-over narrator [in film] . . . is not in control of his or her story to the same degree, or in the same manner, as a literary narrator' (Kozloff, 1988: 43).⁶⁸ But a viewer may accept the narrator as a reliable guide to the events on-screen if they do not conflict, and especially if the viewer perceives a certain amount of ambiguity in the story that this voice-over helps to clarify, as in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982).⁶⁹ However, although the voice-over narration may be considered unreliable (if it is making claims which are regarded as subsequently proved false), the images of film-thought that are interpreted as in some way corresponding with the unreliable narration should not also be considered as unreliable in this manner, as I will demonstrate below.

It is first of all worth looking again at some examples of when a voice-over narration overlaps with events shown on screen, what role the narration plays in this instance, and the various ways in which the image-track can be interpreted in relation to this, before exploring the implications that the idea of film-thinking explored above has

68 Although in a film such as Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), where a continual shot of saturated blue colour is accompanied by voice-over telling stories, the narrative takes place entirely through the spoken-word, such that the image does not seem to serve any narrative function in terms of framing the voice-over, as it does when presenting a diegesis. However, although not serving a narrative function, framing that of the voice-over, Vivian Sobchack describes how the particular experience presented by the 'referentially indeterminate' 'image of "no "thing"' (2011: 197) leads to the impression that 'however invisible, Jarman is embodied and insistently present' (203).

69 Deckard's (Harrison Ford) voice-over was added to *Blade Runner* as an 'explanatory narration' (Bukatman, 1997: 32) because the film's producers believed it would help to clarify what they feared was too ambiguous and abstruse a story. Here the narrator provides a commentary on the action on screen, providing clarification as to why certain events are taking place, further examples of which I will discuss later. It is worth noting that Scott restored some ambiguity to the film by removing the voice-over from the later 'Director's Cut' (1992) of the film, as well as suggesting that Deckard may himself be a replicant through the addition of a unicorn dream, although this remains indeterminate. However, this type of indeterminacy – involving character identity – is not the focus of this thesis, looking instead at the indeterminacy of events (Chatman's (1978: 19) distinction between existents (characters and setting) and events (actions and happenings) is relevant here).

for this relationship and how this relates to the indeterminacy of the event. I will then examine films in which a narrator's testimony is deemed unreliable and how the image relates to this testimony.

Max Ophul's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) has been discussed extensively in terms of the relationship between the visual point of view presented by the film and the narration of the letter of the title. The letter is sent from Lisa Berndle (Joan Fontaine) to Stefan Brandt (Louis Jourdan), and in it Lisa recalls the story of her meeting and falling in love with Stefan, and revealing to Stefan many things which went unnoticed by him. The film begins with Stefan receiving the letter. As he reads it Lisa's voice is heard on the soundtrack, narrating the letter: 'By the time you read this letter I may be dead. I have so much to tell you and perhaps very little time,' she begins. The image of Stefan reading the letter shifts out of focus and fades to a shot of possessions being unloaded from a van. The narration of Lisa reading the letter continues over this change of scenes, giving the impression of a homodiegetic⁷⁰ framing narration. She states that 'nothing is vivid or real in my memory before that day in spring when I came home from school and found a removal van in front of our building,' whilst we see a young girl poking her head inside the removal van. The voice-over here, along with the optical device of a focus-push and fade, serves to signal a shift back in time from the time of Stefan reading the letter in the previous scene to the time of the events that the letter is recounting. The voice-over complements the image here: there is an overlap between them, such that we identify the girl in the shot with the woman reading the letter and are thus encouraged to interpret the subsequent framed narrative as a visual representation of events recounted by the letter. However, on closer inspection it seems unclear from which point of view exactly these images are being shown. A discussion of why this is the case – including a brief survey of the various interpretations of point of view in this film – helps to elucidate the status of film as thought, as well as some important points about the distinction between the articulation of narrative through words and through images, both with consequences for the indeterminacy of narrative in film.

Critics such as Robin Wood and George Wilson argue that the images presented

70 Genette uses this term to describe a narrator who is 'present as a character in the story he tells,' with a heterodiegetic narrator 'absent from the story he tells' (Genette, 1980: 244-245). He uses these terms instead of 'first' or 'third-person' narrators, recognising that presence/absence from the narrated story, as well as the diegetic level of this narration – which I discuss in more detail later – are more appropriate terms with which to describe narrators.

by the film cannot be equated with the point of view expressed by Lisa through her letter because the images show more than Lisa can possibly have been aware of, and that many things are shown happening which Lisa did not see. Wood therefore notes a 'pervasive tension between subjective narrative and objective presentation' (1976: 127), giving the example of the scenes at the fairground where

we see that Lisa is completely enclosed in the world of her dream, aware of nothing except Stefan and the apparent realization of her fantasies. Ophuls, however, shows us a lot that is outside that world: the old man who works the levers that operate the backdrops, the old woman Stefan pays for the entertainment All this, clearly, is outside Lisa's consciousness, and could not have been described in the letter.

(*ibid.*)

Similarly, Wilson describes how after first watching Stefan enter his flat with another woman from the stairway, Lisa later takes the place of this woman, and is shown entering the flat with Stefan from the same position as before, such that we see her from her previous point of view, in an action that she is now the subject of. Wilson interprets this as emphasising that the images are not shown from Lisa's point of view, claiming that the effect of the echoing of shots here indicates an independent narrational agency:

If the first of these shots had been a subjective shot that directly presented her field of vision and thus excluded her wholly from the frame, then the echoing second shot would not mark as it does her earlier complicity and later lack of complicity with the camera's point of view.

(1986: 103-104)

This visual 'narration,' provided by the camera, is therefore distinct from the narration provided by the letter, according to Wilson: '[T]he narration cannot be read as a mere visual rendering of the contents of Lisa's letter. The interrelationship of sequences and the design of shots and *mise en scène* are used too persistently as a means of commenting upon Lisa and her experience for that' (122). And for Wilson this visual narration is used to convey the intentions of what he refers to as an 'implied film maker': 'It is impossible to escape the impression of an intelligent and sometimes ironic observer, the implied film maker as it were, who is continuously observing with special

insight into the wider patterns that Lisa ostensibly describes' (123).

Indeed, apart from these issues of narrational commentary and impossible memories, there still remains the problem of representing memories and recollections through the filmic image, which Wilson begins to explore but fails to draw out the full implications of. Wilson recognises that it is problematic in any instance to regard flashback scenes as a visual representation of a verbal narrator's assertions: '[T]he shots of the film present far more information than the speaker's statements could convey, and, thus, the presumption that what the audience sees "translates" what the speaker has said, seems, upon reflection, to be absurd' (106). Instead, Wilson argues, it is more plausible to a viewer 'that the flashback depicts, from its own proper perspective, the *actual* occurrences that the narrator then claims to be describing' (105). And, as Wilson also observes, this accounts for the shock of films featuring lying flashbacks, as I will discuss below. However, in accounting for the source of this visual narration, although being sensitive to the problem of dividing narration between subjective and objective (as his discussion of point of view in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* demonstrates), Wilson falls back on narrating agents and implied film-makers placed outside of the film. As Frampton states, 'Wilson is . . . incapable of separating film's actions from either human perception or an implied author, and thus cannot see how a metanarrative could be anything other than "subjectivity" forced on top of "objectivity"' (37).⁷¹ Instead, as I have argued, it is more appropriate, following Frampton's model of the filmind, to regard the narrational agency of film as transsubjective and immanent within the film. Although, as I have mentioned, Frampton does not fully consider the implications that this concept of the filmind has for theories of filmic narration, as I do here.

To reiterate, film-thinking is transsubjective because it provides neither objective nor subjective representations of events – the filmic images are always first and foremost the immanent intentions of a filmind, which may then be interpreted as thinking objectively or subjectively: '[A]ll "subjective" and "objective" shots within the film are produced through the filmind's "thinking": the filmind is neither subjective or objective, it is both, it is transsubjective' (Frampton, 2006: 87). This leads to the fact that 'no point of view is pure, it is always the filmind's thinking' (88). The filmind, not a

71 Although, as I have discussed, Wilson does later attempt to reintegrate narrational agency within the film itself, a lead which Frampton follows in his more thorough elaboration of this agency as a 'filmind.'

character and not a narrator, is always the origin of the image, with the filmind immanent within this image-thinking, such that it does not frame it as a further layer of discourse but 'exists' – is manifest – only through this image of thought: '[Film-thinking] is an intention that comes from within the film: it is not an extradiegetic or ghostly intention' (83). And it is as a result of the problems encountered in accounting for the agency and origin of images in terms of external figures, foregrounded in unreliable narration and non-subjective point of view shots (these being the 'two aspects to contemporary film that provoked the idea of filmosophy' (6)), that Frampton identifies a 'need to radically resituate film-being – we need to understand film as issuing from itself. The film becomes the creator of its own world, not from a "point" of view, but from a realm, a no-place, that still gives us some things and not others' (38).

So what are the implications of this transsubjective immanency for an analysis of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*? Regarding visual narration as transsubjective film-thinking enables us to see the film as both thinking with Lisa's point of view, and thus overlapping to an extent with the information (her memories) provided by the letter, as well as thinking these events 'objectively,' outside of any embedded point of view, the important point being that both of these perspectives are thought together through the transsubjectivity of the filmind, and importantly this film-thinking does not represent or recreate subjective experience or objective occurrence, but *creates* these events through the movement of the image.

We thus have a dual indeterminacy of the event in film-thinking: the indeterminacy of the event in relation to segments of movement, as I have discussed, and the indeterminacy of the ontological status (and therefore diegetic level) of the event. Neither of these can be stated through the image-thinking of the film, which does not assert what the event is nor its level or status, but creates movement through the image and thus, as thinking in this manner, presents both objective and subjective events as transsubjective, creating them as its own thought rather than recreating or representing some other events. Unreliable narratives featuring lying flashbacks take advantage of this transsubjective indeterminacy of film-thinking, as I will discuss in more detail below, however in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* it is point of view rather than reliability that is at issue, in particular who – if anyone – the film is thinking with through the various shots; whose thoughts the film is creating as its own thoughts, and how this image-thinking relates to the voice-over narration spoken by Lisa. I argue that only the voice-over, as discourse, can be assigned to any one narrational location and

that the images, contrarily, are always necessarily independent of any such point of origin, although can be regarded as 'thinking with' a character (or indeed, as thinking 'objectively'). As Frampton puts it,

[A] character never *completely* originates a narrative, the filmind is always giving its version of what the character tells. This double authoring, where personal narratives are enclosed by the larger filmind, allows us some possible scepticism over what the character is relating, allows us the possibility of not believing the character (and removes any need to call-up an implied author). The filmind can think (imagine, create) the “contents” of its character's minds.

(85)

The issue then becomes one of determining when and who the filmind might be thinking with at any particular time, whilst retaining the idea that the image-thinking of the filmind is always in fact transsubjective and so is never truly subjective or objective.

According to Frampton's theory of the filmind, the filmic image, constituting film-thought, does not, unlike the word, belong to anyone; it 'intends from a non-place or realm of perspective rather than a singular point of view. The filmind is not outside the film, it is the film. The film's perspective is the whole film' (86). It is not a point of view of something, but exists only as this intentionality – this thinking of the thing: 'Simply by moving us in and out of the subjective and the objective – comparing, contrasting – the filmind becomes a pure intentionality (there really being *no intentional object*)' (87). What Frampton does not explore is the narrative indeterminacy that results from this 'pure intentionality' of the moving image of thought created by film, and from the unique ontological status and creative power of the moving image of film compared to the word.

As I have described, both Wilson and Chatman note the excessive informativity of the image compared to spoken words (although they do so apart from the mobility of the image and its consequences for the determination of the event). Voice-over narration can therefore be used to provide a descriptive or explanatory commentary on the image, emphasising certain events and information within the shot, and facilitating the establishment of causal relationships, helping to segment events accordingly. For example, in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, Lisa's voice-over narration informs us of the moment at which she fell in love after we see Stefan, a concert pianist, leave a

rehearsal session and Lisa rushes to greet him after having listened to him from outside his window. Stefan thanks her as she holds the door open and then glances back as he leaves the courtyard. Her friend then remarks 'You're all red in the face – you're blushing!,' with Lisa's voice-over narration then confirming: 'Yes, I was blushing, and hard as it may be for you to realise, from that moment on I was in love with you.' We then see Lisa carefully ironing her clothes, taking dance lessons, researching classical composers, and then taking a program for one of Stefan's concerts out of the pocket of a man on a tram, with Lisa's voice-over narration explaining the cause of these actions, which might not otherwise be apparent: 'Quite consciously I began to prepare myself for you: I kept my clothes neater, so you wouldn't be ashamed of me. I went to dancing school – I wanted to become more graceful, and learn good manners, for you. And so I would know more about you and your world I went to the library and studied the lives of the great musicians of the past. Though I was not able to go to your concerts, I found ways of sharing in your success.'

Similarly, *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944) shows prior events through a flashback with a voice-over seeming to frame these events. Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) is an insurance salesman who has been double-crossed by the femme fatale, Phyllis Dietrichson (Barbara Stanwyck), and tricked into killing her husband. He is shot and injured when he confronts Phyllis, and then goes to confess to his boss, Barton Keyes (Edward G. Robinson), the head of the insurance firm. He records his memory of events onto a dictaphone for Keyes to hear, which acts as the voice-over narration which accompanies the images which therefore seem to relay Walter's flashback – the events leading up to and causing his confession. As with *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, the voice-over narration provides insight into character motivation and the reasons for certain actions being carried out. For example, we see Walter in his car with a bottle of beer and then at a bowling alley after he has angrily accused Phyllis of wanting to kill her husband in order to claim the insurance. As he pours the beer his voice-over informs us that 'I stopped at a drive-in for a bottle of beer, one I had wanted all along, only I wanted it worse now to get rid of the sour taste of her iced-tea and everything that went with it.' And then, as he bowls: 'I didn't want to go back to the office so I dropped by a bowling alley on 3rd and Western and rolled a few lines, get my mind thinking about something else for a while.'

We can therefore see that voice-over narration can serve to explain to the viewer what events are taking place and why, helping to clarify the indeterminacy of the image,

and that it plays this role when there is a certain amount of overlap between the words and image, which gives the impression that the images constitute a thinking-with the words and the determinate perspective from which they issue, as a statement of fact. However, as with *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, there may remain the possibility that the images are thinking with (filtered by) the recollections of another character or combining various perspectives together, including that of the transsubjective 'non-place' of the filmind itself, thinking as 'itself' – creating its own thinking-images, rather than creating those of others.

In *Letter from an Unknown Woman* it is not the reliability of the recollections that is at issue – i.e. what actually took place – but the point of view from which these events are being shown (or, to use the filmsosophical terms, who the filmind is thinking with). However, in the case of films featuring lying flashbacks, which I explore below, it is precisely the reliability of the recollection, and the image that seems to be framed by it, that is undermined. Although the indeterminacy of film-thinking that I have been elaborating leads us to regard this image-thinking in different terms to the unreliability of a character's testimony.

Lying Flashbacks and Transsubjective Indeterminacy

The flashback structure, as we have seen in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Double Indemnity*, is often accompanied by a voice-over narration which bridges the temporal shift between the diegetic present of the framing narration and the recollection visualised on screen, and gives the impression that the image is thinking-with the voice-over. This lends the image the assertive quality of language, such that it – like the voice-over narration that accompanies it – is regarded as making a statement that the events actually took place. This 'narration' provided by the image is thus regarded as reliable in this manner, until further information is revealed which calls into question the testimony of the voice-over narration and the images that seem to stem from it, and thus the effect of unreliable narration is produced. Chatman argues that the sounds and images outside of the flashback are presented by a 'cinematic narrator' who frames the unreliable narration, and that both of these narrators (cinematic and homodiegetic) are framed by the intent of an implied author-figure, which he describes 'as the principle within the text to which we assign the inventional tasks' (1990: 132). According to

Chatman, it is this figure that enables the two narrations to be compared and thus for one to frame the other as unreliable in accordance with the perceived intention of the text, which he identifies with an implied author: 'Controlling both narrations [character and cinematic] there must be a broader textual intent – the implied author. It is the implied author who juxtaposes the two narrations of the story and “allows” us to decide which is true' (132). However, Frampton's concept of an immanent, transsubjective thinking 'filmind' enables us to regard unreliable narration in a different manner.

As I have discussed, Frampton's filmind has the advantage of locating cinematic intentionality and agency within the film itself, with the image itself constituting the immanent transsubjective 'being' of the filmind, such that the filmind always originates the narrative and therefore both 'cinematic' and 'character' narrations are produced through this immanent film-thinking. It is for this reason that Frampton refers to a 'double authoring, where personal narratives are enclosed by the larger filmind' but also simultaneously issuing from (and as) the film itself. In the cases of homodiegetic narration in film – where the images are cued as corresponding with the testimony of a character – the film should therefore be considered as thinking with the character, creating their thoughts as moving images and not translating their words into images or 'recalling' the events as they 'actually' happened (i.e. creating and presenting, rather than *recreating* and *representing*). And so properly speaking, a voice-over narration does not frame the images when the film is thinking with a character in this manner. As I have discussed, the filmind removes the need to posit any kind of cinematic narrator, as Chatman does and Wilson struggles with: '[F]ilm may just be thinking *from itself*, and, only if it feels like it, through or “as” characters' (Frampton, 2006: 85).

The image-thinking of film is therefore not making an ontological statement or truth claim through its creation of thought *qua* moving image, and thus the supposed unreliability of the image in films featuring unreliable homodiegetic narrators is a misnomer: it is not making a claim to a reliable assertion in the first place, and so cannot then be considered unreliable when the image is revealed as thinking with a fabrication. The images of a lying flashback should therefore not be considered as unreliable but, at best, as misleading, which stems from the creative power of film-thinking, thinking 'subjectively' and 'objectively' with equal veracity. This indeterminate ontological status – a result of the transsubjectivity of film-thought – can be exploited to mislead a viewer. In films where the flashback of a character is revealed as false – as a fabrication – the viewer may have been misled into believing

that the film is thinking 'objectively' when in fact it is thinking 'subjectively,' with the homodiegetic narrator, such that they may feel deceived at having being led to this assumption, believing that the images are making statements of fact – that such and such took place – like the verbal testimony of the homodiegetic narrator. For example, in *Stage Fright* (Hitchcock, 1950) the conventional device of a dissolve and overlapping dialogue – such that it moves from voice-on-screen to voice-over – is used to cue a flashback sequence (similar to the examples discussed above) and give the impression of an equivalence between words and image, as if the latter is a continuation of the former.⁷²

Stage Fright opens with Eve Gill (Jane Wyman) and her friend Jonathan Cooper (Richard Todd) in a car escaping from the police to Eve's father's boat. When they are clear of the police Eve asks Jonathan 'could you tell me now what happened? I'd really like to know.' Jonathan then begins to explain that it had to do with Charlotte Inwood (Marlene Dietrich) being 'in a jam,' and that he felt had to help her. He continues, 'I was in my kitchen, it was about 5 o'clock,' with this statement accompanied by an image dissolve from the car to Jonathan in a kitchen drying the dishes. He goes on, 'the doorbell rang and I went downstairs to see who it was,' the sound of a doorbell coinciding with the words being spoken about this event, and the last part of the statement fading in volume as we see Jonathan leave the kitchen and go downstairs. The 'flashback' over the next few minutes shows Charlotte – apparently his lover – arriving at Jonathan's and informing him that she has killed her husband in self-defence. She persuades Jonathan to go back to her house – where the murder took place – and get a new dress to replace her blood-stained one for a performance she has to give later. He does this and whilst there decides to make it look like there has been an intruder to explain away the murder, but is seen by Charlotte's maid, who then informs the police. Jonathan flees the police and goes to his friend Eve for help, hence the pursuit that the film opens with. Eve – being in love with Jonathan – then gets involved in an elaborate ruse to prove the guilt of Charlotte. When eventually cornered by Eve about the murder, Charlotte denies having killed her husband and attempts to explain the blood on her dress and how her husband died: 'Yes, some blood did splash on my dress – I was there in the room when Jonathan killed my husband, . . . but I had nothing to do with it.' She explains that after the murder Jonathan wanted her name kept out of it and so sent

⁷² Indeed, in *Stage Fright* the voice-over fades in volume over the images of the 'flashback,' as if the images take over its function.

her away and made it look like the work of an intruder and that he then brought her a clean dress. And it eventually transpires that Jonathan has been accused of murder before but that he successfully claimed self-defence: the police detective – and Eve's new love interest – Wilfred Smith (Michael Wilding) declares that Jonathan 'killed Charlotte's husband alright, and he's killed before.' This revelation – made by a character whose honesty and integrity has not been called into question – together with the claims of Charlotte – although not a particularly sympathetic character⁷³ – causes a viewer to doubt the truthfulness of Jonathan's account and his reported flashback: we now have an alternative narrative of events (provided by Charlotte) and an undermining of the character and honesty of the initial (homodiegetic) narrator. The fact that Jonathan has fabricated his account of events is confirmed when he later confesses to Eve that he did kill Charlotte's husband, but only because she goaded him into doing it, taking advantage of his bad temper, because she wanted her husband dead so that she could go off with another man.

Hitchcock's film takes advantage of the transsubjective indeterminacy of film-thinking – with thoughts and reality both presented with equal veracity (i.e. as neither subjective nor objective, but as uniquely *transsubjective*) – in order to mislead the viewer by presenting a fabricated sequence of events as if it were a statement of fact (with the images *seeming* to continue the assertion of the voice-over): Jonathan's version of events exists only in his mind, expressed through his words to Eve, and yet the film is able to create these thoughts as moving images and spoken dialogue within these: as Frampton put it, '[t]he filmind can think (imagine, create) the “contents” of its characters minds.' *Stage Fright* was particularly controversial at the time because of this breaking with the convention that the portrayal of a flashback could be relied upon as a truthful version of events that took place objectively – that had physically taken place within the diegesis – to the extent that viewers felt deceived when Hitchcock flouted this convention. However, we can see that it is not the 'flashback' itself that should be considered as unreliable and thus deceiving, but only as far as it is taken in a certain relationship with the verbal testimony of the deceiving narrator.⁷⁴

73 Her later heartfelt confession to the Sergeant Mellish (Ballard Berkeley) that her mother didn't return her love seems to make her more trust-worthy and sympathetic, realigning her with 'the good guys,' although this is undermined by Johnathan's subsequent claim, having confessed, that she manipulated both him and her husband, such that we may now see this conversation with Mellish as itself symptomatic of her manipulative character.

74 Again, Frampton, whilst recognising the transsubjective nature of film-thought, does not follow through the implications of this for a conception of unreliable narration, i.e. the unsuitability of this

Hitchcock, however, was not the first to employ this device of the 'lying flashback.' *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) is an early example of such a narrative structure. Like *Stage Fright*, this film sets up a framed narrative at the beginning with Francis (Friedrich Feher) replying to an unnamed man's comment, sat beside him, that 'spirits surround us on every side – they have driven me from hearth and home, from wife and child' with the claim that – referring to a wandering, dazed woman – 'what she and I have experienced is yet more remarkable than the story you have told me. I will tell you In Holstenwall where I was born...' Being a silent film this dialogue is related through inter-titles, but nonetheless a similar effect of the images being a continuation of the words, and thus an equivalent assertion, as well as a reverse temporal shift is produced by ending the dialogue mid-sentence, speaking in the past-tense, and the image then gradually transitioning to a different location (although an iris-out/in is used here, rather than a dissolve, as became the convention for signalling temporal ellipsis in later films of the sound era (Bordwell, 1985a: 44)).

This apparent flashback shows Francis and his friend Alan (Hans Heinrich von Twardowski) going to see a somnambulist, Cesare (Conrad Veidt), and his master Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss) at a carnival. Cesare predicts that Alan will die before dawn the next day, a prediction which is proved correct when he is murdered. Francis' fiancée Jane (Lil Dagover) is then kidnapped by Cesare, the prime suspect for the murder, who refuses the orders of Caligari – who has also hypnotised Cesare – to kill her, instead running away with her. Cesare then dies of exhaustion. Francis finds out that Caligari is in fact a director of a mental asylum, who has been mimicking a previous Caligari, who used a somnambulist to kill people hundreds of years ago. Dr. Caligari reveals that he is insane when confronted with the body of the dead Cesare, and is then put in a strait-jacket and locked up. There is now another iris-out/in as the film makes the transition back to the opening scene of Francis and the other man sitting on the bench. Francis now tells the man: 'Today he is a raving madman chained to his cell.' However, what is shown next casts the truthfulness of this 'flashback' into doubt as it is revealed that Francis (and presumably the man he tells his story to) is in fact himself an inmate at a lunatic asylum, in the grounds of which they are sat, and that the man who appears as Caligari in his 'flashback' is his doctor and the director of the asylum, with Cesare and Jane being other inmates, wandering around in delusional states. It therefore appears

that Francis' 'flashback' is part of a delusion; he announces the following as 'Dr Caligari' enters the grounds of the asylum: 'You fools, this man is plotting our doom! We die at dawn!' The doctor then declares that 'at last I recognise his mania. He believes me to be the mythical Caligari. Astonishing! But I think I know how to cure him now!' At which point the film ends.

As with *Stage Fright*, the unreliable narrator is revealed as such when the framing narrative presents information that undermines the truthfulness of his account, although in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* there is no confession that the flashback is dishonest and the 'flashback' is to be regarded as a delusion symptomatic of mental illness, as opposed to a lie motivated by a desire to bring about a certain states of affairs (in the case of *Stage Fright*, Jonathan getting away with murder). However, in both cases we can see that during the 'flashback' the image is thinking with the homodiegetic narrator who frames this story, creating their lie/delusion through images of movement and dialogue, but not asserting its objectivity or facticity, as occurs through the language of the narrators that introduce the 'flashback.' Instead the image-thinking, in its transsubjectivity, should be considered as manifesting ontological and diegetic indeterminacy, but in these examples the viewer is led toward determining it as objective or subjective by the wider actions of film thought, encouraging the viewer to regard the image as an assertion of an objective truth – as in the introduction of the 'flashbacks' – or subjective imaginings, through the undermining of the testimony of these homodiegetic narrators, for example. And in both of these cases the evidence for the 'subjective' nature of the flashbacks seems overwhelming. However, as we shall see, this is not always the case, such that transsubjective indeterminacy seems to remain.

Rashomon and Indeterminate Framings

Whilst these techniques may have been controversial and unconventional at the time, they have since been employed as a familiar trope of Hollywood story-telling, some exploiting this transsubjectivity of film-thought to a greater extent than these archetypal examples, and some to a lesser extent.⁷⁵ In the latter category I would

⁷⁵ Bordwell labels these recent examples as 'puzzle films' in acknowledgement of audiences' attitudes toward their narratives: 'Viewers seem to apply the notion fairly broadly, invoking it whenever a film asks us to discuss "what really happened," to think back over what has been shown, or to rewatch the

include films such as *Fight Club* (David Fincher, 1999), *A Beautiful Mind* (Ron Howard, 2001) and *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999). Unlike the above examples, each of these films lacks a framing narrative which can embed it as unreliable, but instead an aspect of the 'objective' world of the protagonist is revealed as some form of hallucination/delusion, i.e. as subjective, such that with regards to these features the film is thinking with the protagonist in question, as they are not part of the experience of other characters within this world.

For example, in *Fight Club* the character Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) is revealed as a mental projection of the nameless protagonist and narrator (Edward Norton), with Tyler controlling his body when he is asleep. So when we see Tyler – who is a main character throughout the film – we are actually thinking with and sharing the delusions of 'the narrator.' The result of the revelation of a split mind manifesting itself as two different characters is that certain aspects of the narrator's world (Tyler and presumably all the actions that he carries out whilst the narrator is also conscious and which cannot be carried out by him) are to be interpreted as on a separate ontological level from others, existing only in his mind and not in the material world of shared experience.

A similar twist is also revealed in *The Sixth Sense*, albeit with a supernatural bent. In this case a character, Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis), who we took to be alive and thus existing objectively is in fact dead: only one other character, Cole Sear, sees him, for Sear (Haley Joel Osment) can see dead people (and the dead cannot see each other). The filmind is therefore thinking with Sear when Crowe is shown. *A Beautiful Mind* again employs the device of mental illness as a cause of the delusions suffered by the protagonist, which the viewer shares with him, however in this case this revelation of the delusional nature of these experiences occurs midway through the film, rather than towards the end, as in *Fight Club* and *The Sixth Sense*.

There are then those films which exploit the transsubjective indeterminacy of film-thinking to a greater extent by leaving open how much of the action presented is objective (actually having taken place) and how much subjective (a delusion/hallucination/fabrication). For example, *The Usual Suspects* (Bryan Singer, 1995) features a character, Verbal Kint (Kevin Spacey), telling the story of the events leading up to a huge fire and shoot-out on-board a docked boat, and the role of a mysterious character, known as Keyser Soze, in organising the crimes that culminate in

this climactic scene, and the group of criminals involved in this, including Kint himself. Kint narrates this story to a detective at a police station as a recollection of events he was involved with, whilst the image presents these events to the viewer, as if a flashback (the camera zooming into extreme close-up as he is about to tell his story, and then cutting to the corresponding scene). However, at the end of the film information is revealed that causes a viewer to doubt the accuracy of Kint's story: the viewer is encouraged to make the connection between the apparently innocuous and mundane surroundings in which the character Kint narrates his apparent recollection of events and the content of this 'recollection,' matching up the names of objects around the room with the names of people and places in Kint's story, revealing that his 'flashback' is nothing more than a story, at least partially made up on the spot. This dishonesty of Kint is further confirmed when we see him walk out of the police station, his apparent physical disability evaporating before our eyes as he gradually assumes an able-bodied posture.

The viewer is thus encouraged – by the agency of narrative film-thinking – to regard Kint's testimony as a lie, and therefore the 'flashback' as film thinking with this fictional story. As Frampton puts it,

The Usual Suspects creates the recounted, remembered story given at the police station, leading us to believe that the film is simply, understandably, giving us earlier scenes from a greater story – but the filmind is actually “creating” the story told by “Keyser Soze.”⁷⁶

(2006: 137)

Frampton is here making the assumption that Kint is in fact Soze, whereas Bordwell notes what he refers to as 'a zone of indeterminacy' regarding central facts that remains by the end of the film, such that a viewer cannot be sure how much of Kint's story is a lie, and even whether he is in fact the mysterious Keyser Soze (Bordwell, 2006: 81-82). Kint/Soze himself offers no confession, as in *Stage Fright*, and there is no explanation offered by other authoritative figures, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. The viewer, however, is led to doubt at least some of the central claims made by Kint/Soze, and

⁷⁶ Although it must be added that the filmind is creating its own version of the story, because – as we have seen – a story told through language is not equivalent to a story shown through images. It should instead be regarded as the filmind translating thoughts into images (to the extent that we can talk of film thinking 'subjectively'), but again as its own filmic intention – as film-thought – and thus not simply a projection of human thoughts onto a screen.

therefore the objective status of the images that seem to follow from them.

Memento (Christopher Nolan, 2001) is another film in which there is an embedded narrative which is initially presented as objective but with information then arising that casts this into doubt, although not definitively. This framed story is narrated by protagonist Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), who tells the story of a man, Sammy Jankis (Stephen Tobolowsky) (a previous case of Leonard's, as an insurance claims investigator), who lost his memory and was tricked by his diabetic wife into giving her a fatal insulin overdose. We hear Leonard's voice-over narration as these events are shown on screen. But Leonard, who is unable to form new memories, is later told by Teddy (Joe Pantoliano), a corrupt detective, that this memory of Jankis' story is in fact a memory of what happened to Leonard himself, following the attack that caused his anterograde amnesia – it was *him* that killed his wife.⁷⁷ In which case the embedded narrative about Jankis is not objective but is the filmind thinking with Leonard's delusion (with Leonard's verbal testimony as unreliable). However, Bordwell claims that 'the film doesn't provide enough redundancy to let us ascertain this' (*ibid.*). Teddy's version of events competes with what Leonard, and the viewer (sharing his restricted knowledge of key past events, and therefore learning with Leonard) has been led to believe up to this point; but Teddy's character is depicted as dishonest and so which version are we to trust?

In both of the above examples the viewer is initially led by a homodiegetic narrator to regard the events that they recount – and the images and dialogue which this voice-over seems to frame, as if making similar assertions – as a truthful recollection/presentation of veridical events, although a certain amount of indeterminacy remains as to the ontological status of these events. However, in *Rashomon* (Akira Kurosawa, 1950) there are multiple and conflicting versions of events put forward by several homodiegetic embedded narrators, such that they each lead the viewer to make certain assumptions regarding the ontological status of the image-thinking which accompanies – seems to be framed by – their verbal testimony, and only one of which can be true, or none of them at all. Here transsubjective indeterminacy is foregrounded, as it is not clear which 'flashback' is veridical, nor who frames who, as I will now demonstrate.

⁷⁷ Leonard believes his wife was killed in the attack that caused his amnesia, and is consequently trying to find the perpetrator. Teddy tells him at the end of the film that he has been exploiting Leonard's lack of memory and desire for revenge in order to carry out murders on his behalf.

Rashomon features the testimony of six different characters, each giving a different version of the events which led up to the murder of a man. Unlike the above examples, *Rashomon* features a doubly embedded (or metadiegetic, to use Genette's term) narrative (although this framing is unclear, as I will demonstrate). The initial frame narrative features three men taking refuge from a storm, with one of these men, a woodcutter (Takashi Shimura), describing how he found a body in the woods: 'It was three days ago, I'd gone to the hills to cut wood.' And then we have the familiar flashback transition of a cut to a scene where the image corresponds to a certain extent with the dialogue spoken (although without an overlapping voice-over): the next scene features a low-angle shot of a tree canopy, with the woodcutter walking through the forest, first stumbling upon some discarded belongings and then a dead body, at which point he screams and runs away. The voice-over of this man then states that 'I ran to tell the police,' such that the viewer is given an insight into the motivation of his actions by informing him/her of the event that follows this (the effect of the causal event of finding a dead body) – his telling the police. The voice-over then introduces the next scene which follows as a causal result of this event, as well as informing of the temporal interval between the various diegetic levels: 'That was three days ago. Today I was called to give evidence.' There is then a wipe transition to the trial, where a series of witnesses, including an accused bandit, Tajomaru, now each gives their version of events, within this framed situation and thus as apparently doubly embedded.

The woodcutter describes the belongings that he found in the wood, and then the priest's testimony begins: 'I saw the murdered man when he was still alive. It was three days ago in the afternoon. It was on the road between Sekiyama and Yamashina.' We are then given the impression of a flashback again, as the scene cuts from the trial to the priest walking down a road. His voice-over then describes seeing the couple – the murder victim and his wife – as they are shown on horse-back. Cut back to the trial and the priest describes how he didn't think he would see the man again but then saw his dead body. A screen-wipe then cuts to the testimony of the bandit's captor (again, marking time and place): 'It was the day before yesterday on the riverbank at Katsura.' This is followed by a cut to the captor on the riverbank who sees Tajomaru lying on the floor in agony. His voice-over describes what he saw and his interpretation of it – he identifies items lying on the ground as property of the dead man and interprets the scene as the aftermath of the bandit having fallen from the stolen horse, which he interprets as an act of retribution. The bandit, Tajomaru, goes next: 'On that day . . . I suddenly

became very thirsty, so I stopped to drink at a stream.' Cut to him drinking at stream. He then explains why he got off the horse and lay down: he had a stomach ache after drinking from the stream (believing a snake was upstream from him), thus challenging his captors' interpretation. However, he then confesses: 'It was me, Tajomaru, who killed him.' Tajomaru is shown asleep under a tree as the couple approach and pass on horse-back. Back at the trial he explains that he desired her and 'decided to have her. I'd have her even if I had to kill the man.' He is then shown going after the couple, and after leading her husband away ties him up and then attacks the woman. She doesn't want to be raped and lose honour in front of two men and so promises to 'belong to whoever kills the other.' They fight and Tajomaru kills her husband.

The scene then switches to the framing narrative, where the priest describes how the woman was found by police and also gave evidence at the trial. The woodcutter claims that both the bandit's confession and woman's story are lies. Back at the framed trial the woman's testimony then begins. She describes, and the viewer is shown, how after Tajomaru raped her she could not bear the way her husband looked at her, with hatred, and encourages him to kill her. She becomes angry whilst holding the dagger and then back at the trial describes how she fainted and that when she came round she found a dagger in his chest, the implication being that she killed him, thus contradicting Tajomaru's testimony.

Returning to the frame narrative once more, the priest introduces the testimony of the dead husband who speaks through a medium during the trial, whose voice-over describes how Tajomaru tried to persuade his wife to go with him after raping her. We then see her agree to this and then tell Tajomaru to kill her husband, but Tajomaru then offers to the husband to kill her. She escapes and he goes after her. Tajomaru then returns and tells husband she got away, cutting the ropes that bound him. Her husband then gets up and stabs himself. Again, this contradicts both Tajomaru's and his wife's version of events.

In the frame narrative the woodcutter refutes this, saying 'there was no dagger. He was killed by a sword,' and then reveals that he saw more than the dead body, as he initially claimed, and is therefore accused of lying with his earlier story. He goes on to describe seeing the three of them alive, with Tajomaru 'in front of the woman . . . begging for forgiveness.' The image then cuts to this scene, with Tajomaru having just raped her, again, giving the impression of a flashback. He tells her to come away with him and asks her to marry him, threatening her with death, but she will not make this

decision and so sets her husband free so they can fight it out. Tajomaru ends up killing him and she runs away. Tajomaru retrieves the sword and then also escapes. Once more, we have a version of events that contradicts those that have gone before it, the only difference here being that, unlike the previous characters, the apparent narrator of the 'flashback' in this case – the woodcutter – does not confess that he is the culprit, but accuses someone else.

What is interesting about *Rashomon* is that it provides multiple versions of events leading up to a man's murder (which seems to be the only fact not disputed between these various accounts), but without any one of these accounts seeming more believable than the others, such that it remains unclear which, if any, of the testimonies, and the images accompanying these, is to be regarded as a faithful rendering of events. There is no authoritative narrator that seems believable over all the others, and therefore it remains indeterminate which of the collections of sounds and images that are introduced as a flashback of a character are to be regarded as subjective – as the filmind thinking-with (i.e. creating) this character's fabrication – and which objective – as the filmind creating events that actually happened. Indeed, it is not only an issue of 'subjective' vs. 'objective' – of believing one character over another – but also of which character the 'flashback' might be said to 'belong' to. This is because of the way in which the film sets up a hierarchy of narrative levels, opening with a frame narrative within which a character recalls a series of events, telling a story to another character, and then giving the impression that the subsequent images and sounds are a depiction of this testimony (which of course strictly they are not, as I have described), and then within which the same process – words → depiction – recurs, such that the impression of an embedded (intradiegetic, as Genette terms them) narrator and doubly embedded narrative (story-within-a-story) is created. However, if we are to regard the initial 'flashback' as the filmind thinking with a character – that is, creating their testimony through images of movement and sound, such that it does not belong to that character as their own recalled experience – then the 'flashback' that seems to be 'within' this is not necessarily framed by this character either – such that it is not a flashback within a flashback – but may be the filmind thinking with this embedded character, and not necessarily through the framing character. Although it may indeed be interpreted as the filmind thinking this series of events with the character through the 'flashback' of another. In other words, a doubly embedded, metadiegetic narrative is not guaranteed in this instance, and this is due to the transsubjective mobility of film-thinking, which is

not framed by the verbal testimony of character narrators, but creates the story as its own transsubjective intention, immanent within the film. It is up to the viewer to judge the relationship between the characters and film-thinking, and to what extent the latter is thinking-with the former, and in *Rashomon* this issue is complicated by the fact that the film sets up two homodiegetic narrators within the framing narrative – the woodcutter, who seems to narrate most of the embedded narrative, and the priest, who narrates – and by this I mean that he introduces – the testimony of the dead husband during the trial, channelled through a medium.

We can therefore see that the 'flashbacks' themselves in *Rashomon*, apart from the verbal testimonies of the characters, are not unreliable but indeterminate, in terms of who they are thinking with and how closely they accord with the truth, and the allocation of these 'flashbacks' affects their veracity, depending on how much we trust the character, such that the viewer brings them into a position to be judged as reliable or not by associating them with a certain character and making judgements as to the reliability of that character.⁷⁸ For example, the woodcutter reveals that he lied about finding the dead body when he admits to the 'commoner' character in the apparently framing narrative that he saw everything but did not tell the police because he didn't want to get involved, which therefore reveals that the earlier 'flashback' was in fact a fabrication – the apparent source of this flashback admits its falsity and then proceeds to provide the impression of recalling a new version of events to put in its place. If the testimonies and 'flashbacks' of the bandit and his captor are regarded as embedded and doubly embedded respectively within the woodcutter's flashback, then the revelation of his dishonesty may cause the viewer to also doubt the honesty of this apparent flashback to the trial of the bandit and his captor and the 'flashbacks' that take place within this (although the priest is not shown challenging this apparent version of events, and he claims he was also at the trial). Indeed, the status of the woodcutter's 'flashback' is complicated even further later, when the commoner accuses the woodcutter of stealing the dagger, which therefore would have motivated him to deny that the dead man was killed by a dagger, as he did earlier, and invent a story in which he was killed by a sword, as he may well have done with his 'flashback.' But then are we to believe the commoner, who at the end steals clothes from an abandoned child? And the woodcutter redeems his character somewhat by adopting this baby at the end.

⁷⁸ We can see a parallel here with the manner in which Iser claims that schematised views are related in the literary text, a point I will develop later.

If, however, we are to regard the trial scene that follows the woodcutter's verbal testimony as the filmind thinking objectively – presenting actually-occurring events – i.e. as not 'framed' by the woodcutter, then the 'flashbacks' that take place within this are perhaps more likely to be trusted, at least in the sense of the filmind thinking with these characters (as opposed to thinking with these characters through the woodcutter), for they cannot both be trusted as veridical due to the mutual exclusivity of their content.

Perhaps, then, the priest should be trusted, who was not a witness and so therefore offers no direct testimony of the events leading up to the murder, but does seem to frame the testimony – and therefore also the 'flashbacks' – of the husband and wife. But then the contradictions between these two versions of events 'within' the priest's testimony means that taking sides with the priest still does not enable one to locate a truthful version of events.

The question, in *Rashomon* and in film in general featuring apparent flashbacks, is therefore not only 'who is telling the truth?' but, more fundamentally, 'to whom does each "telling" belong?' with the transsubjective mobility of film-thought leading to such indeterminacy. And the determination of this may, as in *Rashomon*, involve making a judgement as to the veracity of the account – the 'flashback' – offered by that character, if one character is more trustworthy than another, or when the film is thinking 'objectively' (and not 'belonging' to any character) such that it can then be regarded as reliable or not. The important point is that in order for film-thinking to be regarded as reliable or not it must first be interpreted as making an assertion of truth, which it does not do inherently but only when tied to the testimony of a character, positioning them as a narrator, or when regarded as thinking 'objectively.' Although, as I have demonstrated, film-thinking is neither properly subjective nor properly objective, but fundamentally transsubjective; it is always film-thinking first, which may then be interpreted as thinking with a character or not. *Rashomon* is an early example of a film which exploits this transsubjective mobility of the filmic image through the use of indeterminate framing to produce a fundamentally indeterminate narrative, such that many interpretations seem possible, with the overall effect being that truth is elusive. The viewer seems to be led by various narrator-figures to a certain interpretation of events, but each contradicts the other, and upon further reflection the indeterminacy of these events only seems to increase, as I have demonstrated.

Unreliability, Transsubjectivity and Agency

It is the transsubjective status of the filmic image that enables it to be 'up for grabs' in the manner I have suggested, with film-thinking indeterminate in terms of the status of the event and who it is thinking with. This becomes apparent when a viewer is misled about the status of the image – it is the transsubjective indeterminacy of the image that enables them to be misled in this manner. But who is misleading here? Clearly it is not just the words of a homodiegetic narrator, who is not in control of the images that seem to accord with these words, but, in this context, it is an effect of the relationship suggested between the words and the images, with the image in film – despite the contrary impression that can be given when the two overlap – framing speech. And, as Frampton proposes, it makes sense to conceptualise the agent responsible for this as a 'filmind,' rather than as any kind of narrating agent, with the connotations of discourse and transcendent (as opposed to immanent) figures.

As we have seen, Chatman makes the distinction between a cinematic narrator and an implied author – a figure that Wilson also falls back on – in order to explain the effect of unreliable narration that he locates in 'lying flashback' films such as *Stage Fright*: 'If the sole source of the ostensible story is a narrator, and if we come to believe that the "facts" are not as the narrator presents them, there can only be some other and overriding source of the story, the source we call the implied author' (Chatman, 1990: 131). However, we can now see, since I have argued that it only makes sense to ascribe unreliability to the verbal testimony of a homodiegetic narrator, that this distinction is not required if we are to reconceptualise this unreliable cinematic – as opposed to homodiegetic – narration as indeterminate film-thinking instead.

To return to the example of *Stage Fright*, Chatman believes that during the 'lying flashback' 'everything that we see and hear follows Johnny's scenario. Thus, even when his voice falls silent, he remains the controlling, if unreliable, narrator of the flashback' (132), and that this is distinct from the cinematic narrator who controls everything else we see and hear. Chatman claims that '[i]t is the implied author who juxtaposes the two narrations of the story and "allows" us to decide which is true' (*ibid.*). Whereas I argue, with Frampton, that this distinction between narrators is not necessary here and that the agent responsible for each of these views is better regarded as a transsubjective filmind. However, in an extension of Frampton's theory to cover narratological concerns of truth, authority and narrational agency, I propose that the nature of transsubjective film-

thinking is inherently indeterminate, such that it does not present facts that are asserted as reliable in the sense that a verbal narrator does, but is indeterminate in terms of the status of the event that it presents and its segmentation, and can mislead through the actions of its film-thought. It therefore does not make sense to talk of film-thinking itself as unreliable, but only the verbal testimony of characters within this, and therefore an implied author is not necessary to explain the misleading effect of films like *Stage Fright*.

In terms of the events presented through the image, it is not about disbelieving a narrator, or believing one narrator over another, as if facts were being asserted through the image only to be challenged by other images, but about the viewer determining the events being shown and their ontological status and diegetic level, which remains indeterminate within film-thinking. The question then arises of whether there is any place for the concept of an implied author in film, which in turn depends on the amount of agency we are willing to grant Frampton's concept of the filmind and whether there are things that can't be ascribed to this figure and that therefore require us to call up the figure of an implied author instead. We have seen that the filmind enables us to theorise both the creation and presentation of the film image as the intention of film-thinking, and thus without recourse to external figures, such that there is no need to distinguish between a presenter of the film – which Chatman terms a 'narrator' – and an inventor, which Chatman terms the 'implied author' (133).⁷⁹ But are there limits to the powers of intent that we can ascribe to this film-being? This is an issue which I believe Frampton does not fully consider, and which I will towards the end of this thesis, but before doing so it is necessary to consider in more detail this idea of indeterminate narrative film-thinking, and how agency operates in this case.

79 Chatman identifies the narrator as 'a component of the discourse' and the implied author as the 'inventor of both the story and the discourse (including the narrator),' arguing that 'if we deny the existence of the implied author and the cinematic narrator, we imply that film narratives are intrinsically different, with respect to a fundamental component, from those actualised in other media' (1990: 133), and whilst this is intended as a criticism of Bordwell – that he implies the former but doesn't seem to allow the latter – I would accept this as the conclusion of an extension of Frampton's concept of film-thinking into the area of narrative, something which he himself does not carry out, but which I have here. This 'intrinsic difference' of film narrative will be set out in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis

Chapter 7

Indeterminate Film-Thinking and Narrative Agency

I have argued in the last chapter that it does not make sense to regard film-thinking as fundamentally reliable or unreliable, because these terms suit the verbal testimonies of narrators, and this figure of a narrator is not applicable to the agency of the filmic image and its presentation. Instead we can locate a medium-specific indeterminacy of film-thought, with particular consequences for the articulation of narrative. I have shown how a voice-over narration can be used to both overcome this indeterminacy by guiding the viewer towards a segmentation of narrative events, and also to mislead the viewer about the status of the events, thus exploiting the indeterminacy of the image, which remains fundamentally transsubjective. However, what I now wish to look at is a film in which the relationship between the voice-over narration and the image is such that this narration problematises the segmentation of narrative events and the determination of the status of events, to such an extent that rather than guiding the viewer toward a certain interpretation of events, the organisation of both sound and the image – and the indeterminate relationship between the two – problematises the determination of narrative, producing a more extreme, and yet related, effect of narrative indeterminacy than the films I have previously discussed. The question then arises of how narrative film-thinking can be said to operate – if at all – in this instance.

Indeterminacy in *Last Year in Marienbad*

Alain Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad* (1961) is renowned for the ambiguous nature of its narrative and its apparent resistance to understanding in terms of the familiar conventions of story-telling, such as coherent characterisation, causation, chronology and spatial orientation. I will therefore look at how the film is indeterminate in terms of these formal narrative features, and in relation to the image-ontology and agency I have outlined, but whilst demonstrating that the film does indeed

accord in certain key ways with these essential qualities of narrative, if only to then undermine them. I will demonstrate the implications of this for the act of viewing and the idea of narrative film-thinking.

By way of introduction it will help to outline the plot of the film, although with the caveat that it is precisely this that seems at issue – and thus resistant to summary form – throughout the film. The film features three nameless main characters,⁸⁰ staying at a grand hotel who seem to be involved in a love triangle, with X (Giorgio Albertazzi) trying to convince A (Delphine Seyrig) throughout the film that they met and fell in love the previous year, despite the fact that A is married to M (Sasha Pitoeff), also present at the hotel. X also provides a voice-over narration throughout much of the film, seeming to overlap at points with the images, and with some episodes appearing to be flashbacks, recalling events of the previous year, at points accompanied by X's narration. At the end A seems to leave with X, abandoning her husband. And in these respects the film fits with the definition of narrative that I discussed in chapter four (with casually-related acts of agents), as well as employing familiar conventions of homodiegetic narration that I have also explored, such as the voice-over and flashback. However, *Last Year in Marienbad* employs these devices and articulates narrative in such a way that it simultaneously undermines the possibility of determining a coherent narrative, such that any narrative that remains seems unstable in terms of the assumptions made in determining narrative, regarding character, location, causality, chronology and diegetic/ontological levels. It is precisely this suggestion of both the existence and the indeterminacy of these constituent features that can lead to such a confounding effect when attempting to locate a determinate fabula. I will now look at how exactly this effect is produced in terms of narrative film-thinking, before comparing this with the indeterminacy that I have located in the films discussed previously and the notion of narrative agency that arose from this.

In some ways the voice-over in *Last Year in Marienbad* is employed in the conventional sense in which some correspondence between words and images can be identified, such that the narrator seems to be an authoritative guide, giving the impression of framing the events on-screen, and with most of the narrative seeming to take place through this voice-over narration. For example, in the opening scene the voice-over describes how 'I made my way once again along these corridors and through

80 Although in the screenplay they are referred to using the initials 'X,' 'A' and 'M,' as I will do here.

these rooms, in this building that belongs to the past, this huge, luxurious and baroque hotel where endless corridors..., and whilst these words are heard the image is mobile and at a low-angle, as it makes its way through the corridors of a baroque hotel. And then the volume fades, becoming inaudible, before rising again, referring to 'silent rooms where the sound of footsteps is absorbed by carpets so heavy, so thick, that all sound escapes the ear. As if the ear itself, as one walks, once again, along these corridors, through these rooms..., and it fades and returns seconds later, whilst the image proceeds along elaborately decorated corridors: 'Cross corridors that lead in turn to rooms laden with a décor from the past, silent rooms where the sound of footsteps is absorbed by carpets so heavy, so thick that all sound escapes the ear. As if the ear itself were very far from the ground.'

This last couple of sentences seems to fit between and overlap slightly with the first two audible sections of the narration, as if filling in the inaudible section and giving the impression that the segments of the voice-over are out of sequence. But the overlap is not exact, with the phrasing and emphasis slightly different each time. This repeats as the volume then recedes and rises again, with the camera continuing its journey within the very same interior that the voice-over seems to be describing:

I made my way once again along these corridors, through these great rooms, in this building that belongs to the past. This dismal baroque hotel where corridor follows corridor. Silent, deserted corridors heavily laden with woodwork and panelling with marble, mirrors, pictures and darkness, pillars, alcoves and rows of doorways.

The volume fades, and returns as the film enters a theatre off the corridor and tracks between audience members:

Cross corridors leading in turn to empty rooms, rooms heavily laden with a décor from the past. Silent rooms, where the sound of footsteps is absorbed by carpets so thick that all sound escapes the ear. As if the ear itself were very far from the ground, far from this empty décor, far from this ceiling with its branches and garlands, like classical foliage. As if the ground were still sand and gravel and stone paving where I crossed once again on my way to meet you. Between these walls laden with woodwork, with pictures and framed engravings through which I made my way, amongst which I was already waiting for you. Very far from the setting where I find myself now, as you still wait for someone who will not come.

Someone who may never come to separate us again, to take you away from me.

An actress in the play is now shown over these last couple of sentences, and the image cuts back to the audience, at which point a woman's voice, presumably the actress, speaks the following words off-screen: 'We must wait a little, a few minutes, a few seconds, no more.' A different man's voice then talks about her still waiting for a man that isn't going to come, and 'frozen' marble statues and a hotel 'filled with emptiness' and 'static, silent characters, long since dead, standing guard in the corridors as I made my way towards you.' As these words of the play are spoken a different person is always shown to the one speaking these words, such that the dialogue is a voice-off (as opposed to over), until the man utters his final lines and then the woman declares 'I am yours,' at which point the curtain comes down.

So initially it seems that the words are being spoken by a voice-over narrator, apparently framing the images on screen and also commenting on them, with the image thinking with this character as the camera moves through the building, such that it seems to offer a 'first-person' perspective through both the image and the narration: 'I made my way once again along these corridors and through these rooms.' However, the voice-over then addresses another person directly: 'I was already waiting for you,' and describes a state of affairs between them, the effect of which is to change the address from narrator → viewer to narrator → second person, and thus the (apparent) framing narration may now be embedded and not simply told from an external (extradiegetic) position. The narration may remain here as a voice-over, with the images being framed by this embedded voice-over, and therefore doubly embedded, with the filmind thinking with the voice-over (which belongs to X) in his reference to the surroundings of the hotel. Or perhaps the voice-over may in fact be construed as a voice-off, and the referent of the voice-over – 'these corridors' – lies elsewhere (although it may indeed coincide with the images shown), and therefore not framing this image at all, which further information seems to support, although (as is characteristic of the film) not definitively so. The important point here is that the nature of the film image – with agency immanent within it and therefore not framed but transsubjective – means that this status of the image and its relationship to the verbal narration is fundamentally indeterminate, which the film-thinking emphasises and exploits here.

It is this indeterminate relationship between voice and image, and between diegetic levels that remains throughout the film, as I will continue to demonstrate. The

loosely repetitious and erratic nature of this narration of the opening sequence by X also has the effect of undermining the authority of the narrator as a reliable and coherent guide to on-screen events, an impression that also continues throughout the film. What is apparent throughout *Last Year in Marienbad* is a series of disconnects – that is, indeterminate relationships – both within and between the different points of view provided by verbal exposition, between these spoken words and images and between the images themselves.

Later on we see X talking to A elsewhere in the hotel, and his words seem to fit with those spoken in the opening sequence, giving the impression that these first words were also spoken to A, and that they were part of this conversation taking place in the same building – though obviously not the precise spot – that the opening sequence takes place in. And so in this case the words would not be regarded as framing the opening images as a homodiegetic voice-over. Although at other points X's words do seem to function as a voice-over, framing a recollection of events.

For example, after we see the guests talking about the hotel and playing games, X's voice-over returns, as if continuing where it left off: 'But you hardly seem to remember,' as we see A alone looking up at the ceiling and then an apparent point of view shot of the decorated ceiling and cornicing (were the opening images a similar point of view?⁸¹). 'Yet you're familiar with the setting,' the voice-over continues, 'this hand holding a bunch of grapes. Behind the hand, you see the almost living foliage. In a garden that would be ours,' with the image of the ceiling detail (a statue of a cherub holding out grapes) corresponding with the description given by X. Then the camera pans down to show X and A as she begins to laugh, as if in response to X's remark, such that it seems that the previous voice-over does indeed belong to a conversation between X and A, in which case it becomes a voice-off, referring directly to their surroundings: 'You've never noticed?' he asks her, 'I've never had so good a guide' she replies, as we see them talking together for the first time.

He then says to her, in the next scene whilst dancing, 'you hardly seem to remember me at all.' He proceeds to tell her about how they met last year and recalls their conversation about the statues. And then, sitting down with M (who we later learn is A's husband), the voice-over starts again: 'And once again we found ourselves separated,' as if the image is thinking with X's apparent recollection to A (the words and

81 With the caveat that, as I have discussed, there is no pure point of view in film – it is always the filmind thinking as this perspective.

image seeming to overlap here), continued from the previous scene, and thus taking place in the past. After they have finished playing a game, the image cuts to a mobile tracking shot through the lobby and corridors of the hotel, with the voice-over continuing again, talking about how last year the hotel was 'empty and deserted,' as if informing A of what she can apparently not remember, but the hotel is shown full of people (although strangely motionless), such that the words and images no longer overlap – how is this to be explained? Was the cut from the game to the lobby a temporal shift forwards to the present time at which X is talking, such that the image is no longer framed by the voice-over (or more accurately, is no longer thinking with it), with the words being spoken in the present of the image, the voice-over thus becoming a voice-off? But the tracking shot concludes once it has settled on the character of A, seated alone, such that if the voice-over is to be regarded as a continuation of the conversation between X and A, then the image is not in the present of this voice-over (which is therefore not a voice-off).⁸² There has been no employment here of the conventional means of cueing a transition backwards or forwards in time, such as a dissolve.

Such indeterminate transitions, which occur throughout the film, mean that it is not clear on what diegetic level the filmind is thinking and how the words relate to this. However, at times we do get the suggestion of a flashback, though by nothing quite as suggestive as a visual device. For instance, after the tracking shot settles on A, the voice-over of X, after talking about A in the present, seems to refer to her as presented in the image at the same time as addressing her: 'It was last year. Have I changed so much? Or are you pretending not to know me?' he asks, seeming to frame the image of her as a recollection, before stating: 'At least you haven't changed' and then describing how she looks, acts, sounds and smells, and then telling her: 'Remember. It was in the gardens in Frederiksbad.' Mid-way through this sentence the image cuts to an exterior shot of some elaborate gardens, with the overlap between words and image here suggesting a flashback in the manner I have described in the previous chapter. The voice-over then continues: 'You were standing alone. You were leaning on a stone balustrade, resting your hand on it, your arm half outstretched.' As X describes A, the camera pans around to reveal A indeed standing alone, standing in front of a stone balustrade, but not resting on it, as X describes, although once these words are spoken A

⁸² Although it may be the case that the voice-over has switched diegetic levels, such that it is now framing the diegesis of the previous conversation between X and A, as I will demonstrate below.

proceeds to assume the position that X describes in the voice-over, and this continues throughout the scene as X describes how he was watching her and how she turned to face him but didn't seem to see him.

What we have here is the image and the voice-over appearing to be at odds, such that the image seems not to be thinking with the voice-over, but then the connection – through the correspondence – is restored, strengthening the impression that the voice-over is in control of the image, as if the image is following its commands, to the extent even that what is foregrounded here is the image as a subjective recollection, thinking with (creating) X's memory as an image, rather than depicting the scene objectively; that is, thinking 'objectively' (with the caveat that in both instances the image is in fact transsubjective). This is an effect that is undermined later in the film, when the narrator seems to 'lose control' of the image, as I will demonstrate.

It is not only the case that temporal shifts and movement between diegetic levels is made unclear through the cutting together of scenes; at points the impression of a flashback (the filmind thinking with the characters' testimony), created by an overlap between the images and words (as above), is violated when the apparently framed scene seems to become part of the framing narrative itself, and similarly the voice-over seems to comment on (and thus frame) the framing narrative of which it seems to be a part, providing an effect of *metalepsis*.⁸³

An example of the first scenario occurs when X and A are embracing, part of a scene which a viewer is led to interpret as a flashback, due to fact that the X's recollections to A seem to narrate the images after the cut from the scene of him beginning the narration to A. Seated together, X tells her: 'You never seemed to be waiting for me. But we met at every turn. Behind every shrub. At the foot of every statue. By every fountain's edge. As though in all this garden there were only you and I.' The shot then cuts to them walking together through the gardens during the daytime, and wearing different clothes, with the narration continuing: 'We talked about the statues' names, the bushes, the water in the fountains, and the colour of the sky. Sometimes we remained silent.' After a cut back to what seems to be the framing narration – although now the couple have moved outside, but with X's narration continuing – they are shown embracing back in the apparent flashback, but then X,

83 Gerard Genette uses this term to describe an 'intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe (or by diegetic characters into a metadiegetic universe, etc.), or the inverse' (1980: 234-235).

within this scene, seems to pick up the voice-over that we have heard throughout the film: 'And again these walls, corridors, doors. And still more beyond. In order to reach you, you don't know the paths I've taken. Now you are here. You still try to escape. But you are here in this garden, within my reach, within my sight. You are here.' A then replies with a sentiment also familiar from the framing narrative: 'Who are you? What's your name?' she asks. 'That doesn't matter,' X replies. A then claims that X is 'like some phantom, waiting for me to come' and then requests: 'Leave me,' words that we have already heard her speak both within the apparent frame narrative and within another apparent flashback (although the temporal and diegetic indeterminacy is such that it is hard to ascertain the original utterance of these words). These words spoken in this dialogue within the scene are all words that could quite easily accompany the image as its framing narration, expressing the same sentiment and tone of the apparently framing narration and conversation up to this point, and yet they are spoken by X as he is apparently recalled *within* what seems to be an embedded narrative, with the filmind seeming to think with this voice-over recollection. And then later the couple are shown dressed in the same clothes as in this 'embedded' narrative, inside the hotel, with X once more trying to convince A that they have met and were romantically involved in the past, this time producing a photo as apparent evidence.⁸⁴ The effect of this is that diegetic levels seem to collapse in on each other, with the boundaries between them breaking down. The embedded narrative starts to take on qualities of the framing narrative, creating a *mise en abyme* effect: where is the real flashback? And what are the temporal relationships between the scenes? The narrative film-thinking is such that an answer to this seems impossible.

Inversely, at times the voice-over seems to frame the framing narrative when X's voice-over accompanies images of the apparent framing narrative, and when this can't be regarded as a voice-off: for instance, when X and A walk down the corridor together after X has made reference to their apparent meeting last year (and implying now that she acknowledges it), and X is heard – speaking elsewhere from the image – declaring that 'this story is already over. In a few moments, it will freeze into a marble past. Like these statues in this garden in stone. Like this hotel with its now empty rooms.' Which story is he referring to? The one on screen whilst these words are spoken? And if so,

84 The multiple outfits worn by X and A throughout the film serve to disorientate the viewer further by fracturing the sense of continuity between scenes, as well as seeming to unify apparently disparate events, as in the above examples. It is a flouting of the means by which gaps in time are conventionally indicated.

from where is he referring to it? Is the present he is referring to, with 'its now empty rooms,' at a time after the scene on-screen, which apparently is at a time when the hotel is busy, such that the voice-over is looking back on the apparent framing narrative as the past? Or maybe it is coming from within the embedded narrative, a year ago when the hotel was apparently empty, and thus not embedding the corridor scene, but more accurately encroaching on it. To an extent it seems futile posing such questions, as if definitive answers could be provided.

Indeed, on top of the apparent mobility of voice-over narration in terms of framing and its relation to the image, the perspective offered through this voice-over is also variable in terms of its knowledgeability and reliability, with the narrative film-thinking of *Last Year in Marienbad* seeming to make use of various (verbal) narrator positions and levels. For example, X's narration seems to shift from first to third person, or to use Genette's revised terms, from homodiegetic to heterodiegetic: he describes how '[M] had just left your room. You had just had some row with him,' as we see A alone in her bedroom. She then looks out of the window (with an apparent point of view shot seeming to show her walking with X through the gardens⁸⁵), and then recoils, after which X's narration asserts that 'You can see the garden.' Here X is recalling events at which he seems to have not been present, and therefore should not have knowledge of, and is recalling these events to A, who should have knowledge of them but apparently does not.

The image initially seems to correspond with his narration, as if thinking with him in his newly acquired status as a heterodiegetic omniscient narrator, but then the images and words start to contradict each other: X's narration describes how

Then, you went back to bed. Not knowing where to go, you went back to the bed again and sat on it. Then you let yourself fall back. You went back to the bed, after a few seconds of indecision, not knowing what to do, staring in front of you. And you went back to the bed. Listen to me! Try to remember. Please listen to me. Yes, there was... It's true. There was a big mirror. You didn't dare go near it. It seemed to frighten you.

However, as these words are spoken we see A walking slowly around the edge of the room, up against the wall and then across the face of a large mirror, directly

85 See below for a discussion of this, and other impossible continuities.

contradicting – if we interpret them in this relationship – X's narration: she does not go to bed and she does indeed dare to go near mirrors.

But perhaps the image is presenting events that took place at a different time than those asserted through X's voice-over narration, such that both could be correct if taken to assert that these events actually took place. But then next, X seems to refer directly to the image and its apparent presentation of a contradictory situation and series of events to the one he asserts, addressing this contradiction:⁸⁶ after addressing A in the present – 'You're determined not to believe me. Where are you? Where have you gone? Why try to run away? It's too late. It was too late even then' – X seems to then turn his attention to the scene that we see on screen: 'The door was closed. No! The door was closed!' he exclaims with increasing agitation, whilst we see A approach an *open* door.

The impression here is of X trying to command the image to make it correspond with his verbal testimony; it is as if X as a narrator is losing control over the images, which have previously seemed to think with him, following his testimony (either as an 'objective' presentation of actually-occurring events, or a 'subjective' presentation of fantasised events, or a mixture of both, depending on your interpretation), such that the filmind could be regarded as thinking 'against' him here, with X's protestations foregrounding this (perhaps the film is thinking A's memories here). This has the effect of undermining X's authority and reliability as a narrator, with X himself seeming unsure about his own testimony at points: he is unsure about exactly when he thinks they last met – 'One year. Maybe more,' and then later admits that 'it's probably not true.'

However, despite the fact that we may doubt the veracity of the verbal testimony of X, the narrative film-thinking does not produce the effect of a lying flashback due to the fact that it problematises any attempts at discerning diegetic levels, such that it is not even clear what images are to be interpreted as an embedded flashback, let alone whether this is the film thinking with a character's fantasy or not. As I have demonstrated, this is because diegetic levels seem to collapse into each other, such that one level can't be definitively identified as framing or as embedded, but seems to contain elements of both, which also makes it difficult to locate any present from which this past is apparently being recalled. And it is because of this slippage that film-thinking does not provide a more useful guide to the structure of events in terms of their

86 As also might be interpreted in his previous, more subtle emphasis on her being in bed – repeating this 'fact' three times – whilst she is shown wandering around the room.

ontological status, diegetic levels and cause and effect relationships: film-thinking leads the viewer to mistrust the image, and any sense of narrative given by it, by suggesting impossible continuities such as those between diegetic levels (in terms of framing/embedding), ontological levels (in terms of memory, fantasy and reality), and of space and time also, with dialogue apparently continuing unbroken across scenes, i.e. between different locations and at different times, and with characters seeming to appear in two locations at once.

Narrative Indeterminacy, Immanent Fabula and the Time-Image

Bordwell recognises within *Last Year in Marienbad* the dominance of style, which presents syuzhet in such a way 'as to make it impossible to construct a fabula' (Bordwell, 1985b: 232). According to Bordwell the stylistic system of this film is not dominated by the requirements of the syuzhet in cueing fabula construction (involving inferences of space, time and causality), as found in classical Hollywood narration and to a lesser extent art cinema narration, but takes on a central and independent role in itself, dominating the form of the film:

L'Année dernière à Marienbad elevates various stylistic features to the level of intermittently dominant structures: the splitting of image from sound, the use of false eyeline matches and matches on action, the refusal of camera movement to adhere to the action or to reveal a coherent offscreen space.

(278)

Bordwell therefore identifies *Last Year in Marienbad* as belonging to a distinct narrational type: 'parametric' narration, 'in which the film's stylistic system creates patterns *distinct from the demands of the syuzhet system*. Film style may be organised and emphasised to a degree that makes it at least equal in importance to syuzhet patterns' (274).⁸⁷ However, as I have argued, we should regard syuzhet events (those which are presented by the film) as in the film itself, and with the fabula consisting of a

⁸⁷ Bordwell views *Last Year in Marienbad* as a departure from the norms of art cinema narration as well as classical Hollywood narration due to this dominance of style over syuzhet: 'Art cinema self-consciously points to its own interventions, but the aim is still to tell a discernible story in a certain way. These schemata are of no help when everything in the film may represent both subjective vision and authorial address' (Bordwell, 1985b: 233).

segmentation of these events into causal relationships (although it may indeed be the case that off-screen events form part of the fabula also), such that syuzhet and style are united in the immanent film-thinking of the filmind.⁸⁸

I have also argued, through the Deleuzian idea of the movement-image and Frampton's idea of transsubjectivity, that narrative indeterminacy is inherent within this film-thinking, both in terms of durational flows and the event therein, and the ontological status of the image in terms of the movement that it is creating (as opposed to recreating or representing), with narrator-figures both assisting in overcoming the indeterminacy of the former, as well as in certain instances playing on the indeterminacy of the latter. Developing Frampton, I have identified this agency of narrative articulation in film as narrative film-thinking, elaborating this idea in terms of narrative indeterminacy, viewer activity, and the relationship of these to this model of narrative agency (this latter point in particular being elaborated throughout the rest of this thesis). And so now it is necessary to pursue the implications of this for my analysis of *Last Year in Marienbad*.

What I wish to argue is that rather than seeing the film in terms of an excess and dominance of style, which prevents the construction of a coherent fabula, we instead look at the film in terms of indeterminate film-thinking, with this idea of film as thought unifying form and content, and movement and the event, such that we can identify segments of a narrative – of a fabula – within this film-thinking⁸⁹ (the identification of which signals it as narrative film-thinking⁹⁰). But this narrative film-thinking simultaneously leads a viewer toward regarding the ontological status and diegetic level of the action as indeterminate, therefore adding to the durational indeterminacy of the event, already complicated by the indeterminate temporal structure of the film. So, unlike the 'lying flashback' films that I examined in the last chapter, where the ontological indeterminacy of the filmic image allows a viewer to be misled (made easier by the seductive influence of narrators in overcoming the durational indeterminacy of

88 Indeed, one of Frampton's main intentions with his concept of the filmind is to unite form and content in our understanding of filmic intention, however he does not pursue this idea in terms of its consequences for an understanding of the filmic articulation of narrative, as I do here, being more concerned with the dramatic actions of film-thinking and its affective qualities: 'Filmosophy is concerned to merge form and content via the concept of film-thinking – everything in a film is thought, is intended, and so is possibly poetic, meaningful, affecting. The filmind actualises intention in the realm of film form. Film is not form *and* content, and the filmind arranges everything we see, sometimes subtly integrating and mixing "form and content"' (Frampton, 2006: 114).

89 As I will elaborate below.

90 I will examine in more detail the issues involved in determining narrative film-thinking in the final chapter.

the event), in this instance the narrative film-thinking leads a viewer toward regarding the event as indeterminate, both in terms of ontology and segmentation (with the former problematising the latter). And it does so in a manner more extreme than *Rashomon*, where a viewer may choose to interpret one version of events above others as veridical, due to the metaleptic transgressions. I would therefore disagree with Bordwell's claim that '[b]y teasing us to construct a fabula but always thwarting us, *Marienbad*'s narration radically separates the potential "story" from the syuzhet and stylistic patterning that are available to us' (233). Bordwell is here drawing once again on this idea that fabula (and the causally related narrative events that constitute it) is an abstract structure which a viewer constructs from the syuzhet cues and their articulation through style, whereas if, as I argue, the events that constitute the story are, when presented, in the film itself – as movement – then the story is potentially there, directly in the immanent, narrative-thinking of the film.⁹¹ Although it may be the case, as with *Last Year in Marienbad*, that this narrative film-thinking, through the arrangement of images and voice-overs in this case, leads a viewer towards regarding the status of these events as indeterminate, or that there appear to be several potential stories, as in *Rashomon*.

This status of the event, as there in the image, but also indeterminate within it (durationally and ontologically speaking), which is derived from the medium-specific movement-image through which filmic narrative is articulated, means that in film we can observe what simultaneously seems to be both a potential excess and indeterminacy of narrative, and this enables film-thinking to achieve the narrational effects that I have been describing. It is for this reason that we can describe *Last Year in Marienbad* as both presenting narrative at the same time as undermining it, which it does by exploiting the fundamental indeterminacy of the event in film.

The indeterminacy of the event in *Last Year in Marienbad* is such that it is impossible to segment the action into causally related events with any real certainty. This is because of the indeterminate relationships between the segments of the film, both in terms of temporal ordering and ontological status. For example, at the end of the film A is shown leaving with X – are we to regard this as the concluding event to their time together, such that X has eventually persuaded A to leave her husband? Or is it X's fantasy of how their affair concluded the year before, or this year? Or was A shot and killed by her husband as we see earlier? Such determinations of sequence, reality

91 I will examine in more detail this idea of narrative potential in the next chapter.

and causality seem arbitrary, for the reasons I have explained. But nonetheless, according to the definitions of narrative I explored in chapter four, we can identify narrative potential within the various segments of the film, as I will demonstrate.

According to Roy Armes, *Last Year in Marienbad* can be counted as a narrative because it accords with the large-scale transformations of narrative, with the conclusion to the play that the film opens with being inverted at the end of the film when A leaves with X:

[T]he inversion [is] an equivalent to the transformation which most theorists have seen as essential to all narrative and the balance of beginning and end a perfect illustration of the truth of Tzvetan Todorov's assertion that "the minimal complete plot consists in passing from one point of equilibrium to another."

(1980: 15)

For Armes this ending is the definitive one because of its place in the narrative sequence, such that he disregards all the other potential endings in favour of this: 'A's decision, however, is already fixed in the opening play sequence and X, having emerged from nowhere at the beginning of the film, must return to the void at the end' (*ibid.*). And indeed, the narrative-thinking of the film, by placing this event at the end, may indeed seem to be suggesting such an interpretation of the story, but I would argue that the arrangement of the other elements of the film – that I have outlined above – simultaneously undermines this assumption, with narrative being located instead on the small-scale presentation of segments of action within the shot, which in this instance the film-thinking often seems to sequence together (and to accompany with voice-over narration) in such a way that the determination of a large-scale narrative is undermined. The narrative comes not from the large-scale organisation of the elements (as in Armes) but indeed is compromised by this formulation. It may therefore be more appropriate to describe film-thinking here as 'anti-narrative,' with narrative occurring through the presentation of movement in the film *in spite* of the arrangements of this action into sequences, rather than being facilitated through this arrangement, as we have seen in my previous analyses (of *The Last Laugh*, for example).

For the reasons explored in the previous chapter, I would disagree with Bordwell's claim that 'the narration [of *Last Year in Marienbad*] is revealed as thoroughly unreliable' (2006: 82). The voice-over narration may indeed be regarded as

unreliable, but the narrative film-thinking – which I choose over the term 'narration' – is better regarded as indeterminate. Wilson also regards 'unreliable narration' as an inappropriate label for *Last Year in Marienbad*,

because the concept of “unreliability” presupposes in this context a notion of the truth about the fictional world of the film – truth about which the narration may then be unreliable – which the history of events in these films is deliberately too fractured to support.

(Wilson, 1986: 42)

However, I would extend this claim to narrative film-thinking in general, such that we can see the film-thinking of *Last Year in Marienbad* as exploiting the fundamental indeterminacy of the event in film in a manner more extreme than we have seen with previous examples.

To return to the philosophical basis of the movement-image that I discussed in chapter five, Deleuze (2005b: 100) identifies *Last Year in Marienbad* as an example of a breakdown of the sensory-motor schema that dictates the relations between actions in the movement-image, such that we get a direct image of time itself – the time-image – previously only expressed indirectly through the movement-image, in which time is derived from movement and action. In *Last Year in Marienbad* the arrangement of the images is not dictated by the causal relationship between actions and events, by actions and reactions, such that a sense of temporal order is provided by the causal relationships between events; instead, there is no determinable temporal order to the segments of actions shown, no present from which the past is recalled: irrational cuts (compared with the rational cuts of the movement-image) give the impression of a series of discontinuous presents rather than of a linear progression from past into the present and continuing into the future: 'Each of these presents has its own duration that may be both consistent yet impossible with the ones surrounding it' (Rodowick, 1997: 104). In this instance, it is not possible to close down the open whole of duration by determining causal relationships between the actions presented in the segments of movement (deriving time from the relations of movement between the mobile sections), and so what you have is each segment 'distinct as durations consistent within themselves yet impossible with one another' (107). So the time-image emerges from the relationship (discontinuity) between segments of movement (mobile sections), with

these segments consisting of indeterminate openings (in terms of what follows and what preceded), which gives an impression of duration in itself, rather than being reduced to relations of movement between these segments: '[T]here is no longer linkage of associated images, but only relinkages of independent images. Instead of one image after the other, there is one image *plus* another, and each shot is deframed in relation to the framing of the previous shot' (Deleuze, 2005b: 206).

But then there is also potential for narrative *within* this movement in *Last Year in Marienbad*, within the mobile sections, with the viewer segmenting the action into narrative events. For example with the match game that X plays with M, which can be interpreted in terms of discrete, causally related events in the moves that each player makes, as well as being interpreted as part of a larger event: the playing of the game.⁹² Film-thinking closes down movement within the frame and mobile section, with movement 'opening out' to the open whole and to indeterminacy, and the interpretive activity of the viewer closes down the durative nature of movement into segmented transitions from one state to another through their causal relationships. The actions of film-thought may combine these segments of movement (mobile sections) presented through (as) the image to produce an impression of causal relationality, although necessarily maintaining a degree of indeterminacy, due to the durative quality of the image. As Frampton puts it: 'The filmind may be seen to think "causally" (usually through editing), but there is no particular sequence of images that denotes "cause"' (2006: 97): it is in these cases that film appears to think narratively.

We can see here, then, that the time-image emerges from *Last Year in Marienbad* as a symptom of the extreme indeterminacy of narrative film-thinking – which I describe as a kind of anti-narrative film-thinking – whereby the organisation of segments of action and narration does not provide an impression of (large-scale) causality, but confounds any such impression, such that a direct image of time emerges.

This can be contrasted with the impression of time that emerges through the narrative film-thinking of non-linear narratives, such as *Memento*, *Irréversible* (Gasper Noé, 2002) and *21 Grams* (González Iñárritu, 2003). Though not obeying the empirical chronology of time, none of these films could be described as doing so through the use of flashback structures, therefore marking them as non-linear (although, as I have discussed, *Memento* does seem to feature a flashback it is not the main source of non-

92 I discuss the issues of the interpretation of scale and narrative-film thinking below.

chronology). For example, *Memento* presents black and white scenes in chronological order, interspersed with five-minute colour scenes presented in reverse chronological order. The colouring here assists the viewer in ordering events, with an overlap of action between the end of one colour scene and the beginning of a previous one also demonstrating the temporal relationship of these scenes. As the film reaches its conclusion the action of the colour, 'reversed' scenes begins to overlap with that of the black and white, chronological scenes, with a slow shift of the image-tone from black and white to colour indicating this. And in *Irreversible* all the scenes are arranged in reverse order, so when the scenes change the viewer knows they are witnessing prior events. Once the viewer has grasped this principle of the reverse ordering of scenes (hinted at in the title of the film), the determination of the film's fabula is not particularly problematic: a clear indication of when the narrative has moved back in time assists the viewer in segmenting the action they are about to be shown – prior in diegetic time – as a cause of a reciprocally segmented event in the previous (in terms of screen-time) scene.⁹³

21 Grams is slightly different in that the narrative is presented to the viewer in temporally disordered fragments, rather than in any consistent order or with any cues assisting the viewer in determining the temporal relationships or transitions between scenes (such as the colour/black and white differentiation of *Memento*, or the 'blacking out' of *Irreversible*); indeed, it is through the determination of cause and effect relationships between the events within these scenes that a viewer is able to arrange the scenes in their correct temporal order (this fact indicates that non-linearity in itself does not constitute the time-image, as I will discuss in more detail below).⁹⁴

In none of these films is there any suggestion that the past events are being recalled by a character or that there is a definable present from where these events might be being 'recalled', as we have seen in other 'flashback' films. So rather than being motivated by the filmind thinking 'subjectively',⁹⁵ the non-linearity of the narrative presentation is attributable to the filmind alone, such that – in its defiance of empirical chronology through editing – it foregrounds these actions of the filmind as an agent

93 The switching of scenes – moving back in time – is emphasised by the fluid movement of the film's visual perspective between spatial boundaries, 'blacking out' as it breaches material borders, such as walls of buildings and sides of vehicles, mirroring its transgression of temporal strictures.

94 See Charles Ramirez Berg (2006: 27-29 and 41-44) for a comprehensive list of films featuring such non-linear plots.

95 Although in the case of *Memento* this presentation of events does situate the viewer with Leonard in terms of knowledge of the past and the causal series of events that lead up to the concluding events of the narrative – i.e. both the viewer and Leonard have restricted knowledge of the past.

responsible for guiding the viewer towards the determination of a story, with this narrative film-thinking in this case initially problematising the location of a narrative, but not to such an extent that the indeterminacy of the event cannot be overcome by a viewer in their determination of the narrative.

So we can see that despite being non-linear and against the empirical chronology of time, these films are still within the regime of the movement-image, due to the fact that although their presentation may in some ways obstruct rather than facilitate the determination of causal relationships between events, the linearity of events has the potential to be restored by the interpretative activity of the viewer, effectively replacing what seem like irrational cuts with rational ones, such that time is derived from movement and the relationship of events (in terms of actions and reactions). Whereas in films such as *Last Year in Marienbad* it is precisely because of the fact that temporal discontinuity is mixed up with ontological and diegetic indeterminacy – producing such a disorientating effect – that a direct image of time arises from this level of indeterminacy: '[I]n *Last Year in Marienbad* we can no longer tell what is flashback and what is not' (Deleuze, 2005b: 118): the real and the imaginary, the actual and the virtual, are indistinguishable here. Deleuze uses the term 'indiscernible' to describe the presence of each of these identities/qualities within the crystalline image of time:

What we see in the crystal is no longer the empirical progression of time as succession of presents, nor its indirect representation as interval or as whole; it is its direct presentation, its constitutive dividing in two into a present which is passing and a past which is preserved.

(262)

Indeterminate Diegeses in *Inland Empire*

A similar effect – narrative indeterminacy leading to a particular impression of time – can be found in David Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006), with indeterminacy of diegetic levels and films-within-films problematising the interpretation of a coherent narrative. It seems possible to segment various narrative threads (of causally related events), therefore locating small-scale narratives, but attempts to determine a larger scale narrative are frustrated. As in *Last Year in Marienbad*, apparently permeable

boundaries of diegetic levels exploit the indeterminate status of the film image, in terms of ontological status and diegetic level, undermining attempts at determining the status of the events thought by the filmind.

The initial causal thread that can be located is one regarding the making of a film, featuring Nikki Grace (Laura Dern). This is first mentioned by a woman, unknown to Nikki, who comes to her house telling her – much to Nikki's surprise and joy – that she has got the part. It transpires that she is indeed correct when Nikki hears the news on the phone. The viewer then sees the director, Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons), congratulating the two leads – Nikki and Devon Berk (Justin Theroux) – on getting their parts. This subject of the film then connects the next few scenes, as Nikki and Devon are interviewed on a chat show and then meet with Kingsley, and his assistant Freddy (Harry Dean Stanton), on the set of the film, where they begin to rehearse a scene. This rehearsal is interrupted as Harry spots someone on the set and Devon goes to investigate, following the footsteps as the person is heard running though apparently not seen. Kingsley then reveals that the film they are to make, *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, is a remake of a film, based on an apparently cursed Polish folk-tale, which was never finished because the two leads were killed.

The ontological/diegetic indeterminacy created by fluid metaleptic framings is apparent early on in the film, as the viewer sees a girl watching on screen – and from the same (camera) perspective – events that they are to see in the next scene as the woman approaches Nikki's house to tell her, among other things, that she has got the part, i.e. presenting the diegesis/narrative that frames the intradiegetic film-world/narrative that Nikki is to act in as Sue Blue. This act of the girl watching the events on TV may suggest that this film-world – of *On High in Blue Tomorrows* – is in fact doubly embedded as a *metadiegetic* narrative, with the world of Nikki and the apparent 'framing' narrative itself an embedded fictional world, framed by the world of the girl watching TV. However, as in my above discussion of *Last Year in Marienbad*, there is no such strict distinction between narrative levels in *Inland Empire*, as future events demonstrate.

This confusion of narrative levels occurs as the worlds of Nikki and Sue seem to merge, each retaining features of the other. For example, the viewer – after seeing Nikki and Devon getting on very well together – sees Nikki apparently in character telling Devon (also presumably in character) that her husband knows about them (her husband has already made veiled threats to Devon about this issue). But she then refers

to how much their situation is like that in the script – this reference to the script indicating that they are not acting, although her accent indicates otherwise – but then Kingsley's voice is heard off-screen asking 'What the bloody hell is going on?' indicating that they are in fact in character. Sue's accent acts as a way of distinguishing her from Nikki (Sue speaking with a southern drawl and Nikki with a less regional accent). In one scene in which she and Billy Side (Devon's character) are making love her accent switches mid-scene as she tells Billy desperately 'it's me, Nikki!' However during this breaking-out of character there is no intervention by the director and Devon (Billy?) seems unresponsive, the effect being that Nikki now seems more trapped in the world of Sue than merely mistaken about when she is in character.

This impression increases in the next scene, and the film in general, as – having told Devon/Billy in the previous scene about an incident that occurred when she was filming a scene without him – events are shown which accord with Nikki's previous narration, providing the impression of a flashback.⁹⁶ We see her – as if in character, and therefore apparently within the diegesis of *On High*... – enter the set of the film. She then appears to see herself (as Nikki), Devon, Kingsley and Freddy around the table, as they were in the previous scene when they were discussing the film and rehearsing. And as before, Devon gets up to investigate, walking towards her, though apparently not seeing her, as the rest of them do not. Sue then runs away toward the supposedly fake house that Devon tried unsuccessfully to open the door of in the earlier scene. However, the door opens for Sue and she rushes inside. Devon is unable to get into the house, and Sue is now unable to get out. She looks through the window, seeming to see him, shouting to him, but he is unresponsive, as if he can't see her. Then Sue sees daylight outside the window, as if the house has now become completely real. Now able to get out, she goes outside and looks back on the exterior of the house, as if to confirm that it does actually exist.

This scene is significant as it seems to involve not just an impossible transgression of narrative levels – the character sees the actress playing her – but also a jump back in time, so that the character (Sue) finds herself in a time before the shooting even began of the film that forms her reality: time and diegetic levels loop back on themselves. The moment at which Sue enters the house – and it becomes real – seems to signal a shift within the narrative as the film more fully enters Sue's world as a

⁹⁶ Although confusingly she refers to the world of the film that she was acting in as if she were in fact in character.

reality, leaving the artificial set for good and depicting the 'framing' narrative and the world of Nikki in a more fragmented fashion. Yet even so, this distinction between worlds and characters is continually violated.

What is particularly interesting about this scene is that it demonstrates several features that produce an extreme effect of indeterminacy, which can be analysed to reveal what is so indeterminate in *Inland Empire* and how this effect is produced. What we seem to have in this scene is the diegesis consisting of the narrative of Nikki, Devon, etc. and the film they are creating (i.e. as a constructed, artificial reality/narrative), infiltrated by this constructed artifice, in the form of Sue. It seems that Sue then retreats into the world of the intradiegetic film in which she is a character, escaping into the house which seems to change from an artificial set to a real house, such that Sue's world – and not just her character (already having taken on a dimension of reality once she entered the 'framing' narrative) – is now portrayed as real, not as a constructed, artificial reality created and embedded within this apparently framing narrative.

What is indeterminate in this scene is the transsubjectivity of the image (which is complicated somewhat by the foregrounding of the film-image itself by the film-within-a-film device). What I mean by this is that because reality and fiction seem to blur and merge before our eyes it is therefore difficult – impossible even – to establish which shots – and the events depicted by them – are real and which are fictive. For example, the first part of this scene, introduced by Nikki's narration (the shot accords with her description of her filming a scene – as Sue – in which she is carrying groceries), seems intradiegetic, and it is possible even that the image presenting this scene is also intradiegetic, for there is no pull-back to show the diegetic camera (as occurs in the final scene of the film, discussed below). In filmsophical terms, the film is thinking here with the intradiegetic world of the embedded film. However, she then enters the set of the film, effectively entering the previous scene in which cast and crew are on set prior to filming, which may cause the viewer to relinquish the belief that this scene is still intradiegetic, undermining the belief in coherent, stable diegetic worlds within the film (if this has not already happened), such that the perspective in this scene is not 'objective' – i.e. the film is not thinking as an objective perspective – in the conventional use of the term as presenting events that actually took place (within the embedded film).

Maybe the film here is thinking with Nikki, and the events narrated to Devon/Billy are delusions (she describes them to him as if they actually took place, talking of 'a strange thing that happened the other day when I was shooting a scene

without you'), with either the whole scene presenting her delusion, or only from the point at which it becomes 'impossible' (i.e. when she enters the set). If it is this latter option then the door that she enters does not actually lead to the set of the film, and her entering it marks the end of her reality and the beginning of the delusion, which could possibly be inspired by her memories of the previous event, before shooting began, when Devon chased footsteps on set.

There is nothing impossible about this first incident (i.e. it could have taken place within a conventional, coherent reality), but there is in the second incident, apparently recounted by Nikki: how can she be on the set of the film? How can no one see her? How can Nikki – as seen by Sue – vanish into thin air? None of these 'facts' can be explained within conventional, coherent reality.⁹⁷ And if it is a delusion, then when does it end, if at all? Is it part of Nikki's delusion when the house she enters becomes real? Is she acting, or does she feel she is Sue? Perhaps Sue is real and Nikki is some kind of delusion. The transition from an artificial to a real house could all be a part of Sue's delusion: acting (or not, as it may then be) as Sue could mark the change from Sue's delusion – that she is Nikki, acting as/believing she is Sue – to Sue's reality. Or maybe it marks the end of Nikki's delusion and the start of the film 'realising' the fictional world of the embedded film – the filmind thinking with *On High...* as if it were real, and not a fictional film, elevating its diegetic level.

What is potentially troublesome here is the gradual transition (of shots) between the house being fake and becoming real: there is no clear distinction between the two worlds, frustrating attempts to demarcate the status of the images as delusional/real. Indeed, it is this suggestion of continuity in situations where there would conventionally be none that leads to an impression of impossible continuity in *Inland Empire* (something also evident in *Last Year in Marienbad*, as I have demonstrated).⁹⁸

Worlds appear to overlap spatially in *Inland Empire*, as when Sue enters a fake house which then becomes real. This continuity between worlds is suggested by the use of physical portal devices such as doors and holes, in tandem with the use of continuity editing, which suggests to the viewer an impossible continuity across space and between diegetic levels. For example, a character may enter a door/building from one place and

97 And nor does the film present a standard of verisimilitude able to explain these apparently anomalous events.

98 I use the term 'continuity' to describe the transitions from one state to another that are suggested by the film, and 'impossible' in this context to emphasise that this apparently continuous movement appears inexplicable, i.e. cannot really have taken place within a coherent, conventional reality, and therefore this continuity may not be so, although this is what is suggested.

then be shown exiting into another. And the film seems to physically move in space between the different worlds, suggesting that these apparently disparate worlds are in fact linked. For example, several times Sue looks through a hole in a folded piece of silk (having been told earlier by a voice on a record player to 'burn a hole in silk, turn it and look through the hole to see'), and each time the film enters the hole, and in doing so comes out on the other side in a different location. There is no sudden jump or cut between images, but a smooth transition occurs as the film moves gradually through the hole, fading into darkness and then fading back into light, giving the impression of continuity. In these instances, by nature of this apparently smooth transition which seems to occur diegetically (i.e. accountable for within the world of the film as a physical movement into a dark place), it is indeterminate how the different locales are to be linked. It is unclear what is suggested by this movement: are the two places physically linked within a single diegesis, or is there rather a metaleptic transgression taking place within the darkness, switching between locales/worlds? Or is there even some kind of 'worm-hole' transition taking place? These smooth transitions therefore simultaneously suggest continuity as well as disparity, leading to an impression of indeterminate continuity.

On the one hand, the impression of distinct worlds in *Inland Empire* is given by the identifiably distinct locations, from the suburban hinterland of 'Smithy's house' (which Sue enters on-set), to the opulent decadence of Nikki's Hollywood mansion, both distinct from the snow covered Polish town, and the 'sitcom' occupied by three large rabbit-human hybrids, or the Hollywood boulevard on which Sue is stabbed. And to an extent each of these locales features a distinct set of characters. Also, the featuring of the making of a film as part of the story creates the possibility for distinct diegetic worlds, including the framing narrative of Nikki and Devon, the embedded narrative of Sue and Billy, and also the scenes featuring Polish characters, which the viewer can connect (on the basis of the 'Polish' link) with the Polish folk-tale that the (embedded) film is based on, such that these scenes may be regarded as depicting real events that the tale is based on, creating a narrative parallel to that of the framed one. However, as with *Last Year in Marienbad*, such stable boundaries of diegetic and framed/framing worlds are suggested yet simultaneously undermined. Each of these 'distinct worlds' infiltrate each other, to the extent that they cannot be regarded as distinct, but seem to be impossibly connected. As I have described, there are impossible spatial connections suggested between these worlds, implying a spatial overlap, and it is

this impossible connection that simultaneously both links and marks these worlds as distinct from each other, the intermediary zones functioning as some sort of portal, straddling both worlds (although this remains indeterminate).

Characters also seem able to switch between worlds, with Sue appearing in the world of the actress who 'plays' her, Nikki (as described above), and Nikki also appearing in the world of Sue as herself when she tells Devon/Billy 'it's me, Nikki.' The integrity of Sue's world as real – not acted – is maintained here by the fact that Devon/Billy does not seem to recognise her as Nikki (suggesting he is Billy here), and there is no pull-back to reveal a film crew as a framing device. Such a pull-back does occur towards the end of the film, when Sue is shown dying on the street, stabbed by a screwdriver. The film pulls-back to reveal that the scene, and events leading up to it (although how far back in the fabula is precisely what is indeterminate), are part of the film being made by Kingsley. However, though the scene is over, Nikki appears to remain in character, wandering off the set as if in a trance.

These continuities of worlds and of characters undermine their reality, for it is not possible for both the worlds of Sue and Nikki to be real (in the conventional sense of reality), but the points of overlap between these worlds – such that they 'bleed' into one another – makes distinguishing between them problematic, as I have described (and demonstrated with *Last Year in Marienbad*, too). These overlaps could be dismissed as delusional, but then delusions of who – Sue or Nikki? The point is that *Inland Empire* effectively exploits the ability of film to present – to 'think' – dreams/delusions and reality with equal veracity, but does so in such a way that there is no way of distinguishing one from the other with any real certainty. The indeterminate overlap between mutually exclusive worlds and characters brings about a reciprocal 'de-realisation' between them, for it is not clear where, and therefore if, one ends and the other begins, such that neither world or character therefore seems able to frame the other as a fictional world, whether dreamt/hallucinated or filmed as an embedded story. There is no coherent reality within which the viewer is able to frame apparently inexplicable and anomalous events as delusional/fictional.

When events are 'narrated' to a viewer, as in 'lying flashback' films, this provides an apparent framing device, as I have described, which – as it is revealed in such films – may frame the narrated events as fictional, the film thinking with the lie/delusion of the narrator that introduces these events. And in *Rashomon* narratorial perspectives effectively compete – in the viewer's understanding of the overall narrative – for

authority. However, in *Inland Empire* there is no such narratorial position to provide a potentially authoritative interpretation of apparently inexplicable events. The nearest things to such an authoritative narrator occurs when Nikki tells Devon/Billy the 'strange thing' that happened to her during filming. However, her narration is limited as she only introduces the story, and problematically does not indicate – and no other indication is given – when, in relation to the events we see on screen, her narrated story ends. Here, again, we have another instance of indeterminate framing. And also the position from which Nikki relates this story is problematic (in terms of its authority as real), for she is apparently embedded in the world of Sue as she tells it – Devon seems in character as Billy, and there is no indication that they are on set. To all intents and purposes she really is in Sue's world, telling a story about acting as Sue. In a similar fashion to *Last Year in Marienbad*, this circular logic of framing worlds, such that diegetic levels fold back on each other in a kind of continuous feedback loop within which no diegetic level is able to frame others without being pulled within the frame itself, as if traversing a Möbius strip, makes an authoritative distinction between real and fictional events impossible in *Inland Empire*.⁹⁹

The diegetic act of filming in *Inland Empire* also introduces a further type of indeterminacy, which I shall term 'transdiegetic indeterminacy.' This indeterminacy relates to the diegetic indeterminacy, and thus ontological status, of the events on screen – are they part of a framing or framed (embedded) narrative? But what differentiates it from transsubjective indeterminacy is that transdiegetic indeterminacy involves uncertainty as to whether an image is diegetically filmed or not, as opposed to whether it is a 'subjective' imagining or an 'objective' depiction. As I have shown, there is a significant amount of indeterminacy in *Inland Empire*, some of which relates specifically to filming and to cinema, foregrounding the act of viewing in several key ways.¹⁰⁰

99 This figure of the Möbius strip is often discussed in relation to Lynch, particularly with regards to *Lost Highway* (1997) – see Žižek (2000), Elsaesser and Buckland (2002: 185), Jerslev (2004: 157), and Rhodes (1998).

100 This indeterminacy also occurs in Haneke's *Hidden* (2005), where it is the act of filming that forms the central mystery of the film (a family receives video-tapes of their house being filmed, but are unable to determine for sure who is responsible – a similar opening scenario to *Lost Highway*). There is an equivalence between the diegetically filmed scenes and the film itself (framing this act of filming), to the extent that there are no visual cues to suggest which is which. Their diegetic status remains indeterminate. This equivalence is exploited to great effect in the film's opening, where a long static shot of a street scene is suddenly rewound, startling the viewer by revealing the shot as diegetically filmed. Frampton describes the implication of this revelation for the viewer: '[T]he rewind video immediately alters our perception of the street. From being a relatively meaningless

Several times throughout the film the same image – not just the content but also the framing of the shot – is shown diegetically on a screen within the film, and is presented before or after the exact same shot is presented 'extradiegetically'.¹⁰¹ This creates an equivalence between the diegetic and the extradiegetic – for there is no explanation given for the diegetic shot shown on an embedded screen: the events that it depicts (such as the strange woman approaching Nikki's house that I described above) are not revealed as having been filmed diegetically (either as on the same diegetic level – real events that happened to be filmed – or as an embedded fiction). And the same phenomenon occurs towards the end of the film as Nikki/Sue leaves the set following the final scene she has shot, and enters a cinema, only to see herself on the screen exactly as the viewer sees her.

This creates transdiegetic indeterminacy, for if the image on the viewer's screen is revealed by the diegetic screen as filmed, this act of filming is necessarily part of the diegesis. Yet there is no coherent framing narrative able to account for the events as fictional or as filmed, as the foregrounded filming of them would imply, therefore the diegetic status of this image is indeterminate. On one occasion, an image is revealed as diegetically filmed, just after Sue is shown dying on the Hollywood Boulevard. This comes as a surprise to the viewer since it is not clear when this framed narrative – revealed as filmed here – began. Indeed, this circularity of the diegetic levels problematises discussion of coherent diegetic levels. Nevertheless, when the film pulls back to reveal that the previous shot was filmed (the camera shown matching the position and angle of the previous shot), this previous shot becomes unavoidably embedded and framed by a higher diegetic level – whether or not these levels remain, or were previously, consistent.

This circularity of diegetic levels in *Inland Empire* is revealed visually when a shot of Nikki/Sue, having climbed the stairs next to the cinema screen in the above-mentioned scene, is shown being watched in a room on a TV by the same girl that

establishing image, of location and time, to being a scoped and intended image (the gaze of an other). *Hidden* thus shocks us into realising that perhaps all images are thought, are intended and directed' (2006: 144).

101 This term is generally used to refer to the lowest level 'at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed' (Genette, 1980: 228) [italics in original], however, as I have argued, if we conceptualise the agent responsible for the creation of the film image and the world which it presents as immanent within this world, as Frampton proposes, then we have no need to distinguish between the 'narrating act' (narrative film-thinking) and the product of this act (which I term the 'primary horizon'). I therefore use the term 'extradiegetic' here to convey the fact that there seems to be no other image framing this image.

watched the strange woman approach Nikki's house. Nikki/Sue then enters this room, at which point the two shots – of Nikki/Sue (with the TV in the background) and the one shown on the TV screen – align, showing the shot of the room with the TV in the background, with the TV in the room showing the same shot, etc., in a continuous feedback loop, creating a visual *mise en abyme*.

In filosophical terms, the confusion involved in transdiegetic indeterminacy is over whether the film is thinking with an embedded act of filming or not. In a film like *Inland Empire* this is radicalised – by the circularity of diegetic levels – to such an extent that there seems no possible solution to this indeterminate status.

So what we have seen across *Stage Fright*, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Rashomon* and the other 'lying flashback' films I have looked at, as well as with *Last Year in Marienbad* and *Inland Empire*, is the filmind playing on the ontologically indeterminate status of the filmic image – presenting dreams, delusions, fabrications and memories with as much veracity as apparently objectively occurring events – derived from the transsubjectivity of film-thought to produce certain narrational effects, which vary from misleading a viewer about the status of the image, partly through the use of voice-over narration, to offering the viewer several possible versions of events via embedded narrators, to undermining the very possibility of stable diegetic levels and framing relationships. I have also argued that in none of these circumstances should the film be described as an example of unreliable narration, and that instead, whilst the voice-over narration may be described in such terms – having an assertive quality and making a claim to truth – the film-thinking, within which a voice-over is always embedded,¹⁰² should instead be ascribed a fundamental indeterminacy which is exploited to varying degrees and in various manners by narrative film-thinking.

This indeterminacy is on two fronts: that regarding the status of the image (*ontological indeterminacy*), as I have just discussed, and that regarding the segmentation of the event as a transition from one state to another as expressed through movement, which I term *durational indeterminacy*. This dual indeterminacy is due to the indeterminacy of film-thought, which cannot state what the event is or how these are causally related (the determination of the latter involved in determining the former in the act of viewing), and nor its ontological status/diegetic level; these must be determined by a viewer. Later on I will return to the interpretive nature of this act and

102 Unless, that is, the image does not seem to serve a diegetic function, as in *Blue*.

how it relates to and interacts with the agency of film-thought, and its relation to the ontology of the filmic image, but first I want to look at some films in which durational indeterminacy is exploited to produce a particular effect.

The Seventh Continent and Indeterminate Narrative Film-Thinking

Michael Haneke's *The Seventh Continent* (1989) shows the routine life of a middle-class Austrian family – husband and wife Georg (Dieter Berner) and Anna (Birgit Doll) and their daughter Evi (Leni Tanzer) – over the course of one day in a year, for three years in a row. The film is split into three parts, each corresponding to the different years. In part one the family is shown going carrying out normal everyday duties and activities, such as taking the car through the car wash, getting ready in the morning, driving to work/school, going shopping, having dinner and watching television. Part two, taking place a year later, depicts many of the same routine activities, some in shot-for-shot repetitions. The final part revisits the family the following year. It soon becomes apparent that the family's routine is about to be disturbed. The first indication of this is Georg telling Anna that 'we must cancel the newspaper subscription.' The viewer then learns, through Georg's internal narration of his letter to his parents, that he has resigned from his job and that they 'have decided to leave because there is nothing to keep us here apart from you.' They are later shown at the bank withdrawing all of their savings, informing the bank manager that they're emigrating to Australia. The family continues their preparations for leaving – Georg sells the car, and Anna calls Evi's school to excuse her absence, although only because of illness; she makes no mention of their apparent plans to emigrate. Further doubt is cast on the reliability of their stated intention to emigrate when the viewer hears more of Georg's internal narration, telling his parents that although they had their doubts, they have decided to take Evi with them, partly because she has expressed in the past that she is not afraid to die. The next day they collectively set about systematically destroying all of their possessions and property, before finally committing suicide.

Although the viewer may doubt their intention to leave for Australia (why would Anna lie to Eva's school?), this act of destruction, though hinted at through Georg's buying of tools and his letter to his parents, is nonetheless unexpected by the viewer. This is because the film hardly provides any expression, through language for example,

of what is going on in the minds of its characters, and so their motivations for carrying out this radical act of self-destruction remain unclear to the viewer. Indeed, it is a hallmark of Haneke's work,¹⁰³ and also of art cinema in general (as I will discuss below), that the viewer is not privy to characters' motivations for carrying out certain acts, such that acts of these agents often seemed unexpected and unexplained.¹⁰⁴

The effect of the lack of verbal communication between characters and psychological insight, as if characters struggle to express themselves accurately and honestly through language,¹⁰⁵ is that there is little information revealed that would enable a viewer to assign determinate causes to characters' actions, such that the cause of the final act of suicide – an unusual and apparently unexpected event, thus conventionally requiring the most explanation – seems unclear. There seems no one event within the film's horizon that the viewer can identify as a necessary and sufficient cause of the suicide. The following events presented in the narrative could be conceived – segmented – as causes by the viewer:¹⁰⁶ experiencing the repetition of routine daily life, witnessing the aftermath of a fatal car accident, repeatedly seeing war on television, and seeing Australia advertised as a holiday destination on a billboard.

Regarding these events as causal factors involves an interpretation that they have a certain effect on the minds of Anna and Georg, ultimately leading to the view that life is no longer worth living, which is then acted upon through the act of suicide. The effects of these causal factors – in terms of the feelings, thoughts and emotions of the characters (reactions that contribute to future actions) – could be interpreted by the viewer as follows: the routine of daily life may cause the feeling that life is monotonous and unchanging; the accident may cause the feeling that life is unpredictable and cruel, and that one is never in complete control; hearing news of war on the radio may cause the feeling that life involves too much suffering; and the advert of Australia may cause them to yearn for what may be an impossible dream, representing unrealisable change to them. Any one of these things individually or all of them combined may have caused their ultimate act of collective suicide, but the lack of expositional psychologisation contributes to the indeterminacy of these causal connections between and segmentation

103 I will look at the relationship between film-thinking and authorship in the next chapter.

104 For example, in a similar fashion to *The Seventh Continent*, in the other two films belonging to what is referred to as Haneke's 'glaciation trilogy,' *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), the reasons for Benny and Max's respective acts of murder are unclear.

105 Or indeed any other way; as we have seen with *The Last Laugh*, the expression of psychological states through actions can also help a viewer to make causal connections between events.

106 And indeed, so could events outside of this, although my focus here is on the indeterminacy of the causal relationships and segmentations of events presented by the film.

of events, as it is unclear how characters are affected by events that they have experienced.

Although there is a lack of exposition, certain events do seem to be emphasised through repetition. For example, the morning routines which open part two of the film are pretty much identical to those depicted in part one. Some of these activities are also framed with identical shots, such as the garage door opening and the car leaving. Other things that are repeated in parts one and two are the family taking the car through the car-wash, Anna sitting in the doctor's waiting room, and Georg arriving in the car-park of his workplace. Again, identical shots are used to frame the depiction of some of these events. This repetition serves to emphasise the routine nature of their lives – these events become emphasised through their repetition, taking on more significance than if they were shown only once, and encouraging a viewer to group them together as a possible cause of their subsequent suicide. This effect is accentuated by the replication of shots.

There seems to be a general openness in *The Seventh Continent*, in terms of the action that can be segmented within the horizon of the film as causal events leading to the concluding events of the film, with various events together or alone potentially explaining the final act of suicide. The result of this is that we end up with a series of actions segmented within the time and space of the actions of film-thought with a variety of possible causal relationships that can segment these actions into a network of causally related events. We can therefore describe the narrative film-thinking as more indeterminate than that of say *The Last Laugh*, where the necessary and sufficient conditions of transformative events seems more apparent. And neither does *The Seventh Continent* employ a narrator to guide a viewer toward a certain interpretation of events in terms of causal relationships, whether singularly, such that they seem to offer an authoritative version (as in *Double Indemnity*), or plurally, such that they offer conflicting versions (as in *Rashomon*). Instead, a series of actions are presented with minimal exposition and various possible causal connections.

In the films of the glaciation trilogy it is a central act of murder that seems unexplained: neither the characters nor a narrator explain what caused the act of murder to be carried out by the protagonist, so that '[i]nstead of forming the sensationalist foundation for a standard mystery plot, death becomes each film's enigmatic epicenter' (Grundmann, 2007). In a 'standard mystery plot' the motivation of the killer – what caused them to carry out the act of murder/suicide – would be revealed by the end of the

film. However, in the films of the glaciation trilogy this motivation remains indeterminate: the viewer is left to speculate, on the basis of the information provided by the film's horizon, as to which, if any, event within this horizon caused the act of murder/suicide. Motivation remains ambiguous and therefore more open to interpretation in these films. The ambiguity I identify here in *The Seventh Continent*, as well as in *Rashomon*, *Last Year in Marienbad* and *Inland Empire*, is a common feature of art cinema, where, as Bordwell states, 'the tight causality of classical Hollywood construction is replaced by a more tenuous linking of events' (1985b: 207). However, I have demonstrated that it is in the nature of film's presentation of events in the moving image that an element of indeterminacy remains, although it is more pronounced in certain styles of film, such that this level of indeterminacy may form one of its defining features, as with art cinema. Bordwell claims that this level of indeterminacy in art cinema encourages a viewer to interpret a higher level of meaning in order to explain these uncertainties regarding causal motivation: 'Eventually, the art-film narration solicits not only denotative comprehension but connotative reading, a higher-level interpretation' (212), but I believe that that this activity of interpretation is involved in the act of comprehension itself due to the implicit nature of narrative in the filmic image.¹⁰⁷

So in terms of the dual indeterminacy of the event in the moving filmic image – in terms of both ontological status and segmented transitions – we can see that although the status of events in *The Seventh Continent* does not seem to be called into question, such that the film-thinking guides us toward regarding it as thinking objectively, the other aspect of guiding – of narrative film-thinking – does seem particularly indeterminate, in that the primary horizon of film-thought consists of a segmentation of day-to-day activities without any identifiable causal thread unifying them – and thus reciprocally segmenting them further – into a network of narratively significant events, such that the film seems to lack a large-scale narrative. Causally related events can be segmented on a small scale but none of these seem able to explain the magnitude of the final, transformative act, which emerges as a significant and unexpected event compared to previous actions throughout the horizon of the film.

With *The Seventh Continent* you have a significant, transformative event – the act of suicide – which is defined not by its causal relation with other events that take

¹⁰⁷ I will elaborate on this idea of narrative being implicit and the issues involved in determining this in the next chapter.

place before it, and nor by its effect on future events (indeed, this act is marked by a certain finality), but is actually marked as significant and transformative precisely by nature of the gravity of the gesture, of the act, in relation to those other seemingly mundane events and passive reactions of the protagonists that take place before this. This precisely points toward the fact that this climactic event seems unexplained, perhaps inexplicable, and thus could be said to foreground the indeterminacy of the narrative film-thinking here, which presents a final climactic event but without seeming to offer any explanation of it in terms of its causes. On the other hand, some films present segments of actions (moving agents), constituting the primary horizon of film-thought, within which it seems difficult to pick out any events as significant, lacking the immediately apparent transformative nature of the suicide in *The Seventh Continent*, and where actions of agents often seem unmotivated and are not remarked upon, producing perhaps a less immediate impression of narrative connections between – and thus segmentation of – events but nonetheless various narrative threads can be identified, and therefore also an element of narrative film-thinking. It is through such films that we can see the inherent narrative potential of the moving image, as I will now demonstrate.

Significance and Scale of Events in *Uzak*

The Turkish film *Uzak* (2002, Nuri Bilge Ceylan) is an example of such an understated narrative, with seemingly minor events taking on greater significance in light of the scale of action that makes up the film's horizon. The film begins with Yusuf (Mehmet Emin Toprak) leaving the countryside, framed in long shot walking in a field with a bag, through the snow and then up a hill, toward the camera, looking back over his shoulder before walking on past the camera. The camera then pans in the direction of Yusuf, showing a van approaching in the distance and Yusuf enter the frame from the left by the side of the road, gesturing for a lift. The van slows to pick him up, and the image cuts to the title 'Uzak (Distant)' over a black screen before the van stops. In this opening scene we have the beginnings of a narrative: a character – agent – on a journey gets a lift; indeed, causally related events can be segmented within this segment of action: Yusuf sticking his arm out, gesturing to the approaching van, which begins to pull over as a result of this. However, this scene also prompts questions about the past –

where has he left? Why? – as well as the future: where is he going to? Why? These are answered by the revelation of subsequent information, as the horizon of action extends, and the narrative within it, although the protagonists remain in many ways inscrutable. Similar to *The Seventh Continent*, they fail to reveal much of their thoughts or emotions to each other or the viewer, such that they don't verbalise the reasons for taking certain actions, with implications for the determination of narrative, as I will demonstrate.

There are several narrative threads¹⁰⁸ that emerge within the film's horizon. One of the over-arching ones is Yusuf's search for a job, which is the reason for him coming to Istanbul and staying with Mahmut: he informs Mahmut that he has lost his job in the factory and is to try to get work on a ship, such that the previous actions of Yusuf's, in travelling to Mahmut's and trying to get in to the building, can all be segmented as events caused by the loss of his job in the country and Yusuf's decision to come to the city which arises as a result of this. This decision of Yusuf's manifests the link between the earlier event of being fired (which we find out about only through Yusuf informing Mahmut about it) and the later events of travelling to Mahmut's, with Yusuf verbally expressing this causal series of events, and the intended outcome (i.e. the future course of events) when he arrives at Mahmut's. Indeed, this arrival at Mahmut's can be regarded as a transformative event within the context of the horizon of events of the film, in terms of the effect that it has on future actions. In accordance with Todorov's schema (1977: 111), we can identify a disturbance of an equilibrium here, which is manifest in later events, forming a network of events which can be related, through the interpretive activity of the viewer, to this initial event, thus enacting a reciprocal segmentation of these events and forming a secondary horizon of events within the primary horizon of action segmented by the filmind.

What we can see with *Uzak* is the narrative potential – including the apparently major events of transformation that Todorov identifies as essential to narrative (224) – within what might at first seem to be minor actions and events, such that – as I stated in chapter five – the significance of events, including their transformative nature, is relative to the other actions and events presented through the primary horizon of film-thinking. For example, Yusuf's arrival is understated – Mahmut finds him asleep in the foyer of his apartment block, informing him that he had forgotten he was coming – and

108 By which I mean a series of causally connected events, though of course, seeing as they do not take place in isolation but overlap in terms of time and characters, there is indeed some overlap between them.

in many ways not particularly disruptive: Mahmut has a spare room for him and carries on with his routines and job photographing tiles in the apartment, both men keeping themselves to themselves. Mahmut does ask Yusuf about what kind of work he intends to get – on ships – and how long this will take: 'I don't know exactly,' Yusuf replies. Mahmut then reminds him that 'You said about a week on the phone,' to which Yusuf responds, 'I suppose it will take a week or so. Yeah, about a week.' But this is as close as Mahmut gets to giving Yusuf any kind of deadlines or time pressure (a common narrative device in the classical Hollywood narrative). Indeed, both men seem laid back and relaxed about their communal and individual situations. However, this same temperament could be interpreted as symptomatic of distance and ennui (linking back to the title), with the characters unable to express their thoughts and feelings. Either way, there are implications for a viewer's interpretation of the causal links between events: characters often do not express the reasons for the actions, with this lack of exposition leading to an increased amount of indeterminacy, to the extent that it can be identified as an art film for this reason, with links between events seeming 'tenuous,' to use Bordwell's term. However, it is also apparent that indeterminacy cannot be judged on the basis of the film alone, but is also dependent on the knowledge, experience and involvement of a viewer (this is an issue I discuss in more detail in the next chapter), and so therefore if we are to identify a film as belonging to the category of 'art cinema' on the basis of its level of indeterminacy then we can see that such a judgement in turn depends on what the viewer brings to the film and their own interpretation of the indeterminacy/determinacy of the narrative film-thinking.¹⁰⁹

The effects of Yusuf's staying on Mahmut's life could be considered small: he appears to object to the smell of Yusuf's shoes, spraying them with air-freshener and then putting them in a cupboard soon after he has arrived, this latter action repeated later. Similar apparently small acts seem to annoy Mahmut – Yusuf comes to get a magazine, interrupting Mahmut's porn-viewing; he also leaves the door open whilst having a cigarette outside, and makes a mess whilst Mahmut has been visiting his mother in hospital. In each of these situations Mahmut reacts to the actions of Yusuf with certain actions: turning the TV off in the first, shutting the door on Yusuf in the

109 Of course, there are other determinants of the category of art cinema, outside of narrative characteristics: Bordwell refers to art cinema as 'a distinct mode of film practice, possessing a definite historical existence, a set of formal conventions, and implicit viewing procedures' (2002: 94). It is therefore the case that these features, alongside other factors such as exhibition and reception, influence the assignment of this label. I will look at the cultural specificity/universality of the category of art cinema in the next chapter.

second and tidying up after him in the third, such that the events can be reciprocally segmented – as acts – in this manner. Though the manner of his reactions might lead us to believe that Mahmut is not happy with Yusuf, the only time that Mahmut openly expresses disapproval to Yusuf is when he confronts him when he gets home about smoking in the living-room and accusing him of taking advantage of him. Soon after, he angrily questions him about not having found a job; Yusuf fobs him off and asks if he can get him a job. Mahmut refuses to even ask on his behalf, accuses him of being lazy and calls him a burden.

It seems that these events caused by Yusuf – his acts – have in turn caused Mahmut's outburst, such that these apparently small events become significant in light of their subsequent effects. However, as I have also discussed, events don't tend to occur in isolated, linear chains, with narratives instead consisting of networks of variously related causal events. A viewer can therefore also speculate that other events in Mahmut's life – that have somehow impinged on him – have also contributed to this outburst, and thus can be segmented as causal events: he has recently come back from visiting his sick mother in hospital, and staying with his sister, whom he doesn't seem to get on with, and just before Yusuf came home to be subjected to Mahmut's outburst, Mahmut had been visited by a woman who seems to be a sexual partner but not much more. The woman appears distressed by this fact and Mahmut does not offer any form of emotional comfort or indeed communication with her. As well as this, Mahmut's ex-wife is about to emigrate to Canada with her new partner.

Shortly after this incident between Mahmut and Yusuf, Mahmut is shown searching his apartment for something. After Yusuf enquires he tells him he is looking for a watch and asks if he has seen it. Yusuf claims he hasn't but Mahmut does not seem to believe him. He then goes to search for it in the next room, and whilst Yusuf asks him further questions about it, seemingly concerned, Mahmut finds the watch – as described – in a box, but rather than announce this event, his reaction is instead to recover the watch and leave it in the box, leaving Yusuf to keep on offering potential explanations as to what might have happened, whilst Mahmut tells him to forget about it. The question arises here as to Mahmut's motivation for not revealing that he has located the watch, i.e. the cause of his actions upon finding it: concealing it within the box of possessions and carrying on as if nothing has happened, as if he has not achieved his goal with regards to this narrative thread. What might Mahmut set out to achieve through this act? This can potentially be revealed through the segmentation of a future

event as caused by – and therefore reciprocally segmenting – this prior event, for Mahmut himself does not express his reasons for taking such action. The next day when Mahmut returns home he sees that a key is back on the hook and that Yusuf's bag has gone. From this, he – and the viewer – can deduce that Yusuf has left, although we nor he knows where to or why exactly. We can speculate as to the cause of this event (the aftermath of which we witness): Mahmut's anger with him and disapproval of his activities, and perhaps he feels that Mahmut suspects he is a thief – he sees earlier, after being questioned about the missing watch, that Mahmut has apparently looked through his bag (it now being open after being closed when Mahmut first sees it) packed and apparently ready to go in his room. We know that Mahmut no longer believes Yusuf is a thief after having found the watch, and can speculate that Mahmut has not shared this fact with Yusuf because upon seeing his bag packed, Mahmut realises that Yusuf is apparently intending to leave, or at least thinking about it, and that if he continues to hold him under suspicion he will no longer feel comfortable staying at his house, such that Yusuf's leaving, though not seen, can be segmented as an event at least partially caused by Mahmut's earlier actions; the events can be reciprocally segmented in this manner (although Yusuf's departure is not shown, such that it is an inferred segmentation, and therefore becomes part of the secondary horizon in this manner). This interpretation of the causal relationship between these events is also in keeping with what we know of Mahmut's character and his behaviour in terms of reacting to events and communicating with people.

Or perhaps Mahmut is too proud to admit that he was wrong in suspecting Yusuf and that it was him that misplaced it (the proud sensibility of Mahmut revealed when he refuses to ask his employers for a job for Yusuf: 'I've never asked them for anything Ever heard of pride? You can't just throw it on the rubbish heap'). It may be that a viewer attributes various causes to an event, thus determining a more elaborate causal network of connected events, or deems an event inexplicable in light of the information provided by the film's horizon, or chooses one cause over another, and these determinations also involve a viewer's own horizon of knowledge and experience. For example, a knowledge of Turkish culture may influence the causal connections made here: perhaps there is a particularly strong sense of family bonds, and perhaps especially between men, which would explain the impact of such events as Yusuf leaving Mahmut's flat in a mess, and of the implicit accusation of theft on Yusuf's future actions and/or Mahmut's inability to go back on this suspicion. Or perhaps these are just traits

of Mahmut's, whom we have seen as generally quite intolerant and distant, from men as well as women, with Yusuf less so. It is these kinds of judgements made by a viewer that influence the determination and segmentation of causally related events. We can therefore see that whilst this indeterminacy of the event in film is indeed medium-specific and thus has a degree of cross-cultural application, it may also be influenced by culturally specific factors: it is against such backgrounds that we interpret actions of characters.¹¹⁰

A viewer is potentially able to make various connections between these events, which involves interpreting a current action in the context of those that have taken place before and with a projection of the intended consequences, which may or may not come to fruition, weighing up the various possibilities against this horizon. And whilst a lack of expressed motivations and intentions of an agent of action – bridging the gap between being acted upon and reacting to – may lead to a greater degree of indeterminacy regarding the causal connections between events, it is important to state that even an agent's verbal expression of motivation and intent must be judged against the horizon of previous actions and words, both their own and others, such that we can see that the understanding of what Bordwell refers to as explicit meaning is an hermeneutic activity (as I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter).¹¹¹

The significance of an event is also determined by the context of the causal network within which it is segmented. What might in another context be interpreted – with regards to the narrative – as insignificant events, in this context emerge as significant, and indeed transformative, due to the fact that when causally segmented they constitute the main narrative thread – it is in being connected that events constitute a narrative, and their significance and transformative power emerges relative to the effect that other events have in terms of the future events that can be attributed to them. For example, in *Uzak* the finding and then concealing of the watch take on great transformative significance if we attribute Yusuf's departure, even partially, to these

110 I will consider these points in relation to horizons of interpretation, expectation and experience in the next chapter.

111 Victor Perkins makes a similar point here, criticising Bordwell's distinction between indirectly spoken implicit meaning and directly spoken explicit meaning, believing that he ignores the significance of context in the determination of meaning: 'Statements always come in a context which guides the assessment we can make of them. When they occur in a movie, what we make of them (how literally, so to speak, we take them) depends on the way we understand them to function in a context that has been elaborately constructed' (Perkins, 1990: 3). This is a point which Iser's elaborates with regards to the act of reading, and which I have developed here with regards to the determination of events in film.

actions of Mahmut's. There is also Mahmut's act of smoking one of Yusuf's cigarettes that he seemingly left by accident during the final scene of the film. Earlier, Mahmut rejects Yusuf's offer of one of these cigarettes, objecting to the particular brand and asking: 'How can you smoke that shit?' So what are we to make of Mahmut's smoking of one of these same cigarettes later? We may interpret it as a significant event, caused by Yusuf's departure – Mahmut feels bad for what has happened and so smokes one as a tribute to Yusuf, seeming to be deep in thought as he gazes out over the open water. However, we also have the issue of Mahmut having apparently quit smoking earlier – this could be interpreted as making the gesture even more significant, but also simultaneously less so: he is just in need of cigarette and this brand was convenient. Again, it depends on the interpretation of his motivation, and the relationship between current acts and previous ones.

But the film-thinking is also responsible for guiding a viewer toward these apparently minor events and focussing attention on them, enabling – encouraging even¹¹² – a viewer to make further segmentations within this primary horizon of segmented actions by showing (which I conceptualise as 'thinking') action with the potential for causal relationships within it. The scale of the narrative – in terms of the size of the segmented transitions from one state to another – is therefore partially determined by the scale of the film-thinking, which encourages the viewer to zone in on certain events whilst (necessarily) allowing a certain amount of freedom as to how and where the action – the movement of agents – is to be segmented as an event, as well as the status to grant this event. And it is in this dual tendency of film-thinking that we can locate both the narrational agent – but not narrator, for reasons I have discussed – of film-thinking as well as the indeterminacy of this narrative film-thinking, derived from the indeterminacy of the event, which leaves a certain – though variable – amount of freedom for the agency of the viewer in determining the narrative through interpretive activity.

As I have discussed, a film cannot state what the event is, its ontological status, nor why it has taken place¹¹³ – the key determinants of a narrative – and so this determination is enacted by the viewer in their interpretation of a narrative within the

¹¹² I will discuss the issue of guiding in more detail in the next chapter.

¹¹³ As I have demonstrated, such assertive statements may come from narrator-figures, overcoming the indeterminacy of the event, but these figures do not possess the same authoritatively framing status that they do in the literary text, being embedded within film-thinking. Character exposition can serve a similar function, assisting the viewer in the segmentation of events, but again these assertions are not authoritative and, as with Iser's schematised views, need to be interpreted with the horizon of the film.

sections of movement – of moving agents – that film-thinking uses to articulate narrative. This film-thinking can seem to function to guide a viewer toward a certain segmentation of causally related narrative events – becoming narrative film-thinking – through the use of various devices that I have outlined throughout this thesis: the use of narrator/character exposition/expression, presenting actions with the potential for causal relationships to be inferred between them, presenting these segments – mobile sections – of actions in a certain order, and also presenting these actions in such a way that a viewer's attention is directed towards them. As I have also demonstrated, the exact use of these variables of narrative film-thinking can also problematise the determination of narrative by a viewer by either misleading them or leaving the potential for narrative connections between actions, as well as the status of these actions, too open, with both of these functions exploiting in different ways the indeterminate quality of film-thinking involved in any articulation of narrative through the moving image of agents.

We can see then, to return more explicitly to the ideas of Deleuze that I introduced in chapter four, that in narrative film-thinking – the organisation of actions of film-thought to give the impression of narrative – there is both a containment of movement and action within the frame and duration of mobile sections as well as an opening out of movement and action within these segments, with this latter quality leading to the durational indeterminacy of the event. Actions of narrative film-thinking serve to contain the narrative and reduce this indeterminacy to various degrees by encouraging a viewer to make causal segmentations within these sections, such that a viewer is able to link events in a causal network. However, there is always a certain amount of indeterminacy, a certain amount of openness regarding the narrative event in the image of movement, which some films may accentuate and others may strive to contain.

But it is important to state that this indeterminacy of the event in movement is not simply relative to the size of the action or the agency involved, as if containing a smaller movement within the frame and duration of the mobile image necessarily reduces the indeterminacy. This is because actions do not take place on a fixed scale but have a recursive quality, with a larger action that may be interpreted as a punctual act itself consisting of smaller actions, which may be segmented as punctual acts. It is therefore the case that narrative – as expressed through images of movement – also has a recursive, fractal-like quality. Edward Branigan recognises that 'narrative patterns are recursive' and 'may be found at both small and large scales in a narrative text – at the

level of an individual shot, a sequence of shots, a scene, a sequence of scenes, a segment, as well as the film as a whole' (2006: 31), and that they are defined by their context, such that 'an act, object, or film device may have different narrative functions when considered at different scales of the text as well as different functions at different times' (32). He therefore asserts that '[i]n analyzing narrative causality it is important to keep in mind the *scale* at which the text is being examined' (31). However, I tie this recursive quality of narrative patterns to the indeterminacy of the event, something Branigan does not do. He refers to the narrativisation of shot scale, where

the scale of a shot is being used to direct a spectator's attention to relevant action. Changes in scale will indicate the significance of events and will lead the spectator toward an appreciation of a character's emotions and motivation with respect to events.

(234n)

In other words, this shot scale is motivated by narrative, such that, in the terms of this thesis, this scale is responsible for guiding a viewer toward certain actions with the potential for narrative connections between them, and therefore is a key constituent of narrative film-thinking. However, as I have been demonstrating, there is always a certain amount of openness regarding the scale of the event; the scale, and leading of the viewer by shot scale, does not entirely determine the event. The scale at which the event has narrative significance, as well as being partially determined by the scale and amount of movement captured within the framed duration of the mobile shot, is therefore also dependent on the segmenting activity of the viewer and the secondary horizon of segmented events that they determine within these mobile sections.

For example, in *Uzak* there is a cut from a medium-shot – over the shoulder of Yusuf – of Mahmut searching in a box for his watch to a close-up of Mahmut's hands rummaging through the random items in the box. In this cut the viewer's attention shifts from – alongside Yusuf – looking at Mahmut looking through the box from the doorway to looking inside the box, with the change in scale guiding the viewer toward a certain segment of movement that is part of the larger event of Mahmut looking for the watch: Mahmut pushes some bits of ribbon to the side to uncover the watch beneath them. He turns it over in his hands and then glances over at Yusuf, with the image cutting to a close-up of Mahmut as he does this. There is then a cut back to the close-up

of Mahmut's hands in the box as he slowly conceals the watch under some envelopes. The scale of the image here guides the viewer toward a series of actions, obscured from Yusuf's perspective, that have the potential to be segmented further into significant events (transitions) in the context of previously segmented events: Mahmut uncovering the watch and then recovering it, with the action segmented into these events on the basis of previous events.

The narrative thread of Mahmut searching for his watch in this scene connects with the larger-scale narrative of the relationship between Yusuf and Mahmut: the event of Mahmut uncovering the watch is not followed by him taking it out and telling Yusuf not to worry because he has found it, as might be the event expected to follow the event of his finding the watch (following the apparent goal of looking for the watch). Instead, the event of him uncovering the watch in the box is then followed by the event of him concealing the watch, with the horizon potentially segmenting this second event as significant, and the cut-away to Mahmut's glance at Yusuf emphasising the considered nature of this second act in relation to the first, as if he is reflecting on those same events that constitute the larger narrative thread here. We can see here, then, that if narrative film-thinking consists of leading the viewer towards a certain scale of events through the framing of durative sections, then the mobility of these sections leaves a certain amount of freedom as to where within the movements these events will be segmented, with this freedom leading to – in the context of determinate events that constitute a narrative – narrative indeterminacy.

Conversely, whilst we can identify indeterminacy on this apparently small scale of events, a larger scale of events does not necessarily lead to a greater amount of indeterminacy; once again this depends on the potential narrative connections that exist within the primary horizon of the film and how a viewer makes these segmentation in their determination of the narrative (the secondary horizon). For example, Godfrey Reggio's epic *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982) is film-making on an enormous scale, both spatially and temporally, with aerial shots of vast landscapes, space travel, industry and city life, much of it shot using time-lapse photography. However, it is possible to interpret the grand movements and action presented in the film in terms of narrative agents, events and patterns (the struggle of civilisation versus nature throughout time, the disruption of the natural order, and the consequences for human-kind, for example), such that the scale of the film-thinking here guides us toward 'thinking big,' but with the potential for narrative on a similarly epic scale within this horizon.

On the other hand, the scale of the film-thinking may be such that a potentially significant event is missed all together; the scale of film-thinking can here be regarded as problematising the determination of narrative. For example, in Haneke's *Hidden* (2005) the final scene consists of a long-shot of a crowd of students spilling out of school. The shot is held for a couple of minutes before the credits roll over the top. Amongst this crowd two central characters can be seen meeting and conversing, which is a key event in relation to the narrative of the film (involving a mystery of anonymous hate-mail and video-recording). However, the scale of the shot here is such that this event may easily be lost amongst the other actions and movement in the scene. Although the horizon of the film would enable a viewer to regard this action as a significant event, the scaling of this shot in relation to the significant narrative action within it (for this is no larger action here – such as the event of children as a group leaving school – that seems of particular narrative significance) risks losing a viewer's focus on the key narrative event.

Presenting events in this manner, allowing a certain extension of events in time through the duration of the long-take and within space through the use of the wide-angle, deep-focus shot was celebrated by Bazin for the amount of freedom it allowed the viewer in selecting what actions to attend to within the shot, and yet, as I introduced in the first chapter, this freedom is balanced with narrative agency in order to enable a viewer to determine the narrative within the primary horizon of film-thought.¹¹⁴ In any articulation of narrative through images of movement these two tendencies exist: of filmic agency and of narrative indeterminacy, though in various proportions. It is to this issue of the relationship between agency and activity, along with some of the other key issues that I introduced during the earlier part of this thesis, that I will now turn, in order that the significance of my intervention becomes clear.

¹¹⁴ Although, as I have mentioned, the narrative may also include the inference of events segmented outside of the action shown, but in this instance the events can be conceived as gaps filled through inference by the viewer, rather than being segmented within movement. However, this gap filling involves similar considerations of horizons, both internal and external, as the segmentation of events does.

Chapter 8

Theorising Filmic Agency and Viewer Activity

Having detailed my theory of narrative indeterminacy it is now useful to both recap the main points of my intervention and to position these within the narratological debates that I have been engaging with. A good place to start is the ontology of film that I set out and the narrative indeterminacy that stems from this.

Immanency and Indeterminacy

As I have described, Deleuze opposes the idea, stemming from the structuralist conceptualisation of film, that the filmic image should be regarded as an utterance, due to the fact that this reduces the image to a static representation, and therefore removes its defining quality: movement. The movement of the filmic image grants film a unique ontological status for Deleuze, where 'there is no longer any distinction between image and object' (Deleuze, 2005b: 26): there is an image of an object in movement which gives us the object itself through this movement: 'The movement-image is the modulation of the object itself' (*ibid.*).¹¹⁵ This immanence of the object within movement means that

¹¹⁵ This is because for Deleuze, influenced by Bergson, there is no difference between the perception of the object and the object itself: the object in movement *is* perception. Deleuze regards the movement of the image as equivalent to natural perception of movement in the way that that both synthesise movement from selected perceptions, but film has a mobile point of view that we do not, and with movement immanent within the image: 'Cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image' (Deleuze, 2005a: 2). So what you have here is cinema as perception – cinematic perception – but distinct from natural perception, which in this sense, as Rodowick observes, 'breaks with the conditions for "natural" perception upon which phenomenology is based' (1997: 22). However, for Deleuze this idea of cinematic perception and the movement-image is derived in the first from a rejection of phenomenology's model of consciousness, such that there is not perception of the image in movement (with consciousness *of* something, as the phenomenological model would have it); the image in movement *is* perception. Rushton recognises the consequences of this idea for considerations of the spectator: there is no separation between the cinematic perception on screen and the spectator's perception of it, as if the subject were placed outside of what it perceives, such that there is 'no distinction between *what a spectator perceives* in a film and *what the film presents* . . . for the spectator is fused with the screen in such a way as to be indistinguishable from it' (Rushton, 2011: 141). This may seem to contradict the model of viewer-activity that I have put forward here, but I believe, following Frampton, that we can regard film as manifesting a particular and unique *type* of intentionality (including its perception), which is immanent within that which it thinks (Frampton describes it as 'pure' in this respect (87)), this

the filmic image does not represent or resemble the object that moves but *presents* it through this movement. Deleuze also follows through the implications of this idea that the moving image is not an utterance in his claim that the images of movement in time are not narrated but in fact narration is derived from these images.¹¹⁶ Deleuze's ideas here have implications for film-narratological debates that have not yet been explored, the central one regarding the status of the event.

On the one hand is the idea that film provides us with a direct image of movement, with the object immanent within this movement. This also leads to the fact that the event as a segment of presented movement is also immanent within this presentation of movement. An implication of this is that it therefore makes sense to regard the narrative derived from this presentation – consisting of causally related events – as also somehow immanent within the film that presents these events. This problematises the distinction that Bordwell makes between *fabula* and *syuzhet* (following a heritage throughout narratology of separating the events of a story from their presentation, as I outlined in chapter four). According to Bordwell, the *fabula* of a film is an abstract structure consisting of causally related events constructed from the *syuzhet* cues which represent the events of the story (with the *syuzhet* in turn presented through style), such that the event is not given, 'is never materially present on the screen or soundtrack' (Bordwell, 1985b: 1959), but is inferred. However, we can see that when we have such a direct (and medium-specific) presentation of movement and the event immanent within this (as we do with film, when events are shown) that such a distinction between story events and their representation through plot/discourse is unnecessary. But although the movement of which these *fabula* events are a part is given by the film this does not necessarily mean that the events themselves and the narrative which they constitute are given – that is, determined – by the film. And it is here that we can locate an aspect of the indeterminacy of the event that I locate in film.

Key to Deleuze's conception of the movement-image is the idea that it is duration which enables the changes in space which constitute movement, and that it is

immanency leading to the fact that we don't just have images (shown representations) but thoughts and agency in these moving images, and therefore the object itself presented in this regard (this is not something that Frampton explores). This allows for an active spectator in the manner that I have suggested, and which Deleuze's account seems to foreclose, and for a consideration of how a viewer engages with this filmic intentionality (see below for further discussion of this), but whilst retaining Deleuze's ontology of the image in certain important regards. I believe that it is only in this combination that we can allow for the unique presentation of narrative in film, as well as for the activity of a viewer in responding to this.

¹¹⁶ In the conclusion I will consider further the unique ontology of narrative in film.

this which can be intuited through the movement-image, consisting of mobile sections. These mobile sections involve both the open whole of duration – that which enables change – and the closed sets in space, enclosed by the frame, which move and change. And I have demonstrated that this has implications for the indeterminacy of the event in film. On the one hand, the durative quality of the image, with objects in movement, means that the potential narrative event of this movement, defined as the punctual act of an agent, is not determined as such within this flux of movement, but is segmented as a transition from one state to another in the act of viewing. It is for this reason that I argue that narrative events are both immanent and yet indeterminate within the moving images of film that presents these events. But on the other hand we can see that, much as the punctual act – a completed action – is a section of movement (although in a sense immobilised through the act of viewing), so the shot is also a section of movement in space, contained within the frame, and so in this sense the narrative event is partially determined by being enclosed within the mobile section of the shot, which I refer to as a primary horizon of movement within which narrative events are segmented to form the secondary horizon of the fabula (which can also include events outside of those shown). There is therefore a duality of openness and closure in film's presentation of the event through movement, and it is for this reason that we can identify both what I refer to as durational indeterminacy – derived from the openness of the event – as well as the guiding agency of the film in this act of closing down movement when there is narrative potential implicit within this.¹¹⁷

This agency is manifest through both the movement segmented within the shot as well as the arrangement of these segments in shot sequences, and although Deleuze does attend to the impression of continuity created through the editing (rational cuts), he does not discuss this in terms of narrational agency. And this is where Frampton's theory of the filmind is useful, providing as it does a medium-specific model of narrational agency which doesn't fall back on linguistic models of enunciation and discourse – positing a narrating figure outside of the film yet responsible for it – but incorporates this agency as intentionality immanent within the film. And yet Frampton does not himself pursue the implications that this figure – and the related notion of film as thought – has for the narratological issues that I have been exploring throughout this thesis, such as narrative articulation and organisation, segmentation of events, unreliable

¹¹⁷ I will discuss the relationship between filmic agency and viewer activity and the issues involved in identifying such guiding agency in more detail below.

narration and narrative understanding.

I have developed Frampton's idea that narrative is 'one result of film-thinking, a certain type of thinking, one which lines-up plot and characters to tell a story' (2006: 113) and used his model of filmic agency, combined with the Deleuzian conception of the durative image, to demonstrate that the articulation of narrative through film should be conceived in terms of narrative film-thinking – as opposed to showing or telling – able to guide a viewer toward the determination of narrative, and yet which exhibits a unique and fundamental indeterminacy regarding the narrative event, which can be exploited to various effects.

The other aspect of the indeterminacy of the event in film that I identify as significant for theorising the indeterminacy of narrative and viewer activity is that regarding the ontological status of the event, which also stems from the idea of film as thought. In presenting the image of movement and manifesting intentionality within this – constituting thought in these ways – I have shown via Frampton's idea of transsubjectivity that not only is film-thinking unable to state what the event is or how they are to be connected with one another (which I classify under durational indeterminacy) but it also presents the movement from which these events are derived by a viewer (in their understanding of narrative) as ontologically indeterminate: '[F]rom a transsubjective no-place' (Frampton, 2006: 47). This has important implications for theorising unreliability in film, with the effect that regarding film in these terms – that is, in terms of ontological indeterminacy rather than unreliability – reveals a fundamental potential indeterminacy that can be exploited to mislead the viewer in various ways (as I have demonstrated through my analysis of so-called 'unreliable narrator' films).¹¹⁸ Now that I have emphasised the narrative indeterminacy and agency of film-thinking it is necessary to reiterate the viewer's activity in understanding narrative and how this responds and relates to the narrative indeterminacy and agency that I have identified.

¹¹⁸ Another important aspect of this is that regarding film as thought, and combining form and content in this manner, emerges as an alternative to realist/idealist conceptions of film. Frampton develops Deleuze's ontology of film as thought to show that this has important implications for our understanding of filmic agency and our response to it. In this way we can see that to regard the event as thought in this manner is not to reduce it to the profilmic event, as Bordwell warns against. Rather, the events are immanent within the pure intentionality of film-thinking, which consists of the content and form of the image as one. Later in this chapter I will return to some of the issues that I introduced in the first chapter, regarding ontology and agency, in light of the interventions I have made since.

Interpretive Horizons in Film

If film-thinking does not state what the events are nor how they are to be connected – the defining constituents of narrative – and without making any claims as to the ontological status of the images that it presents in movement (the former constituting *durational* indeterminacy, the latter *ontological* indeterminacy) then it is down to the viewer to make these judgements, determining the narrative events in this manner. I have proposed that this involves a segmentation of movement into acts of agents within the primary horizon of action presented by the film(ind), and that this takes place through a determination of these events as causally related, such that they reciprocally segment each other once a causal connection is determined by the viewer. This network of causally related events constitutes a secondary horizon of events which acts as a hermeneutic framework guiding future segmentations of events.

It is here that I draw influence from Iser's theory of the role of interpretive horizons in a reader's determination of meaning in the literary text, with the indeterminacy that arises as a result of the perspectival constitution of the text prompting the reader to connect the perspectives distributed throughout the text to form a hermeneutic horizon. This horizon of connected perspectives then forms a background against which the future segments of textual perspectives are connected. It is in this manner that Iser regards the act of reading as an active process of interpretation, in that meaning is not simply found in the text but is created by the reader in response to the indeterminacy of the text, stating that meaning is not 'a definable entity but, if anything, a dynamic happening' (1978: 22).

Although the indeterminacy of narrative that I identify in film is distinct from the indeterminacy that Iser identifies in the literary text – the former occurring within the perspective of the filmind, the latter between the various perspectives which constitute the literary text – it is nonetheless the case that in both cases indeterminacy is a hermeneutic prompt, with narrative meaning in film involving horizons of interpretation which aid in overcoming the indeterminacy of the event. And although Bordwell proposes an active model of narrative comprehension, emphasising the viewer's construction of meaning, it is apparent that he neglects the interpretive dimension of narrative comprehension – which stems from the indeterminacy of narrative film-thinking – regarding comprehension as an activity distinct from the process of interpretation. Instead I have shown that involved in the determination of a

network of causally related events, which Bordwell regards as the comprehension of referential meaning (the meaning produced when 'the spectator builds up some version of the *diegesis*, or spatio-temporal world, and creates an ongoing story (*fabula*) occurring within it' (Bordwell, 1989: 8)), is the interpretation of acts within a horizon of indeterminate movement. The determination of events in this manner is fundamentally hermeneutic in character in that 'the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine this whole' (Gadamer, 1979: 258).

Indeed, Bordwell's sidelining of interpretation is not without its critics. Branigan points out that it is 'unclear what is included within "comprehension" and the extent to which interpretation might penetrate comprehension at rather fundamental levels' and that 'the category of "referential" meaning is too fuzzy and permeable' (1993: 11). And Wilson (1986: 202-203) and Perkins (1990: 3) both stress the significance of interpretative horizons in judging causal connections and character expression, respectively. However, my intervention specifies the interpretive aspect of narrative comprehension that follows from the presentation of the event through the moving image of film. It is now necessary to look in more detail at the factors affecting this fundamental indeterminacy of the event in film and the interpretive activity of the viewer that follows.

I have shown that in presenting a viewer with sections of movement within which there is the potential for narrative events to be reciprocally segmented through causal connections, film-thinking can be regarded as thinking narratively, guiding the viewer towards the determination of narrative in this manner. It is in this sense that narrative film-thinking can be regarded as assisting the viewer in overcoming the indeterminacy of the event, and which it can do so through various means, as I have demonstrated through my analyses. These include: presenting (potential) events in their causal order, presenting these events as potential necessary and sufficient causes of other events, focussing attention on certain movement (with the potential for segmentation into acts) through shot-scaling, and through characters expressing their intentions, motivations and goals. But in each of these instances I have demonstrated that the narrative can be regarded as only partially determined by these actions of film-thinking, such that an element of indeterminacy remains, and that involved in judging each of these is a consideration of their place within the wider horizon of film-thinking that constitutes the film as a whole.

Iser's theory of textual perspectives and their indeterminate relationships can be

applied most readily to the last of the aspects of narrative film-thinking listed above. This is due to the fact that character expression – either verbal or otherwise – can be regarded as the expression of a discrete perspective within the world of the film, and thus, as Iser tells us with regards to the textual perspectives that make up the literary text, must be considered – that is, interpreted – in the context of the horizon of all the other perspectives within the world of the film (for example, when judging one character as more believable than others in the 'lying flashback' films that I analysed in chapter six). The key difference is that in the case of film all these character perspectives are embedded within the image-thinking of the filmind, which as well as introducing the durational indeterminacy that I have outlined above also introduces some issues specific to film regarding verbal and unreliable narration, as I will now reiterate.

Indeterminacy and Unreliability in Film

I have shown that the filmind is unique as a perspective in that it is authoritative as framing, embedding other perspectives within it, and yet indeterminate as an assertion of fact, both in terms of punctual acts and the ontological status of the movement which it presents. This means that a voice-over narration (similar to character expression) can assist in overcoming the durational indeterminacy of the event, and give the impression that it is controlling and even creating the image (with both of these seeming to frame it), but the image – as a result of the unique perspective of the filmind that it manifests/constitutes – exists in an indeterminate relationship with the voice-over narration: the images do not make assertions equivalent to the statements of a narrator, and so it does not make sense to claim that the images follow from this verbal narration. Instead, the filmind is the agent of these images, at the same time as being immanent within them. This means that a narrator does not enjoy the same level of framing authority as they would in the literary text. And one of the consequences derived from this situation in which these images constitute the immanent agency of film-thinking – 'pure intentionality' as Frampton puts it (2006: 87) – as opposed to being assigned to a narrator figure, is that these images (and the world which they present) are also indeterminate in terms of their ontological status and therefore diegetic level: the status of the image is 'up for grabs' in this sense, which has significant consequences for

our understanding of 'unreliable narration' in film.

I have demonstrated through my analysis of these films in which an apparent flashback is revealed as false that if we are to regard the image as ontologically indeterminate in the manner that I describe then the image that accompanies the testimony of the homodiegetic narrator telling their story does not make the same assertions or statements of fact that this verbal narration does, and is not framed by this narration, but is to be regarded as the film(ind) 'thinking with' the character and whatever their thoughts manifest (a lie, delusion, dream, or whatever). It is therefore the case that this image-thinking is not actually manifesting or stating an untruth as true, but is thinking-with an untruth which can be assigned to a character: the image isn't lying here. What follows from this is that when the film is thinking with a character in this manner it is more appropriate to describe the image as misleading, as a result of the manner of its presentation – often following, as if continuing, the verbal testimony of a character for example, and thus interpreted as an assertion of truth equivalent to the verbal statement – rather than unreliable.

As Frampton tells us, film-thinking is never truly objective or subjective, but only the filmind thinking as these states, with its own ontological status being transsubjective. We can therefore see that Frampton builds on Deleuze's idea that film does not represent or recreate some other, more primary reality (Deleuze claiming that 'cinema produces reality' (1995: 58)) to show the implications of this for thinking about the issue of perspective and point of view, treating the reality produced by the filmic image as the reality of film-thought, which then can be offered and interpreted as presenting the reality of a subjective imagining or an objective happening. Richard Rushton gets across this dualistic ontology of film, which enables the image to be regarded as the presentation of a real unreality, with his claim that in Deleuze's account 'the divisions or lack of divisions a film makes between reality and unreality does not in any way reduce the reality of the film itself' (2011: 131). However, although introducing some narratological concerns to this ontological conception of film, such as perspective and point of view, Frampton doesn't explore the issues that arise from theorising narrative agency in these terms. For example, how the agency of the filmind thinking narratively operates (and how much agency it can be granted), and the activity of the viewer in responding to this.

I described above how film-thinking can be regarded as narrative film-thinking if it is interpreted as presenting the potential for narrative within the world which it

manifests as its intention, and that in this way it can be regarded as a guiding agent (sharing certain characteristics with a narrator in this respect, although I have also explained the key distinctions between the two). But it is also the case that film-thinking can mislead a viewer by encouraging them to make a certain series of connections between events, thus segmenting them accordingly, as well as an interpretation of their status, but then reveal information which casts this version of events into doubt (as in 'lying flashback' films), and thus lead the viewer toward another interpretation of events in terms of their status and/or segmentation. For example, if it becomes apparent that the film was presenting the subjective thoughts/delusions of a character as if they had actually taken place, when in fact they did not (either with these events seeming to be framed by the verbal testimony of a characters, as in 'lying flashback' films, or mixing the 'subjective' with the 'objective,' as in *A Beautiful Mind* and *Fight Club*). It is in these instances that the film is thinking with a character's lie/delusion, but without this being made initially apparent. However, it may be the case that multiple characters give conflicting testimonies regarding a causal series of events, as in *Rashomon*, which brings each of these testimonies under suspicion and thus draws attention towards the indeterminate status of the image, able to present fiction and truth with equal 'veracity.' It is down to the viewer in these situations to interpret the reliability of the character providing the testimony/experience and to measure it against that of the character that is challenging this reliability, but my intervention here shows that it is not the image that is being judged as either reliable or unreliable, but the status of the film-thought, as either 'subjective' or 'objective.'

So the filmind can either seem to guide the viewer toward making this judgement one way or the other, as well as problematising such a judgement, such that the 'true version of events' remains indeterminate, as in *Rashomon*, *Last Year in Marienbad*, and *Inland Empire*. And a similar situation can be found in relation to the durational indeterminacy of the event, with the filmind both guiding a viewer to make certain segmentations through causal relationships, as I have shown in *The Last Laugh*, as well as leaving open the causes of apparently transformative events, as in *The Seventh Continent* and *Uzak*. What I have shown is that both of these types of indeterminacy exist simultaneously, for the reasons that I have given above, although they are exploited and manifest to varying degrees and for certain narrational effects, such that they are more at issue in some cases than others and therefore some films can be described as more determinate than others. It is now necessary to look at some of the

issues involved in making these judgements about levels of indeterminacy and how they relate to issues of narrative intentionality and viewer agency.

Horizons of Reception

What I have identified is a fundamental openness of the narrative event in film which can either be contained to give the impression of a more determinate narrative or exploited and accentuated to give the impression of a more indeterminate narrative, although without either of these being absolute. However, not only is the amount of indeterminacy dependent on the actions of film-thought but also on the act of viewing. I now wish to look at some of the wider determinants of the latter before looking at how we should theorise its relationship to the former. It is appropriate here to return to some of the issues that I discussed earlier when introducing Iser's reader-response theory. Iser's reader-response approach shares objectives with the wider reception theory of which it is in many ways a part,¹¹⁹ but in focussing on the response of readers to the structure and organisation of a text Iser shifts attention away from the historical reception of literature. As Iser states, '[a] theory of response has its roots in the text; a theory of reception arises from a history of reader's judgements' (1978: x). However, although I have demonstrated the advantage of Iser's conception of textual meaning and the role of interpretive horizons in its determination, it is apparent that theoretical debates around reception can also inform my model of filmic indeterminacy, with this topic forming a nexus point for many of the theories and issues that I have been tackling throughout this thesis.

My emphasis so far has been on the internal horizon of the text and its effect on the indeterminacy of the event, and whilst this has been my central focus, in response to Bordwell's lack of attention to it, this is not to suggest that external horizons have no influence on the perceived indeterminacy of events and the location of narrative within a film. For example, the knowledge and experience that a viewer brings to a film may affect both their inclination and ability to determine the causal relationships between events and their ontological status. Bordwell, albeit within a constructivist model,

¹¹⁹ Robert Holub declares that 'both have been concerned with a reconstitution of literary theory by drawing attention away from the author and the text and refocusing it on the text-reader relationship' (1984: 82).

provides an extensive elaboration of the role of conventions – and the schematic patterns of knowledge that accord with these – in conditioning a viewer's response to the information provided by the film. In many ways Bordwell's project does indeed fit with the objectives of reception theory,¹²⁰ and in the sense in which Robert Holub claims that reception theorist Hans Robert Jauss is 'dealing with the macrocosm of reception, [and] Iser occupies himself with the microcosm of response' (1984: 83), we can similarly perhaps distinguish my concerns from those of Bordwell. A look at the relationship between Iser and Jauss, and between the theoretical underpinning of Bordwell and of reception/response theory will enable us to see how these two concerns can inform each other, with implications for the ideological concerns of contemporary film theory that I looked at in earlier chapters.

As I have discussed, Bordwell's work has roots in Formalist criticism, as does reception theory; indeed the following passage from Holub serves not only to outline the significance of Formalism for reception theory, but also emphasises the overlap between the concerns of Bordwell *et al*'s cognitivist criticism and those of reception theory, including Iser's project, in that both respond to similar influences (and in this respect differ from the emphasis on linguistics which influenced structuralist criticism). Holub describes how what was important for reception theory in Formalist criticism was

the shift in vantage point to the text-reader relationship. By widening the concept of form to include aesthetic perception, by defining the work of art as the sum of its 'devices,' and by directing attention to the process of interpretation itself, the Russian Formalists contribute to a novel manner of exegesis closely related to reception theory.

(16)

Hermeneutics is also a shared legacy, although this is much more explicit in reception theory than in Bordwell's work, as has become clear through my discussions. It is through the influence of Gombrich's ideas of schemata and correction on Bordwell's work that the hermeneutic influence can be felt, although it is also apparent that Bordwell's approach could benefit from greater attention to these ideas which motivated

¹²⁰ Richard Murphy also notes that 'Post-Theory's project is similar to Iser's to the extent that it too attempts to understand how the subject responds to textual cues, and how the subject uses interpretative schemata to make sense of the text and its narrative' (2004: 119).

the work of the influential reception theorist, Hans Jauss, as well as those of Iser. Indeed, it is apparent here that these ideas can inform my own intervention here in important ways.

Like Bordwell, Jauss is concerned with grounding theory in historical research, attending to the reception of texts within a given context, the role of this context in determining meaning, and the relationship between this reception and the production of the text: 'Literature and art only obtain a history that has the character of a process when the succession of works is mediated not only through the producing subject, but also through the consuming subject – through the interaction of author and public' (Jauss, 1982: 15). As I have shown, Bordwell's concern is with moving away from the hypothetical, ideal spectator posited by contemporary film theory and moving toward an empirical viewer grounded in history and active in their understanding of film. The significance of historical context for Bordwell is that it enables one to chart the emergence and development of narrational norms and conventions – or 'modes' as he refers to them – which he regards as involving both the knowledge of the film-makers in the employment of these conventions through the form and style of the film and of the viewers in their response to this employment, with this feedback taking place through a process of schemata and correction (1985b: xiii). There is also a parallel between Jauss and Bordwell here with regards to the notion of horizon. Jauss refers to an 'horizon of expectations' (1982: 28), which can be regarded as similar to Bordwell's idea of schemata, and both emphasise the importance of what the reader/viewer brings to the text in terms of their own knowledge, experience and expectation.¹²¹ It is this underlying hermeneutic element that can be drawn out in order to indicate a way of consolidating the different emphases of mine and Bordwell's approaches.

As Holub notes, although Iser was certainly influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophy of hermeneutics, as can be seen in his model of theme and horizon interaction, the influence of hermeneutics is more apparent in Jauss's work, with phenomenology being the primary influence on Iser's (1982: 83). Iser's main concern is with the internal horizon of the text and the function of this in enabling a reader's determination – interpretation – of meaning as they move through the text as a

121 This connection is made even clearer in Holub's recognition of Gombrich's earlier use of the phrase 'horizon of expectations,' from whom – as I have mentioned – Bordwell took his model of schemata and correction. Although Holub notes that '[t]he trouble with Jauss's use of the term "horizon" is that it is so vaguely defined that it could include or exclude any previous sense of the word. In fact, nowhere does he delineate precisely what he means by it' (1984: 59).

'wandering viewpoint,' with Iser describing this viewpoint as 'a means of describing the way in which the reader is present in the text' (1974: 118). The horizon is thus a part of Iser's phenomenology of the act of reading, with the wandering viewpoint merging together the horizon of previously connected textual perspectives and the past of the text which they form, with the expectation of the future horizon that they will constitute (Iser, 1978: 112). And although we can identify a parallel here with Bordwell's idea of hypothesis testing, it is nonetheless the case that, as I have demonstrated, Bordwell does not attend sufficiently to the role of the internal horizon of a film in the determination of narrative events in the act of viewing. But in much the same way in which Iser's focus can be complemented by greater attention to the role of external horizons, and indeed to the hermeneutic approach outlined by Gadamer and adopted by Jauss in relation to literary criticism, so can both my account of the phenomenology of the act of viewing and Bordwell's focus on narrational modes and schematic patterns of knowledge be informed by this too. I have shown the function of the internal horizon of a text in guiding a viewer's understand of narrative in film, but in light of the above observations what role do external horizons play and how might these horizons be consolidated?

Whilst Iser does attend to the role of norms and conventions through his idea of a text's 'repertoire' which forms the content of a literary text, structured by the 'strategies' of the text which organise the presentation of this material, Holub (1984: 87) accuses these conventions of playing a primarily negative role in Iser's account, in that the world is *deformed* through its presentation in the literary text because it presents reactions to the world – 'a familiar world reproduced in an unfamiliar form' (Iser, 1989: 7). And according to Iser, it is this *lack* of context, and the indeterminacy that this manifests, that stimulates the interpretive activity of a reader in that they are presented with a new situation which effectively creates its own rules:

[T]hose elements of the sender's [text's] repertoire which are familiar to the reader through their application in real-life situations, lose their validity when transplanted into the literary text. And it is precisely this *loss* of validity which leads to the communication of something new.

(Iser, 1978: 83)

However, conversely, as I have demonstrated it is precisely the immanent reality of the events presented in film-thinking that leads to the type of indeterminacy that I propose;

in this respect the movement of events is familiar, and determinate in this respect, but to what extent is the segmentation of events within this movement and the status of this movement familiar and thus apparently determinate in this manner? This familiarity/unfamiliarity is influenced by factors outside of the internal horizons that I have focussed on, which has an effect on the determinacy/indeterminacy of the narrative, and therefore my approach can be complemented by the emphasis that Bordwell places on history and conventions. For example, as I have demonstrated through my analysis of *Uzak*, knowledge and experience of cultural norms and conventions can affect the segmentation of causally related events, and thus the perception of indeterminacy. It is also the case that intra-textual, as well as extra-textual norms, can play a role in determining a viewer's segmentation of events, including both wider narrative norms and narrational modes as well as generic conventions. For example, with regards to the former, knowledge of the conventional pattern of narrative in Western culture may condition a viewer to expect – and thus segment accordingly – a transformative event towards the beginning of the story, before it even emerges as having had a transformative effect in terms of future events. And knowledge of the conventions of art cinema for example may condition a viewer to expect and accept a greater amount of narrative indeterminacy – that is, an inability to make determinate connections between events and distinguish 'objective' from 'subjective' (Bordwell, 2002: 95-99) – than if the viewer were only familiar with classical conventions. Indeed, the very perception of a certain level of indeterminacy in a film may also lead to the film being placed within the category of 'art cinema,' and the particular mode of exhibition and reception that this entails, where this ambiguity may be prized as a prompt of the 'connotative reading [and] higher-level interpretation' that Bordwell describes (1985b: 212).

We can therefore see, in light of my above point about the culturally-specific aspect of indeterminacy, a potential reason for the fact that, as Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover recognise, 'it has been widely noted that many films that are understood as popular in their domestic market become art films when exhibited abroad' (2010: 7). Although it is also interesting to note the extent to which narrative indeterminacy has become incorporated into popular cinema as a defining characteristic of a particular type of narrative, which has been labelled the 'puzzle film.' Buckland uses this label to refer to 'a popular cycle of films from the 1990s that rejects classical storytelling techniques and replaces them with complex storytelling' (Buckland, 2009: 1), whereas

Bordwell emphasises that this label embodies attitudes of viewers in their engagement with the film, drawing on conventions of both classical and art cinema (2006: 80-82), regarding the films as a puzzle to be 'solved.'

As well as being conditioned by horizons of genre and narrational modes, the response to perceived indeterminacy may also be influenced by familiarity with the body of work of a director and the discourse surrounding this. For example, familiarity with the work of David Lynch, renowned for its ambiguity and apparent contradictions (as I demonstrated with *Inland Empire*), may mean that a viewer suspends their usual activity of narrative comprehension, which they expect to be confounded, in favour of engaging with the film in an alternative manner, in terms of affect for example. Indeed, Lynch's own discourse around his films seems to encourage this, eschewing coherent meanings and interpretations in favour of affective feeling:

There are things that can't be said with words And that's what film-making, to me, is mostly about. There are words and there are stories, but there are things that can be said with film that you can't say with words. It's just the beautiful language of cinema.

(Rodley, 2005: 26-27)

It is also the case that although there is a certain amount of narrative indeterminacy inherent within the presentation of events in the filmic image of movement, the identification of this, and the segmentation of a narrative that takes place in the process of overcoming this indeterminacy, depends on the activity of a viewer: both the indeterminacy and the narrative that follows are a product of the interaction between film(-thinking) and viewer in the act of viewing. In light of this, it is now necessary to look at how we may theorise the exact terms of this interaction in relation to both horizons and intentional agencies.

Narrative Agency and Implied Viewers

Since, as I have demonstrated, film, rather than just presenting reactions to the world and representative mediations of narrative events through language, though it may present these also, is able to present events immanent within an image of thought

as pure intentionality, we can regard the act of viewing in this regard as a unique merging of this immanent intentionality of the filmind with the thoughts of a viewing agent, with narrative as a product of this blending of horizons. But how might we theorise the terms of this interaction? Frampton states that '[a]s our mind meets the filmind so the collision produces a third thought (which is our thought of the film)' (2006: 163) in order to stress that film-thinking does not replace the thinking of a viewer as an active agent: 'We are always selecting and choosing – whether parts of an image to concentrate on or parts of a narrative line' (*ibid.*). However, Frampton does not tackle the issues involved in determining the boundaries of these agents or the extent to which thinking can be said to be in the film itself or interpreted by a viewer, both of which have consequences for some of the fundamental issues of this thesis. Indeed, Frampton goes so far as to claim that

[t]he filmgoing experience is one of constrained freedom – an endless push-pull mix of thinkings. Each filmgoer is invested in the film drama in their own (ideological, narcissistic, emotional) way. Their way of thinking attends to particular peaks of the image, particular elements of the narrative. But this undeniable aspect of all filmgoers *cannot be theorised*.

(2006: 162)

Whereas I argue that it is precisely this encounter between film-thinking and a viewer that needs to be theorised in these terms, and which I have attempted to do so here.

Frampton seems confused about exactly how much intentional agency to grant the filmind, talking of the 'pure' phenomenological intentionality that I have discussed and stating that '[t]he filmind does not determine meanings, it determines actions of film-thinking by which we receive and create meanings' (101), yet also talking of 'received' meanings. This would imply that the filmind does determine meanings, and at other points – despite his protestations over the anthropomorphisation of film-beings – Frampton claims that film is able to somehow think for itself, complete with anthropomorphic capabilities, such as judgement and intention (with 'intention' conceived as 'aim' or 'objective'), which the viewer feels and experiences directly.¹²² It

¹²² On this note, Brian Price criticises the description by Frampton of *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1992) as consisting of 'a decision by the filmind – *to empathise, to become, where it could have observed and judged*' (2006: 133), claiming that '[i]t is very difficult to imagine how this does not qualify as anthropomorphism in its most extreme form, despite Frampton's complaints against the film/mind

actually makes more sense to regard these intentions as interpretations of film-thinking and therefore not film-thinking itself: these interpreted intentions of the filmind are not strictly inherent within the film-thinking itself, whereas the phenomenological 'intention' *is* – it is this intention that enables us to see film as 'thinking' and not the prior one.¹²³ And so we can say the same for narrative film-thinking, and the narrative that follows, regarding it as a potential interpretation of the immanent intentionality of film-thinking by a viewer. It is useful here to look at Iser's theory of an 'implied reader' to explore how this meaning of film-thinking as narrative, narrative film-thinking, is actualised.

For Iser, the implied reader is a role offered to the reader by the text that is taken up by them in the act of reading. It is a figure partly constructed by the text, but one that must be adopted by the reader:

If . . . we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader's presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation. We may call him, for want of a better word, the implied reader.

(Iser, 1978: 34)

In taking up this role the reader actualises the meaning of the text, which until this point consists only of 'response-inviting structures' (*ibid.*) that offer the role of the implied reader to the actual reader: 'The concept of the implied reader is . . . a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him: this concept prestructures the role to be assumed by each recipient' (*ibid.*). The textual structure of the implied reader is not a perspective represented within the text (a schematised view) but is 'the vantage point from which . . . [the reader] joins them together' (36). It is in taking on this role and responding to these structures that the meaning of the text is actualised by the activity of the reader.

analogies that precede his own argument. Instead of attempting to discover levels of narration or construct a horizon of expectation for the determination of what might have been possible for a director to intend, we are asked to imagine an inanimate object capable of empathy; film style as the various forms of consciousness, emotion and decision' (Price, 2008: 103). Indeed, these levels of narration and the horizon of expectation in relation to the intentionality of film-thought has been a central topic of this thesis.

123 Indeed, Frampton does not seem to recognise the hermeneutic element of many of his 'descriptions' of film-thinking, claiming that '[m]y primary aim is to write about film as thinking – to see *how* to write about film-thinking at a descriptive level rather than at a critical/interpretive level' (2008: 369).

The advantage of Iser's model of an implied reader here is that, in keeping with his wider aims, it enables him to both account for the role of the text in structuring a reader's response at the same time as allowing for the active role of the reader in determining the meaning of the text in this response: 'The term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning of the text and the reader's actualisation of this potential through the reading process' (Iser, 1974: xii). As Holub observes, Iser proposes an implied reader in order to enable him to 'account for the real reader's presence without having to deal with real or empirical readers, as well as the various abstract readers' (1984: 84). We can therefore see that this model may be of some use, with modification, to a theorisation of the relationship between filmic agency and viewer activity that I have been exploring throughout this thesis, and which may enable us to consolidate some of the different approaches and issues I have been discussing.

Iser uses the concept of an implied reader to describe both the potential for meaning within the textual structures of a text as well as the actualisation of this meaning through the structured act that constitutes the act of reading: 'Textual structure and structured act are related in much the same way as intention and fulfilment, though in the concept of the implied reader they are joined together in the dynamic process we have described' (Iser, 1978: 36). And so with regards to the model of narrative indeterminacy I have proposed, we can regard film-thinking as immanent within the images that manifest its phenomenological intention which can be interpreted as offering the *potential* for narrative, and thus interpreted as narrative film-thinking – as intending narrative – by a viewer, but without this narrative being defined as such by the film-thinking. In this respect the segmentation and ordering of events and the other features of narrative film-thinking that I have identified offer an implied narrative viewer as a textual structure, with the indeterminacy within this film-thinking stimulating the structured act of narrative interpretation that constitutes the act of (narrative) viewing, and with the potential narrative meaning becoming actualised in this respect. As I have demonstrated, this narrative is interpreted within the horizon of film-thought as well as within the wider horizon of expectations and experience of narrative, with the exact constitution of these horizons impacting upon both the inclination and ability of a viewer to recognise the potential for narrative and to actualise it in the act of viewing.

The value of this idea of an implied narrative viewer is that it enables us to theorise the indeterminacy of narrative within the immanent agency of film, and thus

also the activity of a viewer in their determination of narrative, but whilst recognising that although narrative is always only an implicit potential, there are certain features of this immanent agency of film-thinking that guide a viewer toward a certain interpretation of narrative.

Holub, however, is critical of this division of a reader between the internal structure of a text – immanent in this respect – and their transcendental act of reading. Whilst recognising that Iser must encompass these two meanings if the implied reader is not to be reduced to a purely immanent meaning, in which case 'to call it a "reader" at all would be senseless, if not downright misleading' (1984: 85), he claims that 'defining the term in this fashion allows him to move to and fro from text to reader without ever clarifying the composition and contribution of either half of the partnership' (*ibid.*). Elizabeth Freund makes a similar point, claiming that

[b]y using this double-barrelled definition, Iser manages both to distinguish and divide The sophistication of this dialectical manoeuvring, however, is achieved at the cost of blurring the distinction which Iser assumes throughout his work between the phenomenological reader and empirical or historical readers.

(1987: 144)

How then might this problem be addressed when theorising an implied viewer, namely the slippage from textually determined viewer to empirical/historical viewer? One way is to tackle head-on this encounter between an actual viewer and the hypothetical viewer which the former interprets as implicit within the presentation and address of the film, such that, with regards to narrative, we see both the recognition of narrative potential and its actualisation in one moment, as it were, as well as a bifurcation of viewer activity and attention between the interpretation of the narrative and a consideration of this interpretation as the actions of an implicit viewer (between 'what I think' and 'what the film wants me to think').

It is apparent that, as I discussed in chapter two, it is exactly this relationship between textual determinism and viewer agency that emerged as of central importance following the encounter between *Screen* Theory and cultural studies, and between spectators and audiences, in the later period of contemporary film theory. And despite the fact that the type of meaning at stake is distinct from the narratological issues I have been exploring here it is nonetheless the case that these debates can inform the issues

that I am discussing here, with the potential for incorporating the empirical and historical viewer that has emerged as the central concern of cognitive film theory and audience-based research within a theorisation of an implied viewer, as I indicated in these earlier chapters.

With regards to ideological meanings of films, *Screen Theory* posited a spectator position constructed by the classical cinema's mode of address, and although I have shown that criticisms of this type of spectator as immobile and fixed are wide of the mark, I have also discussed the need to supplement such models of spectatorship with attention to other determinants of meaning and to the agency of audiences in determining meaning through their use of texts. As critics like Mayne, Doane, Gledhill and Kuhn recognise, it is not the case that this turn to audiences negates the theory of spectatorship proffered, for the former revolves around real – that is, empirical and historical – viewers, whereas the latter involves a theorisation of discursive – that is, textual – positions. And although, as I have discussed, Doane is sceptical of any attempt to unify the two, considering the 'profound divergence in epistemological premises and theories of subjectivity' (1989: 12), others have made attempts at bringing these two facets of the act of viewing together, and so have the potential to inform Iser's bifurcated implied reader, and then feed back into the phenomenological account of the act of viewing that I have proposed in this thesis. For example, Gledhill, incorporating the concerns of reception-theory, calls for textual criticism to be sensitive to the social negotiation of meaning as well as its textual determination, such that [I quote again]

[b]y studying the history and forms of aesthetic practices, codes and traditions as they operate within institutions, by studying narrative forms and genres, or the interpretative frameworks and viewing habits suggested by ethnographic research, the textual critic analyses the *conditions and possibilities of reading*.

(1999: 174)

And in a similar way it is appropriate to call for narratological criticism to be sensitive to the cognitive processes of viewers and their interpretive and institutional frameworks,¹²⁴ their viewing habits (as obtained through audience research, for

124 Though Bordwell does certainly engage with these frameworks, Ira Bhaskar is critical of Bordwell's lack of engagement with the cultural and ideological determinants of a viewer's interpretive activity and the centrality of this to narrative meaning, calling for 'a historical and cultural contextualisation of interpretation, without which no "historical poetics" of narrative art or cinema is either comprehensive

example), and the interaction of these with the hypothetical, transcendental and phenomenological viewer that I have been theorising; it is in this way that the multifaceted dimensions of the act of viewing and the implied viewer can be brought together. In doing so Bordwell's historical viewer would be supplemented with a transcendental, phenomenological viewer (with a similar relationship to that between textual spectators and historical audiences with regards to the determination of ideological meaning), which equally can supplement the immanent agency of the film, such that the agency of a viewer, the narratological agency of the film(ind) itself, and the interaction and relationship between the two could be fully considered, hypothetically and empirically.¹²⁵ It is through this that a new model of both viewer activity and filmic agency with regards to both the interpretation and articulation of narrative emerges.

What I have attempted to provide through this theses is a refined vocabulary and conceptual framework with which these relationships can perhaps be probed further, allowing for the specificity of filmic narration – which I conceive instead as narrative film-thinking – and the duality of indeterminacy/determinacy that a viewer responds to in the act of viewing. This relationship between reception and response, and the various viewing positions involved in these, can then be approached in the manner which, following Norman Holland's criticism of his apparent lack of attention to actual responses of readers, Iser proposes: in terms of 'an intricate hermeneutic interrelation between *Wirkung* [response], as a response-inviting structure, and reception, as the result of a selective operation carried out by the actual reader' (Iser, 1989: 51).

or adequate' (2004: 393).

125 This is not to suggest that the phenomenology of viewing I have proposed is compatible with Bordwell's account of narrative comprehension, but that the potential remains for the act of viewing that I have theorised to be explored empirically.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated through this thesis how we may theorise both the narrative agency of film in light of the unique ontology of the filmic image and the interpretive activity of a viewer in response to this. What emerges from this is an alternative to linguistically oriented models of narration and meaning, proposing in place of these the idea of film as a particular type of thought, with the presented events both immanent and indeterminate within this. As a result of this we have a different model of viewer activity to that proposed in cognitivist accounts, emphasising the hermeneutic element of the act of viewing and the indeterminacy of the event which prompts this. But rather than pose this active viewer as an alternative to the passive spectator (as distinct from viewer) of ideologically-oriented contemporary film theory, I have instead focussed on the activity of a viewer in understanding narrative, whilst at the same time proposing this interpretive viewer as a potential position, with the act of viewing bringing together the empirical, historical viewer and the immanent agency of the film (actualising this implied viewer position). And whilst the exact manner of this encounter will be variable, and the narrative that is actualised through this, depending on the horizons of these agencies, I have set out the terms on which this encounter may be theorised and researched further.

What has also emerged as significant in this unique ontology of film narrative that I have been exploring is the excessive quality of events in their filmic presentation. As I have described, this movement of the image leads to durational indeterminacy, as the viewer has a certain amount of freedom as to where to segment movement within the actions of agents presented in the image. The question then arises of whether, following from this excessive nature of events in film, it can be said that there is a related excess of narrative in film, with durational indeterminacy leading to an excessive potential for narrative in the image of moving agents. It is here that Rick Altman's (2008) recent theory of narrative is useful.

Altman stresses that the material of narrative – such as action and character – 'is insufficient by itself to define narrative' (11). He argues instead that narrative also requires narrational activity as well as narrative drive, with the former involving both 'following' and 'framing.' Altman uses the term 'following' to describe the activity of a

narrator following the actions of a character:

Not until the narrator begins to follow a particular character will the text be recognizable as a narrative. Or, to put it more accurately, not until a particular character is followed will we sense the activity of a narrator, thereby defining the text as narrative.

(15-16)

In film we can see that the filmind carries out this function, but for Altman this sense of narratorial agency provides a diegesis ('which is where the narrative is located' (17)) distinct from the narrational level, which is the vehicle of the narrative. What I have demonstrated with film is that no such distinction exists, the narrative events (when shown) being immanent (but not real) within their presentation as film-thought. But what Altman's account does is recognise the activity of a narratorial agent as an *attending to* the diegesis that it creates, rather than as simply a showing or telling, which in this respect fits with the model of narrative film-thinking that I have developed throughout this thesis. And similarly with Altman's idea of framing, which he describes as the activity of 'delimiting and framing' narrative actions by the text: 'By itself, daily life cannot be said to constitute narratives, however much narrative material it may provide. But when a naturalist novelist cuts daily life into slices, thus delimiting and framing it, the narrative implicit in daily life may be revealed' (18). I have shown that narrative film-thinking can be described as a segmenting of actions in this manner, but that the nature of framing movement in film always introduces an element of indeterminacy, and the necessity of the activity of a narratee in determining narrative Altman recognises with his claim that narrative also requires 'narrative drive,' which 'designates a reading practice required for narrative material and narrational activity to surface in the interpretive process' (10). Altman describes this as another layer of attention, on top of that of the following-narrator, choosing to attend to certain parts of the narrative material which the narrator frames/follows. Again, we can see a parallel with the act of viewing and the relationship between the intentional agency of the film and of the viewer that I have described. Without this drive motivating the act of viewing and the interpretation of film thinking in this manner, the narrative remains as an unrealised potential of film-thinking. However, when this drive is present, along with the filmind following and framing narrative material, then narrative is actualised in

the act of viewing, which interprets film-thinking as narrative film-thinking. As Altman puts it: 'While narratives may be read in many ways, the reading of a narrative as narrative always involves the presence of narrative material, the implementation of narrational activity, and the deployment of narrative drive' (21).

However, as I have been arguing, the unique ontology of narrative in film is such that acts of moving agents (when shown) are reduced from the image of movement, such that narrative is presented in this moving image of the world (as thought) rather than the world being represented as narrative; film gives us the world (as uniquely thought movement) from which narrative is derived, rather than vice versa, and it is this that leads to the uniquely indeterminate status of narrative in film that I have been proposing. This indeterminate presentation of narrative through film and the freedom of the viewer that follows this chimes with Siegfried Kracauer's recognition here of the 'indeterminate visible meanings' that accompany the presentation of narrative in film, and which I have elaborated throughout this thesis:

Consider any moment of . . . a story film. No doubt it is intended to advance the story to which it belongs, but it also affects us strongly, or even primarily, as just a fragmentary moment of visible reality, surrounded, as it were, by a fringe of indeterminate visible meanings. And in this capacity the moment disengages itself from the conflict, the belief, the adventure, toward which the whole of the story converges. A face on the screen may attract us as a singular manifestation of fear or happiness regardless of the events which motivate its expression. A street serving as a background to some quarrel or love affair may rush to the fore and produce an intoxicating effect.

(1961: 303)

But whilst in Kracauer's account this indeterminacy is derived from the reality of the world that film is uniquely able to record and reveal, which he describes as the 'hunting ground of the motion picture,' 'the external world expanding in all directions' (41), in my account it is the particular *filmic* reality of images as the intention of a filmind, thinking and thus creating the world through movement, as film-thought, that leads to the narrative indeterminacy I have been describing throughout this thesis.

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