Observers and Narrators in Fiction Film

ABSTRACT

In the debate on our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films, the thesis that the viewer of a fiction film imagines observing fictional events, and the thesis that these events are imagined to be presented by a narrator, are usually taken as the two components of one theoretical package, which philosophers such as George Wilson and Jerrold Levison defend while philosopher such as Gregory Currie and Berys Gaut reject. This paper argues that the two theses can be disentangled and investigates their logical connection. The investigation shows that the second thesis entails the first but there is no entailment the other way around. Endorsing the first thesis is thus compatible with two options, namely, endorsing the second thesis or giving it up. However, the paper argues that, if we endorse the first thesis, endorsing the second provides us with a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.

PAPER

The philosophical debate on the audience's engagement with fiction films focuses on two theses, namely, the Imagined Observer Thesis (IOT) and the Film Narrator Thesis (FNT). Philosopher such as George Wilson (1986; 2011), Jerrold Levinson (1993; 1996), Gregory Currie (1995) and Berys Gaut (2010) consider these theses crucial to understand the peculiar experiential and cognitive response that fiction films are meant to elicit from their audience. The two theses can be expressed as follows:

(IOT) Viewers of fiction films are meant to imagine being observers of fictional events.

(FNT) Viewers of fiction films are meant to imagine that fictional events are told by a narrator.

My raw intuition is that the two theses are incompatible, and that (IOT) is true while (FNT) is false. When I ask my students to express their intuitions on these theses (before sharing mine with them), their answers tend to converge with mine. Although that is surely not a proper piece of experimental philosophy, such convergence of intuitions seems to suggest that when one reflects on one's experience as a viewer of fiction films, one has the impression of having enjoyed a perceptual experience of fictional events, but not the impression that those events were told by a narrator. Indeed, we might add, one does not have the latter impression precisely because one does have the former. Since the film viewer imagines seeing fictional events, she does not need a film narrator

who would tell those events to her, just as she does not need a "real-life narrator" who would tell her what she sees in everyday life.

However, in the philosophical debate things go differently. On the one hand, philosophers such as Wilson and Levinson argue that (IOT) and (FNT) are both true. On the other hand, philosophers such as Currie and Gaut argue that the two theses are both false. Despite disagreeing on what is true and what is false, philosophers seem to agree on rejecting the intuition that, if (IOT) is true, then (FNT) should be false. Indeed, in the philosophical debate, the (IOT) and (FNT) are so intertwined that they are sometime criticized or defended as if they were one, as if they had to stand or fall together (cf. Levinson 1993, Currie 1995, Gaut 2010, Livingston 2013, Curran 2019). A notable exception is Mario Slugan (2019a, 110; 2019b 174), who disentangles (IOT) from (FNT) though he expresses skepticism about both theses.

In this paper, I would like to explore the logical connection between the two theses rather than arguing for or against them. I will neither defend nor reject (IOT), but I will investigate whether endorsing (IOT) involves endorsing also (FNT), as philosophers seem to think, or, instead, involves rejecting (FNT), as the above-mentioned intuitions suggest. I will argue for a middle ground: endorsing (IOT) does not involve rejecting (FNT), unlike what intuitions suggest, but the connection between (IOT) and (FNT) is less tight than what philosophers have so far assumed. When one endorses (IOT), both the endorsement and the rejection of (FNT) are available theoretical options. However, I will argue, the endorsement of (FNT) is a preferable option because it offers a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.

1. The Imagined Observer Thesis

The theoretical background of (IOT) is a conception of fiction as prescription to imagine (see Walton 1990, Currie 1990). This background is shared by both the philosophers who defend (IOT) and those who reject it. Thus, the discussion about (IOT) is a controversy on whether the imaginative project that the film viewer is meant to implement involves not only imaginings about fictional characters and events but also imaginings about the viewer herself. In sum, according to (IOT), the viewer imagines not only that fictional characters exist, and fictional events occurs, but also that, in the fiction, she observes them.

All this helps us to explain why the intuition in favor of (IOT) might be misleading. (IOT) does not limit itself to claiming that the viewer has the impression of perceiving fictional events. If the intuition of favor of (IOT) relied only on that impression, what the intuition suggests could not settle the philosophical debate on (IOT).

What (IOT) claims is rather that the impression of perceiving fictional events is included into the imaginative project whereby the viewer is meant to enjoy the film as a fiction. The defenders of (IOT) might insist that the viewer's impression of perceiving fictional events *supports* the truth of the thesis, *assuming that* the viewer is inclined to import this impression into her imaginative project. Yet, the critics of (IOT) precisely deny the latter assumption.

The debate involves both a normative and a descriptive reading of (IOT). According to the normative reading, (IOT) specifies what film viewers should do in the framework of fiction as a cultural practice. However, what a cultural practice such as fiction prescribes is not something that one might find in written laws or user manuals. Rather, the normativity of cultural practices lies in attitudes and habits of practitioners. Therefore, individuating the norms that govern a certain practice involves providing a correct description of it which might highlight not only features of it which the practitioners are aware of but also tacit assumptions that remain implicit in it. In this sense, (IOT)—just as (FNT), as we shall see—has not only a normative component but also a descriptive component: it is a thesis on what the (ideal) viewer *should do* based on what (actual) viewers *have done and keep doing*. (IOT) thus concerns the viewer's rules of engagement, as it where, but these rules are grounded in actual practices.

To clarify the controversy on (IOT), let me consider an example. In the opening scene of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the viewer sees the hero, Scottie, slipping off a roof. Both the defenders and the critics of (IOT) agrees that the viewer is meant to imagine that Scottie slips off a roof. In other words, it is fictional—it is true in the fiction—that Scottie slips off a roof. The controversy is whether the viewer is also meant to imagine that she herself, as a fictional observer, sees Scottie slipping off a roof. Is her perceptual experience of Scottie's slipping fictional in the same sense in which that slipping is so?

At this point, intuitions seem to go against (IOT). If a viewer of *Vertigo* should tell the story of Scottie, she would hardly mention her presence as an observer when Scottie fell from the roof. Her perceptual experience of that event does not seem to belong to the fictional world in which the event occurs. Currie (1995) relies also on this intuition to argue that (IOT) is false. Yet, the defender of (IOT) is not committed to the claim that the viewer as an imagined observer belongs to the same fictional world to which fictional events like Scottie's slipping belong. Slugan (2019a, 111; 2019b 201) interprets Wilson's epistemology of film as committed to that claim but, as we shall see, Wilson's theses can be also interpreted in a way that avoids that commitment.

According to Kendall Walton (1990 and 2015), each fiction involves two fictional worlds, which he calls the "Story World" and the "Game World". The former is the world in which fictional events occur while the latter is the world in which the viewer, as a fictional observer, can perceive

those events. Scottie's slipping occurs in both worlds, but the imagined observer sees it only in the Game World, not in the Story World.

We might say that the Game World is constituted by the Story World plus a further ontological region which is a sort of observatory on the Story World. From there, one can observe a world to which one does not belongs. Stefano Predelli (2020, 47) calls such region "the Periphery" of the Story World. The imagined observer figuring in (IOT) is a denizen of the Periphery whom I will name "the Observer". In sum, the film viewer located in the actual world is meant to imagine seeing events that occur in the Story World by playing the role of the Observer in the Periphery of the latter world.

The controversy on (IOT) does not concern whether the Observer belongs to the Story World but rather whether we really need to posit the Observer, the Periphery, and the Game World to explain our engagement with fiction films. Although the defenders and the critics of (IOT) may agree that the Observer does not belong to the Story World, the disagreement remains on whether the Story World is all that the viewer is meant to imagine or she is meant to also imagine a Periphery, and to locate herself there as the Observer. If we want to afford a compelling explanation of our engagement with fiction films, do we really need the Periphery and the Observer as its inhabitant? This is, I contend, the best way of casting the controversy on (IOT) as a genuine philosophical debate. Moreover, this approach also enables us to properly characterize the debate on (FNT), as I will show next.

2. The Film Narrator Thesis

Narrators are fictional agents—possibly, fictional counterparts of actual authors—who are meant to supply information about fictional events. Some fiction films have *explicit* narrators. For example, in Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* the story is told by the voice over of an omniscient narrator, played by the actor Michael Hordern. Explicit narrators like that are not controversial. In fact, (FNT) states more than this. According to (FNT), narrators play a role also in films such as Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* that do not exploit voice overs or analogous stylistic devices to indicate explicit narrators. Such *implicit* narrators are controversial. Defenders of (FNT) argue that implicit narrators play a key role in our engagement with fiction films. Critics of (FNT), on the other hand, argue that implicit narrators are just cumbersome philosophical speculations that play no interesting explanatory role as regards film experience.

The debate on implicit narrators also concerns literary fictions that lack an explicit narrator endowed with a recognizable psychological profile (see Kania 2005 and 2007; Alward 2007 and 2009). There is, however, a rationale for positing implicit narrators in literature that does not apply

to the case of film. Although novels are made of sentences that authors have written as *prescriptions* to imagine, a reader who engages imaginatively with a novel is rather inclined to cast those sentences as assertions that describe fictional events. Manuel García-Carpintero (forthcoming) calls this "a first phenomenological motivation for covert narrators", stressing that "it intuitively seems that the contents of third-person narratives are reported to us".

This phenomenology of reading bears upon the reader's imaginative project in such a way that, in this project, the subject who utters the sentences cannot be the real writer who indeed makes prescriptions rather than assertions. The reader is thus led to imagine the narrator, that is, the fictional subject—possibly, the fictional counterpart of the real writer—who makes those assertions. Ultimately, the same sentences are assertions of the narrator when considered from within the imaginative project, and prescriptions of the writer when considered from without that project (for an insightful discussion of this issue, see Slugan 2019a, 108; 2019b 191-194).

In literary fiction, both an explicit narrator such as Barry Lyndon in William Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* and an alleged implicit narrator like that of Gustave Flaubert's *L'éducation sentimentale* make linguistic assertions about the fictional world. Yet, when it comes to films, things are quite different. The omniscient explicit narrator who replaces Barry Lyndon in Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of Thackeray's novel also makes linguistic assertions which describe the fictional world, but the alleged implicit narrator who would describe the fictional world of Fellini's *La dolce vita* surely is not making linguistic assertions, otherwise there would be something like a voice over to vehiculate them, but nothing like that can be heard in that film.

All this seems to motivate the intuition that (FNT) is false. If a narrator is a fictional agent who makes linguistic assertions to describe the fictional world, there is no narrator in fiction films in which there is no voice asserting anything. Yet, the defenders of (FNT) have a way of addressing this issue. They can argue that the implicit film narrator does not make linguistic assertions but rather pictorial assertions, that is, assertions that have pictures instead of words as their vehicle. The rationale for the implicit narrator in film, from this perspective, resembles that for the implicit narrator in literature. Filmmakers use pictures to prescribe imaginings but, when the viewer engages with her imaginative project, she is inclined to cast these pictures as pictorial assertions on the fictional world rather than as pictorial prescriptions, thereby attributing them to the implicit film narrator instead of to the filmmaker.

Still, this argument in favor of (FNT) seems to be in tension with (IOT). According to the latter thesis, the viewer imagines *seeing* fictional things. If "seeing" here means "ordinary seeing", pictures play no role in the viewer's imaginative engagement. In ordinary perception, indeed, we have the impression of directly seeing things, not pictures of things (cf. Strawson 1979). Hence, the

way in which the viewer imagines seeing fictional things prevents one from positing the film narrator.

To sum up, both literature and film may involve a Periphery, but what there is in the Periphery seems to be different. In literature, the Periphery has two denizens. First, the Narrator, who makes linguistic assertions about the Story World. Second, the imaginary counterpart of the reader, namely "the Narratee" (Prince 1985), who pays attention to the Narrator's assertions, thereby gathering information about the Story World. In film, on the other hand, the Periphery seems to be inhabited only by the imaginary counterpart of the viewer, namely the Observer, who directly sees events in the Story World without the need of any narrator who would describe them through pictorial assertions.

3. How to Reconcile the Observer with the Narrator

Relying on intuitions, one might be tented to conclude that (IOT) refutes (FNT), instead of entailing it as both defenders and critics of (IOT) are inclined to assume. Yet, two strategies for defending the compatibility between the truth of (IOT) and that of (FNT) remain available.

The first strategy consists in interpreting (IOT) as the claim that the viewer imagines seeing pictures that visually record fictional events. Just as the reader of a novel reads sentences that are prescriptions to imagine as if they were assertions about the fictional world, thereby playing the role of the Narratee, the viewer of a fiction film sees pictures that are prescriptions to imagine as if they were recordings of fictional events, thereby playing the role of the Observer. As Wilson (2011, 51) puts it, "we imagine motion picture shots as motion picture shots [...], but as motion picture shots for which the fictions they construct are real". From this perspective, the Narrator becomes the subject who has produced and assembled those visual (and possibly auditory) recordings: the "Grand Imagier", as Wilson (2011, 29) dubs him or her, borrowing the term from Christian Metz and Albert Laffay. If (IOT) claims that we imagine that the pictures we see on the screen are recordings of fictional events, (FNT) adds that the Narrator is the Grande Imagier who, in our imaginative project, provides us with those recordings. Hence, (IOT) does no longer refute (FNT). Indeed, the former nicely complements the latter.

The second strategy consists, instead, in interpreting (IOT) as the claim that the viewer imagines directly seeing fictional events, not visual recordings of fictional events. However, this interpretation of (IOT) does not commit itself to the claim that the viewer also imagines that her body is located at the standpoints from which she sees fictional events. In other words, the viewer imagines seeing from within the fictional space without imagining that her body is within that space. Wilson (1986, 55) offers a simile that may help to clarify this interpretation of (IOT): the

Observer is like the immaterial and imperceptible occupant of an immaterial and imperceptible capsule, which can freely move and jump within the fictional spacetime. This simile also helps us to figure out the role of the Narrator in this imaginative framework: the Narrator is the subject who moves or displaces the Observer's capsule within the fictional spacetime. In this case, the Narrator is not a "Grand Imagier" who produces visual recordings of fictional events but rather an "Audio-visual Presenter" (Chatman 1990) or "Perceptual Enabler" (Levinson 1996) who directly provides the Observer with viewpoints on those events. This scenario also enables us to reconcile (IOT) with (FNT) by casting the Narrator as the source of the Observer's perceptual access to the fictional world.

At this point, one might object that both strategies rely on somehow metaphorical readings of (IOT). In the Grand-Imagier strategy, the viewer imagines seeing fictional events through *a sort of* visual recording of them. In the Perceptual-Enabler strategy, the viewer imagines seeing fictional events through *a sort of* immaterial and imperceptible capsule. Metaphors such as the visual recording and the immaterial capsule, if taken literally, generate absurd imaginings which critics of (IOT) and (FNT) such as Currie (1995), Gaut (2010), Carroll (2016), and Curran (2019) have aptly stressed. For example, one might wonder how visual recordings can be made if no camera was present where fictional events occurred, or which technology made possible the construction of the immaterial capsule. Trying to answer these questions within the viewer's imaginative project surely leads to absurd imaginings.

Defenders of (IOT) and (FNT) usually reply by stating that these are "silly questions" which do not deserve any answer within the imaginative project (see Wilson 2011, Curran 2016). Yet, a reason why these questions are "silly" is to be offered. I argue that these questions are silly because they wrongly turn metaphors aimed to describe the Periphery of the Story World into features of that world. In fact, there are neither visual recordings nor immaterial capsules within the Story World. There is just a Periphery from which that world can be seen in peculiar ways. These ways of seeing are unavailable both in our actual world and in the Story World, but become available in the Periphery which, as such, is metaphysically anomalous with respect to both the actual world and the Story World. The Observer and the Narrator are denizens of the Periphery, not of the Story World. The visual recording and the immaterial capsule are only rhetorical attempts to illustrate the "peripherical" ways of seeing in terms of worldly objects such as recordings and capsules. Yet, what matters are not those objects, but just the peripherical ways of seeing that the objects illustrate. Those objects are like the ladder in Wittgenstein's (1922, 6.54) remark concerning the reader of his *Tractatus*: "he must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it". Once the

ladder (that is, the visual recording or the immaterial capsule) is thrown away, silly questions reveal all their silliness.

4. The Narrator and the Filmmaker

Even if one acknowledges that the visual recordings and the immaterial capsule are nothing but rhetorical devices which do not threaten the consistency of (IOT), one may still insist on the dispensability of the Narrator. Specifically, one might argue that the viewer imagines seeing fictional events but, in her imaginative project, the way in which perceptual access to those events is given to her might remain indeterminate (cf. Slugan 2019a, 110; 2019b, 200). Thus, imagining being the Observer of fictional events does not entail imagining the Narrator as the source of those events. (IOT) does not entail (IST). Theater is a case in which imagining the Observer without imagining the Narrator seems to be quite plausible. The viewer of a play can imagine seeing fictional events without the need of a further imagining concerning an agent who would enable her to see those events. The events are just there, in front of her, to be seen (cf. Williams 1973).

Still, the medium of film has specific features that the medium of theater lacks, namely, framing and editing, which enable films to change the Observer's point of view in a way that is not available to plays. To properly understand a fiction film, the viewer should acknowledge that the change of her point of view is the effect of an intentional action taken by a rational subject for communicative purposes. The viewer is imaging seeing a certain fictional event from a given viewpoint and suddenly the viewpoint changes because of a camera movement or editing. Hence, the viewer can wonder why this happened thereby acknowledging that somebody intentionally did so to help her to better understand what is going on in the fictional world. For example, when a cut replaces a closeup of a character with a shot of an object, the viewer is entitled to infer that the character is looking at that object. The so-called Kuleshov effect exploits this inference to trigger a further inference concerning affective states: if what follows the close-up of a man is a shot of a bowl of soup, the man might feel hunger; if it is a shot of a coffin, he might feel grief; if it is a shot of a woman, he might feel desire (see Prince and Hensley 1992).

Changes in point of view can also license inferences concerning spatial and temporal distances. For example, when a cut replaces a viewpoint on a character walking in the street with a viewpoint on that character sitting in her armchair at home, the viewer is entitled to infer that some time has passed, and in the meanwhile the character arrived home. The temporal distance can even be a vast one, as in the bone-to-spaceship cut in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which entitles the viewer to infer not only that much time has passed, but also that a genealogical connection holds

between the two objects: the bone is the starting point of a historical development whose end point is the spaceship.

Relying on Paul Grice's (1989) account of communication, one might say that there is a cooperative communicative activity involving the Observer and the Narrator (cf. Donati 2006, Kobow 2007, Pignocchi 2015). When the point of view undergoes a change, the Observer is entitled to wonder why the Narrator did that, under the assumption that the Narrator is cooperating with her thereby helping her to properly understand what is going on in the Story World. Such reflection on the reason why the Observer's viewpoint has changed enables her to gather further pieces of information about the fictional world that would not be accessible if she limited herself to perceiving from the given viewpoints. If a cut links a closeup of a character to a shot of an object, the Observer can directly see the character, and then the object, but the fact that the character is looking at the object is to be inferred under the assumption that the Narrator has changed the viewpoint to help the Observer to better understand the story. Likewise, in the example of the cut linking the street to the house, the Observer can directly see the character walking in the street, and then the character sitting in the armchair, but the fact that the character arrived home in the meanwhile is to be inferred under the assumption that the Narrator is guiding the Observer in the exploration of the Story World. The same assumption, in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, enables one to infer, from the bone-to-spaceship cut, that the spaceship is the ultimate effect of a historical process originated by the bone.

Samuel Cumming, Gabriel Greenberg and Rory Kelly (2017) have argued that the meaning of some changes of viewpoint in film can be explained in terms of general semantic conventions rather than in terms of context-dependent pragmatic mechanisms such as those described above. Yet, even if one assumes, for the sake of the argument, that those authors are right, the fact remains that the alleged semantic conventions cannot exhaust the meaning of all changes of viewpoint in film. Specifically, Cumming, Greenberg, and Kelly individuate conventions that would govern changes of viewpoint aimed to explore a certain environment, but there are other changes of viewpoint that essentially depend on context-dependent factors, and therefore cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of semantic conventions. No semantic convention, for example, can enable viewers of Fritz Lang's *M* to infer, from the cut that links a woman setting the table for lunch to a little girl leaving school, that the woman is waiting for her daughter. Viewers can draw that inference only by presupposing that the scenes are shown to them by a *rational agent* who is intentionally cooperating with them for communicative purposes.

(FNT) identifies this *rational agent* with the Narrator. To grasp the meaning of the peculiar changes of viewpoint that are crucial to film experience, the viewer should imagine not only that

she is the Observer of fictional events, as (IOT) states, but also that the Narrator is providing her with viewpoints on those events. Here is a sense in which endorsing (IOT) may lead one to endorse also (FNT).

It might be objected, however, that (FNT) is not required to make sense of the changes of viewpoint since the viewer can grasp the meaning of those changes simply by conceiving of the filmmaker as a rational agent who is helping her to understand fictional events. The viewer imagines being the Observer, as (IOT) states, but when the viewpoint changes the viewer can make sense of this by considering her actual cooperation with the filmmaker rather than the imaginary cooperation between the Observer and the Narrator. Hence, endorsing (IOT) would not lead to endorsing also (FNT).

Still, the combination of (IOT) with (FNT) seems to have an explanatory advantage compared to the combination of (IOT) with the actual cooperation between viewer and filmmaker. Both combinations enable the viewer to properly draw inferences from changes in viewpoint, but only the former enables the viewer to do so *within* her imaginative project.

If (IOT) is combined with (FNT), the viewer can draw inferences from changes in viewpoints while she is playing the role of the Observer. For example, she imagines seeing the gaze of the character and then the object, and, by relying on the cooperative stance of the Narrator, she can infer that the character is looking at the object.

If, instead, (IOT) is combined with cooperation between viewer and filmmaker, the viewer is forced to consider the character as the performance of an actor, and the object as a piece of production design, despite imagining seeing the character and the object as fictional entities. That is because interacting with the filmmaker, who is the agent who created fictional entities, forces the viewer to cast these entities as created in our actual world instead of as existing in the Story World. The viewer is thus forced to give up the role she was playing, namely the Observer, thereby temporarily going back from her Game World to the actual world.

Interacting with the Narrator, on the other hand, does not have this shortcoming. The Narrator is the agent who provides the Observer with information about fictional entities, not the agent who created them. Hence, while interacting with the Narrator, the viewer can keep playing the role of the Observer thereby preserving her place in the Periphery.

The same point can be made by considering that most fiction films are made in a way that leads the viewer to focus on fictional events rather than on actual actors and settings. As Robert Hopkins (2008) aptly points out, the viewer of a fiction film is led to experience a photographic representation of fictional events even though she rather faces a photographic representation *of a staged representation* of fictional events. In the viewer's experience, the staged tier disappears—or,

in Hopkins' terms, collapses. Yet, if the viewer should interact with the filmmaker to infer meaning from changes of viewpoint, the staged tier would systematically reappear. Since fiction films are carefully crafted to remove the staged tier from the viewer's experience, it would be odd to restore this tier each time that meaningful changes of viewpoint occur. (IOT) and (FNT) avoids this odd consequence by enabling the viewer to play the role of the Observer and to draw inferences by interacting with the Narrator.

If all this is right, the combination of (IOT) with (FNT) helps the viewer to preserve the continuity of her imaginative project in which she imagines being the Observer. Giving up (FNT), instead, would threat such continuity by breaking the imaginative engagement with fiction when changes of viewpoint occur.

5. The Narrator's Contribution to the Aesthetic Appreciation of Fiction Films

The changes of viewpoint due to camera movements and editing show that the viewer of a fiction film should appeal to some communicative agency to properly understand the fictional events that, according to (IOT), she imagines seeing. Such communicative agency might be ascribed either to the Narrator, as (FNT) states, or to the filmmaker. In the previous section, I have argued that the former ascription is preferable since, unlike the latter, it does not force the viewer to break her imaginative project of perceptual exploration of the Story World. Yet, one might object, the main goal of the viewer, from an aesthetic perspective, is not the imaginative exploration of the Story World but rather the appreciation and evaluation of the fiction film as an outcome of human creativity. In this sense, communicative agency is to be ascribed to the filmmaker, not to the Narrator, even if doing so involves temporary breaks of the viewer's imaginative project. Therefore, although (IOT) might stand, (FNT) should fall.

I argue that this objection relies on a too intellectualistic conception of aesthetic appreciation, which mistakenly severs the appreciation of films as artifacts from the exploration of the Story World. If the fiction film is an artifact whose function consists in affording the exploration of the Story World, a proper appreciation of the artifact should be as close as possible to the enjoyment of the exploration. Hence, what we need is a way of exploring the Story World that can also favor the appreciation of the film as an artifact without the need of relentlessly switching between one activity and the other, which seems to be problematic especially if the film affords immersion. By supplementing the exploration of the Story World with the acknowledgment of an agency that guides this exploration, (FNT) positively contributes to the appreciation of the film as an artifact. Although (FNT) does not involve directly casting the film as an outcome of human creativity, it involves an appreciation of the communicative skills of the narrator which is somehow preliminary

to the appreciation of the creative skills of the filmmaker. (FNT) thus throws the seeds of aesthetic appreciation, as it were, in the very middle of the imaginative exploration, thereby bridging the gap between the viewer's exploration of the Story World and her appreciation of the film as an artifact.

Such contribution of (FNT) to aesthetic appreciation can be clarified by deploying the notions of form and content. Following Richard Eldridge (1985), I take "content" to designate things in the narrative, and "form" to designate manipulative operations on the narrative and on the medium whereby it is narrated. Specifically, I call "Content*" individuals, properties, relations and events in the Story World of a fiction film, and "Form*" the manipulations of points of view whereby the Narrator presents those contents to the viewer who plays the role of the Observer.

If one assumes that appreciation involves considering how form configurates content, a first piece of appreciation can already occur within the viewer's imaginative project by considering how Form* configurates Content*. Then, adopting a reflexive attitude toward her imaginative project, the viewer can finalize her appreciation by treating Form* and Content* as the contents of the Game World, namely, Form*-as-Content and Content*-as-Content. These constitute the two dimensions of Content of the fiction film.

In this way, the viewer can finally consider how the film as an artifact configurates its Content through its Form. On the one hand, the Form of a fiction film configurates Content*-as-Content through features such as screenplay, production design, acting and direction, which determine what occurs in the Story World. On the other hand, the Form configurates Form*-as-Content through features such as cinematography and editing, which determine what happens in the Periphery. Following Marcel Vuillaume (1990), one might call what happens in the Periphery "the secondary fiction", as opposed to the "primary fiction" which takes place in the Story World. In this sense, Form* individuates the secondary fiction, just as Content* individuates the primary one.

Once the viewer has individuated Content* by playing the role of the Observer of the primary fiction, and Form* by imaginatively interacting with the Narrator in the secondary fiction, she can finalize her aesthetic appreciation by considering how the Form of the film as an artifact has configurated the two dimensions of its Content. These are Form*-as-Content and Content*-as-Content, which correspond to Form* and Content* respectively, when the latter are considered from without the viewer's imaginative engagement.

If all this is right, the combination of (IOT) and (FNT) affords an aesthetic appreciation of fiction films than can be subtler and more rewarding than that provided by the mere combination of (IOT) with the recognition of the filmmaker's agency. Appreciating a fiction film, from this perspective, it is not just a matter of enjoying the imaginative exploration of the Story World, and then assessing the film as an artifact. Appreciation is already at work during the exploration by

virtue of (FNT), which enables the viewer, while playing the role of the Observer, to assess the manipulative activity of the Narrator.

6. Conclusion

Although there seem to be good reasons to posit the Narrator in literary fictions, the Observer plays no role in them. The imaginative role that the reader of a novel is meant to play is that of the Narratee, who is a subject gathering *linguistic* information about the Story World. The Observer, instead, is a subject who gathers *perceptual* information about the Story World. Arguably, theater and film differ from literature because the imaginative engagement with the former arts involves playing the role of the Observer rather than that of the Narratee.

On the one hand, imagining being the Narratee surely entails imagining interacting with the Narrator since linguistic information should have some agency as its source. On the other hand, imagining being the Observer might not have this consequence. The Observer, in principle, might perceptually explore the Story World on her own. If this were the case, (IOT) would stand but (FNT) would fall. Perhaps the best explanation of our engagement with theater would only require the Observer, not the Narrator. This suggests that the literature, theater, and film are different from a phenomenological perspective since literature involves the Narrator without the Observer, theater involves the Observer without the Narrator, and film involves them both. This comparative proposal is compatible with what I have argued in this paper, and is surely worth exploring. However, the aim of my paper was just to investigate how (IOT) and (FNT) are related in film.

(FNT) directly entails (IOT). If the Narrator is the agent who offers perceptual access to the Story World, the Observer is needed as the beneficiary of such access, otherwise the Narrator's activity would be pointless. Yet, I have argued, (IOT) does not directly entail (FNT) since the Observer might have perceptual access to the Story World without any agent giving that access to her, just as we have perceptual access to our environment without any agent giving it to us. Nevertheless, I have argued, if one endorses (IOT), endorsing (FNT) provides us with a more compelling explanation of our engagement with and appreciation of fiction films.

References

Alward, Peter (2007), "For the Ubiquity of Nonactual Fact-Telling Narrators", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65, 4, 401-404.

Alward, Peter (2009), "Onstage Illocution", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67, 3, 321-331.

Carroll, Noël (2016), "Motion Picture Narration". In K. Thomson-Jones, ed. *Current Controversies in the Philosophy of Film*. New York/London: Routledge.

Chatman, Seymour, (1990), *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cumming, Samuel; Greenberg, Gabriel; Kelly, Rory (2017), "Conventions of Viewpoint Coherence in Film", *Philosophers' Imprint* 17, 1-28.

Curran, Angela (2016), "Fictional Indeterminacy, Imagined Seeing, and Cinematic Narration". In Katherine Thomson-Jones (Ed.), *Current Controversies in Philosophy of Film*, New York/London: Routledge, 99-114.

Curran, Angela (2019), "Silly Questions and Arguments for the Implicit, Cinematic Narrator", in N. Carroll, L. T. Di Summa & S. Loht (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 97-117.

Currie, Gregory (1990), *The Nature of Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Currie, Gregory (1995), *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Donati Stefano (2006). *Cinema e conversazione: l'interpretazione del film narrativo*. Civitavecchia (Rome): Prospettiva.

Eldridge, Richard (1985), "Form and Content: An Aesthetic Theory of Art", *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 25(4), 303-316.

García-Carpintero, Manuel (forthcoming), "Fictional Narrators and Normative Fiction-Making".

Gaut, Berys (2010), *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Grice, Herbert Paul (1989), *Studies in The Ways of Words*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hopkins, Robert (2008), "What Do We See in Film?", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 66, 149-159.

Kania, Andrew (2005), "Against the Ubiquity of Fictional Narrators", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 63, 47-54.

Kania, Andrew (2007), "Against Them, Too: A Reply to Alward", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 65, 4, 404-408.

Kobow Beatrice S. (2007), *See What I Mean – Understanding Films as Communicative Actions*, Paderborn: Mentis Verlag.

Levinson, Jerrold (1993), "Seeing, Imaginarily, at the Movies", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 43, 170: 70–78.

Levinson, Jerrold (1996), "Film Music and Narrative Agency", in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (eds.), Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Livingston, Paisley (2013), "The Imagined Seeing Thesis". *Projections. The Journal for Movies and Mind* 7 (1): 139–146.

Pignocchi Alessandro (2015), *Pourquoi aime-t-on un film ? Quand les sciences cognitives discutent*

des goûts et des couleurs, Paris: Odile Jacob.

Predelli, Stefano (2020), *Fictional Discourse: A Radical Fictionalist Semantics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prince, Gerald (1985), "The Narratee Revisited", *Style*, 19, 3, 299-303.

Prince, Stephen, and Hensley Wayne E. (1992), "The Kuleshov Effect: Recreating the Classic Experiment", *Cinema Journal*, 31, 2: 59-75.

Slugan, Mario (2019a), *Noël Carroll and Film – A Philosophy of Art and Popular Culture*, Bloomsbury, London.

Slugan, Mario (2019b), *Fiction and Imagination in Early Cinema*, Bloomsbury, London.

Strawson, Peter F. (1979), "Perception and its Objects", in *Perception and Identity: Essays Presented to A. J. Ayer*, edited by G. F. Macdonald, Macmillan, London, 41-60.

Vuillaume, Marcel (1990), *Grammaire temporelle des récits*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.

Walton, Kendall (1990), *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Harvard University Press.

Walton, Kendall (2015), "Fictionality and Imagination – Mind the Gap", in *In Other Shoes: Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 17-35.

Williams, Bernard (1973), "Imagination and the Self". In *Problems of the Self* (26–45). Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, George M. (1986), *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Wilson, George M. (2011), *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies*. Oxford University Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1922, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.