

# On Time in Cinema

## 1. Cinema as an art of time passing

In a seminal paper on the definition of cinema, Noël Carroll (1996) pointed out five basic features an entity  $x$  must satisfy in order to qualify as a moving image:

1. “ $x$  is a detached display” (1996: 70). More specifically, the moving image is a “display” since it is constituted by a visual array; and it is “detached” since it induces the spectator to visually experience a space which, unlike her ordinary space, is not centered in and connected to her body (namely, it is not an “egocentric space”).
2. “ $x$  belongs to the class of things from which the impression of movement is technically possible” (1996: 70). That is, the cinematic display is produced in such a way that it can induce the spectator to visually experience things moving.
3. “Performance tokens of  $x$  are generated by a template that is a token” (1996: 70). Here, Carroll treats the moving image as a type and calls “templates” the particular objects (e.g., film prints, videotapes, DVDs, computer files) that instantiate the type by storing it, while he calls “performance tokens” the particular events (namely, screenings) that instantiate the type by showing it.
4. “Performance tokens of  $x$  are not artworks in their own right” (1996: 70). That is, the screening of a movie, unlike the execution of a symphony or the staging of a play, cannot be artistically assessed in its own right.
5. “ $x$  is [...] two-dimensional” (1996: 70). That is, the visual array constituting the cinematic display is a flat surface.

Interestingly, Carroll never mentions time in his five conditions. Conditions (1) and (5) concern spatial features, while conditions (3) and (4) concern the process through which a film is instantiated, and condition (2) concerns movement. Nevertheless, in condition (2) time seems to play a crucial role, albeit unnoticed – a more fundamental role than movement.

In fact, Carroll does not require that the moving image elicits the impression of movement from the spectator, but only that it has the possibility of eliciting such an impression. He does so because he wants to take into account “static films” such as *La Jetée* (C. Marker, 1962), *One Second in Montreal* (M. Snow 1969), and *Poetic Justice* (H. Frampton, 1972), which are made, partly or wholly, by still images (for a thorough account of static films, see Remes 2015). Although in such works there is no movement, in principle there might have been movement, and for Carroll this is enough to count them as cinematic works; the possibility of eliciting the impression of movement distinguishes such works from full-fledged static images like paintings or photographs.

Still, one might wonder why static films have the possibility of eliciting the impression of movement whereas paintings and photographs lack this possibility. The most basic reason seems to be that static films, unlike paintings and photographs, have *a duration*. Although static films do not in fact elicit the impression of movement, their duration in principle gives them the possibility, albeit in fact unexploited, of eliciting the impression of movement (cf. Ponech 2010, Terrone 2014, and Remes 2015). Conversely, static pictures such as paintings and photographs *cannot* elicit the impression of movement *even in principle*.

The point is that any film, as such, has a fixed duration, namely its runtime, which is a *normative* feature of the film as a type. That is to say that every *correct* screening of a film that has a duration  $D_f^*$  *ought* to last  $D_f^*$ . Because of that, the duration of the spectator’s experience is in turn *normatively* set by  $D_f^*$ : a proper experience of a film the duration of which is  $D_f^*$  *ought* to last  $D_f^*$ . As Craig Bourne and Emily Caddick Bourne point out, “there is an important sense in which a film has duration and static images lack duration. You can sensibly say ‘The film lasted ninety minutes’,

but not ‘The painting lasted ninety minutes’. The moving nature of the film determines a particular viewing time in a way static images do not.” (2016: 136)

Such a feature distinguishes cinema not only from static images but also from literature and theater. Indeed, neither literary works nor theatrical works have a fixed duration. Theatrical works have a fixed duration, which sets the duration of the spectator’s experience, only at the performance level, not at the work level; a certain performance of *Hamlet* may last four hours, but *Hamlet* as a work does not have a fixed duration. And literary works lack duration even at the performance level, since any reader can take all the time she wants to read a certain book (even a book made of pictures, such as a comic book). The only form of art that functions like cinema with respect to duration is recorded music; from an ontological point of view, indeed, one might conceive of a piece of recorded music as a film pared down to its soundtrack (cf. Kania 2006).

If this is right, Carroll’s condition (2), i.e. the possibility of eliciting the impression of movement, is rooted in a more basic feature of the moving image, namely the possession of a duration. A film can lack movement, as in the case of static films, but it cannot lack a duration. As Justin Remes puts it, “Whether one is considering Gérard Courant’s 187-hour *Cinématon* (1978–2014) or Thomas Edison’s five-second *Fred Ott’s Sneeze* (1894), all films have a running time [...] the more fundamental distinction between cinema and photography (as well as other traditional visual arts) is not movement but duration.” (2015: 12)

Notoriously, cinema is the abbreviation of ‘cinematography’, a term coming from the two Greek terms ‘kinema’, which means movements, and ‘graphein’, which means writing. Yet, if we agree to treat static films as works of cinema, then a more appropriate name for this medium would be ‘chronography’, that is, the writing of time. In the domain of continental philosophy, such a priority of time over movement in cinema has been emphasized by Gilles Deleuze (1983 and 1985). Deleuze splits up films into two kinds, namely, the “movement-image” and the “time-image”. Films of the former kind focus on the movements and changes of the characters that liven up the narrative, whereas films of the latter kind focus on the passage of time as such and treat the movements and

changes of the characters as nothing but accidental ways in which the passage of time can show up. Deleuze suggests that the latter films get closer than the former to what is fundamental in cinema, inasmuch as they show that cinema is more than merely an art of depicting movement.

## 2. Film as depiction of time

In order to investigate how cinema “writes” time, I shall focus on the notions of representation and depiction. Firstly, by *representation* I mean an entity that elicits thoughts or experiences about some other entities from a *suitable recipient*. That is to say, a representation is an entity that *prescribes* thoughts or experiences concerning other entities. The content of a representation is what this representation mandates us to think or experience. As Recanati puts it, “Representations have two aspects: they are objects like tables and chairs, and as such they belong to the real world; but they also have a content by virtue of which they *represent* the world as being a certain way, possibly distinct from the way it actually is.” (1996: §6) To sum up, I conceive of a representation as a normative notion inasmuch as it requires a *correct* attitude, namely the attitude of a suitable recipient who entertains the thoughts or enjoys the experiences prescribed by the representation itself.

Secondly, by *depiction* I mean a representation that shares some relevant features with the entity it represents thereby prescribing and supporting a perceptual experience that shares some relevant features with a possible experience of the entity represented. Moreover, the sharing of features between the representation and the entity represented cannot be accidental; the representation must represent an entity as possessing certain features *in virtue of* the representation’s possessing some identical or, at least, relevantly similar features (cf. Currie 1995: 91; Yaffe 2003: 118; Le Poidevin 2007: 133). For instance, a painting can represent the sky as being blue in virtue of being itself blue whereas the inscription “black” does not represent the color black in virtue of being black; it does so in virtue of a convention. That is why the inscription is just a representation whereas the painting is a depiction.

In cinematic depiction, the relevant features shared by the representation and what is represented are not only spatial but also temporal. In Catharine Abell's terms, "cinematic representation is a distinctive form of depiction, unique in its capacity to depict temporal properties" (2010: 278). In Gregory Currie's terms, "What is distinctively temporal about film is not its portrayal of time, but the manner of its portrayal: its portrayal of time by means of time." (1995: 96) For instance, a film can depict an event that lasts three minutes by means of its own duration of three minutes. In this case, the property of the event of "lasting three minutes" is depicted by the property of the representation of the event of "lasting three minutes", namely by the *same* property. Thus, experience prescribed by a cinematic depiction lasts exactly the *same* time as a possible direct experience of the event represented.

Still, the fact that cinema *can* represent a three minute event by means of a three minute representation does not entail that any film necessarily does so. Indeed, in cinema we often find representations that last less time than the events represented; for instance, *American Graffiti* (G. Lucas, 1973) represents an event lasting one night (namely, the adventures of a group of teenagers) in less than two hours, and so do *Into the Night* (J. Landis, 1985) and *After Hours* (M. Scorsese, 1985). Though less frequently, we can also find cinematic representations that last longer than the events represented, namely "expansions" (cf. Bordwell 1985: 83–88). For instance, a film can implement an expansion by resorting to slow-motion, or by showing multiple points of view on the same event – for example, the three points of view on the money exchange in *Jackie Brown* (Q. Tarantino, 1997).

In order to take such possibilities into account, we should distinguish three kinds of cinematic duration, namely, the duration  $D_f$  of the film itself; the duration  $D_s$  of the spectator's experience; the duration  $D_e$  of the events portrayed (cf. Levinson & Alperson 1991: 446; and Currie 1995: 92). By "event portrayed" I mean an event that the film represents by prescribing a *continuous* experience that enables the suitable spectator to *perceive* either the event in its entirety or at least the highlights of it. In the former case the cinematic depiction is more complete than in the latter, just as a portrait

of a person that shows her body in its entirety is more complete than one that shows only her face. Yet, many cinematic representations are of the latter kind. For instance, *American Graffiti* portrays an event lasting one night by prescribing a *continuous* experience lasting about a hundred minutes, and this experience enables the suitable spectator to *perceive* the highlights of this event.

David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2001) call the duration of the events portrayed the “plot duration”, and distinguish it from the “story duration”, which encompasses the events portrayed as well as other events related to them. In Bordwell and Thompson’s example, “The *plot* of *North by Northwest* [A. Hitchcock, 1959] presents four crowded days and nights in the life of Roger Thornhill. But the *story* stretches back far before that, since information about the past is revealed in the course of the plot.” (2001: 75, my emphasis) In fact, films can also represent events without depicting them at all. For instance, when a film shows a character telling a past episode – say, when Alexandre in *La Maman et la Putain* (J. Eustache, 1973) tells the episode of the people crying in a café – the episode is represented but not depicted; what is depicted is just the event of telling, namely Alexandre’s speech act.

To sum up, among the distinct kinds of duration that are relevant for cinema, the duration  $D_f$  of the film is the ontologically fundamental one, that is, that grounding the possibility of the impression of movement, which Carroll treats as an essential feature of the moving image (see §1).

$D_f$  normatively sets not only the duration of any correct screening of the work but also the duration  $D_s$  of any correct experience of the work. Yet, such a normative requirement does not hold for the duration  $D_e$  of the events represented. A film lasting  $D_f^*$  *can* portray an event lasting  $D_f^*$ , but it might also portray an event lasting more than  $D_f^*$  or even less than  $D_f^*$ .

If a film that lasts  $D_f^*$  actually depicts an event that lasts  $D_f^*$ , then, following Alaina Schempp (2012), I shall call it a ‘real-time film’. Examples of real-time films are *Rope* (A. Hitchcock, 1948) and *Timecode* (M. Figgis, 2000), as well as *12 Angry Men* (S. Lumet, 1957) and *Buried* (R. Cortés, 2010) – and arguably even the experimental film lasting twenty-four hours *The Clock* (C. Marclay, 2010). *Rope* notoriously achieves the real-time effect by means of a unique long take (with ten

hidden cuts) while *Timecode* is a four panel split screen display that was filmed with four cameras running simultaneously. In general, the property of being constituted by a unique long take is neither necessary nor sufficient for a film to be a real-time film. It is not necessary since a film lasting  $D_f^*$  can depict an event lasting  $D_f^*$  even if it exploits editing, as in *Twelve Angry Men* or in *Buried* – let alone *The Clock*. And is not sufficient since a film lasting  $D_f^*$  can portray an event that lasts more than  $D_f^*$  even if it is constituted by a unique long take. For instance, *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (A. González Inarritu, 2014) portrays several days in the life of the hero by means of a long take lasting about two hours; *Imagine* (Z. Rybczyński, 1987) portrays an entire life by means of a long take lasting three minutes and fifteen seconds; and *Russian Ark* (A. Sokurov, 2002) portrays centuries of the history of Russia by means of a unique long take lasting about ninety minutes.

In fact, most movies are not real-time films. A film usually portrays a story that lasts longer – sometimes much longer – than the film itself. Yet, if we focus on a single shot of a movie, we find that the real-time principle normally holds. A shot seems to infringe the real-time principle only in special cases such as fast-motion or slow-motion (for subtler violations, see Bordwell 1985: 81–82; and Smith 1995: 42–44). I will discuss such cases in §4. Alleged exceptions like these apart, the real-time principle seems to be standard for single shots. Bourne and Caddick Bourne characterize what I have called the “real-time principle” as a “norm of duration” according to which “the fictional duration of an episode and the amount of viewing time over which it is represented are identical” (2016: 137). Likewise, Currie observes that “in the filmic case, at least within the confines of a single shot (and frequently across the class of shots that constitute a scene), there is no violation of the time of the film – neither with respect to order nor with respect to duration” (1995: 220).

As suggested by Currie, most movies are inclined to abide by the real-time principle not only for single shots, but also for bigger temporal units that depict unitary events that are relevant for the progression of the story. Following Christian Metz (1966), I shall call the latter units “scenes”. A

scene is a real-time portion of a film even if it can be – and in fact often is – constituted by the editing of several shots; the temporal continuity in such cases is often warranted by sound. The special case in which a scene is constituted by a unique shot, without any cut, is called “sequence shot” (cf. Metz 1966: 122).

Ultimately, with respect to duration, the spectator’s experience exhibits analogies but also differences in comparison with ordinary perception. Both at the shot level and at the scene level, the spectator’s experience normally has the same duration as the event it is about, just as ordinary perception does. Conversely, at the level of the whole film, the spectator’s experience normally lasts much less time than the event it is about, and in this sense it significantly differs from ordinary experience. In watching *American Graffiti*, we experience an event lasting one night by means of a continuous perceptual experience lasting two hours, whereas in ordinary perception we could never do so. That is why real-time films are correctly said to be more realistic than the other films with respect to duration; the former, unlike the latter, provide us with the same temporal relation between experience and experienced events that we enjoy in ordinary perception.

### **3. Film experience as a temporal experience**

Let us initially focus on the case of real-time films, which is the one that exhibits the strongest analogy with ordinary perception. Is the experience of a real-time film a temporal experience of the same kind as ordinary perception? In order to address this question, it is worth noting that, even in the case of a real-time film, film experience remains a pictorial experience, that is, an experience of entities depicted.

Richard Wollheim (1998) characterizes the pictorial experience as a peculiar perceptual state, namely “seeing-in,” constituted by two folds; in the “configurational fold” we experience the marks on the picture’s surface as content-fixing features, while in the “recognitional fold” we experience the depicted scene as the picture’s content. In cinema, the configurational fold is harder to characterize than, say, in painting, since the film’s spectator does not normally pay attention to the

light spots projected on the screen. Nevertheless, the film's spectator is aware at least of the shape and the size of the screen, and this seems enough to have a configurational fold also in the case of cinema. As Robert Hopkins puts it, "Perhaps cinema images differ in that we find it hard to see the content-fixing features. We are frequently aware of them only by seeing in them the content they fix, and see what is before us as a picture only by seeing other features, such as the shape and size of the screen" (2009: 69). Interestingly, Francis Sparshott foreshadows cinematic twofoldness when he writes: "most of the time one is simultaneously aware of a film (as one is of a painting) both as a two-dimensional arrangement on the screen and as a three-dimensional scene, so that neither aspect dominates the mind except in moments of excitement or disaffection" (1971: 18). And so does Alexander Sesonske: "We experience a film as a two-dimensional design on a flat surface and a three-dimensional space within which the action of the film occurs. Cinema shares this duality of its space with painting" (1974: 54).

Such a twofoldness – or, as Sesonske calls it, "duality" – is related to the basic feature of the moving image that Carroll calls "detached display" (see §1). On the one hand, the spectator experiences the screen as having its place in her egocentric space (i.e. the space centered in and connected to her body); the screen is at a certain distance from the spectator who can orient herself with respect to it and even move towards it. On the other hand, the spectator does not experience the entities depicted as having their place in her egocentric space (cf. Matthen 2005). Thus, the space depicted "is discontinuous with the space of our normal world" (Sesonske 1974: 55); "we observe from a viewpoint at which we are not situated" (Sparshott 1971: 19). This is what Carroll calls "detached display".<sup>i</sup>

That being the case, one might wonder whether what holds for space also holds for time. Given that the spectator does not experience the events depicted as happening here, in front of her, in her environment, can we conclude that she also does not experience those events as happening now, in her own present? The inference seems to be hasty. Indeed, there is at least one case in which the spectator experiences the events depicted in the moving image as happening now. This is

the case of live television, in which the spatial detachment of the pictorial experience does not prevent the spectator from experiencing the events depicted in the moving image as temporally present. In short, the spectator of live television does not experience the events depicted as happening here, but nevertheless she experiences those very events as happening now.<sup>ii</sup>

Is live television a paradigmatic case for all the other kinds of cinematic experience, including the experience of fiction movies? Currie calls the positive answer to this question “The Claim of Presentness” (1995: 200). I am focusing here on the Claim of Presentness understood as the *phenomenological* claim that the spectator experiences the events depicted in a film as being present, as going on right now. As pointed out by Gideon Yaffe (2003), Robin Le Poidevin (2007) and Bourne and Caddick Bourne (2016), we may also interpret the Claim of Presentness as the metaphysical claim that a film ascribes the property of being present to the events depicted, so that the fictional events represented in a film constitute what McTaggart (1908) calls an “A-series”.

From Currie’s perspective, the Claim of Presentness is wrong both as a phenomenological claim and as a metaphysical claim. The point is that cinema cannot depict tensed properties (or “A-series” features) of pastness, presentness and futurity; it only depicts tenseless relations (or “B-series” features) of precedence or simultaneity (cf. Currie 1995: 218). Therefore, cinema can neither elicit a sense of presentness from the spectator (phenomenological claim) nor ascribe the property of presentness to the events depicted (metaphysical claim). The metaphysical interpretation of the Claim of Presentness lies beyond the scope of this paper, which concerns temporal experience. In what follows I focus on the Claim of Presentness as a phenomenological claim.

Accounts of film experience like those proposed by George Wilson (1997, 2011) or Hopkins (2008, 2010) make room for the Claim of Presentness, inasmuch as they treat the experience of a fiction movie as having the same phenomenology as the experience of moving pictures of real events – for instance, live television pictures. Yet, according to Currie, the Claim of Presentness is flawed since it cannot take such “anachronies” as flashbacks into account (1995: 201).

A film exhibits an anachrony when the temporal order of the depiction of the events does not comply with the temporal order of the events depicted. In the paradigmatic case of a flashback, a film *depicts* an event  $X_1$  *after* another event  $X_2$  even though, in the objective order of the events in the fictional world,  $X_1$  *occurs before*  $X_2$ . Currie argues that if the spectator's ordinary phenomenology involves a sense of presentness, then the experience of a flashback should exhibit a distinctive phenomenology, which either suspends the sense of presentness or preserves it by supplementing it with a sense of time traveling. According to Currie, no phenomenological changes of these sorts show up in the experience of flashbacks. Although the spectator *knows* that the event  $X_1$  that she is seeing in a flashback objectively precedes the event  $X_2$  that she saw before, at the experiential level she *perceives*  $X_1$  in the same way as she perceived  $X_2$  (instead of *perceiving*  $X_1$  as past, or as the experiential result of a time travel of her own). For these reason, Currie finally rejects the Claim of Presentness.

In the first instance, one might defend the Claim of Presentness against Currie's argument by observing that when an exciting scene of a movie is suddenly interrupted by a flashback, the phenomenology slightly changes. The flashback seems to modify the spectators' phenomenology just as a commercial break would modify the phenomenology of the experience of a live broadcast of a football match.

More generally, the Claim of Presentness can be defended by arguing that film experience, as a *perceptual* experience, should conform to a principle that Le Poidevin (2015: §1) expresses in the following terms, "what we perceive, we perceive as present—as going on right now." If one combines Le Poidevin's principle, which states that the *perceptual* experience is an experience of events as happening now, with the premise that film experience is a *perceptual* experience of depicted events, one can conclude that film experience is an experience of depicted events as happening now. As Yaffe puts it, "if ordinary visual experiences represent A-series properties, why should films be any different?" (2003: 125)

Still, this conclusion is debatable if we go back to the consideration that film experience, as a *pictorial experience*, is a *peculiar* perceptual experience. It might be that the peculiarity of film experience as a pictorial experience also involves the possibility of an infraction of Le Poidevin's principle. Since pictorial experience has two folds – one might argue – Le Poidevin's principle only holds for the configurational fold, not for the recognitional fold. The spectator experiences the projection of light on the screen as going on right now, but not the events depicted as going on right now.

However, the perceptual experience of the spectators normally focuses on the events depicted, not on the light projected. If the perceptual experience that is more relevant for the spectator is that in the recognitional fold, why should Le Poidevin's principle not apply to this experience? We can try to address this issue by relating the peculiar temporality of film experience to its peculiar spatiality. Film experience, as pictorial experience, involves two spaces, namely the egocentric space in the configurational fold and the pictorial space in the recognitional fold; the spectator experiences the screen as being located in her egocentric space and the depicted events as taking place in the pictorial space. In Sesonke's terms, we can draw a distinction between "screen space, the two-dimensional rectangle on the surface of the screen" and "action-space, the three dimensional space within which characters live and die, horses run, lovers sigh, and we can encounter almost any imaginable kind of event" (1980: 420).

That being the case, one might wonder whether film experience involves not only two spaces, but also two temporal dimensions. Henry Wallon (1953) answers this question affirmatively. He argues that film experience involves two temporal series. The first one, which I shall call the "egocentric series", is based on the spectator's proprioception of her own body, which is at the center of her *egocentric* space, but may also involve a visual component (for instance, noticing a moviegoer who checks her smartphone) and an auditory component (for instance, hearing a moviegoer who munches popcorn). The second one, which I shall call the "pictorial series", is based on the visual and auditory experience of the events that occur in the *pictorial* space. In short,

the egocentric series is an experiential route through egocentric space whereas the pictorial series is an experiential route through pictorial space.

In the experience of live television, the suitable spectator treats the events experienced as present in the pictorial series *as simultaneous with* what is felt as present in the egocentric series. In contrast, in the experience of a recording of a real event, the suitable spectator treats the events experienced as present in the pictorial series *as prior to* what is felt as present in the egocentric series. Finally, in the experience of a fiction movie, the suitable spectator treats the events experienced as present in the pictorial series *as completely disconnected from* what is felt as present in the egocentric series; the two temporal series run parallel and never converge. Although in all three cases (live TV, recording, fiction) the events in the pictorial series are *experienced* as present at the perceptual level according to Le Poidevin's principle, nevertheless they are *treated* differently at the cognitive level. Therefore, the experiences in the pictorial series, depending on their different relationships to the egocentric series, have different inferential roles and lead to the creation of different beliefs.

#### **4. The spectator as a time explorer**

In an insightful book on time in literature, Marcel Vuillaume (1990) argues that the recipient of a work of fiction can play the role of an unnoticed observer who enjoys special perceptual capacities not available in ordinary perception – first of all the capacity to observe events without any spatial connection to them. If one combines this hypothesis by Vuillaume with Wallon's hypothesis that film experience consists of two temporal series (see §3), one might conclude that the film spectator can enjoy the privilege described by Vuillaume, i.e. observing events without any spatial connection to them, in the pictorial series described by Wallon. I shall call this “the Wallon-Vuillaume hypothesis”.

This hypothesis provides us with a way of facing another objection that Currie raises against the Claim of Presentness, namely that the spectator cannot experience the fictional events as

happening now since she has no place in the fictional world. According to the Wallon-Vuillaume hypothesis, the pictorial series provides the unnoticed observer, whose role can be played by the spectator, with the capacity to observe events in the fictional world without having a place in that world (for similar arguments against Currie's point, see also Wilson 1997 and 2011; and Walton 1997).

If all of this is right, cinema is capable of supplementing our ordinary temporal experience with a peculiar temporal experience, which unfolds in the pictorial series. In ordinary temporal experience, experiencing an event as happening now involves a strong inclination to believe (unless one has independent reasons for not doing so) that this event is actually happening now. This can occasionally lead us to undergo some temporal illusions, as when we instinctively treat a distant star displaying long past states as present. Conversely, in the peculiar temporal experience that fiction films provide us with, experiencing an event as happening now in the pictorial series does not involve a strong inclination to believe that this event is really happening now inasmuch as such a putative inclination to believe also requires a correspondence between the pictorial series and the egocentric series (as in the case of live television). Thus, in experience of fiction films, the sense of presentness comes down to our way of experiencing the portion of fictional time that we are currently exploring.

Furthermore, the pictorial series makes room for additional experiential privileges that specifically concern the temporal dimension, viz. jumps (flashback, ellipsis, flashforward) and phenomena of acceleration (fast-motion) and deceleration (slow-motion, freeze-frame). Currie characterizes such cases as "a violation of a cinematic norm", namely "the violation of real time" (1995: 119–220). According to the Wallon-Vuillaume hypothesis, the violation is carried out by the pictorial series, which violates the constraints of standard temporal experience which the egocentric series abides by. In particular, as suggested by Currie, in such cases the pictorial series violates the real-time principle, which is a core feature of ordinary perception. Yaffe nicely expresses this point when he writes: "films [...] freely transform the location of the present, and thus give to viewers the

sense that the spotlight of the present—the spotlight that, in life, moves so doggedly to the right across the timeline—can be shined on any time” (2003: 138).

The first kind of temporal experiential privilege I shall consider is that of jumps. In the pictorial series, indeed, the spectator can jump from experiencing an event X to experiencing another event that is not temporally contiguous to X. If the spectator jumps to an event W that is successive but not contiguous to X, we have an *ellipsis*. If the spectator jumps to an event U that is prior to X we have a *flashback*. As suggested by Yaffe (2003: 136) the *flashforward* can be conceived of as a strong ellipsis, which produces a narrative gap that is then filled – or, at least, it should be – by a flashback (or a series thereof). In this sense, the flashforward “lets us glimpse the outcome before we have grasped all the causal chains that lead up to it” (Bordwell 1985: 79). In other words, the spectator jumps from an event X to an event W successive to and apparently disconnected from X (here is the strong ellipsis), and then she jumps back from W either to X itself or to an event Y located between X and W (here is the flashback).

In sum, the pictorial series allows the spectator to jump both towards the future and towards the past. In the pictorial series, time can be explored by moving back and forth, as we normally explore space, and nevertheless the Claim of Presentness remains in force. Indeed, if we acknowledge the distinction between egocentric series and pictorial series, we can interpret Currie’s criticism of the Claim of Presentness as stating that the suitable spectator of a fiction movie, unlike the suitable spectator of live television, does not treat the pictorial series as coinciding with the egocentric series. So far, we can agree with Currie. Nevertheless, the Claim of Presentness still holds in the pictorial series: the spectator can jump from an event to another, as in the case of a flashback, but once she has jumped to a certain event, she starts experiencing this event as present, in accordance with Le Poidevin’s principle. To borrow Yaffe’s expression, “The cut resets the location of the present within the fiction.” (2003: 134–135) Cases of acceleration and deceleration also can be treated as a peculiarity of perceptual experience in the pictorial series. In such cases, the spectator experiences an event in its entirety through an experience lasting less (fast-motion) or

more (slow-motion) time than the event's actual duration. It is worth noting that what accelerates or decelerates here is not the event itself, but the spectator's perceptual experience of it. A slow-motion shot does not normally ascribe the property of slowness to the things depicted just as a wide-lens shot does not normally ascribe the property of being warped (and a black and white shot does not normally ascribe the property of being black and white) to them. In other words, the pictorial series allows the spectator to enjoy a peculiar perceptual experience that, instead of sharing the duration of the event perceived, speeds through it (fast-motion) or lingers on it (slow-motion) or even stops at a certain moment of it (freeze-frame).<sup>iii</sup>

Such an account of slow/fast-motion and freeze-frame works well when their primary function consists in modifying the *phenomenology* of the spectator's temporal experience. It seems to me that the uses of the fast-motion in grotesque films such as *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* (S. Peckinpah 1970) or *A Clockwork Orange* (S. Kubrick 1972) are of this kind, as well as the slow-motion in dramatic films such as *Zabriskie Point* (M. Antonioni, 1970), *The Killer* (J. Woo, 1989), *2046* (Wong Kar-wai, 2004), *Closer* (M. Nichols, 2004); the freeze-frame in such films as *Les 400 Coups* (F. Truffaut, 1959) or *Goodfellas* (M. Scorsese, 1990) also seems to be of this kind (for a thorough account of slow-motion in cinema, see Rogers 2013).

However, cinema makes room for at least two other uses (or interpretations) of these techniques. Firstly, they can be used to represent peculiar ontological singularities of the fictional world, namely, temporal acceleration or deceleration: consider for instance the fast-motion in *Click* (F. Coraci, 2006) or the slow-motion and the freeze-frame in *The Matrix* (A. and L. Wachowski, 1999). Secondly, these techniques can be used to represent *psychological* states of characters, that is, as Bourne and Caddick Bourne put it, to “convey fictional truths about time as it is experienced by characters in the fictional situation” (2016: 148). For instance, “A slow-motion representation of a car accident may communicate fictional truths about how the fictional driver experiences his world, fictional truths which we know in the form: *That* is what it was like for him” (Bourne and Caddick Bourne 2016: 148). In sum, the slow/fast-motion and the freeze-frame function

*phenomenologically* inasmuch as such techniques shape the spectator's temporal experience, but they can also function *ontologically* inasmuch as they depict the temporal singularities of the fictional world, and even *psychologically* inasmuch as they represent a peculiar temporal experience of some character.

## **5. Conclusions**

*La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (A. and L. Lumière, 1895), traditionally considered the first film in the history of cinema, is a real-time film. That is, an event lasting forty-six seconds is depicted as lasting forty-six seconds by a film lasting forty-six seconds. However, the real-time principle not only lies at the origin of the history of cinema but also constitutes a core principle of the moving image as a medium. The spectator normally experiences the events depicted in a shot or in a scene as having the same duration as the shot itself or as the scene itself. The Claim of Presentness adds that the spectator experiences these events as present, as going on right now. This claim is highly debatable, and yet a weaker and maybe more acceptable version of it can be formulated by means of what I have called the Wallon-Vuillaume hypothesis. The idea is that the spectator's experience of the depicted events as present occurs in a peculiar temporal series, namely the pictorial series. First of all, the spectator does not treat the pictorial series as coinciding with the temporal series she experiences through the proprioceptive feedback of her body, unless she is watching such moving images as those of live television. Furthermore, the pictorial series makes room for temporal experiences that are not possible in ordinary temporal experience, namely flashbacks, ellipses, flashforwards, fast-motion, slow-motion, and freeze-frames. Such special experiences violate the real-time principle, thereby allowing the spectator to experience an event through a continuous experience that lasts less or more time than that event. While ordinary perceptual experience is forced to obey the real-time principle, the pictorial series normally abides by it but can sometimes violate it.

On the one hand, when the pictorial series abides by the real-time principle, film experience emulates ordinary perception. Such an emulation allows films to elicit intense emotions of fear, hope, suspense, disappointment, surprise, exultation, which seem to require a sense of presentness inasmuch as they depend on the *imminent* resolution of a certain uncertainty in what we are perceptually experiencing. As Yaffe puts it, “The point is that in whatever sense sensory experiences represent A-series properties, films do also, and this is a large part of the reason that films have the particular emotional effects that they have” (2003: 128). On the other hand, when the pictorial series violates the real-time principle, the film experience overcomes ordinary perception thereby turning the spectator into a sort of time explorer, who can do in time what we normally can do only in space, namely slowing down, stopping, pausing, speeding through, or jumping. Both the emulation of ordinary temporal experience and its overcoming, when skillfully exploited by filmmakers, can elicit valuable aesthetic experiences from spectators. As a matter of fact, some films favor the former and others the latter. Yet, in principle, cinema consists of them both.<sup>iv</sup>

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### Further reading

J. Leirens, *Le cinéma et le temps* [Cinema and time] (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1954) and F. Bettetini, *Tempo del senso. La logica temporale dei testi audiovisivi* [Time and meaning. The temporal logic of audiovisual works] (Milano: Bompiani, 1979) are two seminal books on time in cinema. T. Grodal, *Moving Pictures - A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) explains the distinction between objective and subjective time in terms of temporal schemata and modalities. S. L. Feagin, "Time and Timing," (in C. Plantinga and G. M. Smith. (eds.) *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) investigates how timing in film affects both spectators' cognition and emotions.

i 3D films can reduce such a detachment but cannot completely suppress it, since the events depicted are relegated into a parallelepiped which intersects the spectator's egocentric space but remains distinct from it. Instead, in the case of virtual reality, the space depicted wholly replaces the spectator's egocentric space

ii One might wonder whether a screen on wall providing a depiction of just what was going on behind the wall would count as both live and 'here' TV (I owe this suggestion to Ian Phillips; Currie (1995: 64) considers a similar case involving a window instead of a wall). I think that there remains an asymmetry between time and space in this respect since live television is live at the type level (all the broadcast tokens of that moving image are live) whereas Phillips's wall or Currie's window are 'here' only at the token level (only one special token of that moving image has the privilege of being 'here').

iii If one conceives of depiction in terms of sharing of features between the representation and the represented, then, strictly speaking, a slow motion shot *depicts* things slowed just as a wide-lens shot depicts things as warped and a black and white shot depicts things as black and white (cf. Phillips 2009, §3.4). Yet, a slow motion shot, as a representation, does not prescribe an experience of things slowed but rather a slowed experience of things moving at their normal speed (likewise, a wide-lens shot prescribes a warped experience of things having their normal shape, and a black and white shot prescribes a black and white experience of things having their normal shape). That is to say that, in such cases, what matters is not depiction strictly understood but the way in which depiction is exploited in order to prescribe a certain experience. I believe that this holds also in the case of the backwards shots that we can find in films such as *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* (A. Resnais, 1968) or *The Rules of Attraction* (R. Avary, 2002).

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