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Reconsideration of Excess in Cinema: Arrested Narratives, Opened Diegetic Spaces, and Hidden Details

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Reconsideration of Excess in Cinema: Arrested Narratives, Opened Diegetic Spaces, and Hidden Details

by

Jason Gutierrez

Bachelor of Arts, Middlebury College, 2009

Advisor: Michele Schreiber, Ph.D.

An abstract of

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Abstract

Reconsideration of Excess in Cinema: Arrested Narratives, Opened Diegetic Spaces, and Hidden Details

by Jason Gutierrez

Writing about excess in cinema can be traced back to the earliest film writing, as Surrealists and Impressionists attempted to articulate a theoretical approach to the ineffable qualities of the film image. The approach was subsequently adopted by cinephile critics of the 1950s and 1960s. With film studies' entry into the academy, theorists like Roland Barthes continued to write about cinematic excess using semiology as a means to account for those elements of film which fall outside the standard modes of analysis. Writing about Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* Barthes noted that, after an images informational and symbolic levels were accounted for, he was still "held by the image. I read, I receive a third meaning—evident, erratic, obstinate." Shortly there after Stephen Heath investigated those same elements by placing them within the context of narrative, and Kristin Thompson used neoformalism as method to investigate that which tends to elude analysis. Eventually, excess fell out of favor, as theorists circumscribed the affective qualities of *excess* as a theoretical term but did not attempt to put the term in dialog with contemporary scholarship. This thesis is a reconsideration of the critical term excess. Using Howard Hawks' Western *Rio Bravo* and Steven Soderbergh's *Ocean's Twelve* as the key examples throughout, the work explores how the term has been deployed by academic film studies and how it can be utilized by contemporary scholarship. Mirroring the range of application by past scholars, this thesis similarly puts excess in dialog with narratology, psychology and cognitive functions in the brain, cinephilia, Giles Deleuze's theories of the movement-image and time-image, temporality, and alternative modes of spectatorship. Ultimately the thesis argues that excess has a great deal of utility for contemporary scholarship as a discourse through which one can engage with elements of film (both formal and affective) that fit uneasily within traditional scholarly frameworks.

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For Ardie.

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"In the films of Fellini, the scenes that establish the logical relations, the significant changes of fortune, the major points of dramatic articulation, only provide the continuity links, while the long descriptive sequences, seeming to exercise no effect on the unfolding of the 'action' proper, constitute the truly important and revealing scenes. In *I Vitelloni*, these are the nocturnal walks, the senseless strolls on the beach; in *La Strada*, the visit to the convent; in *Il Bidone*, the evening at the nightclub or the New Year's celebration. It is not when they are doing something specific that Fellini's characters best reveal themselves to the viewer but by their endless milling around."

--André Bazin[1]

INTRODUCTION

The above passage from André Bazin's article "*Cabiria*: the Voyage to the End of Neorealism," was the genesis for everything that will follow. The question of what happens when a film makes space for its characters to simply exist, unencumbered by the mechanizations of narrative, is an intriguing one. How does this effect an audience's relationship to the film and to the characters? How do we understand the reality of the film, and how do these instances destabilize the systems of understanding and knowing as it relates to film and film language.

As I began to approach the subject my initial conception of these moments was as idleness, and in a way that still holds true. The characters are idle (they are, as Bazin puts it, milling around), and as such the narrative, broadly conceived as the movement toward the resolution of an introduced disruption of the status quo, is idle. However formulating the instances as ones of idleness proves overly

[1] André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?,* trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 90

restrictive, for it takes into account only characters and their relationship to the structures of narrative. To call them idle is not correct. They are doing *something* (milling around), it is not as though the characters are sitting or standing around innert. The question therefore becomes, *what* are they doing? How does their action, given its tangential relationship to the narrative, effect potential readings? These scenes, shots, moments, are included in the film, so they must have some import, even if it is not immediately clear why they are important enough to include.

Dramatic films regularly excise details that are unimportant to the picture as a whole. If they hold little or no narrative or thematic importance, the tendency is to leave them out. In 1954 Vittorio de Sica, working with Hollywood producer David O. Selznick, made the adaptation of Cesare Zavattini's novel *Terminal Station* his English-language film debut. With a running time of just under an-hour-and-a-half, a fairly straightforward plot about the affair between an American housewife and an Italian academic, and two charismatic stars in Montgomery Clift and Jennifer Jones, *Terminal Station* has the appearance of a comfortable entrée into Hollywood filmmaking for one of Italian Neorealism's key figures. However, after disastrous test screenings, Selznick took over the picture, re-editing it down to a swift seventy-two minutes and replacing the original title with the more descriptive *Indiscretion of an American Wife*. Both versions of the film survive and, when comparing the two, the most readily apparent distinctions are in what Selznick chose to remove. Throughout de Sica's version of the film he allows the scene to continue after the main character leaves the frame, or is no longer the central focus of the shot. Intruders from without the frame crowd into the space vacated by the star and the

shot lingers on them for a few fleeting moments before cutting to the subsequent shot. Similarly, de Sica holds shots of seeming inconsequence, like characters walking through a space, before making the edit and moving on to another shot or scene. Selznick's version completely removes these lingering shots and unnecessary movements. In an effort to bring the picture more fully in line with the dominant Hollywood mode of storytelling at the time, he strips away what he considers to be the *excess*, leaving what he, presumably, considers a solid picture. One that is clear and efficient.

It is these moments that interest me, and which will be taken up in this project. The moments that David O. Selznick left on the cutting room floor. As a result, it would not do to restrict the work only to idleness and its portrayal in film, or even idleness, its relationship to narrative, and narrative's operation in cinema. In order to fully encompass my fascination with the endless milling around it was necessary to expand my scope.

As a theoretical concern of film, excess' roots lie in the structuralist/post-structuralist moment in the development of film theory. The concept's introduction is commonly attributed to Roland Barthes, who, in his essay "The Third Meaning," attempts to account for those elements of film which fall outside the standard modes of analysis, or as he frames it, "levels of meaning."[2] Those levels being the informational, "which gathers together everything I can learn from the setting, the costumes, the characters, their relations, their insertion in an anecdote with which I

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[2] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 52

am (even if vaguely) familiar,"[3] and the symbolic. The symbolic level can be wide reaching, depending on the text, but Barthes succinctly breaks the level down into referential symbolism, diegetic symbolism, Eisensteinian symbolism[4], and historical symbolism. In short, the level is that of signification.

Beyond that, however, there remains a part of the image that remains outside of these levels of communication and signification, about which he writes, "I do not know what the signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can clearly see the traits, the signifying accidents of which this-consequently incomplete-sign is composed."[5] This is the third meaning.

The importance of this third meaning for Barthes is tied to idiosyncrasy and emotion,[6] but also a certain dislocation from narrative and symbolic consequence. Later on he writes that "the third meaning also seems to me greater than the pure, upright, secant, legal perpendicular of the narrative, it seems to open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely."[7]

Here Barthes gestures toward another area of importance that is later taken up by Stephen Heath in his essay, "Film, System, Narrative." The obtuse meaning, as described by Barthes, "appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, [and]

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[3] Ibid.
[4] By which I believe that readers should infer he is referring to symbolism common to the filmmaker whose work is under consideration. The symbolism one associates with Stanley Kubrick is presumably different from that which one associates with Sirk, for example.
[5] Ibid, 53
[6] As it remains unclear whether this third meaning is apparent in all filmic images or only particular ones of import to himself as a spectator
[7] Ibid, 55

information."[8] Therefore, it operates outside of systems of meaning and knowledge, as such. Looking at this insistently-beyond, for lack of a better term, quality of films one quickly realizes that they are features of the film that cannot be contained, or broken down, into conventional narrative structures. Or, put another way, traditional narrative structures make no place within their frameworks for conceptualizing anything beyond those structures. These elements tend to be left unaddressed. Heath recognizes this when he writes that

> the narrative […] strives to gather up the elements it puts forward in order with them to go forward *evidently*. This, however, is never simple, never without slippage: the narrative cannot contain *everything.* Except by resorting to a scrupulous—'abstract'—construction of profilmic space […], the narrative film can only seek to maintain a tight balance between the photographic image as a reproduction of reality and the narrative as the sense, the intelligibility, of that reality.[9]

While classical film form tends to emphasize the importance of notable elements within the narrative there remain elements that are "left aside."[10] Heath argues that it is from these unexplored, excessive elements, which are "lost" to the narrative as it moves along, that a film narrative receives its feeling of reality. "In short," he writes, "the film-narrative is a *regulated* loss, that loss becoming the *sign* of the real."[11] Put another way, the clarity of narrative depends on framing and editing in order to "cut short the

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[8] Ibid.
[9] Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 134-135
[10] Ibid, 135
[11] Ibid.

interminable play of the signifier, the subject in process, impose a coherence and a continuity of representation."[12] Without this there are "slippages […] slidings [which] produce gaps […] contradictions, and an excess that works against organization, homogeneity and motivated representation […] in other words, against the codes taken to systematize and order classical cinema."[13]

The impulse to look within the film image for a method to undermine classical cinematic forms is not new. In France during the 1920s and 1930s, Surrealists altered their moviegoing habits in an effort to reflect their goal of perceiving the world in an alternative, or as Adrian Martin has put it, "a suitably intoxicated manner."[14]

To this end, photographer Man Ray would regularly watch a film with his hand in front of his face, viewing the action through his fingers so he could isolate and focus exclusively on sections of the images. In a practice that is amusingly similar to the contemporary practice of channel surfing, Andre Breton would arrive at a cinema, not knowing, or particularly caring, what was being shown, and sit in on the film until the narrative began to take hold before abandoning the film altogether and moving on to another theater. Writer Paul Hammond describes the Surrealists endgame as wanting "to desublimate cinema, not to bring it down to earth, but to go deeper, to

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[12] Ibid, 136
[13]Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 42
[14] Adrian Martin. "The Artificial Night: Surrealism and Cinema," in *Surrealism: Revolution by Night,* ed. Christopher Chapman, Ted Gott, and Michael Lloyd (Canberra: The Gallery), 192

crack open the volatile magma at its core […] a transgressive, liberating dialogue could unfold in the ellipsis between discrete monologues."[15]

In this sense, arguably, the most successful Surrealist experiment with alternative modes of film spectatorship is Joseph Cornell's 1936 film *Rose Hobart.* Working with a 16mm print of George Melford's 1931 film *East of Borneo*, Cornell re-edited the film into a 19-minute short film that revolves almost entirely around shots of the film's star, Rose Hobart. Cornell's film is important to this discussion of excess because its composition is heavily dependent upon excess. Nothing in the film suggests, or even gestures at, the narrative of the original film. Instead the film's images are decidedly of Barthes' third meaning, tied to Cornell's idiosyncrasies and emotional association to them.

It would be easy to mistake Cornell's work on *Rose Hobart*, which ties a visual pleasure to a particular figure and situation, with that of another, likeminded group: the impressionists, whose contemporaneous writing on Japanese actor Sessue Hayakawa was similarly enthralled with the star's movement and presence on-screen. In singling out Hayakawa the impressionists turn every aspect of his films into a form of excess. For the impressionists his presence stands apart from the rest of the film, distracting from the narrative and filmic apparatuses around him. The star is excess to the film, and the film is the excess surrounding the star.

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[15]Paul Hammond, "Available Light," in *The Shadow and Its Shadow*, ed. Raymond Danowski (San Francisco: City Lights Books), 17

While both groups are interested in exploring that which is excessive about the presence of a star persona, Cornell and the Surrealists take a more explicit stance about their view of excess' relationship to classical cinema and narrative forms. Where Impressionists were interested in isolating Hawakawa himself, regardless of what was being left out, the Surrealists were always cognizant of the relationship of excess to the structure of classical film, and how emphasizing an aspect of excess (in the case of *Rose Hobart* by literally removing the narrative) undermines not only the codes of classical cinema, but also the codes of classical film spectatorship.

As a theoretical concept, excess fell out of favor in film theory fairly quickly. Though Euginie Brinkema argues that the concept of excess was, to some degree, subsumed into the concept of a formal affect, what seems closer to the truth is that excess, as presented in the 1970s and 1980s, appeared to be a dead end. Todd McGowan articulates this uncertainty, writing that "if excess remains irreducible to and blocks any effort at interpretation, if 'excess innately tends to elude analysis,' then the critical task becomes one of 'pointing out' this excess rather than including it in an interpretation, as Thompson says."[16]

While Thompson does indeed write that, "I can do no more than indicate; a systematic analysis is impossible,"[17]McGowan is playing it somewhat fast and loose

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[16]Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Cinema After Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 26

[17] Kristen Thompson, "The Concept of Cinematic Excess," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 496

in terms of where Thompson ultimately falls on the utility of studying excess. She goes on to write that

> Once the narrative is recognized as arbitrary rather than logical, the viewer is free to ask why individual events within its structures are as they are. The viewer is no longer constrained by conventions of reading to find a meaning or theme within the work as the solution to a sort of puzzle which has a right answer.[18]

Her reasoning pre-supposes that a viewer has familiarity with narrative structures and conventions,[19] however it does point at the ways in which excess allows for the text to be opened up, and therefore allows for alternative scholarly approaches.

That being said, McGowan's larger point, that as a theoretical concept excess has been used as a way to articulate the limits of narrative and interpretation, or as an "almost exclusively negative value in the history of film theory,"[20] is well taken. However McGowan himself offers no way forward, and in fact utilizes excess as a means of articulating the limits of film's ability to "elude the excess of the gaze."[21]

Eugenie Brinkema is equally clear-eyed about excess history in film theory. She notes that theories of excess

> [f]ailed to generate inventive questions after the heyday of *Screen* theory […] one can glimpse in excess theory the seeds of solipsistic or idiosyncratic reverie that would germinate into the full blown indifference to theoretical reach in contemporary work on affect. 'Excess,' like 'affect,' was also routinely invoked in the singular, general, universal as the capacity of a text to fail in relation to structural systematicity.[22]

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[18] Thompson, "Excess," 497
[19] Which is not necessarily a sound assumption
[20] McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 27.
[21] McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 28
[22] Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects,* 42.

Unlike McGowan, though, Brinkema sees a utility in the resurrection of excess theory, seeing a way to put it in dialog with contemporary scholarship on affect.

It is here, before I attempt to put excess into dialog with anything, that I would like to interject a working definition of excess. As might be clear by now, defining excess is filled with ambivalence and conflicting explanations. In the first few pages of this work excess has taken into account the following definitions: idleness and a connection to realism, an obtuse meaning based on *an individual's* idiosyncrasies and emotional response to the filmic image, the impact of the star persona, an aspect of film that can not be circumscribed by the narrative, and a means to undermine classic Hollywood cinema. Going forward, the term will also be used as a way to discuss an aspect of film that resists interpretation and theoretical frameworks, as a digressive attribute in a film, and as diegetic openness.

A definition can also include not only what excess is, but also the effect of excess. Later on in this work excess will be looked at as an occurrence that destabilizes a spectator's understanding of temporality, as well as interjects a moment of instability in the relation between perception and reality.

There is a recurring dichotomy in how excess is defined by theorists: excess can be seen in terms of the obvious (readings of narrative excess or excess' relationship to idleness and reality that can be argued about by generally everyone) or it can be defined in terms of the individual (the idiosyncratic, personal description of Barthes' obtuse meaning or the emotional connection to a star, gesture, or detail in the image that stands out to the individual but might not appear as excessive to all).

One of the intriguing aspects of investigating excess as a critical term is that the term has been deployed in so many different ways. While it might stymie a universal understanding, the multitude of appropriations of excess opens the term up to a range of theoretical approaches. I am hesitant to come to a single definition; instead I would prefer to recognize the range of its application across scholarly work, draw attention to the ways in which previous writers deployed the term, and acknowledge that I will be drawing upon multiple ways of defining or describing excess throughout the work.

I suspect it comes as no surprise that I also see a utility in revisiting the concept of excess. My reasons for doing so are two-fold: first, I do not believe that film theory has exhausted the possible uses of applying excess as a critical concept while engaging with films. What Brinkema gestures toward when she notes the lack of inventive questions asked using the concept of excess is that there have been *no* questions asked by using excess. So much energy is spent trying to define and articulate what excess, as it relates to cinema, *is,* that once theorists arrived at a definition the interest in articulating how the concept can be further investigated waned.

Ways in which the concept can be re-approached is the primary concern of the rest of this work. The first chapter is another look at narrative, and the relationship of excess to narrative, applying Deleuze's Affect-Image to instances of excess as it relates to narrative. The second chapter is an ecological approach to the issue of excess and human cognition, arguing that when confronted with instances of excess the cognitive approach to film is similar to that of gameplay in open world

video games, allowing for exploration and a suspension of time. The final two chapters address alternative modes of spectatorship and temporality. Benefitting from a resurgence in film studies for the theoretical concept of cinephilia, and its relationship to modernity and concepts of time, the final part of the work will investigate excess from this perspective. The final sections makes the case that instances of excess open the film up to alternate viewing practices, instantiate an unstable relationship to temporality, as well as an unstable relationship between perception and reality.

My alternate rationale for this investigation is somewhat more obtuse, to borrow Barthes' term, but can essentially be summed up by acknowledging a deep fascination with excess. When I watch films I look for these moments, and am enthralled by them when they appear. This work is an attempt to articulate something about why I am so enthralled by them. It is in the excess of film that I confront a potentially unanswerable question: what is my relationship with cinema? This work is a first attempt at understanding.

"All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."

-Roland Barthes[23]

CHAPTER I. Excess and Narrative Structure

The first part of this work will consider the relationship between excess and narration. As an area with a theoretical traditional that foregrounds frameworks narrative and naratology provides a structure against which it is easier to see that which is excessive to it. To begin we must first address narrative more generally and how it functions in film. This chapter will examine several schools of narratological thought, and their applicability to film, focusing on how they situate moments of narrative excess. As a means of grounding, I will analyze Steven Soderbergh's film *Ocean's Twelve* (2004) as a text that deviates from many of these narrative theories put forward through arrest and digression. I will then go on to make a case for an alternate framework of narration and narrative that can account for films like *Oceans* that in similar deviate from these traditional narratological models.

Narrative is a difficult concept to pin down. Barthes' above observation is indicative of the problem that confronts us: we know what a narrative is even if we are unsure of how to define it. For the sake of argument, let us propose a minimal definition: *a narrative is an understood sequence of events that are rationally*

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[23] Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 79

connected together, usually built around the establishment of a status quo followed by the introduction of a disruption in the status quo, and involves a sentient being who experiences these events. It is an inherently unsatisfying definition because of its minimalism, but it provides a foundation upon which to build.

This definition highlights several features included in almost all narratives: individuals as the primary parties who experience the narrative (protagonists and antagonists), sequential events, and conflict as the propulsive element for these individuals. Myths, novels, drama, and films, all share these elements—fiction or non-fiction, it does not matter.

A brief digression to establish *Ocean's Twelve* is necessary. A sequel to the critically and commercially popular 2001 film *Ocean's Eleven*, *Ocean's Twelve* is set a number of years after the events of the first film. At the beginning of the film, casino owner Terry Benedict (Andy Garcia) tracks down the members of the heist crew that robbed his casinos in the previous film, led by Danny Ocean (George Clooney) and his compatriot, Rusty Ryan (Brad Pitt). Benedict demands his stolen money returned within two weeks, and in exchange he will spare their lives. Their backs against the wall, the crew goes to Europe hoping to pull off enough robberies to pay back their debt. They are contacted by an aristocratic cat burglar, the Nightfox (Vincent Cassel), who offers to pay off their debt to Benedict in exchange for participating in a wager to prove who is the best thief: whoever steals the un-stealable Fabergé Egg wins.

CHARACTER

Of the above highlighted facets of narrative, character is the most fundamental. In their most basic form, a character is an individual that populates the narrative. As Uri Margolin observes, "characters […] exist within storyworlds, and play a role, no matter how minor, in one or more of the states of affairs or events told about it in the narrative."[24] Their presence is necessary because, without character there is no conflict and, therefore, no narrative. Encompassing the protagonists, antagonists, as well as those they come in contact with, characters are actors affected by the shift in status quo that serves as the narrative's inciting incident.

There are different theoretical approaches to character, but the most reasonable approach for understanding characters in film is as a well-specified individual who exists in a fictional domain. These individuals exist according to a set of laws that govern the storyworld. Whether these are the rules that govern the animated fish in *Finding Nemo*, the bent reality that allows a character to jump off a bridge in an action movie like *Lethal Weapon*, or the relatively grounded reality of a film like *Ordinary People*, all of the characters exist within an established hypothetical domain, each with its own modal logic.[25] In addition,

> "Any entity can exist in the fact domain of the storyworld […] or in any of its subdomains: the beliefs, wishes, intentions, and imaginations of one or more characters, or in a secondary embedded world projected by stories the characters read, plays they watch, etc.

[24]Uri Margolin, "Character," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71

[25] Modal logic is what is understood to be possible in a given world

> In addition, characters form in their minds mental versions of other characters who, like them, exist in the fact domain. The total population of a narrative universe consists of *all* of the above."[26]

In a film we see this play out as films accompany individuals as they navigate the storyworld and express, either verbally or through action, their thoughts and desires. These individuals engage with other entities within the storyworld. These characters experience the hypothetical domain through their own interactions with the storyworld. Finally, these entities must navigate a storyworld crowded with ancillary characters, subaltern to the narrative at work, which presumably exists with their own subdomain of wishes and desires.

Even the most complex character identification sequence in *Ocean's Twelve* fits within this schemata, albeit uneasily. After most of the group is captured in Rome, the three that remain call upon Danny's wife, Tess (Julia Roberts) for assistance. Reasoning that Tess bears a striking resemblance to real life actress Julia Roberts, she can pretend to be Julia Roberts and get them close enough to the egg to steal it. Here, though, the audience of the film understands Tess to remain Tess even as the character acts as if she is the actress portraying her.

In this context "Julia Roberts" is part of the subdomain of the character Tess, this Julia Roberts is still a member of the total population within the narrative. This is destabilized when Tess, playing the role of Julia Roberts, is briefly forced to speak to the real Julia Roberts on the phone. The

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[26] Margolin, "Character," 57

Julia Roberts on the phone is introduced as a character in the narrative, and therefore as part of a total population within the narrative that already includes a character Julia Roberts as the subdomain of a totally separate character.

When the situation is proposed to her Tess remarks, "You're playing a role. I'm apparently playing a real person!" In that moment Linus (Matt Damon), Basher (Don Cheadle), and Turk (Scott Cann) are preparing her for her role by introducing some of Julia Roberts' biographical background. "You're from Smyrna, Georgia," Linus tells her. "Your favorite color is peach, but you tell everyone it's blue," Basher reminds her. When she voices doubt Linus says, "It's good (that you're feeling insecure). You're an actress, they're all insecure." The scene is not only introducing "Julia Roberts" as a character within the narrative's subdomain, it is also highlighting the constructed nature of Julia Roberts as a public persona. This persona is a construct not only by Hollywood as a system, but by fans and the public at large.

Ultimately this sequence still fits within the framework introduced by Margolin. The audience understands the two Julia Roberts' to be separate characters, one a primary character (i.e. as an entity within the fact domain of the story world), and one a construct of another character. However, this sequence highlights how *Ocean's Twelve* goes out of its way to emphasize the constructed nature of its own narrative and the elements that make up that narrative, in this case specifically the characterization of Tess as a character

as well as Julia Roberts as an actress and construct within the Hollywood system.

ACTION AND PLOT

Characters populate a narrative, but narrative is built around events in which these characters participate. These events might not necessarily be causally related, but, they are rationally connected, and the addressee of the narrative understands them as such.

Characters go places as a narrative moves along; they do things, and whatever activity they engage in develops as the characters move spatio-temporally through the storyworld. In other words, a narrative has a *trajectory*. Two events rest at either end of a narrative's trajectory: one that initiates the ensuing action and one that resolves it. In between, there is a steady cycle of rising action and falling action, which, in its totality, can be broken up into a beginning, a middle, and an end. As Aristotle notes in his *Poetics*,

> A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.[27]

The inertia of the inciting incident propels subsequent events in the direction of the narrative's conclusion. Another way to think about a narrative's trajectory is as causally related events, or as stated in the definition proposed at the beginning, the

[27] Aristotle, *Poetics*. Section I, Part VII.

rational connection of a sequence of events. The connections made between these events makes up the trajectory.

Narrative theorists tend to discuss narrative as having two domains: story and discourse. Russian formalists designated these two domains *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot), respectively. *Fabula* is the raw story material, and "(with qualifications) comprises events, characters, and settings […] a chronologically-ordered deep structure representation of all the primary and essential information concerning characters, events, and settings"[28] The *syuzhet*, or discourse, is the way that these event-units are constructed to relay that information. As Boris Tomashevsky writes, "plot is distinct from story. Both include the same events, but in he plot the events *are arranged* and connected according to the orderly sequence in which they were presented in the work."[29]

For David Bordwell, the term *fabula* is "the action as a chronological. Cause-and-effect chain of events occurring within a given duration and a spatial field."[30] He considers *fabula* to be generated partly by the audience's past experiences with narrative, a cognitive interaction with the text and its narrative. As he puts it

> The fabula is thus a pattern which perceivers of narratives create through assumptions and inferences. It is the developing result of picking up narrative cues, applying schemata, framing and testing hypotheses […] the viewer builds the fabula on the basis of prototype schemata (identifiable types of persons, actions, locales, etc._ template

[28] Michael Toolan, *Narrative: a Critical Linguistic Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 15-16
[29] Boris Tomashevsky "Thematics," in *Russian Formalist Criticism* ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press , 1965), 67
[30] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 49

> schemata (principally the 'canonic' story), and procedural schemata (a search for appropriate motivations and relations of causality, time, and space).[31]

When he refers to the "canonic story," he is also, implicitly, alluding to the canonic film, or the mode of narration found in the classical Hollywood film. As he outlines it, the classic Hollywood film features "psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals."[32] Throughout this struggle to solve their problem or attain their goals, these characters will be in conflict with other characters or the circumstances in which they find themselves. And at the end, the problem is resolved and equilibrium restored.

For Bordwell, causality is the most important principle in the construction of classical Hollywood *fabula*. The film's *syuzhet* is similarly motivated by causality. "The syuzhet represents the order, frequency, and duration of fabula events in ways which bring out the salient causal relations. This process is especially evident in a device highly characteristic of classical narration—the deadline."[33] Sure enough, *Ocean's Twelve* is structured around a deadline. If their debt is not paid within two weeks, the members of the gang of thieves will be killed.

The *syuzhet* is also broken up into discrete units (what Bordwell terms "segments"[34]), and they fall into two categories: montage sequences and scenes. In accordance with the rules of classical Hollywood, scenes are demarcated by a unity of time, space, and action. But the

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[31] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 49
[32] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 157
[33] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 157
[34] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 158

> classical segment is not a sealed entity. Spatially and temporally it is closed, but causally it is open. It works to advance the causal progression and open up new developments […]. The montage sequence tends to function as a transitional summary […] (whereas) each scene displays distinct phases.[35]

Here too, *Ocean's Twelve* follows with this description of the classical mode of narration. Scenes, marked by a unity of time, space, and action, display a distinct phase in the relation of *fabula* events.

However, even though the *syuzhet* of *Ocean's Twelve* follows that basic outline it oversimplifies what the narrative of *Ocean's Twelve* is doing. While the fabula recounted above is correct, it also takes place in a very condensed time within the film. The reintroduction of the villain, Benedict, and the introduction of the problem that drives the rest of the film occur before the film's opening credits even begin. As the film makes clear at the end, the resolution of this problem takes place before Ocean and his gang travel to Rome to try and steal the egg. They instead steal the egg on a train from Paris while it is en route to Rome. At that point, the inciting incident has found a conclusion that restores equilibrium to the storyworld. An argument could be made that the conclusion of the film, and restoration of order, is when the Night Fox realizes he has been bested and pays the debt. However, the motivation for paying the bet and thus restoring order is the conclusion of the wager, or stealing the egg, and that event happens significantly earlier in the fabula.

Yet there remains an excess of story material. Everything that happens subsequent to their failure to steal an antique stock certificate from an agoraphobic in Amsterdam happens after their successful stealing of the Faberge egg, and thus

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[35] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 158

subsequent to this restoration of order within the diegesis. So, what are we to make of it? How are we to understand it?

NARRATIVE EXCESS

Bordwell asks, "is there anything in a narrative film that is not narrational? Any image or sound can contribute to narration, but we can also attend to an element for its sheer perceptual salience […]. Kristin Thompson has identified these elements as 'excess.'"[36] However, the elements that he is addressing here are what Roland Barthes identifies as the third meaning. Excesses in terms of "casual lines, colors, expressions, and textures,"[37] but not necessarily in terms of story material.[38] In trying to address these excesses, Kristin Thompson notes, "A perception of a film that includes its excess implies an awareness of the structures (including conventions) at work in the film, since excess is precisely those elements that escape unifying impulses."[39] However, Bordwell disregards excess by pushing it outside of the realm of his concerns. What is clear is that excess, which makes up a significant portion of *Ocean's Twelve*, does not fit within Bordwell's theories of narrative and therefore we must look elsewhere for a better understanding.

At this point, it is important to gesture toward the fact that not all that appears to be excess is excessive. If that sounds redundant let us consider one brief

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[36] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 53
[37] Bordwell, *Narrative*, 53
[38] "Casual lines" could be read to mean these excessive diegetic materials, but his meaning is vague
[39] Kristin Thompson, *Eisenstein's Ivan the Terrible: a Neoformalist Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 302

scene from a different film, Alfred Hitchcock's 1943 film *Shadow of a Doubt*. The film revolves around a young woman's (Charlie) growing suspicion that her beloved uncle is a notorious murderer. Following the introduction of Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotton), living alone in a rented room in New York City, the action moves to the idyllic town of Santa Rosa, California where the youngest niece, Ann, is sitting in the living room of a large home, reading a book. The phone rings and Ann answers it. It is the telegraph office informing the house that her mother (Charlie's sister) has received a telegraph. There is some back and forth between young Ann and the unheard office worker, before she hangs up and continues reading. The scene itself is superfluous from a narrative perspective. The information conveyed does not move the story forward. The audience knows who the telegraph is from and what message is being conveyed, because they are shown Uncle Charlie sending a telegraph to the family, telling them that he is en route via train in the previous scene. It is not an "event" in that it does not change the state of being for any of the characters in the film. Yet the scene, which takes about three minutes to play out, remains in the film even though it has no cause-effect relationship with subsequent scenes. But it is not necessarily narrative excess. It introduces the small-town setting of Santa Rosa as well as the family unit and their relationships. So even though relay of *fabula* information is being halted for this scene, it does function as the establishment of the storyworld in which the rest of the film will take place and establish a broadly drawn characterization of the family to whom the rising action will impact. Both the establishment of the storyworld (whose rules will govern the

actions of the characters at play within it) and these characterizations *are* important in terms of narrative, if not plot.

Giles Deleuze delineates film history into two distinct modes: the motion-image and the time-image. Within the movement-image we see further delineation between what Deleuze terms the perception-image, the affection-image, and the action-image.

For Deleuze the movement-image mode was characterized by a narrative that revolved around a set of problems in need of a resolution. Plots were characterized by reaction to these problems and they delivered a resolution that restored equilibrium to a world that was out of joint.

For Deleuze, who was deeply influenced by Henri Bergson, the restoration of the status quo portrayed no change, and for Deleuze (as for Bergson) time is change. If there is no change, there is no time passing. Therefore, films of this type are characterized by movement, not by time, because there is no change.

However, Deleuze devotes the final chapter of his tome regarding cinema to the crisis of the action-image. The crisis of the action-movement is just that. There is a large problem that needs a resolution. But, the main character, feeling overwhelmed by the circumstances he is confronted with, is inert in the face of the problem. The crisis, as Deleuze sees it is,

> "The cinema of action depicts sensory-motor situations: there are characters, in a certain situation, who […] act according to how they perceive the situation. Actions are linked to perceptions, and perceptions develop into actions."[40]

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[40] Giles Deleuze, *Cinema I: the Movement-Image* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 222

This description covers a large swath of Hollywood filmmaking, and seems to include *Ocean's Twelve* as well. Characters find themselves within given situations, and act according to how they perceive that situation. While in Amsterdam, Ocean's crew needs to steal one of the world's first stock certificates from an agoraphobic old man. Upon closer inspection, they literally perceive that their plan is impossible to achieve because the window they're trying to fire a crossbow bolt through is too low. Therefore, they take action and raise the building from its foundation in order to achieve a positive resolution.

Indeed, it is useful to think of the events in the first half of *Ocean's Twelve* as being the continuous action response to perceptions. However, as discussed above, the resolution of the inciting event occurs early and there remains a surplus of *fabula* events.

I propose that two things are happening in the film's second half. First, the film is constructed the way that it is in order to place the audience in the position of the Nightfox. The camera regularly tilts or pans to video cameras showing Ocean's team planning or executing a heist. The film's *decoupage* goes out of the way to show the group under surveillance by the Nightfox, from that one can infer that in terms of total narrative information, the audience knows about as much as he does. The benefit of constructing a narrative that places the audience in the position of the antagonist is the maintenance of suspense through the final half, and the ability to surprise the audience at the end when it is revealed that the story's core problem was wrapped up earlier while their attention was elsewhere. In contrast to a more traditional Hollywood narrative, where the audience learns narrative information

along with the protagonist (or beforehand) as he outwits the antagonist, here the *syuzhet* is constructed to provide the audience *fabula* information with the antagonist, placing us in a similar position to him, even though we are rooting against him.

We must still approach the excessive actions of the film's second half and engage with them. We cannot simply brush them aside or attempt to subsume them within a larger narrative construct at work. Therefore I propose a second approach to the latter half of *Ocean's Twelve,* one that revolves around characteristics Deleuze identifies in post-war American cinema: "the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, the condemnation of the plot."[41]

Deleuze identifies the dispersive situation as one in which the image does not refer to a situation that is totalizing. Instead, it is diffuse. "The characters are multiple, with weak interferences and become principal or revert to being secondary. It is nevertheless not a series of sketches […] since they are all caught in the same reality which disperses them."[42] While the group in *Ocean's Twelve* acts as a team, each portion of the team is given the autonomy of a discreet unit. When they are all arrested, only two are arrested together. Instead, each member is off on his own, dispersed within the larger reality of the storyworld. Indeed, because each is on their own, it flattens the hierarchy of characters. They all share the same fate and therefore all revert to being secondary.

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[41] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 233
[42] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 230

The deliberately weak links throughout the second half of *Ocean's Twelve* allows for the creation of an on-going reality which has no ramifications for any of the characters involved. The trap was set, so to speak, long before any of the events that take place in the second half of the film. Therefore, the connection between everything that occurs is due to something else entirely (Deleuze calls it "chance"[43]). Similarly, he notes that, "sometimes the event delays and is lost in idle periods, sometimes it is there too quickly […] And there are close relationships between these aspects of the event: the dispersive, the direct in the course of happening and the non-belonging."[44] Throughout the film, the happenings of events tend to be undercut by those moments surrounding them. The stealing of the bond in Amsterdam is bookended and interrupted by meetings and conversations, frequently about things that are tangential to the happening of the event. Likewise in the film's Rome section, the arrest of the characters outside of the museum where the Egg is being held is preceded by a long, digressive conversation between Danny and Rusty about something that is tenuously connected to the Event.

"The modern voyage […] happens in any-space-whatever- […] in opposition to action which most often unfolded in the qualified space-time of the old realism,"[45] is how Deleuze characterizes the modern voyage. While Deleuze argues that the modern voyage has no initiatory aspect, it seems more appropriate to say that, in the case of *Ocean's Twelve*, the initiatory aspect gives way to digressive ambling. At the beginning of the film Linus says that, "we (the group) are too hot to work

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[43] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 230
[44] Ibid.
[45] Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 231

anywhere in this country," leaving the only recourse to find work abroad. However once abroad the impetus for resolution is lost, replaced with ambling strolls around Amsterdam and Rome where characters are frequently discussing their predicament without ever taking definitive steps to solve it. The film itself ambles throughout Europe, frequently digressing from the main action to present a montage sequence that takes place in a different part of Europe. Or, in the film's most striking scene, the characters are literally standing around a train station talking, unable to go anywhere or do anything except for exist.

The final two aspects of Deleuze's characteristics are the consciousness of clichés and the condemnation of plot. In *Ocean's Twelve* the excess of the film's narrative opens the film to lay bare its plot mechanisms. Julia Roberts the actress plays Tess, a character, who plays the part of "Julia Roberts." The film's plot stops and starts for digressions and intrusions. It is in these excessive moments that we become aware of the narrative that is at work.

CHAPTER II. An Ecological Approach to Film Narrative

The first part of this work looked at excess as it relates to the structures of narrative. By engaging with what falls within the context of narrative, we were able to see the excess that falls without. This chapter will focus on the way that narrative is cognitively understood, the way it shapes our perception of the filmed reality, and how moments of excess effect cognitive functions.

Joseph Anderson notes that as human beings develop and our ability for linguistic expression grows, narrative becomes an increasingly important structure through which we mediate our everyday experiences with the outside world. We generate meaning through our relationship to objects and events. Creating narratives is a useful cognitive tool that facilitates the stabilization of meanings. We condense the immense number of potential relationships (meanings) between ourselves and the events and objects that surround us through a chain of cause and effect. The decreased number of potential meanings in a given relationship facilitates this stabilization of meaning. It grants us the flexibility to "learn lessons from (our) own experience […] apply this understanding to future situations, […and] gain a tremendous flexibility, the ability to reformulate past experience in terms of new information of experience."[46]

Emotion factors into the narrativized experience as well. The functional purpose of emotion is to spur change within the body so that it acts in a manner that

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[46]Joseph D. Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach o Cognitive Film Theory* (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1996), 147

tends to prioritize its welfare. Emotions begin as a set of chemical and neural responses produced by the brain[47] as a response to an object or event that stimulates emotion. The result is a "temporary change in the state of the body proper, and in the state of the brain structures that map the body and support thinking,"[48] which leads to one placing oneself in circumstances better conducive to survival and well-being.

In this experience there are two examples of a causal chain in play: an action was taken by the subject that led to the response; I took a toy truck, Kyle hit me. That response led to a reaction on the part of the subject; it made me cry. Since narratizing events assists in learning lessons that can then be applied to later experiences. As such, the connection of the causal chains is an important step in this process and leads to the conclusion that, "if I take Kyle's truck, he might hit me and make me cry. If I don't want that to happen I shouldn't take the truck."

Another important point is that the narratizing of events often takes the form of a verbal articulation of the experience. Therefore, one can conclude that another impetus for narratizing our experiences is to both share lessons learned with others ("don't take Kyle's truck, or he will hit you"), and also seek a validation and confirmation of the conclusions already drawn.

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[47] I should note that, for the sake of clarity, the term "brain" should be understood as separate from the mind. Where the mind will refer to the organization of complex mental processes and higher order thought, the brain refers to the organ itself and the unconscious physical processes that undergird our consciousness. This might appear to be a controversial position. However, exploring the relationship between consciousness (the mind) as a process of making meaning, and that process' relationship to the brain as an organ, is outside the scope of my inquiry. For the time being, the difference is simply a semantic one.

[48] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003), 53

Narratizing our own lives and experiences is a process we do continually. When we go to a film, similar cognitive processes are at work. We are able to make sense of the multitude of relationships between characters, objects, and events by streamlining the possible meanings that result from cause-and-effect events. As Torben Grodal notes

> The fundamental narrative flow is based on the way in which incoming perceptual (story) information relevant to some vital concern of the protagonist activates emotions in the viewer that are linked to the protagonist's preferences. The emotional activation of body and brain informs the viewer's engagement in the film, as he or she identifies with and seeks to solve to protagonist's problems, and it gives rise to mental simulations of motor actions relevant to the protagonist's concerns and preferences.[49]

When viewing a film, we are able to recognize the protagonist's goals and concerns. We are able to empathize with whatever predicament they are in because we narratize events in our own lives. Seeing similar events play out in the film activates a mental process in which we engage in every day.

Human motivation is an important factor in which stories are told, and the way in which they are told. Motivations function hierarchically, with lower order goals nested within higher order goals. Within these high order goals, like solving a mystery, there are lower order goals, such as finding clues and conducting interviews. Even within these lower order goals there are still even more basic goals

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[49] Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 161

(what Grodal terms "(sub)goals")[50] that must also be achieved, like sleeping and eating. Typically, higher order goals form the basis of broader stories, like . Which is not to say that stories cannot be formed from lower order goals, indeed many art films tend to revolve around these lower order goals.

Similar to how human motivations are nested in a hierarchical structure, remembering events and experiences has a nested hierarchy. For example, a specific event does not necessarily have a privileged place in one's memory. However if we experience similar events enough times, we begin to forge a generic memory that persists over time. Ulric Neisser writes, "the organization of autobiographical memory evidently parallels the hierarchical organization of the remembered events themselves. Mental representations […] are nested in one another just as events are."[51] We might not remember all the specific events that have caused grief (though we might retain memories of a distinct event), but we have experienced grief often enough to recognize its manifestation in others. It is generic memory, learned through causal chains in narratizing events, that we apply to a film character when watching a film in order to understand the event being relayed through the narrative.

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[50] Grodal, Torben. *Embodied Visions*, 160

[51] Ulric Neisser, "What Is Ordinary Memory the Memory Of?" in *Remembering Reconsidered*, ed. Ulric Neisser and Eugene Wilnograd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 363

UNDERSTANDING REALITY

The narrativizing model does not take into account the ways in which we actually watch a film. The tendency in film theory is to adopt the position that film stories are third-person narratives told from the past, but this does not take into account the fact that spectators experience the events on-screen as they occur. When watching a film, we are confronted with the audio and visual stimulus of the filmed event—the people on-screen and the actions they are undertaking. For instance, as Alan J. Pakula's *All the President's Men* opens, we see men enter the Watergate Hotel. They may be playing characters, but they are real that have a specific appearance. They are wearing clothes and using walkie-talkies that may be costumes and props, but they are still representations of physical objects on the screen. They are moving around a space that might be a set, but they are still engaging with a real physical location. These objects and individuals are not just mental representations of objects with which an audience has past experiences, they are also an indexical representation of reality within a sphere of the unreal. Their appearance on-screen denotes the fact that those individuals were in that space, interacting with the objects in that space.

There is a connection between reality and excess that is implied in the Bazin quote in the introduction. The idleness he sees in Fellini is indicative of a reality that the camera just happens to capture. In the above example there is a similar capturing of reality that even the construction of the film itself cannot hide. There is

excess in that reality that distracts from the veil of narrative that the Hollywood film works to prioritize.

While we understand the events portrayed in film to be part of a fiction and our engagement with those events to be a form of play (a point to which I will return later), all live-action, fiction filmmaking involves these indexical representations of reality, and we are able to perceive these objects as belonging to an ordered schema in the world outside of the diegesis. Grodal says, "Even if we perceive a given situation or object as something unique, our minds will process these particular and unique phenomena into something simpler and more general."[52] This is why if we see a blaster in *Star Wars*, an object with which no one has any experience, we recognize it on the order of guns. This object has a barrel and a trigger that emits a deadly projection at other beings. Therefore, it is a gun. In this way, the constructive procedures used for watching films or television are the same when interacting with reality from immediate sensory perceptions.

There are parameters that dictate how we experience of a representation of reality. To begin, there is a temporal parameter that facilitates a greater feeling of reality in a representation. Present states feel more "real" than past or future states, which are "in a double sense, mental constructions, constructions of the 'presentic material' (memories, pictures, descriptions, and so forth), and constructions of temporal dimensions."[53] Present states lack the necessary mental construction of the past or the future, it is therefore easier to accept as "real." The present is the

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[52] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 253
[53] Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: a New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30

dominant temporal situation of film. Its typical focus is "on the now, with an undecided future that has to be constructed by the actions of the hero." [54]

The reality-experience also "has a perception-source space parameter."[55] An exterior (physical) space presents a greater experience of reality to our consciousness than an interior (imagined) space. In other words, a tree immediately in front of us, one that we can engage with using our perceptual abilities, is a more authentic experience than imagining a tree. These exterior perceptions are divided even further as "full-modality perceptions and perceptions like mirror-images, backdrops, and film images with, for instance only a visual existence."[56] If we sit in a movie theater, the film image belongs to an order of exterior space experience, but it is also a different understanding of that reality when compared to the reality of the chair in the theater.

Similarly, actions that are not intended to convey a message are perceived as more real than those with a communicative intent. In *Casablanca* there is a moment after the capture of courier-killing con man Ugarte (Peter Lorre) where saloonkeeper Rick (Humphrey Bogart) addresses his patrons. Walking around a column and into the open courtyard of his saloon he says, "I'm sorry there was a disturbance, folks. But it's all over now, just enjoy yourselves and have a good time." As he makes this quick apology he glances down at a nearby table, apparently disturbed in the fray, and notices a fallen sherry glass. Without hesitation he reaches down and rights the glass. It is this kind of behavior that feels more realistic than a

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[54] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 170
[55] Grodal, *Moving Pictures*, 30
[56] Grodal, *Moving Pictures*, 30

direct address to an audience. It is not an action that communicates anything about Rick, the bar, or the story, it is simply an action. There is no way of knowing if that gesture was a planned bit of business, or if Bogart noticed an upturned glass while delivering his line and impulsively righted the fallen prop.

FILM SPECTATORSHIP AS PLAY

Film spectators understand that the filmed events on-screen represent a constructed version of reality. However, we derive our enjoyment of a film by suppressing this understanding, telling ourselves, consciously or not, that we should pretend that the filmed reality is a version of a reality that we occupy. "The mode of 'Let's Pretend' allows individuals in a species to try out behavior without the consequences of the real situation."[57] Beyond experimenting with alternative behaviors, play also provides a space to use and train important skills for survival. One thinks of playing as physical activity where those survival skills are most thoroughly exercised (running, jumping, dodging, etc. as a means to defend oneself if need be). However play encompasses cognitive operations such as imagination (or creating a cognitive flexibility), problem-solving abilities, and hypothesis forming, as well.

Play is the actualization of a desire. We do not play because there is a cognitive or behavioral flexibility that needs to be exercised, we play for enjoyment.

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[57] Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion*, 114

Indeed, "humans find ourselves with not only the capacity to play, but an active disposition to play."[58] Anderson also notes that play is part of an effort by human beings to maintain optimal arousal of the brain. The level of the brain's arousal is indicative to the level of its performance. If under-stimulated, the brain will seek to augment the environment to raise the level of arousal; if bored in a meeting or class, one doodles, for example. Similarly, if over-stimulated the brain seeks a form of escape, paying attention only to particular aspects of the stimulation. As a result, humans tend to seek the maintenance of the brain's arousal at this optimal level, and certain types of stimulation are more effective at this than others

Play is one of the ways in which we stimulate our mind to achieve an optimal arousal. Film is another means to that same end. Like play, film consumption is an activity that audiences enter into voluntarily, seeking some form of pleasure from the moviegoing experience. It is also an activity that exercises abilities that are crucial for survival. When we watch films we are constantly challenged to recognize objects and place them within a specific context, order perceptual information within larger cognitive constructs, form hypotheses about intentions based on behavioral observation, and recognize the simulation of reality.

Film viewing is a form of play that is entirely cognitive, though. The parameters of our actual viewing experience[59] coupled with an inherent understanding that the images we see are representations, ensures that spectators do not attempt to physically interact with the on-screen images. As a result, one aspect of play absent from film viewing is a link to motor skill development. A more

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[58] Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion,* 116

[59] In a theater, on a couch, and so on

precise simulated corollary to play is video games. Open-world, 3D video games exercise many of the same cognitive operations as film viewing. We are asked to form hypotheses based on motion (how does the character I control respond if I move him in this way?), motivation (how does the character respond to other automata in the game world?), and the rules of the in-game world (do the physical laws of the game world allow my character to leap from rooftop to rooftop?). Video games require the action of the user in order for the underlying narrative to proceed. "Video games [provide…] the full simulation of our basic first-person 'story' experience because they allow 'the full experiential flow' by linking perceptions, cognitions, and emotions with first-person actions."[60] The user, linking their motor cortex, muscles, and audiovisual attention, manipulate characters and the game world in such a way that opens the story world for further exploration and narrative continuation.

When the game *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* opens the player is introduced to the main character, CJ Johnson, as he returns to his childhood home in Los Santos after learning of his mother's death. In the opening stages of the game, CJ is weak, poor, and unarmed. It is only through the completion of the game's main missions (and continuation of the primary narrative, which is the restoration of CJ's neighborhood and gang to prominence) and other side undertakings that CJ gains character and strength points, changing him both physically and the way in which he is able to interact with others in the story world. Similarly, as the game begins your ability to explore the game world is restricted to a few locations within Los

[60] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 132

Santos. However as the player completes missions the game unlocks additional areas in the city[61], and as the player completes the narrative gameplay it is revealed that the complete game world is significantly larger than it appears in the beginning with narrative missions bringing the main character to four distinct regions (three different cities and a rural divider between them).

Traditionally, the role of recounting a story lies with the storyteller,[62] with video games that power is with the player. Though it seems a simple enough observation, one is not forced to move the narrative of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* forward if one is not inclined to do so. It is entirely possible to play out any number of scenarios within the gameworld that have nothing to do with the overarching narrative or mini-missions that are determined by the game's creators. It is possible to engage with the game like this ad infinitum, neither time nor narrative need to progress. The temporality of the open world video game is unencumbered by a relationship to narrative, leaving only a world open for the player's exploration.

Exploring the game world, and interacting with it to make the narrative move forward, necessitates a skill set that is not needed when engaging with less active modes of narrative. The viewer of a film only needs to activate general cognitive skills,[63] but the video game player, "needs to possess a series of specific skills to 'develop' the story, from concrete motor skills and routines to a series of planning

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[61] Players can unlock different restaurants, car shops, gyms, and other stores by completing side missions or other mini-games that one can find by exploring the game world

[62] Film director, playwright, author, or what have you

[63] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 139

skills."[64] These skills can, and often are, developed by playing the game. The repetition of action trains the player to best interact with the video game in order to proceed.

Though different in the execution, film viewers are also trained in how to best interact with a text. If a filmmaker uses a style or formal element that is unfamiliar, the film might repeat the element several times over, or adhere to that formal irregularity as the audience catches up with the deviation from film form. A film does not need to be formally or narratively innovative or unusual for this process to take place, though. Over the course of one's life one sees any number of films. Some of the cognitive processes involved in the process of making meaning out of films are innate, but it is only through the repetition of watching films that these processes are trained to adequately work together to understand the film. The story of the first audiences in a Paris café watching *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* screaming and diving under tables may be apocryphal, but it is an apt metaphor for how we begin the process of training ourselves to view films. Through repetition we come to understand that the image on-screen is not there, it is only a representation; we understand that the people on-screen are only pretending to be characters, and the events did not happen but are part of a story; we begin to differentiate between different types of stories, sorting them into genres based, in part, on the emotional response they elicit; and as we become more adept at identifying stories, we begin to see patterns develop between stories. Grodal argues, "A sophisticated viewer of, say, a tragic Western might see the film as a game, as less

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[64] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 139

real and serious than it appears, because he or she recognizes in it a formal structure consisting of elements that could be repeated in other Westerns."[65] Although Grodal seems to be implying that one need be a sophisticated viewer in order to achieve this familiarity with film and film narrative, one need only think of a conversation between any two common moviegoers that proceeds along the lines of, "film X reminds me of film Y," to realize that the acknowledgement of repeated formal or narrative structures across films is common practice. In fact, because a film's form and narrative structure tends to follow the formulas of its given genre, audiences become increasingly attuned to these repetitive story beats or formal tropes. It is the deviation from these formulas that constitute a form of game playing.

It is those moments cognitively recognized as deviations from the film as a whole that stand out as excess. In Howard Hawks' 1959 Western *Rio Bravo*, a single scene interrupts the narrative of the film. The film's fabula and syuzhet move along at more or less the same pace. There are no flashbacks, unexplained ellipses, or uncommon narrative techniques The film is a relatively straightforward narrative about four men guarding a killer in a jailhouse while his cattle baron brother tries to bust him out. All of the action in the film revolves around that goal: keeping the prisoner from being freed. But in the middle of the film, after the resolution of a subplot revolving around the character Dude's (Dean Martin) drinking problem, the narrative comes to a halt and makes way for a musical number. Martin and one of the film's other stars, Ricky Nelson, are in the jailhouse and Martin, apropos of

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[65] Grodal, *Embodied Visions*, 173

nothing in particular, begins to sing the song "My Rifle, Pony, and Me." Nelson accompanies him with a guitar and Walter Brennan on harmonica, while John Wayne, playing the sheriff, stands by watching. After the first song is finished, Nelson takes the lead on the song, "Cindy," before the sing-a-long finishes and they begin to plan their next tactical move.

It is an odd scene for a number of reasons. First, despite the presence of two musical stars in the film's cast, it is odd to find a musical number in the diegesis of a Western unless that Western is also understood to be a musical like the singing cowboy films starring Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, or Tex Ritter. It also halts the narrative momentum just as the tension is ramping up for the final shootout. Finally it serves no additional purpose like character development or establishing the setting, mood or tone for the film, either. In fact, it disrupts the mood that has already been established. It begs the question: what is this scene doing, why is it in the film, and how do we make sense of it as it stands outside the narrative?

Traditionally, we understand musical numbers as being distinct from a film's narrative. Laura Mulvey writes about the opposition between narrative and spectacle, while Tom Gunning writes about that between narrative and attraction.[66] While a song and dance sequence might interrupt the narrative of a musical film, there is a tacit understanding that these sequences are not meant to be understood, or even viewed, with the goal of making them fit within the flow of the narrative. Mulvey notes that even though mainstream film combines spectacle and narrative, the musical song-and-dance numbers break the flow of narrative in order to present

[66] In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and "The Cinema of Attractions," respectively

the spectacle unencumbered by the distraction of narrative. Mulvey notes the spectacle is the female body on display as much as it is the musical number itself, and she cites two sequences that are not dissimilar from the songs in *Rio Bravo*: Marilyn Monroe's entrance in *The River of No Return* (Preminger, 1954) and Lauren Bacall's song in the hotel in *To Have and Have Not* (Hawks, 1949).

Rio Bravo does not have spectacle in the way that Mulvey is talking about. There are no women, only the marketability of two singing celebrities, so we must still reconcile how the scene functions in the film. I suggest that we make sense of the scene, and engage with narrative excess in general, in much the same way that we engage with an open world video game. Like an open world video game, when a scene or sequence is not burdened with the responsibility of advancing a narrative thread, the spectator is encouraged to engage with the scene differently than he would if the scene was critical for understand the film's narrative. There is not the pressure to decode shots, interpret character actions, or make hypotheses about what will follow the sequence with which one is immediately presented. One is afforded the ability to explore, to the limited degree that one can explore, the diegetic space, seeking out details and gestures that might have otherwise escaped attention. For example, a stovepipe, wood burning fireplace sits behind Ricky Nelson in this scene. Walter Brennan is sitting on a chair in front of a map of Texas. These are all details that are, presumably, visible in a number of shots inside the jailhouse, but it is only when the narrative comes to a halt, when one is not forced to pay attention to actions related to story, that we are able to notice these details. The diegetic space is opened up for these alternative viewing practices, and frees the

spectator to engage the image in any way they please. While we can watch movies for details at any time, it is only in these moments of excess that the film's construction encourages that mode of spectatorship.

Similarly, the spectator's relationship to the film's temporality is unstable in these moments. In a video game, when one explores the game world there is a freedom from time in the game's diegetic openness. It moves neither forward nor back, at least in terms of the narrative. There is a gesture in some games toward the passing of time as the sun rises and falls, but in general if the narrative does not move forward, neither does time. There is no change in the game world. Within the narrative excess of this scene in *Rio Bravo*, one is overcome with a similar feeling. Although there is the looming threat outside the walls of the jail, and one that has a sort of time clock associated with it,[67] the scene feels displaced from time. It is not part of the narrative, per se, even though it shares the same diegetic world as the narrative. As a result, it feels as though time neither moves forward nor backward. The diegetic temporality of the film simply stops, making way for a scene that is displaced from that temporality.[68] Temporality will be addressed in the following chapter, so more will be said on it then.

Finally, this sequence calls into question the reality-experience of the film. As the lack of narrative opens up the diegetic space for alternative modes of spectatorship, allowing an audience to explore the space and find details and objects of interest, it stands to reason that once these objects are remarked upon one begins to think of them as real objects in a real room that is occupied by real people. The

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[67] The sheriff and his deputies are *waiting* for the marshal to arrive

play factor, and ability to discern differences between reality and fiction, does not break down, per se, but is certainly disrupted. It calls forward the indexicality of the film image, and lays bare the image on-screen as the signifier of a real object. Similarly, the actors become more than simply their characters. Colorado is at once a young gunslinger in a remote Texas town, and also Ricky Nelson, an actor playing the part of a fiction. In this way, the excess narrative is more than just an interruption of narrative, it is also an interruption of the reality-perception needed to maintain the veil of fiction and keep film spectatorship as a game.

"From 1982 to 1984 I worked in one of the first video stores in Manhattan, and I will never forget the shock I felt when a customer asked me for 'something big and plush that I can really sink into, like the *Godfather* movies.' I realised [sic] right then and there that home video was opening up a new form of film appreciation antithetical to any I had ever seen, in which film could be used as a self-prescriptive therapy device. Home video had made each film into a consumer item and potential fetish object which could be stopped, started, reversed, repeated or abandoned at will. This was the beginning of a whole new world, the world we live in today."

--Kent Jones

CHAPTER III. Excess and Cinephilia as a Viewing Practice

The following chapter will address cinephilia and the cinephilic moment. Put another way, it will address the spectator's relationship and response to instances of excess. As such, it seems as though this is the best place to place an intervention of my own experience of excess and cinephilia. The examples that I use are culled from my own experiences, but because one's response to instances of excess are so personally determined, my own examples should be seen as just that: illustrative of how the cinephilic moment can manifest. This is by no means the only way one can experience cinephilia and excess in the cinema.

Forty minutes into Paul Thomas Anderson's two-and-a-half-hour long paean to the San Fernando Valley of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the pornography industry that it nourished, Dirk Diggler (Mark Whalberg), arrives at the house of pornographic filmmaker Jack Horner (Burt Reynolds). Jack invites the young man, who is fleeing an overbearing mother, into his home, which is in the midst of

preparing for a pool party. In a single shot, Jack leads Diggler around the back patio, introducing him to the actors and crew that are in attendance, before finally introducing him to Reed Rothchild (John C. Reilly), Diggler's main compatriot for the remainder of the film. Maintaining the same unbroken shot, the two quickly develop a rapport as they one-up each other over how much they can squat, discuss movies, and talk about "being in the movies." A fade indicating some passage of time jumps the film forward several hours, the party now in full swing. In another long take, the camera follows a series of characters around the party, dropping into and out of conversations as it floats around the soiree. The camera's movement always motivated by one character in the conversation exiting, before settling on another group of characters. The audience is introduced to Buck Swope (Don Cheadle) and Becky Barnett (Nicole Ari Parker), reintroduced to Roller Girl (Heather Graham) and Amber Waves (Julianne Moore) in a different, more domestic setting, and given a glimpse of the drug-saturated milieu the rest of the film occupies. The shot, inspired by a similar one in Mikahil Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba* (1964), is arresting, but for me the most interesting aspect is seeing characters as they navigate the party in the background. One moment in particular stands out. As the camera halts on Buck and Becky sitting at a plastic table in front of the pool, the diving board is visible in the background and Reed climbs onto it. He stands on the board, motionless, staring out at the water for a distractingly long pause, before walking to the end of the board, idly bouncing up and down, and retreating away from the pool. Back at the other end of the board he holds his arms away from his sides and holds the pose, then swings them forward, walks purposefully to the end board, hopping once before he

leaps into the pool. As Reed splashes into the pool, Buck stands up from the table and walks away, the camera following him. but it is not clear what movement initiated the movement, Buck standing up or Reed jumping off the diving board. Every time I watch this scene I cannot watch anything but Reed on the diving board. It is a small detail, but it is one that pulls my focus away from everything else going on in that moment.

DEFINING CINEPHILIA AND THE CINEPHILIC MOMENT

In general the term cinephilia, and by extension cinephile, has been deployed as a means to describe a deep love for the cinema. It implies a number of assumptions about those that wear the badge of cinephile, or profess to the obsessive relationship with cinema that engenders cinephilia. The cinephile is, at once, perceived as a snob, idealist, and old-fashioned.

At a May, 1995 conference organized by Antoine de Baecque[69] and Theirry Frémaux[70] cinephilia was defined primarily as a method of *watching* films. They went on to say the secondary role is one of writing and speaking about them, diffusing a cinephilic discourse into the moviegoing public, but practices of spectatorship was the primary means of defining the cinephile. “Cinephilia is a system of cultural organization that engenders rituals around the gaze, speech, and the written word,” they wrote in a statement for the conference. “Here, undoubtedly, is the very identity of the practice: once ‘bitten by the cinema’ […] everything comes

[69] A French critic and historian who focuses on the history of cinephilia
[70] Director of the Institut Lumiere and the Cannes Film Festival

to depend on how one sees films [...] and how, finally, the films become the site of symbolic battles through competing attitudes and writings."[71] In this sense cinephilies (and cinephilia) is defined as much by their response to films as to the films themselves. While a master filmmaker might enthrall a cinephile, that same cinephile might just as easily come under the spell of a B-movie filmmaker whose films offer a glimpse at something thrillingly original. This tendency is as true during the so-called heyday of cinephilia in the 1950s and 1960s, when Joseph H. Lewis and Samuel Fuller held as much sway as Bergman and Renoir, as it is today, where online forums extol the virtues of Tony Scott and Apitchatpong Weerasethakul in the same breath.

This emphasizes another key attribute of the cinephile: one who is possessed by the films and filmmakers cast aside. "The 'definitivie essence of cinephilia,' de Baecque and Frémaux explain, is organized around 'a culture of the discarded,' one that is inclined 'to find intellectual coherence where none is evident, to eulogize the non-standard and the minor.'"[72]

Excess and cinephilia are connected in a very direct way: the cinephilic moment. Paul Willeman has noted that in the writings of cinephiles "there exists a recurring preoccupation with an element of the cinematic experience 'which resists, which escapes existing networks of critical discourse and theoretical frameworks."[73] This preoccupation tends to center on fleeting details within the film image, not unlike what Roland Barthes describes when talking about the fluttering of a long

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[71] Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History: or the Wind in the Trees* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), 6
[72] Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*, 7
[73] Keathley, *Cinephilia and History*, 30

veil as it lightly kisses a stone floor in *Ivan the Terrible.* These moments are not choreographed to be noticed, certainly not dwelt upon, and at times give the impression of being entirely accidental. Willeman articulates these cinephilic moments as the realization that "what is being seen is in excess of what is being shown […] it is produced *en plus*, in excess or in addition, almost involuntarily."[74] The articulation of the excessive moments is found throughout the writing of cinephiles and non-cinephilic contemporary writers. In Willeman's article he describes a fascination with a toy as it is about to fall of a table in Sirk's *There's Always Tomorrow*. His co-author, Australian scholar Noel King talks about his attention being drawn to Eva Maria Saint and the number of times she tries to get her gloves back from Marlon Brando in a famous scene in *On the Waterfront.* New York Observer critic Manny Farber has a famous quip that "one of the fine moments in 1940's film is no longer than a blink: Bogart, as he crosses the street from one bookstore to another, looks up at a sign."[75] James Naremore notes the color of Cary Grants socks as he flees the attacking crop duster in *North by Northwest*, and I relayed my most cherished cinephilic moment earlier in this thesis: in *Casablanca* when Bogart rights a fallen sherry glass. The cinephilic moment is a type of excess that is highly personal and idiosyncratic. This is not excess that is evident to all, but an excess defined by one's own relationship to a particular cinematic image.

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[74] Paul Willeman, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 237
[75] Keathley, *Cinephilia and History,* 31

HISTORY AND CINEPHILIA

Writing, and thinking, about excess in cinema has a long history that predates its incorporation into the academy with the structuralists and post-structuralists in the 1970s. As Tom Gunning has shown, much of the impetus for early filmgoers was not to consume narrative. Indeed, narrative was a tertiary concern of the majority of films from the early cinema period, as Gunning notes that "actuality films outnumbered fictional films until 1906."[76] Instead, audiences of these films simply wanted to see something move. The attraction of film was in their "ability to *show* something,"[77] be it the disappearance of a man in the early work of Meliés or the arrival of a train at La Ciotat or a travelogue actuality around the New York City harbor. Christian Keathley has noted that early cinemagoers "were often delighted less by the scenes being staged for their amusement than by the fact that, in the background, the leaves were fluttering in the wind."[78]

As film transformed into an almost exclusively storytelling medium, alternative approaches to spectatorship developed that attempted to reclaim this initial fascination with the image beyond its narrative implications. As I recounted in the introduction, Surrealists were incessantly searching for new ways of viewing—ways of seeing through the images on-screen to reveal a truth underlying what was being presented. In addition to their attempts to bring the unconscious to the surface through activities like automatic writing, Surrealism was interested in reinvigorating the quotidian objects of everyday life with an intensity that had been

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[76] Gunning, Tom. "The Cinema of Attractions," *Attractions Reconsidered*, p. xxx
[77] Ibid.
[78] Keathley *Cinephilia and History,* 8

dulled by their everyday use. That impulse is clear in their viewing practices, as utmost attention focused on the objects in an effort to bring out their ineffable qualities when filmed. What they called the "fundamental crisis of the object" is solved, to a degree, by recontextualizing the object within a filmed image.

Led by writers Ricciotto Cannudo, Louis Delluc, René Clair, René Schwob, Germain Dullac, and, most notably, Jean Epstein the Impressionists[79] were representative of a flourishing film culture in France in the 1920s. Their aim was similar to the Surrealists insofar as both were viewing films hoping for the film to capture and reveal that which is mysterious and extraordinary in ordinary objects, utilizing the term *photogénie* to describe these moments. As David Bordwell explains, "the concept of *photogénie* grows out of an attempt to account for the mysteriously alienating quality of cinema's relation to reality. According to the impressionists, on viewing an image […] we experience a certain otherness about the content."[80] Crucially for the Impressionists, it was in the familiar that one was most likely to confront instances of *photogénie*, and it is because of this familiarity that "the image's material seems to be revealed in a fresh way."[81] It was an attempt to describe that which is uniquely, ineffably cinematic.

For Epstein, who was the primary proponent of *photogénie*, the phenomenon had two requirements. The first was motion. Movement within the frame signaled, and emphasized, the seamless flow of space and time that undergirds the cinematic appratus' representation. Even close-ups required some sort of motion, as Epstein

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[79] The concurrent and ideologically similar, though tacitly oppositional, movement to the Surrealist.
[80] Bordwell, David. "French Impressionist Cinema,"
[81] Ibid.

noted that "the close-up, the keystone of cinema, is the maximum expression of the *photogénie* of movement […] The face alone doesn't unravel its expressions but the head and lens moving together or apart."[82]

Epstein's second requirement for *photogénie* is the revelation of the personality in the thing being reproduced. He argues that, "personality is the spirit visible in things and people, their heredity made evident, their past become unforgettable, their future already present. Every aspect of the world, elected to life by the cinema, is so elected only on condition that is has a personality of its own."[83] The sentiment is similar to those found in Surrealism. What the Surrealists framed as reinvigorating commonplace objects the Impressionists positioned as looking for the personality of an object.

Ultimately, though, what unites the two ethos is their desire to encapsulate the excess of cinema through alternative viewing practices—looking into the image to find a hidden, elusive, emotional meaning behind them. The similarities end there, though. As I mention in the introduction, the Surrealists explicitly tie together the visual pleasures derived from excess to that excesses dissociation from narrative as a whole. For the Surrealists part of the pleasure of excess is in pulling it out of its narrative constraints, allowing the excessive material to undermine the codes of classical film spectatorship. Therefore it is tied only to ways of seeing and spectatorship.

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[82] Jean Epstein, "Magnification," in *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 236
[83] Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*" in *French Film Theory and Criticism, 1907-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 317

The Impressionists, on the other hand, saw *photogénie* as an activity that extended beyond a viewing practice (though it definitely was that) and became a theoretical exercise—an investigation into the ontology of film. *Photogénie* was promoted as the "law of cinema," by Delluc and "the purest expression of cinema" by Epstein.[84] In an attempt to define Impressionism and Impressionist writing, David Bordwell notes that the inconsistencies in their writing makes it hard to articulate specific theoretical positions aside from a "broad position known as idealism."[85]

As Bordwell implies, the cohesiveness of their theoretical work left much to be desired. However, the impact of the Impressionists on film culture in France cannot be overstated. As a group they arranged screenings, organized film societies, produced their own films, and, crucially, wrote film criticism.

As I mentioned earlier, the act of writing is a crucial component to the practice of cinephilia. The group of *Cahiers* critics of the 1950s and 1960s gained notoriety through their writings as cinephiles long before any fame as filmmakers. At the time, writing about these cinephilic moments necessitated both a connoisseurship, and ideally the ability to see the films more than once. An ability that was hindered by the spotty availability of the films. Even a popular film, one would not expect to be able to see it more than a handful of times before it was replaced with another film. As a result, writing tended to take on a reverent, almost religious tone when discussing films. These were not just screenings, these were events. Similarly, one wonders if the cinephilic moment, or *photogénie*'s rise is as a

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[84] Willeman, *Looks and Frictions,* 124
[85] Bordwell, David. "French Impressionist Cinema: Film Culture, Film Theory and Film Style," p. 112

result of only being able to see a film once. Writer Ulric Neisser has noted that events, like seeing a film, are remembered, but arriving at a total truth of the event is difficult because what really happens is too reach for one's memory to preserve. As a result, we remember events in a way that is accurate with respect to some overall characteristics of the situation. Attached to these episodes-as-remembered are specific mental images, the function of which is not to provide specific information, but serve as an illustration of the memory. The color of Cary Grant's socks stand out to some, who use that memory as a stand-in for the whole experience of seeing the film. What this points to is not the unimportance of the cinephilic moment, but a postulation that the rise of the cinephilic moment in critical writing is tied to film consumption in this historical moment. It stands to reason that if one is able to revisit a film eight or ten times the relationship with the excessive would be altered, if for no other reason than it is normalized. One gets accustomed to seeing a moment of excess.

What I would term second-wave cinephilic writing, that of critics like Kent Jones, Adrian Martin, and Nicole Berenz, comes from critics born in 1960, coming of age around the time of the first appearance of the VCR and home video recording. Two momentous changes occurred simultaneously. First, the world of cinema was opened. Where once one could only read about the films of Ozu or Kurosawa, they were now available on video. This opened the door to the exploration of world cinema in a way that was never before possible—a wider world of cinephilic moments were waiting to be discovered. Concurrent with this was the ability to manipulate the film. When sitting in a movie theater the film could go only one way:

forward. With the rise of the VCR also came the rise of the manipulation of the flow of the film. One could pause on a single frame, rewind to watch a scene twice, or skip forward to find a specific scene in the film. As a result, writing could become more detail oriented. Writers could discover gems hidden in the background of scenes that once they would have skipped past. It was not just the new abundance of previously unavailable films that was fodder for the discovery of cinephilic moments. It was any film played in a VCR for an audience that was receptive to seeing the excess that might have swept by on previous viewings.

CHAPTER IV: Excess and the Destabilization of Cinematic Temporality

There was a mall in the small city near where I grew up. It was a small mall, but it had the video arcade and movie theater and department store that one associates with a small town mall. In the middle of the 1990s the mall closed, the stores moved to a newly built mall across town, and the movie theater closed down for good. A few years later the mall was demolished and the property converted into box stores.

I was eight years old when stores began their crosstown move, but I still have vague memories of what it looked like. I was thinking about the mall recently, so I did a quick search for photos online, curious to see how well my memory held up to the passage of time. There were none to be found. A Google image search turned up nothing, and a glance through the local newspaper's photo archive was equally fruitless. It was as though the entire property had disappeared into the morass of time and locations lost to an overmatched memory.

It seemed that way until that place was rescued from the edge of oblivion by a chance encounter with a film. Situated right next to the mall was a grocery store which local filmmaker David Giancola used for a brief scene in his 1994 micro-budget independent film *Time Chasers*. The film itself isn't particularly good; a confusing time travel mish-mash with an imagination that succumbs to its meager budget, but the surrounding mall that I had been searching for appears in the corners of the insert shots of this one scene. I had forgotten that the siding was a dark brown, and was convinced that the roof was green when it was, in fact, painted

the same color as the siding. By capturing these images from this time in history, by bottling time, this most unsuspecting film was my assistant in the retrieval of those details. It kept them safe for me. And it was by exploring the frame, by trying to find the excessive aspects of the film, that I found them.

The matter of time and temporality as it relates to film is one of the enduring issues of cinema and film theory. Part of the attraction of early cinema was seeing movement captured, but implicit in that attraction is a fascination with time, corked and able to be replayed whenever one was so inclined. In each movement there is a change in the spatial relationship from instant to instant, and therefore one can perceive the passage of time. French philosopher Henri Bergson positions time, and the perception of time, as the result of change. He writes that

> Time is invention, or it is nothing at all.' Nature is change, the continual elaboration of the new, a totality being created in an essentially open process of development without any preestablished [sic] model. 'Life progresses and endures in time.'"[86]

He did not, however, credit cinema with representing the truth of time or movement. Bergson contends that movement occurs in the transition between states. Using Zeno's paradoxes as a jumping off point, Bergson argues that "Zeno's mistake lies in assuming that what is true of the trajectory or line is true of the trajectory or line is true of the movement, but the trajectory simply subtends the movement—it does not define it. Movement takes place in the interval."[87]

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[86] D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 20

[87]Mary-Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 174

Movement takes place in the change of states. Therefore, Bergson approached cinema as a medium made up of individual still images, none of which have anything to do with motion.

Bergson's position is problematic for Giles Deleuze who uses Bergson as the framework for *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. Deleuze is invested in the idea that cinematic movement is *real* movement, not a facsimile or illusion of movement. Similarly, he allies himself with Bergson's claim that movement and time are, essentially, irreducible continuities.[88] Where he breaks from Bergson, though, is where he situates the movement of cinema. Instead of situating movement within the apparatus, he situates it in relation to the spectator,

> [F]or the spectator, movement is immediately given in an 'intermediate image.' The spectator does not see the succession of photograms but, instead, an intermediate image, which is a 'mobile section' not an immobility. This mobile section is not the illusion of movement but its reality; it is imbued with qualitative change and duration. [89]

Conceiving of time and movement in tandem is a common approach to both issues. Movement is often portrayed as the embodiment of time passing. Deleuze, however, attempts to separate the two, referring to time as the "number of movement."[90] Time is a measurement of movement, and sometimes it is beholden to this movement, while in other instances it is entirely independent.

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[88] Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time,* 177
[89] Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time,* 176
[90] Giles Deleuze. *Cinema 2: the Time-Image* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 35

The basic schism that separates Deleuze's two tomes on cinema relate to this very issue. In *Cinema 1*, Deleuze addresses classical cinema (loosely defined as cinema through the end of World War II) as one which subordinates time to movement in a literal, bodily sense, but also in a narrative sense. He refers to the two, bi-furcated halves of cinematic history as the *movement-image* and *time-image* respectively. The "image" in question is not a reflection, or even conception, of the words to which they are attached. It is instead defined as

> [T]he system of the relationships between its elements, that is, a set of relationships of time from which the variable present only flows […] What is specific to the image, so soon as it is creative, is to make visible, relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present.[91]

The constituent elements of the movement-image, the perception-image, action-image, and affection-image, thus become perceptions, actions, and images in themselves, part of a system of meaning that relates to the movement-image itself, but still freed from ties with human processes of perception and comprehension. As it relates to time, "their distribution certainly does determine a representation of time, but it must be noted that time remains the object of an indirect representation in so far as it depends on montage and derives from movement-images."[92] In contrast, the Time-Image offers a direct representation of time.

The Time-Image is not one that is necessarily an evolution of the Movement-Image. Indeed, Deleuze goes out of his way to observe that there were films of the Time-Image before World War II (Welles, Renoir) and that the Movement-Image

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[91] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi
[92] Deleuze, *Cinema 1,* xi

continues to persist today. He positions the Time-Image as a result of the social, historical, and cultural context from which it emerged in postwar Europe.[93] Films of the Movement-Image proceed through the linkage of logical divisions, "projecting a model of Truth in relation to totality. The noosigns of the movement-image derive from a belief in the possibility of action and stability of Truth."[94] The occurrence of World War II altered the perspective of filmmakers that worked in its shadow, and the films produced in this post-war context changed accordingly. The narratives tend to be dispersive. Linear actions break down and digress toward other, disconnected actions.[95] Because images are not linked by a motivation such as action, the physical space within the image is affected, becoming empty or dissociated from the narrative. "Acts of seeing and hearing replace the linking of images through motor actions pure description replaces referential anchoring."[96] One result of opening of the image, and disconnecting the sensory-motor link, is that it allows time, or what Deleuze calls "a little time in the pure state" to "rise up to the surface to the screen. Time ceases to be derived from the movement, it appears in itself […] the body is […] subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer of time."[97]

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[93] Many of the films and film movements that Deleuze holds up as emblematic of the Time-Image can fall under a broadly defined category of "European Art Cinema." Films like *Germany Year Zero, Voyage to Italy, L'Avventura,* etc. American (Kubrick, Cassavettes, et al.) and Japanese (primarily Ozu) films and filmmakers are mentioned, but they represent a relatively small sample size.
[94] Rodowick, *Giles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 12
[95] Think of *L'Avventura,* where the search for a missing woman dissolves into the story of a love affair between her lover and her best friend
[96] Rodowick, *Giles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 12
[97] Delezue, *Cinema 2*, xi

Mary Ann Doane notes that cinema engages with multiple temporalities, or more precisely multiple temporalities are woven together during out viewing experience of a film. Arguably the most foundational, because without this level one would not be watching the film, is that of the apparatus. Whether one is seeing a film projected from a 35mm film print or spinning on a Blu-Ray player, the temporality of that apparatus is linear, moving continually forward.

Within the text itself, there is the temporality of the diegesis, or "the way in which time is represented by the image."[98] Here Doane is describing the temporality of the moment in the film, and an audiences comprehension of that temporality by cues within the diegetic world.

Finally, Doane sees a temporality in the reception of a film, or the temporality of its spectatorship. It is the temporality of an audience member watching the film, in a given setting, and seeing the images on-screen pass in front of them.

Nearly all of the films discussed in this work thus far[99] have fit into the movement-image mode—both in terms of narrative and in its use of montage to interrupt the purity, to adopt one of Deleuze's descriptors, of time. This is entirely by design.

The concern of this work is in discovering the excess of cinema—and investigating that excess. One reason for using films of the movement-image is that it makes the instances of excess that much more apparent. But when confronted

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[98] Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, 30

[99] *Terminal Station, Indiscretion of an American Wife, Ocean's Twelve, Shadow of a Doubt, Rio Bravo*, and, to a lesser degree, *Boogie Nights*

with excess in films of the Movement-Image, preconceived notions relating to the films' temporality are shaken.

In films of the Movement-Image, the narrative moves to continually address the violence done to the status quo as presented at the narrative's introduction. It is a move to return to restoration of the opening's status quo. Stephen Heath's otherwise useful definition positions narrative action as "a series of elements held in a relation of transformation such that their consecution […] determines a state S_1 different to an initial state S [...] A beginning, therefore, is always a violence, the interruption of the homogeneity of S."[100] The issue I take with the definition is this final point, that the violence is the beginning. To be sure the violence incites a move *away* from S to S_1 and from there, the film concerns itself with a return to S.

If one takes as a given that the Movement-Image is a film style that returns to the homogeneity of S, there is no change at the end. But there is constant change within the diegesis—the very motion to restore homogeneity ensures that activity is constantly occurring to achieve this end; time is passing. It is this diegetic temporality that is ruptured in instances of excess.

Returning to a scene discussed in chapter two, when John Wayne watches Dean Martin and Ricky Nelson sing "My Rifle, My Pony, and Me," in *Rio Bravo* it is a moment that is a disruption of the movement toward resolving the initial violence that disturbed the status quo. As there is no movement toward resolution, it is narratively inert. Nothing is being changed, and therefore time is not moving foreword.

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[100] Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, 136

The scene is remarkable for how completely it gives the impression of being cut off from the narrative and diegetic time that surrounds it. The narrative and temporal relationships to the scene before it are extraordinarily tenuous at best, and while there is a gesture toward temporal continuity between the singing scene and the one that follows it in the hotel, it is a weak connection. This scene could take place at any moment in time. It is temporally un-struck from the film that surrounds it. As a result, it clues the audience into the layers of temporality at play. In viewing a scene play out that is without change, and therefore without time, it highlights the duration of the scene at hand. It makes one aware of how long it is going on.

One of the likely reasons for the scene's inclusion in the film is that two of the biggest singing stars of the 1950s were members of the film's cast. Watching the scene does not subsume their individual personas to that of their characters, it emphasizes their presence in work *beyond* those characters. In this scene the audience is clued into all three layers of Doane's temporality all at once. The audience is aware that Dude is not Dude, he is Dean Martin. Dean Martin is a singer and an actor. He is on a set, in front of a camera in 1954, and the audience is watching this happen for a duration that they can feel because time has stopped. In one scene, excessive to the film as a whole, the audience can feel the duration of the apparatus' temporality. They are clued into the construction of the diegetic temporality as Dean Martin (the Star) supersedes Dude (the character). Similarly, they are aware of their own temporality as a spectator. As one feels the duration of the scene and is aware of the position of Dean Martin as an individual separate from the diegesis, one is also aware that their position as a spectator is separated from

the site of production. One might not be able to escape or alter their own spectatorial temporality, but this scene certainly makes one aware of oneself as they consume the film while also emphasizing the time spent in that consumption. This is a little bit of time in a pure state. The constructed cinematic temporality is ruptured, suddenly giving way to an experience of real world temporality.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction I made mention of Eugenie Brinkema's lament that excess was fallen by its inability to ask compelling questions. It is a disappointment that I share, because our understanding of narrative and diegesis, our perception of time and temporality, the limits of filmed reality, and our own personal response to film can be engaged with by looking at excess. The inquiry stopped at a definition and did not both to continue asking questions of excess. Two damning assumptions were made: that excess could not be encapsulated in the discourse of film studies, and excess was an end point of inquiry.

When Roland Barthes wrote "The Third Meaning," I believe that his intention was to pose a question: what is excess doing? How is it functioning? He termed excess the obtuse meaning. It may not be readily understood, but for Barthes there is meaning in this excess. His work has the tone of an essay that wants to start a conversation, not end it.

Similarly, my goal with this work was to reintroduce a theoretical term that has fallen by the wayside and reconsider its applicability. Instead of, as Kristin Thompson says, "do no more than indicate," how can we use excess as a lens through which one can approach issues ranging from spectatorship to temporality to cognition. There are some immediately obvious problems with the term *excess*, and many of those problems stem from the instability of the term's definition. However, one possible solution that this work points toward is not necessarily conceptualizing of excess as a term, but instead as a discourse.

In the introduction I was reticent to offer a single, encompassing definition because no matter what definition I settled on would be inherently unsatisfying. Throughout this work excess has been deployed as a term that articulates an audience's relationship to the cinematic image, an unstable relationship to filmed realism and temporality, the undermining of classic Hollywood cinema, an alternative mode of spectatorship, a highly subjective and personal fascination with an individual shot, a star persona that captures attention, and an aspect of film that influences how we cognitively approach film.

Though it is possible for excess, as a term in and of itself, to be all of those things, the major conclusion I arrive at is that *excess* is a discourse within which all of these operations are happening. Excess is the way in which one can discuss the aspects of film that fall beyond the theoretical frameworks within which film is traditionally approached. It is, paradoxically, a discourse through which we can engage with what escapes critical discourse.

Reaching this conclusion is not the potential dead end that Thompson, McGowan, and Brinkema point to in the beginning. One of the benefits of approaching excess as a discourse instead of a term in need definition is that it pushes beyond the simple pointing out, or articulation of excess in one form or another. It avoids the creation of a taxonomy of excessive moments, but can instead take those instances of excess and put them into dialog with other instances of excess, or other methods of approaching a form of cinematic excess.

Similarly, having a wider range of potential definitions of excess, or ways or articulating that which is excessive in the cinematic image, allows one to interrogate

excess from a variety of different positions, and ask a wider range of questions. Are instances of excess tied to specific historical moments? Well, perhaps one could look at films from the close of the studio era and investigate whether there are excessive moments or sequences in those films that undermine the classical Hollywood cinematic system. What do those moments of excess say about that point in time in American filmmaking?

Excess was cast aside because the utility of it, as a term, was thought to be limited. I am not so sure. It certainly does not fit easily within most discursive frameworks in film studies, but I suggest that is where the benefit of excess, and thinking about excess in the cinema, lies.

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