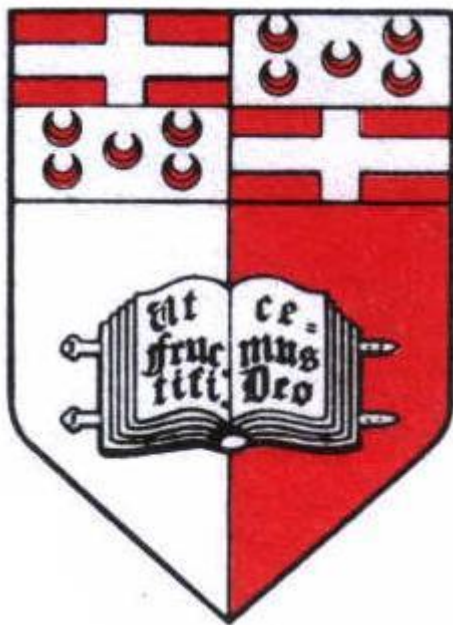# Filmic Immersion: An Analysis of Technique and Perspective in Contemporary Cinema

A thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

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Abstract

This work discusses filmic immersion in light of the three types of immersion distinguished by the theorist Marie-Laure Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001): temporal immersion, spatial immersion, and emotional immersion, with a chapter devoted to each topic. Seven filmic texts serve as case studies to support the arguments, namely: *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999), *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), *Big Fish* (Burton 2003), *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Fincher 2008), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry 2004), *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010), and *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell 1945).

The first chapter introduces the specific theories and the terminology applied throughout the study, key among which are Peter Verstraten's application of *focalisation* and *filmic narration*, and Gerard Genette's levels of narration. The second chapter concerns emotional immersion and how this can be both effected and affected by cinematography.

The third chapter discusses spatial immersion and the various roles played by the screen space in advancing the plot and psychologically anchoring the viewer in the diegetic world, while the fourth chapter analyses the effect of temporal immersion and discusses the cognitive processes affected while watching a film.

The concluding movement argues that filmic immersion results from an in imbalance in the cognitive processes outlined in Chapter Four, and proposes that an effective analysis of the process requires a further type of immersion – sensory immersion – be distinguished.

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Dedication

Finally, I give my heartfelt thanks to my darling wife Julie who, so shortly after the birth of our daughter, instilled me with the belief that I could commence academic studies while holding down a fulltime job. Her surrender of much of what little free time she had, while also contributing most of my share of household and parenting duties, coupled with her continued toleration of my many foibles, is the reason I have managed to complete this course and retain my sanity. It is to her, and our daughter, Zoe, that I dedicate this work.

Filmic Immersion: An Analysis of Technique and Perspective in Contemporary Cinema

Contents

Chapter One

Literature Review

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the different ways in which narration in contemporary film instigates a level of psychoemotional engagement with a filmic text, typically termed "immersion," which Janet Murray (1999: 98) defines as 'a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water [it describes] the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality.' She furthers that, if attained, this state 'takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus.'

While this subject has been discussed at some length since the turn of the millennium, academic focus has been dedicated primarily to applying the theory to literature and new media, while filmic immersion has often served as a footnote to the broader study of the topic. The aim of this study is to compensate this lacuna in film criticism by applying the theories of immersion to seven filmic texts which illustrate the various facets of the topic under discussion.

From its infancy as a form of mass entertainment, film has been studied as an art and as a science. As early as 1916, in *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, the psychologist Hugo Munsterberg wrote about the effect a film's cinematography and editing had upon a viewer, describing how the relatively new plastic art 'obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world' (1916: 41). In his study, Munsterberg focuses on how certain techniques employed in films – the use of flashbacks, close-ups, movements in space, and disjointed

continuity – channel the viewer's attention, noting how the same techniques would not work as effectively in other media.

Jean Mitry, whose theories are still referenced by modern scholars, discusses concepts related to the immersive aspect of film spectatorship in *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema* (1998), an abridged version of a study published exclusively in French in 1963. His work introduces many concepts which define aspects of the different levels of engagement with a filmic text, distinguishing some of the mental processes experienced by film viewer.

A cornerstone of Mitry's philosophy is that images shown on film are representative of a real world – one typically recognisable as the same world as that inhabited by the viewer – and that this resemblance to reality is what enables films to so easily draw their viewers into their story-worlds. Furthermore, he argues that everything presented on screen, from the mise-en-scène to the cinematography, is exhibited with the intention of evoking a particular response, and it is these responses which encourage the viewer to engage with the filmic text. This engagement encourages the audience to become what Mitry refers to as 'spectator participators,' who must make sense of the filmic text before them by forming a coherent story from the scenes they are presented with over the course of a narrative (1998: 205).

The levels of participation, he argues, are manifold, but all are central to a spectator's engagement with the text, and that, unlike the reader of a book, who must imagine what is being described, all a film viewer need do to experience the effect of what he terms 'film fascination,' is 'surrender to the images and "live" the represented reality.' This fascination, he argues, once the viewer has succumbed to it, resists regulatory voluntary control and is a

direct result 'of the (hypnotic) relaxation brought on by film' (Mitry 1998: 205). However, seemingly contradictorily, he argues that no matter how fascinated a viewer may be, this fascination is almost always a conscious process, in which the viewer participates willingly, despite the fact that he is equally capable 'at any moment of opting out.' Indeed, Mitry states:

> All the audience member has to do for the image to appear to him as an independent representation, external to him, is detach himself from the action, abandon his interest: he sees the film, but no longer feels anything; he no longer participates (1998: 80):

Further to this, Mitry maintains that the deepest level of engagement with a filmic text is when the viewer, thoroughly engrossed, becomes 'spellbound,' (willingly) surrendering the choice of opting out as, in this state, they can barely distinguish the filmic world from reality. He claims that if a viewer becomes overwhelmed by a filmic text to this extent, 'they become paralysed by its very existence, but this paralysis in no way suspends our capacity for thinking.' Mitry also argues that the viewer's judgement is guided by the intention of the director, who transplants symbolic and signified meanings into scenes, and this influences their reaction to the filmic text (1998: 206). Although the term 'immersion' is never used, this distinction is primarily terminological rather than ideological, and many of the points he raises are central to this thesis.

A contemporary theoriest who has been influential in this field is Marie-Laure Ryan, who devotes an entire monograph, *Narrative as Virtual Reality* (2001), to the study of immersion. Indeed, there are a number of similarities between the stages of immersion Ryan identifies and Mitry's work in filmic narration, despite their differences in focus and the four decades

which separate the two studies. Furthermore, while Mitry's work discusses all aspects of film photography and spectatorship, Ryan focuses upon the immersive effectiveness of written and digital media. She specifically delineates different levels of immersion in a *written* text: 'Imaginative involvement', 'entrancement' and 'addiction' (2001: 98-99). So, while many of Mitry's terms focus on the visual process of the film going experience, much of Ryan's study concerns turning words into worlds. Consequently, she focuses upon the power of the written word and its effect on the imagination, and how the reader is encouraged to participate in the immersion process by visualising the scene in their mind's eye.

Unlike a novel, filmic narration requires a blend of cinematographic techniques and technical processes, so the viewer is not required to visualise the narrative space for themselves, nor imagine what its inhabitants look like. The visual data is provided by the medium, often in saturating detail. So, while a film is not giving of all story information – thereby leaving the viewer to piece the elements they are presented with into a comprehensible story over the course of the narrative – what the viewer need not do is create images, as these are presented directly by the medium. This vital distinction was among the foremost considerations when utilising Ryan's theories in this thesis.

Ryan covers many aspects of the immersion process and its relationship to printed and electronic media in depth, and these observations shall serve as the cornerstone to much of this thesis. In *Virtual Reality* she differentiates between three distinct types of immersion, which shall be discussed over the course of this work: emotional immersion: 'the response to character,' spatial immersion, 'the response to setting,' and temporal immersion 'the response to plot' (2001: 121). Further to these, Ryan now identifies a fourth type: epistemic

immersion, which is concerned with 'the desire to know,' and outlined in her essay *From Playable Games to Narrative Stories* (2009). However, it is within the scope of this study to retain the distinctions Ryan makes in her earlier work, and relate epistemic immersion to aspects of the other types of immersion she distinguishes.

Ryan's distinction between different types of immersion is central to the structure of this thesis, with each of the three central chapters of this work based upon a form of immersion distinguished above. However, as Ryan also points out, no form of immersion is isolated from another or exists in a vacuum, with each triggering, overlaying, or connecting with other types of immersion. Consequently, the distinction between the exact effects of each type of immersion are not clear cut, with each merging into the other.

Regarding the films to which these theories shall be applied, it is notable that while the majority of popular concepts in contemporary film theory were put forward in the last quarter of the previous century, the filmic texts utilised to illustrate examples are usually drawn from canon – classics from the Golden Age which ended around 1960. This study proposes that more contemporary examples should be considered when illustrating a contemporary theory. Resultantly, of the seven films selected as case studies, most were produced since the turn of the Millennium.

Each work was selected for possessing striking characteristics, while still considered "mainstream" – in regard to their distribution and wide release, rather than any thematic-aesthetic considerations – supporting the argument raised by the writers of *Classical Hollywood Cinema,* that Hollywood films may diverge to a point while still remaining on the

acceptable spectrum, stating that 'any complete account of Hollywood filmmaking must recognise deviations from the norm. Hollywood itself [stresses] differentiation as a correlative to standardisation' (Bordwell, Thompson & Staiger 1985: 70). Of the films chosen to examine the concepts under discussion, *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell 1945), a British film from the classical period, has also been included in order to illustrate how techniques to encourage immersion have been in practice for decades.

Approach to Viewing and Terminology

Film theory focuses on how choices made by the filmmakers in the presentation of a filmic text can affect the manner in which a spectator interprets the events presented on screen, and how they react in response. Before discussing the case studies, it is necessary to introduce the terminology which will be used throughout this thesis to describe the way in which the diegetic content is presented. In regard to film narration, the theories and terms adopted throughout this work are based around those introduced by Peter Verstraten in *Film Narratology* (2009).

Verstraten's methodology is dependent on the viewer functioning as a *narratee*, addressed by a filmic text constructed specifically with the narratee in mind. Key to this process is an ever-present *narrative agent* which, unlike a human narrator, is a "function" that conveys story information in a manner specific to the medium of film. Central to Verstraten's argument is the notion that the task of narrating is delegated to three narrative agents: the *visual narrator* is responsible for everything that is depicted on screen, while both diegetic and non-diegetic sound is the responsibility of the *auditive narrator*. These two narrators, he argues, are

regulated by a third: the *filmic narrator* who is ultimately responsible for selecting what a viewer sees and hears over the course of a film (2009: 129). These are the terms which shall be utilised throughout this study. Focus will be primarily placed upon how these concepts can be applied to the study of the texts under examination, as opposed to the authorial intent of any human agent.

However, although this thesis intends to foreground and apply Verstraten's terminology and approach, *Film Narratology* is his sole monograph as an author to date, and the breadth of its content is not sufficient to cover the points raised across the scope of this study. Therefore, a thorough analysis requires that this work be supplemented by that of other theorists. While Verstraten (2009: 9) argues that an entirely new approach is required, as he believes contemporary approaches to the analysis of film narration are 'imprecise,' David Bordwell – a prolific writer whose work can be associated with the Cognitivist school of thought which has asserted a great deal of influence on film theory – has maintained a consistent approach throughout his body of work, published extensively over the past three decades.

One of Bordwell's most cited works, *Narrative in the Fiction Film* (1990) details his theory which, as a consequence of the prevalence of this school of thought, is one of the most widely known in the field of film studies. He argues that the viewer mentally orders and constructs the film's complete *fabula* (or *story*) from the fragments and cues presented over the course of the *narrative*. The order in which the given story segments are shown on screen is termed the *sjuzhet*, or plot. Although these terms are adopted from the Russian Formalists, and widely used in film and media studies, the notion that the filmic text cues the viewer is

widely attributed to Bordwell and is a widely applied, but divisive, topic in contemporary film theory.

Further to this, Bordwell has also written extensively on other aspects of the film production process. Many proposals introduced in his segments of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985) were developed further two decades later in his monograph *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006). Consequently, some of his observations on narration shall be applied at length in parts of this thesis, specifically in regard to how viewers initially engage with filmic texts and his argument that the text cues the viewer via prompts in the narration, as these aspects of Bordwell's theory are entirely compatible with the approach of this study.

However, as cuing the viewer is one of the principle tenets of Bordwell's approach to narrative, his approach to spectatorship diverges significantly in one key area from the approach taken in this study: namely, his assertion that, although the filmic text has a narrator responsible for its construction – the director – the text itself is not narrated *per se*, as neither the film nor the director are addressing the viewer as narratee. Instead, he maintains that the viewer constructs their own interpretation of the story, prompted by the cues in the text (1990: 30). This approach, which is structuralist, has not been accepted by post-structuralist theorists such as Verstraten, who goes as far as accusing him of 'prematurely decapitating his narrative theory' (2009: 6).

Thus, in line with Verstraten's criticism of Bordwell's line of thought, this thesis will adopt the view that it is necessary to examine how each individual filmic text is structured in order to determine the viewer's share and responsibility for interpretation: that, depending upon the

situation, sometimes the filmic narration may be "spoon feeding" the viewer, providing them with all the visual and auditive information they require to construct a complete fabula, while on other occasions the viewer may need to draw their own conclusions, which may or may not be correct. Resultantly, over the course of this thesis, prominence will be given to the theories of Ryan, Verstraten and Mitry, whose theories are both compatible with one another and with the approach adopted over the course of this thesis.

Agents and Focalisation: Who Sees and What is Seen?

Much of the viewer's initial engagement with a filmic text is established (and then encouraged) via the agency of the on-screen protagonist. Ensuring that this development transpires entails that the text provide insight into the lead protagonist's mind-set via visual and aural indicators such as cinematography, computer effects, and voiceover narration. Such filmic devices combine to effect a manner of engagement with the text considered emotional immersion. However, to enable the filmic text to address the viewer at a level which will successfully achieve this level of engagement requires a process known as focalisation.

This term is introduced by Verstraten who adopted it from the work of his compatriot Mieke Bal, the progenitor of much of the theory Verstraten's work is based upon. Bal's theory, however, initially applied only to literature, and Verstraten has adapted it to suit the medium of film. Both theorists maintain that every perspective entails a vision and, consequently, an interpretation. From this stance, everything depicted on screen is subjectified content. So, even a shot termed "objective," is still subjective to the extent that it was selected above another angle or perspective (Bal 2001: 46-47). This approach is entirely compatible with

Mitry's theory, but conflicts with those outlined below introduced by Gérard Genette and Edward Branigan who adopt a structuralist stance.

The subject of this focalisation, the *focaliser*, is the point from whose perspective the object of the narration – the elements within the filmic text, relayed by the narrative agents, detailed above – are viewed. This point of focalisation may lie within an *actant* (or *protagonist*), seen or heard, who exists as an element within the narrative. If such is the case, the character is considered an *internal* (or *embedded*) *focaliser*, while anything on screen which represents either a point-of-view shot, or represents a hallucination or other such image imagined by an onscreen character, is considered *embedded focalisation,* whether or not the perspective it is presented from is internal or external. So, all internal focalisation is also embedded focalisation. Although the effect of this type of focalisation may be most evident in the filmic texts detailing emotional immersion, its covert influence is apparent in all the texts discussed throughout this work.

Alternatively, the focaliser may lie outside the text, in which case the work is considered *externally focalised* (Verstraten 2009: 9-10). In such cases, the unseen focaliser is considered an anonymous agent, 'situated outside the fabula,' (synonymous with the author of a novel) who functions as an external, non-character-bound focalizer (Bal 2001: 49). As no diegetic character in the world depicted on screen typically sees the film camera via whose agency the viewer is watching the action, it is generally assumed to be recording the action from the viewpoint of an external focaliser, who may or may not be considered objective.

Emotional Immersion

The first text which shall be used to illustrate the power of external focalisation is *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999), which concerns events taking place in neighbouring houses in suburban America. Further to demonstrating various types of focalisation, the text also illustrates how the seemingly objective presentation of certain scenes is also a form of focalisation, as each scene has been deemed worthy of inclusion, chosen above another, which supports both Mitry's and Verstraten's arguments. This filmic text shall also be used to contrast the functions of embedded, internal focalisers as narrators and protagonists.

Focalisation may also be auditive, and this text illustrates how voiceover narration may affect a viewer's interpretation of a filmic text, as the commentary may "dilute" the impact of certain key scenes. How such aural focalisation, when coupled with the selective "objectivity" of certain scenes, may affect the viewer's reading of a film, thereby directing their emotions, shall also be discussed.

Black Swan (Aronofsky 2010), the tale of Nina, a ballet dancer who lives with her domineering mother, presents an entirely different kind of focalisation. The narrative centres on Nina's quest to master the dual roles of the black and white swans in Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake while also struggling to cope with an increasing number of psychological problems. Although it features some brief ballet sequences, the film is ultimately a study of obsession and mental collapse.

Much of this is illustrated via its cinematography. Rather than subtly influencing the viewer's interpretation of the text, this filmic text disguises its overt focalisation by hiding it in plain view, integrating focalisation which reflects the subjective perspective of the protagonist into highly stylised camerawork. On a stylistic level, the work takes an experimental approach in relating emotive states via its cinematography, the integration of CGI effects, and a variety of framing techniques which serve to depict the focaliser's increasingly unstable psychological state. This text shall serve as both the primary case study for emotional immersion and to further illustrate the variety of ways that the four different types of 'camera' or 'image' introduced by Mitry (1998: 210-218) can influence a viewer's interpretation of a film.

Spatial Immersion

Along with engaging with the protagonist, an understanding of the space in which the diegesis is set also encourages engagement with the text. Ryan (2001: 15) argues that, for a text to be immersive, it must 'construct the setting for a potential narrative action,' thereby creating a space 'to which the reader, spectator, or user can relate, and it must populate this space with individuated objects' so that it constitutes a viable world and becomes a narrative setting.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Gondry 2004) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1945) shall be utilised to illustrate both the role played by different kinds of space in the immersion process, and how films may crosscut between events taking place simultaneously at different locations, or depict "mind spaces" as concrete, physical locations. The former text concerns the introverted Joel Barish, who, upon discovering that his impulsive girlfriend Clementine

has ended their relationship and undertaken a radical new type of memory erasure which has eradicated all her memories of him, decides to undergo the same procedure. The setting of the film primarily alternates between Joel's New York apartment, where the plotline focuses on the *Lacuna* employees tasked with erasing his memory, and the memory space of Joel's mind, where he relives his past. The plot of *A Matter of Life and Death* also alternates its setting between two primary spaces: although in this case one of the spaces may only exist inside the protagonist's mind. Both texts shall also be used to illustrate the effect spatial immersion has upon the viewer and their understanding of the narrative.

Analysing the role of space in both of these texts involved applying theories proposed by Mitry regarding the distinction between the space occupied by the viewer and that inside the frame, (1998: 38) and points raised by Ryan in her article *Space* (2012), which discusses different types of narrative space and their varying functions. In order to convey the diegetic content of these narrative spaces in more detail, the on-screen space is divided into levels of action so that a distinction can be made between the different levels diegetic action contained within a filmic text. To best illustrate these differences, terms introduced in Genette's *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), a text widely recognised as a commendable introduction to the diegetic structure of narrative, will be employed.

Depicted events occur on the *intradiegetic* (or *diegetic*) level: this term relates to everything which comprises the textual world, both on and off screen, including the protagonists, their speech, and anything they can see or hear. Actants operating at this level who, according to Verstraten's terminology, are considered embedded within the narrative are *homodiegetic*. Contrastingly, the *extradiegetic level* defines everything which is narrated from outside the

fictional universe of a particular text and communicates the primary narrative to an audience equally removed from the story-world. This includes anything which relates to the narrative but exists outside of the diegesis, such as theme music, title credits, and most importantly for this study, voiceover narration. These unseen narrators are *heterodiegetic*, while the audience for this narration is the non-diegetic, *narratee*.

Diegetic space performs a different task when it is used to represent the visual or psychological perspective of a diegetic character. In the two texts above, the setting alternates between two defined spaces, both of which are presented from an externally focalised perspective regardless of whether the depicted space is internal or external. However, this is not the case with *Shutter Island*, a neo-noir detective film purportedly about a government agent and his partner searching an island for an inmate who has escaped from a high security mental institution. The text uses the narrative space to encourage empathy between the viewer and the protagonist resulting from the use of what Edward Branigan, in his work *Point of View in the Cinema* (1984: 103), refers to as 'point object' and 'point glance' shots. These terms relate to what is shown on screen when a protagonist looks at something out of shot: the former to a shot of the character looking at something off-screen and the latter to shot of their face as they react to the thing they have seen.

This filmic text contains frequent examples of visual narration which use diegetic space to indicate subjectivity and represent recollection, hallucination, and what is later revealed to be unreliable narration. It also uses its setting as a vital component of its plot and integrates the blur in the distinction between internal and external space first introduced by *Black Swan*.

This use of space also relates to epistemic parity, which Ryan considers a part of temporal immersion.

Temporal Immersion

Temporal immersion has a very broad range of applications, but generally relates to the viewer's desire to see the narrative progress until it reaches a satisfactory conclusion. While the heterodiegetic narrator's power to affect the focalisation and, consequently, the emotional impact of key scenes is illustrated in *American Beauty*, Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003) demonstrates the power voiceover narration when accompanied by visual images, motivated by (and therefore considered to support) the voiceover, may exercise upon the viewer. The plot concerns an adult son's search for facts about his dying father, who has always told tall tales. It will serve to illustrate how a filmic narrator can draw in its audience by presenting its protagonists as reliable diegetic narrators. It also introduces Genette's concept of the *metadiegesis* – a story within a story – whereby a diegetic character can serve as narrator.

Much of the text serves to draw the viewer's attention to the film's status as an assembled text, and the way this affects the viewer's reception of the events depicted on screen is central to both how the text is structured and how the viewer interprets the given story information. Until its last scene, the text gives the impression of being a rather straightforward example of the three-level structure proposed by Genette, effectively demonstrating the role of the homodiegetic voiceover narrator. However, it is revealed in the closing moments that there is a further level of narration, this shows that while Genette's terms may be sufficient for literary works and for much of this study, they are not ideal for discussing every filmic text,

especially those with a more complex narrative structure. Consequently, additional terms for distinguishing narrative levels need to be applied.
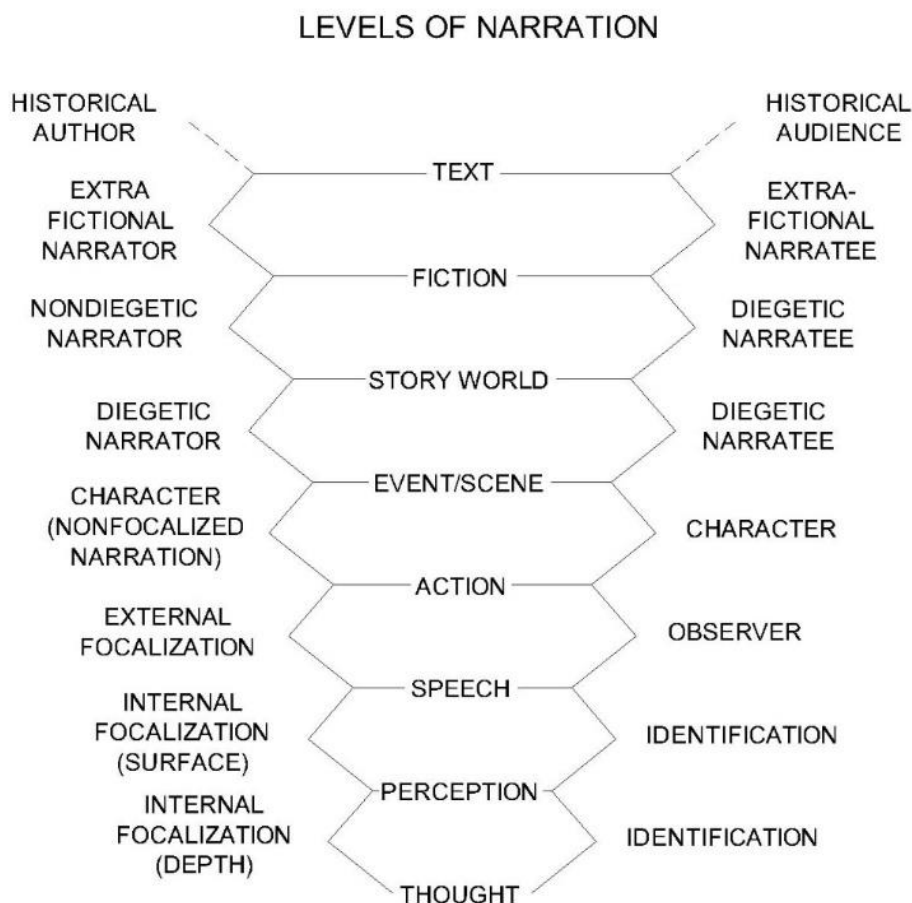
Further analysis of *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010) reveals how its use of cinematography effects spatial and emotional immersion. It also illustrates both the way in which the viewer's access to story information is directly linked to how it is imparted by the narrative, and the psychological effect which the impression of visual and epistemic parity has upon the viewer. This also ties in with the suspenseful aspect of what is considered temporal immersion and the desire for events to reach a satisfactory conclusion. Defining such effects necessitates that the terminology applied in its analysis be expanded.

To this purpose, Branigan (1992: 86-90) argues that the cognitive processes involved in film-viewing require a more complex analysis than those afforded by Genette's terms. So, he has built upon a diagram originally designed by Susan Lanser, expanding her original hierarchy to reflect film's status as both a manufactured work and as a marketable product, as well as an artistic medium. Consequently, Branigan's diagram (Figure 1) illustrates eight levels of narration and eight levels of reception, or awareness, which the viewer may interact with the filmic text.

These levels can be divided into two groups. The upper four levels primarily relate to the viewer's *declarative knowledge*: the 'what' of the narrative process. This addresses the viewer's awareness of 'the contingency of cause and effect chains' and relates to their understanding of the film as a narrative text, a marketable product, and ultimately something which has been assembled (1992: 113). Collectively, these processes are considered 'top-

down' perception. The remaining four levels relate to the viewer's *procedural knowledge*: the 'how' of narrative. These are the elements of the visual and auditive information depicted via the diegetic content of the film and 'stratified into levels,' allowing the viewer to respond to the 'cause and effect chains' in multiple ways. This process is termed 'bottom-up' perception. (1992: 113-15)

Figure 1 (Branigan 1992: 87)

LEVELS OF NARRATION

Left	Center	Right
HISTORICAL AUTHOR	TEXT	HISTORICAL AUDIENCE
EXTRA-FICTIONAL NARRATOR	FICTION	EXTRA-FICTIONAL NARRATEE
NONDIEGETIC NARRATOR	STORY WORLD	DIEGETIC NARRATEE
DIEGETIC NARRATOR	EVENT/SCENE	DIEGETIC NARRATEE
CHARACTER (NONFOCALIZED NARRATION)	ACTION	CHARACTER
EXTERNAL FOCALIZATION	SPEECH	OBSERVER
INTERNAL FOCALIZATION (SURFACE)	PERCEPTION	IDENTIFICATION
INTERNAL FOCALIZATION (DEPTH)	THOUGHT	IDENTIFICATION

A more detailed breakdown of the eight levels Branigan outlines is beyond the scope of this study, but his analysis of the viewing process is highly relevant in regard to how it describes the viewer's awareness of the way different levels are connected. Most specifically, his

description of how the two cognitive processes affect the manner a viewer accumulates and analyses narrative information. This is central to the arguments presented in the final chapter of this work and the conclusion.

A more complex example of how this applies to film spectatorship is demonstrated by *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (Fincher 2008), which further illustrates the necessity for this distinction between top-down and bottom-up perception. The plot concerns the fantastic life story of the eponymous Benjamin, born as an 'old' baby in 1918, whose appearance and body appear progressively younger as he ages. His life story is recounted through the pages of a diary read by his daughter and tales recalled by his former partner. As with Burton's film, *Benjamin Button* was selected for its employment of different levels of narration, and illustrate a text's acceptance of a viewer's ability to follow various plot strands and multiple narrators, while displaying consistent stylistic traits, as well as for demonstrating the role of diegetic characters as narrators. This supports Branigan's argument that '[a] common structure for narration is hierarchical, where one subject-object pair (describable in a temporal, spatial, and causal frame of reference) becomes the embedded object of another (more powerful) subject in a higher frame of reference' (1992: 116-17).

However, for the majority of this study, Genette's terms have been applied as, although they distinguish only three levels of narration, they are straightforward, interdisciplinary, and do not conflict with any of the terms applied throughout the work. Branigan's diagram meanwhile, as it is specific to film analysis, helps stratify the various levels of a viewer's awareness and cognitive processes. In doing so, he applies terminology defining the functions of each level in a very precise manner, which contradicts both the reasoning and terminology

which shall be applied throughout this thesis. As with aspects of Genette and Bordwell's theories, these had to be omitted as a consequence of their structuralist leanings contradicting other theories induced in this work regarding film spectatorship which primarily use the same terms but in a post-structuralist sense.

This is most apparent in Branigan's definition of focalisation, which diverges considerably from the approach adopted in this thesis on significant points, arguing that shots should only be considered focalised when representing or reflecting the perceptual point-of-view of homodiegetic characters (1992: 101-3). Although the reasoning behind his logic is explained in detail, it clashes with the terminology and the approach applied throughout this thesis, which considers all shots as focalised. Consequently, although the terms 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' are applied extensively in the conclusion of this thesis, the terminological words he uses to label individual levels shall not be discussed, as to avoid any confusion which may arise through conflict of meaning with other terms applied throughout the work.

Chapter Two

How You Make Me Feel: Emotional Immersion

'The dynamics of focalisation are at work in every visual work that contains traces of the representational work as seen and interpreted by the viewer, since it is precisely within those traces that the work becomes narrativized.' – Mieke Bal (2001: 63)

In fictional narratives the characters presented on screen are not real, yet feeling something toward them and their situation is central to engagement with the text. In *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, Bordwell (2006: 2261) argues that, regardless of any technological developments and changes in the audience profiles over the past decades, Hollywood films still rely on a traditional formula in order to ensure a viewer's engagement with any filmic narrative:

> The Hollywood default remains characters we care about. And the readiest way to make us care about characters is to plunge them into a swirl of cause and effect, goals and obstacles, conflicts and resolutions, appointments and deadlines, patterns of restricted and unrestricted narration, recurring motifs and dangling causes and symmetrical closure – in short, all the resources of tradition.

Notably, of the numerous elements Bordwell mentions, foremost is that the action need involve a character 'we care about.' This relationship between protagonist and viewer affects the viewer's interpretation of a film's content, which in turn has consequences on their engagement with the filmic text and the response it evokes. Moreover, Ryan maintains that in life we experience two main types of emotion: 'those directed toward ourselves, and those

directed toward other creatures through a vicarious experience known as empathy.' She argues that, by imagining oneself to be another person, and 'imagining their desires as our own' we feel joy, pity, or sadness for them. She furthers that narrative has a 'unique power to generate emotions directed toward others' (2009: 55). If the level of emotion a filmic text can elicit towards its protagonist(s) reaches a certain depth of feeling, a state of emotional immersion can said to have been achieved.

This chapter will discuss what level of engagement with a character is necessary to effect emotional immersion, and how this engagement affects a viewer's interpretation of a narrative's content; the vital function performed by the visual narrator in initiating and sustaining this process; and the role focalisation plays in manipulating the way a film's content is presented to, and processed by, its audience.

Central to this process is the role of the protagonist as both an agent of focalisation and an agent of identification. Identification in this sense, as Berys Gaut notes, is associated with 'the matter of putting oneself in the character's shoes,' rather than the sense of seeing them as similar to oneself (1999: 202). If a viewer or reader feels that they can identify with a character and the situations they are placed in – or as a consequence of the situations in which they are placed – they should also want to see them achieve any goal they set out to achieve. Furthermore, as Verstraten (2009: 89-90) argues, viewers may even care for the protagonist regardless of whether or not that character is deserving of the emotion or not.

The typical fiction film features an actant, or actants, posited in a chain of events which will typically resolve itself satisfactorily by the end of the narrative. Central to rousing a viewer's interest in this chain sufficiently enough that they want to see the story out to its conclusion, is getting them to care enough about the actant(s) most involved in this chain. As a result, the actant's initial role is as an agent to encourage a viewer's engagement with the narrative.

As Branigan notes, a viewer 'has an intrinsic interest in characters as agents since comprehending a narrative event requires at least recognising how agents interact with one another in a causal framework' (1992: 101). At the onset of a narrative, this agent is a subject with an assumed, but as yet unspecified, set of personality traits. However, within a short space of time, the narration, via cuing, establishes this character to a point where they can be considered 'a center of attention' and serve as the protagonist from then on (1992: 103).

As events unfold over the course of the narrative, other aspects of the protagonist's personality, knowledge, skill set, or their private life should also be seen to develop. As the viewer should take an increasing interest in, and develop a corresponding attachment to, the protagonist and his goals, their level of interest in the progression of the narrative (and especially its resolution) should heighten as a consequence. This psychological chain links emotional immersion with temporal immersion, as the viewer should long to see whether the protagonist will succeed in achieving their goals, the importance of which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Along with encouraging the viewer to feel a sense of attachment toward the protagonist via overt narrative elements such as character traits and goals, the filmic narrator may further

accelerate the viewer's level of engagement with a character by presenting elements of the diegesis focalised from their perspective. Such focalisation may be *external*, and represent the filmic narrator or another extradiegetic agent, such as the heterodiegetic narrator, or *internal*, and represent the psychological or physical perspective of a protagonist.

So, when filmic focalisation corresponds with an embedded character, that character should have an advantage over the other characters, as the viewer should be more inclined to perceive the events from their perspective: a seemingly objective camera may be just as subjective as an author's pen. Just as a reader who views the world of a novel through its focaliser's eyes will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented (and often the opinions expressed) by that character (Bal 2001: 49), such focalisation – if the immersion process has been effective – should result in the viewer assigning the character the role of on-screen surrogate.

In certain narratives, however, rather than having one main protagonist, the character-bound focalisation can vary, shifting from one character to another. This privileges the viewer with a greater understanding of the various protagonists who populate the narrative space.[1] In such cases the focalisation can also shift, and this process may have the consequence – intended or otherwise – of dividing a viewer's loyalties and impact upon the way they react to the film as a whole. However, as Bal (2001: 49) notes, there is usually no doubt in the viewer's mind which character should be given the most attention and sympathy. Typically, this will be the character who is devoted the most screen time, but a viewer's opinion of a character can change as more character traits are revealed, or as further characters are introduced.

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[1] Narrative space and related concepts shall be further defined in Chapter Three of this study.

From Whose Perspective? Embedded Focalisation and Selective Objectivity

American Beauty (Mendes 1999) is an example of a filmic text with a character established in the role of focaliser while, at the same time, the filmic narration encourages varying levels of engagement with other protagonists by regulating the amount of screen time they are allotted. At the onset of the story, an unseen extradiegetic voiceover narrator informs the viewer that he is dead and that the events unfolding on-screen took place in the last year of his life. The voiceover narrator also introduces his former self, in the guise of Lester Burnham, followed by his wife Karen and teenage daughter Jenny, divulging enough about this past life in the process for the viewer to consider him a heterodiegetic embedded focaliser.

However, the filmic narration does not restrict itself to depicting events immediately concerning Lester. As the narrative progresses further protagonists are introduced, and an increasing number of scenes take place where he is not present. This ultimately results in the viewer having emotive information disclosed to them regarding other characters in the narrative via the filmic narration. This should not result in dividing the viewer's loyalties, however, as these characters have no conflict of interest, but it may divert the viewer's focus and dilute their empathy with Lester as a result.

Bordwell (2006: 907) notes that it is typical for a film to have two parallel plotlines, which may be considered "narrative threads," and these intertwine at points in the narrative. In the case of *American Beauty*, there are at least four such threads. In addition to scenes featuring Lester, which focus on his relationship with his family, the viewer learns of the awkward and violent relationship between the Burnhams' new neighbour Colonel Fitz and his son Ricky, the relationship that grows between Ricky and Jenny, and Jenny's increasingly strained

relationship with her best friend, the seemingly arrogant and self-centred Angela. Later in the narrative Karen also starts an extramarital affair.

As the number of characters participating in the narrative increases, the manner in which the filmic text depicts diegetic events becomes increasingly 'descriptive' or 'objective:' terms which Mitry (1998: 214-17) uses to describe situations where the camera 'shows' events taking place on screen with the minimum degree of stylisation. The term 'objective' is misleading in this context however, as the filmic narrator has acted subjectively by deeming these events more relevant than any others taking place at the same time. Rather, the term focuses on the fact there are no instances of embedded shots, nor any shots reflecting a characters subjective point of view.

The visual narration's purported objectivity ceases the moment Lester develops a crush on Angela. From this point on, the filmic narration features bursts of embedded focalisation which reflect Lester's fantasies, and further establish him as focaliser in the scenes he is present. The narration is not complicit in its focalisation, however: every fantasy and dream sequence is, eventually, clearly marked off by increasingly loud non-diegetic music and an abundance of rose petals. Such instances ensure that, even though the voiceover does not return for the majority of the film, Lester's status as central protagonist is retained, even when other characters begin to play more prominent roles in the story.

Such instances also serve to encourage the viewer to forget that the depicted events are taking place in the past and that Lester will die, although this is once again connected to the process of temporal immersion. It is only as the film enters its last act and the heterodiegetic voice of

Lester's spirit returns, that the viewer is reminded of what they were informed at the onset of the narrative: Lester is going to die in the coming day.

In a more conventional narrative with fewer protagonists, Lester's death would be expected to evoke a response of shock followed by sadness, but the cuing by the auditive narration pre-empts the event and primes the viewer to expect the incident at some point. As quite some time elapses between the voiceover narrator's disclosure and the event's occurrence, it may not entirely remove the sense of shock, but the emotive impact should be muted by the filmic narration and, more covertly, by an act of overt focalisation.

For it is at this point Lester's voiceover returns for a third time, explaining his own, relaxed feelings about being dead, urging the viewer not to pity him, but to enjoy whatever time they have left on Earth. This is coupled with an embedded scene of some of Lester's fondest memories. In this way the filmic narration cues the viewer's emotions regarding the response to Lester's demise and its place in the narrative. The film does not end with this eulogy, however, further to these scenes, the closing scenes show the other characters who had been introduced over the course of the narrative reacting to the sound of the shot.

One such scene shows Jenny and Ricky discovering Lester's body, and Ricky smiles at the serene look on Lester's face. Such events, combined with the previous auditive narration, may markedly change the effect that Lester's death has on the viewer by emphasising that the film was not entirely about Lester's epiphany, nor an evaluation of his life. Ultimately, the manner of the visual narration and the positing of a flawed, but realistically drawn, main protagonist (as both heterodiegetic voiceover narrator and diegetic focaliser), along with the

introduction of other sympathetic characters, should combine to have a discernible effect on the impact of the closing scenes, which may differ from that of a typical filmic narrative.

Although the narrative makes a point of the fact that the other characters' lives will continue on their own paths, a case could also be made that Lester's death serves as a convenient temporal frame for the narrative, closing the majority of the narrative threads running through the film. However, the thread concerning Jenny and Ricky – upon whose relationship the filmic narration places increasing importance as the story progresses – has only been partly closed: the possibility they may be framed for a murder they did not commit is left open, and this may dilute the viewer's emotional response to Lester's death. Central to this outcome is the viewer's knowledge of Lester's relaxed attitude to his own death, which contrasts sharply with their knowledge of Jenny and Ricky's fates and the couple's own desires: they want to escape, but may not. That the viewer may only speculate on their fate illustrates how closely intertwined emotional immersion and (the epistemic element of) temporal immersion are, and this interdependency repeatedly resurfaces in all types of immersion.

This also adds support to the argument that identification with a character requires imagining being in the character's situation, rather than entirely agreeing with his or her opinions or actions. However, although immersion necessitates that the viewer become involved in the drama surrounding the protagonist and any predicament they find themselves in, interest in these events alone is generally not enough to sustain a viewer's interest; there has to be an emotive angle. Carl Plantinga (1999: 245-7) maintains that, to experience empathy, one must respond in a way that evinces commonality or solidarity with the person's goals or desires. This, he argues, results in the viewer feeling emotions 'congruent to those' we suppose the other person (on screen) is feeling.

Gaut (1999: 206), meanwhile, proposes that to attain such a state via identification necessitates the viewer being made aware (or reminded) at points in the narrative of the character's 'visual perspective' (what they can see), their 'affective perspective' (what they feel), their 'epistemic perspective' (what they believe or know) and their 'motivational perspective' (what they propose to do, and why). These elements, if developed sufficiently and utilised correctly, encourage the viewer to perceive this fictional character as "real" – or at least "real enough"– for the duration of the film or novel. Seeing the protagonist as a real, complete human being, and not merely as a fictive creation assigned a set number of traits, is an essential part of establishing an emotive connection. Such reminders ensure the bond between viewer and protagonist, once established, remains intact.

Focalisation and the selectivity of the 'objective' frame also plays a major role regarding which emotions are evoked, and towards whom. That Karen is not supposed to be viewed in an equally sympathetic light as Lester, Ricky or Jenny, is supported by the fact the filmic narration does not present events from her perspective. As a consequence of the focalisation, the viewer is predisposed to viewing her – and judging her actions – externally. Resultantly, even though the focalisation is ostensibly objective in Lester's absence, the viewer's interpretation is not: the distance evokes a coolness which may not be entirely a consequence of her personality and that she is seen indulging an affair.

Making a Connection: Different Types of Engagement

Gaut further proposes that engaging with a character on screen is not the same as empathy in the real world, as 'empathy is not imagined.' In his understanding, true 'empathic identification' requires 'some degree of imaginative identification,' but that it is not necessary for a viewer to feel such a level of connection or understanding in order to adopt a character as surrogate for the duration of a film. He proposes that it is possible 'to identify with a character affectively, imagining his sorrow, anger, or fear without empathizing with him' (1999: 206).

If Gaut and Plantinga's theories are accepted, a narrative's focalisation should only be required to evoke a sense of affective identification with the protagonist, rather than strive for true empathy with the character. Once this connection has been established, the narrative must sustain this sense until it is possible to clearly establish what the protagonist's initial goals are as, once they have also been established, a causal chain is begun, as the desire to see whether the character achieves these goals initiates the process of temporal immersion – again proving how interdependent these two forms of immersion are. Over the course of the narrative, as more of a character's traits are revealed, this strengthens the level of emotional engagement with the protagonist which may eventually develop into a genuine state of empathic identification.

However, even if such a state were achieved, the sense of engagement with the character via the text, or the text via the character – be it affective or congruent – it is essential that it be sustained. As Greg Smith proposes, such feelings must be reinforced at points along the

narrative, to either uphold the viewer's prevalent disposition towards the protagonist or introduce a new one, as otherwise their engagement with the text will wane (1999: 125). He also argues that the viewer's understanding of the protagonist's emotional state 'must be bolstered by occasionally highly concentrated bursts of emotional cues, or the mood will be extinguished' He furthers that a film 'will encourage viewers to establish a *consistent emotional orientation* toward the text' which is considered 'the mood' (1999: 118). This 'mood' is key to cueing the viewer's emotions towards the protagonist and their emotional response to events depicted on-screen.

Smith argues that a mood is 'not entirely self-perpetuating,' as such feelings cannot be maintained indefinitely, requiring 'occasional moments of strong emotion' to prevail. To achieve this, 'emotional experiences are required in order to reinforce the mood' (1999: 116). These are typically provided in 'bursts,' which he labels 'emotional markers.' He describes these as 'highly visible textual cues' which exist solely for the purpose of eliciting brief moments of emotion. These 'markers' serve to cue the viewer to which emotion they should sense, or perpetuate a previously established one. Such moments 'reinforce the mood's predisposition and encourage the mood to continue' (1999: 118).

The role of such bursts, and the way they are used to perpetuate affective and empathic identification, is central to impact of *Black Swan* (Aronofsky: 2010), as the crux of the film is the viewer's engagement with its internal focaliser/protagonist, Nina. The film begins with a dream sequence in which she performs the role of the White Swan in the prologue to Swan Lake. The fantasy depicts her transformation from a princess into a swan, and functions both as a premonition for Nina – as, unknown to her, she will soon appear in this ballet – and as

foreshadowing for the viewer: the transformation from girl to White Swan took place in moments, but Nina's transformation into the Black Swan will take place over the course of the narrative, and the viewer shall be party to it. Vitally, the sequence also introduces what will later be recognised as both a motif and a cue: the sound of flapping wings. However, it is not made clear the scene is a dream until the next scene, while its deeper significance only becomes apparent as the plot progresses.

The prolonged shot which opens the subsequent scene introduces a woken Nina, and helps cement her status as focaliser. Her face is shown in close-up, she is smiling and still lying in bed, reflecting on the dream the viewer has shared with her. Shot in such an intimate space, in her nightclothes – with the viewer now aware that they have already seen inside her mind – it is telling that this first shot of the real Nina should be framed in such a way. Plantinga describes how the human face is a vital component in conveying filmic emotion, most specifically in encouraging empathy:

> [F]acial expressions in film not only communicate emotion, but also elicit, clarify and strengthen affective response – especially empathic response. This is possible because viewing the human face can elicit response through the process of affective mimicry, facial feedback and emotional cognition (1999: 240).

The three terms which end this quote all relate to psychological processes which relate to how seeing a person's face can cue evocative responses in other people, and how films utilise this reflexive response to induce certain emotions in a viewer by holding a shot for longer than the few seconds necessary for the viewer to register which emotion the protagonist is

experiencing. Such shots serve to provide the emotional markers required to establish and maintain emotional engagement.

From the onset, the cinematography maintains the close style established in the first scene, with the shots generally remaining intimately close, cropped tightly to Nina, who is a constant presence on screen. This closeness often makes it difficult for the viewer to distinguish between the aforementioned objective/descriptive shots and what Mitry (1998: 211-13) terms 'subjective/analytical' shots – conventionally referred to as point-of-view shots – for the first third of the film. Verstraten (2009: 115-18) deems such cases, where it is unclear whether the protagonist or the visual narrator is functioning as focaliser, to be 'ambiguous focalization.'

However, as with many of the film's other stylistic quirks, this trait is established so early on, and remains consistent from that point on, so the viewer is conditioned into accommodating to it, accepting it as part of the film's style. Resultantly, the subjective ambiguity of these shots may go unnoticed. This, over the course of the narrative, eventually results in blurring the line between externally focalised and internally focalised shots. This merging is central to the impact of the second half of the film. Until that point is reached, the cinematography may have the effect of encouraging the viewer to disregard inconsistencies in the framing and focus on Nina's actions. This may also encourage the viewer to disregard any distinction between subjective and objective visual narration. Introduced in the earlier stages of the film, this subliminally encourages the viewer to ally with the protagonist and accelerates emotional immersion.

A further consequence of the intimate framing (and clearly the director's intention) is that Nina's face or body take centre stage in almost every scene. This too, within a short time, becomes familiar and establishes itself as the norm, reinforcing Plantinga's previous point regarding facial feedback encouraging affective mimicry. Further to this, Smith (1999: 120) argues that:

> [A] primary task for a film's early sequences […] is to establish an emotional orientation that will guide the audience through the film, encouraging them to evaluate cues in mood-congruent ways. Establishing this mood requires coordinated cuing, potentially involving a broad range of cinematic signifiers.

Black Swan's narration sets out to establish emotional orientation in a number of ways. Further to the strategy of the close-up, another technique adopted by the visual narrator is the over-the-shoulder close-mid-shot. This type of framing is adopted from an early stage in the narrative, and employed whenever Nina is depicted moving through crowded public spaces. Her face is seldom seen. Verstraten (2009: 103-04) explains that an over-the-shoulder shot 'distinguishes itself from a subjective shot because internal focalization has now become embedded in external focalization' and the camera no longer depicts objective reality, but rather how the protagonist views the world she inhabits 'through the eyes of the external focalizor.' Supporting this is the fact that the first instance of this shot is preceded by the same sound of flapping wings introduced in the dream sequence, which may hint that the shots are embedded and subjective. Ultimately, there is never any covert indication of whether these scenes depict embedded focalisation, but the primarily monochrome colour scheme would indicate this to be the case.

Alternatively, this may not represent embedded focalisation, but depict the visual narrator's interpretation of how Nina "views" the world, rather than what she "sees". Termed 'descriptive subjectivism' by Mitry (1998: 218) – or 'the personal image' – this represents the view of the filmic narrator, who wishes to use the colour scheme to emphasise Nina's emotional isolation from the world around her. Whichever interpretation is agreed upon, the emphasis of the shot is upon highlighting the difference between Nina, dressed almost entirely in white, and the darkly dressed people surrounding her, this projects a strong sense of her 'otherness' and her alienation from the world surrounding her. Cued to this isolation, the viewer may now feel a stronger bond with her as the central protagonist. Alternatively, the viewer may not see it as a cue and start to perceive the world as Nina does. Whichever interpretation is accepted, a form of affective engagement with the protagonist is encouraged.

This sense of otherness and alienation is maintained when indoors, but now Nina faces the camera. Bordwell (et al 1985: 65) notes that '[f]rontality functions as a strong cue for the spectator […] Hollywood cinema is predominantly anthropocentric, the representation of the expressive body arouses in us an interest nourished not only by art but by everyday life.' This passage could have been written specifically with Nina in mind for, although she earns her living expressing herself through art, she is seen to be introverted, shy, repressed and never truly capable of expressing herself: every movement is calculated and practised. From the onset she is portrayed as someone who is always alone – isolated, even in a public space or crowded dressing room – and yet never truly alone, as a consequence of her domineering and seemingly omnipresent mother: even the bathroom door has no lock.

The viewer is encouraged to sympathise with her plight, which in turn serves to encourage affective engagement. Further to this, her proclivity for time alone places her in situations, or locations, where the concealing of emotions is neither necessary nor appropriate. Over the course of the story, she is shown occupying constricted or intimate places such as toilet cubicles, her private dressing room, her bedroom at home, even the bath: places which are typically spaces of utmost privacy. Unlike those situations in life where it may be necessary to control one's facial responses, these are locations where someone can drop their public façade. It is in such spaces, where Nina is alone and does not think she is being observed, that the viewer is encouraged to feel as though they are privy to a private moment and, consequently, that her facial expressions and behaviour reflect her true feelings (Plantinga 1999: 251). Here, emotional cognition combines with the viewer's sense that they are witnessing highly emotive, personal events, and this encourages a sense of empathy – be it congruent or genuine – which is intended to heighten emotional engagement with the protagonist.

Such moments build up incrementally over the course of the narrative. This should result in the viewer feeling the required sense of identification, which stems not only from the intimate spaces and experiences they have shared with Nina, but also results from the sense of epistemic parity which builds up as a consequence of having spent so much time with her. The consequence of this is that the viewer is prompted to feel they identify with how Nina perceives the world, and the amount of pressure she is under – be it self-inflicted, or originating from external sources – and this encourages an empathic understanding of her delicate psychological state.

Further to the intimate, ambiguous framing, as the narrative progresses, the visual narration also utilises increasing instances of what George Wilson defines in *Seeing Fictions in Film*, as *subjective inflection*, whereby 'visual outcroppings' of the embedded focaliser's conscience become embedded in the diegesis. Such 'outcroppings' appear increasingly frequently but are, initially, less clearly marked off than those in *American Beauty*, increasing gradually over the course of the narrative. Initially, the manner in which they are marked off as embedded is primarily through the use of mirrors (2009: 147-52).

Throughout the narrative, Nina is accompanied by the perpetual presence of reflective surfaces: windows are occasionally used in outdoor scenes, but almost every indoor scene features a mirror. Mirrors are a longstanding filmic trope, and in another narrative such a profusion would seem excessively obvious, but as a consequence of the film's balletic context, such an abundance of mirrors is necessitated. Consequently, their presence should go unquestioned until Nina's mind starts to break down and they cease to show objective reality. They increasingly begin to display what Nina's conscious sees and reflect how she feels. Bordwell (et al 1985: 65) explains that, in daily life:

> Our principal information about people's mental states is derived in large part from posture, gesture, facial expression and eye movement (as well as voice), so that if classical cinema is to represent psychological causation in its characters, narrational space must privilege these behavioural cues.

Viewing Nina in private areas has already placed the viewer high on what Branigan (1992: 75) refers to as the 'hierarchy of knowledge,' but depicting her psychological state – initially

via her reflection – places the already "privileged" viewer in a state of subjective parity. Having witnessed Nina's most private moments, the viewer can now delve into the most intimate area that remains: her mind. Having used visual narration to draw the viewer progressively deeper into Nina's life, only the boundary between internal and external realms remains. By revealing her psychological state through visual and auditive narration the filmic narrator can intensify the viewer's level of emotional immersion, raising it to new heights, for if the highest level of empathy is to be achieved the viewer requires as much narrative information as possible.

Although Plantinga (1999: 253) notes that, traditionally, such 'scenes of empathy are often used sparingly,' typically utilised to evoke an empathic response when a character has 'undergone some kind of trial or sacrifice, has neared the end of her life, or in some cases, has actually died,' this is not the case in *Black Swan*. Instead, supporting Smith's argument regarding emotional bursts, the filmic narration reminds the viewer at regular intervals of the internal turmoil Nina is suffering: they are not allowed to forget for a moment how much emotional currency they have invested in her success.

The Semisubjective Image and Subjective Saturation

Almost from the onset of the narrative, everything revolves around Nina's struggle to perfect the role and battle her personal demons, which in Nina's case are numerous: her mother's obsession with every aspect of her life; her relationship with fellow dancer Lily, which oscillates between friendship and rivalry; and the emergence of Dark Nina – the doppelganger who represents a manifestation and projection of Nina's emerging dark side,

which must be harnessed and channelled to tackle her upcoming role. From around a third of the way into the film, these problems start to manifest themselves as hallucinations which become increasingly vivid as her stress levels and insecurities mount. What initially occurs is a manipulation of just one element of the diegetic space, while everything else in the scene is presented as normal.

The first major instance shows her imagining she is peeling the skin off her finger: such external injuries embody the pain she feels on the inside. As a consequence of the visual narration and the level of emotional immersion attained by this point, it is not immediately clear that the injury is imagined and this serves as a stark reminder to the viewer of the power of focalisation. Furthermore, this instance of body horror both sets a trend and is relatively tame in comparison to what follows later.

This and later instances of subjective inflection presented from an ostensibly objective viewpoint demonstrate what Mitry refers to as the 'semisubjective' or 'associated' image (1998: 214-19). He describes this image as retaining the attributes of the descriptive/objective image, while adopting the psychological viewpoint of a particular character who, 'objectively described, occupies a special position in the frame,' meaning the viewer sees the protagonist and also what she sees but, unlike a point-of-view shot, they are not watching *as* her, nor truly *with* her, but are placed in the privileged position of seeing what she perceives. Mitry (1998: 218) considers this to be the 'total image,' as it embodies all the elements of the other three types of shot he distinguishes. It is 'descriptive' (through what it shows), 'analytic' (identified with the character's vision) and symbolic (though the resulting compositional structures).

As the narrative progresses, the touches of subjective inflection develop into *subjective saturation* (Wilson 2011: 151-52) – this state is achieved when the screen is filled with images entirely imagined by the focaliser, and in *Black Swan* such scenes are central to the film, as they are essential to the progression of the narrative and the viewer's association with Nina as focaliser and protagonist. The first prolonged example of this occurs when Nina willingly takes a spiked drink while socialising with her alter ego, Lily.

After an intense night out – over the course of which Nina's perception occasionally leaks into the diegetic space – Lily joins her in a taxi home and they return to Nina's apartment to enjoy an intensive sexual encounter. At the height of the experience Lily transforms into Dark Nina, who knocks Nina unconscious. This scene is both the first sustained instance of embedded focalisation in the film which does not include a mirror and Dark Nina's first appearance in the diegetic space proper (outside of a reflection).

The two instances of Dark Nina during the sex scene are clearly marked off, posited in subjective point-of-view shots and accompanied by the flapping sound on the auditive track, but other than the implausibility factor, there is nothing to indicate a lack of verisimilitude in any other element of the scene or those preceding it. However, upon waking late and finding herself alone, Nina rushes to dress rehearsal, where Lily dispels any remaining doubts by insisting she slept with a man that night. If the viewer accepts Lily's explanation, the entire previous scene, except the cab ride home and an argument with her mother, was a subjectively saturated example of internal focalisation, filtered through the semisubjective image. Upon reappraisal, the clues are there to be seen, but the viewer – who had been conditioned to that point to believe that either mirrors, or the flapping sound, would cue any

inflected scene – is assumed to be too involved in the plot to concern themselves with alternatives.

However, the experience primes the viewer to be wary of the narration, and indicates that mirrors are no longer necessary as a portal to Nina's conscience. After putting on her first promising performance as the Black Swan – most likely a consequence of her experiences the previous night – Thomas, her director, tells Nina to go home and rest. Instead, she stays behind to practise even more intently, obsessively striving to become ever more perfect. From here on, the level of subjective saturation in the film increases inexorably and the viewer should become increasingly aware that the filmic narration to this point had encouraged an active identification with Nina's perception. This awareness is now utilised to reinforce the truly unstable state of her psyche.

While practising alone backstage, Nina's reflection suddenly pauses and Dark Nina stares back at her before the backstage lights cut out. Hearing noises, she follows the sounds until she is confronted by the sight of Thomas and Lily having passionate sex on a table in a backstage area. This encounter is shown from Nina's perspective via a subjective point-of-view shot, and that it is a clear example of subjective saturation is reinforced by Thomas's instantly transforms into Rothbart – the ballet's evil prince, originally envisioned in the opening dream sequence – and Lily's face becomes that of Dark Nina. At this moment, the flapping sound – familiar by this point as a prompt that Nina is hallucinating – is heard on the audio track, so both the visual and auditive narrators are prompting the viewer regarding the scene's hallucinatory nature.

Panicking, Nina rushes to her dressing room to collect her things, before going to hospital to visit Beth, the former prima ballerina. Woken by the sound of Nina quietly returning items she had previously stolen, Beth explodes into a violent rage, thrusting a returned nail file fully into her face several times. The initial shock evoked by Beth's reaction is reduced briefly once the scene becomes too extreme to be anything but fantasy, but the shock and confusion return when Nina rushes out of the ward with the bloody file still in her hand. She tosses it to the floor, and returns home to an empty apartment.

The remainder of the film continues in this way, with the number of instances of subjective inflection increasing along with the level of subjective saturation. From here on, the viewer, now fully primed to Nina's precarious emotional state, witnesses internally focalised, subjectively saturated scenes become progressively more frequent and extreme. Having been encouraged by the filmic narration to empathise with Nina for the majority of the narrative, this both contextualises her behaviour and reminds the viewer of how far she has plummeted psychologically since the onset of the narrative.

Plantinga (1999: 248) notes that during the climax of most films, a formal resolution coincides with an emotional satisfaction. In the case of *Black Swan*, its conclusion leaves the viewer uncertain of Nina's fate, but the narrative arc still has a clear-cut climax and resolution. She has "killed" her doppelganger Dark Nina by both absorbing her (or having been consumed by her) and expressing her, completing her transformation into the Black Swan as a result.

As the camera zooms out and the visual narrator departs the scene, a bleeding Nina is depicted lying prostrate, staring into oblivion as she laps up the audience's love for her and her work. She revels in their appreciation of her skill, her own recognition of her achievement already affirmed in her last words to Thomas, and reinforced by the audience's applause: she has achieved perfection. But at what price? The process of striving for success may have lead Nina to mutilate Beth, and accidentally end her own life.

Ryan (2001: 148) presents a case that tragedy has the effect of eliciting what Aristotle defined as catharsis, or 'purification' through 'terror and pity.' It could be argued that Nina's strained domestic arrangements and sense of isolation may elicit an (affective) emotion closer to pity than either sympathy or empathy in the viewer, while the increasing use of body horror and shock effects throughout the narrative had the effect of startling and horrifying them. So, while Nina, clothed entirely in white lies bleeding, the manner in which the screen fades to white – the colour universally associated purity and, in this context, with the original, unsullied Nina – may also symbolise redemption through death.

As Gaut (1999: 213) explains, one of the significant experiences in film viewing is often that the viewer comes to identify with a character, but in doing so, usually comes to realise that 'her reactions are in some ways inappropriate to her situation, and discovering that there is a deeper perspective on her situation, different from her own.' In the case of *Black Swan*, once the narrative concludes and the screen fades out, the viewer may come to realise how extreme Nina's behaviour truly was, but for the duration of the narrative the combination of emotional markers and focalisation achieved the goal of initiating emotional immersion.

Ryan (2001: 111) attests that fiction is noted for its ability to 'foster understanding and even attachment for people we normally would condemn, despise, ignore, or never meet in the course of our lives.' But, as her focus is primarily upon written narration, Ryan's attention lies more in how readers project themselves "into" these characters, to fill in the parts of the character's nature the author has declined to mention. In the case of these filmic texts, and those introduced over the remainder of this thesis, the process is often reversed. The viewer sees so much of the protagonist, and in such intimate situations, that the fictional character projects themselves *into* the viewer and, as a result, builds a connection which strengthens as the film progresses.

This connection creates a bond between viewer and protagonist which results in the protagonist's actions evoking an emotional response in the viewer. Whether the bond is affective, congruent or truly empathic depends on the text and the individual, but a strong case could be presented that the viewer's emotional engagement with the protagonist is more affected by the manipulative power of the focalisation than by similarities between the viewer and the character(s) they are following on screen. This emotive connection is what initiates the viewer's desire to see what happens to the protagonist over the course of the narrative and links it with temporal immersion.

Chapter 3

Everything Which Surrounds Me: Spatial Immersion

'The film image is above all an image of a space, a space in which an action takes place and which involves us in that action.' – Jean Mitry (1998: 57)

The subject of this chapter is the analysis of the essential role played by different kinds of space in film spectatorship. Beginning with how the "framed space" of the screen functions initially as a portal between the medium's content and viewer, but focusing primarily upon the role of screen space in placing both protagonist and viewer in an identifiable world, and the filmic frame's function as both a focalising agent and boundary within the intradiegetic space presented on the screen. Each of these elements has an effect upon the viewer in the non-diegetic 'reception space' and combine to effect spatial immersion.

Ryan (2012: 54) defines spatial immersion as an 'emotional attachment to a certain location,' furthering that this phenomenon is 'known to geographers and phenomenologists as "sense of place" […which…] echoes the importance of the setting' and that many people 'select narratives on the basis of where the action takes place.' Furthermore, she proposes that setting is the most easily remembered narrative component (2001: 5). However, Ryan's focus here is upon one of spatial immersion's key functions in literature, which is a very different process and serves a different purpose.

The novel and the film, as Seymour Chatman (1990: 38) notes, are two media whose affordances – abilities and traits a particular medium is able to utilise that another medium

may not possess to an equal degree, if at all – enable each to utilise narrative in diverse ways the other cannot. Filmic landscapes, as with their characters and events, are vividly depicted portrayals: shown rather than described and imagined. Resultantly, rather than being imparted gradually, the physical attributes of the landscape are often immediately imparted and do not require description. Such settings have the detailed appearance of a real world, while the medium also possesses the ability to switch between locations at an instant, often without any exposition – affordances which neither the novel nor theatre possess. This is a consequence of the diegetic space of the novel requiring a written description, while being created in the imagination of the reader, while a play's performance space occupies the same physical space as its audience, giving it an immediacy a film does not possess, while stage scenery typically lacks the saturation of realistic detail provided by a film.

So, while the reader of an engrossing novel may become 'lost' in a book, oblivious to the passing of time and the goings on around him, when a film is screened a different type of psychological immersion takes place, with the viewer losing themselves in the "real" world presented to them on screen. This immersion relates to the level of engagement required when occupying one physical space whilst watching a narrative text unfold in a space which only exists on screen.

Mitry argues that the viewer's engagement with, and immersion into, the screened space is encouraged by 'the brilliance of the screen against almost totally black surroundings,' which 'produces a sort of preoccupying fascination which confines the impressions of consciousness within a frame which is clearly circumscribed.' Once gained, however, the viewer's attention must be held, remaining focused upon this 'brilliance' for the duration of

the narrative, foregoing all other distractions. He furthers that the effect of the screen is 'somewhat similar to hypnosis in its "captivation" of our consciousness […] and more specifically, with a state analogous with dreaming […] by virtue of this "perceptual transfer" in which the imaginary takes the place of reality' (1998: 82).

This 'captivation' relates to his notion of 'film fascination,' discussed in Chapter One, and stems from the sense of immersion into a world which only truly exists within the confines of the screen upon which it is presented for the duration of the narrative. Mitry continues:

In the cinema "reality is removed" from reality, though it is placed in "another space," we *are part* of that reality; we associate ourselves with that space, whereas it is only convention or our own willing suspension of disbelief which allows us to participate in the "represented" reality of the stage whose action unfolds in the same physical world as our own. This participation is due to several factors, specifically camera movement and changes of shot. Since everything happens as though we were moving in the represented space, we accord to it an identifiable "reality" and we "include ourselves" in it (1998: 79).

Defining Different Types of Space

This act of, 'including ourselves in it' involves engagement with, and immersion into, the aforementioned 'representative space' presented on screen. Further understanding of these phenomena necessitates that a distinction be made between the different types of space encountered by a viewer over the course of a film, from the frame around the screen to the world it presents. Ryan, in her essay *Space*, defines the different types of diegetic space encountered in literature (2012: [8-14]). Although intended to apply to literary space, in many cases these terms are equally applicable to film.

Firstly, she redefines the notion of *setting*, which she refers to as 'the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place,' deeming it separate from *narrative space*: '[the] physically existing environment in which characters live and move' (Ryan 2012: [8]). Further to this, the individual locations in which narratively significant events take place are described as 'shifting' *spatial frames* 'which may flow into each other,' while *story space* defines 'the total space implied by these events,' and the entire space 'relevant to the plot […] as mapped out by the thoughts and actions of the characters'(Ryan 2012: [11]). Applying these terms to film, narrative space would refer to the space depicted over the course of a narrative, while individual scenes take place inside spatial frames. Every other term relates to space outside of what is depicted on screen.

All narrative action is contained by the *narrative* (or *story*) *world*, which is the remainder of the world not immediately relevant to the story and neither shown nor described in the narration. In filmic texts, this is the world beyond that depicted on screen over the duration of

the narrative. In both novels and films, the undisclosed "gaps" are filled by a combination of the receiver's knowledge, imagination, and real life experience. While, in a fiction novel, this process serves to complete the information gaps and details which the author does not impart to the reader. The film viewer still understands that the depicted events are taking place in a broader "real" or fictive world which the particular narrative is set (Ryan 2012: [12]).

In filmic texts, the most immediately relevant space is the section of the spatial frame physically framed by the screen, which functions as the viewer's portal into the world the narrative is set. Bordwell (et al 1985: 215) terms this portal 'the knot hole in the fence,' which posits the viewer as an invisible onlooker, enabling them to look into the spatial frame with an ideal vantage point, 'from its edge, unseen by anyone within that space.' This often gives the viewer a different visual perspective of the spatial frame to any of its diegetic occupants. A different understanding of the protagonists and their relationships to the space and to each other may result as a consequence.

Much of this is a direct consequence of the frame and its positioning. While the framed space of the 'knot hole' enables the viewer to witness the goings on inside the diegetic world, at the same time it selects and limits what is seen, how much can be seen, and for how long. Ultimately, the very device which grants access to the filmic world also limits access to it. For, not only does the frame limit the view granted in much the same way as the frame around a painting but, in another similarity, the camera-eye also choses the perspective, thereby also functioning as physical focaliser. However, what distinguishes the camera-eye from the picture frame, is that the 'knot hole' is not stationary, rather it:

> [M]oves to the ideal place for viewing. The displacement may be gradual in the
> case of camera movement, or instantaneous at a cut. The author's conception of
> the audience being 'put in the position' […] helped define the basis of the classic
> cinema. (Bordwell et al 1985: 215)

The viewer requires being put into position because the framed space poses a psychological contradiction of sorts: the screen exists in the same physical space as the viewer, but serves to depict a shifting spatial frame which does not. The actant in their dual role as protagonist and surrogate, assists the viewer simply by being placed within the space and interacting with its content. In so doing, the viewer is granted a better understanding of the space on the screen, and a focal point for their attention in this limited, framed, section of a potentially limitless space.

Ryan (2001: 90) states that '[f]or immersion to take place, the text must offer an expanse to be immersed within.' In filmic texts, the depicted space may represent part of a fictional or a real world, or exist inside the mind of one of its protagonists. So, further to the terms introduced previously, which are adopted from literary analysis, filmic space can also be divided into what shall be termed *external space* – the area which the characters in a narrative are seen to occupy and move around in – and *internal* (or *psychological*) *space*, which relates to how the homodiegetic characters' memories and dreams are presented on screen. This distinction is necessary as, while literary space is described, filmic space is depicted, and the viewer needs to relate to the represented space and understand its role in the narrative and its relationship to the protagonist in order for immersion to ensue.

Seeing is Believing: The Effect of Effects

One way of drawing a viewer into a newly established filmic world is to impress them with its verisimilitude, while another way the world presented on screen may inspire awe and encourage immersion into the text is through its vastness, or the technical brilliance with which the narrative space is realised on screen. The introduction of colour film stock developed film's capacity to achieve such aims by broadening the medium's range of affordances, thereby affecting its potential both as an artistic medium and a narrative device.

An early British example of this capacity to impress is *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell 1945). Returning from a mission in his severely damaged, crewless, Lancaster bomber, Peter, a British airman, radios in while flying over the Channel to report what he assumes to be his imminent demise, declaring his intention of bailing out without a parachute. He makes contact with June, an American radio operator, who tries to dissuade him. Her pleas go unheeded and he is seen jumping from the bomb-bay doors. He regains consciousness (or awakens) to find himself washed up on a beach, seemingly unhurt.

Soon after, he chances upon an incredulous June, who informs him that a day has passed since their radio contact, and they arrange to meet later. The remainder of the narrative concerns the progress of their blossoming romance while, simultaneously, a court case takes place in a nameless celestial space to determine whether Peter should be "recalled" to rectify the mistake which resulted in his survival.[2] Conductor 71, the celestial messenger held

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[2]The film opens with text informing the viewer: "This is a story of two Worlds: the one we know and one which exists only in the mind of a young airman whose life and imagination have been violently shaped by war," but the cheeky subtitle 'Any resemblance to any other world, known or unknown, is purely coincidental' (Powell, 1945) hints that this disclaimer was only used to skirt any accusations of blasphemy. Furthermore, there is no

responsible by the higher powers for "missing" him (on account of the fog), is tasked with passing updates to Peter regarding the events taking place in his absence.

Only the second colour film to be produced in Britain, about two thirds of the production is shot in colour. Stark stylistic differences serve to illustrate which diegetic space is being observed and purposefully draw attention to the differences between the two. Black and white film stock is used for the celestial scenes: this effectively accentuates the vast openness of the otherworldly space and helps emphasise the immense size of the crowd during court scenes. Contrastingly, events on Earth are shot in colour, highlighting the vibrancy and joy the film associates with life. Furthermore, whenever Conductor 71 pays a visit everything other than he and Peter freezes, enabling the two characters to navigate the 'frozen' terrestrial space, walking around the other, immobile, actants.

This combination of colour and special effects serves to draw the viewer into the narrative space and also clarifies each space's vital role in the narrative: the resultant effect encouraging immersion in the narrative world. Colour and effects are further utilised by the narration to help the viewer distinguish between events "definitely" taking place in this world and those which may only exist inside Peter's mind. The way this affects the viewer's understanding of the role of these different spaces, and the key function each space plays in the plot, are central to the film's effectiveness as a narrative. This not only relates to the viewer's comprehension of the characters' physical relationships to each other and the space they inhabit, but also on an epistemic level, which, as introduced in Chapter One, plays a key part in effecting temporal immersion.

direct reference to heaven in the film, but there are angels with wings in this 'other world' and the American title is *Stairway to Heaven*.

This epistemic element relates to the viewer holding a higher position in the hierarchy of knowledge than any diegetic character, including the main protagonist. They are the sole witness to two key elements that everyone on in the narrative space other than Peter doubts the viability of: they "see" Peter jump from the plane and survive and they "see" Conductor 71 speaking to Peter while everyone else in the space is frozen and oblivious. In certain respects they are placed higher than Peter as they "see" the celestial court in session, and see his friend Dr Reeves crash his motorbike: which, if the text's assertion of Peter's unreliability is accepted, would be the only one of these events which has truly taken place. The only key event which is not depicted is Peter's fall to earth. Furthermore, other than two instances where Dr Reeves is seen riding his motorcycle, the film contains virtually no veridical point-of-view shots, nor any other effects to suggest any internal focalisation. So even though it is not presented from his subjective visual perspective, everything in the narrative world is shown as Peter perceives it and conforms to his perspective of events.

However, if the introductory titles are to be believed, it should be assumed that (almost) every scene involving Peter involves embedded internal focalisation, but there are few diegetic clues encouraging the viewer to support these claims or to question either Peter's belief in Conductor 71, or doubt the existence of the celestial space. This would support Branigan's claim (1992: 113) that unless there is evidence to the contrary, a viewer is more likely to be interpret a scene as being objective than subjective 'because fewer assumptions are necessary' and that it is easier for the viewer to accept what he see than to question it.

In the case of *A Matter of Life and Death*, the question of whether these vital components are real, or exist exclusively in an internal 'dream space' remains unanswered, and the viewer is

left to decide upon the verisimilitude of the situation for themselves over the course of the narrative. Ultimately, utilisation of the film's affordances to encourage spatial immersion is central to the way the plot is structured, and enables the viewer to more easily relate to Peter's situation and ally themselves with him as focaliser. Although affective identification is not vital, sympathy with Peter's situation is essential, as the whole narrative would be interpreted differently if the viewer doubted the veracity of Peter's belief in what he is experiencing. Furthermore, the way the film presents its narrative space(s) should ensure the viewer remains immersed in Peter's perception of the story-world.

Central to how this is achieved is the way in which the frame draws attention to the fact that the protagonists occupy a specific, defined space. This relates to the aforementioned point regarding the framing of intradiegetic space, and how the placing of a protagonist within it, is central to a viewer's immersion into the space. Mitry (1998: 91) explains how these processes are key to the viewer's level of emotional engagement with the narrative content of each scene:

> The plastic structures determined by the framing exert an influence on the audience's emotions. They draw its attention to a particular component of the image or a character or object with a specific position within the frame; they establish relative proportions between different characters and between characters and objects, thereby pointing up the dramatic or psychological meaning of the action […] they allow the audience – without it being conscious of it – to relate to the represented action the emotions which the representations generate within it.

Internal Space, External Space and Eternal Sunshine

Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind (Gondry 2004), could be considered as innovative for its own time as *A Matter of Life and Death* had been six decades prior. The two films share key similarities in that the story involves two parallel narrative threads unfolding simultaneously in different types of space, and in the way the films exploit contemporary technology to help define the different roles of the intradiegetic spaces within their narratives with the aid of special effects.

This time, however, rather than alternating between terrestrial and ethereal (or imaginary) spaces, the two homodiegetic spaces represent a physical reality and an internal, psychological one. Resultantly, although key events in the narrative are shown to take place in a variety of locations, in actuality the vast majority of action plays out in just one physical space: the New York apartment of protagonist and primary internal focaliser, Joel Barish.

The majority of the locations depicted over the course of the narrative only exist in internal space, as they represent memories being replayed and removed inside Joel's mind. However, upon reaching the more positive events which took place earlier in his relationship with Clementine, Joel has a change of heart and decides to stop the process. While this is taking place internally, a parallel narrative is unfolding in the external space around his sleeping body, with Mary, the *Lacuna* company secretary, joining Stan and Patrick – the technicians tasked with performing the erasure procedure – in Joel's flat. Resultantly, the majority of the film is spent crosscutting between the two narrative spaces of the external "real world" space of Joel's apartment and the "internal" memory space of Joel's mind. Although viewer

satisfaction should result from the knowledge of the (contrast between) events taking place in the different spatial frames, much of the narrative also concerns using space to toy with notions related to temporal and emotional immersion.

The earliest scenes, prior to Mary's arrival at the flat and Patrick's departure, primarily serve to complete the backstory and familiarise the viewer with the narrative's structure, switching between the two spaces with the filmic narration's level of stylisation increasing incrementally, heightening the probability of immersion into the filmic text by allowing the viewer time to familiarise themselves with the film's narrative techniques. During this time, many of the recalled memories relate to the backstory, while only an occasional buzzing sound indicates transitions between each memory space. This also serves to remind the viewer that this ostensibly "external" space is internal and exists exclusively within Joel's mind. It may initially seem this distinction is as notable for its novelty value as for plot progression, but the similarity between the events being recalled internally and those taking place in the external space may cause occasional confusion in the unfamiliar or inattentive viewer.

The need for the viewer to remain attentive during these stages stems from way in which the scenes set in external space play chronologically while, initially, internal scenes are presented out of sequence, requiring the viewer to "rearrange" them. The pleasure in this process derived from having to distinguish which space each scene is taking place in, while simultaneously reordering the events they depict and understanding their relevance to the narrative. This, once again, relates to temporal immersion, which is discussed in the following chapter. Such processes are the primary reason Alan Cameron (2008: 82-85)

considers *Eternal Sunshine* a film which 'embodies the database aesthetic popular since the turn of this century.' He accredits this association to this 'disjunctive flashback structure' and its 'representation of memories in a manner reminiscent of dreams.'

From half an hour into the film, the visual narration becomes more frantic and the crosscutting between the events unfolding in the external space of the apartment and those which Joel is re-living becomes increasingly frequent, while elements of each memory space start to overlap, resulting in such phenomena as torrential rain inside living rooms. This rapid pacing and frequent crosscutting stands in distinct contrast to *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell 1945).[3]

However, there are also shared similarities. The first being that the viewer is once again at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge in regard to their awareness of events taking place within the story-space: no diegetic character has any awareness of the events taking place in every spatial frame. On a technical level too, similarities lie in how cutting-edge technology is central to how the story-space is depicted on screen, as special effects and digital manipulation are used to both progress the plot and remind the viewer that they are viewing an internal memory space which freely disregards the conventions of the external world.

An example of this, which also serves to illustrate the connection between the two spatial frames, occurs after Joel has resolved to fix his relationship. During one scene set in internal space, Joel forces his eyes open in the hope this will wake his sleeping 'real' self. This proves

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[3] David Bordwell contrasts contemporary film techniques at some length in *The Way Hollywood Tells It,* (2006: pp. 1062-1065).

to be momentarily successful, and the screen shows a grainy point-of-view shot from the sleeping external Joel's perspective for a few brief seconds, before returning to internal space. He then tries a new tack: attempting to fight the erasure process by moving his projection of Clementine into memories she does not belong. This involves remembering much earlier events and integrating Clementine into them. These scenes not only serve to remind the viewer that the internal spatial frame only exists inside Joel's mind, but introduces a ten-minute sequence which utilises and accelerates the use of techniques introduced up to that point. This emphasises the film's unique approach to memory, space and dreams and establishes what shall become the narrative style of the film for the remainder of the narrative. From here on, not only do elements from one memory space surreally seep into another before each transition, but changes in memory locations become more rapid than at any previous time.

The number of scenes set in external space also increase, as a stoned and panicked Stan and Mary realise Joel and has gone off the grid. This coincides with narrative complications resulting from Patrick's attempted courtship of Clementine. So, along with the greater level of stylisation and an increase in the number of narrative spaces, the viewer now has to contend with "two" Clementines and a further thread in the plotline.

The viewer's knowledge of the diegetic content of both narrative spaces, and the spaces' relationship is central to heightening temporal immersion, for not only does witnessing these events strengthen the viewer's position at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of knowledge, but the sense of temporal immersion should increase as a consequence of the novelty that the two key stories are taking place in one physical space simultaneously. This sense should be

heightened by the viewer's knowledge that the diegetic occupants of each of those spaces are oblivious to the events taking place in the opposing space. Further to this, the viewer should experience a heightened level of suspense knowing that while the internal Joel is frantically trying to save his relationship with a projection of Caroline, his relationship with the real Clementine is in jeopardy.

While such scenes illustrate how spaces may serve to heighten temporal immersion, there is also the key role played by narrative space in relation to emotional immersion. Traditionally, flashbacks and memories have different roles in film. The former are usually considered to be objective and feature events exactly as they took place, their narrative function is that of a tool which enables the filmic narrator to provide the viewer with the knowledge required to understand the content of the narrative, while memories, as Mitry (1998: 211) states, are the 'result of a personal vision, delving into the significant moments of a previous Self,' and represent 'a certain personal point of view and becomes the actualisation of a past reality related to someone in the *present* with concrete behaviour.' Resultantly, memories are focalised and frequently suffer from subjective inflection or saturation as a result, and are often utilised as much to impart information about the psychological state of the character having the recollection as to depict the actual event being recalled.

However, this is not the case in *Eternal Sunshine*. As previously illustrated, once Joel decides to save the relationship by attempting to halt the erasure process, memories no longer serve their typical narrational purpose. Instead, as the narrative progresses, they increasingly function as backdrops. Joel's desire to remember Clementine renders each memory's content less relevant, but the geographical location of the memory and its topography, along with its

position in his brain, becomes increasingly important. As the erasure process approaches its end, and the events which Joel recalls take place progressively closer to the beginning of their relationship, the memories pan out in increasingly divergent ways from the original events they purportedly recall. Now the internal spatial frame functions as a canvas for Joel and his projection of Clementine to concoct a plan to ensure her survival in his mind.

Returning to Cameron's point above, the style of the film could be said to illustrate how accustomed (and inured) the post-Millennial viewer is to the rapid cutting between internal and external spatial frames, and the relationship between the 'dream world' of memory and the 'real' world which are understood to follow different rules, while maintaining the ability to follow events unfolding simultaneously in occasionally-anachronolgical plots and sub-plots. Additionally, it could be seen to stand as testament to how effectively the film primes the viewer by gradually introducing each new stylistic concept.

To assist in achieving this, the film disregards Mitry's claim (1998: 210) that, for the sake of realism, flashbacks and memories should not contain the protagonist experiencing them, arguing that, in reality, a protagonist wouldn't be able to see themselves. As with David in *A Matter of Life and Death*, Joel is placed centrally and externally focalised in almost every shot.[4] However, Mitry (1998: 208-11) also notes in regard to the much-maligned *Lady in the Lake* (1947), that a protagonist must be seen to enable the viewer to affectively identify with them: 'I can share his point of view only if I can relate it to him, recognizing it as his.'[5]

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[4] This method of presentation is much closer to how dreams are presented, as dreams do not generally follow the same cinematic conventions, so a viewer will still be familiar with this method of framing but may forget they are witnessing a replayed memory rather than a dream.

[5] This noir was (infamously) shot entirely in point-of-view, and is frequently cited by critics reaching for an example to illustrate why not seeing the protagonist is counter-productive regarding affective engagement.

Gaut concurs with Mitry, furthering that that external reaction shots are a far better indicator to the viewer than point-of-view shots at illustrating what a character is feeing, as the latter can only show what the character sees rather than what they feel (1999: 212). Furthermore, seeing the protagonist's facial response is a vital function in affective response. However, the content of the "internal" spatial frame in *Eternal Sunshine* depicts the protagonist's personal memories and constitutes the primary intradiegetic space for the majority of the narrative: rather than providing supporting information for another narrative thread, it *is* the narrative thread.

As the scenes do not purport to be conventional flashbacks, but represent Joel's memories, it could be argued that this already depicts a form of embedded focalisation. Consequently, point-of-view shots should not only be quite unnecessary, but inappropriate, as memories do not serve their typical narrative function in this filmic text. Joel is placed centrally within a space he clearly remembers and associates with personal experience, and his facial expressions, speech and other behaviour convey the information the viewer requires and make how the location make him feel explicitly clear.

Furthermore, as Joel is reliving these memories-as-dreams he does not react in the way he did originally, instead his behaviour reflects how the recalled event makes him feel at present. This is key to the emotional immersion the scenes intend to encourage. Vitally, it should be noted that many of the internal scenes are supplemented by voiceover narration. Joel is frequently berated by Clementine during internal scenes for not emoting or expressing how he feels. The diegetic depiction of his internal space privileges the viewer with knowledge

regarding his emotions that even his long-term partner is not party to, functioning in a similar way to the enclosed spaces favoured by Nina in *Black Swan*. This, once again, shows how spatial immersion may also result in the onset of other forms of immersion.

Irrespective of what *Eternal Sunshine* demonstrates regarding the effectiveness of spatial immersion, Gaut (1999: 211) argues that the epistemic aspect of temporal identification is more effective at fostering affective identification than perceptual identification is, as 'we may occupy the character's epistemic perspective by virtue of having our knowledge of what is happening restricted to [their] knowledge.' *Shutter Island* (Scorsese 2010) however, offers an alternative take, by using spatial immersion to foster both affective identification and a sense of epistemic parity.

Shutter Island and Spatio-Emotional Immersion

Citing Gaston Bachelard, Ryan (2001: 122) states that receivers comprehend spatial immersion 'in terms of security and rootedness.' From its opening scene onward, *Shutter Island* toys with this aspiration, encouraging the viewer to share in its protagonist's unease. The viewer is introduced to the nauseous protagonist, agent Teddy Daniels, in the confined space of a ship's toilet. A sense of discomfort permeates the narrative from hereon, as the visual narration plays upon this sense of unease associated with the fascination with, and mistrust of, the unfamiliar. A brief flashback of his wife presenting him with the tie he is wearing establishes embedded internal focalisation.

The process of affective engagement is furthered once back on deck, as he reveals during a conversation with his new partner, Chuck, that she is dead. This exchange is followed by a subjective shot representing Teddy's visual perspective as land is sighted, the men on the shoreline are seen creeping slowly closer as the boat approaches the eponymous island. Just a few minutes into the narrative, the visual narration is already actively encouraging the viewer to identify with Teddy as protagonist and focaliser via the embedded focalisation of both physical and psychological space.

Upon disembarkation, the unease Teddy felt on the boat is exacerbated by the intense stares of the guards who meet them. Again, this event is shown from Teddy's point-of-view. The visual narrator's utilisation of embedded focalisation continues, with several pans and point-of-view shots of the surroundings employed during the agents' journey from the quayside to the asylum compound. Employing the visual narration in this way gives the (false) impression that Teddy is encountering the location for the first time. The extensive use of 'point object' and 'point glance' shots whenever Teddy comes across a location or character for the first time instils a sense of perceptual and epistemic parity, which in turn serves to ally the viewer with Teddy as protagonist, as each encourages the processes of affective identification with him (Branigan 1984: 103).[6]

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[6] Branigan notes that a sequence of three shots is typical, but as long as the object is seen, followed by the 'point glance' reaction shot, a point object is not mandatory (1984: 103).

Discussing the relationship between protagonists and space, Dudley Andrew (1976: 203) maintains that:

> [b]y interrelating the objects which his senses build for him, man gives to reality an order and a logic. Space, time, and causality put man at home in the world and allow him to understand it rather than simply perceive it.

Such frequent use of embedded point-of-view shots followed by reaction shots – taking in the same details as Teddy, from the same visual perspective – especially when looking at scenery rather than people – also accelerates spatial immersion, as the manner of framing encourages the viewer to see the space as intriguing and new. It also supports Mitry's argument (1998: 216) that the subjective image is 'never more than a complement to another image,' as such a shot has meaning only when related to a character already depicted and placed in a setting. However, such shots seemingly contradict Mitry's belief (1998: 79-80) that the filmic frame 'presents reality objectively,' by making 'each member of the cinema audience attentive observers "outside" the drama,' and typically functions to establish 'a sort of alienation between the characters and us.' This approach would suggest that no matter how engrossed and immersed a viewer becomes, they always maintain a psychological distinction between the physical space they occupy and the space within the world depicted on the screen.

Further to the concrete physical space, the narrative also places emphasis upon the importance of internal space, as Teddy's increasingly frequent (and increasingly disturbed) dreams involving his wife, and an extended flashback to his experience in the war, fill in spaces in his past (as he recalls it). Such long internal flashbacks, as with the frequency of veridical point-of-view shots, fly in the face of Hollywood noir traditions, which deem that

the viewer's attention should be focused on the case more than the detective's psychological state.

Bordwell (et al 1985: 76) notes that, traditionally, flashbacks in film are motivated by memory, and do not function primarily to reveal character traits. Unlike many noirs, however, *Shutter Island* does not feature voiceover narration, so initially both visual and psychological embedded shots seem to perform the auditive voiceover's traditional narrative role of filling in Teddy's backstory. Nevertheless, after an extended dream sequence which blends hallucination, memory and fantasy, instances of subjective saturation start to occur, and these become increasingly frequent as the narrative progresses.

In the penultimate scene, Teddy is revealed to be a delusional fantasist and the majority of what the viewer had held to be real up to that point was just a consequence of narrative manipulation. Vitally, at the moment this news is delivered the film should have successfully manipulated the viewer to the point that they may be more likely to ally with Teddy than the doctor when his diagnosis is given. The reasoning behind this disbelief is encouraged via two primary factors. Firstly, the viewer should have allied themselves with Teddy throughout most of the narrative, primarily as a consequence of the visual narrator's presentation of the filmic space from his perspective combined with the conventions of the genre regarding the role of the protagonist. This links in the second factor which is the projection of Teddy in the role of surrogate for duration of the film. Resultantly, until the moment of revelation, the immersed viewer may have no more reason to believe the doctor than Teddy does, and the filmic narrator's effective manipulation of the framed space via the sustained use of such

techniques encouraged the viewer to perceive the story-world – both inside and outside the spatial frame – from Teddy's perspective.

Any doubt in the viewer's mind is expected to cease when they are presented with an internally focalised point-of-view shot of Teddy "shooting" Dr Cawley, which juxtaposes Teddy's perception with an "objective" depiction of the same event. It is this contradiction which illustrates how delusional Teddy truly is. Essentially, the same embedded focalisation which had encouraged the viewer to consider Teddy as surrogate at the onset of the narrative is the same device which now forces them into re-evaluating both the ensuing situation and the preceding ninety minutes of narrative time, while they (simultaneously) continue to watch and process the vital few remaining scenes of the film. This, once more, should effect temporal immersion as the viewer hopes a satisfactory conclusion and a full explanation will be forthcoming.

As evidenced in *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010), upon reappraisal, the viewer should note many incidences throughout the narrative which would have primed them for this eventual outcome. These cues, if acknowledged, would have demoted the status of the doctor's statement from a revelation to merely a confirmation. But two further factors worked against the viewer. Firstly, that a noir's visual style is intended to unsettle the viewer in order to express the hero's disorientation, so any sense of discomfort may be mistakenly discarded as the film conforming to type. In this regard, both conventions of general film spectatorship and prior experience of noir style films encourage the viewer to believe that any issues will be resolved in the closing act. This belief relates to the viewer's desire for the narrative's

resolution and concerns temporal immersion which shall be discussed in the following chapter.

Further to this, Mitry (1998: 14-15) argues that a viewer instinctively considers a depiction to be objective, and equates vision with truth, professing that filmic space 'is presented relative to the particular field of view in its "existential" entirety,' which presupposes that because it is seen on screen it "must" exist. He furthers (1998: 58) that events on screen are 'presented as a concrete reality with all the elements comprising it. Everything is actually objectively present.'' Or, in other words, that as it can be seen taking place it "must" be happening.

The three films discussed in this chapter present a case that, in creating the space for the viewer to immerse themselves, the process of spatial immersion is exacerbated by their desire to "complete" the space, while instinctively accepting what is depicted as objective reality. However, it could also be argued that, four decades on from Mitry, Scorsese's approach in *Shutter Island* is symptomatic of a new era which was heralded around the turn of the Millennium where, viewers ought to be more wary as 'we are not always sure if we are witnessing a memory, a hallucination or an alternative reality' (Cameron 2008: 11).

However, although on occasion the viewer may be unsure of the veracity of the events being depicted, the progression of a narrative necessitates the interaction between protagonists and other actants or objects. As this should (typically) take place in a defined space, the role of that space as a visual anchor, central to enabling the viewer's understanding of the character's relationship to their surroundings, and the instinctive assumption that depicted events are truly taking place, all derive from the same cognitive responses. This interpretation of the

space enables the viewer to engage with the narrative content and enables the process of temporal immersion, the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

What Happens Next? Disclosure and Closure: Temporal Immersion

'The passing of time matters […] because it is not a mere accumulation of time particles but a process of disclosure.' – Marie-Laure Ryan (2001: 141)

The focus of the previous chapter was on the vital role spatial immersion plays in positioning and anchoring both the viewer and protagonist firmly inside the diegetic world. However, as Ryan (2001: 330) explains, once physical boundaries and relationships are firmly established, there comes a point where spatial immersion often takes on a lesser role: '[A]fter a while the purely spatial immersivity of the medium will be taken for granted, and it will become more and more important to focus on emotional and temporal immersion.'

As discussed in Chapter Two, emotional immersion relates to the level of attachment a viewer feels toward a protagonist, and as '[d]ramatic tension is usually correlated to […] interest in the fate of the hero,' (Ryan 2001: 142) it is logical that these two types of immersion are strongly connected. Further to this, Ryan also maintains that the phenomenological basis of temporal immersion stems from an innate desire to watch events pan out in a '"lived" or "human" experience of time,' rather than the progression of actual '"objective" or "clock" time,' and that temporal immersion results from a receiver's 'desire for the knowledge that awaits her at the end of narrative time.' She describes suspense (2001: 140) – 'an emotion or state of mind arising from a partial and anxious uncertainty about the progression or outcome of an action' – as the 'technical name' for this desire. H Porter Abbot

(2008: 160) meanwhile, refers to suspense as 'the pleasing ache of wanting to know what has happened or what will happen next, and has the audience straining to look back or ahead.'

Although this type of immersion is ascribed with a broad range of functions, this chapter will focus upon the crucial role – introduced in Chapter Two – performed by the goals and deadlines introduced over the course of a narrative, and the role which the passage of time plays in a viewer's engagement with a filmic text. This regards both the way the filmic narrator utilises the medium's affordances to affect the gradual disclosure of plot information, and its relationship to the pleasure the viewer elicits from the text. The former performs a vital role, feeding the viewer's 'desire to know' (Ryan 2012: 55) – which stems from the epistemic element of temporal immersion, distinguished in Chapter One – and encourages engagement with the filmic text, while the latter results from seeing these events depicted on screen.

Seeing events being acted out, rather than described, is a central element of the pleasure a viewer elicits from a filmic text. The aural and visual senses play a central role in the process of temporal immersion in film as they concern the vital differences in affordances which distinguish the medium from the novel, as describing an event (as a novel must) 'always distances a narrator from the action he is describing,' while depicting it 'involves [the viewer] in its own course of events, and the only distance between the narrative and the actual event is the distance between the screen and the audience'(Mitry 1998: 358). As discussed in the previous chapter, when an action is performed and an actant is seen undertaking it, it is easier for the viewer to believe than disbelieve. This gives the viewer the sense of having witnessed

the given event, even though the event itself may be imagined, focalised or subjectively saturated.

Typically, a film's plot involves the gradual disclosure of information over the course of the narrative up to the final scenes, where any remaining questions should be resolved. To maintain interest, a filmic text should keep a viewer speculating as to what its final outcome will be. Ideally, only in the final scenes should the viewer be 'finally able to solve all the enigmas of character and action because the structure of disparities responsible for managing the partial truths of the plot become known through the camera' (Branigan 1992: 74). To enable such an effect, films employ narrative devices such as flashbacks, recalled memories, and heterodiegetic voiceover to fill in the gaps in the past which are relevant to the narrative's present (Bordwell et al 1985: 40). This requires the viewer to mentally sequence the recalled events as they would have taken place in the story rather than the order they are presented in the plot. Further to this, much of the disclosed information serves to encourage the viewer to speculate on events which may yet take place in the narrative. These cognitive processes combine to encourage the viewer's increased interaction with the text and heighten their sense of immersion.

However, as Bordwell argues, the onus is typically on what is to come rather than what has passed as, in a text with a goal-oriented plotline, much of the viewer's attention is focused upon the desire to learn more about the undisclosed future, with curiosity about the past often playing a relatively minor role (1985: 40). In Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2010), however, as with all detective films, flashbacks and recollections generally play a much more significant role than in other genres, as recollecting past events is often essential in helping the detective

(and the viewer) uncover information, encouraging the viewer to speculate upon the outcome of the investigation and the reliability of clients and suspects.

When the search for Rachel Soldano is initially established as Teddy and Chuck's assignment, the viewer's prime goal should be discovering a solution to the mystery. Teddy, as a government agent, should be considered the ideal candidate to perform the task. The viewer's extradiegetic knowledge of film-going conventions, bolstered by the processes of spatio-emotional immersion initiated so early in the narrative – and discussed in Chapter Three – should ensure that he is placed in the role of surrogate, especially once he is established as focaliser. The bestowing of this prestigious position stems from all three types of immersion working in unison: spatio-emotional immersion is effected as the viewer discovers more about Teddy's personality and personal history, while temporal immersion also takes hold as Teddy pieces his investigation together. As the investigation proceeds and the plot thickens the level of immersion should deepen, as the viewer speculates upon a solution to the mystery.

Such manners of engagement with this filmic text correspond with the way that temporal immersion is typically evoked in films of this genre, with the desire to see the mystery solved motivating the viewer's engagement. However, a major stylistic difference which differentiates *Shutter Island* from other detective films regards the manner in which the protagonist's backstory is revealed. Typically, flashbacks in detective films are narrated by the hero, addressing the viewer, or are related by another protagonist who addresses the detective directly, while the visual narrator often assists the viewer by depicting the events as they are described.

Although such scenes are, typically, 'a conventional requirement' (Verstraten 2009: 186), in *Shutter Island* no homodiegetic character provides a voiceover commentary at any point. The events must speak for themselves in many cases, while in others it is the spectre of the dead wife who speaks (addressing Teddy). The viewer is thereby required to draw their own conclusions regarding the significance of these flashbacks and hallucinations, but their true meaning, and their relevance to the story, are not revealed until late in the narrative, so the likelihood of the viewer misinterpreting their meaning is heightened.

As the dreams and hallucinations provide an outlet for divulging story information, this results in the formation of two narrative threads. The first relates to the generic plotline outlined above as Teddy strives to uncover the mystery. The second results from the manner in which the text portrays the unravelling of Teddy's mind via embedded focalisation. As the narrative progresses, this comes to play an increasingly important role in the immersion process, while also serving as the film's novel variant of the traditional noir plotline involving a femme fatale who may cause the downfall of the hero. As she is already dead, the viewer is called to question not her reliability, but the effect of her memory on Teddy's psychological state.

Vitally, although the increasing frequency of subjectively saturated shots as the narrative progresses bring Teddy's fragile psychological state increasingly into question, the topic does not dominate the narrative. Rather, this key narrative component is disclosed gradually, along with clues and other story information relating to the other narrative thread concerning Rachel. When Rachel inexplicably reappears, Teddy, sustained by his continuing belief that Andrew Laeddis – the man he holds responsible for killing his wife – is also an inmate

hidden somewhere on the island, develops the conviction that mind experiments are being performed somewhere on the island, and this establishes a new plotline. The viewer, having been exposed to the same evidence as Teddy, is primed by the narration to consider these new goals and beliefs as being quite justified.

As the narrative progresses, and Teddy's flashbacks and nightmares impinge increasingly on the external space, it becomes increasingly clear that Teddy is a deeply troubled man. Consequently, the viewer may be as intrigued by the story behind the flashbacks as they are by the search for answers to the mystery. However, regardless of the increasingly frequent examples of embedded focalisation, the viewer's primary goals should remain tied with Teddy's, so the desire to discover the solution to the mystery should outweigh the desire to question the protagonist's state of mind. Resultantly, these hallucinations, while far too important for the viewer to set aside, should not dislodge Teddy from his established position as surrogate, and the state of emotional immersion should continue quite unabated. This should also increase the viewer's desire to see him succeed and accelerate their desire for the narrative to progress to a satisfactory conclusion, either out of concern for Teddy or for the desire to discover the solution.

Conversely, rather than adversely affecting Teddy's position as surrogate, the hallucinations should be considered evidence of a traumatised past, providing information for (what is still assumed to be) the secondary narrative thread, thereby adding a further layer of mystery and suspense to the plot which, following convention, should resolve itself by the film's conclusion. However, convention also dictates that only the progression of the story towards its ultimate conclusion can provide the viewer with the information required to solve this

mystery for themselves, or have it disclosed to them by the narration. This desire for both resolution and further knowledge should strengthen the viewer's emotional engagement with Teddy and maintain the desire for the resolution of the narrative as their prime objective.

The argument that Teddy's visions aid the progress of the narrative, rather than hinder it, is supported by Bordwell's conviction (2006: 1722) that all noir films feature elements of 'self-conscious, ludic narration,' where the viewer – following conventions of the genre – expects to be misled and reach a point where they have their 'expectations dramatically revised' before all the loose ends are neatly tied up in the closing scenes. However, the extremity of Teddy's psychological state results in a situation encountered in similar 'radical' narratives such as *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010) which are constructed on the basis of what are termed 'unstable hierarchies.' In such cases, the immersed viewer's level of emotional engagement is affected by the visual narration's divestment of visual information, creating a situation whereby they may alternate between identifying with, and feeing alienated or 'separated' from, the protagonist (Branigan 1992: 74). However, just as with *Black Swan*, the depth of temporal immersion by this stage should ensure these bouts of alienation do not affect the momentum of the plot, and the level of suspense should continue to build up, reaching a peak as Teddy winds his way up the stairwell of the ominous looking lighthouse.

When Teddy bursts into the lighthouse's uppermost chamber to find it Dr Cawley seated at his desk in a sparsely furnished room, his new goal is seemingly also revealed to be a red herring. The viewer, for a few brief moments, faces the unwelcome prospect of having watched a "solutionless" detective film. However, the film's climactic reveal ensures this unwanted eventuality never materialises. Cawley explains that Rachel's disappearance to be a

McGuffin to entrap Teddy (and, consequently, the viewer).[7] Further to this, Teddy is informed that *he* is Laeddis, the very inmate that he had believed he was searching for. Cawley also informs him that the only "experiment" taking place on the island is a role-play, with Teddy/Laeddis as the subject, which the viewer has been both party to and victim of. Upon the disclosure of this information, the viewer is made fully aware that a combination of filmic narration and the generic conventions governing the viewing detective genre films had prompted them to disregard an answer that was cued from almost the onset of the film.

Although there is a final turn of events at the narrative's finale, the scenes in the lighthouse constitute the main conclusion as they serve as closure for both the narrative threads that have run the length of the film. However, instead of leaving the viewer satisfied, the ultimate result of Cawley's revelation of what had been assumed throughout the narrative to be the main narrative thread to be a decoy may result in the viewer feeling that they have been hoodwinked. The viewer's previous (misplaced) sense of purpose would have resulted from a combination of cinematic convention and their own susceptibility to manipulation, which primarily stems from their intertextual knowledge relating to the generic conventions of noir. These had primed them to question the motives and actions of every character in the story other than the focaliser. Branigan supports this, citing Robert de Beaugrande, he argues that:

> [E]lements of knowledge are considered already present in the [viewer's] mind, and the task is to decide how to connect them together to suit a plan and a topic […] The task of communicating is then not to *fill* other people's minds with content, but to instruct them *how* to *limit* and *select among* the content they already have in their minds (1992: 111).

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[7] A McGuffin is a term coined by Alfred Hitchcock, and relates to an event early in a narrative which initially motivates the plot but is eventually forgotten about or relegated to an insignificance by further events. A classic example is the microfilm hidden in the statue in *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock 1959).

The disconcerting effect the ending may have upon the viewer relates to the scopic pleasure elicited by any filmic text being dependent, to some extent, on the elements of temporal immersion concerned with film-going traditions and convention. Many films based upon established genres work because 'they take into account the narrative principles of their respective genres:' the intertextual knowledge the viewer brings with them to every film they watch assists immersion to a great extent by encouraging them to predict certain (as yet undisclosed) plot elements. This process results in the viewer feeling gratified if their speculated hypothesis is proven to be true, and a sense of anticipatory excitement if it is disproven, as the level of suspense evoked rises. The conventional understanding that 'the options for the ending of a film noir are limited' is one of the reasons *Shutter Island*'s outcome is probably unexpected (Verstraten 2009: 186-87).

The closing shot of the film shows the lighthouse at sunset, overlaid by deep, sinister sounds on the audio track. As well as reinforcing the previous argument that the true conclusion to the narrative were the events which took place inside the building, this particular combination of visual and auditive narration could be interpreted as the filmic narrator taunting the viewer for their gullibility in trusting the ravings of a man revealed to be a delusional psychotic, or challenging them to question Cawley's explanation, raising the possibility that Teddy was right all along, and that experiments truly are taking place on the island. For although the visual narration employed embedded shots to "prove" Teddy was hallucinating, there is no concrete proof as to whether the medication he is seen taking was aiding his condition or exacerbating it. This leaves the lingering possibility that certain elements within the narration may not have been as deceptive as they are presented as being, and that Cawley is misleading both Teddy and the viewer. However, as the viewer has no other evidence to work with they may only speculate.

Although only limited access to (back)story information relating to the case is expected by the viewer as they watch a detective film, a sufficient level of disclosure is still expected. If this is not provided, as Branigan (1992: 112) argues, a viewer will 'demonstrate [their] knowledge of narration, of "how to go on", by interpreting, by going on.' In such cases, where a narrative does not provide enough information to enable the viewer to construct a complete, structured "interpretation" in their mind, they take what they have and complete it with the 'filling in of certain data' which seems to be 'missing.' This is supplemented by the 'construction of macro-propositions that are about the text though not strictly in it, or denoting it.'

The cognitive process detailed above is, according to Branigan's diagram (Figure 1), operating from a 'top-down' perspective. Therefore, it could be argued that the viewer's acceptance of Cawley's explanation is a reluctant one, and a consequence of a lack of visual evidence to support a counter-claim – as no alternative solution is offered, only inferred – rather than a case of having been entirely convinced. It could also be contended that the visual narration drew the viewer's attention to the 'bottom-up' elements of the process from the onset of the narrative, and this resulted in distracting them from their lack of awareness of the authorial processes taking place higher up the chain. As a result, any sense of frustration which the ending may evoke may stem from the fact that the viewer is having their own susceptibility pointed out to them.

The Intradiegetic Narrator and the Extradiegetic Focaliser

It is not uncommon in films for protagonists to recount events to other characters and for these recounted events to be dramatized on screen. The recounted events – the story within the story – constitute the metadiegetic level. Such is the case in *Big Fish* (Burton 2003), which makes the authorial presence of a filmic narrator explicitly clear from the very first scene. However, while *Shutter Island* achieves immersion via visual focalisation, here montage and voiceover are applied to depict the passage of time in a manner ideally suited to the medium's affordances.

As Edward Bloom tells the tale of how he caught a giant fish on the day of his son Will's birth, the continuous auditive narration alternates between the extradiegetic and homodiegetic levels as it overlays the montage of brief sequences displayed on screen. The sequence starts with the original event as it supposedly took place, before moving to Edward's recounting of the event: first as a familiar bedtime story to his keen young son, then to an eager audience of cub scouts (including a slightly older and disgruntled looking Will), and again to a young lady as Will prepares for the prom, and finally at the after dinner speech at Will's wedding reception.

As a result, at least two pieces of narrative information are divulged simultaneously. Utilising the medium's affordances in such a way enables the filmic narrator to indicate both the passage of time, and the tiresomeness of hearing the same stories recounted repeatedly, while also establishing Will's familiarity with each story, and his increasing frustration with his father's fantastic embellishment of past events. It also increases the probability that the

viewer be more rapidly drawn into the story-world while also becoming familiar with the film's two narrative levels, and simultaneously being introduced to the key protagonists.

Many such short stories, all featuring a younger Edward, are told over the course of the narrative. However, unlike a heterodiegetic narrator – such as Lester in *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999) – when a character within the diegesis is tasked with recounting a story operates as a diegetic narrator they are limited by the rules of the story-world (Branigan 1992: 101). While *Eternal Sunshine* (Gondry 2004) changed what constituted its narrative space by alternating between two spaces which existed simultaneously on a temporal level, *Big Fish* directs the viewer's comprehension of narrative time by having the metadiegetic story-world conform to different rules to the homodiegetic world, utilising the notions of time and fantasy, rather than physical distance, to distinguish between the two narrative levels.

The visuals of the intradiegetic scenes set in contemporary America contrast sharply with the majority of the events depicted during the metadiegetic narrative, which take place in a non-specific past with an uncanny resemblance to a slice of stereotypical, Midwest 1950s American pastiche. This provides these recounted scenes with a unique look and helps the viewer distinguish between spaces which conform to the same rules as the non-diegetic world and those which do not. This version of the past only exists on the "lower" metadiegetic level, recounted in vignettes by protagonists who inhabit the intradiegetic level. The stylistic touches clearly define much of this past as idealised and fantastical, rather than representing the "true" past of the story-world.

The brilliance in the level of detail the film imbues these scenes with greatly reduces the amount of imagination required to understand the events related by the diegetic narrators, immersing the viewer in this idealised fictional past, exactly in the way the teller wants it to be recalled. Setting the narrative in a fictional past benefits the teller in two key ways: it ensures that the viewer's attention is focused entirely on the content of the tale and not speculating on events in the broader narrative space, and it also gives the filmic narrator the freedom to introduce or reference events in the metadiegetic world which never happened in reality but which took place in the fantastic past of the narrative world.

Although the voiceover narrator recounting these events alternates between Edward and Will from tale to tale – with one further tale told by a supporting character – the visual narration remains consistent, as does the structure and style of each vignette, regardless of the teller of the tale. This is further strengthened by the way the images on screen accurately reflect and support the auditive narration: during the recounting of one story time even "stops" and then "speeds up" just as Edward describes it. This emphasises the consistency between his narration and the events on screen, but also serves to remind the viewer that the event depicted is a subjective, focalised recollection. This consistency accelerates the process of spatio-temporal immersion, as it presents the unreliable teller of the tale as a reliable narrator of the fantastic metadiegesis. Resultantly, the viewer should not need to devote attention to distinguishing between reliable and unreliable information during metadiegetic scenes, freeing them to immerse entirely in the fantastical scenes and enjoy them as spectacle.

At the film's climax, the same techniques and stylisation which had been used to depict all the metadiegetic events are employed once again, as Will tells his dying father the fantastic

story of his impending final moments, leading to an equally fantastic funeral. Although this new tale takes place at a time synonymous with the narrative's present, the stylistic elements conform with those established in the tales recounted throughout the narrative, serving as a fitting end(ing) to both Edward's life, and the metadiegetic thread. This fantasy scene is followed by Edward's actual funeral which seems to close the intradiegetic thread, and complement the events in the preceding scene. The large number of attendees should assist both Will and the viewer in assessing how much fact lay behind Edward's tales, and the viewer may also hypothesise that Will may achieve closure by speaking to as many people about his father as he wishes.

However, it is subsequently revealed in a brief closing scene that what had been assumed to be the homodiegesis is actually embedded in a higher level of narration set around seven years later. Although this helps contextualise Will's linking voiceovers, it calls into question who the true focaliser of the narrative had been, and this may affect how the text as a whole is interpreted. This holds especially true regarding the end scenes, as events which were previously assumed to be homodiegetic and relatively objective may now be considered focalised. Furthermore, if the hospital scene indicates that Will has adopted his father's mantle as tale teller, the presence of so many people from the metadiegetic thread at the "true" funeral could infer that Will in turn adapted certain events to make for a better story, moulding the obviously fantastic recollections of his father into something which conforms to his own version of the past.

Raised at such a late point in the narrative, the revelation could easily be overlooked and considered a footnote. However, analysed on a deeper level, this occurrence supports

Branigan's claim (1992: 101) that diegetic narrators higher up the narrational chain may exercise their power by manipulating events which operate at a lower narrative level. This power is demonstrated in this text by the way the intradiegetic level is assumed to be (f)actual and reliable, primarily as a consequence of the stylistic consistency in the presentation of the fantastic metadiegesis and its acknowledgement as fictional throughout the text. Such instances also support Mitry's argument, raised in the previous chapter, that a viewer may take certain narrative events to be true unless given a reason to question their reliability (1998: 14-15).

Epistemic Knowledge: Evaluating the Image and Cognitive Perception

When a story's ending, or part of it, is revealed at the onset of a narrative the dynamics of the relationship between filmic text and viewer changes. Rather than establishing deadlines and goals which will be arrived at in the future, the viewer is instead instilled with a desire to fill in knowledge gaps which will enable them to understand how a given situation came about. In such cases, the viewer's attention is focused not upon the future, but the history of a certain state, and discovering which key events occurred between the given point in the past and the time of the film's setting. Such is the case with *Benjamin Button* (Fincher 2010).

Unlike the protagonists in the prior examples, the eponymous Benjamin is only brought into being when the events of his life are recounted by Daisy, one of the two homodiegetic protagonists, who lies dying in hospital, attended by her daughter Caroline, who functions as the homodiegetic narratee and serves as a secondary narrator. The interaction between the two constitutes the majority of the narrative's homodiegesis which, unlike *Big Fish*, is immediately established as taking place both in the recent past and in a specific city: New Orleans in 2005. The spatio-temporal situation enables the viewer to formulate their first

hypotheses from the onset, before any significant story information has been disclosed, as, through the window, the beginnings of what will become Hurricane Katrina can be seen raging outside.

Coupled with Daisy's condition, this introduces the first in a series of deadlines: will the hurricane seriously damage the hospital before the narrative ends, before Daisy dies, or before she and Caroline resolve whatever issues they have between them? This speculation acts as the first "hook" which enables the narrative to draw the viewer in, initiating the process which should result in temporal immersion. There is also an element of epistemic immersion which comes from a non-diegetic source as the viewer's (assumed) knowledge of the severity of the infamous hurricane adds a further edge to the urgency in the intradiegetic scenes which heightens the temporal immersion.

After a brief scene which serves to foreshadow the remainder of the narrative, Daisy presents her daughter with Benjamin's diary. As soon as Caroline starts reading, the visual narration depicts Benjamin's birth almost ninety years earlier. Further hastening the process of temporal immersion, the voice heard is not that of Caroline reading aloud to her mother, but Benjamin's: an actant who is not present at an intradiegetic level and whose voice Caroline has never (knowingly) heard.

Ryan (2001: 131) notes that spatio-temporal immersion takes place when the imaginative distance between the position of narrator and narratee and the time and place of the narrated events 'is reduced to near zero.' So, when a narrator informs a receiver of an event that took place a temporal and spatial distance from the present location, the receiver must typically

use their imagination to bridge the gap between this description and actuality, by completing the image in their mind's eye. However, here the event is depicted, and the need to imagine is replaced by a desire to garner as much story information as possible. By utilising Benjamin's voice as narrator, much of the telling changes its function. Rather than merely relating narrative content it complements the mise-en-scène by providing additional temporal and emotive depth to the metadiegesis rather than detracting from it.

In the first of these metadiegetic scenes, Button's horrified father grabs his new-born son and bolts out the house. Once again temporal immersion affects the viewer on two levels. Firstly they may quite safely predict Benjamin will not be thrown into the canal which his father races toward, as it is assumed he will survive long enough to write the diary Caroline is reading. As with events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, this knowledge is not imparted by the film, but is part of the extra-diegetic knowledge the viewer possess, related to Branigan's top-down hypotheses discussed in Chapter One. This complements the viewer's desire to see what will be imparted by the narration from the bottom-up perspective of events presented on screen (1992: 113).

The scene is still loaded with suspense, however, as the viewer is yet to discover what Benjamin's father will do instead, and what other events will take place between this date and the point where the diary is written. These as yet undisclosed events will comprise the majority of the plot from hereon, providing the viewer with an extra narrative thread to speculate upon. Vitally, narrative information regarding these events can only be accrued by continuing to watch the screen, and it is the desire to have this information divulged and the

(anticipation of the) scopic pleasure derived from viewing the events from a bottom-up perspective which motivates the viewer to keep watching.

Along with initiating a second narrative thread, the introduction of the diary invests the viewer with a need to amend their initial set of hypotheses: adding the desire to discover what will be disclosed in regard to Benjamin's experiences, and how the content of his diary relates to the protagonists on the intradiegetic level, to those previous desires established in the initial hypothesis. The narrative events depicted in the homodiegesis involving Daisy and Caroline further ensure that suspenseful elements and deadlines are not lodged entirely in the metadiegesis, adding an extra level of speculation to the homodiegetic present, as the desire to find the solution to unanswered questions can be coupled with the desire to learn how Caroline will react as she reads the diary, and whether she will extract as much information as she (and the viewer) requires from Daisy before she dies. These elements further imbue the homodiegetic narrative strand with an element of urgency, immediacy and speculation which the more fantastic metadiegetic level of the narrative should not evoke, especially as the related events are known to have happened in the past and they are often mediated via Benjamin's narration, which affects their effect upon the viewer.

The remainder of the narrative alternates between the embedded metadiegetic level narrated by Benjamin, and the homodiegetic interaction between Caroline and the ailing Daisy, who occasionally punctuates her daughter's reading with her own recollections. These are also presented as embedded metadiegesis, but with Daisy as narrator. The desire for knowledge should also ensure that the viewer wills Daisy to live longer, so as to provide further background information, and this further encourages temporal immersion especially when

coupled with willing Caroline to read more and discover more as, "trapped" inside the diary, Benjamin's story cannot tell itself. In such cases, the viewer's attachment to either Caroline or Daisy depends on whether they consider them characters worthy of emotive engagement or (merely) agents with the function of presenting narrative information to the viewer. This may also be why the events relating to Daisy are incorporated into the narrative.

Further to this, although the metadiegetic content takes precedence over events on the intradiegetic level in terms of screen time, Benjamin is presented as quite a laconic character and his narration, although delivered from a subjective point-of-view, is not emotive in its delivery. Even during the romance and battle scenes, although the events on screen may often be emotively loaded everything is reported matter-of-factly in the voiceover. As with the role of the heterodiegetic spirit of Lester in *American Beauty* (Mendes 1999), this can affect both the viewer's understanding of the character and the emotional impact the events have upon them.

This further distinguishes the different ways that emotio-temporal immersion can affect the viewer, for while the metadiegetic story evokes temporal immersion by exciting the viewer's fascination with its combination of fantastic 'otherness' coupled with stimulating their desire to see where the protagonist's adventures will lead him, the hospital scenes function as a platform for relaying emotive information to bolster the temporal immersion and sustain a sense of immediacy. The frequency that the filmic narrator returns from the metadiegesis to Daisy's ward would also support Smith's argument, presented in Chapter Two, regarding the required frequency of bursts of emotion (1999: 116).

The aforementioned balance the filmic text strikes between the emotively loaded and realistic contemporary homodiegesis, and the visually resplendent representation of a past which blends fantasy and reality contained within the metadiegesis, relates to yet another way in which the filmic text's temporal setting plays a significant role: the manner in which it toys with notions of reality and verisimilitude. As with *Big Fish*, effective temporal immersion may require a willingness on behalf of the viewer to accept certain fantastical elements as real in the context of the narrative, while other factors relating to how the real world operates must retain their functions in the diegetic space. As Wilson explains:

> The proper viewing of a given film may require that members of its audience be situated a certain epistemic distance from their usual habits of perception and common-sense beliefs […] a spectator who is to achieve even a rudimentary understanding of a segment of film narrative must draw nonstop upon the incredible diversity of perceptual knowledge that we ordinarily assume and unendentiously assume we have about actual things and processes [including] our more trustworthy beliefs about the nature and operation of the extracinematic world and about the ways they manifest themselves to us [and] our prior knowledge of the techniques and conventions of film narrative and narration. (1992: 4)

Assuming the viewer will accept such a balance is central to *Benjamin Button*'s structure, as although the central character suffers an affliction which is a biological impossibility, he and those around him are presented as having inhabited the world the viewer now occupies, and not a fantasy realm. Therefore, viewing the protagonists as this filmic text entails necessitates

the viewer accepting Benjamin's fictionality, while also imploring them to care about him, Daisy and Caroline not only as characters, but as real people.

To succeed in this aim, further to hooking the viewer and motivating interest in the plot, Benjamin's impossible and unexplained "condition" draws the viewer's attention to the importance of time and its passing. While *Big Fish*'s metadiegesis depicts the elaborate events that Edward alleges took place earlier in his life, they always take place within a metadiegetic space which is clearly presented as being fantastic, and representative of an idealised version of a past specific to that narrative. The situation presented in *Benjamin Button* is, to an extent, the antithesis of this. For not only is Benjamin's condition accepted as true by those protagonists inside the story-world aware of his condition, but the progression of his life – which is linked to the viewer's desire to see and to know – also brings his fictive life closer to the real present. Furthermore, the events taking place in the story-world surrounding him are contextualised in a narrative world where, virtually everything else conforms to the same rules as the viewer's own reality, while the past he inhabits is also that of the viewer. [8]

The historical setting of the film acts as a temporal frame, serving to place the narrative at a point in time – a temporal space – in much the same way as spatial immersion, discussed in the previous chapter, places the protagonists and viewer in a physical one. By setting the narrative in a fixed and familiar past much exposition may be filled in by the viewer's own knowledge. Vitally, spatial immersion is introduced via a realistically rendered historical past

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[8] The appearance of a humming bird out at sea then during the hurricane are rare nods to the narrative's status as fantasy. Further to this, the occasional anachronisms and minor historical and factual inaccuracies in the film may be considered accidental, or intentional nods to its own fictionality.

which is never overwhelmed by the fantastical elements it depicts. They instead serve to evoke temporal immersion as the historical setting also enables the "knowing" viewer to speculate upon "future" events in the narrative's wider story-world.

As Button's birth takes place on the last day of the First Word War, any viewer with a rudimentary knowledge of history would assume Benjamin lived through certain significant historical events that took place between that point and the (narrative's) present, and assume that some of these events will be mentioned or integrated into the narrative at some point. Further to this, each historically significant date (and event) serves as a temporal anchor reminding the viewer that, in the context of the narrative, Benjamin's past is also their own.

That World War II arrives and plays a significant role in the film is not surprising, but its arrival, as with the speculation regarding the contemporary events in the homodiegesis, provides the viewer with a familiar event which gives them an extra narrative thread to base new hypotheses upon. Such hypotheses would involve speculating upon the likelihood of Benjamin being in imminent danger in, thereby adding to the level of suspense evoked by the story.

This presents the viewer with at least five distinct causes for speculation divided between the two narrative levels. On the metadiegetic level there is the concern for Benjamin's safety, the desire to see what adventures he will encounter and the desire to discover how his relationship with Daisy will develop. On the higher, intradiegetic level of narration, the speculation concerns how these events will affect Caroline, and how they have already affected Daisy. The level of suspense is also exacerbated by the threat posed by the

meteorological and personal events taking place on the intradiegetic level which could cause the events on the metadiegetic level to come to a halt at any time.

Further to this, while the war is the only historically significant event which has a direct effect on the metadiegesis, other historical events such as the space race and the Beatles performing on the Ed Sullivan Show are used as narrative devices to help the viewer keep track of progression through narrative time, rather than motivate the plot, but this too plays a role in keeping the viewer temporally anchored, rooted in the narrative world while comprehending both Benjamin and the world he inhabits as real.

The sources of scopic pleasure are cerebral as well as psychological. When events are depicted on screen – be they explosive military confrontations or a gentle tram ride – the viewer may elicit pleasure from seeing the unfolding action depicted as vividly as if they too were at the scene: even the most active imagination may not be equipped to realise such scenes so brilliantly. Hence, both enjoying the events unfolding on screen while predicting, and anticipating what is to come is another central component of temporal immersion, and vital in encouraging the viewer to keep watching.

Such visual saturation is a vital component of temporal immersion in contemporary film. As the above examples prove, this form of immersion both thrives upon and results from the viewer's understanding of the passage of time and the interdependent relationship between narrative depiction and the cognitive processes of prediction, calculation, sequencing and assumption: between what is seen, what can be understood to have taken place, and what may yet take place. The most vital component in the effectiveness of this process regards the

viewer's perception of events – which had resulted in the establishment of hypotheses – and the pleasure of seeing and hearing their eventual outcomes being realised in saturating detail on screen, played out before their eyes rather than solely inside their minds.

Conclusion

In order to conclude this study, a breakdown of the rudimentary elements of each type of immersion, as discussed over the course of this thesis, should be addressed from the perspective of Branigan's 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' cognitive processes (1992: 37-38). In doing so, a number of similarities can be noted. These similarities should serve to illustrate how, although each type of immersion results from, and encourages, different types of engagement with the text, these types of engagement all serve a common aim: to effect, encourage or heighten temporal immersion.

As discussed in Chapter Two, a viewer's initial engagement with a filmic narrative is typically triggered as either a result of emotional engagement with the protagonist, or a consequence of the protagonist being placed in a situation and the viewer relating to either the situation or to the protagonist's response to it. From this point on, the screen remains the bottom-up source for fuelling either type of engagement, be it in 'emotive bursts' (Smith 1999: 116), which may sustain the viewer's sense of emotional engagement with the protagonist via the bottom-up process of caring about them, or the plot development required for temporal engagement with the story, via the top-down process of desiring to see the character develop and the narrative progress.

In each case, the resultant effect of these two processes working in tandem is a top-down connection initially triggered in response to an event depicted on screen, thereby initiating the process of immersion. The desire to *see* what a protagonist will do, both in the short and long term, and the desire not to just *discover* whether they achieve their goal, but to *see* how it is

achieved, should cause the viewer's engagement with the text to increase, with their susceptibility to becoming further temporally immersed also increasing as a consequence.

This urge to watch and to discover should ensure that the viewer maintains an interest in the filmic text, while the desire to see the plot out to its conclusion is sustained by the narrative's parcelling out of story information, accompanied by (gradual or rapid) character and/or plot development. Again, the top-down desire to discover more, which enables both engagement and immersion, is fuelled by the information provided by the bottom-up process of viewing events on-screen.

The viewer's manner of engagement with the filmic text as described thus far could, in many cases, be seen as similar to engagement with other forms of narrative media, such as theatre and literature, as far as the affordances of those media allow. However, the emphasis on *seeing* (and hearing) events transpire, rather than having them related via an intermediary, heightens the level of immediacy involved in viewing a filmic text, highlighting the key affordances of the filmic medium.

Spatial immersion meanwhile, while serving to anchor the protagonist physically – and the viewer, psychologically – in an established space, introduces the first major difference between the roles of immersion in film and literature: a reader requires a vividly *described* scene to evoke a sense of place in the environment which the narrative is taking place, while in a filmic text, not only is the space seen, it is *required* to enable the viewer to relate to the protagonist as "other". The resultant sense of reassurance and stability identifies the

stabilising quality of spatial immersion as a top-down process but, it too, is initiated, then sustained, by the bottom-up process of viewing.

As a result, it should be agreed that the connection between viewer and text either begins as the cumulative result of the sensory stimuli emanating from the text, or is borne from a cognitive desire to engage with the text's content. However, although a viewer's initial engagement may result from an emotional connection, it is likely this connection occurred as a response to the protagonist's reaction to a depicted event, rather than upon first sight of the protagonist. From this perspective it would not be too much of a leap to consider temporal immersion as a first among equals.

Ultimately, each aspect of immersion performs an essential task. However, the processes detailed above reveals temporal immersion to be both the result *and* the cause of attachment to a filmic text. So, rather than approaching immersion as Ryan does, as four connected sub-categories, it could be argued that a diagram representing immersion (and its aspects) would resemble something similar to a cuboid, with each side representing the different types of immersion distinguished in this thesis: each distinct from the other, but with each connecting each of the other aspects, thereby forming the "shape" which represents immersion itself.

In sustaining this metaphor, another vital side to this "cuboid" must be distinguished. As film is a medium which transmits information via visual and aural channels, much of the viewer's engagement with a filmic text is achieved via sensory stimulation. Seeing a vast, awe-inspiring sight; gazing upon a beautiful landscape, or a scene of devastating carnage; looking upon a beautiful face, or a grotesque one; straining to hear a whispered conversation, or being

overwhelmed by a musical score: none of these could be solely categorised in terms of the types of immersion defined above, although the culminating effect upon the viewer may eventually lead to one.

Consequently, it could be argued that, although the effects of the two receptive processes may result in one of the types of immersion detailed above, there are aspects of the receptive process of viewing a film which could be exclusively defined as *sensory immersion*, and relate entirely to the sounds and images produced by the filmic text. As Ryan's theories primarily concern novels, it is plausible that she neglected to consider this aspect as separate to the other types of immersion she has distinguished, but it could also be applied to other media.

As a reader's interest in a written text may be the result of a fascination with its author's style, rather than motivated by an interest in any particular plot element, the desire to keep reading, although it may be considered part of temporal immersion, may be motivated entirely by pleasure in the writing. Equally, the desire to keep watching a filmic text may, in certain cases, may stem purely from the craving to sustain the sensory pleasures attained from the visual and aural stimuli emanating from the text, or the scopic pleasure of viewing, rather than pleasure motivated by character or plot development. In such cases, this thesis upholds the view that temporal immersion or emotional immersion would be inappropriate definitions.

Branigan maintains that a "knowledgeable" viewer, although watching a text from the bottom up, is constantly aware of the upper four layers – the higher "cognitive" levels – and their

relationship with the "sensory" lower four levels, which concern themselves primarily with the actual on-screen depiction of events which comprise the plot. An understanding of this relationship, he argues, is essential to the top-down approach of appreciating the text as a constructed narrative work. He explains that, since the operation of the lower levels 'depends upon the working assumptions of *all* the levels above it, [as] each step down the hierarchy increases the number of assumptions that must be made and narrows the range of knowledge available to the spectator (1992: 113).

However, if a heightened sense of immersion is achieved, a viewer's attention may become so focused on what is unfolding before them that they no longer concern themselves with the simultaneous interaction between the two manners of cognitive perception, but focus (almost) entirely on the stimuli provided by the text. When such "sensory" immersion takes hold, the desire to see or hear more, to have the senses stimulated or saturated, may result in the viewer neglecting the upper elements of the cognitive process. Approaching filmic immersion from this perspective would seem to address the contradiction raised by Mitry, introduced in the first chapter, regarding the 'fascinated' viewer becoming 'spellbound,' while also maintaining the choice of 'opting out' (1998: 80).

If Mitry and Ryan's approaches are considered along with Branigan's hierarchy, it can be seen that a certain level of engagement with a text allows the viewer to appreciate both the content of the work and the skill in the art behind the image; this would liken it to Ryan's 'imaginative involvement' (2001: 98). However, if this involvement is superseded by a desire for sustained sensory immersion, a suitably immersed viewer could disengage the upper levels and allow themselves to 'surrender to the images' (Mitry 1998: 205). As the

thoroughly immersed viewer is required only to process given images, rather than transform words – which must be read – into images in their mind's eye, as a reader must, this situation could transpire relatively easily in such cases.

However, if the reverse were to occur, and the text was just "taken in", viewed as a sequence of staged actions performed by paid actors, rather than as its creators intended, a different outcome ensues. With neither temporal nor emotional engagement involved, the resultant effect would be that of the viewer truly opting out. The complete lack of engagement would result in a detached analytical viewing and preclude any subsequent possibility of immersion. The possibility of such a breakdown illustrates and reinforces the necessity of any viewer watching a film solely for pleasure, to engage with the text and 'surrender' to a point which allows them to become immersed to the required extent (Mitry, 1998: 205).

However, in keeping with theme of the scopic process, it must also be noted that Janet Staiger, in her work *Perverse Spectators* (2000), distinguishes between film genres 'that might be said to be more in the gaze/narrative mode; others in the glance attractions mode.' She defines 'gaze' genres as detective, gangster, romance, thriller and melodrama, while 'glance' genres are action-adventure films, fantasies, westerns 'many comedies [and] spectacular science fiction.' She also notes that '[h]orror films and musicals might exist in either group depending on how they operate' (2000: 22).

From this perspective, it could be argued that the filmic texts utilised throughout this dissertation – although most exhibit what could be considered fantastic traits, such as body horror and special effects – are primarily what she defines as 'film[s] for reading, with a

stable viewer participating in gazing in sustained attention to it' (2000: 17). Nor were what Staiger terms 'perverse readings' considered, as the films were approached as if being viewed by a "knowledgeable" viewer who would likely respond in the way the filmic narrator expected them to. Such an approach also presupposes that the viewer is viewing the text in the conventional way the filmic narrator expects the film to be viewed (2000: 22).

As addressing the areas detailed above was beyond the scope of this study, it is clear that there remain several aspects of immersion which have not been explored here due to lack of space, but which warrant further investigation. Foremost among them is the analysis of epistemic immersion as a separate area of study, rather than merely integrating it with temporal immersion, and a more thorough analysis of the levels involved in the "accordion" of Branigan's diagram, modifying it in such a way that the terms defining each level would be compatible with the post-structuralist theories applied throughout this study. Furthermore, a study of what proportion of immersion is a voluntary choice, and how much is the direct result of any process intended by the filmic narration, is also debatable, and the ideal subject matter of further discussion.

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