

Extra-ordinary cinema

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The proposed paper aims to articulate some of the possibilities of an ‘extra-ordinary’ cinema – one that would be consonant with what Deleuze indicates in his two books on cinema in terms of what he calls the ‘movement-image’ and the ‘time-image’, respectively. This does not preclude the possibility of formulating the conditions of extra-ordinary cinematic creation in different terms, however – one which I propose to pursue by drawing on the work of Lyotard, specifically on what he calls ‘acinema’, and that of Barthes, particularly his evocative distinction between ‘texts of pleasure’ and ‘texts of bliss’. Far from intending to pursue this exclusively at an abstract philosophical level, however, amplification is called for with reference to actual cinematic artefacts, that is, films. To this end, I intend exploring what may qualify as extra-ordinary films in terms of what has been elaborated here, including, briefly, Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge* and Antonioni’s *The Passenger*, as well as, more at length, Gavin Hood’s *Rendition* and Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing*. This is done by way of exploring the manner in which these films elaborate at the level of cinematic praxis on Deleuze’s ‘time-image’, Lyotard’s limiting notion of ‘acinema’, and Barthes’s texts of ‘pleasure’ and ‘bliss’, respectively. This may be seen as giving cinematic flesh, as it were, to the fruitful relationship between theory and artefact.

Keywords: Lyotard, Deleuze, Barthes, Hood, Roeg, cinema, ‘acinema’, pleasure, bliss, movement-image, time-image

Buitengewone rolprente

Hierdie artikel ondersoek die moontlikheid van ‘buiten-gewone’ rolprente, wat versoenbaar sou wees met wat Deleuze in sy twee boeke oor die rolprent aan die hand van die onderskeid tussen die ‘beweging-beeld’ en die ‘tyd-beeld’, respektiewelik, formuleer. Die moontlikheid van sodanige rolprente kan ook aan die hand van Lyotard se begrip van die ‘a-kinematiese’, en Barthes se onderskeid tussen ‘tekste van genot’ en ‘tekste van *jouissance*’ geformuleer word. In plaas daarvan om hierdie moontlikhede uitsluitlik op die vlak van abstrakte filosofiese konseptualisering te ondersoek, word etlike ‘buiten-gewone’ rolprente ter verheldering op so ‘n wyse bespreek dat die funksionering van die ‘akinematiese’, tekste van ‘genot’ en ‘*jouissance*’, asook die ‘beweging-beeld’ en ‘tyd-beeld’, verkonkretiseer word. Daar word gevolglik kortliks aan Luhrmann se *Moulin Rouge*, en aan Antonioni se *The Passenger* aandag gegee, en meer breedvoerig aan Gavin Hood se *Rendition*, asook Nicolas Roeg se *Bad Timing*, ten einde aan te toon hoe die bogenoemde filosofiese begrippe in die eerste plek in ‘n filmpraktyk gewortel is. Hierdie rolprente kan as die beliggaming van die vrugbare verhouding tussen teorie en artefak beskou word.

Sleutelwoorde: Lyotard, Deleuze, Barthes, Hood, Roeg, rolprente, die ‘a-kinematiese’, genot, *jouissance*, beweging-beeld, tyd-beeld

The materials of cinema are five-fold: images, graphic marks, dialogue, music and noise – two visual (corresponding to the faculty of sight on the part of viewers), and three auditory or acoustic (corresponding to the faculty of hearing in viewers). Before the advent of sound-film, only the first two were available to film-makers intra-cinematically (with sound being added or superimposed on the unfolding or succession of images, by means of piano-playing, for instance).

Is this all that film-directors have to work with? No. They presuppose something else – usually taken for granted, but crucial to the question, whether the film produced is ordinary, mainstream, conventionally viewable, on the one hand, or extra-ordinary, off-beat, unconventional (‘viewable’, at all), on the other. Who could forget Kant’s Copernican Revolution in philosophy, his so-called transcendental turn, consisting in asking the question, what must be presupposed on the part of the subject for a perceivable world to be conceivable at all? (Which he answered by delineating the *a priori* synthetic structural functions of reason at the levels of sensibility and intelligibility.) As far as cinema is concerned, this means that, of necessity, these materials presuppose the indispensable, and inescapable, functioning of movement (something which implicates space), and – even more fundamentally in Kantian terms – *time* as the matrix of all (human) experience, including cinematic experience.

The latter is a special case, of course. Why? Because, as Gilles Deleuze (Colebrook 2002: 30-33) noted, the cine-camera freed the human eye from its usual perspective in the recording of events, of movements and the like. This still requires the unavoidable, embodied human perspective on the projected film – on what is presented in its unfolding – of course, but the primary recording is done by a ‘disinterested’, mechanically and electronically functioning device. Cinema, in its first phase of development, enabled humans, according to Deleuze (Colebrook 2002: 40-43), to capture the ‘movement-image’, where images were freed from being framed by the embodied eye-perspective, and could be captured differently through techniques like cutting, panning, montage, tracking, zooming and so on. Even more radically, however, the second phase in the developmental history of cinema introduced the ‘time-image’, according to Deleuze (Colebrook 2002: 50-53), where the capacity of the cine-camera to repeat, or enact, the constitutive role played by time in human experience is explored. Just how radical this discovery, that cinema represents an artistic sphere where the most fundamental condition of experience, namely time, can be creatively appropriated, is difficult to overestimate. In the process time is condensed, slowed down, accelerated, stretched or dilated, even arrested – as Antonioni does in the notorious final scene of *The Passenger*, where, significantly, time seems to stand still, or (as Orson Welles remarked apropos of Antonioni’s film-art) ‘nothing happens’.

In allowing such meddling in what Kant called one of the ‘forms of intuition’ (the other one being space), cinema has extended the ‘natural’ sphere of human perception and experience. Anyone who doubts this, should recall breathtaking film-sequences of the acceleration of weeks-long plant-growth into efflorescences lasting mere seconds, or of lengthy weather changes condensed into a few eye-winks (accelerated montages); or the opposite, namely spectacularly slowing down movements that, under normal experiential circumstances, elude the ability of the human eye to discern their anatomy, their constituent micro-kinetic components – including the making-visible of a sunbird’s otherwise invisible, rapidly beating wings in films such as David Attenborough’s astonishing BBC-nature series. To be sure, as will become apparent in what is to follow, it is difficult to separate the ‘time-image’ from the ‘movement-image’ in these instances, the decisive question being whether movement is subordinated to time, or *vice versa*. Given the ‘unnatural’ or ‘aberrant’ character of the movements concerned – excessively slowed down, or alternatively, accelerated – it would appear that what Deleuze calls the ‘time-image’ (to be discussed below) is predominant here.

I believe that a cinema which successfully or creatively takes up the challenges of re-perceptualizing (analogous to reconceptualizing) human experience along the (implicitly, even for anaesthetized mainstream cinema) inescapable axes of the movement-image and the time-image, is an extra-ordinary cinema, capable of imparting to audiences an experience of the world transformed into previously unimaginable contours and movements. And this, I would argue, is a salutary reminder of, if not a prerequisite for, an alternative politics and ultimately a different, less exploitative society than the one we live in. Just as Schiller (1981) argued in favour of the ‘aesthetic education’ of humankind as a prerequisite for mature, political judgement and action, I believe that an extraordinary cinema of the kind that Deleuze, Lyotard and others have imagined and conceptualized, and that some film-directors (including Antonioni, Luhrmann, Roeg, Hood, Reggio and Attenborough) have already produced, may just enable otherwise apathetic individuals to overcome their political lethargy, with the realization that extant social reality can also, just like mainstream cinema, be transformed into formerly unseen and unheard-of proportions. In brief: an extra-ordinary cinema functions perceptually to open viewers’ eyes to previously unimagined events, in this way reminding them that, as Adorno would say, what is, is not all that is possible (specifically in the political and economic domain).

Concerning movement and cinema, Lyotard (1989: 169) observes in ‘Acinema’ that:

Cinematography is the inscription of movement, a writing with movement, a writing with movements – all kinds of movements: for example, in the film shot, those of the actors and other moving objects, those of lights, colours, frame and lens; in the film sequence, all of these again plus the cuts and splices of editing; for the film as a whole, those of the final script and the spatio-temporal synthesis of the narration (*découpage*). And over or through all these movements are those of the sound and words coming together with them.

Isn't it astonishing that Lyotard here brings together all those 'elements' of cinema that I have enumerated? There are the elements of sight and sound, as well as movement and time (implicated in narration), with movement conspicuously being singled out as the overarching category for the comprehension and theorization of cinema. It may seem that these considerations would dictate the production of a standard kind of cinema, but nothing would be further from the truth. All depends on *what* is done with these 'elements', and with *which* of them it is done (Lyotard 1989: 169):

Thus there is a crowd (nonetheless a countable crowd) of elements in motion, a throng of possible moving bodies which are candidates for inscription on film. Learning the techniques of film-making involves knowing how to eliminate a large number of these possible movements. It seems that image, sequence and film must be constituted at the price of these exclusions.

...*which* movements and moving bodies are these? Why is it necessary to select, sort out and exclude them?

These questions are all-important, and determine the very character of cinema in both its commercial, mainstream, 'normalizing', and (perhaps 'impossible') 'extra-ordinary' varieties. Cinematography is always, unavoidably, selective, and thus predetermines what viewers see and hear synaesthetically. Condensing mercilessly, for present purposes, Lyotard's delineation of what would constitute what he terms 'acinema', in contrast to 'commercial' (or 'normal') cinema, emphasises that what the techniques belonging to the latter exclude, is conceivable in terms of the political economy of capitalist production, but can also be shown to proceed along the lines of an analogous libidinal economy. In the first case commercial cinema radically excludes anything that does not conform to value conceived of as productive movement(s), instead of the 'sterile', entropic or excessive differences which do not follow the law of investment and return (see Derrida 1978, for a penetrating distinction between these two kinds of economy). The kind of cinema ('acinema') which would be 'sterile' in this sense of exhibiting useless features would be one of either extreme immobility, or excessive mobility – two 'pyrotechnical' limit-conditions which are intolerable to the normalizing function of mainstream cinema.

But this dense summary is cryptic – what does it mean? Think of film, as one scene-sequence after another unfolds on the screen, as analogous to a series of investments in commercial enterprises. As a rule, investors assess investment opportunities in light of the question, whether it is likely to get a 'return' on their investments or not, in other words, whether a profit will be made on them, and those that seem 'sterile' or 'entropic' (not likely to produce a profitable return) are best avoided. What Lyotard is saying, is that mainstream cinema operates like the economic realm of 'safe' investments, in so far as scene-sequences and the images that comprise them are constructively edited into a form where viewers 'do not lose the plot' because of image-movements that seem to go nowhere, but are instead 'hooked' by image-investments that comprise a foundation for viewing-anticipation. That is, they point forward to 'viewing-profits' to come, where earlier perceptions will be recouped in an economically satisfying manner. By contrast, 'acinema' resembles economic activity where there is no meaningful indication that a 'return' may be expected on such perceptual investment. From the perspective of mainstream cinema, therefore, 'acinema' makes no sense, especially because it introduces a model of viewing that goes against the grain of the 'good' cinematic variety, which cultivates instead a receptiveness for mainstream capitalist economic activity on the part of viewers.

Moreover, mainstream, commercial cinema's 'movement of return' should be conceived of as follows, according to Lyotard (1989: 172-173):

All so-called good form implies the return of sameness, the folding back of diversity upon an identical unity. In painting this may be a plastic rhyme or an equilibrium of colours; in music, the resolution of dissonance by the

dominant chord; in architecture, a proportion. Repetition, the principle of not only the metric, but even of the rhythmic, if taken in the narrow sense as the repetition of the same (same colour, line, angle, chord), is the work of Eros and Apollo disciplining the movements, limiting them to the norms of tolerance characteristic of the system or whole in consideration...

Cinematic movements generally follow the figure of return, that is, of the repetition and propagation of sameness. The scenario or plot, an intrigue and its solution, achieves the same resolution of dissonance as the sonata form in music; its movement of return organizes the affective charges linked to the filmic 'signifieds', both connotative and denotative, as Metz would say. In this regard all endings are happy endings, just by being endings, for even if a film finishes with a murder, this too can serve as a final resolution of dissonance. The affective charges carried by every type of cinematographic and filmic 'signifier' (lens, framing, cuts, lighting, shooting, etc.) are submitted to the same law of a return of the same after a semblance of difference; a difference that is nothing, in fact, but a detour.

Commercial, mainstream cinema, in other words, combats entropy, loss, as well as excess, abundance (the two go together) by means of the periodic, intermittent, re-establishment of similarities of various kinds – visual, whether chromatic or graphically formal, and auditory, whether in terms of rhythm or repetition of tonal elements. It is not difficult to see how such disciplining of potentially wayward, irruptive sights and sounds instantiates the movement of investment and return characteristic of capitalist production and consumption. It is in the interest of the large corporate production houses of mainstream cinema to inculcate and continually reinforce these predictable, reassuring economic rhythms, lest the behaviour of consumers deviate, under the influence of (among other things) an extra-ordinary cinema which disobeys the law of the 'return of the same', from consumer behaviour patterns indispensable to maintaining the economic status quo. After all, as Lyotard (1989: 173) intimates, Freud distinguished between two types of repetition – the repetition of the *same* (serving the life – and by implication the preservative – instincts) and the repetition of the *other* (serving the death drive or instinct). In relation to cinema this requires the difficult, if not 'impossible' task of conceiving of, or imagining, an 'other' cinema which would be the embodiment of the latter. The question would remain, however, whether such 'heterogeneous repetition' would qualify as 'cinema' at all – perhaps this would coincide with what Lyotard dubs 'acinema'.

It is the way that 'other' is conceived of here that is important for my purposes. On the one hand, it must be admitted that, within mainstream cinema – where the regime of the return of the same holds sway – the rhythms that this economy gives rise to are reassuring and, for that reason, conducive to pleasure. It is no accident that, apropos of the return of something that is wholly *other*, Lyotard remarks, alluding to Freud (1989: 173): '...it is impossible to discern *what* is returning, when returning with these drives is the intensity of extreme *jouissance* and danger that they carry'. His use of the word *jouissance* implicates the work of Roland Barthes (1975) on two types of text – or, for that matter, two kinds of cinema – 'texts of pleasure' and 'texts of bliss' (a translation of *jouissance*, which means, among other things, 'orgasm'). *Jouissance*, or excessive, disruptive 'orgasmic pleasure' that surpasses pleasure in the ordinary sense, and for that reason cannot be subjected to the regime of investment and return (because there is less of 'insemination' and 'gestation' than 'dissemination' and 'entropy', loss, here). This explains why Lyotard (1989: 173) suggests that one may have to conceive of such '...sterile explosions of libidinal discharge...in a wholly different time-space than that of the repetition of the same, as their impossible copresence'. 'Assuredly', he continues, 'we find here the insufficiency of *thought*, which must necessarily pass through that sameness which is the concept'.¹

To be sure, as far as cinema is concerned, Lyotard is correct, in so far as it works, inescapably, with images and image-sequences, which are in principle different from thought – instead of working with concepts, cinema (as one of the arts) works with 'percepts' (Deleuze & Guattari 1994: 163-199) in so far as it creates new ways of perceiving. This is where Barthes's distinction between two types of 'text' is illuminating for cinema (1975: 14):

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language.

Correspondingly, a 'cinema of pleasure' 'contents' or pleases because it confirms to viewers, in a 'comforting' manner, via recognition of familiar – if newly updated, re-arranged, re-inscribed – images, that they live in a comparably stable, if economically expanding and developmentally innovating world, the fundamental structures of which are in no need of being questioned. A 'cinema of bliss', by contrast, raises questions in the guise of various concrete experiences of space-time disorientation and disruption concerning the very 'grammar' of perception.

There seems to me to be a correspondence between Lyotard's characterization of commercial, mainstream cinema and what Barthes calls 'texts (cinema) of pleasure', on the one hand, and what he thinks of as 'acinema', and Barthes conceives of as 'texts (cinema) of bliss', on the other. It will be recalled that Lyotard's description of commercial cinema highlights its 'economic' structure of investment and 'return of the same', in other words, a pattern which inculcates, in Barthes's terms, 'a *comfortable*' viewing-practice, given viewers' ability to anticipate some kind of resolution, a final 'return' of sorts, even if – as Lyotard points out – it occurs after a 'detour' which temporarily seems to destabilize the predictable rhythm of investment and return. In the analyses that follow, it should be kept in mind that, in contrast to this insistence on a secure viewing experience via the stabilization of image-flows on the part of commercial cinema, 'acinema... would be situated at the two poles of the cinema taken as a writing of movements: thus, extreme immobilization and extreme mobilization' (Lyotard 1989: 177). Significantly, he immediately adds: 'It is only for *thought* that these two modes are incompatible'. From this it follows, therefore, that *cinema* – as opposed to 'acinema' – will be situated at various points of articulation between these two extremes, and depending on precisely *how* it negotiates the spectral distance separating these two conditions of (im-)possibility, it may succeed (as extraordinary cinema) or fail (while 'succeeding' as mainstream, commercial cinema).

Before turning to cinematic instances of this, attention has to be given to the work of Gilles Deleuze, probably the most important philosopher of the cinema of the 20th century. In contrast to what Deleuze calls 'cinema of the movement-image' – which presents movement(s) through the disinterested 'mechanical' eye of the cine-camera, in this way only presenting time indirectly – the 'cinema of the time-image' presents time, or flow, duration, 'itself', according to him, and not merely indirectly, via movement(s). Claire Colebrook (2002: 50) puts it like this:

In the cinema of the movement-image the flow of time is sensed as that which lies above and beyond any of the divergent movements. In the time-image we sense duration directly, not derived from movement... its becoming is positive: for we confront becoming itself, not as an indirect whole of all the composed mobile sections. And this non-dialectical or positive becoming also has a different political orientation. It does not just free us from fixed images by indicating the flow of history from which we have emerged; it presents the creative flow of time as becoming or the opening to the future.

One may wonder how to understand this – we are so accustomed to thinking of the visually perceivable world as comprising enduring things or objects that it is hard to adjust one's mind to the thought that, in Colebrook's words (2002: 51): 'Life is movement and becoming from which distinct things are actualized'.

By way of an aside intended to clarify Deleuze's position, it should be noted that Lacan, too, reminds one that the all too human tendency to substantialize things is fundamentally a falsification of what is primarily given in perception. In his early paper, 'Aggressivity in psychoanalysis' (1977: 17), he elaborates as follows on what he conceives of as a 'stagnation'

of one of the stages of organization of the ego and of objects (which are experienced as ‘events in a perspective of mirages’):

...this formal stagnation is akin to the most general structure of human knowledge: that which constitutes the ego and its objects with attributes of permanence, identity, and substantiality, in short, with entities or ‘things’ that are very different from the *Gestalten* that experience enables us to isolate in the shifting field, stretched in accordance with the lines of animal desire...

Lacan is here taking further, in the direction of the surrounding world of ‘things’, what he has shown regarding the genesis of the subject’s sense of self as ‘ego’ in the imaginary register (Lacan 1977a: 1-7; 1977: 20) – that it emerges from a kind of alienating projection of putative ‘permanence’ into a mirror image which is then mistakenly taken as being the ‘enduring’ subject ‘itself’, despite really being a fictional construct distinct from the ‘I’-position from which one speaks. Similarly, the world of things, in the ‘shifting field’ of everyday experience, lacks the apparent substantiality or ‘permanence’ attached to it through this psychic attribution of ‘stagnation’.

Returning to Deleuze one may once again note that, like Lacan, he intimates that the fluctuating, dynamic field of experience is constituted by humans *as if* it consists of relatively unchanging objects identical to themselves. He quotes Bergson – the philosopher of ‘pure duration’, which can only be apprehended through intuition, and not discrete object-directed intellect – by way of asserting that, in the case of moving things, there is no reason to accord primacy to the things, instead of to movement: ‘The truth is that the movements of matter are very clear, regarded as images, and that there is no need to look in movement for anything more than what we see in it.’ (Bergson, quoted by Deleuze 1986: 58.) And the cinema of the time-image, by presenting the flux of time, or pure duration, to the eye of the viewer, can disabuse one of the prejudice, that we live in a world of substantially unchanging objects and egos. Against this prejudice, and in the idiom of the movement-image, Deleuze claims (1986: 58):

There is no moving body [*mobile*] which is distinct from executed movement. There is nothing moved which is distinct from the received movement. Every thing, that is to say every image, is indistinguishable from its actions and reactions: this is universal variation...

It is the cinema of the movement-image that enables human beings to discover movement as such (Deleuze 2005: 33-35) – movement which is no longer inescapably tied to ‘centred’ perception, but which is ‘abnormal’ in so far as it can consist in speeding-up, slowing-down, reversal, paradoxical motionlessness-in-motion (such as, when a person is running, but her body is presented as remaining in ‘the same place’ relative to the audience). Hence one could say (Deleuze 2005: 35):

The movement-image does not reproduce a world, but constitutes an autonomous world, made up of breaks and disproportion, deprived of all its centres, addressing itself as such to a viewer who is in himself no longer centre of his own perception.

When all of this is recast in terms of the time-image, it reveals an even more radical thinking about the conditions of possibility of a natural and social world. For Deleuze, in ordinary perception, as well as in the cinema of the movement-image, time remains subordinated to movement (in accordance with Aristotle’s precept, that time is the measure of motion). For the time-image to emerge, however, (p.35)

...aberrant movement calls into question the status of time as indirect representation or number of movement, because it evades the relationships of number. But, far from time itself being shaken, it rather finds this the moment to surface directly, to shake off its subordination in relation to movement and to reverse this subordination. Conversely, then, a direct presentation of time does not imply the halting of movement, but rather the promotion of aberrant movement.

What does all of this imply with regard to what I here choose to name ‘extra-ordinary cinema’? Succinctly stated, it is a cinema which eschews the audio-visual economy of commercial cinema

(as analysed by Lyotard in terms of investment and return of the same), and which negotiates, perhaps unavoidably, the ‘acinematic’ extremes of immobility and extreme flux (or hyper-mobility). These extremes, I believe, should limit each other reciprocally, because, should each be instantiated in its ‘purity’ *in a sustained manner*, it would probably subvert the possibility of cinema in an intelligible sense. Sustained, total ‘acinematic’ immobility would be virtually indistinguishable from still photography, while sustained, excessive iconic flux would tend to subvert ‘intelligent perception’ in favour of mere kinetic impressions (which, admittedly, would still be subject to interpretation).

Baz Luhrmann’s quasi-hyperkinetic film, *Moulin Rouge* (2001), tends towards, but does not reach, the degree of audio-visual flux that would entail unintelligibility. It seems to me to belong in the category of Deleuze’s cinema of the movement-image, and not that of the time-image, although its ‘aberrant movements’ do sometimes appear to release the time-image from its cage of subordination to movement. On the other hand, Antonioni’s *The Passenger* (1975) concludes with an extended scene (executed by a seven-minute tracking shot) that approximates immobility to such a degree that it requires an effort in perceptual concentration to register the infinitesimally slow change that can be perceived, in retrospect, to have occurred in the visual field. Again, this is (still) cinema, and not still photography. Arguably, it instantiates cinema of the time-image, in so far as this protracted, continuous shot-scene (*sans* sequence) imparts a direct experience of time (ostensibly) ‘standing still’ – and mediated by this, a sense of existential emptiness). Hence, neither Luhrmann’s nor Antonioni’s film fails to be cinema, by virtue of negotiating the two limit conditions of cinema instead of coinciding with them. Even mainstream cinema does this, of course, but in a formulaic, predictable manner, so that one should perhaps not, strictly speaking, think of it as ‘negotiating’ the two extremes, but as exemplifying a specific type of ‘immobility’ – that of the endless ‘return of the same’, instead of, as in the case of a film like *The Passenger*, a ‘return with a difference’.

What about texts, or cinema, of pleasure as opposed to texts and cinema of bliss, in Barthes’s sense? Do the two films referred to here surpass the representational level of everyday spatio-temporal familiarity, which yields ‘pleasure’, in the process putting ‘normal’ space- and time-awareness in question? I believe that, formally speaking, *Moulin Rouge* does indeed surpass the bounds of a cinema of pleasure, by disallowing a secure, centred perceptual viewpoint (as encountered in mainstream cinema) and exacerbating movement to an almost unbearable degree. Unfortunately, by retaining a more fundamental, ‘sub-textually’ (or ‘sub-audio-visually’) functioning plot-development along the predictable lines of a *La Traviata*-type love story, it proffers precisely the spatio-temporal security that, on the surface, is perceptually withheld by the hyper-kinetic image-flow. In this way, Luhrmann ultimately fails in giving viewers access to an alternative perceptual universe, with its potentially salutary implications for a re-conceptualization of extant social reality.

Regarding Antonioni’s *The Passenger*, the concluding scene comes close to a fragment of cinema of bliss, given its disruption of ‘normal’ viewing practices and conventions – something that encourages reflection on the multi-faceted notion of time. Seen in relation to the disturbing existential probings of the film as a whole – a man alienated from his own identity switching identities with a dead man, only to be assassinated for his ‘mistaken (assumed) identity’ – this final scene may be understood as the culmination of the film’s pessimistic tenor, where the audience is given access to the experience of time as the most enigmatic burden that human beings have to bear.

There is a rapprochement between Lyotard’s acinema, Barthes’s texts of bliss, and Deleuze’s cinema of the time-image, which is not to say that they are identical or synonymous. They resonate with one another, amplifying, differentiating, nuancing one another, in the process

illuminating what I here conceive of as ‘extra-ordinary cinema’. The two films I would like to discuss more at length, to illustrate how this is possible, are Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing* (1980) and Gavin Hood’s *Rendition* (2008). Very succinctly, the latter involves the arrest and detention, without trial, of an Egyptian chemical engineer living in the United States, on suspicion of having been complicit in a suicide bombing that ‘collaterally’ killed an American CIA official in Egypt. The suicide bomber is a young Egyptian who is in a relationship with the daughter of the Egyptian Head of Security, who happens to be the target of the suicide bombing operation. The wife of the Egyptian living in the US waits in vain for her husband (who is returning from South Africa) at the airport, where he is whisked off by CIA operatives, and in the ensuing days one witnesses her vain quest to find out what happened to him, coming up against the stonewalling tactics of those in power time and time again.

The film switches scene-sequences between her actions, those involving her husband in an Egyptian prison (where he has been flown by the American CIA) and the developing relationship between the young man who turns out to be the suicide bomber and the daughter of the Egyptian Chief of Security, and the impression is created that all three of these trains of events are happening concurrently, on parallel tracks of time, as it were. The culminating moment in the film comes when, near the end of its viewing time, one suddenly realizes that you are witnessing, again, something that happened near the beginning of the film in viewing time. Things have come full circle, as it were, but with a twist due to the functioning of the time-image.

How does this happen? Already when cutting from one (ostensibly simultaneously occurring) series of events to another, the time-image manifests itself through the very impression of virtual simultaneity. The ‘movements’ which occur strike one as being subject to a kind of parallel temporality, so that the Egyptian’s American wife’s vain efforts to track down some clue that could lead to her husband, appears to be concurrent with his initial interrogation in the US, as well as with the torture that is later inflicted on him in Egypt, and – given the comparable weight given to it alongside of these two narrative threads – also with the successive events concerning the developing relationship between the Egyptian Security Chief’s daughter and the young Egyptian. In fact, so compelling is the magnetism of apparent simultaneity, that one’s perception is accompanied by the tacit belief that there is a connection between the latter event-series and the former two as well, not merely incidentally, because the girl’s father is the Egyptian Security Chief presiding over the ‘American’ Egyptian’s interrogation and torture, but in a stronger, causal sense. Little does one know, until the pivotal moment near the end of the film, what the causal link will turn out to be.

To be more exact, the initial impression, that one is witnessing, again, the events immediately prior to the suicide bomber’s strike, and that one has ‘come full circle’, is shattered by the realization that the unfolding relationship between the two young Egyptians has *not* been concurrent with the other series of events, but *precedes* them in a decisive causal sense. Hence, this scene-sequence, where Fatima, the Security Chief’s daughter, discovers the book of photographs and commemorative writing (dedicated to his brother, who was killed by Egyptian security forces) compiled by Khalid, her boyfriend, becomes the fulcrum tipping the events into disaster. The book reveals Khalid as Islamic ‘revolutionary’, pictured complete with sub-machine gun, with his brother, before and after the latter’s death, and – crucially – photographs of her father, as well as herself; a discovery that puts a completely new complexion on (at least the commencement of) their ‘relationship’. The book ends with an inscription, to the effect that he (Khalid) would ‘do this in memory of my [his] brother’. This discovery does not leave much to the imagination – without further ado, Fatima starts running, frantically, and the images that appear now, intermittently with the camera ambiguously focusing on her running, are those that

impart to the viewer the experience of *déjà vu*. Except that this time it is accompanied by the sinking feeling of connecting those same images – of the Egyptian Security Chief arriving at the café where he has tea in the morning, of the American CIA officials talking in their vehicle, approaching the area – causally with the impending activity of the previously anonymous suicide bomber, whom one now knows, as Fatima knows, to be Khalid, and whom she is desperately rushing to stop in his attempt at a suicide-assassination of her father.

Needless to say, one already knows, from having witnessed this scene-sequence from a different perspective earlier, that the assassination-attempt fails, but not the suicide bombing, and this time one has to confront the fact that, when the explosives are detonated, Fatima is in close proximity to Khalid, trying to prevent it from happening. Small wonder that she disappeared completely, as the audience gets to know. The important point here, in terms of the time-image, may be grasped through Deleuze's observation (which fits *Rendition* like a glove), that (Deleuze 2005: 36):

If normal movement subordinates the time of which it gives us an indirect representation, aberrant movement speaks up for an anteriority of time that it presents to us directly, on the basis of the disproportion of scales, the dissipation of centres and the false continuity of the images themselves.

With this in mind, one can see how the culminating point I have just reconstructed, casts the previously viewed image-sequences, in retrospect, in the guise of 'false continuity', in so far as – through Fatima's 'aberrant movement' – it uncovers a 'disproportion' which was always there, to be sure, but was hidden because of the impression of simultaneity, of the parallel unfolding of events. Here, Fatima's desperate, headlong rush to the café where she knows her father will be, is what presents to the audience the 'anteriority of time' *directly*, in the process letting the cat out of the bag in more than one sense, but significantly, in the sense of affirming the priority of time over movement. In other words, this is the point at which the present images are seen as having a comet-tail-like past and future (what Husserl called temporal 'retentions' and 'protentions', respectively) and not merely the images unfolding in the viewing present, but in (temporal) retrospect, all the image-sequences that have preceded these in viewing time, too.

By way of the 'temporalization of the image' (Deleuze 2005: 37), in other words, as cinema of the time-image, *Rendition* therefore affirms the ascendancy of this revolutionary conception of time – as the fundamental form of intuition framing human life and knowledge in all its variety – over movement in Kant's work (in the 18th century) over that of Aristotle, for whom it was the other way around (Deleuze 2005: 38; 1999: vii-viii). As cinema, it eschews coinciding with the 'acinematic' limiting conditions of total immobility and unmitigated flux (*à la* Lyotard), respectively, and it qualifies as 'cinema of bliss' (*à la* Barthes) in so far as the tragedy of two young lives snuffed out in the misguided interest of mutually opposing, exclusivist ideologies, points towards the (perhaps impossible) utopian possibility of a different time and space, where decisions and actions do not accord, predictably, with the interest of only one (dominant, or subordinated) party, but with the interests of humanity as a whole. The Prince's words, in the face of the two young lovers' death, at the end of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, come to mind here, for they are as valid in light of what *Rendition* represents fictionally, today, in a global context, as they are in Shakespeare's Verona (Shakespeare 1993: 859):

Where be these enemies? Capulet! Montague!
See what a scourge is laid upon your hate,
That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love...

What is the tragedy of two 'star-struck lovers' in *Romeo and Juliet*, however, is a tragedy that is enacting itself globally, today, in the uncompromising, relentless vendettas waged between ideological enemies such as those fictionally portrayed in *Rendition* (as well as in other films,

such as *Paradise Now* and *Babel*). In both cases the works of art (drama and film, respectively) beckon powerfully, as texts of bliss, towards a not-yet realized (social and political) state of affairs, which is qualitatively different from the strife-ridden world as we know it, albeit not in a kitsch manner, as mainstream, commercial cinema depicts it in an anaesthetizing manner (thus re-affirming the political and economic *status quo*; see Olivier 2003).

Nicolas Roeg's *Bad Timing* (1980) also qualifies, in my view, as cinema of the time-image, although it does so differently from *Rendition* (see Olivier 1984, for a thoroughgoing analysis of this film in terms of identity and difference). The narrative concerns the relationship between Alex, a lecturer in psychological research (concerning, appropriately, concepts such as 'looking', 'watching', and so on) at a university in Vienna (Freud's city), and an apparently promiscuous, independently minded young woman, Milena, whom he meets at a party. In the course of them seeing each other, Alex gets frustrated by the fact that Milena always seems to be just out of his reach, and with the skill and astuteness of someone who understands the human psyche, he gradually succeeds in creating a situation where Milena shows a dependence on him – so much so that it reaches a point where she threatens suicide in the face of his calculated indifference. This is where eponymous 'bad timing' finds its first application: when Milena phones Alex, yet again, telling him that she has taken an overdose of amphetamines, he pretends not to believe her, but joins her in her apartment anyway, discovering a virtually comatose Milena there. Instead of phoning an ambulance immediately, he waits, cutting her nightdress from her body and raping her supine, unresisting 'body'. From the way he consults his watch one knows that he is calculating a time when it would be too late to save her life, before phoning an ambulance, which is finally summoned by him.

To cut a long story short, Alex gets more than he bargained for in the person of the Police Inspector assigned to Milena's case – as a shot of a degree certificate in the Inspector's office shows, he, too, is a qualified psychologist. The picture of a labyrinth on his wall further serves as an appropriate symbol, not only for the human psyche, but also for the film as a whole, given the way that Roeg put it together, namely, as a labyrinth in which the viewer constantly has to find his or her way anew. As new images, non-chronologically presented, either add more confusion to an emergent narrative, or provide a piece of evidence – a kind of Ariadne's thread – which promises to lead one out of the labyrinthine convolutions of the temporally disturbed narrative, it dawns on perceptive viewers that the film not only revolves around the 'bad timing' of Alex's supposedly late call for an ambulance (which let Milena live, instead of dying), but that it *is*, fundamentally, an exploration of time as being 'bad'. The present is always, inescapably, contaminated by a past and a future, to the extent that every present is at some time, itself a future or a past. And this is done by means of Roeg's deft treatment of the time-image.

When, in the final scene (in what appears to be New York), Alex, as well as the viewer, is unexpectedly confronted with Milena, and more specifically, the scar on her neck, reminding one of the tracheotomy which had to be performed on her the night of her near-death, the scar functions, in psychoanalytic terms, as 'object a' (*objet petit a*; see Evans 1996: 124-126) – the little, 'other' object or fragment from the perspective of which one can detect the desire of the subject (here, both Alex and Milena). The desire concentrated in the scar as visual signifier involves Alex's thwarted desire for Milena, as well as her (manipulated) desire for him, and simultaneously the scar becomes the knot or stain that frames the narrative in temporal terms: it is the time-image par excellence in *Bad Timing*, which is nevertheless metonymically connected with every other time-image in the film. Alluding to Proust's literary exploration of time, Deleuze remarks that (2005: 37):

...the direct time-image always gives us access to that Proustian dimension where people and things occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space.

When Alex sees Milena unexpectedly, some time after their liaison, and her scar recalls the fateful events in Vienna, he and she ‘occupy a place in time which is incommensurable with the one they have in space’. This scene is but one in a rich, non-chronologically arranged series of ostensibly haphazard, randomly selected scene-sequences, every one of which constitutes a piece of the time-puzzle or temporal labyrinth that the viewer has to traverse to be able to understand the narrative reconstructed in this way. All the scenes and scene-sequences are fragments of time, which nevertheless, in each case as instances of the time-image, carries a significant signifying charge. For example, the film opens, focusing on paintings such as *The Kiss*, in the Gustav Klimt Museum in Vienna, with Alex wandering about, from where it cuts to the interior of the ambulance, with Milena lying on a stretcher and a medic, as well as Alex, sitting next to her. There is also a cut to a party where Alex is watching Milena intently, until she confronts him with the statement that, if they are going to meet, they might as well do it then. Several scene-sequences in the hospital follow, intermittently alternating with scenes such as Milena parting with her husband, Stefan, at the Austrian border, and Alex talking to a heavily drugged Milena over the phone. When considering these it dawns on one that, far from random, they have been carefully selected to follow one another in this sequence: *The Kiss* frames the narrative to follow, while emphasizing that it is art, not social reality; the ambulance scenes highlight that the narrative involves a matter of life and death (or, that art is a matter revealing the truth of life and death); the parting scene, where Stefan removes the wedding ring from Milena’s finger, inserts a conspicuously complicating factor into the temporal sequence; the phone call from Milena to Alex complicates things further because she is wearing the same nightgown that she is wearing in the ambulance, and so on.

Hence, as the scenes follow one another in narrative or viewing time, the structure of narrated time gradually takes shape, but not as neatly as the word ‘time-puzzle’ suggests. Rather, while the diegetic gaps are incrementally filled in, one experiences the comparatively incommensurable temporal weight of every scene as it unfolds: when one eventually learns what happened on that night, one has already encountered the Police Inspector, and knows that Alex is being investigated for his involvement in Milena’s admission to hospital in a comatose state. But one does not know, until later, precisely what that role is, and when the crucial scene-sequence unfolds – haphazardly, not in neat chronological sequence – one’s expectations are either confirmed or disappointed, but in any event with an enriching effect, via the images understood as instances of the time-image, regarding one’s grasp of Alex’s motives, as well as Milena’s (and concomitantly also the Police Inspector’s).

Instead of merely using the flashback or flashforward (which appears ubiquitously in mainstream Hollywood movies), Roeg’s film is constituted by a sequence of time-images which continually interact with one another, amplifying and specifying their meaning mutually, finally leaving the viewer drunk with the richness of time viewed, as it were. *Bad Timing* therefore represents, in my judgment, one of the finest examples of Deleuze’s ‘cinema of the time-image’.

At the same time, reflecting on *Bad Timing* from the perspective of Lyotard and Barthes’ work invoked in this essay, it approximates ‘acinema’ to a much greater degree than *Rendition*, mainly because of the sheer cinematic fragmentation of narrated time – the bearers of the narrated events, which consequently have to be pieced together in a manner resembling what Freud called ‘secondary revision’ of dreams (the recall, in memory, of one’s dreams, which unavoidably smoothes over what occurred in the dream in haphazard, incoherent fashion, for the sake of making some kind of sense of them on the part of the dreamer; Wollheim 1991: 72). This fragmentation, although no doubt confusing to anyone conditioned by mainstream Hollywood movies’ insistence on a coherent narrative of ‘investment and return’ (with or

without the use of flashbacks and other cinematic techniques), is not sufficiently severe to attain the limit of unmitigated flux, but it nevertheless unsettles commercial cinema's normalizing economy of investment and the 'return of the same' (which leaves the visual, as well as the social and economic *status quo* intact) significantly. In Lyotard's terms, it instantiates or enacts an alternative libidinal economy of difference, not merely by way of a detour, as in commercial cinema, but at several levels at once. These include that of the interrupted, aberrant narrative, of the visual level, where urban, western scenes contrast sharply with those shot in North Africa, and of cinematically embodied identity, where one witnesses in the form of various images, the radical undermining, on the part of Milena, of the standard conception of personal identity – something that provokes Alex's desperate, murderous attempt to domesticate her, finally making her into someone who will 'remain the same'.

In Barthes's terminology, *Bad Timing* is unmistakably a text (cinema) of 'bliss' – here, one does not experience the 'pleasure' of traversing a familiar time-space continuum, reproduced, as in mainstream cinema, for the sake of recognizability by the audience (with all the attendant socio-economic implications regarding extant reality); instead, one's orientation in time and space is disrupted, but not so severely that every time-pregnant image should fail to draw the viewer forward, inviting one to explore a temporal landscape that continually eludes one, tantalizingly promising viewing satisfaction around the next corner, as it were, just to snatch it away again. Even right at the end one is not allowed complete, economically secure, viewing closure, but only the rich tapestry of memory-images that beckon one towards interpretation. Might one not understand this, at another level, as an allegorical intimation of as yet unheard-of social and political possibilities, towards the realization of which one is simultaneously beckoned? After all, as cinema of the time-image (or of 'bliss'), *Bad Timing* affords one the opportunity, as viewer, of an alternative experience of time, and given its fundamental function as indicated by Deleuze (following Kant), time is inescapably the medium for the restructuring, or alternative organization, of social and political reality, too. Cinema here affords one a different mindset, as it were, as a prerequisite for re-thinking the structure of society.

As the analyses of both *Rendition* and *Bad Timing* show – to which I paid more attention than to *Moulin Rouge* and *The Passenger*, given their exemplary status as far as cinema of the time-image is concerned – cinema is capable of exploring the constitutive function of time via a specific treatment of its materials, subsumed under the image. In so doing, it renders valuable insight, not merely into the human world-expanding capacity of cinema, but further provides indispensable material for philosophical reflection on what may well be the paradigmatic role of cinema concerning our understanding of time. To be able to do this, however, cinema has to be extra-ordinary, which, when it is the case, is itself extraordinary in a society largely anaesthetized by the never-ending supply of mainstream (mainly Hollywood) kitsch.

Note

1. It should be pointed out here that Lyotard is using thought in a manner that is different from its meaning in the context of an experience of the sublime, at least in a Kantian sense, where what is experienced as 'sublime' is 'thinkable' at the level of ideas – that is, can be *thought*, but not reduced to a clear concept – but cannot be (re-)presented as an image or cluster of images (Kant 1969: 98-103; Olivier 1998: 197-203).

When Lyotard talks about the sublime (1992: 11) as 'presenting the... unrepresentable', it refers in the first place to certain kinds of (paradoxical) images in the arts, but also, unavoidably, to what is conjured up by ideas, for instance the idea of an absolutely powerful being, which resists presentation in the form of an image (Lyotard 1991: 98-99; 136-139).

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