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Space and Time in Film

Issue Editors' Note

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The categories of space and time are of such fundamental significance to cinema that one might be tempted to think that all that can be said has been said about these two interlinking concepts and their production and negotiation in a cinematic context. However, our understanding and perception of space and time and of spatio-temporal relationships constantly evolve and become more complex, particularly in relation to absolute, substantival and relational theories of both space and time, Einstein's reframing of time as a spatial dimension and the ensuing construct of a space-time continuum. Thus, by necessity, the shifting paradigms of space and time and their interrelationship impact both on their representation in film and the concomitant theorisation and analysis of this representation within Film Studies. As film scholars, we must constantly return to the cinematic production and manipulation of space and time to reassess how it is affected by our changing perception of the ontologies of space and time and, conversely, how our understanding of these physical concepts in cinema alters our spatio-temporal awareness in the real world. The advent of digital technology, with its formal atemporality and virtual space, presents a further radical challenge to our understanding of these categories, adding another layer of complexity to an already complex topic.

Dynamic concepts of both space and time and their on-screen representation also afford us the chance to compare how cinematic space and time have been variously negotiated across the different eras of cinema, thus providing us with a fascinating insight into film's changing relationship with these fundamental physical concepts. In 1920, André Breton wrote:

> Today, thanks to the cinema, we know how to make a locomotive *arrive* in a picture … as we grow accustomed to see oaks spring up and antelopes floating through the air, we begin to foresee with extreme emotion what this time–space of which people are talking might be. Soon the expression "as far as the eye can reach" will seem to us devoid of meaning; that is, we shall perceive the passage from birth to death without so much as blinking, and we shall observe infinitesimal variations. As it is easy to see by applying this method to the study of a boxing match, the only mechanism it can possibly paralyse in us is that of suffering. Who knows whether we may not thus be preparing to escape one day from the principle of identity? (8, emphasis in original)

While Breton captures with a prescient awareness the manner in which the representation of space and time would develop in the century that followed his comments, his belief that the

principle of identity would become void within the context of that development has proven unfounded. From the original moving images of Breton's time to digital video and virtual realities, conventional notions of identity and subjectivity have consistently been questioned. This questioning inevitably implies the consideration of how time, space and their intrinsic relationship with memory and history are represented and how this representation tallies with—and varies from—our lived realities. The interrelationships of space and time with memory and history, on the one hand, and subjectivity and identity, on the other, figure largely in the articles presented here, whether in the Cartesian mapping of spatio-temporal relationships in film, as in Elisa Pezzotta's contribution, or in the Deleuzian reading of a diegetic mid-life crisis, as in Anna Backman Rogers's article.

The first two articles in this issue consider the topic of space in the science fiction and fantasy genres. Alexander Sergeant discusses the relationship between the magical land of Oz and the mimetic space of Kansas in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). Using Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Sergeant outlines how the film vacillates between the two environments, creating an ontological rupture, in order to celebrate both the familiar and the fantastic; in doing so, he seeks to redress the lack of critical attention paid to cinematic spatial aesthetics in relation to the film's Kansas setting. The oscillation between mimetic and fantasy worlds is also discussed by Randy Laist in his analysis of spatial relations in the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (1999). Drawing primarily on Jean Baudrillard's theories of space, Laist focuses on the first film in the trilogy, using the filmmakers' direct reference to Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* and his subsequent dismissal of the film as a launch-pad to investigate the theorist's themes within the film.

Giacomo Boitani analyses stylistic and narrative continuity between the canonical neorealist films of the Resistance and the satirical comedy-"Italian style" genre of the 1960s and 1970s, an area that has received little critical attention to date. Boitani differentiates between those comedies set in and focussing on the Italy of the Economic Miracle of the late 1950s and the 1960s and those that—by engaging with the history of the partisan war—in fact commented on the Italy of the 1960s, while also revealing the traces of neorealist practice evident in the genre.

Focussing on *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), and *Groundhog Day* (1993), Elisa Pezzotta examines the narratological concepts of story time and plot time by analysing time travel in the films under consideration. Central to her argument is that "personal time"—time as experienced by the traveller—also needs to be studied to reach a full understanding of these films' narratives.

In her article, Elise Wortel explores spatial reframing of the past in a range of contemporary films including *The Lady and the Duke* (2001), *The King's Daughters* (2000), *The White Ribbon* (2009), and *Coco Before Chanel* (2009) in the context of Deleuze and Guattari's theories of affect and haecceity. She focuses on the interaction of heritage and post-heritage aesthetics, which, the author argues, transpose historical texts into haptic textures of fabric, skin, shape, sound, colour and movement, making the past ever more tangible in the present and creating a nonlinear sensation of time.

Finally, in her elegant analysis of *Broken Flowers*, Anna Backman Rogers draws from Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche and, in particular, of the "eternal return", with its concepts of

nihilism, passivism and affirmation, to demonstrate that Jarmusch's film is exemplary of a new kind of emerging independent cinema: one of time, thought and becoming.

Employing with lucidity and conviction a range of methodological approaches, these articles challenge us to rethink texts and genres from the vantage point of spatio-temporal constructs and relationships, showing how, rather than annihilate the principle of identity, the filmic observation of the infinitesimal variations of the space-time continuum has the power to both establish and interrogate it.

Works cited

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