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Verena Marie Eberhardt and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger (eds.)

Escaping the Moment

Time Travel as a Negotiation of Transcendence

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JRFM
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JRFM is a peer-reviewed, open-access, online publication. It offers a platform for scholarly research in the broad field of religion and media, with a particular interest in audiovisual and interactive forms of communication. It engages with the challenges arising from the dynamic development of media technologies and their interaction with religion.

JRFM publishes peer-reviewed articles in English that focus on visual and audiovisual media, feature film, documentary, advertising, interactive internet-based media and other forms of communication in their interdependencies with contemporary or historical forms of religion. It critically reflects on theories and methods, studies on intermediality, phenomenological and comparative approaches to media and religion across different cultures and periods. The main focus lies on contemporary phenomena, but diachronic analysis of the interaction between religion, film and media is also promoted as an essential facet of study.

JRFM is edited by a network of international film, media and religion experts from different countries and with professional experience in research, teaching and publishing in an interdisciplinary setting, linking perspectives from the study of religion and theology, film, media, visual and cultural studies, and sociology. It was founded in cooperation between different institutions in Europe, particularly the University of Graz and the University of Zurich, and is published in cooperation with Schüren publishing house, Marburg (Germany). It is an online, open-access publication with print-on-demand as an option. It appears twice a year in May and November and encompasses generally 4–6 articles.

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Verena Marie Eberhardt and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

Make the Impossible Possible

Time Travel as a Transcendent Motif
Editorial

As we all know, time flies, and that is also true for us: JRFM is celebrating its 10th anniversary. When we think back to the beginnings of our journal, we take a mental journey through time. This issue is therefore dedicated to the topic of time travel, which is a strong motif in the media and popular culture. The cover of this issue evokes a character influential in popular culture for over 150 years: Alice, renowned for her adventures in Wonderland, strides resolutely across the gears of the Grand Clock of All Times to start a journey into the past. The books in which Lewis Carroll developed the character of Alice have been widely read and often adapted: The time-travel motif is central in the Disney film Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016). At the start of the film, Alice's mother dismisses her daughter's confession that she once believed she "could do as many as six impossible things before breakfast",[1] but the film will deliver the impossible over the ensuing ninety minutes.

This issue of the *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* is dedicated to the apparently impossible phenomenon of time travel. Time travel is a frequently explored motif in literature, art, music, and audiovisual productions. In this editorial, we navigate with Alice Through the Looking Glass through this fascinating theme, formulating theses that thread through the motif of time travel and presenting the contributions in this issue.

The Disney film is intriguing in its allegorical conception of time and in presenting associated religious moments that prompt us to reflect on values and power, on identity, and on our understanding of the world. In this issue we discuss time travel as transcendent per se – it cannot be observed and is impossible in everyday life. If we understand religion as a process of negotiation with the transcendent, then time travel can be taken as in effect

1 Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:10:58.

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a religious motif. Time travel exists in narrative content, but it is also heavily influenced by its media staging. With their unique cinematic techniques, films can take us on a journey through time, inviting us to contemplate our understanding of time and reality, of fantasy and contingency, of transcendence and immanence. This issue proposes that time, an inherently abstract concept, is materialised on multiple levels in media, in its narration and in its aesthetics.

Alice Back in Wonderland

Alice Through the Looking Glass is a good example of how time travel is staged in the media and what it means to approach time travel as a reflection on transcendence. British author Lewis Carroll wrote his children's books with Alice as their protagonist in the 19th century. Since then, time travel has remained an important, and also complex, theme in children's literature. In her contribution, entitled "Conceptions of Time Travel in Literature for Children and Young Adults", Sabine Planka discusses three case studies. She shows how time travel within the narrative enables the reader to identify with, for example, the protagonists and how it constructs history as moments that can be "visited" by the reader. Norms and values in relation to history, humankind, and life are formed as the reader goes with the protagonists on their adventures.

In Alice Through the Looking Glass, we accompany the adolescent protagonist on her adventures in the fictive country Underland. In Underland, which had already appeared as a world of adventure in the first instalment of the film series – Alice in Wonderland (Tim Burton, US 2010) – up is down and down is up, animals speak, and chess pieces rule. It is the setting for a time-travel adventure that begins in London in the year 1875. Following an extensive expedition to China, Captain Alice Kingsleigh returns home safely. Upon being informed that she must sell her father's ship to keep the family home, Alice flees through a mirror and enters Underland, known to her since her childhood as "Wonderland". She is expected: the Mad Hatter is in crisis, believing his family to be dead. Finding a hat he had crafted as a child, he begins to wonder if he is right. Alice is tasked with traveling back in time to save the Hatter's family. She steals the Chronosphere from personified Time, enabling her to travel through time. Alice experiences past moments but realises she cannot alter events. She recognises, however, that

the Hatter's family must be alive and, together with her friends, manages to save them. Time is physically connected to the Chronosphere, but if the Chronosphere stops, time will run out. In the final moment, Alice succeeds in returning the Chronosphere to its place, saving everyone.

The film's employment of a background story and various internal stories prompts viewers to repeatedly question the boundaries between reality and fiction. It explores themes of family and friendship, repeatedly asking what might have happened if things had been different. The transcendence of time is particularly evident. Time is a possibility expressed materially, but "at the same time" it goes beyond what can be experienced in the everyday and what can be perceived. The film – as is typical of the time-travel motif – disrupts our idea of temporal linearity. Materiality plays a central role as a visualisation of this transcendence.

The Materiality of Time

In the account of Alice, Time is an allegory, dressed like a king – or a god. He emphasizes his supernatural character when he introduces himself: "Young Lady, I am Time. The infinite … the eternal … the immortal … the immeasurable. Unless you have a clock."[2] The eccentric character stages himself as a great, inevitable, and divine power, but at the same time, he makes clear that his force depends on the measurement of time. So, time is only relevant when it is conceived and acknowledged as a concept. In the course of the film, it becomes clear that Time is vulnerable, reliant on mechanical measures and not as mighty as he initially seemed. His extravagant appearance is supported by his attire. He wears a splendid costume, his shoulders resemble the wings of a clock key, and an hourglass is worked into his sceptre. The figure is the personification of time but also a cyborg, with a mechanical clockwork in the back of his head. He is therefore staged as "supernatural" on several levels. Time is physically connected to the Grand Clock of All Times, an experienceable manifestation of time but also an abstract concept connected with the idea of eternity; a miniature of the Grand Clock of All Times is enclosed in Time's chest (fig. 1). The Grand Clock of All Times also materialises time on a second level. The clock face refers to the measurement of time, while the display of the moon phase represents lunar time (fig. 2). Within the

2 Alice Through the Looking Glass, 00:29:34.



Fig. 1: Time, the personification of time, has a miniature of The Grand Clock of All Times within his chest. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:31:05.

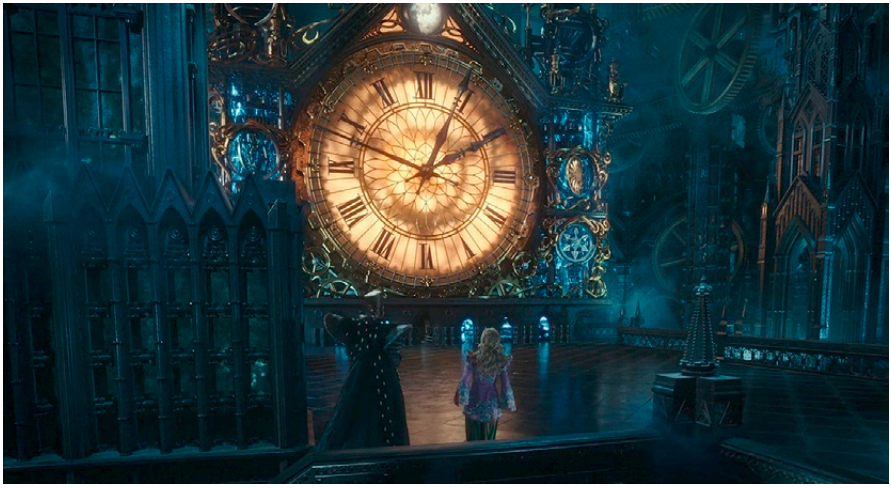

Fig. 2: The Grand Clock of All Times represents ways of measuring time. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:30:57.

Grand Clock of All Times lies the Chronosphere, a small ball that provides energy to the clock, keeping it running as, in effect, a perpetuum mobile. This energy is depicted by imaginings of electricity. The Chronosphere glows brightly, flashes of lightning darting through it, connecting the sphere to the clock (fig. 3). In the Victorian style of the clock and the portrayal of electric-



Fig. 3: The Chronosphere provides energy to the Grand Clock of All Times, which is depicted through imaginings of electricity. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:37:13.

ity, the film adopts a steampunk aesthetic, representing time as transcendent and thereby creating a stylistic journey through time.[3]

The Chronosphere is both the energy at the core of the Grand Clock of All Times and a vessel that makes time travel possible. On falling to the ground, the sphere transforms into a kind of boat, allowing Alice to traverse the Ocean of Time. So, we find here different but connected metaphors of time: the clock as measuring time and in this sense materialising the abstract; electricity as activating time, which "runs" and needs to be driven; and time as an ocean, emphasizing the fluidity and expanse of time, on which – so the film – a person can travel.

The materialisation of time plays a central role in Monika Weiß's article, entitled "Time Travel as Living History. Exploring the Media Representation and Sensual Experience of Historical Everyday Life". Weiß analyses three living-history TV shows, in which individuals travel back in time. This travel is staged as the relocating of contemporary people to historical settings, where they then live as if in the 19th or early 20th century. The article demonstrates the significance of the body and of clothing for this experience and for its filmic staging. The participants wear clothes of the period to which they have "travelled" and work without modern tools. The time

3 See Stiglegger 2014, 43.

travel in these examples is material and emotional – and always set against current ways of living.

What Would Have Happened If Things Had Been Different?

Time is an abstract concept given form in media, as is evident when Alice steals the Chronosphere. The time travel is literal: Alice moves with the Chronosphere across the Ocean of Time, a wild, undulating area with images that emerge from within the waves. The space is neither here nor there, or rather, simultaneously above and below. Moments exist within the waves, shown via audiovisual footage that depicts fragments of different times (fig. 4).

Alice seeks to travel back in time in order to alter the moment when the Hatter's family was killed. She wants to land at Horovendoush Day – the day all evil began – but veers off course and arrives instead at the coronation of the Red Queen, Iracebeth. There Alice discovers that Horovendoush Day occurred because Iracebeth, whose head is oversized, shattered the crown during her coronation. Alice learns that the Queen's head became disproportionate as the result of an accident. She travels back into the princess's childhood with the goal of stopping Iracebeth's head from enlarging. As the young princess run towards an obstacle, Alice seeks to clear the path. However, Iracebeth still falls, striking her head, which causes it to swell. Alice realises she cannot



Fig. 4: Alice crosses the Ocean of Time to immerse in a past moment. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:40:29.

alter the past and the diachronic effects of time. Her failed attempt leads to a reflection on what would have happened if everything had turned out differently. Her journey is not in vain, as it provides insight that ultimately saves the Hatter's family. While it is initially portrayed as a powerful, inevitable, and intimidating force to which humans are subjected, by the end of the film Alice realises that time is not inherently negative for it can enable learning and understanding. This potential for change is inscribed within the motif of time travel, where history is not only experienced but can perhaps be shaped.

In the article "Time Travel as Homecoming. A Journey for Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998)", Haotian (Walden) Wu explores the questions of what if the past had been different and what it means to look back on time. Wu analyses the Greek film Eternity and a Day from a philosophical perspective. The film's topic is "homecoming" in the sense of a farewell to life. We accompany the protagonist, the poet Alexandros (played by Bruno Ganz), on his last day. The film ends at the sea, which metaphorically anticipates time and the (last) journey. The article highlights how the film brings together time (travel), life, and memory to form a complex network that transcends today and tomorrow. As the title of the film suggests, time is portrayed as both liminal and eternal.

Liminality is also important in Alice's story. When Alice disappears through the looking glass, she lands, significantly reduced in size, in a room where the butterfly Absolem talks to her. He guides her to a door, in which

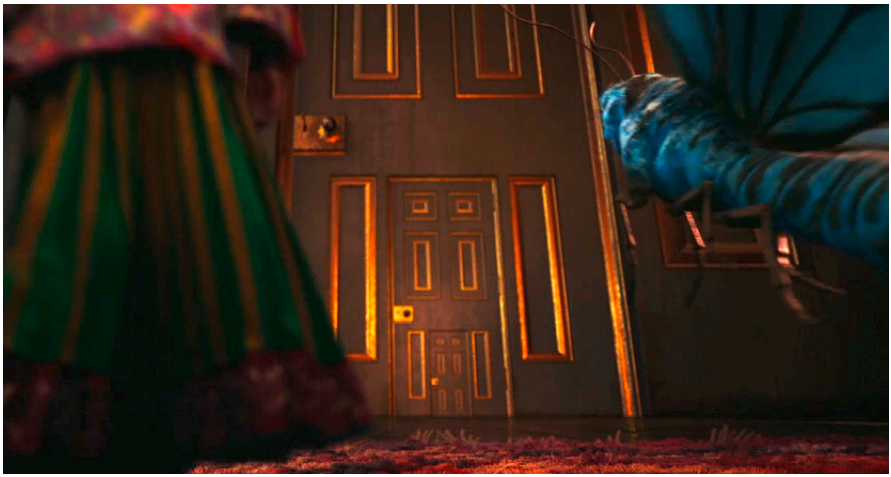

Fig. 5: A door within a door within a door. Visual representation of *mise en abyme*. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:15:24.



Fig. 6: The reflecting mirrors create an impression of infinite depth. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 01:34:49.

a smaller door is embedded, within which an even smaller door is embedded (fig. 5). Alice exits the room through the smallest door and lands in Underland.

At the end of the film, the visual interlacing is revisited as Alice leaves Underland. She stands with the Hatter in front of a mirror, with another mirror on the opposite side. The two mirrors reflect each other, creating an impression of infinite depth (fig. 6).

The materiality of time is present in Alice Through the Looking Glass not only thematically but also in the film editing that connects various timelines. The integration of temporal levels within frame and subplot involves temporal shifts. The transition between these levels is strongly connoted with the motif of the gaze, of looking, of eyes. Alice disappears multiple times through mirrors into which she has looked, the camera films the faces of the Hatter or his dog Bayard, focusing on the eyes, thus symbolising the following scenes are memories of events that took place in the past. The film is self-referential on more than one level: it specifically addresses and presents time travel, but the film itself also traverses time through its representation and narration. While the entire story spans several years, the film is only 113 minutes long. This self-reference is captured through *mise en abyme*: things within things within things. Visually, *mise en abyme* plays a role at the beginning and end of the film, framing the entire narration.

Such filmic self-reference in relation to time travel is addressed by Temitope Abisoye Noah in the article "Time Travel and Bodily Epistemology in Ava DuVernay's Selma (FR/UK/US 2014) and Haile Gerima's Sankofa (BF 1993)". Noah analyses two films by two Black filmmakers of different generations, in particular their negotiation of slavery, oppression, and protest: Selma, a film about the marches championing voting rights for Blacks in the South in 1965, was nominated for four Golden Globes and two Oscars, and Sankofa, a film about African slaves in American plantations. Noah shows how Selma is inspired by Sankofa and how the idea of time travel is used to reflect on power, identity, and history. The *mise en abyme* can be used in light of self-reference, but it can also provide a strong visual account of power processes.

In Alice, the visual *mise en abyme* relays the depth of the friendship and connection between Alice and the inhabitants of Underland. It also shows that Alice is exactly where she belongs: "What we typically see in a mirror, besides our own image, is what lies behind us – in a sense, not where we are going, but where we have been."[4] The set-up of the mirrors means that Alice is in front and behind simultaneously, her past, present, and future coincide in a reference to time travel.

The *mise en abyme* is an astonishing optical phenomenon. It is used in literature, film, and art to suggest change.[5] The reproduction of what is seen prompts the question of what if it were different. This possibility is exactly what Alice captures, making a feminist interpretation viable.[6] Alice's original setting, Victorian London in the late 19th century, is depicted as a patriarchal society. Alice is to marry Hamish Ascot, and as she is a woman she should not interfere in men's affairs. She escapes from Underland through a mirror to evade the pursuing Time, but she wakes up in an institution in London, where a doctor diagnoses her with hysteria.[7] We can interpret her in a feminist way because she defies the misogynistic diagnosis of hysteria and is not crazy, but self-determined. Alice succeeds in escaping. She travels the world as a captain, bravely saves all of Underland, and at the end of the film, she and her mother establish a trading company.

4 Rackin 1991, 72.

5 Wolf 2008, 502–503.

6 Director James Bobin was aware that the original Alice, Alice Little, was born in the same decade as Emmeline Pankhurst, a leader of the twentieth-century Suffragette movement in England. He integrated the feminist position into his film. See Hua 2016.

7 On the motif of female hysteria in 19th century medicine, see Gilman 2020.

In cultural history, the mirror is closely associated with knowledge and self-awareness, perspectives and reflections.[8] Alice Through the Looking Glass incorporates these elements, taking the audience on a journey through time to reflect on gender norms, the boundaries of good and evil, friendship, and forgiveness.

A Pool of Religious Symbols

This issue approaches time travel as religious in that it negotiates transcendence. Additionally, depictions of time travel often refer specifically to religious symbols, traditions, and values. Jochen Mündlein considers this relationship between religious symbols and time travel in his article "Bodies in Space and Time. Time Travel in Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014)". In light of this connection between religion and time travel and in the context of current debates, Mündlein notes the anthropological themes of the film and how it shapes normative ideas. Religious symbols and religious values are used in this film, Mündlein argues, to articulate hope for a better future in which love unites people. Religion provides a symbolic "language" with which to speak of the transcendent.

Religious symbols are moulded, however, by their cultural context, as are the idea and materialisation of time according to Alice Through the Looking Glass. The film makes clear the conditions in which time travel takes place: Time reigns over time in Underland but not in London, which illustrates that time is a culturally variable concept. Alice is chosen to undertake the journey into the Mad Hatter's past as she exists outside of Underland, having been raised in a counter-world. According to the internal logic of the narrative, when a person perceives themself as a time traveller, time freezes and everything petrifies. This moment occurs again at the end of the film, when Iracebeth travels back in time and sees herself as a child witnessing her deformed future adult self.

At the beginning of the movie, Time is a powerful divine entity; he resides in a grand castle in the heavens, existing in light and darkness simultaneously. The castle is not accessible to everyone. Alice reaches it only through

8 See Konersmann 1988.

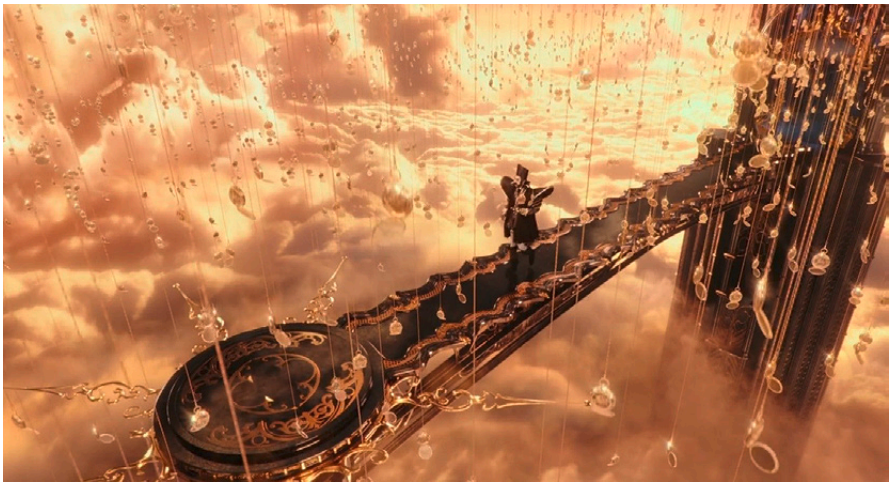

Fig. 7: In the realm of the living, Time holds sway over their lifetimes, which are preserved in pocket watches. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 00:27:51.

a long case clock belonging to the White Queen. Time can control the lifetimes of all living beings in Underland, for he preserves their personal time in pocket watches hanging from the heavens (fig. 7). When he closes the watch of a resident, he hangs it in the dark realm of the dead. As the personification of time, Time is granted a power typically attributed to transcendent figures in religious systems: he decides on life and death, and with his demise, Underland faces destruction, a fact revealed throughout the film.

As Time weakens because the Chronosphere has been stolen, his influence over Underland diminishes. He loses his power, which increasingly falls to Alice. Not only is she tasked with saving the Hatter's family, but by the end of the film she has also become the saviour of Underland itself. One of the final scenes in this peculiar world alludes iconographically – in terms of composition, motif, image of a hand, underlying meaning, and the spark – to a work by the Renaissance artist Michelangelo: Alice assumes a position reminiscent of God in *The Creation of Adam* (fig. 8). Underland is completely petrified, and just as Alice returns the Chronosphere to its place, she too begins to petrify. The sphere remains in Alice's hand until a small spark, a tiny bit of energy between the clock and the Chronosphere, causes Alice's hand to loosen its grip, allowing the sphere to return to its original location.



Fig. 8: After a spark jumps from the Chronosphere to the Grand Clock of All Time, the petrification of Alice's hand dissolves and Underland is saved. The scene refers iconographically to Michelangelo's ceiling fresco *The Creation of Adam*. Film still, Alice Through the Looking Glass (James Bobin, US 2016), 01:28:34.

The iconographic reference to *The Creation of Adam* expresses a connection to a religious tradition with which many viewers of the film are likely acquainted. Michelangelo's ceiling fresco in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican depicts the creation of life by God, with the spark of life passing from God's finger to Adam. This motif is recalled in the film, where the spark that raises all life in Underland is depicted as a lightning bolt. It is Alice who manages to establish the connection and turn events towards the good. In Alice Through the Looking Glass, time is a transcendent category closely associated with religion; time travel is about negotiating transcendence, for it overcomes borders and boundaries and asks questions about life, death, and the position of human beings in the world.

Reflections on Kings and Honor

This issue is dedicated to the motif of time travel, but it contains two additional articles in the open section. In both contributions time plays a crucial role. In her article "The Making of a King through Space and Time. Mediatisation of Transcendence in the Coronation of King Charles III", Caroline Kloos analyses the coronation ritual of the new British king, a

ceremony that constructs Great Britain and the king as transcendent. This portrayal occurs not only in Westminster Abbey, through the materiality of the ritual, which transforms the monarch, the monarch's power, and British history in stages, but also in homes around the world to which it is broadcast. Thus, transcendence is formed in and through media representations.

The second article in the open section, by Christian Feichtinger, is entitled "'Jesus Was a Good Gangster'. Honor and Religion in the YouTube Channel *Grim Hustle*". *Grim Hustle* is a YouTube Channel that presents speeches by a so-called "Russian mafia boss". He gives life advice and provides normative rules, suggesting how to act for oneself and how to deal with other people. In these short videos, Feichtinger focusses on the concept of honour and on its relation to religion. He demonstrates how values are linked to religious ideas but argues that both are reinterpreted in *Grim Hustle* for a contemporary (mostly male) audience.

In both articles, time forms identity by connecting the past with the present. Which leads us back to Alice and her travel through the looking glass. Identity is also a core theme of Alice Through the Looking Glass. Time travel is associated with a transformation of the self. Alice becomes the savour of Underland, a Messiah figure who, on the cover of this issue, walks on the materialisation of time.

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Filmography

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Selma (Ava DuVernay, US 2014).

Sabine Planka

Conceptions of Time Travel in Literature for Children and Young Adults

Three Case Studies

Abstract

This article explores the motif of time travel in children's and young adult literature. After a brief overview of the origins and development of this motif, the article focuses on three books: Todd Strasser's *The Beast of Cretacea* (2015), Alex Scarrow's *TimeRiders* (2010), and Torben Kuhlmann's all-age picture book *Einstein. The Fantastic Journey of a Mouse Through Space and Time* (2021). While the time travel in all three books requires technical equipment, the reasons for undertaking this travel differ, connected to various topics that affect the readers. Time travel is evidently a flexible and adaptable motif. As the article shows, it can be connected to memory studies.

Keywords

Time Travel, Children's Literature, Youth Novel, The Time Machine, H. G. Wells, Memory Studies

Biography

Sabine Planka, Dr. phil., is a literary scholar of children's and young adults' literature/media from the 19th to the 21st century, with a particular interest in food, food cultures, and food systems as well as gender and space discourses in children's literature. Film is also part of her research. She has published a number of articles in scholarly journals and essay collections. Her recent publications include "Räuberkost. Die kulinarische Lektüre von Otfried Preußlers *Hotzenplotz*-Geschichten und *Das große Räuber Hotzenplotz Koch- und Backbuch* (in *Otfried Preußler revisited*, edited by Julia Benner / Andrea Weinmann, Munich: kopaed, 2023 [kjl&m 23.extra], 93–103), and "Meet to Eat. The Restaurant as Narrative Setting in Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) and *The Fisher King* (1991)" (in *A Critical Companion to Terry Gilliam*, edited by Sabine Planka / Philip van der Merwe / Ian Bekker, Lanham et al.: Lexington, 2022, 101–116).

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> "There is no difference. Earth *is* Cretacea, and Cretacea *is* Earth." […] A millennium ago […] scientists discovered how to create wormholes – tunnels between different points in space-time. "Cretacea, Triassica, and Permia aren't other planets […]. They're the names we've given to the missions taking place in different periods of Earth's history. […] To harvest the past for the resources we need in the future."
>
> *—Todd Strasser, The Beast of Cretacea*

The Earth of the future is dead: "Almost one hundred percent of life on Earth, including man, is gone."[1] The scenario created by Todd Strasser in his young adult novel *The Beast of Cretacea* (2015) is dark and bleak and makes unmistakably clear where careless use of the Earth's resources can lead. Readers are sensitized to a theme that is more relevant than ever in the 21st century. The motif of a destroyed Earth is linked to another motif that has been used in literary works since the 18th century: time travel.

Time-travel narratives are many and varied, as the following section will briefly outline. In this discussion, I focus my analysis on three novels that use a time machine as a prominent tool to travel through time, aligning the novels with the science-fiction genre: Todd Strasser's youth novel *The Beast of Cretacea* (2015), Alex Scarrow's youth novel *TimeRiders* (2010), and Torben Kuhlmann's all-age picture book *Einstein* (2021). I aim to show how the time-travel motif is woven into the narratives and connected to topics ranging from current ecocritical debates about historical events to scientific findings. I explore the facts that these narratives mediate, thus allowing the books to be read as sources of knowledge in the sense of literary memory studies, yet without conveying the didactic implications too obviously. Such books can be understood as circulation media that help reproduce memory, as Astrid Erll proposes.[2] She notes that such "collective texts" (German: *kollektive Texte*) mostly belong to the field of popular literature and contribute to the creation of collective memory by mediating collective identities, historical images, values, and norms.[3] According to Erll, high literature is not alone in being read with reference to cultural memory:

1 Strasser 2015, 389.

2 See, additionally, Planka 2014a, 63–83.

3 See Erll 2017, 181.

> Trivial literature in particular makes use of symbolic resources that can be assigned to cultural memory. It generates and perpetuates myths and conveys culturally specific patterns of meaning. The memory of a solid past and collective constructions of meaning of a normative and formative nature are obviously determined more by popular circulation media than by institutionally mediated memory media, which are refreshed in the context of enculturation, for example, at school or during religious instruction.[4]

Children's and young-adult time-travel narratives are able to mediate facts in an entertaining and tension-filled setting, as this article will show – and are thus far removed from the accusation of escapism that entertaining children's and young-adult literature is occasionally subjected to.

Before turning to the case studies, I begin with an overview of the development of time-travel narratives in general and in children's and young-adult literature in particular, where I note theoretical aspects connected to the motif of time travel.

The Motif of Time Travelling in (Children's) Literature – A Historical and Theoretical Approach

Initially dreams and long periods of sleep bridged large spans of time in literature, but since H. G. Wells' short story *The Chronic Argonauts* (1888), time machines have also allowed literary protagonists to travel through time.[5] It is no wonder, then, that Wells' *The Time Machine* (1885) has influenced children's literature, too, for example Edith Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), the first time-travel narration for children.[6]

4 "Trivialliteratur [, die …] sich symbolischer Ressourcen [bedient], die dem kulturellen Gedächtnis zuzuordnen sind. In ihr werden Mythen erzeugt und perpetuiert, kulturspezifische Sinnstiftungsschemata vermittelt. Die Erinnerung an eine fundierende Vergangenheit und kollektive Sinnkonstruktionen normativer und formativer Art sind offensichtlich gesamtgesellschaftlich mehr durch populäre Zirkulationsmedien bestimmt als durch institutionell vermittelte Speichermedien, die im Rahmen der Enkulturation, etwa in der Schule oder bei der religiösen Unterweisung, aktualisiert werden", Erll 2017, 181. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

5 See Planka 2014b, 9–27, esp. 13. The introductory remarks in this essay are partly based on this introduction.

6 See Nikolajeva 1988, 62. Additionally, Planka 2014b, 9–27.

Authors are creative in engineering these journeys through time. Magical time travel exists alongside time machines, perhaps initiated by a bump on the head or a fall. The various devices used to link times are often combined with the relocation of the protagonists. In Mary Pope Osborne's book series *Magic Tree House*, the protagonists travel in the eponymous tree house, which moves from the woods behind their house to, for example, Nepal, a wildlife reserve in South Africa, or the ancient Andes in Peru. The protagonists point to an image in a book, then the magic tree house starts to rotate and delivers them to that place at that time. This pattern is typical in time-travel narratives in children's literature, as Maria Nikolajeva shows, and stands in contrast to Wells' story, in which the Traveler only travels through time, not through space. While Wells' conception of time travel does not entail simultaneous journeys through time *and* space, children's narratives often operate with precisely this concept – a sign that the motif of time travel has developed since its earliest appearances. Time-travel narratives in children's literature – Nikolajeva labels them "time fantasies"[7] – operate in relation to primary and secondary worlds, a dualism that is constitutive for the majority of fantasy narratives: while the primary world is similar to the readers' world and does not include magical elements, the secondary world does contain magic. Nikolajeva suggests that "travelling in space implies travelling in time", since "the principle of time travelling in fantasy is a possibility of a direct connection between the two or more simultaneously existing times. But this is the same principle that admits the possibility of travels into secondary worlds."[8] Nikolajeva calls this a "chronotope", in reference to Mikhail Bakhtin, and describes a "*primary chronotope* (a unity of primary world and primary time) and *the secondary chronotope* (a unity of a secondary world and a secondary time)".[9]

Time travel can therefore mean transgressing borders and boundaries. The central meaning of time travel is, however, the ability to encompass past and future. Time is no longer linear: "For modern concept [*sic*] of time, as well as for science fiction and fantasy, there are no such things as 'past', 'present' or 'future'; all times and epochs exist simultaneously. Still, we are used to thinking of history as 'the past' and of something that has not

7 See Nikolajeva 1988, 62.

8 Nikolajeva 1988, 62, 64.

9 Nikolajeva 1988, 63.

happened as 'the future'."[10] For that reason, I use these terms too in accordance to Nikolajeva, who uses these terms "for sake of lucidity. By present is meant the narrator's and the protagonists' primary time. The past and the future are secondary times placed respectively before and after the primary time on the linear vector."[11]

Any epoch can become the setting for these time travels, and since the epoch will be unfamiliar to the protagonists, it invites exploration. Similarly, time travels enable glimpses into potentially utopian or anti-utopian/dystopian futures, but also ways of responding to or rewriting the past while exploring social or technical achievements. Here lies a vital aspect: secondary worlds constructed as the traveller's destination can be historically "realistic". As Nikolajeva notes,

> In time fantasy two *real worlds* are described, or at least the other world (which does not involve the character's own time) is rationally possible. It has no magic in itself. […] It is the linking of the two worlds that is magical. […] Thus we may consider a world placed in another historical time as a variable of the secondary world fantaseme. No magic is present in the secondary world itself, but the connection is achieved in a magical way.[12]

This aspect of the time-travel narrative can contribute to its educational use, in the classroom for example, for it allows its reader to learn about the past.

In such narratives, past and future times may be deterministically fixed and appear unchangeable, but in other stories times may be alterable, a device that enables protagonists to change – or try to change – their own times, whether for good or ill (the latter must then be prevented at all costs). Leaps in time may be straightforward or circuitous, resulting in time loops; additionally, parallel timelines create multiple realities, between which the protagonists can jump. Nikolajeva notes, "Most time fantasy writers assume that time is not linear, that all different times and epochs exist simultaneously, like a multitude of parallel worlds"; they also assume that time paradoxes often come into play.[13] While some pro-

10 Nikolajeva 1988, 70.
11 Nikolajeva 1988, 70.
12 Nikolajeva 1988, 62.
13 Nikolajeva 1988, 63.

tagonists are able to travel through time repeatedly, some can only travel once, moving from the present into the past or the future and then staying there.

Various theories are linked to these "thought experiments":

> From time as a fourth dimension to the butterfly effect – changing the past has (massive) effects on the present and sometimes also on the future – to chronoclasm […] – changes in the future can equally change the present – all possible physical considerations are taken up and made narratively usable.[14]

Within time-travel narratives in children's literature, the thematic spectrum is correspondingly wide. The breadth since the late 20th and early 21st centuries reflects how authors have absorbed and refracted technical developments and social-cultural as well as political ideas. If topics that appear in these realistic settings are didactically charged, the books in which they appear may be good teaching material,[15] especially when historical aspects are woven into the narrative.[16] It is also striking that environmental, ecological, and ecocritical positions are becoming more prominent. By virtue of the time-travel component, writers are able to visualize and show changes to the Earth caused by human misconduct: as the protagonists seek solutions to climate catastrophes, the readership can identify with the characters in the story, who thus work as role models.

The connection between time-travel narratives and historical topics allows any moment in time to be visited. In such cases, as we shall see, authors will often research the historical background and include an appendix with facts about the relevant historical period.

14 "Von der Zeit als vierter Dimension über den Schmetterlingseffekt – die Änderung der Vergangenheit hat (massive) Auswirkungen auf die Gegenwart und mitunter eben auch auf die Zukunft – bis hin zum Chronoklasmus – Änderungen der Zukunft können gleichermaßen die Gegenwart verändern – werden alle möglichen physikalischen Überlegungen aufgegriffen und narrativ nutzbar gemacht" (Planka 2014b, 10). On chronoclasm see Slusser/Heath 2002, 11–24.

15 See Planka 2014b, 9–27, esp. 14.

16 See Planka 2019, 417–440.

The Failure and Ignorance of Humankind. Todd Strasser's *The Beast of Cretacea* (2015) as a Children's Ecocritical Time-Travel Narrative

Strasser's *The Beast of Cretacea* shows a destroyed and eradicated world, a product of the Anthropocene, from which his protagonists seek a way out. Strasser cleverly incorporates the time-travel motif and only reveals it as such at the end of his novel. He leaves his readers – along with his protagonists – to believe that the main characters have been sent on a journey to another planet to test whether the living conditions are suitable for the resettlement of the people still on Earth. The final twist is that the journey was not just through space but also through time.

The time travel in this narrative is technology-based: the protagonists are sent on their journey in "pods" – curiously, the German edition of the novel changed these pods into cryostasis capsules with the protagonists put in a deep sleep, a connection to an early version of the motif of time travel, when the protagonists "travelled" through time by sleeping for a very long time, rather than by using a technical device. This time travel seems to go hand in hand with spatial relocation: the protagonists awake on a ship (instead of on the solid ground where they likely started their journey) in the middle of an ocean in a faraway past that turns out to be the Earth's Cretaceous period – a clue is given in the title of Strasser's novel.[17]

It is therefore not that one world is real and one fantastical, for both are real worlds, revealed to be the Earth. The Earth of the past, a place so distant in time that the writer has a blank canvas, is depicted as utopian. As the novel's "present" is the readers' future, the author is free to show the worst possible outcome of the Anthropocene: the death of humankind on a desolate Earth destroyed by humans. This dualism – a dystopian future and a utopian past – establishes the frame for the setting of the story. The reader is called to explore both worlds, and while the future seems to be a foreseeable extrapolation of present behaviours, the very distant and unknown past provides room for plentiful speculation.

The connection between the two worlds is principally circular: although most of the characters prefer to stay in the past, a minority want to return to their time, and thus to the destroyed Earth. But the end of the Anthro-

17 See Strasser 2015, 1–2, 389.

pocene is the end of life on Earth. At this point in the novel, its critical and didactive intent becomes clear, having been anticipated by the speculation of characters earlier in the novel: the majority of humankind has learned nothing from their past mistakes, and those responsible for the mission are continuing to make in the "new world" the mistakes they made in the future (their present), mistakes that have led to the destruction of the world. They are exploiting the world of the past, taking what they can. They seem to be aware of the harm they are doing: "We chose times prior to extinction events in the hope that whatever […] *alterations* we caused wouldn't carry over. Of course, all of that is now moot, as the time you and I came from – the Anthropocene Epoch – has ended."[18] The adult mission leaders are willingly accepting a renewed destruction of the world without realizing the paradox they are creating: if they destroy the Earth at an earlier point in time, it, and humankind, will not exist in the future. Therefore, people cannot travel to the past and destroy it. It is the classic motif of a time loop – and seems to be their blind spot. The young protagonists, by contrast, are constructed as role models for the readers; they are aware of the potential for destruction if humankind's behaviour does not change, especially as they observe how the new adult arrivals behave in their new homeland:

> The camp smells of freshly cut wood, and the thatching on the roofs is green. But unlike the islanders' elevated village, the construction here is crude and clumsy. The walkway creaks and dips unsteadily, and instead of having finely carved joints, the woodwork is amateurishly lashed together with strings of rope and vine. Still weak and needing to pause and catch his breath, Ishmael watches while a handful of men and women on the ground attempt to raise a newly built hut onto an elevated platform. It's plain to see that they're not used to manual labor. Their polished shoes sink into the mud, and the men's tight trousers and rain-soaked tunics hinder their movements. There is fevered shouting as some of them tug on the ropes attached to pulleys, hoisting the small dwelling into the air, while others attempt to guide it over the platform. *Snap! Crash!* A hoist rope breaks. Workers cry out and dive for safety as the hut smashes to the ground and splinters apart. […] Ahead on the walkway, an irate woman with two children is complaining loudly to a harried-looking man holding a tablet. The woman and children are dressed in gold-trimmed finery

18 Strasser 2015, 388.

> and have the same ashen-skinned and plump look Pip had when he first arrived on the *Prequod*. The woman lugs a heavy bag in one hand while using a purse to shield her head with the other. The children cling to armloads of electronic toys. The woman gestures at a thatch-roofed hut. "*This* is where you want us to live?" "It's the best we can offer right now, madam," the man apologizes. The woman peers inside. "It's so tiny and dark." "We hope to have lightning soon." "And the washroom?" The man blushes and points down a walkway at two small structures. The nicer one – with a metal roof and small skylights – has a human figure painted in gold on the door. The other is made of rough-hewn wood and has a thatched roof. Instead of a door, there hang sheets with a crude outline of a worker with a shovel. "You … expect us to *share* a toilet?" the woman asks, aghast. "It is only temporarily, madam," the man replies. "We are working to remedy the situation as soon as possible."[19]

This situation shows more than the ignorance and disrespect of the newcomers in relation to nature. They do not seem to understand that they are survivors of a catastrophe that has cost billions of lives; consequently, they show no gratitude. Additionally, it shows how ill-prepared the newcomers are for an epoch that is characterized by a life with and in nature, and not – again – against it.

The key theme in this quoted passage relates to the destruction of nature and the interlinked and apparently unconscious behaviour of the new arrivals, but it also mentions, albeit in passing, the 'islanders', a group of people that protagonist Ishmael has met before. They live in a unity with nature that accords with Karan Barad's definition of an *agential realism*. As Adrian Tait elucidates, "In Barad's subject–object blurring reading of the continuous and constitutive entanglement of entities – a reading that blurs the subject–object divide – the human body is reinstated as itself a part of the natural world, and as itself natural."[20] This principle is perfectly illustrated in Strasser's novel, where the islanders take only what they need – unlike the pirates who live on Cretacea and selfishly exploit nature. Thus, the islanders show how life in the past can exist in respectful harmony with nature, without damaging the future. And here, too, Strasser creates a plot twist, as the islanders the young protagonists meet are descendants of other time

19 Strasser 2015, 393–394.

20 Tait 2024, 14.

travellers, who were sent even further back in time – and one of them is revealed (at the novel's end) to be Ishmael's brother, who made this way of life possible.

All of this underlines that lacking the ability to travel through time, we (the readers) cannot change the past from the future; our only option is to act in the present in a way that secures the future for generations to come.

The mediation of historical knowledge is not the primary goal of this novel; its main interest is in evoking a critical understanding of ecological issues and leading the protagonists (and readers) to recognize that they must take responsibility for the future of Earth. By contrast, the mediation of historical knowledge is integral to the adventure-novel series *TimeRiders*, by Alex Scarrow. We turn now to the first novel of that series.

Rescuing the Course of History, Saving the Future of Humankind: Alex Scarrow's *TimeRiders* (2010)

TimeRiders, the first novel of the *TimeRiders* series by Alex Scarrow, takes an approach different to that of Strasser's novel. Time travel, achieved by means of technological innovation, is integrated into an adventurous science-fiction story. The time setting of the story is striking: the starting date for the young time travellers is 11 September 2001, the day the World Trade Centre in New York was obliterated by terrorists. Readers are familiarized with this historical event[21] – and with other events, as the analysis here will show – but it also works as cover for the actions of the time travellers, as it is integrated into a time loop. The protagonists have to experience 10 and 11 September 2001 over and over again. This momentous historical event has been chosen as the traveller's home base because it will help hide from the citizens of New York that the characters are travelling through time.[22]

It turns out that there are other time travellers journeying from the future back in time to change things to their advantage. Our three time travellers are responsible for correcting these manipulations of time to preserve the "correct" course of history. The first novel establishes a complex storyline

21 See also Planka 2019, 417–440.

22 For example, Liam does most of the time travelling and therefore grows older faster than the other protagonists. See Scarrow 2010.

that starts in the present, a realistic present similar to the present of the reader. The time travellers jump back and forth in time, between past and present – a present that changes twice within the novel because of actions in the past. The past depicted is not long ago: it is the year 1941 and Adolf Hitler is planning to invade Russia. Kramer, a time traveller who wants to change the course of events, convinces Hitler not to carry out the invasion. Instead, Kramer instals himself as a ruler and takes Hitler's place, changing history completely: Germany wins the Second World War, and Kramer's army conquers the United States. At this point, Scarrow establishes a split in time that shows two possible futures. The first timeline continues Kramer's success, and New York becomes part of his tightly organized empire. The alternative timeline shows Kramer going mad and detonating a nuclear bomb, with apocalyptic results: New York is destroyed and the remains are inhabited by starving creatures barely recognizable as human.

In contrast to Strasser's storyline, in which the protagonists jump only once into the past (they do not want to travel back to the future, even if they could), Scarrow's protagonists jump back and forward several times. To help the reader understand the novel and to underline its mediation of historical knowledge, the author provides an appendix with a graphic overview of the relevant years, 1941, 1945, 1956, and 2001, points when history changed dramatically and the narration rotates through 180 degrees. Thus, in 1941 Hitler prepares for the invasion of Russia, in 1945 Germany loses the Second World War, and in 2001 New York exists the way the readers know it. In this novel, the turning points are marked by different events: in 1941 Hitler no longer prepares for an invasion, in 1945 Germany wins the Second World War, and in 1956 – in an additional relevant shift in time – Kramer either (a) becomes mad or (b) does not become mad, and in 2001 New York is either (a) tightly controlled or (b) has become a dystopian world. Other actual historical events are named in the story – a concept continued throughout the series. Thus, the series offers real historical facts while entertaining its readers with a fast-paced story. The games the novel plays with time make it even more interesting. Scarrow lets his time travellers travel back and forth in time *and* establishes time loops: when the protagonists travel through time, the time machine can be programmed in such a way that they can stay in the past – or future – for many years. They age, but when they return to their "home time" no time has passed.

Both *The Beast of Cretacea* and *TimeRiders* depict the end of the world, but their central concepts differ. In contrast to the ecocritical perspective

in Strasser's novel, Scarrow's novel centres on the avoidance of a war bigger even than the Second World War, a war that might end apocalyptically in nuclear catastrophe. The novel both mediates history and shows clearly why nuclear conflict must be avoided.

Explaining the Space-Time Continuum: Torben Kuhlmann's *Einstein* (2021)

In contrast to the novels already discussed, Kuhlmann's book is a picture book aimed at readers of all ages from six up (with its 128 pages, it is more extensive than many other picture books). The book is composed of images and text, with text on several pages much longer than is conventional for a "picture" book but also wonderfully illustrated pages that tell the story visually, without written words.

The story centres on a tiny mouse realizing that she has missed the cheese festival in Bern, Switzerland. Another mouse suggests she turn back time. She is then educated by a clockmaker's mouse about the history of measuring time. Yet even the clockmaker's mouse cannot explain exactly what time is, so points to a man who lived 80 years ago in Bern and who worked at the local patent office. The tiny mouse (nameless throughout the story) starts her research. In the attic of the patent office, she finds several books by Albert Einstein, to whom the clockmaker's mouse was referring. She starts reading but cannot find answers to her questions about what time is and how travelling through time might work. At this point, a little bit of magic comes into play: as the mouse puts Einstein's book on the theory of relativity back on the shelf, a flash of inspiration (illustrated as a bright light) hits her. She starts to construct a time machine. A computer helps her calculate the exact time when the cheese festival took place. However, something goes wrong and the tiny mouse is catapulted 80 years back in time, to the year 1905 – when Albert Einstein lived and worked in the patent office.

Kuhlmann's illustration of the mouse's time travel evokes memories of H. G. Wells' highly influential novel *The Time Machine* (1895): the time machine remains standing in the attic, but the attic's interior changes as the clocks run backwards. The mouse has no idea how to travel back to her time, so she comes up with the idea of contacting Einstein to find a solution. The question of how a human being and an animal can communicate is creatively solved: the mouse writes riddles on time on tiny sheets and

places them on Einstein's desk. As her questions become more detailed, Einstein increasingly neglects his regular work in order to solve the riddles. With Einstein's help, the mouse is able to travel back to her time. Einstein, curious about who is asking such questions, catches a glimpse of a tiny time machine in the attic as the mouse leaves his time forever. He finds that she has left him a note saying: "Time is relative."[23]

The story depicts a historical moment, which it does not translate into an action-packed adventure story but instead links to the development of Einstein's theory of relativity – while at the same time giving the reader insight into Einstein's life before he became the famous physicist. To the reader's amusement, the story suggests that it was a tiny mouse who prompted Einstein to think and write about the relativity of time and how light, time, and space are connected. This creative handling of highly theoretical and "dry" facts lets readers immerse themselves in the story, curious about how time travel could work and the theory on which it would be based. Indeed, the picture book includes a rich appendix comprising Einstein's biography and easily comprehended explanations where, in small steps, Kuhlmann explains relativity and Einstein's various thought experiments, including his insight into curved spaces. All this information contains options for time travel, as Kuhlmann explains.

This factual appendix aligns the novel with Alex Scarrow's work, with its timeline of how history happened (fact) and how the story's time travels changed that timeline (fiction). The detailed information given in Kuhlmann's book makes it a perfect teaching tool, prompting thought about history/historical timelines and individuals who have influenced our current thinking and initiated enormous technical, physical, and other developments.

In addition – and perhaps the most relevant aspect of Kuhlmann's book – the story shows that anyone can initiate developments that will have long-lasting impact on humankind. Even a mouse.

Time Travel Narratives in Children's Literature

The narratives discussed above show time-travel stories with different aims and different thematical foci. They are, however, similarly able to connect the reader with historical and/or social-cultural/-political developments,

23 Kuhlmann 2021, n. p.

allowing the reader to learn through literature – in light of the thematic focus or identification with the protagonists[24] – while caught in the tension of the story. Time-travel narratives enable readers to experience historical moments, and when the historical background of these narratives is accurately depicted, these narratives can be linked to memory studies and to the mediation of (historical) knowledge.

All the books discussed here belong to popular culture. While the nature of their narratives differs, they all mediate historical knowledge, norms, and values whilst encouraging a critical understanding of current issues affecting humanity. The concept of time travel generates thrilling and entertaining plots and therefore seems ideally suited to mediating these fields of knowledge. Sent along with the protagonists through time (and space), the reader participates in their adventures, with tension rising from their concern for the protagonists and their return to the reality that corresponds in several narratives to the reality of the reader's life.[25] In Scarrow's novel, for example, the events in the past are relevant for the future – and sometimes for the present, too. Often the structure of the time travel aligns with Christopher Vogler's journey of the hero, with protagonists who step into a foreign world (here, a foreign time) where they have to prove themselves in order to be able to travel back to the familiar time.[26]

The protagonists act as role models, for they are undergoing a journey during which they grow stronger and bolster their own identity. As role models, they offer solutions to real problems that might one day be adopted and realized by readers.

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24 See, for example, Richert/Schlesinger 2022. Also Dore 2022.

25 See Planka 2019, 435–436.

26 See Planka 2019, 435–436.

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Bodies in Space and Time

Time Travel in Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014)

Abstract

This article discusses the motif of time travel in the science-fiction film Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014). Time travel is a common motif in modern science-fiction films and series. The discussion here focuses on the anthropological dimensions of time travel from a hermeneutic perspective. Interstellar contains both a climate catastrophe and a technological optimism that enables time travel. The pseudo-scientific time travel is connected with symbols from the Christian tradition. Intriguingly, time travel is portrayed in light of indirect physical communication. From an anthropological perspective, pseudo-scientific time travel reflects and explores identity issues. The crossing of space and time and their simultaneous constraint lead the viewer to reflect on their own cultural life-world. In Interstellar, time travel is a journey into the past that locates the traveler back in the present and brings hope for a better future.

Keywords

Time Travel, Christian Tradition, Passion, Interstellar, Anthropological Dimension, Hermeneutic Process

Biography

Jochen Mündlein holds a bachelor's degree in Christian Social Welfare undertaken within the Lutheran Church and a master's degree in the Study of Religions / Cultural Studies from the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich. He is currently writing his doctoral thesis on science-fiction films as spaces occupied by existential anthropological questions.

Historically, science fiction has served as a space for cultural and anthropological reflection. It has portrayed events and discourses and displayed forms of coping, ideology criticism, and collective reflection.[1] Contemporary science-fiction films often portray time travel, a motif that has received significant attention from filmmakers and producers. This motif explicitly addresses humanity's

1 Johnston 2011, 27–40.

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embeddedness in history and the struggle with the limits of human existence. Fictional time travel in science fiction reflects cultural perceptions of the present and picks up on the tension between human control and confrontation with a given uncontrollable world.[2] Notable examples include economically successful productions from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, such as Avengers: Endgame (Anthony Russo / Joe Russo, US 2019), Spider-Man: No Way Home (Jon Watts, US 2021), and Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness (Sam Raimi, US 2022). Time travel also remains a popular topic in science-fiction series. In a nostalgic reminiscence, time travel becomes a motif in the second season of the series Star Trek: Picard (CBS, US 2020–2023), while mini-series like Devs (Alex Garland, US 2020) evoke a critical perspective on free will and human self-placement by delving into the tragic past and unalterable future.

In many of these works, cinematic time travel involves a dual crossing of boundaries, into both another time and another space. In science fiction this experience is reinforced by explicit representation of diegetic time travel.[3] This double immersion into a counterworld engages the viewers' imaginations and draws viewers to consider their own identities.[4] Following Paul Ricœur, Pierre Bühler notes that in the encounter between recipient and film, understanding and interpretation always involve the positioning of the audience in front of the work.[5] The distanced encounter with the work involves reflection by the viewer on their own situation.[6] An imagined journey through time is a constant of human existence, for remembering and reflecting on past events and decisions is central to current and future actions. Time travel is thus a crucial anthropological aspect of individual and collective engagement with reality. The visibility of time travel in film provides an individual and collective space for anthropological self-positioning within the viewer's own culture. The cinematic encounter with this motif explicitly calls hermeneutical for historical review and critical examination of the present. See in this light, time travel is an identity process that captures a reflective and backward-oriented engagement with the complex experience of reality.

Science fiction that involves time travel is particularly intriguing from a religious-studies perspective. Here science fiction appears as the realization

2 Helbig/Rauscher 2022, 1–8.
3 Seeßlen 2003, 648–650.
4 Bühler 2009, 14–19.
5 Bühler 2006, 411.
6 Bühler 2006, 411.

of a rational and scientifically enlightened worldview, which seems to have prevailed over a superficial normative orientation.[7] Its technical and physical characteristics make time travel part of a scientific, rather than anthropological, discourse. At the same time, pseudoscientific representations of time travel transcend the viewers' experience and are a way of negotiating transcendence. From an anthropological perspective, time travel in science fiction performs the human experience before a backdrop of linearly progressing time. It raises the finitude of life and thus also the tension between contingency and teleological concept of humanity that is found, for example, within the Christian tradition.[8] There the tension is condensed in the various versions of what is termed the Passion narrative, Christ's journey of suffering and resurrection. Thus, within the multitude of media narratives, a specific temporal event is endowed with supra-individual and timeless significance.[9] It is therefore intriguing how the Christian narrative of the Passion is connected with the motif of time travel.

Exploration of time is a central theme in the films of director Christopher Nolan. Between 2010 and 2020, Nolan produced three Hollywood blockbusters that engaged with time travel through non-linear storytelling.[10] In Tenet (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2020), Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014), and Inception (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2010), time is portrayed as fundamentally relative and manipulable by humans.[11] The representation of time forms an intra-filmic constant, breaking with linear time and handled in various ways.[12] With time presented as the dominant category of human life, existential questions are explored through experience and the imagination. In this article, I focus on the film Interstellar, where time travel is represented with reference to the Christian tradition.

The Family as a Metaphor for Time Travel

The film Interstellar begins with an Earth that appears compatible with our reality, for ongoing climate change has brought the human species to the brink of extinction. Joseph Cooper, a former engineer and pilot, manag-

7 Luckhurst 2009, 403.
8 See, for example, Pannenberg 1995; also Sölle 2014.
9 Fritz/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati/Scolari 2018.
10 Kriesch 2022, 185–186.
11 Kriesch 2022, 185–186.
12 Kriesch 2022.

es corn fields on his farm in the American backlands, the last available food source for humanity. Cooper, a widowed father of two, lives with his father-in-law in a scientifically enlightened world on the brink of apocalypse. Cooper's reality is devoid of religion and hope for a transcendent reality, for impending catastrophe seems the only option. The cinematic narrative starts with a family story. The dynamics between Cooper, his children, and the grandfather metaphorically portray time travel in terms of the conflict of generations: the grandfather represents an abundant past; the children, Murph and Tom, face the fragility of the future; between this wasteful past and a threatened future, Cooper exists in a disillusioned and bitter present where humanity has lost its ability to dream and hope.

Between the Nursery and the Black Hole

The plot takes viewers into the room of the daughter, Murph, where through seemingly supernatural events, Cooper and Murph receive the coordinates of the last secret NASA facility on Earth. As the story unfolds, Cooper agrees to pilot an interstellar NASA mission, leaving his family in order to find a new home for humanity on a distant planet, a voyage made possible by a black hole near the planet Saturn. Travel through this physical object will allow the space-time continuum to be manipulated, as, according to Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, the black hole allows the materialization of time as a physical dimension. Because of the space-time shift within the black hole, time passes more slowly for the team of astronauts, including Cooper, as they travel to a distant galaxy than for the process of aging on Earth. Bad decisions, betrayal, and death turn the mission into a disaster and the attempt to save humanity seems hopeless.

To save the astronaut Amelia Brand and the frozen fertilized eggs on board the spaceship, Cooper plunges directly into the black hole. Instead of being killed by gravity, Cooper finds himself, along with the AI Tars, in a space of the fifth dimension. The space he occupies is a reproduction of Murph's nursery. He is located behind the room and can observe past moments in the nursery through the transparent bookshelf. Duplications of the nursery give him access to every past moment that has occurred in this room. The countless interconnected duplications make the nursery appear as a vast cathedral, through which Cooper glides weightlessly (fig. 1).

The viewers witness a desperate Cooper, who can see his daughter in her childhood through the bookshelf but cannot reach her. The bookshelf forms the boundary between father and daughter.



Fig. 1: Cooper floats through the space of the fifth dimension. Film still, Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014), 02:15:35.

In a conversation with the AI Tars, who has also reached the fifth dimension, Cooper realizes that he can communicate with his daughter via gravity. He sends messages by dropping books, manipulating a wristwatch, and creating patterns in sandstorms. At the climax of the film, Cooper becomes a time traveller able to send his daughter as both a child and an adult the scientific information needed to save the world. The supernatural events at the beginning of the film are retroactively revealed as messages from Cooper to his younger self. The love between father and daughter enables Murph to recognize and understand her father's messages. In the end, Cooper, now well over 100 years old but physically unchanged, returns to humanity and can see his daughter, as an elderly woman, one last time before her death (fig. 2).

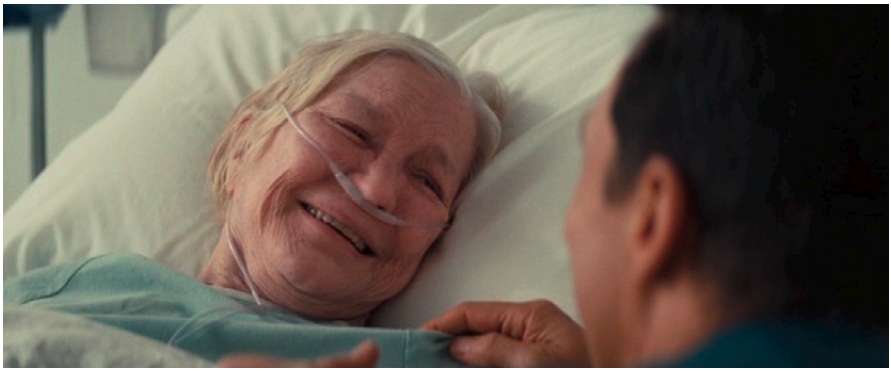

Fig. 2: Cooper reunites with his daughter after returning from the black hole. Film still, Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014), 02:33:51.

Semiotic Dimensions in Interstellar

Interstellar contains a complex interplay of religious references and symbols, fictional applications of theories of physics, and anthropological statements. In a captivating analysis, Bina Nir has highlighted the cinematic references from the Judeo-Christian tradition.[13] In her interpretation, the film recapitulates numerous motifs from the biblical narrative of the Flood and the election of Moses, and it adapts the figure of Jesus in the character of Murph. Interstellar is all the more intriguing as its time travel, applied as the theory of relativity, was substantiated by the expertise of Nobel laureate Kip Thorne.[14] The cinematic portrayal evolves into a visualization of an actual physics-based phenomenon.[15]

The motif of time travel is visually and auditorily discussed in various variations within the cinematic diegesis. Communication between Cooper and Murph through time is facilitated by materializations of time. The bookshelf represents the preservation of time, while messages in the sandstorm evoke an hourglass. The wristwatch, a gift from Cooper to his daughter, symbolizes both the linear progression of time and its cyclic recurrence. The watch is also present as symbol of time in the film score, composed by Hans Zimmer. While the astronauts' expedition to one of the planets is disastrous, the ticking sound of the clock in the film score makes the merciless progression of time audible.[16] In Interstellar, time and time travel become defining motifs to which the film self-referentially alludes. The visual and auditory representations of time, such as the wristwatch, the falling books, or the ticking of time, lay out various concepts of time. These audio-visual references can be read as condensations of the film's plot and message. Thus, the audible ticking of the clock is not merely a dramatic element but interprets the divergent concepts of time on the alien planet and on Earth.

Time Travel as a Process of Physics

Time travel is most evident from the advancing age of Murph and Tom, visually evident on their bodies. Cooper remains unchanged; preserved in the fifth dimension, he cannot transcend the boundaries of time. He remains behind the

13 Nir 2020, 53–69.
14 Thorne 2014.
15 Thorne 2014, 138–145.
16 Kriesch 2022, 185.



Fig. 3: Cooper helplessly observes his younger self saying goodbye to his daughter Murph in the past. Film still, Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, US/UK 2014), 02:19:51.

bookshelf and cannot reach his daughter, but the messages he sends Murph are a form of physical communication. He uses Morse code and binary signals to send crucial information and exploits gravity, but recognition and understanding of the messages are primarily a product of the love between father and daughter. In entering the fifth dimension, Cooper is placed in a transcendent reality. The staging of the fifth dimension is anthropologically fascinating, as it involves a self-reflective look at one's own life. With this focus on the self, Interstellar opens a reflexive perspective on humanity's embeddedness in its own historicity. Anthropology in this context entails the collective exploration of human existence in relation to a space–time dynamic reality. Through the veils of dimensions, Cooper observes not only Murph but also his younger self. The moment of desperation when he shouts to himself through the bookshelf not to leave his daughter can be interpreted as a symbolic sacrifice and key hermeneutic moment (fig. 3). Cooper sees his own life as a film.[17]

Full of regret, he reflects on his decisions that led to his separation from his family, before ultimately acknowledging the necessity of his past choices and conveying to his younger self the symbols that take him into the fifth dimension. The film introspects and opens up an existential dimension.[18] The fact that the communication between the transcendent Cooper in the fifth dimension and his younger self and daughter occurs indirectly through mediated symbols underscores the interpretation and appropriation of the world through symbols, which is integral to anthropology. The signs and symbols in the film that initially seem to viewers arbitrary develop meaning. Time travel addresses the historical embeddedness of humanity, but it also emphasizes the uniqueness and complexity of life. While Cooper can observe his former life, he can never return to it. The boundary between Cooper and

17 Früchtl 2017.

18 On cinematic self-reference see Pezzoli-Olgiati 2019, 15–17.

Murph allegorically recapitulates humanity's finding itself in history and the ongoing need to interpret and appropriate the world through symbols. In this way the time travel in Interstellar leads viewers into the present of their own perception and interpretation of the world. The solution to saving humanity, albeit dimensionally shifted, is found on Earth.

Time Travel and Passion

From a religious-studies perspective, it is intriguing that Cooper's time travel in the fifth dimension can be seen as an adaptation of the Passion story from the Christian tradition. Drawing on various elements of the Passion narratives, Cooper is staged as a distorted Christ figure.[19] Cooper metaphorically dies a sacrificial death for Amilia Brand and the fertilized eggs, representing humanity's last chance for survival. The plunge into the black hole and entry into the fifth dimension can be interpreted as a descent into the abyss and a scene of death. Cooper experiences his viewing of his younger self and abandoned daughter as a passionate and irreversible tragedy. Cooper's transition from desperation to redemption forms an apotheosis: the human father becomes the transcendent (holy) spirit. The words "You were my ghost!"[20] mark the moment of revelation when Murph identifies her transcendent father as the sender of the supernatural messages. Cooper's return to his daughter when her death is imminent expresses the eschatological concept of Christ's return at the end of the world.

The Christian idea of the Trinity is expressed in the narrative transition of Cooper and Murph. Their cinematic actions can be interpreted as fragmentary and correlative references to the concept of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While the film initially relays Cooper's actions as those of a chosen messianic figure who symbolically sacrifices himself by plunging into the black hole, a reconfiguration of the Trinitarian roles occurs upon his entering the fifth dimension. There he is transformed into the divine Father, while Murph evolves into the chosen daughter and a female Christ figure.

Nir notes that at the peak of the film Murph is 33 years old, an allusion to the age of Jesus when he was crucified.[21] Moreover, through Cooper

19 For cultural adaptation of the Passion story, see Fritz/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati/Scolari 2018.

20 Interstellar, 02:20:35–02:20:36.

21 Nir 2020, 68.

Murph is identified by the creators of the fifth dimension as the chosen one. Murph's hope for her father's return to save the Earth is another element where Murph resembles a Christ figure. Crucial to the cinematic narrative is the love between father and daughter, which can be interpreted as an adaptation of the divine love between Jesus, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The symbolic communication between Cooper and Murph by means of falling books and the hands of the watch is from Murph's perspective the action of a (holy) ghost. Cooper is interpreted by the audience as a divine father figure, while Murph's actions depict him as a transcendent (Holy) Spirit. The Christian motif of the Trinity is thus narratively explored in the dynamics of the relationship between Murph and Cooper. Interstellar portrays the Trinity through relational perspectives on Cooper (and Murph) as a divine figure, mirroring the theological terms of the Trinity within the Christian tradition.[22]

Conclusion

Interstellar contains a complex interplay of motifs from the Christian tradition that are combined with the motif of time travel. Time is rendered measurable and manipulable, a scientific take that is intertwined with anthropological themes. In the narrative, the love between father and daughter is elevated to a physical measurable entity. Interstellar can be seen as a critical examination of a reductionist understanding of reality. Through a combination of religious and scientific references, time travel becomes an ideological critique of the viewer's life-world. Cooper's reflection on his own history becomes a critical examination of the viewer's history. It is no coincidence that the film's premise, to which climate change and resource wastage are integral, directly connects to contemporary discourses. The time travel in Interstellar opens up a reflective perspective on individual and collective cultural histories. Time travel allows the film to articulate hope for a better future and triumph over current and future challenges and crises, despite past events and their influence. A better future is conditional on our recognizing and understanding the signs that surround us. The framework for this semiotic understanding of the world is love, coupled with rejection of an egocentric and personally advantageous culture.

22 Joest/von Lüpke 2010, 287–313.

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Monika Weiß

Time Travel as Living History

Exploring the Media Representation and Sensual Experience of Historical Everyday Life

Abstract

Audiovisual time travel is not restricted to fiction productions, for it can also be found in non-fiction programming. When the Living History format appeared on the international television market in the early 2000s, it was already an established practice in museum education. A group of volunteers travel back in time to a historical period. They act and learn, fail and succeed, not only for themselves but also for the viewers. The programmes are based on the coupling of past and present: during the time-travel experiment the volunteers remain people of their own time and reflect on the historical living conditions from today's perspective. This article explores the nature of time travel within Living History and how everyday life, values, and norms of the present as well as images of the past are discussed within this framework. Contemporary ideas of historical life have expanded and changed with each representation and interpretation. So, does time travel take place only in our imagination of the past? And what effect does it have on the present? The following productions are analysed here: The 1900 House (Channel4, GB 1999), Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002), Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 – Leben wie vor 100 Jahren (SWR, DE 2001).

Keywords

Living History, Reality-TV, Time Travel, Utopia

Biography

Monika Weiß is a scholar of media studies at the Philipps University of Marburg and editor of the television studies blog *fernsehmomente.blog*. Her doctoral thesis was published as *Living History. Zeitreisen(de) im Reality TV* (Marburg: Schüren, 2019). Her research focuses on television, video platforms, streaming (analysis, theory, history), gender media studies, and media education.

Time travel is not restricted to fictional audiovisual programming, for it is also found in fact-based productions. When the Living History format appeared on the international television market in the early 2000s, it was already established practice in museum education, conveying knowledge

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through emotional engagement, sensory experience, and entertainment. Nils Kagel defines Living History as experience-oriented mediation of historical processes aided by interpreters who acquire special knowledge about the period depicted. By performing that knowledge, they pass it on to museum visitors. Accordingly, Living History as found in living museums simulates everyday life through presentation, immersion, and experimentation.[1] Adapted for television, Living History is a form of performative Reality-TV, in which protagonists are removed from their everyday lives to experience non-ordinary events that affect their reality. The "container shows" Big Brother (RTL7, NL 1999)[2] and I'm a Celebrity … Get me out of here! (ITV, UK 2002)[3] are examples. The reality that they portray is a television reality that is constructed, because during production and post-production the real-life experience breaks down and the events become a televisual narrative: framing, camerawork, editing, and montage along with the usual voice-over commentary structure a storyline that does not reflect what actually happened.[4] They use the established patterns of Reality-TV and mix the stylistic elements of fictional series with those of non-fictional documentaries. Staging and presentation always frame the viewer's perception.[5]

Living History formats are set up similarly: participants leave their everyday lives and perform in a specially designed isolated space for the entire production. The main differences between programmes such as Big Brother, on one hand, and Living History formats, on the other, are that only the former involves competition or audience intervention and only the latter involves time travel. In Living History programmes a group of volunteers travel back in time to a historical period. They act together to gain experience; they are not working against each other. They re-experience past lives for themselves and also for those watching the show. They are not acting – or at least acting is not welcome – but instead explore a historical life as themselves. The productions are based on the connection between history and present life. During the time-travel experience they reflect the historical living condi-

1 Kagel 2008, 9; also Hochbruck 2008, 24.

2 Big Brother is an international Reality-TV format that has been aired in around 70 countries since its launch in the Netherlands in 1999 (RTL 7).

3 I'm a Celebrity … Get me out of here! is also an international Reality-TV format. It first aired in the United Kingdom in 2002 (ITV) and has since then been launched in eleven countries, including Germany and the United States.

4 Reichertz 2011, 231–232.

5 Weiß 2019, 56.

tions from today's perspective. Self-experience connects with the non-experienced past on the basis that it is possible to (co-)experience historical life, but always with reference to an understanding of the historical life that has changed over time with each new interpretation. So, these time travellers arrive in a past as imagined today.[6] The history presented is a symbolic world of meaning[7] that has less to do with the real past than with ideas about it.

But how is time travel staged in the Living History programmes? How are their timelines constructed? And how are the subjective experiences of these non-fictional journeys related to current images of past daily life? To explore these questions, the following formats are analysed here: The 1900 House (Channel4, GB 1999), Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 – Leben wie vor 100 Jahren (SWR, DE 2001), and Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002). In all these programmes a family or families are transported back in time: the Bowler family experience English domestic life in London around 1900, the Boro family from Berlin run a farm in the Black Forest in 1902, and the Clunes, Glenns, and Brookses live like homesteaders on the Montana frontier in 1880.

The Time Travel Begins …

In all three formats the journey through time is already constructed in the opening credits, where keywords such as "time machine" or "go back in time" are used in the voiceover. There are also references to bygone eras and the passage of time, such as "life on the frontier" or "back 100 years". Each voiceover also alludes to the men, women, and children of today who are brave enough to participate in the experiment. It also mentions what they have to give up, such as a fridge, the Internet, or running water.[8] The time travel is also visualised by a montage of images. In the opening credits of

6 Fenske 2007, 86.

7 Berek 2009, 162.

8 Opening voiceover of The 1900 House, episode three, 00:00:06–00:00:29: "Meet the Bowler family: Royal Marine Paul, School Inspector Joyce, 11-year-old twins Ruth and Hilary, Kathryn sixteen, and 9-year-old Joe. They volunteer to go back in time. To wash, dress, eat, and live every intimate detail of English domestic life in The 1900 House." The voiceover in Schwarzwaldhaus 1902, 00:00–00:30: "The Kaltwasserhof in the Münstertal. Not a normal Black Forest farm, but a time machine. Here, the Boro family from Berlin is transported back in time. Back 100 years. To the year 1902. To a life without cars, without a fridge, without the Internet. Only four generations removed and yet as foreign as an unreachable planet."



Fig. 1: The Boro family in front of their house in Berlin, before the time travel. Film still, Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 – Leben wie vor 100 Jahren (SWR, DE 2001), episode one, 00:00:15.



Fig. 2: The Boro family in front of the Black Forest farm, dressed in traditional costume. Film still, Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 – Leben wie vor 100 Jahren (SWR, DE 2001), episode one, 00:00:21.

Schwarzwaldhaus 1902, they take the form of time-lapse shots that show the seasons changing and a clock running backwards. Together with the clothing of the Boro family, who move into the Black Forest farm around 1900, they establish both the constructed step back in time and the historical setting (figs. 1 and 2).

The Boro family are first shown dressed in their everyday clothes and standing in front of their house in Berlin. Then they appear in front of their new home dressed in traditional Black Forest clothing. A similar transformation also takes place for the family in The 1900 House. After the Bowlers have been shown in their own living room, they appear one by one in front of the camera as they enter a passe-partout that reinterprets the frame of



Fig. 3: The Bowler family in their living room before travelling back in time. Film still, The 1900 House (Channel4, GB 1999), episode two, 00:01:29.



Fig. 4: The Bowler family entering the passe-partout to start their time travel. Film still, The 1900 House (Channel4, GB 1999), episode two, 00:01:29 / episode three, 00:00:09.

the television screen as an anachronistic picture frame (figs. 3–4). The Boro and Bowler families have each assumed their historical roles and present themselves to the audience.

Frontier House opens with a cinemascope shot. Clouds, shadows, and light move across a deserted land in fast motion. The images suggest that times change, but nature does not, remaining powerful and seemingly untameable. The camera then pans down from the sky to a small wooden cabin and people dressed in period costume (fig. 5): the construction of the American frontier myth is revealed to the viewer. More than for the other two programmes the opening shot for this programme refers to existing media characterisations of a society of the past.



Fig. 5: The participants in historical clothing. Film still, Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002), episode two, 00:00:09.

Reference to the Western genre in film, television series, and other forms is taken up in the voiceover: "Fictionalised, mythologised, often romanticised".[9] A promise that this production will be different follows: it will show "the real experience of life on the frontier". Morphing images of the volunteers appear, from a first image that shows the physical state in which they began their journey through time to a final image from the end of the journey, when they are wearing worn-out clothes and exhausted by their efforts (figs. 6–8). The interesting part for viewers lies between the first and last images – where they will participate via television.

But Living History also refer to the past in other ways. Deeply rooted modern ideas of the past appear, visualised and confirmed by the buildings in which the productions take place: a typical Black Forest farmhouse in the German programme, a Victorian house in the British programme, and the wooden cabins of frontier settlers in the US programme. In this way, the locations are

9 Intro, Frontier House, episode two, 00:00:30–00:00:37.

not only established, but also made historical. The houses used are always from the period in which the time travellers are situated. They are neither replicas nor purpose-built containers of the type Reality-TV viewers are familiar with from Big Brother, for example. Living History formats use the history of the relevant building to restore it to its original form.[10] The first episodes show the transformation of both the houses and the participants. In Frontier House the participants themselves construct the cabins, living in tents while they do so, similar to the frontier settlers. A parallel montage shows the families in bootcamp, being prepared for their everyday life in the past, instruction that legitimises the location, the action, and the materials. In that way the audiovisual construction is able to create an authentic sense of historical setting and atmosphere. It is evident that the intention is to explore the past as a "secondary reality".[11] The focus is on the construction of historical everyday life as media experience – and entertainment.



Figs. 6 to 8: Morphing images of the volunteers. Film stills, Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002), episode two, 00:00:11; 00:00:13; 00:00:15.

Historical Life as a Bodily Experience

The volunteers grow into their historical roles. They start as clueless visitors but acquire more and more knowledge. This learning, which holds the audience, is the central narrative of this format. At the beginning, the families

10 Weiß 2019, 69–70.

11 Schörken 1995, 13.

fail in their tasks. The viewers suffer with them as they worry and struggle but are happy to see that they become more and more successful as they gain command of everyday historical practices. Their sympathies with the participants grow. Neither teachers nor omniscient, the participants present, explain, and reflect on their experiences. As they remain people of the present, they are a link to the audience's own everyday life. The viewer is shown that the protagonists are not actors and that the entire content is not fictional, an "authenticity effect" that gives the programmes the factual character typical of Reality-TV.[12]

The bodies of the participants experience historical everyday life, learning, for example, physical actions and social behaviours. They participate in personal hygiene practices, including the use of chamber pots and outhouses, and in the entertainment of around 1900.[13] They carry out hard physical labour but relax on furniture that is not as comfortable as today, which makes rest periods less restful, with hard mattresses and heavy sheets a particular challenge. The first episode of Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 contains many references to the Boro family's physical, bodily experiences. At the beginning, in particular, they are unable to handle the daily work on the farm without any modern technical equipment. The cameras often focus on their working bodies, showing the effort it takes to look after the animals, muck out the stables, harvest the hay, and pull the heavy carriages – all while wearing unfamiliar shoes and heavy woollen clothes. The effort is underlined by close-ups of suffering and sweating faces. And hard work is accompanied by tiredness. Family members are often shown with their heads on the table or in the courtyard looking for somewhere to rest. When one daughter lies exhausted on the farm bench (fig. 9), the voiceover comments that she has only been up for three hours but would like to go straight back to bed.[14] This combination of tough agricultural work and the participants' exhaustion demonstrates the great physical load.[15]

Another focus is on doing the laundry, where the clash between present and past habits is very evident. In all this programming, the voice-over narration emphasises the difference between the past and the present,

12 Faulstich 2008, 138.

13 Fenske 2007, 97.

14 "Sie sind erst seit drei Stunden auf den Beinen, würden aber am liebsten ins Bett gehen. Nur ein paar Augenblicke Schlaf"; episode one of Schwarzwaldhaus 1902, 00:25:22–00:26:30.

15 Weiß 2019, 124.



Fig. 9: A short rest on the courtyard bench. Film still, Schwarzwaldhaus 1902 – Leben wie vor 100 Jahren (SWR, DE 2001), episode one, 00:26:29.



Fig. 10: Staging manual laundry work. Film still, The 1900 House (Channel4, GB 1999), episode one, 00:44:01.

pointing out that previously laundry had to be done by hand, whereas today washing machines do the job in no time. In episode two of The 1900 House the voiceover explains that Joyce, mother and housewife in the Bowler family, spends more than twelve hours doing laundry with her two daughters, a job that would take a modern machine about 40 minutes. The staging of the manual labour of washing laundry makes the audience aware not just of the time needed but also of the strangeness of the work (fig. 10).

All volunteers across the three productions are challenged by the daily routine of preparing and eating food. Abstinence, reduced consumption, sustainable preparation, and self-sufficiency have to be learnt and practised. Unlike today, only local, seasonal food is available; above all they have no

access to prepared food of any form. The food-related practices demonstrated in the Living History programmes are inspired by historical models. Frontier House, for example, focuses on agriculture and gardening, animal handling and storage. The families received a first food ration at the start of their time travel, because the gardens and fields could not be immediately harvested. Their pantries contain mainly tinned food and flour. They have cows and chickens to provide milk and eggs. The Clune family, made up of two adults, two teenage girls, and two younger children, quickly runs out of food. Adrienne, the mother of the family, explains to the audience: "I'm really concerned about food […]. I'm trying to ration it, because I'm taking care of a family of six and two teenagers who appear to be ravenously hungry all the time. […] They don't understand the concept of rationing. They've never had to do that before."[16] The voiceover explains that Adrienne fears that her two sons are losing too much weight, and indeed the viewer can see that they are becoming thinner. But the narrator puts these concerns into perspective. The audience is told that the Clunes have plenty of supplies; their problem is that they do not have the modern types of food they are used to. The voiceover narration has suggested that initially the time travellers are ignorant, but the viewer sees them learn how to work with the foodstuffs available. Rationing cannot solve their problem, they realise; they recognise that they must emphasise home-grown produce. Lacking fridges, freezers, supermarkets, and greenhouses, they are forced by the time-travel experiment to integrate the cultivation of fruit and vegetables into their daily lives. Self-sufficiency stands in contrast to shopping. A long sequence concludes this storyline, with the planting and care of the gardens presented positively, using cinematic devices such as rhythmic editing and upbeat Western music. Nevertheless, the effort and hard work are always evident.

Over the course of the episodes, all the families find their way in historical everyday life and master their tasks. At first, traditional roles go unquestioned, with the patriarchal family order seeming to function well. However, tension is generated by the participants' comparisons with their "normal" lives in the present. The women are dissatisfied with a role that means they are constantly busy preparing food, ensuring supplies, and doing the laundry and other household tasks. The hard, monotonous work does not engage their intellect, only their physical and organisational

16 Episode two of Frontier House, 00:33:25–00:34:47.



Fig. 11: Gordon Clune is harvesting hay and summarises the time-travel experience from his perspective. Film still, Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002), episode six, 00:13:48.



Fig. 12: Adrienne Clune does the washing up and summarises the time-travel experience from her perspective. Film still, Frontier House (PBS/Channel4, US 2002), episode six, 00:13:00.

talents. The result is a dichotomy of physical overload and mental understimulation. The men, by contrast, feel strengthened in their position as head of the family. They are consistently fulfilled by the physical labour of sowing and harvesting, cutting firewood, and maintaining and expanding the farm – even when the effort exceeds their "normal" daily routine. Liberated from the excesses of the present and reduced to the necessities of life, they recognise an elemental sense of the meaning of life.[17] Gordon Clune at Frontier House takes a short break from haymaking to state to the camera (fig. 11): "All of my children, including myself, we're all leaving here feeling like better human beings, better equipped to enjoy the things that we take for granted in our 21st-century lives. […] It became a labor of love. A lot of this labor's become enjoyable."[18] Back in the kitchen, his wife, Adrienne, sums up her woman's experience (fig. 12):

17 Weiß 2019, 130.

18 Episode six of Frontier House, 00:14:13–00:14:30.

> Men are so much less complicated than women. Women want, they want more than just shelter and food. They want something to look forward to. They want to be entertained. They want a break from the monotony. In five months, I've only had, probably, about three or four meals that somebody else prepared. All the rest I've done. It's almost like I was transported to a labor camp for five months. I have experienced depression here on the frontier. I have never been depressed before in my life. I've never had to deal with that before.[19]

At the end of Schwarzwaldhaus 1902, the voiceover tells the audience that weeks after the end of the time travel, Ismail still feels alienated in the present and misses the peace and quiet of the farm. His wife, Marianne, sees things differently. She liked living in the country, but not the living conditions of the past, which, she realises, she had previously romanticised.[20]

To summarise: Living History formats are not simply focused on historical everyday life but rather highlight comparisons between past and present. The influence of life in the 21st century creates obstacles and limits for the participants that they have to try to transcend. The entertainment value of the programmes lies in the tension between success and failure. But they also open up discussion of ways of living and thinking. The participants and also the audience can review their own values and norms and, if necessary, renew them. The viewer might wonder: How would I have behaved? Could I live and work like that? Could I do without modern conveniences? Reality-TV time travel thus gives viewers the opportunity to consider their current values. That is not, however, the intention of this programming, which is primarily a form of entertainment television. But a welcome side effect.[21]

The Good Old Days – A Utopia?

Time travel creates an alternate space sufficiently distant from the viewer's present to open up today's value and realities for discussion. Such programming is a manifestation of the fascination with experiencing another age at

19 Episode six of Frontier House, 00:12:57–00:13:35.

20 Weiß 2019, 132.

21 Ulrich/Knape 2015, 245.

first hand.[22] Living History is based on existing media representations of the past, which may seem a simpler, more manageable world, a utopian alternative to the complexity of the present. How can we capture in theory the ongoing connection with the present noted in the earlier discussion?

In his "Zeitschichten-Theorie" (theory of layers of time), Reinhard Koselleck distinguishes between spatial and temporalised utopias. These utopias are often created in media narratives. Spatial utopias locate events of the present in strange and unreal places, termed by Dominik Orth "Nirgendorte" (nowhere places).[23] With the location of the story anchored in the present, it appears possible to travel to these places or worlds, if one can find them. Temporalised utopias are created by stories that take place outside the present. With time determining the narrative level, it is not possible to travel to and experience these places, which inhabit the past or future. The narrative level shifts from space to time. At the same time, the reference to reality shifts from time to space. Thus, in spatial utopias the tie to reality lies in the time, while in temporalised utopias the reference to reality is inscribed in the place, where alternatives to contemporary society are designed.[24] The distance from contemporary society in Schwarzwaldhaus 1902, Frontier House, or The 1900 House is not spatial, but pseudo-temporal. In every form of utopia, however, space and time are related.

In this form space is not only functional and geographically locatable but also ideologically charged. Michel Foucault proposed that our lives do not take place in a homogeneous and empty space, for these living spaces are charged with qualities and populated by phantasms. In his view, the world must be perceived as a network of spaces that are interconnected in a variety of ways. There are always ordinary spaces. But there are also spaces that do not seem to belong to the everyday. Foucault calls them "special spaces". Special spaces are related to the ordinary spaces, on which they have an effect.[25] Among others, the worlds created by the media can be seen as such special spaces.

Foucault divides them into two types, which are interdependent on each other. First, there are utopias, which are unreal. They correspond to spatial

22 Kramp 2011, 479.

23 Koselleck, 2013, 133–134; Orth 2008, 2.

24 Koselleck 2013, 138; also Orth 2008, 4.

25 Foucault 1992, 34–37.

utopias according to Reinhard Koselleck or "Nirgendorte" by Dominik Orth. Foucault's second category of special spaces are heterotopias. They are consequently located in contemporary society on the one hand, and in social counter-images with simplified structures and a clarity that the heterogeneous power relations of society do not allow on the other. This real space, Foucault proposes, is as well-ordered, with its own rules and behaviours, as the current space is disorganised and confused. These spaces are connected to all other social spaces by openings and closings, and access to them requires a gesture of permission. So it is also with Living History formats. Selection for participation is as much an opening of the heterotopia as is the broadcasting of the finished programmes to viewers.

How do Living Histories occupy heterotopic spaces? Living Histories involve topological areas that are outside contemporary everyday life but relate to current living conditions, as we have seen. The creation of these special spaces is part of the first episodes of each programme, which portray and relate in voiceovers, the remodelling of historical houses, their decoration with historical everyday objects, the creation of traditional clothing, and the provision of historical furniture.[26] The past is thus transformed into a heterotopia and anchored in the present. The time travel of the participating families, by contrast, accords with Koselleck's concept of the temporalisation of the plot. This model of time travel contrasts the stressful everyday life of the present, characterised by individualism, complexity, technology, and noise, with a utopia of the "good old days", a heterotopic space that meets the desire for greater simplicity and clearer social rules.[27]

Koselleck's categories of spatial and temporalised utopia therefore do not exist separately when it comes to Living History. Spatial verifiability is possible, which is also part of the heterotopic character. The filming locations can be visited: the Bowler family home (The 1900 House) is in south-east London, at 50 Elliscombe Road. The Kaltwasserhof,[28] run by the Boro family, is in Münstertal in the Black Forest. Neither of these houses has been refurbished. The Frontier House site has been transformed into an open-air museum[29] where visitors can learn about the history of the settlement of

26 Weiß 2019, 69–77.

27 Weiß 2017, 103; also Orth 2008, 22.

28 https://t1p.de/8cnc1 [accessed 9 February 2024].

29 https://virginiacitymt.com/Save-Our-History/Frontier-House [accessed 9 February 2024].

the American West through museum-based Living History. All these former film locations continue to have a heterotopic character as museum spaces, even beyond the Living History productions themselves. The programmes remain media-created temporalised utopias.

When we think of utopian stories, it is likely our minds run to future scenarios in which society has overcome fundamental problems such as war and envy and everyone lives together peacefully on a global (or intergalactic) scale according to clear and fair rules. Living History shows that utopian stories can also be located in the past, from where current conditions can be questioned.

Conclusion

Fiction and reality meet in Living History with its medialised narratives of everyday life.[30] Through a constructed shift in time, it opens up opportunities for questioning and then transforming current conditions that are reflected in a historicised setting – even if primarily intended as entertainment.

In this time travel, banalities become central – doing the laundry, physical work, uncomfortable clothing, too-firm furniture, and unappealing food. As shown, many of these problems are experienced physically, by the bodies of the participants. The early failures are not because of the historical situation as the voiceover suggests, but rather because of the psychological and physical limitations of the participants' lives in the now. They have to leave behind their current daily routines and learn antiquated practices. In nominally re-living the past, they open up opportunity for current behaviour and assumptions about what everyday life must have been like in the past. The participants repeatedly break out of their historical roles to act according to their views and routines in the present. But it is exactly this breaking-out that generates the individual and societal knowledge inherent in time travel.

The staging and filmic presentation frame the audience's perception. Above all, the voiceover narration and emotionalisation provide instructions on how to interpret what the viewers are seeing, generating a bond for the audience not only with the participating family members but also with the time travel itself. In light of the heterotopian utopias of the "good old

30 Wulff 1995, 107.

days" that are embedded in the present, the content of Living History programmes is far enough removed from the current everyday life of the participants and viewers to bring it up for discussion. Nevertheless, it remains close enough to their lives to be understood. The complicity of participants and viewers within the construction, but outside the narrative, allows the viewers to take a position on the historicised events from a contemporary perspective. With the re-creation of historical living conditions, the present and the past constantly collide. The programmes present traditional values and conservative lifestyles but set them up for discussion alongside contemporary ways of life.

However, we should not overlook that in Living History, as always in Reality-TV, events are turned into narratives and entertainment. The filmed footage is documentary in nature, as the protagonists are accompanied only by camera teams during the experiment and they are free to act. However, this documentary material is edited during the post-production to provide a specific message. The editing and structuring interweave several narratives dramaturgically. In each episode, storylines are launched, at least one is ended and another is continued; a cliffhanger is included to keep viewers interested by holding in suspense. In the final episode all the narratives are brought to a satisfying conclusion when the time travellers return to their own time, where they review their experiences for themselves and the audience. Furthermore, the omnipresent and omnipotent narration, also added during post-production, forms the plots. The narrator always knows more than the protagonists and more than the audience, because the script is written when the filming is complete and the material has been structured, which makes it seem as if the information it contains is taken directly from the footage. In fact, the voiceover shapes that evidence. It "helps" the audience interpret and categorise the events shown as time travel. The historical times seen in the programmes must be understood as a symbolic world of meaning, not as an image or reenactment of a real past. Living History programmes primarily deliver ideas about how life must have been, ideas that are based on other media constructions, in literature, film, television, photographs, or paintings, for example. History is presented according to the taste of the audience – in a narrative, as entertainment, and experientially.

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Haotian Wu

Time Travel as Homecoming

A Journey for Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998)

Abstract

Time is an essential issue in phenomenology and existential philosophy. In this article, I argue that Μια αιωνιότητα και μια μέρα (Eternity and a Day, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), the masterpiece of the understudied auteur, contributes to this scholarship by showing us two modes of time experience: depressive time and narrative time. In the light of Paul Ricœur's, Matthew Ratcliffe's, and Thomas Fuchs's phenomenologies of time, I will show how the film delineates the phenomenological contours of depressive time and narrative time with the protagonist poet Alexandros's last day sojourn in the world on the one hand and a series of his time travels on the other. Overall, I frame this new phenomenology of time with Angelopoulos's cinematic thinking on home. I argue that depressive time underlies the time experience of homelessness while narrative time reorients us towards homecoming. Hence, Eternity and a Day not only contributes to the phenomenology of time but also constitutes an existential philosophy that addresses and redresses what Georg Lukács calls "transcendental homelessness", the fundamental alienation of modern humanity.

Keywords

Theo Angelopoulos, Phenomenology, Existential Philosophy, Time, Home, Paul Ricœur

Biography

Haotian (Walden) Wu is a doctoral student in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK. His research focuses on film and philosophy with an emphasis on phenomenology and existential philosophy. He works with philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer as well as global auteurs like Werner Herzog, Theo Angelopoulos, Wong Kar-wai, Jia Zhangke, and Hirokazu Koreeda. He is particularly interested in how cinema contributes to our existential-ontological homecoming.

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Introduction: An Odysseus of Time

At the end of Μια αιωνιότητα και μια μέρα (Eternity and a Day, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), the poet protagonist Alexandros (Bruno Ganz) shouts towards the sea three words he learned from a little boy: *Korfulamu*, *Xenitis*, and *Argathini*.[1] "Korfulamu" literally means "heart of a flower". As Angelopoulos explains in an interview with Gideon Bachmann, "in Greece the word is used to express the feeling of a child when it sleeps in the arms of its mother",[2] continuing, "it stands for everything that is love, closeness, intimacy, with whoever it may be, your mother or your lover".[3] Conversely, "Xenitis", a word Angelopoulos learned from an old sailor, means "a stranger, but a stranger who is a stranger everywhere […] it describes the feeling of being a stranger. Or a feeling of exile."[4] The final word, "Argathini", means "very late at night"[5] and "expresses time".[6] These words, Angelopoulos says "actually express the essence of the film",[7] which I interpret as a dialectics between being-at-home *(Korfulamu)* and homelessness *(Xenitis)* taking place in time *(Argathini)*, a homecoming journey through time travel.

The film as a journey in time is not only indicated in its title but manifests at its very beginning: engulfed by the rhythmic sound of waves and facing a pale-yellow mansion, we hear a conversation between two boys – the young Alexandros and his friend – talking about a trip to "the island". There is "the ancient city", "a happy city" which "has slept under the sea for centuries"; "it comes out of the water once a month and for a very short time", when "all stops … time also stops". Alexandros asks, "Time … what is it?" His friend says, "Grandfather says that time is a child that plays dice on the shore." Thus, this mythopoetic beginning introduces the film as a time travel that

1 This article is an offshoot of my ongoing doctoral research, generously funded by the Queens'-Daim Zainuddin Scholarship. The resonance between my doctoral project and this Time Travel special issue is miraculously generative. The comments of my doctoral supervisor Isabelle McNeill, advisor Catherine Pickstock, and the anonymous reviewer have been most insightful. Where I have failed to incorporate their suggestions, I have done so at my own risk. The article is dedicated to the late Theo Angelopoulos, whose cinematic vision deserves far more attention than acknowledged in the English-speaking world.

2 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

3 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

4 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

5 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

6 Angelopoulos 2001, 110.

7 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

overcomes time, towards the sunken city of bliss, "Home" in the existential-ontological sense.

In this article, I argue that Eternity and a Day articulates an existential philosophy of homecoming in terms of time. The film first initiates us into depressive time, an experience of time as decaying and out-of-joint with other people, which characterises the temporality of *Xenitis*. Then, via a series of time travels, it reorients us towards narrative time, time configured and reconfigured as a meaningful whole, which generates the temporality of *Korfulamu*. This is a film-phenomenological argument that draws insights chiefly from Matthew Ratcliffe's and Thomas Fuchs' phenomenologies of depression and Paul Ricœur's study of narrative and time. I will show how the film motivates a synthesis of their ideas on time and develops a philosophy of homecoming that addresses and redresses the modern malaise of "transcendental homelessness", an expression coined by Georg Lukács,[8] which I will discuss later in light of *Xenitis*.

Xenitis: Transcendental Homelessness as Depressive Time

The film tells the story of Alexandros's last day, in which he seeks to sort out his affairs before he enters the hospital the next day due to his terminal cancer. This one-day journey is intercut with several time-travel sequences, during which he meets his late wife, Anna, when she is still young. The film was awarded the Palme d'Or and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998. Unanimously recognised as Alexandros's masterpiece, it epitomises a perennial issue in his filmmaking: the dialectics between homelessness and homecoming. This sentiment of nostalgia, understood in its Greek etymology as nostos (return home) + algos (pain), is rooted in the director's self-perception. As he told Bachmann, "I feel somehow like a stranger in Greece. I live here in a situation that is as if my house wasn't here, as if this wasn't my home", a point he reiterates with Gabrielle Schulz and Dan Fainaru.[9] More paradoxically and intriguingly, most of his films are shot in northern Greece, while he is from the South.[10] "This sadness of the north", he says to Michel Ciment, "is so essential for me."[11] This twofold

8 Lukács 2006, 41.
9 Angelopoulos 2001, 77, 109, 122.
10 Angelopoulos 2001, 56.
11 Angelopoulos 2001, 55.

geographic dislocation registers the poetic oxymoron of homelessness at home in Angelopoulos's cinema, of feeling at home "in a car passing through a landscape".[12] It echoes the mutual enfoldment of the *Heimlich* (homely) and the *Unheimlich* (unhomely/uncanny) explored by Martin Heidegger as a universal human condition. "What is worthy of poetising in this poetic work is nothing other than becoming homely in being unhomely", says Heidegger when discussing Sophocles' *Antigone*.[13] No less can be said of Angelopoulos's cinema, and the director references Heidegger's thinking on home as a crucial motif of Eternity and a Day.[14] Although there is a clear division between the early political and the late philosophical Angelopoulos,[15] an "existentialism" of home runs across his corpus.[16] His early films, like Ο Θίασος (The Travelling Players, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1975), have a strong Marxist undertone that criticises the bleakness of modern Greek history and society while gesturing towards a communist utopia. Οι Κυνηγοί (The Hunters, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1977) becomes a turning point, deconstructing power and disenchanting the utopian fantasy.[17]

Consequently, the homecoming theme in the late Angelopoulos takes on a more decided metaphysical and existential turn. Most memorable is the line delivered by Marcello Mastroianni in Το Μετέωρο Βήμα Του Πελαργού (The Suspended Step of the Stork, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1991), self-quoted many times by Angelopoulos: "How many borders must we cross to reach home?" It also inaugurates his "The Border Trilogy", which includes this film, Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα (Ulysses' Gaze, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1995) and Eternity and a Day. If home is, as Angelopoulos tells Fainaru, "that privileged place where we can be finally at peace with ourselves and with the rest of the world",[18] then the borders that separate us from home are explored in an increasingly ontological manner throughout this trilogy: "The Suspended Step of the Stork deals with geographical borders separating

12 Angelopoulos 2001, 90.

13 Heidegger 1996, 121.

14 Angelopoulos 2001.

15 A framing unanimously accepted although variously evaluated by Angelopoulos scholars. See Jameson 1997; Bordwell 2005; Rushton 2015; and Karalis 2021. The revaluation of the late Angelopoulos as the more aesthetically and philosophically robust corresponds with this order of scholarship.

16 Angelopoulos 2001, 77.

17 Karalis 2023.

18 Angelopoulos 2001, 100.

countries and people. Ulysses' Gaze talks about the borders, or one could say the limits, of human vision. Eternity and a Day discusses the borders between life and death."[19] That which lies between life and death is time.

Eternity and a Day can be viewed as a phenomenology of time, namely, a study of the experiences of time, of how we live with and within it. The film explores homelessness and homecoming as different takes on time. Time is an essential issue in phenomenology and existential philosophy. As Heidegger argues, "the meaning of Being is Time"[20] and *Dasein* (human existence) is always being-in-time.[21] In Merleau-Ponty's words, "We must understand time as the subject and the subject as time."[22] The film contributes to this exploration of existential temporality by showing us two modes of being-in-time, depressive time and narrative time, what they mean and what kinds of subjectivity they generate.

With "depressive time", I draw attention to the similarity between one mode of time in this film and the temporal experience of depression. My aim is neither to reduce the film to the symptomology of a mental illness nor to suggest that the director or the protagonist are depression patients. Rather, it is to use the phenomenology of depression to characterise the temporal experience of homelessness that the film articulates. Characteristic of depressive time is the experience of time as decay and dying. It is "the feeling that it is running out, that death is approaching at high speed", as Matthew Ratcliffe writes in *Experiences of Depression*.[23] This experience permeates the film as its overall temporal milieu. It incarnates in Alexandros's cancerous body. As we follow him on his last sojourn before hopeless hospitalisation, we also experience the passage of time as an irreversible devolution. His life is terminating as the day draws on to its end. As in almost all films of Angelopoulos, Eternity and a Day embeds itself in a wintry and barren landscape, immersing in rain and mist against an overcast sky. Asbjørn Grønstad calls this Angelopoulos's "meteorological aesthetics" and remarks, "After all, this is a filmmaker who was known to cease shooting if the weather got too nice."[24] Thus, the temporal flow of the day is bereft of the de-light of the

19 Angelopoulos 2001, 117.
20 Safranski 1998, 153.
21 Heidegger 2001.
22 Merleau-Ponty 2005, 490.
23 Ratcliffe 2015, 176.
24 Grønstad 2015, 273.



Fig. 1: The dying poet and his stray dog. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:29:30.

sun's rise but solely coloured by the gradual fall of the night. Unusual sunshine does occur in the film's time-travel sequences, which escape from and redeem this depressive time, a topic I will explore in the next section.

The depressive time announces itself early in the film. After Alexandros leaves his apartment and tries to find someone to adopt his dog, we follow him in a long shot and long take as he walks on a seashore in a dark, heavy coat (fig. 1). This image of a dying, old, and lonely man contradicts the playful boy invoked in the myth at the film's beginning as the personification of time. There, time is young, vital, and innocent. Here, time is experienced as disease and enfeeblement. The mournful music composed by Eleni Karaindrou, which repeats throughout the film, amplifies the melancholy of the scene. With Bergson's philosophy, a melody has become a primary example of time, especially time as *durée*, duration and flow. As Bergson says, "*Real duration* is what we have always called *time*, but time perceived as indivisible […] When we listen to a melody we have the purest impression of succession we could possibly have […] it is the very continuity of the melody and the impossibility of breaking it up which make that impression upon us."[25] In this scene, time manifests as a duration of sorrow to be endured as an irrevocable disintegration.

25 Bergson 1946, 176, emphasis in original.



Fig. 2: Before infinitude. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea*, oil on canvas, 110 × 171.5 cm, Sammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie / Photo: Andres Kilger, Public Domain Mark 1.0.

The visuality of the scene mirrors this durational aspect of time. It lasts for almost two minutes and consists solely of a long take, a trademark of Angelopoulos. "The long shots, sequence shots, slow pans and long takes", remarks Wolfram Schutte, "are scenes from a voyage through the world. Their complex structure sends the viewer on his own inner journey" and shows that "his poetic medium is time".[26] Here, the long take effects "an increase in the perceived duration of events", as Ratcliffe writes about "time consciousness in depression".[27] Its integrity keeps the duration of melancholy intact without breaking it apart or diluting it with any cuts. In terms of its formal composition, the scene looks like Caspar David Friedrichs' *The Monk by the Sea* (fig. 2) set in motion. Heinrich von Kleist describes his feelings before this painting as an "infinite solitude by the sea, under a sullen sky, to gaze off into a boundless watery waste. But this has to do with having travelled there, having to return, yearning to cross over, finding one cannot."[28] The film explores Kleist's hesitant crossover with its moving images.

26 Schutte 1991, cited by Horton 1997, 8.

27 Ratcliffe 2015, 175.

28 Kleist 1810, cited by Miller 1974, 208.



Fig. 3: Family disintegration as intersubjective desynchronisation. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:24:04.

As Alexandros journeys on, the time as decay ripples from the personal and reverberates on an intersubjective level. When he goes to his daughter's place and tries to entrust the dog to her, we see that he does not tell even her about his terminal illness and that he is leaving for the hospital tomorrow. The daughter (Iris Chatziantoniou) tells him that her husband, Nikos, does not like animals. The man (Vassilis Seimenis) is also in the apartment. Appearing in a bathrobe, he looks at Alexandros disagreeably. He informs Alexandros that they have sold his seashore house, the yellowish mansion appearing as the film's opening shot. Nikos's nonchalant gestures and distance show his disrespect and disdain for the old man (fig. 3). Here we witness a disintegration of personal connections between the father and the daughter, mediated by the unwanted dog, and a decomposition of family traditions and ethics, symbolised by the sold house. "Tomorrow morning, I'll give them the keys, and the bulldozer will start working", the son-in-law tells the father-in-law.

Thus, this scene presents two parallel temporal schemes: Alexandros retreating from the world and approaching death, and his daughter moving towards a new life and away from the old family. Thomas Fuchs' term "intersubjective desynchronisation" helps illuminate this aspect of depressive time in the film.[29]

29 Fuchs 2013.



Fig. 4: Reading a letter, recollecting a past, recomposing a time. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:16:37.

It indicates a sense of temporal alienation, a loss of contemporality with one's fellow human beings, which is a common symptom in depression and other mental illnesses. Although Fuchs' usage of the term is specifically clinical, I believe it can have a wider application, and the film presents this intersubjective desynchronisation not as a psychopathological but as a cultural and social symptom of the generational gap, the passage of time. Tellingly, the mise-en-scène foregrounds the motif of time by putting a clock in the background, a backdrop to Alexandros and his daughter's conversation (fig. 4).

These two aspects of depressive time, time of decay and intersubjective desynchronisation, are most poignantly summarised by an intensely poetic moment in the film. It comes from a little boy (Achilleas Skevis), an Albanian refugee and orphan whom Alexandros saves first from some policemen and second from a gang that kidnaps and sells children to well-to-do families. As Alexandros looks for the little boy who has been scared away by two policemen, he hears the boy singing a ballad, punctuated by the chimes of a clock from afar:

If I send you an apple, it'll rot.
If I send you a quince, it'll dry.
A bunch of white grapes will lose its beads along the way



Fig. 5: "I'll send you a tear in a …". Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:44:40.

The ballad ends with an unfinished line – "I'll send you a tear in a …" – as if nothing sustainable and reliable can be found to contain this tear, this genuine expression of sorrow. The poetic imageries of rotting apple, drying quince, and shrinking grapes evoke the experience of time as decay. At the same time, the consequent impossibility of gifting mourns the loss of intersubjectivity and synchronicity. It laments the no-longer-possible interactions because of desynchronisation, as if the giver is in fast motion whereas the recipient is in slow motion. Crystalised here, depressive time unfurls throughout the film as the old man and the young boy journey together. Their helplessness, precarities, and vulnerabilities mirror and amplify each other. With one's youth and the other's age, they present time at its beginning and end as equally hopeless and aimless journeys in different ways, though both lead to decay and homelessness. Visually, this sense of destitution is conveyed by the desolate urban landscape where the above scene takes place and the melting snow on the street (fig. 5). Overall, *Xenitis* is this resonance between the homeless individuals and the unhomely world; both are in a time of disintegration.

This phenomenology of the depressive time enriches Lukács' conception of "transcendental homelessness", an existential feeling of estrangement that plagues modern humanity.[30] According to Lukács, the time as decay

30 Lukács 2006.

underlines this *Grundstimmung* of modernity. In his words, "The most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists […] in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time […] that time – that ungraspable, invisibly moving substance – gradually robs subjectivity of all its possessions and imperceptibly forces alien contents into it."[31] Not only does the film show this time of decay characteristic of transcendental homelessness, but it also re-cognises this temporal experience in a larger *Gestalt* of depressive time and explores its intersubjective dimension, which Lukács neglects.

Korfulamu: Transcendence of Homecoming through Narrative Time

The achievement of the film goes even further. While Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel* points out some redemptive aspects of novels in passing moments,[32] his main argument is about diagnosis, not therapy. Namely, he considers novels as symptomatic or diagnostic of transcendental homelessness but not as substantial solutions to it. By contrast, I believe in the redemptive and therapeutic function of art, a belief that goes back to Aristotle's theory of tragedy and is rehabilitated by phenomenology and hermeneutics.[33] I argue that Eternity and a Day brings about such a therapy: it not only addresses but also redresses the temporality of transcendental homelessness. This argument resonates with what Karalis calls "the most pertinent question of Angelopoulos's ontological thinking: *what kind of redemption can we find in a historical reality without transcendental horizons?*"[34] The answer can be found in the time travels that break from depressive time and move towards narrative time.

By narrative time, I mean the experience of time as a configuration and reconfiguration of individual, heterogeneous, and fragmentary events in life into a meaningful, holistic, and dynamic *Gestalt*. Holistic in that the individual elements are coordinated and reconciled with each other and become a whole. Dynamic in that such a whole is not a fixed totality but a perpetual transformation process. Moreover, a narrative is intrinsically intersubjec-

31 Lukács 2006, 120–21.

32 Those moments include his analysis of Flaubert, Goethe, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

33 Gadamer 1986.

34 Karalis 2023, 20, emphasis in original.

tive, for a story necessarily entails at least a narrator and a listener. Hence, narrative time is intersubjectively synchronising; it brings us back in sync with other people. I derive this concept of narrative time chiefly from Paul Ricœur's research into the correlation between time and narrative. In his words, *"Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence."*[35] In essence, narrative time redeems the depressive time of transcendental homelessness by providing such a humanistic and meaningful experience.

Fuchs' and Ratcliffe's studies on depression confirm this redemptive aspect of the narrative. Both scholars notice that depressive patients suffer from a lack of self-narrative that constitutes the *"personal–historical or biographical time"* to make sense of their lives.[36] In Fuchs' words, the depressive time needs a "synthesis […] which is performed through *the active personal fulfilment of time*, namely through the ever renewed integration of a projected future and an appropriated past".[37] However, they do not tell us how to create such redemptive narratives. This is where, I argue, psychopathology ends and artwork begins. An examination of time travels in Eternity and a Day in the light of Ricœur can fill in the gap.

There are two types of time travel in the film: a personal one and a historical one. Personally, Alexandros travels back to an early day in his life, a day celebrated as one month after his daughter's birth. Historically, Alexandros and the little boy travel back to 19th century Greece, where Solomos is active, whose unfinished poem *Free Besieged* Alexandros seeks to complete. Both time travels manifest the structure of narrative time I aim to describe. Here, I will focus on analysing the personal one while pointing out the parallelism in the historical one. The pragmatic reason for this choice is the limited space of the article. More substantially, the historical time travel engages more with political and social issues, a dimension of the film already well explored.[38] Conversely, the personal-existential side of the story is less told, although, as Angelopoulos says to Bachmann, "I no longer deal with politics, with generalisations. I have stopped understanding them."[39]

35 Ricœur 1984, 52, emphasis in original.

36 Fuchs 2013, 80 emphasis in original; Ratcliffe 2015, 146.

37 Fuchs 2013, 101 emphasis in original.

38 See Thomassen 2005; Celik Rappas/Phillis 2020.

39 Angelopoulos 2001, 111; for a critique of the overemphasis on political commentaries at the expense of philosophical reflections in Angelopoulos scholarship, see Karalis 2023.

The personal journey embarks from the apartment of Alexandros's daughter when Alexandros invites her to read a letter written by her mother, Anna, on the date of that full-month-after-birth celebration. This letter, recording and recalling the events of that day, brings Alexandros back to the seaside house where the party took place. Here, we experience time according to Ricœur's first order *Mimesis* or *Mimesis 1*.[40] According to a simplified version of Plato, *Mimesis* is usually translated as "imitation" and reductively understood as reproduction or photo-copying of reality. Ricœur returns to Aristotle and discovers a much richer connotation of *Mimesis*. He argues that the reductive understanding of *Mimesis* is only its first and most shallow dimension, a dimension that nonetheless has value. The first step of creating a narrative, according to Ricœur, is *Mimesis 1*, that is, episodic recording of events, which brings forth a chronology. It is time and narrative in their rudimentary stage, as prefigured time comprising pre-narrative events. This proto-narrative-time already moves away from depressive time as a time of decomposition and gestures towards a time ready for composition.

Moreover, objectivity plays a key role in *Mimesis 1*, as Anna's letter is objectively there, passed between Alexandros and his daughter. Ricœur's understanding of objectivity is not bogged down by a post-Cartesian subject–object divide as something anti-subjective. Instead, it is informed by the tradition of phenomenology as an outcome of intersubjective interactions. As Ricœur puts it, "to act is always to act 'with' others", and "in this sense, all the members of the set are in a relation of intersignification".[41] Thus, *Mimesis 1*, inaugurating an *ensemble* of events and their intersignification, lays the foundation of narrative time.

This first episode of time travel initiates the *Mimesis 1* of narrative time in Eternity and a Day. At least three perspectives inform the journey: Anna's letter and her continuous voice-over, Alexandros's recollection of the event, and their daughter's simultaneous reading of the letter. The film's audio-visual images, which bring us back to the time-space of the seaside house, synthesise all these perspectives. Similarly, the historical time travel starts with Alexandros telling the story of Solomos to the little boy, hence implicating two perspectives. As Anna's voice narrates the past, the camera gradually bypasses the daughter reading the letter and focuses on Alexandros's meditative posture and introspective gaze, foretelling that the coming vision is

40 For the discussion of Ricœur on Mimesis that follows here, see Ricœur 1984, 52–87.

41 Ricœur 1984, 55.



Fig. 6: Yesterday once more. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:17:42.

a collective recollection. With Anna's gentle voice saying, "I went to the veranda", Alexandros also moves towards the curtains. In the next scene, he comes through the curtain and back to the balcony of his old seaside house and encounters the Anna of the past. A conversation ensues between them. However, Alexandros does not speak with any hindsight. Rather, he seems to play-act his younger self (fig. 6). This juxtaposition of the present man and the past identity is a key aspect of the time travels in Eternity and a Day. It highlights, in Ricœur's words, "pastness as such, what we call in ordinary language the reality of the past, or better yet, the real in the past, the *having been*".[42] What is thus re-presented and respected is the objectivity of the past and its discordance with the present, crucial to *Mimesis 1*.

In Eternity and a Day, this objective and discordant dimension of time, co-confirmed and co-constituted by multiple perspectives, plays a significant role in Alexandros's confrontation with his past guilt. He was too engrossed in his writings to be properly available to his family. In Anna's words, "I am trying to kidnap you between two books. You live your life close to us, your daughter and me, but not with us." That is why he finds Anna has been crying before he joins her on the balcony. He forgets that the

42 Ricœur 1991a, 349.



Fig. 7: Like a white bird flying away. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 01:17:20.

dress she put on is a gift from him. When he comes to apologise and console the disappointed Anna, we hear her voice-over saying, "If only I could keep that moment, pin it up like a butterfly to prevent it from flying away."

Intriguingly, this figure of flying-away is pinned down as the cover of the film's DVD version, depicting another moment when Alexandros's guilt of unavailability is re-experienced. The celebration party is journeying to a nearby island, the same island that young Alexandros and his friends visited to seek the sunken city, as indicated at the film's beginning. Alexandros has promised Anna to spend the day with her. Yet, instead of swimming together, he decides to climb a cliff to revisit the names he and his friends left on a rock there and re-instantiate the ritual of waving to ships passing by. Despite her protests and obvious anger, he betrays her again. Calling him "traitor" with chagrin, she turns to the beach and removes her shoes. In a transitory moment, her spreading arms and the shoes in her hands evoke the figure of a seagull flying away (fig. 7). So beautiful is this composition that we are compelled to rewatch this scene or screenshot it and pin it up like a butterfly. But its beauty is intermingled and intensified with pathos: rage and disappointment from Anna and regret and guilt from Alexandros.

Alexandros's imagination has left an indelible mark on this composition because Anna's figure echoes back to the film's beginning, where the



Fig. 8: Time as a child playing on the beach. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:04:28.

young Alexandros runs to the sea to meet his friends for their adventure (fig. 8). This visual alignment of past events and the thematisation of the past guilt elevate us to the second level of narrative time. It is of *Mimesis 2*, the emplotment of discordant events in *Mimesis 1*, to endow them with a coherent narrative and a definite theme. As Ricœur puts it, "A story, too, must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organize them into an intelligible whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the 'thought' of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession."[43] Thus, the narrative time of *Mimesis 2* is a "concordant discordance", "a synthesis of the heterogeneous".[44] With this emplotment, Alexandros's regret is articulated and put into perspective. Comparing and connecting Anna's disappointed figure with Alexandros's childhood memory of adventure, the film puts forward a narrative that makes sense of Alexandros's guilt of unavailability in terms of the ambivalent figure of a child. On the one hand, a child is "childish", emotionally immature and reckless, yet to learn to care for others. It is the child as "'His Majesty the Baby', as we once fancied ourselves", as Freud

43 Ricœur 1984, 65.

44 Ricœur 1984, 66.

puts it.[45] This interpretation is facilitated by Alexandros's uncontrollable desire to ascend the cliff and his mother's remark when he comes back: "You'll never grow up."

On the other hand, childhood can also be interpreted according to what Hannah Arendt calls "Natality", the childlike capacity to redeem the past and begin something new.[46] This alternative interpretation motivates a redemptive narrative and resonates with the glorious and extra-ordinary sunshine engulfing Anna's body. It also brings us to the final aspect of Ricœur's Mimesis, or *Mimesis 3*. *Mimesis 3* opens time and narrative, configured in *Mimesis 2*, to reconfiguration. Regarding narrative, this comes with readers' unpredictable receptions and interpretations, which Ricœur, following Gadamer, regards as the open-ended completion of a narrative.[47] This open-endedness resonates well with Angelopoulos' filmmaking. As he says, "You will have noticed, if you look carefully, that my films never really end. To me they are all 'works in progress.'"[48] So is time, which can always be redirected by newcomers. In Arendt's terms, it concerns the natality of humanity, namely, humans are always already bringing new ideas and actions into history, which is thus never determined or predictable.[49] This unpredictability and changeability of the future also make the past malleable. This is not to say we can fabricate and manipulate past events as we wish, which would violate *Mimesis 1*, but to recognise that those past events can take on different meanings by constantly reconfiguring into new narratives.

In this way, the past can always speak to the present differently. Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar point when he says, "time, in short, needs a synthesis. But it is equally true that this synthesis must always be undertaken afresh, and that any supposition that it can be anywhere brought to completion involves the negation of time."[50] For Ricœur, this ever-renewed synthesis of time depends on the paradoxical co-existence of concordance and discordance essential to time and narrative, a paradox that keeps them *alive*.[51] In Eternity and a Day, this concordant discordance incarnates in the child, juxtaposing childish immaturity and childlike natality.

45 Freud 2018, 91.
46 Arendt 1998.
47 Ricœur 1984, 70.
48 Angelopoulos 2001, 102.
49 Arendt 1998.
50 Merleau-Ponty 2005, 482.
51 Ricœur 1984.



Fig. 9: Seaside house revisited. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:01:40.

The transformative revival of the past comes at the film's end. The next morning, Alexandros revisits his seaside house before its demolition. As he makes his way across the empty rooms, his dark overcoat mirrors the surrounding door frames, while the desolation of the place echoes his inner despair (fig. 9). Both the house and the man will be gone soon. However, with a melody entering the scene, he travels back to that celebration day for the last time. But this time, it is the past that travels back to Alexandros's present. As Anna's voice-over pleads, "Share this day with me", Alexandros turns to the balcony. We, thanks to the point-of-view shot, see with his eyes across his mother caring for the baby on the balcony, across the unlustred palisade and the deteriorated veranda, and find the entire party congregating on the beach and singing (fig. 10). Alexandros goes down to the beach, and Anna comes to greet him, her youthful figure defying the dilapidated veranda, the debris of time around the place (fig. 11). They start dancing with the whole party. As the camera closes on them in each other's arms – *Korfulamu* – he tells Anna, "I won't go to the hospital … I'd like to make plans for tomorrow." Unlike the previous time travels in which Alexandros repeats his old self, this time, the past Anna responds to his present question: "How long will tomorrow last?" Anna says, "Eternity and a day." This past-coming-to-life motif also takes place in the historical time travel with



Fig. 10: Anytime Door. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:03:58.



Fig. 11: Tomorrow once more. Film still, Eternity and a Day (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:05:19.

the 19th-century poet Solomos stepping onto the bus where Alexandros and the little boy spend their last time together. Alexandros asks the poet the same question and gets the same answer.

Argathini: A Day More than Eternity

Thus, we are brought to the enigmatic title of the film. To conclude this article, I will interpret this enigma in terms of *Argathini*. The words "very late at night" evoke Hegel's owl of Minerva, which "begins its flight only with the onset of dusk".[52] It is a metaphor for his preceding sentence: "When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy."[53] Allen Wood, the editor of the Cambridge edition of Hegel, interprets this metaphor negatively, as the unavoidable belatedness of philosophy: "A culture's philosophical understanding reaches its peak only when the culture enters its decline."[54] Conversely, the popular and positivistic reading of Hegel would take this owl of Minerva as the metaphor for the grand philosophical synthesis at the end of history, culminating in "absolute knowledge".[55] The philosophy of time in Eternity and a Day is neither of them. Its phenomenology presents time as neither too late to be redeemed nor so comprehensive as to be finished. Instead, the film points towards a tomorrow, a discordant concordance of eternity and a day.

"Eternity" stands for the eternal resurrection of the past, for the repetition of yesterdays which confront us and force us to recognise them in their undeniability, heterogeneity, and incommensurability, a past that is falling apart. Wallowing in such an eternal past, of time as eternal passing, is the time experience of *Xenitis*, of transcendental homelessness as depressive time. However, the past does not come back unchanged. Each time, it is configured and reconfigured into a different narrative. Because of this narrative openness, time is teleological without a definite telos. It points to an undefined tomorrow that is one day more than eternity, a journey of homecoming that navigates through depressive time and narrates time, a journey for eternity and a day.

52 Hegel 1991, 23.
53 Hegel 1991, 23.
54 Wood 1991, 392.
55 Ricœur 1991b, 98.

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Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα (Ulysses' Gaze, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1995).

Temitope Abisoye Noah

Time Travel and Bodily Epistemology in Ava DuVernay's Selma (FR/UK/US 2014) and Haile Gerima's Sankofa (BF 1993)

Abstract

This article explores the seminal films of two black filmmakers of different generations: Haile Gerima's Sankofa (BF 1993) and Ava DuVernay's Selma (FR/UK/US 2014). It suggests that in creating Selma, DuVernay uses time travel and "bodily epistemology" (Lisa Woolfork) as first deployed by Haile Gerima in his 1993 film to offer 21st century viewers glimpses of the African American slave past. DuVernay's regressions in time are particularly bound up with those of Gerima in her film's most talked about scene: "Bloody Sunday". Several critics denounced the grotesque violence of "Bloody Sunday", failing to recognize that DuVernay crafts the episode to evoke the past in a new way. Her innovative way of transcending the art of the time-travel narrative is influenced by several of her predecessors, including Gerima.

Keywords

Ava DuVernay, Haile Gerima, Sankofa, Selma, Bloody Sunday, Time Travel, Civil Rights Movement, Slavery, Black Film

Biography

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> Haile Gerima is a legend among us, a giant among filmmakers [...] His work is so foundational, so formative, so nourishing to me and so many other filmmakers who regard him as a master, which he is.
>
> — *Ava DuVernay*

> The only contemporary movie I've seen is Selma. Outside that, I do not care. I'm not compelled to get in my car and go see a movie [...] I think she's [Ava DuVernay] an amazing strategist.
>
> — *Haile Gerima*[1]

The time is a Sunday afternoon in March 1965; the place is Selma, Alabama. Several police units, dozens of Alabama state troopers, and eight mounted patrolmen have charged into a throng of Civil Rights marchers on Edmund Pettus Bridge and are bludgeoning and kicking them. The scene falls into slow motion. A mounted policeman gallops across the melee, cutting through a billow of teargas that has begun to engulf the bridge. In pursuit of a lone marcher who has fled for safety, he extends his bullwhip in the air like a lasso. As the fog of teargas continues to thicken, the horseman comes down on the frightened runaway with such intensity that the marcher collapses to the ground. The teargas now obscures the backdrop of the scene, leaving only the horseman and his prostrated victim in view. The whole sequence suddenly feels like something from a plantation in 1800s America rather than a Civil Rights march in 20th-century America. So unfolds one of the most talked about scenes of the film Selma (Ava DuVernay, FR/UK/US 2014).

Selma covers a three-month period of the Civil Rights Movement in the spring of 1965 during which Martin Luther King Jr. (hereafter referred to as MLK) and a number of political activists – clergymen, students, and other rank-and-file Americans – gather in Selma, Alabama, to protest the literacy tests and similarly illegal tactics that are being used to bar black Southerners from voting. Bloody Sunday is the most intense of such protests. When Selma debuted in 2014, viewers were riveted by Ava DuVernay's rendition of it. One reviewer, Alan A. Stone, said, "Bloody Sunday is recreated in the film with clouds of tear gas, biting police dogs, armed cavalry, and unprovoked

1 Epigraphs DuVernay and Gerima: #Childof Testimonials: Ava DuVernay Director of "SELMA", 2015, https://t1p.de/4b937, 00:00:08–00:00:28; Reelblack One, 2015, https://t1p.de/6hc83, 00:01:31–00:01:44 and 00:04:15–00:04:18.

and unreasonable violence against a peaceful African American demonstration. It is one of the movie's most unforgettable scenes."[1] Another reviewer, Chris Nashawaty, called the Bloody Sunday scene a "hauntingly staged fracas" that is "sickening to watch".[2] Scott Foundas remarked that "the events [of Bloody Sunday] are at their ugliest."[3]

Other reviews were less concerned with the violence than with the anachronisms. Reviewer Herb Boyd remarked that "people are watching the violence of 'Bloody Sunday' on television in real time, when the nation actually was shown that footage much later".[4] Amy Taubin pointed out that as Bloody Sunday unfolds, "what [President] Johnson is viewing on his black-and-white TV is not the march as it is reenacted in DuVernay's Selma, but actual news coverage from 1965".[5]

In all of the discourse surrounding DuVernay's recreation of the historical Civil Rights march on Edmund Pettus Bridge to date, a key factor has been overlooked: DuVernay's directorial choices for Bloody Sunday are strongly evocative of the time-travel genre. That genre has been strategically implemented by many Black American filmmakers and writers before her to dislodge their characters from the present and plunge them into the harrowing worlds of their enslaved ancestors. This article reads DuVernay's Bloody Sunday scene alongside a classic Black American time-travel film, Sankofa (Haile Gerima, BF 1993), to demonstrate how the violence and temporal adjustments of Blood Sunday are deployed by DuVernay to merge her characters with the slave past. It also engages the work of scholar and author Lisa Woolfork to demonstrate that with Bloody Sunday, DuVernay inaugurates a novel style of time travel that builds on the brand of time travel Gerima deploys in Sankofa.

Ava DuVernay is an Oscar-nominated filmmaker known for her craft in illuminating the "interior lives of black people".[6] Her first feature film, I Will Follow (US 2010), centered on an African American visual artist, Maye, who moves out of her aunt's home to start her life over only to experience flashbacks of her ailing aunt, who had died. DuVernay's next feature film, Middle

1 Stone 2015, 79.
2 Nashawaty 2015, 93.
3 Foundas 2015, 14.
4 Boyd 2015, 58.
5 Taubin 2015, 27.
6 Martin 2014, 66.

of Nowhere (US 2012), was about an African American nurse, Ruby, who finds herself in limbo between her former life, which she shared with her currently incarcerated husband, and her future life, which she contemplates sharing with a new love interest. Her documentary 13th (US 2016) amplified today's ongoing mass incarceration of Black Americans, exposing the phenomenon as an extension of indentured servitude, notwithstanding the 1865 Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Each of these films by DuVernay interrogates the past of Black people to flesh out its possible implications for their present and, consequently, their future. Selma, given its potent suggestions of slavery, is no exception.

At the 2015 Tribeca Film Festival, DuVernay admitted that she deliberately staged several scenes in Selma to evoke spaces of slavery. The jailhouse scene between MLK and Ralph Abernathy served as her case in point: "There's a whole scene where there's two dark men, David Oyelowo and Colman Domingo, sitting in a dark jail cell and there's just this little peak of light [...] our reference was making it feel like the hull of a slave ship."[7] From the beginning of Selma to its end, such subtle evocations of the slave past abound. Bloody Sunday is the scene in which DuVernay's slavery recreations are particularly suggestive of time travel.

Time Travel and the Neo-Slave Narrative

Time travel is commonly associated with films and television series such as The Terminator (James Cameron, US 1984), Doctor Who (BBC, UK 1963–1989) and Star Trek (NBC, US 1966–2011). It often involves a protagonist who travels – usually by means of a machine – into the past or future. However, many scholars have offered a more expansive interpretation of time travel, suggesting that any act of remembering or psychologically imagining a moment of history preceding or following one's own time constitutes a mode of time traveling. For instance, Andrew Gordon suggests that a life-history review upon a brush with death could constitute time travel:

7 Barone 2015, https://t1p.de/vd6m7, 00:16:24–00:17:49. Bradford Young, the film's cinematographer, states in an interview with Patricia Thomson of *American Cinematographer*, "In the jail, the idea was to remind the audience what it might be like to be in the bow of a slave ship, with that single source of light through the cracks. You get these little subversive conversations between enslaved Africans who are not satisfied with captivity", Thomson 2015, 48–49.

"[T]ime travel can be passed off as a possible hallucination caused by a near death experience, as in the film Peggy Sue Got Married [Francis Ford Coppola, US 1986]."[8] According to Gordon, other films, such as Groundhog Day (Harold Ramis, US 1993), which engage such mental time traveling, feature regressions into the past that are simply "left unexplained" or are otherwise attributed to a "higher power".[9] Susan Stratton suggests another type of nonphysical time travel – the psychic time travel: in Olaf Stapledon's 1930 novel *Last and First Men*, the experience of the past is a "product of [the narrator's] own imagination from information transmitted telepathically across time and space".[10] Kristine Larsen identifies another "mind-only (consciousness shifting) time travel" in the television show Lost (ABC, US 2004–2010), in which the characters repeatedly experience flashbacks and flashforwards.[11]

In the past few decades, Black American films and written narratives about the slave past have increasingly featured this "consciousness shifting" brand of time travel. Scholar and author Lisa Woolfork explains that this developing trend is a direct upshot of the wider society's angst surrounding the topic of slavery. In a society that shies away from discussing the horrors of Colonial America, many Black Americans have become compelled to proactively construct the past in ways that open possibilities to heal this historical trauma. Such stories of the past, termed "neo-slave narratives", are particularly curative by virtue of their shock factor. Woolfork explains that in such stories,

> the protagonist suffers from a form of amnesia about the slave past (they do not know their ancestors, they know little and care less about slavery, they are unaware of the meaning of their contemporary "freedom"). The protagonist then finds her- or himself unwittingly transported to the slave past where she or he is confronted with a living, traumatic history that becomes a personal priority. In this way, characters are forced physically to "go" to the slave past to better "know" it. And when they "get there" they discover that (counter to their previous attitude about slavery) there *is* a "there there", a slave past

8 Gordon 2002, 140.
9 Gordon 2002, 140–141.
10 Stratton 2002, 78.
11 Larsen 2015, 214.

> that is […] "waiting there" to be recognized, remembered, or even re-experienced.[12]

According to Woolfork, Octavia Butler's seminal novel *Kindred* (1979) is one of such time-travel neo-slave narratives. It features a 26-year-old Black American California native, Dana, who one day mysteriously finds herself in early 1800s Maryland, where she experiences several bouts of whippings on a slave plantation. These sufferings uncannily remind her of her contemporary struggles at home in California. Woolfork also underscores another well-known neo-slave narrative, *Stigmata* (1998), by Phyllis Alesia Perry. The novel centers around a Black American woman, Lizzie, who finds a mysterious quilt is inscribed with stories of her deceased great-grandmother, an enslaved African in early America. By virtue of this quilt, Lizzie experiences vivid visions of the past and contemplates them through her contemporary sufferings.

Butler's and Perry's narratives blur the lines between the hardships Black Americans face in the present and what their ancestors experienced during the times of slavery. This blurring of the lines between the trauma of the past and that of the present is a central feature of Gerima's Sankofa and DuVernay's Bloody Sunday in Selma. Gerima and DuVernay use time travel to lead their protagonists into an experience that heals their trauma of slavery.

Gerima's Sankofa and DuVernay's "Bloody Sunday"

Haile Gerima is an internationally renowned filmmaker who has produced groundbreaking films for over 40 years. Gerima's approach to filmmaking is inspired by his will for restoration through remembrance of the past: "Memory gets into a very, very different context when you look at Africans in general because there's a normal relationship human beings have with memory and then there's what displacement, colonialism, and imperialism bring upon a person. That form of displacement becomes an inorganic and in some cases an antagonistic relationship with memory."[13] This importance of recollecting memory is the leitmotif of Sankofa, which Gerima celebrates.

12 Woolfork 2008, 2.

13 Thomas 2013, 85–86.

Sankofa is of the Akan peoples of Ghana and is a philosophical concept symbolized by a bird who simultaneously faces backwards and forwards. Sankofa means "We must go back and reclaim our past in order to create a better future."[14] This mantra constitutes the leitmotif of several of Gerima's films, Ashes and Embers (US 1982), Adwa (ET/IT/US 1999), and Teza (ET/DE/FR 2009), to name a few, in which his main characters integrate their past with the present. Gerima believes that such revisiting of the past, which the Sankofa bird represents, powerfully activates a psychological rejuvenation.[15] In Sankofa, people "return to the past using collective memory" and find "collective memory of past generations within themselves".[16] In Gerima's film Sankofa, this psychological confrontation with one's past is made possible via time travel.

Sankofa is about the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade. The main character of the film, Mona, is a Black American model who bears witness to the sufferings of her ancestors who were once captured by slave traders in Ghana. Mona time-travels into the past, garners vital lessons from her enslaved ancestors, and returns to the present. By the end of the film, Mona's Sankofa pilgrimage has transformed her into a "rebel" who is "no more [...] scared".[17] Viewed alongside Selma's Bloody Sunday, similarities between Mona's oscillation between past and present and that of the Civil Rights marchers emerge. Yet, DuVernay moves beyond Gerima's brand of time travel by developing supplementary techniques that make the time travel occur for the marchers (and potentially for the viewers of the film who observe them) on a visceral rather than psychological level.

In the opening scenes of Gerima's film, Mona is in Ghana, on the grounds of Cape Coast Castle, where sounds of drums reverberate through the premises. Wielding a wooden staff adorned with the Sankofa bird, a local priest named Sankofa begins to eulogise his ancestors who were hauled across the Atlantic Ocean. Under the orders of the priest, Mona descends into the castle's dungeons, where she finds scores of enslaved Africans of centuries ago; they appear to her from the darkness. The enslaved Africans pursue Mona through the dungeon's tunnels until she encounters slave dealers, who then apprehend her. Despite her protests, the dealers drag Mona back

14 Prendergast 2011, 121.
15 Woolford 1994, 103.
16 Woolford 1994, 101.
17 Sankofa (Haile Gerima, BF 1993), 01:12:28.



Fig. 1: Slaveholders drag Mona back into the dungeons. Film still, SANKOFA (Haile Gerima, BF 1993), 00:14:01.



Fig. 2: Slaveholders sear Mona's back. Film still, SANKOFA (Haile Gerima, BF 1993), 00:14:17.

into the heart of the dungeon, into the midst of the enslaved Africans (fig. 1). They position Mona before a bonfire and sear her back with a molten iron staff (fig. 2).

Mona's branding is deliberate. Gerima explains that this violence accelerates her time travel: "The branding [that Mona experiences] allows an exploration of the past. It unleashes the collective memory of people who had

certain identities and characters and beliefs."[18] Such hallmark wounding – typically dealt to enslaved Africans – plummets Mona into her "memory bin", or her unconscious mind, so that she catches a glimpse of her ancestors.[19] In turn, the viewers of the film, who watch Mona's branding, engage in this regression vicariously through her: "It's [as if it's] the mind that is branded when Mona is branded."[20] Through that violence, viewers of the film descend, along with Mona, into their own past.

Back to the Past and Bodily Epistemology in Sankofa and Selma

African American literature and culture scholar Lisa Woolfork's conceptualization of "bodily epistemology" explicates the dynamics of such branding that is said to induce ancestral memory in Mona and in the viewers of the film. In her work *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture* (2008), Woolfork defines bodily epistemology as "a representational strategy that uses the body of a present-day protagonist to register the traumatic slave past".[21] Octavia Butler's novel displays such a technique: in *Kindred*, the physical wounds incurred by Dana from her beatings on the plantation remain on her body after she has returned to the present, thereby demolishing all semblances of a separation between past and present in the mind of the reader. In Phyllis Alesia Perry's work *Stigmata*, Lizzie, like her counterpart Dana, incurs physical wounds in the shape of the manacles which once restrained her grandmother's limbs. "The body […] is used to mediate multiple forms of knowing the past", writes Woolfork. Such works "use the bodily metaphor to suggest that bodies of blacks in the present share a degree of corporeal resonance with […] those enslaved in the past".[22] This phenomenon highlighted by Woolfork is what Gerima engages in Sankofa to merge Mona with her past. Her wounds, just as Woolfork asserts, issue from the conviction that "knowledge about the slave past can be better acquired and understood when the learner participates bodily in a version of that past".[23]

18 Woolford 1994, 100.
19 Woolford 1994, 100.
20 Woolford 1994, 100.
21 Woolfork 2008, 2.
22 Woolfork 2008, 4.
23 Woolfork 2008, 11.

The psychological return to the past through violence that Mona experiences and that Woolfork terms bodily epistemology repeatedly occurs throughout Selma, but it is during the harrowing events of Bloody Sunday that the Civil Rights marchers' incurred physical assault most closely mirrors that of Gerima's Mona. In the scene, the marchers do not enter into a dungeon tunnel but instead venture onto a bridge. Just as Mona is forced to experience the branding of her ancestors, the marchers are forced to experience beatings, and even whippings, not unlike those endured by theirs. The lash of the whip on the back of the lone marcher running for dear life from the mounted patrolman particularly recalls the whippings of enslaved Africans on American plantations, just as the iron staff branding that Mona suffers on her back at the hands of the slave traders recalls her captured ancestors' ordeals. When the Bloody Sunday scene falls into slow motion during this turn of events on the bridge and focuses on the horseman and the runaway marcher, it renders the horrors on the bridge more personal to the viewer: this camera shot of the mounted patrolman and the marcher amplifies the violence of the collective assault on the marchers by the policemen.

In line with Woolfork's theory of bodily epistemology, DuVernay explains that she shot such scenes to "force you to really deconstruct these moments of violence, so that it's not just physical, that it's emotional; you allow it to get into your bloodstream and you just further sink into the story".[24] Through those gory images of Bloody Sunday, the viewer of the film is transported to that fateful day in 1965 on Edmund Pettus Bridge. DuVernay also explains that the creation of such a moment that is "really living and breathing" and that "gets into your DNA a little bit" makes viewers recognize that this violence "is not new; this is a continuum; this is a continuation of what was done before, just as 1965, Selma was a continuation of what was done before".[25] By prompting her audience to identify their present-day traumas in those of their Civil Rights forbearers (and the enslaved Africans before them), DuVernay, like Gerima, uses bodily epistemology to invite viewers into an exploration of the past.

DuVernay's technique of staging this bodily epistemology is more subtle than Gerima's. Whereas Gerima sets up Mona's time travel through the enslaved Africans in Cape Coast Castle whose appearance marks Mona's

24 Selma Movie Interview: Ava DuVernay & David Oyelowo with Cinema Siren, 2014, https://t1p.de/ok8lz, 00:08:20–00:08:32.

25 Harris-Perry, 2015, https://t1p.de/xyuax, 00:16:41–00:16:49 and 00:24:17–00:24:28.



Fig. 3: The mounted policeman chases after the lone marcher. Film still, Selma (Ava DuVernay, FR/UK/US 2014), 01:17:02.



Fig. 4: The marchers run away from the police. Film still, Selma (Ava DuVernay, FR/UK/US 2014), 01:16:16.

imminent regression into the past, DuVernay uses the cloud of teargas on the bridge to adjust the viewers' perception of the scene and the characters in it. When the cloud of teargas fully envelops Edmund Pettus Bridge and obscures the backdrop, viewers are left with the silhouette of the horseman and his victim (fig. 3), along with mostly sounds and faint movements by which to judge what is unfolding in the rest of the scene. As the fracas – replete with the lashing of whips, neighing of horses, and blasts of shotguns – evokes a skirmish on a plantation, viewers are prompted to viscerally perceive just that, and thus the marchers in the scene become suggestive of enslaved Africans on a field (fig. 4). It is this subtle change in the scene – the slight shift in mise en scène – and the way in which the characters move in the melee that achieves this time-travel effect.

Forward to the Present and Psychological Healing in Sankofa and Selma

After Mona enters the past, she reunites with her ancestors on a plantation in the Americas, where she eventually launches a slave rebellion which empowers her and then returns to the present. In Ghana, Mona sits on the steps of Cape Coast Castle and gazes at the Atlantic Ocean before her. Surprisingly, she finds her friend Nunu, an enslaved African from the American plantation, seated to her right. Mona simultaneously gazes into the past, represented by her gaze towards the Americas across the ocean where her ancestors were once enslaved, while affirming her newfound rejuvenation, represented by Nunu, seated to her right.

In this ending scene in Sankofa, there are many other descendants of Africans sitting with Mona and Nunu on the grounds of Cape Coast Castle – these individuals are representative of Black Americans as a collective. Their assembly reflects Gerima's conviction that this psychological healing of the trauma of slavery has been long overdue since the abolition of American slavery: "After slavery [Black Americans] should have been working about healing, but they went straight to work from the mines to the train tracks, to the pullman porters."[26] According to Gerima, such a brusque transition into "freedom" as Black Americans underwent following slavery does not constitute authentic liberation. To liberate oneself, one must take to "knowing thyself", including becoming familiar with the history of one's ancestors, before moving forward.[27] This is what Mona and her counterparts demonstrate as they sit and gaze across the ocean. They communicate to the viewer of the film the urgency of remembering the history of one's ancestors to become liberated in the present.

In Selma, the marchers' merging of past and present takes place following the commotion on the bridge, particularly when the marcher who is whipped by the mounted patrolman falls to the ground. After this occurs, the camera cuts to a room where MLK is watching the scene on Edmund Pettus Bridge on a television set. Like Mona and her African American counterparts on the steps of the castle who deferentially gaze over the Atlantic Ocean towards the horrors of the American plantations, MLK and his comrades gaze with humility at the carnage on the bridge. As in the

26 Woolford 1994, 102.

27 Gerima 2010, https://t1p.de/58ipi, 00:04:27–00:04:32.

anachronism at the end of Sankofa with Nunu and Mona there is something peculiar about this scene: John Lewis, Hosea Williams, Amelia Boynton, and Frederick Reese are surprisingly in the same room as MLK, observing with him the atrocity that they are simultaneously experiencing on the bridge. In this defining moment, the past and present are fused, as in the scene in Gerima's Sankofa between Nunu and Mona.[28]

Just as the ending of Sankofa stresses to the viewer the urgency of looking into the past for psychological rejuvenation, the ending of DuVernay's Bloody Sunday is aimed at inspiring present-day African Americans to reconcile their current realities with the history of their ancestors. MLK and his colleagues observing the atrocity on the television screen are not merely activists of the Civil Rights Movement looking into the face of state terrorism of their times (and into the face of their ancestors' beatings during the days of slavery) but are also representative of African Americans of today as they observe similar acts of brutality on their own television sets: "Selma is not a film that takes place in the context of history. You watch those images and you understand how it feels to be someone in 1965 being shocked about what they see on TV, because it just happened to you in August [2014]."[29] By identifying themselves in MLK and the marchers, viewers of Selma are made to realize that the past and the present are one and that the past must thus be explored as they face the struggles and affairs of the present.

DuVernay illustrates this healing power of remembering the past at the conclusion of Bloody Sunday. As soon as the skirmish on the bridge comes to an end, MLK turns towards his comrades and exclaims, "We're goin' back to the bridge!" Surprisingly, the group is willing to take up his challenge. Even Amelia Boynton, whose face is bloodied and whose arm is visibly broken, nods in agreement with MLK. Evidently, the regeneration of the group is now consummated. The group has retreated into the past, they have developed a stronger spirit of togetherness (by enduring the same beatings experienced by their ancestors), and they are now willing to repeat the gesture as an act of affirming their newfound stamina to push forward in their nonviolent movement.

28 This last Sankofa feature of "Bloody Sunday," where past and present are fused at the end to drive home the healing power of Sankofa, was added to Bloody Sunday during the editing process. Selma film editor Spencer Averick states, "We knew there was an emotion in the scene that hadn't quite come across in the edit. We tried many different ideas to put this right but rounded on the idea of juxtaposing the violence on the bridge with the reaction of audiences watching on TV at home." Pennington 2015, 67.

29 Tsai, 2015, https://t1p.de/zu1ww, 00:02:35–00:02:52.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated that the inspiration which DuVernay gleans from Gerima is very manifest in Selma. Like Gerima in Sankofa, DuVernay fuses the past with the present through bodily epistemology. I have also demonstrated that DuVernay makes this psychological fusion of past and present her own. Deviating from Gerima, who alters his protagonist's environment from one time period to another, DuVernay makes subtle adjustments in Bloody Sunday that are only discernible viscerally. The subtlety of DuVernay's technique showcases the Edmund Pettus Bridge and American plantation simultaneously, ultimately creating a mise-en-abyme effect:[30] the viewer of the film is able to simultaneously observe both the marchers and their enslaved African ancestors. It is in this manner that DuVernay inaugurates a new variety of time travel, a visceral kind of time travel.

On 31 December 2016, Julie Dash, director of the seminal film Daughters of the Dust (US 1991), took to her Twitter account to celebrate DuVernay's talent, stating, "Fearlessly, you reach forward and backward simultaneously."[31] Dash recognized that this reaching backward and forward which is the theme of Sankofa is also at the core of DuVernay's filmmaking craft. In the same spirit as Gerima's film – and as crafted by Butler in *Kindred* and by many writers and filmmakers before her – DuVernay deploys the time-travel genre to encourage her viewers to "go back and reclaim our past in order to create a better future".[32]

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30 The plantation is perceived by the viewer instinctively, and the Edmund Pettus Bridge is perceived consciously.

31 Julie Dash (@JulieDash), 10:01am, 31 December 2016, https://is.gd/0z4YiQ.

32 Prendergast 2011, 121.

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Open Section

Christian Feichtinger

"Jesus Was a Good Gangster"

Honor and Religion in the YouTube Channel *Grim Hustle*

Abstract

In May 2022, the YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* launched a series of short videos containing life advice, rules for life, and motivational speeches by a "Russian mafia boss". Although the protagonist was soon identified as an actor, the channel gained more than one million followers within eighteen months of its launch. The channel's main narrative is the call for a return to traditional values and habits, most notably honor, as an antidote to a modern, "broken" society that is dismissed as corrupting and oppressive. Traditional religion is promoted by the channel as a vital part of old values and habits. The article focuses on the representation of religion in the channel's videos and how it is shaped by the underlying concept of honor.

Keywords

Honor, Social Media, Religion, *Grim Hustle*, Tradition, Life Advice

Biography

Christian Feichtinger is a university lecturer at the Institute of Catechetics and Religious Education at the University of Graz, Austria. His research interests include didactics of religion and ethics, moral pluralism, the role of religious studies in religious and moral education, the development and analysis of teaching materials, and free churches/evangelicalism in Austria. He has published a number of articles and a book on the Star Wars films and religion.

Introduction

In May 2022, the YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* launched an initially occasional, later weekly series of short videos containing life advice, rules for life, and motivational speeches.[1] Within the vast range of similar videos that can

1 *Grim Hustle*, YouTube channel, https://www.youtube.com/@grim.hustle [accessed 20 January 2024]. All the YouTube material cited in this article can be accessed from this link; for

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be found online, the channel stood out for two reasons: for its professional production and because the speeches were given by a "Russian mafia boss" named Андрюха (Andryukha), who stressed the importance of becoming "honorable" in what he called the "grim days" of today's world. The alleged Russian mobster was soon identified as Andrej Kaminsky, a German actor of Russian origin best known for his appearance in the Hollywood movie John Wick: Chapter 4 (Chad Stahelski, US 2023).[2] The exposure of Andryukha as an actor did not harm the series' success: it gained more than one million followers within eighteen months of its launch, mainly because of its appealing, well-produced content and Kaminsky's captivating performance.

The series principally calls for a return to traditional values and habits, most notably honor, as an antidote to the "broken" modern world, which is dismissed as corrupting and oppressive. The following article analyses the series in light of its idea of "honor" and honor's importance for modern societies. Religion is promoted by the channel as a vital element of old values and habits, and the second part of the article therefore focuses on the representation of religion on the channel and how it is shaped by the fundamental concept of honor. The analysis shows that the return to a traditional understanding of honor and religion is presented as a modern counterculture that will enable the audience to "steal back" their lives and their freedom.

Grim Hustle: Life Advice from a "Russian Mafia Boss"

This chapter provides a closer look at the concept and content of *Grim Hustle* and gives a short explanation of its origin, namely *The GRIM*, a real-life foundation that defines itself as a "global members' club for the exceptional"[3], connecting successful and aspiring persons from various professions for mutual benefit. The YouTube channel and its protagonist Kaminsky, a co-founder of the foundation, therefore serve as a public voice of the GRIM.

ease of access individual notes also give short URLs. A single video in a similar style was uploaded in January 2016, but the series started in May 2022.

2 For further information on Andrej Kaminsky see https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1062441/ [accessed 20 January 2024].

3 https://thegrim.me [accessed 20 January 2024].



Fig. 1: Andryukha teaching and guiding a young man in the episode *How to Receive Ultimate Protection*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:02:26.

Grim Hustle: The GRIM's YouTube Channel

The YouTube channel *Grim Hustle* is a public voice of The GRIM, a real-life foundation that defines itself as a "global members club for the exceptional".[4] The channel consists of a series of now-weekly short videos. Most of them feature Kaminsky, a co-founder of the foundation, in his role as the Russian mafia boss Andryukha, also called Дед Дрюха (Ded Dryukha). The Russian term дед *(ded)* means "grandpa" and is also used as an expression of seniority in mafia gangs.[5] Andryukha usually appears in close-up and addresses viewers directly with life advice, rules, and recommendations on topics such as business, personal success, relationships, friendships, modern media, and dealing with fear and personal struggles. In a number of videos, he is depicted teaching and guiding a younger fellow mobster named Роман (Roman), also called Кулак (Kulak), or an unnamed adolescent man, underlining his role as a *ded*, an elderly father-figure (fig. 1).

Andryukha always speaks English with a Russian accent and some grammatical errors. He sprinkles in a few recurring Russian terms like братан (*bratan*, "brother"), родина (*rodina*, "home"/"homeland"), and, to call out institutions or persons he despises, сука (*suka*, "whore"/"bitch"). He speaks slowly, making his words sound more profound. In rare cases, the channel

4 The Grim Foundation, 2024.

5 One example is Aslan Usoyan (1937–2013), a Russian mafia boss also known as Дед Хасан (Grandpa Hasan).

features short clips with the younger mobster Roman as the leading protagonist. Roman also shares advice and insights with the audience. Moreover, the channel offers interviews with reintegrated real-life criminals speaking about their biographies.

The central topic of Andryukha's talks is *honor*. Most of them end with the catchphrase "be honorable". He presents traditional honor as an antidote to a broken modern Western society perceived as superficial, weakening, materialistic, hedonistic, and relativist. Therefore, men – although the channel is not explicit about it, it creates a very masculine scenery – live suppressed lives without meaning, purpose, and faith. They struggle to develop personally or financially. As a response, Andryukha calls on his viewers to rediscover the lost values and habits of the old. In a video called the *The GRIM Manifesto* he states:

> You don't need this system. What you need is decent values. What you need is your family and a loyal clan. What you need is love for God, and no fear for death, and honor for your *rodina* and your ancestors. You would not be here without their love and their sacrifice, *bratan*. Forget all of the so-called values and goods of modern life: There is no love, there is no honor.[6]

In the same video, he provides a list of traditional values that includes truthfulness, discipline, sacrifice, sincerity, concise speech, humility, freedom, excellence, hospitality, patriotism, self-control, emotional resilience, respect for elders and ancestors, silence, secrecy, and protection. However, the channel has no revolutionary ambitions: it does not call for a change in society itself, but instead recommends building up small alternative systems of likeminded people upholding honor and tradition, forming "brotherhoods" to survive and thrive within modernity. As the quote above suggests, spirituality and traditional religion are to play a part in this counterculture but reshaped by the concept of alternative brotherhoods: "Be careful with organizations that claim to follow God. Join organizations that live upright, so God will want to join THEM."[7]

6 The GRIM Manifesto | Honor Over Everything, https://t1p.de/sg0gt [accessed 5 February 2024].

7 Text accompanying *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* | *Russian Boss Motivation*, https://t1p.de/rvwk8 [accessed 6 February 2024].

The GRIM

"Organizations that live upright" is evidently a reference to the organization behind the channel, The GRIM. The only available information about the GRIM Foundation is found in its online channels and its website.[8] The GRIM is defined as a members' club of likeminded persons who strive for honor and success. Its mission statement is to "empower men and women to become independent, free and connected in decent values"[9]. A member is quoted on their website: "THE GRIM is an exclusive members' club that is run in the tech-savvy way of a startup or VC, while leveraging traditional values: Loyalty, cooperation, honor. What a combination!"[10] It offers a network for mutual mentoring, exclusive business opportunities, and close relationships along with access to exclusive mobile apps, AI-technology, cryptocurrencies, and regular real-life events, such as pilgrimages, masterclasses, and survival experiences.[11] Shared expertise in business activities, tax-optimization, and technology are promised to those selected to be members.

The organization is present on all major social media platforms. Although these platforms are heavily criticized in GRIM videos, content by GRIM is found not only on YouTube but also on Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, and LinkedIn. As clarification in light of its mafia-styled videos, GRIM distances itself from any criminal activities. Additionally, ten "club rules" on its website provide insight into its concept of honor and end with a reference to God:[12]

1. Trust Only THE GRIM, Members Are Selected for a Reason.
2. Never Lie to a Grim, Never Steal from a Grim.
3. If a Grim Is in Town, They Will Will [*sic*] Always Have a Bed, Hospitality Is Honor.
4. Once a Year, Go to the Dark Mountains with Your Fellow Grim. Pilgrimage in Honor.
5. Your Brother Is Not Always Right, but He Is Always Your Brother.
6. Respect the Old, teach the Young. Mentorship Is Honor.

8 The Grim Foundation, 2024. The site https://thegrim.me is registered in Estonia.

9 Description in https://t1p.de/gvhjb [accessed 6 February 2024].

10 The Grim Foundation, 2024, in the section "The Members". The abbreviation VC stands for "venture capital".

11 https://www.thegrim.me/jobs [accessed 6 February 2024].

12 https://www.thegrim.me/rules [accessed 6 February 2024].

7. Before Asking for Help, Be of Help. Serving Is Honor.
8. Good Business Is Offered First to THE GRIM. Wealth Is Honor.
9. Silence My Friend, Silence Is Your Master.
10. Whatever Happens, Never Lose Your Calm, God Is on Our Side.

Traditional Honor and Its Importance in Modern Societies

The appeal of the channel's main narrative is encapsulated in its use of the term "honor". In general, the English word *honor* is used to describe structurally related linguistic and cultural concepts such as *ird* (Arabic), *patjiv* (Romani), *namus* (Arabic/Turkish), *qeirat* (Persian), *Southern Honor* (American), and, not least, the Russian *chest'* (честь)[13]. As defined by Frank Stewart, traditional honor can be understood as a "right to be treated as having a certain worth […] as a right to respect"[14]. This right must be earned by meeting certain social norms within a specific social system, an *honor group*. Honor thus is both a positive self-concept (entitlement to respect) and a positive social status (others know about this entitlement). This broad definition leaves room for variations in how this respect is earned, expressed, symbolized, and related to its respective groups.

Sheida Novin and Daphna Oyserman propose that honor can be understood as a fundamental and therefore universal category of moral thinking and feeling that fulfills a specific function within social systems.[15] Having "deserved respect within a certain group" helps build trust, orientation, and social cohesion. Honor establishes stable and reliable relationships and hierarchies: people know who can be trusted and who is in a position to provide protection (including physical protection) in situations of uncertainty. A "word of honor" ensures trust and stability; the exchange of favors and assistance establishes a system of mutual obligations that can, if necessary, be counted upon. Honor also obliges the individual to be loyal to a specific group to ensure the group's material security and social reputation. This is especially important for societies that lack formal legal structures and are insufficiently capable of protecting individuals through state institutions like police or courts, or in societies in which those structures are perceived

13 For a historical overview of honor concepts in Russia see Kollmann 1999.

14 Stewart 1994, 21.

15 Novin/Oyserman 2016, 2.

as corrupt and ineffective. Here, honor-based customary law provides social orientation.[16] Also some forms of organized crime – the Italian mafia is the obvious example – rely on strict codes of honor, group loyalty, authority, trust, mutual favors, and individual respect. This form of criminal honor has been popularized by a partly idealized depiction of mafia organizations in movies and TV-series.

In societies where legal structures are effective, honor can be the answer to perceived social and economic insecurity or disorientation: "In that sense", Novin and Oyserman note, "honor provides a template for organizing social interactions and hence may be functional even among people and societies that do not highly value and endorse honor."[17] In such instances, honor is not a generally accepted function of social interaction and control, but rather a group-specific phenomenon – and this is exactly how honor is understood and used in *Grim Hustle*. The series conceptualizes honor in terms of Stewart's "right to respect", as firmly tied to a certain collective (especially the "brotherhood"), and as a means to build strong cohesive groups and trust within a society that does not follow honor codes. With its stylized mafia symbolism, it also plays with the romanticized connection of honor and organized crime. Although public institutions generally function in Western societies, the channel's heavy criticism of them explains the need for different concepts. "Honor" is an alternative method of self-understanding and social interaction, primarily within the honor group; its roots in a certain tradition, in the "ways of the old", help legitimize the Grim's worldview.

The Role of Religion in *Grim Hustle*'s Way of Honor

Grim Hustle establishes a close connection between its understanding of honor and a traditional understanding of religion. Basic elements of traditional honor codes such as true authority, loyalty, strength, obligation, and sacrifice form a matrix that shapes religion and how religion is perceived. Andryukha is depicted as a faithful man, regularly appearing within religious sites such as churches, monasteries, and graveyards (fig. 2). References to God and faith can be found in various episodes, but six episodes,

16 Nisbett/Cohen 1996, 5–9.

17 Novin/Oyserman 2016, 9.



Fig. 2: Andryukha visiting an Orthodox church in the episode *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:01:19.

all from 2023, focus explicitly on religious themes and habits: In *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* and *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*, Andryukha shares his understanding of Jesus Christ and how it helped him deal with pain and fear of death. In *Anti-Depression Habit #1*, he encourages his viewers to seek silence, not least by going on a pilgrimage, to find God. *God's Bet on Your Life* addresses questions of morality, maturity, and responsibility, while *How to Receive Ultimate Protection* makes reference to ancestor worship and the widespread folk belief in the curse of the Evil Eye.[18]

The sixth explicitly religious episode is an anomaly. *The Mafia Grandmother* does not provide the audience with life advice; it is a short film with English subtitles featuring the younger mobster Roman and his grandmother, who both speak Russian. It also brings up the folk-religious motif of the curse of the Evil Eye: Roman's grandmother sees something dark in her grandson and asks to pray for him. Roman shrugs off her plea, but she insists and starts reciting the Lord's Prayer (fig. 3). She then performs a folk-religious ritual: she uses a raw egg to identify the curse, cleanse the cursed person, and even figure out the identity of the person who uttered the curse.[19] This ritual can be found not only in Greek or Russian Orthodoxy, but also in Latin American Catholicism and Iranian Shia Islam: using an egg serves, as Rose Wellman and Dionisios Kavadias suggest, as "a technology of transference and mediation, shifting the 'strike' from the body of the afflicted to an out-

18 Bowie 2007, 215–220.

19 *The Mafia Grandmother*, https://t1p.de/f02gg [accessed 5 February 2024].



Fig. 3: Roman's grandmother praying for him in front of Orthodox icons in the episode *The Mafia Grandmother*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:01:03.

side object"[20]. In this episode, religious practice is again presented through the matrix of honor: it strengthens and protects the individual, with God as a powerful force on behalf of those loyal to him.

The strongest display of personal religion can be found in two episodes on Jesus Christ, *Jesus Was a Good Gangster* and *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory*. Andryukha reshapes the image of Jesus in light of his honor mindset, turning Jesus into a strong leader to look up to, into an image of loyalty and bravery in the face of death. Andryukha's narrative and perspective make Jesus an accessible role model for an otherwise rather unusual audience for the Christian message:

> Jesus Christ was a good, honorable gangster. Let me explain why. Number one: He started from nothing, a poor carpenter, and rose to a King. In any time it is rare that a man goes from nothing to the top. Number two: He built his own gang, the disciples, and treated them very well. He knew that the number one of assets in life is your loyal people, your gang, your group, your brotherhood. Number three: Loyalty for him was number one: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friend." A good gangster put loyalty on number one because a rat in your ranks can bring your end very quickly. Number four: He said "no" to the state and break the law again and again until he was killed for it; and he died with honor. Number five: He reject all false authorities. He

20 Wellman/Kavadias 2015.



Fig 4.: Andryukha reinterpreting the Jesus narrative in the episode *Jesus Was a Good Gangster.* Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:00:11.

> only accept the true one and he accept the pain if it served the highest authority: "My father, if it possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet, not as I will, but as You will." Listen to that again. Number six: He have strong purpose in life and he never change it despite the biggest part of the society spit on him every fucking day. And of course, the most important reason, number seven: He understood that suffering and death will be your friend, your teacher. It will make you beyond powerful if you have lived your life in honor of God. Jesus Christ was a good honorable gangster, a true Stoic, and the Messiah at the same time. We all need role models for dark grim days. Be honorable.[21]

Jesus is defined here in terms of the values and principles of honor: strength, success, loyalty, resistance, freedom, sacrifice, and resilience. The traditional attribution "King" defines Jesus as a legitimate authority who is in conflict with false political and religious authorities and the social majority. Counter to a widespread "soft" healing and forgiving Jesus, the channel presents a heroic Jesus who is a timeless role model for those facing life's hardships and at the same time adopts Jesus for its own worldview and agenda (fig 4.). The specific reference to Jesus as "Stoic" picks up on the contemporary rediscovery of the philosophy of Stoicism. In recent years, books and videos on how to embrace Stoicism in a modern lifestyle have proved popular for characteristics that are also claimed by *Grim Hustle*: as orienta-

21 *Jesus Was a Good Gangster*, https://t1p.de/rvwk8 [accessed 8 February 2024].

tion, meaning-making, and source of resilience in a society that is perceived as insecure, superficial, and distracting.[22]

The episode *How to Turn Pain into God's Glory* does not mention Jesus by name, but when read together with the former episode, it evidently also refers to him. Jesus is again presented as a true authority ("King"), a role model in times of hardship, and a mentor for dealing with fear of death. And again, he is directly associated with the channel's main narrative of honor:

> Death used to be my enemy, but then I made him my friend. Now he can't touch me anymore. How did I do it? I learned it from the King; the highest King there is. […] The King showed me how to conquer pain. He showed me how to conquer death and transform death to glory. How? With the power of honor. The Lord is on my side, *bratan*, and He should be on your side too. The King of Kings showed you what it means to be honorable. You cannot escape pain, but you can transform it. You cannot escape death, but you can make him the best teacher of your life, because only death makes life significant and only God makes life glorious. All you need is the right values and the right people around you, people with soul. I cannot be stopped by pain. I cannot be stopped by death. […] God is on my side, and I serve him every fucking day. Be honorable.[23]

This speech has an almost missionary profile. Obedience, service, and loyalty, important aspects of traditional honor, are associated with God; turning to God is repaid with personal strength and resilience. Although the videos reference central motifs and narratives of the gospels, their conception of Jesus Christ does not align with traditional religious approaches. Jesus is not simply a model; instead, he is modeled after the channel's specific interests. His resurrection and salvation – which make Jesus "Christ" after all – are not mentioned. Instead, the image of Jesus is shaped to fit exactly with the ideal role model for the channel's worldview.

Religious motifs and terms also play a vital role in an episode called *God's Bet on Your Life* which is focused on morality and personal responsibility. In

22 Popular examples can be found in Irvine 2008, Robertson 2020, and the YouTube channel *Daily Stoic*, https://www.youtube.com/@DailyStoic [accessed 12 September 2024]. In a newer episode though, Andryukha explicitly distances himself from modern Stoicism, not least due to its lack of belief in God: *How Modern Stoicism Will Weaken You. Watch This!*, https://t1p.de/4m51q [accessed 12 September 2024].

23 How to Turn Pain into God's Glory, https://t1p.de/59afk [accessed 9 February 2024].

this video, Andryukha is shown talking directly to an adolescent to guide him into maturity and adulthood:

> Before you were born, the God and the devil placed a bet on your life. The God said: "This is a good kid. He will live with purpose, and honor, and joy. He will lift people up. He will own gold and a house and raise a good family. I am betting on this kid." The devil said: "I don't believe you. I have created a system that will make this boy fall. I have created people that will make him angry, and violent, and finally apathetic. Apathy is my most powerful weapon; and I am betting I can take this boy down." Always remember: There is a bet on your life. God wants to create; the devil wants to destroy. The devil wants to consume; God wants discipline. The devil wants indulgence; God wants your wellbeing. The devil wants your emptiness and misery. God is content, while the devil has never enough. But it's easier to follow the devil than to follow God in these grim times. But there is a bet on your life, every fucking day. And your behavior every day will determine the winner. You have to decide: Will it be God, or will it be the devil? If God wins, you also win. If the devil wins, he wins alone. Be honorable.[24]

Satan, almost *persona non grata* in modern liberal theology, is presented here without hesitation in his biblical role as "god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4). The speech plays with the classic motif of temptation by worldly things and calls for resistance and self-discipline. Worldly goods are not devalued but instead understood as a result of a good and honorable life. Using words and metaphors of traditional religion, Andryukha confronts his novice with a call to action, encouraging him to conquer fears and face the dangers of the world and to accept responsibility in life, which will bring meaning and personal success. He embeds this struggle in a greater metaphysical conflict between good and evil. Again, the channel combines motifs of traditional religion with its heroic honor mindset, here in an attempt to encourage and challenge a younger generation to embrace responsibility and ambition.

In the episode *Anti-Depression Habit #1 by Russian Mafia Boss*, the channel promotes silence and pilgrimage as part of an honorable way of life (fig. 5).

> If you want to get your life on the right path, you need to get your feet on the right path. Your right path is the path of silence, the path of pilgrim-

24 *God's Bet on Your Life*, https://t1p.de/9ods9 [accessed 9 February 2024].



Fig. 5: Andryukha on a pilgrimage to a monastery church in the episode *Anti-Depression Habit #1 by Russian Mafia Boss*. Screen shot, *Grim Hustle* 2023, 00:00:01.

> age. I don't care if you believe in God or the devil. I don't care if you have sinned or killed. Every day you are not on the right path you are sinning against yourself; you are killing who you are destined to be. I believe killing yourself is as bad as killing another human being. Get up now, stay silent, and go on a pilgrimage. Find a good place anywhere on your map. It might be a monastery. It might be a church. It just might be a dark forest. […] Silence will bring out your strengths, your honor, your direction in life, your direction for the path in life you're destined to go. If you walk in silence, God is walking with you. Be honorable.[25]

Silence is presented as an antidote to a society dominated by social media and continuous public discourse and self-presentation. The religious metaphor of the "right path" serves as guidance for people disoriented by modern media and social insecurity. Silence is a way to encounter God; again, God is on the side of those who are honorable.

Traditional Religion as Counterculture?

In connecting traditional honor and traditional religion with modern motivational videos, *Grim Hustle* offers a fresh approach within religious communication and imagery. It reacts to some of the (perceived) problems of

25 *Anti-Depression Habit #1 by Russian Mafia Boss*, https://t1p.de/v06bv [accessed 9 February 2024].

contemporary society: disorientation, lack of meaning, distrust in media and politics, economic insecurity, isolation, and the influence of social media. These are primarily problems of the individual; the channel does not address broad social issues. *Grim Hustle* promotes an updated honor mindset that will allow the individual to withstand the temptations and contestations of modern society. It offers structures of orientation and meaning.

Honor has operated as a form of social control and reputation, but in modern societies it mainly serves as an instrument of individual orientation and meaning-making. It complements modern individualism with strong social ties, with a "brotherhood" for mutual benefit: as Nancy Kollmann has recognized, "Honor may traditionally have played the conservative role of upholding established social institutions and precluding change, but it also provided individuals a sense of belonging and a blueprint for negotiating the challenges of life."[26] This modern understanding of honor helps the self but also "supports and enables tight kinship networks and group coalitions in which [...] resources are retained within the group, and societal norms are maintained"[27]. *Grim Hustle* thus promotes traditional values like discipline, sacrifice, and, not least, religion within a cohesive, like-minded group.

Although the channel focuses on values and spirituality and criticizes modern society, economic success and making a career are still prized, but as a result of an honorable life. Not least in its name, the channel is connected to what Megan Carnegie recognizes as the *hustle culture*: "The hustle-culture narrative promotes the idea that there's always more to strive for: more money to make, a bigger title or promotion to secure and a higher ceiling to smash. [...] this mindset stems largely from tech start-ups in Silicon Valley, and is perpetuated on social media."[28] While the original ideal of hustle culture values work above all and endorses working on evenings or holidays as sign of ambition, *Grim Hustle* steps back from these extremes to insist on a weekly day of rest and silence, the practice of pilgrimage, and time spent with family and the respective "brotherhood". An honor code that is exclusive and partial is hard to reconcile, however, with the Christian notions of universalism and all-encompassing mercy.

This return to values that the channel defines as "traditional", specifically to honor and religion, serves as a form of counterculture in contemporary

26 Kollmann 1999, 247.

27 Atari/Graham/Deghani 2020, 382.

28 Carnegie 2023.

society, as resistance rather than revolution and without abandoning the gains of an affluent capitalist society. This form of counterculture is built not upon liberal and progressive values, but on tradition, on the ways of the old. In contrast to earlier times, though, traditional norms, values, and a certain conservatism are not imposed by society but freely chosen as an individual lifestyle and mindset contrasted with, or as an alternative to, the dominant public discourse.

When it comes to the ways of old, traditional religion has a part to play. Faith and religion are integrated into the whole project and simultaneously reshaped by its honor code: Christian faith is viewed through the lens of authority, loyalty, and sacrifice and seen as an expression of typical honor-based values. Simultaneously, it is presented as a powerful resource for an honorable life: an inspiration for heroic display, an antidote to fear, a source of rituals and blessings that strengthen the individual, and a place of silence and retreat to rediscover peace and calmness, and with a God who challenges individuals and calls them to action and to personal responsibility. Although some of these motifs certainly can be found in Christian tradition, what is depicted here as traditional religion can also be seen as contemporary secular thought presented and legitimized through the mere aesthetics of religious tradition.

The concept of religion in the channel's videos is also influenced by ideas and practices of (folk-religious) magic, for example in the ritual performed to protect against the Evil Eye or in the notion that acting the right way will automatically lead to divine blessing and thus positive effects. In a classic definition, magic can be understood as a variety of acts or practices to bring about desired effects, with the causes and effects having a certain "mystical" or non-scientific basis.[29] Traditionally magic cannot be separated from religion, as magical practices and forms of knowledge are interwoven with folk religion. *Grim Hustle* links religious forms of magic thinking and the secularized magic thinking of the New Thought movement. New Thought, which began in the early nineteenth century, promoted the idea that the right mindset will produce positive effects for the individual, preferably social and economic success. In the video *From Zero to Boss with these 5 Books, Part 2*, Andryukha recommends, alongside "all the holy scriptures", Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) and Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1939), two much-read books of the New Thought move-

29 Middleton 2005, 5562.

ment that stress the importance of spirituality and a good mental state primarily as means for material progress.[30]

Additionally, in the context of the Russian war on Ukraine, including the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church, the stylized "Russianness" of the videos may, whether intended or not, support the narrative that has Russian Orthodoxy as the antipole to a depraved Western society. Although the channel explicitly distances itself from "organizations that claim to follow God", its videos echo the notion that the redemption of Western culture from materialism, liberalism, and relativism will come from the East, from Orthodox spirituality. Moreover, the idealization of patriotism through the repeated endorsement of love for one's home country *(rodina)* plays into the Russian nationalism promoted by the Russian government and its online campaigns. Roman's statement in *How to Become a Classic Man in 2024*[31] that a man has only four loves in life: brotherhood, *rodina*, family, and God and his definition of love as "devotion" and "protection no matter what" have particular resonance in the context of Russian nationalism and the wars waged in its name – although *Grim Hustle* cannot be accused of explicitly supporting contemporary Russian politics.

Nonetheless, with Western Christianity seeming to be primarily concerned with social issues, the modern reinterpretation of traditional religion presented in *Grim Hustle* can be understood as a creative alternative or complementary approach to religion that might appeal to persons who otherwise do not feel they have access to religion or faith. Or does religion serve merely as aestheticization and legitimation of the channel's worldview?

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Caroline Kloos

The Making of a King through Space and Time

Mediatisation of Transcendence in the Coronation of King Charles III

Abstract

This essay analyses the BBC's live coverage of King Charles III's coronation ritual, emphasising the interdependence of the British monarchy and the media. Drawing on the theoretical background of ritual as performance, it examines the King's portrayal as a transcendent figure shaping social order. It offers a close reading of the ritual's key moments according to film analysis methods. The discussion shows the coronation to be an event meticulously orchestrated between the monarchy and the media. In progressing through different spaces, the King is shown undergoing an ontological transformation linking past, present, and future. The BBC's use of various filmic techniques constructs a narrative that connects the King with divine forces. The mediatisation of the coronation ritual thus portrays King Charles III as a transcendent figure beyond time and space. At the root of British society's cosmology, he is depicted as legitimately representing and shaping British social values.

Keywords

Coronation, Charles III, Film Analysis, Transcendence, Ritual, Media, Society, Cosmology

Biography

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Making the Monarchy Visible

"I have to be seen to believed"[1] was the guiding principle for the late Queen's interactions with the public, making her an expert in the art of visibility during her 70-year reign. Given that the public's s acceptance and support of the monarchy hinge on its perception, meticulous control of its image is imperative. The result has been a complex interdependence of the media and the British monarchy. With the death of the Queen, her 74-year-old son Charles was proclaimed "King Charles III". The British monarchy is the last of the European monarchies to adhere to the tradition of a formal anointing and crowning of the new monarch, which takes place at Westminster Abbey, the venue for coronations for centuries. The coronation ritual is embedded in a specific liturgy led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the senior bishop and principal leader of the Church of England.[2]

The close association between church and state, with the monarch seen as divinely appointed, contrasts with the secular and utilitarian character of British politics. Additionally, a growing chorus of critical voices is questioning the legitimacy and relevance of the monarchy. Indeed, opinion polls reveal varying levels of support for the monarchy, which is as low as 40 percent among younger people and ethnic minority groups.[3] Yet, the coronation of King Charles III and his wife, Camilla, on 6 May 2023 was marked by a display of great grandeur and apparently elicited national excitement. Approximately 20 million viewers in the United Kingdom alone watched the live broadcast of the event.[4] Despite critical voices, the monarchy still appears to attract broad support among the British populace and is perceived as an integral part of the national identity.

Many distinguished guests are invited to attend the coronation, including members of the royal family, British aristocracy, church leaders, politicians, influential figures in society, and representatives of the Commonwealth and of other nations. Although these guests are present in the Abbey, many can only hear the ceremony because their seats have a restricted view. The whole of the ritual is, however, filmed by the BBC and streamed live to

1 Bates 2015, 1. Elizabeth II's carefully selected, and always brightly coloured outfits were part of this successful strategy.

2 The British monarch is Supreme Governor of the Church of England.

3 Ryder 2023, 23–24. See also the interview with Graham Smith, leader of the republican organisation "Not My King": Rajvanshi 2023.

4 For viewership statistics see Rhoden-Paul 2023.

both the public and the guests sitting in the nave of the Abbey. The BBC's portrayal of the coronation ritual therefore shapes its perception by the public. The most decisive part of the ritual is the "Anointing", establishing that the King is king by the will of God. Paradoxically, this pivotal moment is concealed from general view, posing a considerable challenge for its media presentation.

This article focuses on the media representation of the coronation ritual and specifically on how the king's connection to a transcendent force is conveyed. Drawing on approaches adopted in political, cultural, and historical studies and in the study of religion, the article explores the intricate interplay between the British monarch, the media, and society.[5] The coronation ritual is shown to epitomise the values and norms that have been shaped and reiterated by this interdependency for centuries. The theoretical background here is provided by the idea of ritual as a performance establishing a social order, while the specific case is the BBC's coverage of the coronation ritual.[6] To offer a close reading, selected scenes are scrutinised according to film analysis methods.

The article demonstrates how the mediatisation depicts the ritual as a materialisation of transcendence and attributes to it a unique ontological quality of time and space that is marked by the King's invisibility in the very time and place the ritual is enacted. The mediatisation creates a distinct context defined by transcendence and linked to British coronation traditions. It conveys a transcendental force at work, transforming the new monarch into King Charles III who reigns by the will of God.

The essay is organised into distinct stages. First, it briefly explores the concept of ritual. Secondly, it delves into the British coronation ritual within

5 Owens 2019, Pankratz 2017, Kramer 2017. Tom Nairn finds the Royal Family representing the essence of the British national character and identifies the United Kingdom as a "quasi-religious state", see Nairn 2011, 90. See also Warner 2002. For the reinforcing effect of the media on public perceptions see Clancy 2019, Clancy 2021, esp. chapter 2. For the sacred meanings of the British coronation ritual and their national implications see Shils/Young 1953. Daniel Lloyd analyses the innovations in Charles III's coronation's liturgy from a theological perspective and sees questions surrounding the anointing answered by its media representation, see Lloyd 2023, 394. Others approach the coronation from a sociopolitical angle and evaluate its presentation by the media, see Ryder 2023, also Hackett/Caughlan 2023.

6 The film material was initially available for general viewing via the Royal family's own YouTube channel. Meanwhile, the material can be viewed at WTVR CBS 6, The Coronation Service, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BqgmLx4Q2LU.

its socio-cultural context, emphasising the role of media coverage in shaping audience expectations in the months and weeks leading up to the event. After a short introduction to the analysis criteria, the selected scenes are scrutinised in chronological order. The sequences are "The King Entering the Abbey", "Anointing", "Investiture and Crowning of the King", and "The King's Return". The final section discusses the results of the film analysis in relation to the categories of space and time and places these readings in a social context.

The Coronation as a Ritual that Performs Transcendence

The British coronation ritual transforms the new King by succession into the nation's King by the grace of God. Contained within an Anglican eucharist liturgy, the ritual unfolds as a meticulously choreographed performance involving various participants who assume distinct roles. While Jens Kreinath distinguishes three main types of theoretical approach to the analysis of ritual, he identifies "process" as the underlying idea of all rituals.[7] This emphasis on transformation is central to the functional approach to ritual developed by the ethnologist Victor Turner. Turner's classic approach, with its focus on both the processual and the performative character of ritual, is an ideal tool for thorough analysis of this transformative ritual so essential to the British monarchy.

Turner characterises rituals as transformative processes comprising three distinct phases. The first phase detaches the ritual subject, referred to as "the passenger", from existing social structures, stripping the subject of their prior status. There follows an ambivalent "liminal phase", wherein a transition from a "before" to an "after" unfolds.[8] The third phase focuses on reintegrating "the passenger" into society and confirming their new status. Critical for this transformation is, for Turner, the "liminal phase", when the ritual subject exists in a state of ambivalence, devoid of previous power.[9] Indicators of this powerlessness include a form of "invisibility",[10] lack of

7 Kreinath 2006, xix.
8 Turner 2017, 94.
9 Turner 2017, 95.
10 Turner 2017, 95.

clothing, and the portrayal of the highest political authority "as a slave",[11] deprived even of speech. Turner sees this ontological quality of the liminal phase as a prerequisite for ensuring that the new authority is utilised solely for society's benefit. Turner observes that the pedagogical aspect of the ritual is believed to be connected to transcendent forces that enable the subject's transformation, forces typically invoked by select specialists.[12] Rituals not only articulate aims but actively produce changes in the ritual subject's status. They construct meaning and thus function as autopoietic processes.

The social anthropologist Stanley J. Tambiah also recognises the autopoietic function of rituals. Additionally, he attributes to rituals the ability to construct meaning and to shape reality.[13] Tambiah describes rituals as deeply rooted within the cosmology of their respective societies. These cosmologies are perceived as self-evident and unquestionable and form the basis of societal moral judgments. They are considered immutable and linked to transcendental forces.[14] These underlying transcendental forces organise and control the threatening chaos in the world – an attribute often assigned to the sovereign within the social cosmology.[15] By engaging the audience emotionally through elements such as music, dance, and speech, rituals have affirmative effects on society's cosmology. Consequently, the meaning of a ritual cannot be objectively verified or falsified; it resides solely in the audience's acceptance of its validity.

Mediatisation under Scrutiny

The audience for Charles III's coronation ritual was not limited to the invited guests inside Westminster Abbey. The whole nation beyond the closed doors of the Abbey was to be convinced of the success of the transformation. It is the task of the media to convey the intended meaning of the ritual to this wider audience, making the media's role critical. The coronation of Charles III, designated "Operation Golden Orb", had been

11 Turner 2017, 102.
12 Turner, 2017, 104.
13 Tambiah 2013.
14 Tambiah 2013, 227.
15 Stolz 2001, 62.

meticulously planned for years.[16] Information about the impending event was disseminated through various channels, with details of the schedule of the coronation, musical selections, and the components of the ritual.[17] This information transforms the public into "insiders" who possess shared knowledge of the events "true meaning" and shapes their expectations and retrospective interpretation.

The coronation ritual itself took place within the Gothic Westminster Abbey.[18] It was filmed by the BBC, the national broadcaster. Digital cameras strategically placed throughout the Abbey according to "Operation Golden Orb" enable precise control of multiple perspectives in real time. The resulting live stream was a meticulously planned production adhering to traditional Hollywood cinema conventions. Here, the narration is typically character-driven and follows a clear chain of cause and effect. It is served by invisible camera and sound-editing aiming at the viewer's emotional engagement.[19] Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati observes that through these narratives, films define, project, and simultaneously confirm societal values.[20] Following these conventions, the BBC's live coverage of the coronation created a filmic narrative that was not simply a neutral presentation of events, for it engaged the audience emotionally and imbued the events with meaning.

Different spaces within the Abbey are assigned to distinct groups, figures, and actions during the ritual.[21] The ritual is embedded in the liturgy of the Church of England, with speech, song, and instrumental score integral to the construction of meaning. The audio-visual narrative, shaped by the camera perspectives and their dynamic assembly, powerfully conveyed this meaning.

In order to explore the way in which this meaning was communicated, I apply here a methodical film analysis to the BBC's live coverage of the event. Four key scenes closely related to the ritual process identified by Victor Turner have been selected for analysis, with the subsequent discussion focused on spatial, auditory, and editing parameters.

16 Blackall 2023.

17 Anon. 2023; Davies 2023; Hurowitz 2023; Royal Household at Buckingham Palace 2023; Caughlan 2023.

18 Webster 2019, 196.

19 Bordwell/Thompson 1990, 70.

20 Pezzoli-Olgiati 2008, 46.

21 Visual Journalism Team 2023.



Fig. 1: St. Edward's Crown being brought into the Abbey. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 00:34:27.

Entering the Abbey

The commencement of the ritual is heralded by fanfares performed by the State Trumpeters of the Household Cavalry. Subsequently, representatives from diverse faith groups and leaders of the Commonwealth of Nations proceed into the Abbey. The clergy, knights, and military representatives lead the processions of Queen Camilla and the King, bearing the regalia on ornate pillows. Right before the most important regalia of all, St. Edward's Crown, walk four members of the Household Cavalry in their red uniforms. Behind its bearer follow representatives of the clergy presenting the Bible, Chalice and Paten as important liturgical devices. From the very beginning of the ritual, the crown, the symbol of monarchy, is embedded in the military and the church (fig. 1).

With the beginning of the anthem "I was glad",[22] the King accompanied by his servants and two Bishops as his assistants enters the Abbey. The King is clad in a red velvet robe, its colour evoking the sacrifice of Christ (fig. 2).[23]

22 This anthem is seven minutes long. Based upon Psalm 122, it has marked the entrance of the monarch since 1626. The version used at the coronation of Charles III was composed by Hubert Parry for the coronation of Edward VII in 1902, including the cry "Vivat Rex". See Welby 2023, 3.

23 Bradley 2023, 134.



Fig. 2: The King enters the Abbey, next to him his Bishop Assistants. Screen shot, The Coronation service, 00:35:33.



Fig. 3: Bird's-eye-view of the King entering the quire. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 00:38:46.

To the rhythm of the music, the camera captures dynamic perspectives of the King's progress down the nave. Various medium shots and close-ups from different angles show the King greeting the guests in the nave with a soft smile. They are standing, bowing their heads, with many of the women curtseying as the King moves past. The dynamic of the editing actively involves the viewers in the veneration of the King. The King passes through



Fig. 4: The crowns on the altar, ready for use. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 00:41:28.

the entrance to the quire, gradually approaching the Abbey's sanctuary. As the King enters the quire, the abbey choir's exclamation of "Vivat Rex Carolus" is met with a brief bird's-eye-view shot, seeming to endorse the protective formula from a divine standpoint (fig. 3).

The King's orderly procession seamlessly integrates with the Gothic structure of the Abbey. With the King leaving the quire and moving past the Coronation Theatre, the music transitions to a calmer tone.

He moves past the Coronation Theatre and is eventually seated next to the Queen in his Chair of Estate on the right side of the Sacrarium. Meanwhile, the camera shows different perspectives on the church space and the King and the Queen and a close-up of the two crowns. These are now positioned on the altar next to the other regalia (fig. 4).

The changing camera perspectives visually link the King, the Abbey's impressive Gothic space, and the precious crowns with the final euphoric passage of the anthem, implying a transcendental connection. In his entry into the Abbey, the King is portrayed with immense dignity as he is venerated by the congregation. He is accompanied and supported by high-ranking clergy, signifying the Church of England's acknowledgment of his legitimacy. The escort by the Household Cavalry emphasises his connection to the armed forces and underscores his role as commander-in-chief. His progress through different parts of the Gothic Abbey's space is accentuated by passages in the anthem "I was glad". Text, music, and editing

link the progression through the Abbey's space with the King approaching transcendence.

Anointing

The King embodies dignity and power in his attire and presentation. Yet his first words spoken during the ritual articulate a commitment "to serve rather than to be served",[24] resonating with the Christian motif of service. As the liturgy commences, the Archbishop of Canterbury echoes the King's exact words, when he refers to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for humanity's salvation. This comparison positions the King as akin to Christ, the son of God. As the liturgy progresses, the most sacred segment of the coronation unfolds – the "Anointing". The King undergoes this profound part of the ritual positioned on St. Edward's Chair, facing the high altar. Consecrated oil is poured from an ampulla onto a golden spoon, then the Archbishop of Canterbury applies the oil in the form of a cross onto the head, chest, and hands of the monarch. This act symbolises the external manifestation of the sovereign's spiritual status.[25] Due to its sacrality, the anointing is usually performed in privacy, shielded from public view. The anointing of Charles III incorporates a specially designed screen, made up of three distinct parts supported by two wooden poles each. The central part of the screen is adorned with an embroidered tree, symbolising the countries of the Commonwealth of Nations. In preparation for the anointing, the choirs sing "Veni creator Spiritus" in plainsong in English, Welsh, Gaelic, and Irish, invoking the Holy Spirit for assistance. This expression underscores the significance of the anointing for all parts of the United Kingdom. As the plainsong concludes, the camera zooms out from the choir, offering an overview of the Abbey's space and giving a sense of spiritual presence and thus the fulfilment of the anthem's plea. While the Archbishop and his assistants speak prayers over the ampulla with the consecrated oil, the orchestra begins playing Handel's "Zadok the Priest", a tribute to the anointing of the biblical King Solomon.[26] Members of the Household Cavalry now enter the Sacrarium bearing the three parts of the Anointing Screen. With military precision they assemble

24 The Coronation Service, 00:56:46.

25 See Visual Journalism Team 2023.

26 Composed in 1727 by Georg Friedrich Händel, the anthem is based on 1 Kings 1:39–40.



Fig. 5: The soldiers assemble the Anointing Screen. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 01:22:35.

the parts around St. Edward's Chair, creating a separate square space within the Sacrarium (fig. 5).

The open side of this newly constructed space faces the altar, and the embroidered central part of the screen is directed at the congregation. Simultaneously, the King's assistants commence disrobing the King. The entire scene is covered by three long shots, with the camera moving around the screen

One last time, the camera attempts a glimpse of the King being disrobed. As the King's jacket is removed, the choir chants "Zadok the Priest", prompting the camera rapidly to zoom back to a respectful distance. The camera and, consequently, the audience remain explicitly excluded from the occurrences behind the screen. Following the rhythm of the music, the camera then alternates perspectives between the singing choir, the guests, the Abbey's interior, and the Anointing Screen in the background. By visually connecting the music with the events in the Abbey, the camera establishes a link between the song's protagonist, the biblical King Solomon, and the contemporary King Charles III. As the last lines of the anthem, "God save the King, may the King live forever", repeat,[27] a close shot depicts the soldiers removing the screen around St. Edward's Chair, to reveal an empty chair (fig. 6).

27 The Coronation Service, 01:25:30–01:25:38.



Fig. 6: When the soldiers remove the screen, St. Edward's Chair is revealed to be empty. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 01:25:40.



Fig. 7: The "naked" King submits to the priests' prayers. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 01:26:05.

The mystery surrounding the King's whereabouts is resolved when he is shown kneeling between two priests in front of the altar. He is dressed only in plain black trousers and a simple white shirt, appearing almost "naked", without any outward signs of power. The kneeling King submits to the priests' prayers while his clothes are being carried away (fig. 7).

The removal of the King's clothes, symbols of his worldly rank, signifies the conclusion of his purely profane status. The anointing transforms

him into a sacred being, blessed by God and infused with the Holy Spirit. This transcendental climax of the coronation ritual is visually conveyed by being excluded from sight. It transpires within a separate, provisional space constructed and secured by the King's guards. The occurrences within this exclusive space are left to the audience's imagination. However, this imagination proves unreliable when after the screen is removed, the King is no longer found in the presumed place in his chair. The transformation is thus depicted as beyond imagination, rooted only in the sacred connection to God, facilitated by the priests. The lyrics of the accompanying anthem link the current events with the biblical ages, positioning the concept of "monarchy" as beyond time. Through the alignment of contrasting camera perspectives with the content and rhythm of the music, cinematic strategies convey the King's transcendental transformation according to audience viewing conventions.

Crowning and Investiture

Following the anointing, the King is gradually adorned in a golden tunic and robe, receiving royal regalia, some placed on his body, others offered for him to touch. The investiture concludes with a long shot featuring the King seated on St. Edward's Chair, prepared to be crowned. The garments and regalia connect him to his British monarchical predecessors, with the golden priestly robe symbolising his elevated and sacred status. The Archbishop of Canterbury proceeds to crown the King with St. Edward's Crown, raising it high above the King's head for all to see before carefully placing it on his head. Stepping back, the archbishop declares, "God save the King!", signifying the successful completion of the crowning (fig. 8).

The King is then enthroned on the Imperial Chair at the centre of the Coronation Theatre, symbolically taking possession of his empire. Kneeling before the King, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King's heir pay homage. Subsequently, the archbishop invites the congregation and all citizens to pledge allegiance to the King and to his heirs and successors.[28] A medium shot from the King's left side captures the King's heir, Prince William, and his family standing in the background as the congregation affirms the King's

28 Welby 2023, 28.



Fig. 8: The King is crowned; the Archbishop of Canterbury shouts, "Long live the King!". Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 01:39:55.



Fig. 9: The King's heir and his family are shown as the congregation proclaims, "May the King live forever!". Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 01:50:22.

new status, proclaiming, "God save King Charles, long live King Charles, may the King live forever!"[29] (fig. 9).

This presentation of collective allegiance bridges the past, present, and future, connecting the monarchy with eternity. With the King seen seated

29 The Coronation Service, 01:50:12–01:50:22.

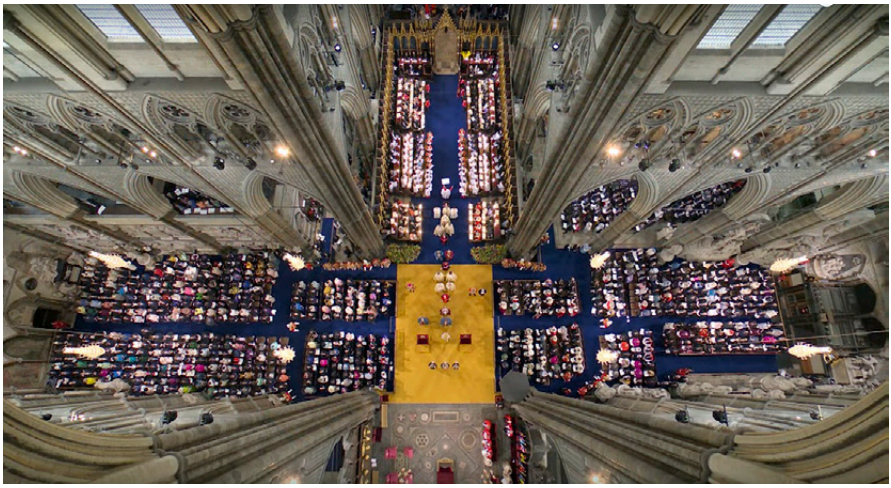

Fig. 10: Camera perspective from an extreme height, visually implying divine presence. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 02:31:53.

on his Imperial Chair, the call for his eternal existence carries clear political implications.

The Return of the King

After the subsequent crowning and enthroning of Queen Camilla, the liturgy concludes with Holy Communion. With the end of the liturgy the King and Queen withdraw, accompanied by their assistants, through the right-hand door of the altar screen into St. Edward's Chapel, behind the altar. Simultaneously, the orchestra and choir start to perform the anthem "Te Deum". Within the chapel, the King changes into his Robes of Estate.[30] Meanwhile, the clergy and sword-bearers position themselves in the Coronation Theatre in anticipation of the King's return. The final words of the anthem plead for God's support and guidance.[31] The camera perspective transitions to an extreme high shot from the Abbey's lantern above the crossing (fig. 10), creating an impression of divine presence.

30 Welby 2023, 40.

31 The exact wording is "Oh Lord, in thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded." Welby 2023, 40.



Fig. 11: The King returns in his full imperial splendour. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 02:34:06.

Fanfares break into the tense and gloomy atmosphere during the King's absence. He returns through the left door of the altar screen adorned in the purple Robe of Estate and wearing the precious Imperial State Crown, symbolising his sovereign powers. Carrying the Sovereign's Orb and the Sovereign's Sceptre with the Cross, the King is led by the Lord President of the Council bearing the Sword of Offering (fig. 11).[32]

Upon the King's entering the Sacrarium, the organ plays the national anthem, with the choir and congregation singing "God Save the King". The King's return answers the previous musical plea for support and is met with the enthusiastic singing of the national anthem. The lyrics affirm his connection to God and invoke eternal protection. The communally sung anthem enacts the congregation's belief in the King's redemptive capacity. After the national anthem, the rhythm of a cheerful march accompanies the King's progress through the quire. Before he leaves through the quire screen passage, a long shot displays the symmetrical order of the King's procession, with saluting guards forming a barrier. Their straight line enhances the shot's perspective. The high altar is the vanishing point in the background, presenting its sacred powers as the starting point for the King's procession back into

32 The orb and the sceptre were made for the coronation of Charles II in 1661 and have been used for coronations ever since. Visual Journalism Team 2023.



Fig. 12: Passing through the quire screen, the King gradually progresses to the world outside. Screen shot, The Coronation Service, 02:37:31.

the world. A subsequent frontal medium shot shows the quire screen in the background, separating the nave from the sacred space behind (fig. 12).

Moving through the small passage, the King gradually progresses back towards the world, reintegrated into society as their new sovereign. Varied camera perspectives capture his relaxed face in close-ups and medium shots. The dynamic of the camera mirrors the King's movements while he proceeds through the nave to the exact rhythm of the music.[33] Along the way, the King is greeted by guests, bowing their heads with some women curtseying. The dynamic interplay of changing camera perspectives and uplifting music engages the audience, eliciting their confirmation of the ritual's success. A final long shot depicts the King stepping out into the world, leaving the clergy behind. His successful journey through the coronation ritual is complete, transforming him into King Charles III by the grace of God.

The Coronation Ritual as a Journey through Space and Time

The mediatisation of the coronation ritual of Charles III portrays the King as connected to a transcendent force. This idea is achieved by the BBC's live

33 The Coronation Service, 02:37:06–02:37:12.

coverage using established techniques of filmic narrative. The impressive Gothic architecture of Westminster Abbey, where the ritual unfolds, is used as a visual backdrop conveying order and grandeur. By its historic importance, the Abbey establishes a link between the contemporary event and every previous coronation held there. It also provides designated spaces for different groups, with the nave, quire, Coronation Theatre, and sanctuary each embodying distinct levels of sacredness. These different zones provide for the unfolding phases of the coronation ritual. Architectural screens, acting as transformative passages, separate and delineate these zones. During the most decisive part of this journey, the anointing, when the King is to be imbued by the Holy Spirit, he is invisible, presenting a great challenge for its medial depiction. Here, the King's transcendental contact is conveyed by the camera engaging in a visual dialog with the Anointing Screen's material border, its explicit boundary integrated into the audience's experience. The significance of the ritual's pivotal phase is communicated to the audience in advance by the media. The audience is thus already informed of the sacredness of the event occurring within this provisional space. It also knows about the political implications of its design, which symbolically depicts the Commonwealth of Nations. With the exception of the newly created Anointing Screen, each of the many facets of the King's ritual journey is steeped in the long traditions of the British monarchy. Regalia, vestments, and music were designed for the coronation ritual, and with only minor modifications they have persisted for centuries. These traditions, along with their historical significance, are effectively conveyed to the public through pre-ritual media coverage. Thus, the audience's expectations have been primed to construct the intended meaning in their imagination.

The mediatisation of the British coronation ritual not only establishes a historical continuum linking the monarchy back to biblical times but also projects its significance forward into future generations. It also presents the King as one link in the perpetual monarchical chain stretching from the very centre of Westminster Abbey out into the world and connecting different parts of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations. While he progresses through the distinct spatial spheres within the Abbey, the King is presented as also advancing through different ontological spheres, being transformed from the late Queen's heir, King Charles III by succession, to King Charles III by the grace of God. The BBC's live coverage provides an audio-visual narrative, portraying Charles III as a transcendental king connected to divine forces. Positioned as the transcendent facilitator of an

all-encompassing order, King Charles III is depicted as an integral part of society's cosmology and the legitimate representative of the existing social structure, thus rightfully shaping societal values.

The media serve to create and maintain this narrative of the British monarchy as legitimated by godly powers. They thus function as a crucial facilitator of the upholding of societal structures and power dynamics. Far from fulfilling their democratic function of "holding power to account"[34] or "reflecting an authentic picture of the entire nation back on itself",[35] with regard to the monarchy the British media yield to power and appear to internalize the narrative they promote. Conflating the religious notion of a transcendent ruler with the identity of the nation and its societal framework, they extend the idea of being religiously legitimated onto themselves. Being part of this society this idea seems too great a temptation to resist.

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34 Ryder 2023, 23.

35 Ryder 2023, 25.

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Media Reviews

Sefer Darıcı and Zekiye Tamer Gencer

Series Review
Yaratılan (Creature, Çağan Irmak, Netflix, TR 2023)
The Ottoman Frankenstein

It seems as if all of Türkiye is talking about Yaratılan (Creature, Çağan Irmak, Netflix, TR 2023), an adaptation of Mary Shelley's cult novel *Frankenstein*, one of the masterpieces of Gothic literature. The series, which was released on Netflix on 20 October 2023, is set in Bursa and Istanbul during the last period of the Ottoman Empire. Director Çağan Irmak's adaptation, which does not have many examples in Türkiye, brought the theme of – as he calls it – "the loneliness of the created" to its audience from a novel perspective. Beyond being based on the novel, the series skilfully handles a chain of events in the Ottoman Empire, the culture of the period, the relationships of daily life, and religious motifs. Although there is an enormous audience in Türkiye, domestic productions of fantasy and science fiction have not been especially successful, probably because their myths, legends, dialogue, and visual scenes have few roots in the culture of Türkiye.

Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, published in 1818, has inspired many plays and films. The extended title "The Modern Prometheus" is revealing. Prometheus is a titan from mythology who creates humankind, determines its destiny, and stands by humankind against the cruel gods; he gives the fire he steals from Olympus to humankind to make it superior to all other beings and to give humankind divine power.[1] This mythological power struggle between humans and gods is found in Shelley's novel in the character of Frankenstein. The novel *Frankenstein* and the characters Frankenstein and his monster are now an element of the cult gothic, science fiction, and horror genres. In various productions, *Frankenstein* has been a vehicle for exploration of the limits of the arrogance of humankind

1 Hacımüftüoğlu 2018.

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when it encounters technology and science, or for a quest for immortality, or for a search for love and compassion behind the seemingly abhorrent.

In an interview with the *Altyazı* film magazine, director Çağan Irmak noted the disjuncture between the Frankenstein legacy in cinema and the original book.

> So far, only Kenneth Branagh has made a complete adaptation of the book. The series created is the second adaptation in this sense. But of course I changed a lot of things, I changed the heroes. I turned it into a more grounded fantasy, to be closer to human beings. I wanted to tell more about people. You won't see such creatures, you won't see a completely fantastic world. There is a life there. There is a struggle between two people, one of whom is pushed out of society, and one of whom is trying to prove himself, and whose intelligence is gushing out of his body.[2]

The series – eight episodes with an average duration of 40 minutes – stars Taner Ölmez as Ziya and Erkan Koçak Köstendil as İhsan. Ziya travels to Istanbul hoping to become a doctor, a dream he has had since childhood, because his father is a doctor and because his mother died of cholera. Even before he leaves for Istanbul, he has been searching for a book known as *Kitab-ı Kıyam* (The Book of Kiyam). The Turkish Language Institution defines *Kıyam* as "to attempt something, to rise up and revolt".[3] In Islamic belief, *kıyam* is resurrection after death. The posture *kıyam* refers to standing in prayer, a pivotal act for Muslims, and is a sign of respect, obedience, and devotion to Allah. İn the Qur'an, verse 218 of the Surah Ash-Shuara states, "He sees you when you do qiyam." In the series, the term is understood in light of rebellion and resurrection. The book, which guides the characters throughout the series, maintains that death can be reversed. When Ziya arrives in Istanbul, where he continues his search for the book, misfortune haunts him and he is left penniless and homeless. Undeterred, he enrols in the medical faculty. He meets the doctor İhsan, a friend of his father, who studied medicine in France and is very intelligent, knowledgeable, and successful but has unusual ideas. Dismissed from teaching because his innovative ideas do not fit with traditional methods, İhsan is lonely. Ziya finds İhsan's unusual stance similar to his own and tries in various ways to work with him.

2 Ildır 2023; The interview was conducted in Turkish; translation into English by the authors.

3 https://sozluk.gov.tr/ [accessed 17 January 2023].

Both science and religion acknowledge that death awaits every human being. Ziya, however, cannot not accept that his beloved mother had to experience death. In Islamic belief, death is a transition to another dimension, from the world of martyrdom to the Hereafter. As life continues in a new dimension, death is not the end.[4] Talk of resurrection implies a return to life after death.[5] In the series, the *Kitab-ı Kıyam* is a guide to this resurrection. İhsan does not share Ziya's extreme ideas about immortality. However, at Ziya's insistence İhsan becomes a partner in the younger man's plans and his idea of deification. They conduct various experiments and while trying to bring back a dead person, İhsan is struck by lightning. Unable to accept İhsan's death, Ziya uses the information in *Kitab-ı Kıyam* to bring him back. At first Ziya is elated by this miracle, but then he realises that the outcome is in fact a failure. İhsan, who behaves like a newborn baby, is left to his fate by Ziya, who flees Istanbul.

Ziya runs away from his responsibility for this creature. İhsan is thus betrayed by the only person he trusts, who created him just as Dr Frankenstein created his monster. İhsan only gradually regains his memory. He finds a place in the circus, where people like him are marginalised from society. Marked by burn scars on his face, he again encounters the evil of humankind. He falls in love and takes refuge in a village but still cannot escape human evil. Director Çağan Irmak's assesses the evil at the core of human beings in light of İhsan's gains importance:

> İhsan's journey after he is created is a story about human evil. İhsan, as in the book, is born like a baby, but then becomes evil as people do evil. What do we expect from a human being in life? To be born, to grow up, to learn, to fall in love, right? We expect these things. I made İhsan experience all of these in his second life, on that journey. As he says, "It's impossible to be good where there are people", that whole journey was to explain that.[6]

Perhaps one of the most important elements of the series is its relevance to culture and belief systems. Irmak notes that the series reflects many faith-based narratives around, for example, hell and the moment of death, as well as containing references to speech and behaviour as taught and expected

4 İlhan/Işıkdoğan 2023.
5 Durmaz 2022.
6 Ildır 2023.

in society. The Islamic faith depicts life in terms of its character before and after death. Human beings, who are subjected to a divine test in this world, will be rewarded or punished[7] in the Hereafter in light of their beliefs and behaviour, which hangs over their pre-death existence in the world. In the series, human anxiety about the reward that is paradise and about avoiding the punishment that is hell is played out through İhsan, who, for example, sees hell and fears its demons. İhsan hopes his second chance will allow him to be rewarded after death.

The realism of so much in the series, from its visual effects to the behaviour of its protagonists, encourages its audience to embrace the series in light of the familiarity of its basic message. The immediacy of the story and its performance are significant reasons for the series' success in Türkiye. The filming locations reflect the conditions of the period very effectively. Experts have worked as consultants to ensure the accuracy of period clothes, speech, and behaviours. One of İhsan's most resonant lines reflects his search for love, which he finds in the barn of the village house where he took shelter: "I was given a second chance in my life." The director sends a subtle message to his audience – not everyone gets a second chance to live. The series, which has been well received for both its presentation and its adaptation of *Frankenstein*, is a pioneer in Türkiye for this genre. It shows that a global story can resonate with a local or national audience when it is subtly, sensitively, and carefully adapted.

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7 Salmazzem 2022.

Reinhard Kopanski

Music Review On the Artist

Niels Petersen, aka R. E. A. L.

Faith and Christianity are not common topics in German-language rap. Moreover, while in the United States gospel rap is a genre in which Christian artists have had enormous chart success – for example, Lecrae and Andy Mineo – in Germany the genre is an absolute niche phenomenon. In 2021, with the creation of the first German gospel-rap label, Realtalk Records – possibly a reference to Lecrae's debut album of the same name[1] – Niels Petersen (stage name R. E. A. L.) took an initial step towards establishing gospel rap in Germany. Petersen has signed seven Christian rappers (Copain, E. R., Kardo/Cardo44, Phuong Dao, G-Time, and the duo Double M), and the album *Sampler 2*[2] was in the German charts for a week in May 2023. As of July 2024, R. E. A. L. has released more than 20 tracks (both solo and collaborations) on YouTube, some of which have been streamed over 250,000 times. His first studio album, entitled *Blessin IV Society*[3] – an obvious reference to the feature film Menace II Society[4] – was released in July 2024 as a collaboration with Cardo44. R. E. A. L. mainly raps in German, although some collaborations with Colombian underground rappers are in Spanish. In late 2023, Petersen published his autobiography, *Hope Dealer. Vom Drogenhändler zum Hoffnungsbringer. Meine 180°-Wende im härtesten Knast Kolumbiens* (Hope Dealer. From Drug Dealer to Bearer of Hope. My 180° Turnaround in Columbia's Toughest Prison). I use that autobiography as the starting point for this consideration of the artist, as it is essential for understanding the mindset, self-image, and (artistic) self-

1 *Real Talk* (Lecrae, Reach Records, US 2004).
2 *Sampler 2* (Realtalk Records, DE 2023, Realtalk Records).
3 *Blessin IV Society* (R. E. A. L. & Cardo44, Realtalk Records, DE 2024).
4 Menace II Society (Allen Hughes and Albert Hughes, US 1993).

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presentation (be it in songs, video clips, or interviews) of the evangelical rapper R. E. A. L.

Petersen narrates his personal story as follows: his life begins in a suburb of the northern German city of Flensburg in 1983, where he grows up as the sole child in a middle-class family. He describes himself as a good athlete and quick-tempered; his strong desire for recognition means that since childhood he has literally bullied his way through. While still at school, he starts taking drugs and initially deals cannabis, amphetamines, and ecstasy, later primarily cocaine. He discovers his love for American rap music and writes his first gangsta rap-style lyrics using the stage name Dirrrty. After graduating from secondary school Petersen spends the next years commuting between northern Germany, where he studies sport, and Colombia, where he makes contacts in the drug scene. In Hamburg, he meets more well-known German rappers such as Bonez MC, subsequently contributing the song "Hustler" to one of Bonez MC's mixtapes.[5] When his Colombian girlfriend gets pregnant, she aborts the fetus, an act subsequently described by Petersen as murder.[6] He continues to try to find a foothold in the drug business in Colombia and claims he survives an assassination attempt and escapes being kidnapped, whereas some of his business partners are less fortunate and are murdered over the course of time.[7] Petersen plans to smuggle about 500 grams of a preliminary stage of cocaine into Germany in a prepared backpack. However, he is caught by the drug squad at Bogotá airport and faces a prison sentence of eight to twelve years; a deal with the public prosecutor's office later reduces his original sentence. In July 2011, he is sent to the prison La Modelo, which according to Petersen is the most dangerous prison in Colombia. After a short time there, he has an epiphany. He describes how one morning, after two weeks in jail, he feels a strong urge to join the daily church service. There, in his words, "the hope of the gospel caught me completely: that God, the Father, would accept me, no matter what I was like, no matter what I had done".[8] From this point on, Petersen attends church every day, and after a while he is baptized. The German embassy in Bogotá arranges for Petersen to be transferred to a prison in Itagüí (near Medellín), where he serves just over eighteen months of his

5 *Mehr geht nicht* (Bonez MC, Jentown Crhyme Records, DE 2008).

6 Petersen 2023, 72.

7 Petersen 2023, 105.

8 Petersen 2023, 151. Translation mine.

sentence before being released on parole at the end of October 2013. After returning to Germany, he initially takes a job as a warehouse worker but soon reverts to his old behavior (partying, womanizing, drug use). Only after his "second conversion"[9] through a chat with a devout Christian woman does he finally rethink his life. He breaks off his contacts in the milieu and sets up a company to import fruit purées from South America. In 2023, he establishes another company in Colombia, where he gives former prisoners a second chance by providing them with work on his fruit plantations. In 2019 and 2023, he travels back to Colombia and preaches in various prisons, including Itagüí and La Modelo. In addition to his business activities, he founds the first German gospel rap label in 2021 and preaches in free churches.

As I had previously perceived Petersen primarily as a gospel rapper – or "gangsta gospel rapper", as he describes his musical style – I was somewhat surprised by the subordinate role that music plays in his autobiography, with occasional comments on his love of hip-hop culture. His short career as rapper Dirrrty is given just a few sentences, and his label Realtalk Records is only mentioned in the last chapter. Nevertheless, the book offers a wealth of information on his self-staging.

Petersen's self-presentation is particularly revealing with respect to the discourse on authenticity in rap music. Ultimately, he describes his life up until his second epiphany as an accumulation of clichés typical for gangsta rap: women, partying, sex, drugs, easy money, violence, and even imprisonment – and not just anywhere, but in the "toughest jail in Colombia". Life as a criminal is described in detail, yet not glorified as is often the case in gangsta rap. Nonetheless, Petersen / R. E. A. L. – it is apparent from several interviews that he makes no distinction between his stage persona and the private person[10] – proves his street credibility and can present himself as "real" in contrast to "fake" rappers (i. e., rappers who claim to be tough guys but have not experienced any of the things they rap about).

This contrast shifts unexpectedly, however, when he retrospectively describes his performance within the genre as also fake, but for a different reason: "Sex, drugs & money, none of that is real, it's just an illusion and not reality. Real life is faith, love and hope. […] I used to be fake too. Not because I told garbage in my songs that wasn't true, but because I hadn't yet arrived

9 Petersen 2023, 190.

10 Wie lebt ein Gospelrapper? (Heukelbach, 2023), 00:00:31.

at the truth."[11] Petersen's mindset that "true" faith in the Christian God is the only path to "the truth" comes through clearly in his autobiography, and his missionary approach is expressed by incorporating an appendix that includes some Bible passages with his own commentary and a sermon that he gave in Hamburg in 2023. The track "Reformation",[12] written as a reckoning with the institutional church, makes clearer what Petersen considers to be aspects of "true" faith: a personal relationship with God in his human form Jesus Christ, acknowledgement of the Bible as the source of truth, and – derived from a specific reading of selective biblical passages – the rejection of liberal stances on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and diversity. Petersen expresses the second and third of these attitudes explicitly in interviews with secular YouTubers, always emphasizing that his rejection is never directed against people, only against a supposedly ungodly way of life.[13]

Petersen's autobiography is an example of the classic evangelical narrative of conversion and religious awakening. This event forms the core of his self-staging, and he tells it in detail in practically every one of his numerous interviews with Christian broadcasting stations and YouTube channels. Moreover, in terms of self-promotion, the autobiography is also an expression of how carefully Petersen has planned his career as R. E. A. L.: in interviews from 2020 and 2021, after telling his life story Petersen always points out that his personal story is not over yet, as God told him to make Christian rap and that he will soon have something published.[14] R. E. A. L.'s first EP[15] dates back to 2021, and the title track, "180°", is essentially a short summary of his autobiography. The EP's artwork alone is revealing, packed with links to hip-hop culture combined with references to Petersen's religious background and his life story: both the EP's title and R. E. A. L.'s logo are in a graffiti style; a small label in black-and-white with the text "Straight Outta Scripture" is based on the iconic "Parental Advisory" warning label and is an adaptation of "Straight Outta Compton", the title of the biopic of the influential US hip-hop crew N. W. A.[16] R. E. A. L aligns with the phenotype of a well-trained "tough" gangsta rapper with numerous tattoos, wearing

11 Petersen 2023, 227. Translation mine.

12 R. E. A. L. & Phuong Dao – Reformation (Realtalk Records, 2022).

13 For example, R. E. A. L. Interview (TV Strassensound, 2022), 00:52:44.

14 For example, Mit Jesus in den Knast (ERF Mensch Gott, 2020), 00:24:00.

15 *180°* (R. E. A. L., Realtalk Records, DE 2021).

16 Straight Outta Compton (F. Gary Gray, US 2015).



Fig. 1: Cover of the EP *180°* (R. E. A. L., Realtalk Records, DE 2021).

sunglasses, a large silver cross on a chain around his neck, and a jersey of the Colombian football team Atlético National from Medellín (fig. 1).

Another element of the careful staging of R. E. A. L.'s career is that a total of eight QR codes are cleverly integrated into chapter headings in his autobiography and link to thematically appropriate songs/video clips by R. E. A. L. or to collaborations on YouTube. These video clips are indicative of the professionalism of Realtalk Records: all are well made technically and are in no way inferior to those of German-speaking gangsta rappers who are far more successful commercially. The themes of gangsta rap are also sometimes taken up visually, for example through the video clip *Brief an die Straße*[17] (Letter to the Street), which accompanies the chapter in the autobiography entitled "Street Credibility".[18] The video clip is shot between blocks of flats; R. E. A. L. walks through streets where easy money is made with drug deals and violence prevails. Crime is omnipresent in the video clip, but more to illustrate life on the street, which – according to the song's message – does not end well. This theme is illustrated by a group of young men who are shown several times with balaclavas over their faces and

17 R. E. A. L. – Brief an die Straße (Realtalk Records, DE 2021).

18 Petersen 2023, 31.

handguns – one member of this group is shot at the end of the video clip and lies dead, gun still in hand, next to the fancy car in which the group had driven up shortly before. R. E. A. L., by contrast, is a calming influence who offers an alternative to violence and crime by praying with young people[19] and reading the Bible.[20] Simultaneously, he reconstructs gangsta rap motifs to give them new meaning: selling drugs from the trunk of a car becomes distributing Bibles from the trunk.[21] Status symbols such as gold jewelry or expensive watches play a role around him, but not for Petersen himself, who wears everyday clothes. Finally, R. E. A. L. replaces firearms with the Bible – true to the motto "the weapon is the word". Especially in connection with the autobiography, R. E. A. L. presents himself as "real" compared to people who are only "fake" – another classic gangsta rap motif – as he raps lines like "Pushers wanna be like Pablo [likely referring to Pablo Escobar – a notorious Colombian drug baron] but never been to Medellín, street credibility, kids are on Tilidine."[22] The narcotic Tilidine (also sold as the medication Valoron) has been glorified in several songs by German gangsta rappers in recent years – for example in the extremely successful eponymous song by Capital Bra and Samra, which reached number one in the German, Austrian, and Swiss single charts.[23] By using such references and buzz words, Petersen demonstrates on the one hand that he is familiar with the secular rap scene, and on the other hand that he is trying to present a "meaningful" alternative with his Christian rap. Only time will show the extent to which he succeeds.

A closer look at artists such as R. E. A. L. reveals the complexity of the interplay between evangelical Protestantism and popular music. By appealing to and at the same time reinterpreting common motifs of a particular genre (here, gangsta rap, drugs, violence, etc.) while overemphasizing genre authenticity, evangelical artists such as R. E. A. L. attempt to connect with audiences beyond their own circle. The success of gospel rap from Germany has so far been limited, but current developments will allow us to understand the self-image, mindset, and staging practices of evangelical musicians. This short consideration might be a first step in that direction.

19 R. E. A. L. – Brief an die Straße (Realtalk Records, DE 2021), 00:01:28.

20 R. E. A. L. – Brief an die Straße (Realtalk Records, DE 2021), 00:02:03.

21 R. E. A. L. – Brief an die Straße (Realtalk Records, DE 2021), 00:01:43.

22 "Pusher woll'n wie Pablo sein doch war'n niemals in Medellín, Street Credibility, Kids sind auf Tilidin"; R. E. A. L. – Brief an die Straße (Realtalk Records, DE 2021), 00:00:51.

23 *Tilidin* (Capital Bra X Samra, DE 2019, Urban).

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Lavinia Pflugfelder

Film Review
Dune: Part Two
(Denis Villeneuve, US 2024)

Over the last 50 years, multiple attempts have been made to adapt Frank Herbert's epic science-fiction novel *Dune* (1965), some more successful than others. The list includes comics, video games, and television series. Particularly notable are David Lynch's film adaptation in 1984[1] and Alejandro Jodorowsky's failed film adaptation in the 1970s. In 2019, filming started for the newest endeavour to bring *Dune* to the silver screen, directed by Denis Villeneuve and starring Timothée Chalamet as Paul Atreides. Dune: Part 1, released in 2021, quickly proved a success. It generated new interest in the Dune books, and a sequel was soon announced. This review looks at Dune: Part Two (Denis Villeneuve, US 2024) from a study of religion perspective, exploring where we find religion in the film and how religion is visualized, implied, and reproduced.

The Legacy and Adaptation of *Dune*

The development of the original books, Frank Herbert's interest in ecology and his work in journalism, and the convoluted myths surrounding the adaptations (even Lynch's Dune is simultaneously a failure and a cult hit) have been told before and need no repetition. But Villeneuve's adaptation certainly inherits a difficult legacy. The book *Dune* was long seen as unadaptable. The success of Dune: Part 1 only raised expectations for Dune: Part Two. The core of the *Dune* franchise lies in Herbert's original trilogy, of which Lynch's film attempted to adapt the first book, *Dune*, into a feature-length film. Dune: Part 1 uses around a third of the first book, and Dune: Part Two finishes it.

1 Dune (David Lynch, US 1984).

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Dune: Part Two picks up at the end of the first film: Paul and Jessica, fleeing from the Harkonnen into the desert of Dune, are taken by a group of Fremen to Sietch Tabr. Jessica will only be accepted by the Fremen if she takes the place of their dying Reverend Mother by drinking the poisonous Water of Life. As a Bene Gesserit, Jessica is able to survive the ritual, but her unborn daughter is changed as well: her mind and genetic memory awaken and she communicates with her mother telepathically throughout the film. While Paul immerses himself in Fremen culture and fights alongside them, Stilgar and other Fremen become convinced he is the prophesied Lisan al Gaib. This is a cause of conflict between Paul and his love interest Chani (Zendaya), who acts as a guide to Fremen culture for Paul but does not believe in the prophecy. Jessica, fully aware of the hand the Bene Gesserit have in spreading the prophecy, plans to use it to consolidate Paul's leadership. In the end, seeing no alternative Paul submits to this role, despite the destruction that he knows will result. He triumphs over the Emperor and kills the Baron Harkonnen, but the Great Houses do not accept him as the new Emperor and Paul proclaims the Holy War.

The basic construction and deconstruction of the Hero's Journey narrative of *Dune* naturally appears in any adaptation, as do religion, the issue of prophecy, and questions surrounding free will. As such, *Dune* has always been interesting in the study of religion, specifically the overlap between science fiction and religion. We can explore Villeneuve's Dune with these issues in mind, and not only in terms of where it differs from other adaptations, but also in relation to how Villeneuve uses light, music, dialogue, objects, and language to frame religion in a specific way.

Prophecy, Predestination, and Free Will

Questions of prophecy and free will permeate Herbert's *Dune*. It also deconstructs the Hero's narrative after the first book. Ever since *Dune* was published, there has been academic and theological interest in Paul as a messianic figure, in its account of prophecy, and in its various religious components. These topics remain relevant. *Dunes*' political theology, the God Emperor, and Eric Voegelin's theory of Political Religion still come together in discussions decades later.[2]

2 Voegelin 1938. Also to be mentioned here are Hauser 1985; Wakefield 2022.

The multiple pressures of religion, politics, and the personal are present in Villeneuve's adaptation as well. Both prophecies, Lisan al Gaib and Kwisatz Haderach, directly influence Paul through his ability to use them in his favour for revenge on the Harkonnen and for the preservation of his life among the Fremen. When both threaten his new identity as a Fremen and as a Fedaykin, his individuality and free will have to be subsumed under the role of the Messiah. In one key scene leading up to the climax, Paul presents himself before the Fremen war council and declares himself the Lisan al Gaib and, in the same breath, the heir of the Atreides dukedom (referencing his father's signet ring). As a result of the powerplay that involves Paul taking the Padishah Emperor's daughter as his wife, he gives up being one Fedaykin among others, which may indirectly lead to Chani having to take the status of a concubine. Paul's personal foresight or prescience, be it supernatural or transhuman, leads him to these roles; he accepts the possibility of a martyr's death in exchange for the possibility of power. And as Princess Irulan (Florence Pugh) comments, martyrdom and repression make religion flourish.

Religion finds a place in the Dune films as a catalyst, a collective conviction, and an aesthetic, but rarely as everyday faith.

Visual Language and Aesthetics

Villeneuve's distinctive visual language overwhelms the viewer with vast landscapes. Vastness can convey a feeling of transcendence, romantic as well as horrific. The vastness of the Atreides' home planet's oceans, the desert sun over Arrakis, and the stark white and black of Giedi Prime seem to characterize each planet's inhabitants. The otherness certainly helps convince the viewer of the existence of a world with an all-encompassing struggle of whole planets, multi-generational blood feuds, eons of eugenics, and breeding programs seeking to transcend human capabilities. Giant worms and their psychedelic by-product, telepathy, and genetic memories are real parts of this world.

But Villeneuve also draws on works by the Swiss artist HR Giger and many science-fiction elements that were themselves a creative by-product of Alejandro Jodorowsky's failed adaptation in the 1970s.[3]

3 Jodorowsky's Dune (Frank Pavich, FR/US 2013).

A specific religious aesthetic can be analysed in the Bene Gesserit and in the Fremen's Reverend Mother. Glimpses into the worship of the sand worms are provided by the decorations seen during the funeral of Jamis (Babs Olusanmokun) and in the temple, where the Water of Life is produced by drowning juvenile sand worms.

It remains to be seen how in future sequels religious aesthetics will be used in the context of Paul as a ruling religious leader. And how might the visual language contrast Paul and the Fremen with the Harkonnen and thus create a possible comparison between religious tumult and fascist fanaticism?

Cultural Appropriation and Representation

Any discussion of *Dune*'s representation of religion includes Frank Herbert's engagement with Middle Eastern culture and Islam. Herbert's *Dune* sought to deconstruct the White Saviour narrative and presents the conflict around Spice in relation to international aggression and conflicts about oil.

Both of Villeneuve's Dune films have been criticised for their incorporation of visuals from Muslim cultures.[4] Representation tilts into orientalism without contextualization: visual shorthand risks become stereotyping. The film makes little space for everyday religious rituals, the ever-present coffee from the books, or explanation of how religions still exist in the universe of *Dune*. The Fremen's relation to real-world Islam remains superficial, evident only in their language and aesthetic.

Religion, Exploitation, and the Masses

The film supplements the source material with the idea that differing religious interpretations exist among the Fremen. Chani jokes about Stilgar (Javier Bardem) being from the south and thus more fervently religious. She herself is named after a part of the Fremen prophecy, which suggests their religious traditions are important throughout their society. Paul assimilates into the Fremen culture, is initiated through the Worm-ride, and takes on a new name. By contrast his mother, Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson), intentionally

4 Some examples include Durrani, 2021; Hadadi 2021; Venkatraman 2021; Wander 2022.

adapts to enter the power hierarchy as a Reverend Mother. The implication persists that she acts as a Bene Gesserit, utilising religious narratives and structures to ensure a position of power. The Bene Gesserit can seem to be a caste of experts or a religious order. In the source material, they are ambiguously located between religion, politics, and secret order, placed thus to allow for exploration of the boundary between religion and non-religious reflections on transcendence, control, and transhumanism. In Villeneuve's film and in the books, religion is evident as an element of the Bene Gesserit when Jessica takes on the role of Reverend Mother for the Fremen, continuing the Missionaria Protectiva in her own interests.

The films, like the books, are interested in religion as a social fact (fait social), as a political tool of manipulation and a way to mobilise the masses. However, they also explore prescience and prophecy, which concern the theological, rather than sociological, character of religion.

We might also wonder about the relative absence of religion, seen only in the Fremen and their fanatical belief in Paul as Lisan al Gaib. Is Paul's first Worm-ride a religious ritual or a secular coming of age transition? What is the function of the Worm-ride, and since the Worm is sacred to the Fremen, is its visual realisation "religious"?

Where Jessica's role promotes a religious narrative among the Fremen, Chani stands for the rejection of a religious interpretation of the events. But even then, Chani plays an integral part in the fulfilment of the prophecy when she awakens Paul from his pseudo-death by the Water of Life.

The *Dune* books and movies invite a number of approaches to their possibly religious content, for they succeed on many levels. I left the movie theatre well pleased with the overall aesthetics, the visual language, and the staging of the landscapes and architecture. While the second part is not uniquely innovative, in some ways it is self-contained and can be understood on its own within the new *Dune* franchise. The opening scene invites the viewer into the story: it contains limited dialogue but makes an immediate impression with its orange landscape and the starkly contrasting black figures of the Harkonnen, hinting at a fundamental antagonism between Harkonnen, Atreides, and the planet Arrakis. The narrative as it unwinds proves immersive and well-paced; the length of the film goes by surprisingly unnoticed. Austin Butler's Feyd Rautha deserves special mention: while the character has little screen time, he still leaves his mark and is an important foil for Paul.

Dune: Part Two ends with the characters and their world on the brink of upheaval and at the start of a Holy War. Many narrative threads are ready to be picked up by the third film. The role of religion will surely only deepen, linked to new themes as the wider world opens up. The prospect of a failed utopia and additional political players will certainly draw an audience to the next *Dune* film. How it depicts and uses religion will surely be interesting to watch, and just as intriguing to analyse.

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Elie Yazbek

Book Review
Serge Goriely / Jean-Luc Maroy / Arnaud Join-Lambert (eds.), Visions et apparitions au cinéma

L'instant de la révélation

Editions Academia-EME 2023, 250 pages,
ISBN: 978-2-8066-4130-4

The collective book *Visions et apparitions au cinema. L'instant de la révélation* (Visions and Apparitions in Cinema. The Moment of Revelation), edited by Serge Goriely, Jean-Luc Maroy, and Arnaud Join-Lambert, tackles the wide-ranging theme of visions and apparitions in movies and TV series, as well as the subject of spiritual and/or supernatural manifestations. Notably, it offers a multidisciplinary reading of a topic that is often observed under a theological or religious microscope. The singular moment of apparition, the "instant" of revelation (as the book's subtitle indicates) in which the real world tips over into an "alternative world", is the focus of the articles, with particular emphasis on the spectator's perception, understanding, credulity, and need for transcendence.

The articles are divided into two main sections: the first part, entitled "Lueurs théologiques et bibliques" (theological and biblical insights), brings together texts devoted to audiovisual works in which references to religion, the Bible, and sacred texts are identifiable. The second part, entitled "Eclats étranges" (strange glimmers), broadens the context and considers films and series whose characters come from different cultures and whose narratives may evolve in universes at the frontiers of reality, where spectral phenomena can emerge in subliminal manners.

In the introduction, Serge Goriely and Jean-Luc Maroy ask, "How should we approach visions and apparitions in the cinema?" (p. 6). Each author in

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this volume seeks to answer that query in light of their field of expertise. In the first article, Régis Burnet explains how the apparitions depicted in cinema movies and TV series are generally codified for the viewer, even if the elements of these theophanies are "tirelessly reworked, altered and re-interpreted" (p. 16). He takes as an example the desert (in the literal sense as well as in the broad sense of a place where the individual is isolated), which by creating a rupture with everyday reality allows apparitions to occur. This does not prevent a subtle interplay of the codes (the use of symbols, the voice, the tremendum) which, depending on the film, allows the mise-en-scène to oscillate between spectacular demonstration and elliptical suggestion, especially in contemporary movies.

Chris Deacy explores the role of apocalyptic visions in cinema and their interaction with the real world in films with non-religious content (for example, Taxi Driver [Martin Scorsese, US 1976], Armageddon [Michael Bay, US 1998], Waterworld [Kevin Reynolds, US 1995], Outbreak [Wolfgang Petersen, US 1995]). These movies are characterized, he writes, by a subtle shift from the "transcendent to the immanent sphere" (p. 39). Theological approaches to the end of the world give way to glorification of the saving action of the individual, as in Outbreak, in which the two main characters reconcile and rediscover love as they confront a virus that threatens humanity.

Katia Malatesta considers Marian apparitions in contemporary Italian audiovisual works to identify current trends in such representations and their relationship with both historical and cultural evolution. Through the film Troppa Grazia (Lucia's Grace, Gianni Zanasi, IT 2018) and the series Il Miracolo (The Miracle, Sky Italia / Arte, IT/FR 2018), she shows how contemporary Marian theophany humanizes the figure of Mary, places her back at the heart of the debate on feminist and gender issues, and redefines her "as a living person 'who' is interested in people's ethics and lives" (p. 54).

Apparitions of the Virgin Mary are also the topic of Geneviève Fabry and Sophie Dufays' article, which looks at two recent films, La pasión de Michelangelo (The Passion of Michelangelo, Esteban Larraín, CL/FR/AR 2013) and L'apparition (The Apparition, Xavier Giannoli, FR/BE/JO 2018). In these movies, the characters/investigators find their initial rational stance indirectly confronted by issues of faith. Their doubts are transformed by the magic of the image-icon, entering an "epiphanic dimension, which thus draws an unexpected and enigmatic path towards [...] the world of souls" (p. 68). Supernatural apparitions thus bring a radical transformation of the human being.

The film Lazzaro Felice (Happy as Lazzaro, Alice Rohrwacher, DE/FR/IT/CH 2018) is the subject of Aurel Rotival's article. In this film, the apparition of a wolf provokes a double shift, both narrative and political. It enables the miraculous resurrection of the main character, who from this point is "out of time", and then recontextualizes this phenomenon to make this character "the privileged messenger of a decisive critique of capitalism" (p. 88). The apparition is therefore the pivotal moment that offers potential deliverance from the bounds of the real world.

Jean-Luc Maroy provides an interesting reading of the futuristic film Bird Box (Susanne Bier, US 2018), in which the forces of evil – the mysterious entities that bring death by forcing humans to look at them – remain totally invisible to the viewer. This salvific ban on catching sight of evil raises the issues of "seeing" and "believing". In this moment of revelation "seeing" is not in the gaze (which kills) but in "the possibility (or necessity) of opening up a fraternal space for a shared vision of the future" (p. 105).

Serge Goriely discusses season two of Fargo (FX/Netflix, US 2014–2023), a detective series about a massacre in 1979. A completely offbeat and unexpected event occurs during this season when an out-of-context flying saucer appears, reverses the course of the action, and saves the main character. Is this an intervention by compassionate aliens or the expression of a divine manifestation that has its origins in the biblical story of Job, "with at its core a challenging of Man, a vision of what God might be, and the possibility of a revelation for the heroes" (p. 123)?

Bruno Dumont's transfiguration of reality through the cinema is analyzed in Jean-Benoît Gabriel's article. Showing "the sacred in the profane" and by giving "through cinema, a sacred dimension to an ordinary man" (p. 134), Dumont involves the viewer in the revelation via the power of uncluttered mise-en-scène and acting that sometimes lacks verisimilitude.

In the second part of the book, Christophe Collard and Christophe Meurée focus on "Jaco Van Dormael's Visions", the title of their article: the multiple visions and apparitions featured in the Belgian director's films are an "attempt to repair the tragedy inherent in existence" (p. 139), multiplying the possible interpretations and championing a cinema that favors mystery over truth.

Alice Michaud-Lapointe and Annaëlle Winand propose film archives and found footage of two experimental films be read through the prism of specters and ghosts as instances of revelation. Absence/presence, they argue, as much as "the emergence of the past in a present media, constantly updated (p. 167)", allows the intersection of temporalities and contexts.

Nausica Zaballos explores the Amerindian visionary experience and its stereotyped representation in Hollywood productions, noting that this visual reproduction is excluded from films produced and directed by Amerindians, which instead privilege "an oral representation, in accordance with the tradition of storytellers" (p. 184) and offer viewers a different conception of history.

Benjamin Campion investigates the interaction of the marvelous and strange with the fantastic in the series Servant (Apple TV+, US 2019–2023), particularly in the first episode. The multiple levels of "vision" – that of the father, the mother, the nurse, and the viewer – ensure the apparition involving the baby/doll makes the series oscillate between "skepticism and credulity, pragmatism and dogmatism" (p. 200). Does this mix of genres hold out the promise of an imaginary world that can contain both life and death?

Cécile de Coninck examines the film Axolotl (Olivier Smolders, FR/BE 2018), analyzing the variations in rhythm and between still and moving images, between montage and composition, between blur and sharpness, in parallel with the apparitions, disappearances, and multiple duplications of the characters. She proposes that "Smolders' aim, through the multiplication of visions, is to assert his creative freedom, as well as man's freedom to constantly invent, molt and metamorphose" (p. 217), even if this means shaking the viewer's certainties and convictions.

Exploring two films by Russian director Vassili Sigarev, Natalija Masjova shows how a revelation, that of death, creates a rupture between "worlds constructed by an individual and those conceived by a collective entity, based on an experience of love" (p. 221). The characters' experience of revelation enables them to see the world differently.

The afterword by Arnaud Join-Lambert, a co-editor of the book, revisits the film L'apparition (2018), focusing on the four apparitions of the icon of the Virgin Mary that punctuate the main character's journey and accompany, even provoke, his inner transformation: from *seeing and believing* to *believing without seeing*, "his journey leads him to doubt both what he sees and his non-belief" (p. 244).

"Do we not therefore need visions rather than images?" ask the editors in their introduction (p. 11)? Faced with such a complex and topical question in a world dominated by all kinds of images, this book has the merit of suggesting diverse and in-depth readings on an important subject and opens the field to further studies of theophanic representations in apparently non-religious contemporary movies and TV series.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Death, Loss and Mourning in Film and Media

Today, death is both something very absent and very present. When people die, they often do so hidden away in care homes and hospitals. Death is dealt with by professionals, making it something absent in most people's lives. At the same time, death is all around us via media images and popular cultural narratives. Whether in media reports from sites of war, televised royal funerals, gruesome murders in true crime podcasts or fictional stories in films, death would seem to be everywhere. The pandemic also influenced our thinking about death. While the dead and dying were often even more separated from the living – with care homes being closed and funerals limited to only a few people – death was very present in news reports and online spaces provided new ways of mourning and remembering those we had lost.

When death and mourning move online or become the topic of media, different modes of production, representation, and distribution are applied. Death and mourning become commercialized and marketized. Still, media can offer different narratives about death and mourning, and online spaces allow for alternative ways to relate to loss and grief. However, media and digital spaces can also uphold norms and strengthen traditional views on death. As with research on religion and media in general, the connection between the online and the offline when exploring grief must not be ignored. Death and mourning online are connected on diverse levels to offline practices. These processes can be subsumed under the term of mediatisation that scrutinizes changes in the field of media and religion.

What are then the narratives the media and popular culture offer us about death? How can media, online spaces, influencers, and popular culture be a part of loss and mourning? What notions of an afterlife do films and the online world provide? How are religious imaginaries about death reinvented

in media representations? These are some of the questions we encourage authors to explore in this upcoming issue of the *Journal for Religion, Film and Media*. Though focusing on death, this issue is also very much about life. It aims to highlight how death, loss, and mourning is also a part of what it means to be human, a notion not always acknowledged in today's culture.

Suggested topics:

- Notions of an afterlife in popular culture
- The ritualization of death in media
- Online sites as places of mourning and memory
- Experiences of online funerals
- Online pastoral care
- Theological perspectives on online death rituals and practices
- Theorizing religion and death online
- Online deaths and afterlives
- Grief practices online and offline
- Mourning processes in media and popular culture
- Death/grief/mourning influencers
- Ethnographic explorations of online and offline grief
- Media and online death ritual innovations
- The visualization of loss and the aesthetics of grief in media
- Beyond language – capturing grief in alternative ways online
- The digital revitalization of old grief norms/rituals
- The commercialisation and marketization of death in media
- The use of media in death rituals

We invite scholars from a range of relevant fields, such as literature, film and media studies, theology, and the study of religion, as well as of sociology or political sciences, to contribute to this issue. The issue also includes an open section for articles on other topics in keeping with the profile of JRFM. The deadline for all submissions is 1 June 2025. The publication is scheduled for May 2026. Contributions of 5,000 to 6,000 words (including notes) should be submitted for double-blind peer review through the journal website at www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register and to follow the instructions for submitting contributions, especially the style guide.

For questions regarding this call for papers or the submission and publication process, please contact the editors of the issue, Sofia Sjö (Sofia.Sjo@abo.fi) and Marie-Therese Mäder (m.maeder@lmu.de).