

Narrative Games and Cinematic Experiences in Contemporary Cinema *The Case of "The Mind-Game Films"*

summary

The goal of *Narrative Games and Cinematic Experiences in Contemporary Cinema: the Case of the Mind-Game Films* is possibly wide characterization of experiences specific to the *mind-game films* – film trend experimenting with narrative and worldbuilding, as well as to propose a methodology that will be adequate to capture the multi-faceted nature of those experiences.

In contemporary cinema, the narration (structure which orders the events) undergoes significant changes, connected to the mediascape remodeling. New experiences of a globalized reality which we access through on-screen media (in particular hypertext Internet), require a new narrative formula. Modes of narration related to the traditional "analogue" cinema seem insufficient for the representation of contemporary identity, reality and our *being-in-the-world*, nevertheless remain the main framework of reference for the film storytelling. Hence the term "narrative game" seems to be useful, since the game is played on two levels of film experience: the convention of the classical mode of narration and a non-standard type of its reception. From the earliest times, narration was the basic form of understanding and organizing experiences. Also today, "storytelling" and "experiencing" are strongly linked: the narrative allows to frame experiences and give them meaning, while experiencing the narrative (reception, understanding or creation) remains the base of identity and culture. The cinematic phenomenon of *the mind-game film* is a postmodern symptom of this feedback, which – as I am trying to explain – represents the of weave the narrative and experience through labyrinthine structures of story, defragmented reality and psychopathology of characters, through which film plays a "mental game" with the viewer's habits, while commenting on the condition of contemporary culture and identity.

In the first chapter, "*Mind-game films*". *Contexts of narrative, production and experience* I outline the characteristics of *mind-game films* (Thomas Elseasser) / *puzzle films* (Warren Buckland) and define their main determinants: complex narrative, cognitive and ontological uncertainty of the diegesis and specific experience of the (dis)comfort. After listing the *mind-game film* examples, I proceed to the characteristics of the phenomenon's narrative specificity. The game is played here with the classical mode of narration (David Bordwell), which is redefined by post-classical stories. I am also referring to the narrative aspects of modernist cinema, claiming, however, that *mind-game films* are the result of an artistic-production compromise within the Hollywood system. Starting from the institutional-production perspective, I present of the most important qualities of post-classical cinema (Eleftheria Thanouli) – a new and evolving narrative paradigm.

Chapter two: *The excesses of accumulation: defamiliarization and aspects of the narrative of "mind-game films"* is a narratological recapitulation of the most important means and strategies of

the mind-game storytelling. I use the word "excesses" assuming that the phenomenon consist of an unprecedented accumulation of "defamiliarizations" and "oddities" that have a key impact on our reception and experience. Following the ideas of Mieke Bal and Brian McHale, I am identifying, listing and characterizing the most important narrative means: retrospection, sequential ordering, nonlinearity, a-chronology, loop, retroactivity, Chinese-box structure, metalepsis, denarration, the final plot twist and the narrative unreliability. I note that all these aspects have already appeared in the history of narrative (both literary and audiovisual), yet *mind-game films* redefine their "traditional" functionality. I analyze the following films: *A Ghost Story*, *Interstellar*, *Arrival*, *The Prestige*.

Chapter three: *The embodied film experience and the „terror of identification”* focuses on the mind-films reception mode, which is a specific combination of *sense-making* process and *mind-blowing* sensation. I use the word "terror of identification" assuming that the *mind-game films* offer viewers a form of identification, which at the same time expands and narrows our perspective - they trigger the embodiment of psychopathology as an alternative form of cognition by paradoxically limiting the horizon of knowledge by strictly inclusive focalization. In the following subsections I recapitulate ideas of subjectivity (Edward Branigan), intersubjectivity and focalization (Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal) to create the ground for the analysis of the *mind-game films'* process of the embodiment (Vittorio Gallese, Michele Guerra) and the circulation of cognition (Miklós Kiss and Steven Willemsen), emotions and affects (Brian Massumi, Steffen Hven, Patricia Pisters). Characterizing the tension between the desire to rationalize the film and the pleasure of astonishment, I use the terms (dis)comfort and dysnarrativia. In the third chapter, I analyze, among all: *Dunkirk*, *Memento*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Wojna polsko-ruska*.

Fourth and last chapter: *Virtual worlds, split personalities and ideological subversion* is devoted to the anthropology of the experience of the contemporaneity. I treat the narration games as both a symptom and a diagnosis of contemporary culture. I analyze the *Fight Club* as an example of a "generational" movie. In the subsection *Rebuilding narration. The database and the myth of interactivity* I characterize the hypertext structure of *puzzle films* as a blending of the traditional storytelling and database pattern (Lev Manovich, Marsha Kinder), and the phenomenon itself as a manifestation of changes within the digital representation systems. In opposition to the traditional approaches towards the identity problem (considered as one in crisis), I focus on the "productivity" of characters' psycho-pathologies (Thomas Elsaesser). In the last subsection, which is a summary of the thesis, I describe the critical potential of the mind-game films, using the discourse of schizoanalysis (Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari).

Across the whole thesis, I argue that the mind-game films go beyond academic classifications and simple oppositions: genre vs. author, experiment vs. tradition, intellect vs. affect, norm vs. pathology, objective vs. subjective, narration vs. attraction. Perhaps this is why they remain attractive.



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