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The Possibilities of 'Film Consciousness':

A Formulation in Search of a Theory

par

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to follow through on two “calls for further research” from recognized film scholars. One line of research centers on early cinema and especially on early American film publications (from 1906 to 1913), which Jan Olsson has defined as a “discursive domain calling for analysis as a phenomenon in its own right,” as opposed to only being “source material” film historians use for writing about early cinema. Another line of research concerns the “relationship between consciousness and film” that Murray Smith argues is an “unchartered territory” in film studies.

In this thesis, this relationship between “consciousness and film” is defined from the perspective of ‘film consciousness’, which is a formulation with several functions. In some contexts, it refers to a “movement of consciousness” that appears in early film publications over the course of several years (between 1907 and 1912) manifested in a growing recognition of the constructed, aesthetic nature of film, changes in terminologies for naming and defining the object of cinema, in particular activities showing an appreciation of the contextual meaning of films, and in self-consciousness, such as in the study of audiences and meta-criticism.

These parallel lines of research have an important scientific and methodological implication, in that early film publications are sometimes implicitly seen as displaying a “naïve consciousness” that is transposable onto early spectators broadly. A “film consciousness” approach recognizes a more complex consciousness that is revealed in subtle changes in language-use and behaviour over a period of time. It also allows for the study of the subjectivity of the writers as well, which is often revealed indirectly to the film historian, as opposed to explicit descriptions of subjective film experience.

The formulation ‘film consciousness’ – which is occasionally used in film discourse, though usually without an institutional definition – is also regarded in this thesis as presenting its own ontological nature in the way it brings two semantic fields (“consciousness” and “film”) into relation. From this formulation, several “categories of film consciousness” are constructed. These include “film aesthetic awareness,” “film production awareness,” “film culture awareness,” “ways of existing towards film,” and several “entities of consciousness” (an imagined place in consciousness assumed to contain past film experiences, conscious phenomena derived from film experiences that are seen as bound to personal identity, a faculty that determines the way reality is engaged with, and a particular kind of conscious experience, defined as “subjective film consciousness.”)

These categories of film consciousness collectively constitute an imagined “field of film consciousness” that serves to conceptualize the “unchartered territory” Murray Smith defines. Each category represents an individual area of research with concomitant questions and criteria that nevertheless exist on a continuum that the key term ‘film consciousness’ brings into constant rhetorical relation. When this field is applied to a set of film-related data, such as early film discourse, a set of connections between different regions of film consciousness emerges, thus allowing for the description of film consciousness at various levels.

**Key Terms:** film consciousness, consciousness, film experience, early film discourse, film trade publications, early cinema, film and philosophy.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude s'inspire de questionnements soulevés, dans le cadre de leur recherche, par deux spécialistes du cinéma. Une première piste de recherche concerne l'histoire du cinéma des premiers temps et les sources documentaires, que l'historien Jan Olsson a défini comme un « domaine discursif » (*“discursive domain”*) à part entière. Une deuxième piste de recherche s'inspire d'une remarque du philosophe et théoricien Murray Smith à propos de la manière dont les spectateurs se représentent mentalement les films qu'ils ont vus comme un domaine de la recherche cinématographique inexploré (*“unchartered territory”*).

Cette thèse se concentre sur la « conscience cinématographique », c'est-à-dire sur la capacité du spectateur à se représenter mentalement un objet filmique ou à penser cinématographiquement. Cette formulation désigne des phénomènes particuliers. Historiquement, cette « conscience » est une forme de « sensibilisation au cinéma » (*“movement of consciousness”*), phénomène dont on peut observer les effets dans les textes consacrés au cinéma dans les années 1907-1912. Cette « sensibilisation » se manifeste par un intérêt grandissant pour les films, par l'invention de termes et de notions permettant de parler de cinéma, par des études spécialisées, portant sur le spectatortat ou la critique, montrant que les contemporains avaient conscience de cette « sensibilisation » (*“self consciousness”*).

Ce questionnement de fond sur les sources documentaires, en tant qu'elles sont le révélateur d'une « conscience cinématographique », a une implication historiographique et méthodologique importante. L'apparente naïveté des sources d'époque a conduit certains historiens à décrire les spectateurs de l'époque comme étant, eux aussi, naïfs. Or, en réalité, la perception des phénomènes filmiques par les contemporains était plus complexe et nuancée que ce que les sources ne laissent le dire. Cette approche, qui porte sur les mentalités de l'époque et l'impact du cinéma sur les spectateurs, conduit à

chercher les traces de cette « sensibilisation » dans les textes d'époque, à prendre compte des champs lexicaux et de leur évolution dans le temps. Elle permet également, pour l'historien, de tenir compte de la subjectivité des textes d'époque plutôt que de ne s'attacher qu'à des sources objectives ou des témoignages.

Dans le cadre de cette thèse, la formulation « conscience cinématographique », dont l'occurrence n'est pas rare dans la littérature consacrée à l'histoire du cinéma, désigne cette partie de la conscience qui est façonnée par le cinéma. Cette conscience a plusieurs fonctions qui correspondent, chacune, à diverses catégories de conscience cinématographique. Il s'agit de la « sensibilité à l'esthétique du film », la « sensibilité à la technicité du film », la « sensibilité à la culture cinématographique », la « sensibilité au cinéma en tant qu'objet de pensée » ainsi que d'autres éléments permettant à la conscience de s'exercer (le lieu de la mémoire où reposent les souvenirs de films, les moments de cinéma associés à une identité personnelle, la faculté d'être conscient de sa propre conscience filmique et la conscience filmique subjective, forme de conscience et de sensibilité liée à une grande connaissance du cinéma.

Ces diverses catégories de « sensibilité » à la chose cinématographique forment un vaste champ d'étude permettant de prendre la mesure de la transformation des mentalités et de cartographier le territoire inexploré évoqué par Murray Smith. Chacune de ces catégories représente un domaine de recherche spécifique, avec ses questionnements et ses enjeux propres, mais prend place dans un champ plus vaste, celui de « conscience cinématographique ». Quand cette approche s'applique aux sources documentaires portant spécifiquement sur le cinéma et son évolution, il est possible de voir à quel point le cinéma transforme les mentalités.

**Mots-clés :** conscience cinématographique, mentalité, spectateur, historiographie, épistémologie, presse corporative, cinéma des premiers temps

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## TERMINOLOGY

Note to the reader: this thesis makes frequent usage of the formulation ‘film consciousness’ which appears with single quotation marks, double quotation marks, or no quotation marks.<sup>1</sup> The same is true of other words in this thesis (‘consciousness’, ‘experience’, ‘film experience’). These punctuations generally, though not always, have the following significance:

‘film consciousness’	Single quotations marks are used when the formulation itself is under discussion. It is not yet an expression, term or concept, but simply a set of words.
“film consciousness”	Double quotation marks are usually clarified in context, but might indicate “film consciousness” is being discussed as a provisional or undefined idea, as an expression, or as a concept.
film consciousness	The absence of quotation marks does not necessarily mean that it has shifted from provisional idea, expression or concept to established fact, only that some fact about the formulation has been established in context, such that scare quotes are not necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> This style of punctuation is taken from Willard Quine’s discussion of the same problem in “Use versus Mention” in *Mathematical Logic* (Harvard University Press, 1981 [1940]), §4.

# INTRODUCTION

This thesis started as an attempt to define a means of studying early American film publications between 1907 and 1913, which answered to Jan Olsson's call for treating these publications as a "discursive domain" rather than just "source material."<sup>1</sup> As a discursive domain, these publications offer a rich variety of writing about film that over the course of several years reveals historically significant changes in terms of attitudes taken toward film, terminology, types of discourse, writing style, and self-awareness. The set of data comprising these different "regions" of activity did not seem to fit within a single overarching discursive category,<sup>2</sup> such as film theory or film criticism, that would provide an interconnected historical narrative. Out of a

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 18.

<sup>2</sup> "Region" has several different meanings in this thesis: 1) It refers literally to the different parts of a publication that contain discourse – articles, headings, titles, editorials, advertising, letters to the journal and so forth; 2) It refers to the activities associated with these different sections, such as attending screenings and observing audiences; 3) It is a deliberate metaphorical abstraction of the journal in order to see all activities as "territorially" connected, since writers operate in several regions simultaneously. In seeing them as regions, the idea is to limit observations to a particular region, in order to identify patterns or relationship with other regions, but also to see that the activity in one region as relevant to the understanding of the other regions (since sometimes changes in discourse or approach occur without an accompanying explanation). I appropriate this metaphor from Edward Branigan's usage of "region" (which he uses twice in *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory*) in reference to language. Branigan writes: "Thus, Wittgenstein's approach to meaning allows one to see how Socrates is making meaning with reference to metaphors and models that move us from one *region* of language to another in an attempt to solve a problem (in this case, the problem of identifying the perfect state)." (London: Routledge, 2006), 158 (my emphasis).

desire to categorize these various changes, and make sense of them globally and chronologically, the term that emerged was ‘film consciousness’, which enabled charting data that reflected an emerging, elusive and new consciousness of cinema that other discursive categories were not necessarily able to detect or conceptualize.

However, while the thesis started in this direction and accomplished, I believe, the objective of illustrating this consciousness,<sup>3</sup> the formulation itself – ‘film consciousness’ – subsequently became the main source of attention. The single quotation marks specify the nature of the phenomenon – ‘film consciousness’ is not initially regarded as a concept, idea, or fact of the world, but rather as a *formulation* in which the words ‘film’ and ‘consciousness’ are deliberately brought into relation in a performative act that renders them into a linguistic expression.<sup>4</sup> Because of the undetermined meaning of these words

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<sup>3</sup> In Chapter 1 of this thesis, “Film Consciousness in Early Film Trade Publications.”

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Fish’s summarizes the significance of “performative” language in contrast with “constative” language, based on his reading of J.L. Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) and John Searle’s *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge, 1969): “Constative language is language that is, or strives to be, accountable to the real or objective world. It is to constatives—to acts of referring, describing, and stating—that one puts the question, ‘Is it true or false?’ in which true and false are understood to be absolute judgments, made independently of any particular set of circumstances. Performative language, on the other hand, is circumstantial through and through. The success of a performative depends on certain things being the case when it is uttered; performatives therefore are appropriate or inappropriate in relation to conditions of utterance rather than true or false in relation to a reality that underlies all conditions.” Stanley Fish, “How To Do Things With Austin and Searle,” in *Is There A Text In This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 198.

– and the different forms of combining them<sup>5</sup> – the result is a dynamic, poetic and ambiguous text. In other words, when considered outside of the original context from which it emerged (my study of early film publications), the formulation presents a self-contained ontology open to different interpretations and uses, much like discovering a poem scribbled on a blackboard.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, in addition to analyzing “film consciousness” in early film publications, this thesis presents an inquiry into the possibilities of this formulation, which evolved organically from this initial historiographic process. The original objective of exploring the possibilities of ‘film consciousness’ was to situate and define my original usage of the formulation<sup>7</sup> within the broadest “film consciousness” context conceivable. However, the question that informally

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<sup>5</sup> As explained in Chapter 3, “Consciousness Defined,” in the section “Compound Nature: A ‘Grammar’ of ‘Consciousness’.”

<sup>6</sup> I am referring, of course, to Stanley Fish’s “How to Recognize a Poem When You See One.” Fish describes drawing a frame around a series of names left on a classroom blackboard from a previous class. He then proceeds to ask his students to interpret the ‘poem’.” This experiment explains the title of his book, which is intended to show, among other things, that textual meaning is relative to a given “interpretive community.” Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?*, 322-337.

<sup>7</sup> The first usage was probably in the context of writing this thesis, but it emerged from an article I published, “Film Theory as Practice: Criticism and Interpretation in the Early American Trade Press,” in which I concluded, “The appearance, in 1909, of a new language of film criticism . . . marks the emergence of a new consciousness about cinema.” This last statement became ‘film consciousness’ in the course of reformulating this idea. In *Proceedings of the XVI International Film Studies Conference-Permanent Seminar on History of Film Theories: In the Very Beginning, at the Very End, 2009*, edited by Francesco Casetti and Jane Gaines (Udine: Forum, 2010): 83-93.

guided this pursuit – “what is film consciousness?” – presented a difficult challenge. It had no “final answers,”<sup>8</sup> or any answer, that made sense without first defining a set of conditions under which such a question was intelligible – which in turn then became the main problematic. As Stanley Fish writes,

The success of a performative depends on certain things being the case when it is uttered; performatives therefore are appropriate or inappropriate in relation to conditions of utterance rather than true or false in relation to a reality that underlies all conditions.<sup>9</sup>

The guiding question thus shifted from “what is film consciousness” to “what is the effect of using the formulation ‘film consciousness’ under different conditions?” This question, as opposed to the first, was answerable pragmatically by defining a “semantic field of consciousness.” This field is imagined as consisting of the sum of statements in which the term ‘consciousness’ – including its variants (‘conscious’) and relatives (‘awareness’) – is used intelligibly.<sup>10</sup> It is then possible to bring the “semantic field of consciousness” into relation with the semantic field of ‘film’. This process gives rise to a series of “categories of film consciousness,” each with different areas of concern, orientations and applicability that nevertheless share in common this initial act of regarding the formulation as a poetic text.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a positions sometimes attributed to Richard Rorty, who believed there were no “final answers” to “questions about truth and knowledge,” as Manuel Arriaga details in *The Modernist-Postmodernist Quarrel on Philosophy and Justice: A Possible Levinasian Mediation* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 97.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text In This Class?*, 198.

<sup>10</sup> Presented in Chapters 2 and 3, “Talking Past Each Other” and “‘Consciousness’ Defined.”

The “categories of film consciousness” constructed on this basis are dividable as follows: “film awareness” (which comprises “film aesthetic awareness,” “film production awareness,” and “film culture awareness,”)<sup>11</sup> “a way of existing towards film”;<sup>12</sup> and an “entity in consciousness” (which includes “identity,” “place,” “faculty,” and “conscious experience”).<sup>13</sup> Each of these categories and subcategories should be regarded as examples of “film consciousness” by virtue of being derived from the formulation. Taken collectively, the categories constitute an imagined “field of film consciousness.”

A strict focus on the formulation naturally raises questions about the objective status of “film consciousness.” Is there something in the world that is “film consciousness?” Or is the formulation the means through which “film consciousness” as a fact or phenomena is imagined? Of course, the answer to these questions depends on the particular meaning of ‘film’ and ‘consciousness’, but there is also a more general epistemological problem underlying it regarding the relationship between language and the world. As

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<sup>11</sup> Presented in Chapter 4, “‘Film Consciousness’ as Film Awareness” and Chapter 5, “Film Culture Awareness and A Way of Existing Towards Film.”

<sup>12</sup> Presented in Chapter 5. It is comparable, but not equivalent to, the idea of a “film movement” and to François Albera’s notion of “cinematic episteme,” as Albera presents in “First Discourses on Film and the Construction of a ‘Cinematic Episteme’,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Early* edited by André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 121-140.

<sup>13</sup> Presented in Chapter 8, “An Entity in Consciousness.”

Edward Branigan asks in his study on the word ‘camera’, “does the world dictate language or does language dictate a world?”<sup>14</sup> While I am using Branigan to raise this point, the question of “linguistic relativity” is widely explored within the philosophy of language, such as in the works of Benjamin Lee Whorf (inspired from Edward Sapir, hence the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”), Ludwig Wittgenstein, Donald Davidson, John Searle, George Lakoff, Richard Rorty and John Searle.<sup>15</sup> These authors are therefore broadly cited in this thesis.

It seems the case that both the relativist and the more objectivist positions on language are supportable through evidence. In some cases the word seems to determine the object it names, as with abstract ideas like “cinema” or certain kinds of complex emotions, like “melancholy” or “love.” Even the performance and experience of visceral emotions like anger, as George Lakoff has illustrated in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal*

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<sup>14</sup> Branigan, *Projecting a Camera*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality; Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (1953; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Richard Rorty, “Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-dualist Account of Interpretation,” in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93–110; and Donald Davidson, “Radical Interpretation,” *Dialectica*, 27 (1973): 314–28 and “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme’, *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47 (1973-1974): 5–20.

*About the Mind*, are given form by everyday expressions particular to cultures.<sup>16</sup> In other cases, as with John Searle's concepts presented in Chapter 2, "Talking Past Each Other": Establishing a Conversation about 'Consciousness'," objects are sometimes present to the senses in a way that seems to go beyond the subjectivity of language, in which case the "thing" the language names is not necessarily "observer-dependent" (John Searle offers the example of a mountain).<sup>17</sup>

However, Rorty suggests that the purpose of these seemingly unresolvable questions that have no final answers is to "keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth."<sup>18</sup> This is the position adopted in this thesis. It is an attempt to initiate and maintain a conversation that examines the relationship between "film" and "consciousness" from different perspectives. The difference between the relativist and objectivist approach lies more so at a rhetorical and methodological level. When language is regarded as "dictating a world," then 'film consciousness' functions more as a category applied to certain data in order to "draw out" details showing different sorts of relationships between "film" and "consciousness." However when the world is

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<sup>16</sup> "[E]motions have an extremely complex conceptual structure, which gives rise to a wide variety of nontrivial inferences." Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, 380.

<sup>17</sup> In which case, the relationship between the word and its object is more on the order of "intrinsic." John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>18</sup> "[T]he point of edifying philosophy is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth." Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979), 377.



seen as “dictating language,” then ‘film consciousness’ will seem to name something in the world that is regarded as a *unified* phenomenon or property that has emerged from film experiences. Since a performative speech-act initiates both positions, the second position, the one that adopts an objective view of film consciousness, is more of an “as if” thought experiment that entails approaching “film consciousness” as having an objective standing. Thus, rather than resolving the question of linguistic relativity on absolute terms, both positions are useful to the objective of creating a field of film consciousness.

Consider, for example, the effect of seeing “film consciousness” as a fact in the world, as something *in* consciousness, such as a “faculty,” a “place in consciousness” containing our memories and experiences of film, a kind of “conscious experience,” or a part of our “identity.”<sup>19</sup> When regarding it from this perspective, certain questions and propositions logically arise. What causes “film consciousness” to emerge? The answer seems to point to “film experiences,” since experiences determine consciousness, at least in part. It is then logical to formulate the axiomatic proposition that “film consciousness belongs to a world in which film experiences occur.” The result of this axiom is the need to examine the meaning of “film experience” (in Chapter 6, “The Meaning of ‘Film Experience’) in order to illustrate its connection with film

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<sup>19</sup> Each of these is discussed in Chapter 7, “An Entity in Consciousness.”

consciousness. Film experience is also important to define because discussions within film studies regarding the relationship between film and consciousness are typically framed according to this terminology.<sup>20</sup>

Another assumption that follows from seeing film consciousness as a thing, as opposed to a category, is that it becomes a historical phenomenon that is linked with the history of film and discourse. As explained below, it is assumed to arise in conjunction with film, thus establishing the premise of “zero-degree” film consciousness, which is an imagined starting point of such consciousness. With such a hypothesis in mind, film consciousness will then assume a historical trajectory, **through** a series of “stages” or “turning points,” until a moment of attainment is reached, in which it will be possible to say, “film consciousness begins around this time.” These motifs are imposed on the historical field based on the assumption that film consciousness grows from “zero-degree” to a more complex, fulfilled variety.<sup>21</sup> In order to determine that film consciousness “begins” at a certain moment, and within a particular context, a set of criteria or conditions is therefore required. Thus, the very idea of an imagined, growing of consciousness from a zero-degree moment, to

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Vivian Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> I am adopting Hayden White’s usage of “motifs” as a historiographic maneuver. “This transformation of chronicle into story is effected by the characterization of some events in the chronicle in terms of inaugural motifs, of others in terms of terminating motifs, and of yet others in terms of transitional motifs.” White, *Metahistory*, 5.

attainment and fulfilment, drives towards the need for defining objectively verifiable criteria – and this without yet asserting what film consciousness is or should be. It is simply in the nature of this sort of thought experiment that these questions arise as a necessity. We can even wonder, for example, if there is film consciousness before film, such as when film consciousness is defined as a set of awareness that enables the understanding of film.<sup>22</sup>

While these are illustrations of the sorts of questions that arise when seeing “film consciousness” as having a unified, objective standing, this thesis is not the first place where ‘film consciousness’ appears in discourse. Over the years, there have been many “informal” usages in both public and institutional discourse (which is to say, it was used without a sense of it being a concept or term worth defining). Nor is this thesis the first attempt at a formal definition of “film consciousness.”<sup>23</sup> It is, though, the first attempt at defining a set of categories that seem to follow from examining the possibilities of the formulation ‘film consciousness’ and transforming these categories into a field of film consciousness. This field can serve to explain the informal history of the formulation’s usage from the likes of David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson

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<sup>22</sup> This is a point discussed in a presentation I delivered with Pierre Chemartin at DOMITOR on the connection between film and comics in early cinema, in which “montage” precedes cinema in some sense (pre-1890). Santiago Hidalgo and Pierre Chemartin, “Learning Film Performance through Comics,” DOMITOR, Brighton, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 3

and Dudley Andrew.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, I believe one of the outcomes of this thesis has been to rationalize and render explicit already existing ideas circulating within film studies that have been given momentary form through this terminology.

Finally, because of the change in trajectory in this thesis, from one area of concern (early writing about film) to another (the categories of film consciousness), the chapters do not necessarily follow a standard progression from a general hypothesis to a specific case study. Rather I would suggest that it is the contrary; the structure of the thesis reflects my own thought process, which began with a case study and self-awareness about the terminology used for presenting my argument, and then moved towards examining this terminology and its possibilities. Therefore, the chapter on early writing about film is presented first when the idea of “film consciousness” was in an emergent state. The remainder of the thesis is an attempt at following through on this intuitive usage, constructing the categories of film consciousness that form the basis of the field of film consciousness.

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<sup>24</sup> Examples from these authors are presented in the course of this thesis. For now, I will simply note these references in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 356, 517, 529, 532; David Bordwell, “Chinese boxes, Russian dolls, and Hollywood movies,” *David Bordwell’s Website on Cinema* (June 6, 2011). <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/06/06/chinese-boxes-russian-dolls-and-hollywood-movies>; and Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 75.

While the ideas taking shape in Chapter 1 were, from my perspective, internally coherent, there is nevertheless a break in method, subject and approach between Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, which initiates a different way of thinking about film consciousness. I believe this break, while stark, shares a common spirit with Edward Branigan's *Projecting a Camera: Language Games in Film Theory* – a work that partly inspired this thesis as many of the examples will show. Some of Branigan's chapters are drawn from texts written at different periods in his career and rewritten or reworked for his book. The effect is that each chapter stands as its own particular argument contributing to the essential idea that film theory, or any understanding of film, is revealed in the use of particular language, such as 'camera' and 'frame'. Thus, rather than being a unified argument, in which each chapter builds towards an inevitable conclusion, there is a spectrum of discussions that converge on a central, guiding idea. In spite of being rigorous, well researched and inventive, Branigan clearly recognizes the fact his work is on the margins of conventional approaches of film studies and at times incomplete in its conclusions. The same is true of this thesis – it is an orienting idea that connects the various middle chapters, as opposed to building towards a final conclusion.

A key element determining the way 'film consciousness' is defined and approached in this thesis is in the way the term "introduced itself" into my

own thinking and vocabulary. As mentioned, ‘film consciousness’ is not always discussed as a term, concept, or fact, although each of these is a possibility that exists in the nature and usage of the term. Based on my experience and observations in early cinema and early cinema historiography, and perhaps of academics more generally, the “trajectory” a particular word or expression takes either historically or within an individual vocabulary has an impact on the way the term is eventually defined.

Early cinema offers many examples of terminological trajectories, both from the perspective of the time and from the perspective of the historian. For example, one type of trajectory is when an existing term is used in reference to a phenomenon that is related in meaning to the original term. This is the case with the term “motography,” or any number of early cinema devices, which then came to name the phenomena as a whole, as David Hulfish’s 1909 article, “Art in Moving Pictures,” illustrates:

Photography....in motography should be considered as merely the means for placing before the audience the thoughts of the author of the picture as embodied in changing scenes, the art of the picture being developed fully in the scenes themselves before the motion picture camera is placed before them.<sup>25</sup>

The meaning of “motography” in this passage is that of “film” or “cinema.” As Chapter 1 indicates, early cinema, especially the first five years, is

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<sup>25</sup> David Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 5 (May 1909): 139–40

overflowing with terms naming some aspect of the general phenomena of “film” – a confusing fact already lamented as early as 1899.<sup>26</sup> John Searle defines the concept of taking an existing word and giving it another new meaning as assigning the word a new “status-function.”<sup>27</sup> However, this assignment of meaning, as the “motography” example shows, is not always deliberate or sudden. Sometimes it grows over time through many usages and appropriations.

A parallel terminological trajectory, closely linked with this one, is when an existing term or expression is *deliberately* assigned a new “status-function.” The trajectory of the term begins at that moment, in the act of presenting it and explaining its new function and meaning. Of course, as with Gaudreault’s concept of “cinématographie-attraction” (translated as kine-attractography)<sup>28</sup> the term might already have a prior history which serves to shape its new institutional meaning,<sup>29</sup> but the difference between Hulfish’s use of

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<sup>26</sup> Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production, and Practical Working* (1899; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970), 187.

<sup>27</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 51-57.

<sup>28</sup> Translated into English by Timothy Barnard and André Gaudreault, as explained in André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 47-48.

<sup>29</sup> Gaudreault explains the advent of this term as follows: “I would very much have liked to have had a flash of genius and been able to blend these two expressions to come up with something like cinématographie-attraction, but I found that I had been beaten to the punch: in consulting Jean Giraud’s indispensable *Le Lexique français du cinéma des origines à 1930* I discovered that this French term already existed. Its only known occurrence to date is in the writings of one of the first film historians: not just anybody because, some twenty years before publishing his history of the cinema, he had been not only a contemporary of

“motography” and Gaudreault’s usage of “cinématographie-attraction” is precisely at the level of self-awareness and intention. Hulfish’s usage is an example of an existing way of talking; Gaudreault’s usage is a deliberate act of redefining, or reassigning a new status function to an already existing term. Yet both are examples of an existing term that previously had a different linguistic life.

We can contrast the above trajectories with an activity that is perhaps best described as “inventing” words and expressions. A clear example in early cinema is the term “photoplay,” which was invented in a contest in which the public participated to name the object of cinema.<sup>30</sup> The *Moving Picture World* reported on this contest in 1910 in an article named “There Is Everything In A Name: What the Essanay Contest Means,” in which the editor indicates a preferred outcome to the contest:

We look then for a clean, good, ennobling name, one saying what it means and meaning what it says; easily, and if possible, universally understood, lest its good be lost in translations.<sup>31</sup>

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cinématographie-attraction but also one of its major figures. This early (!) historian was G.-Michel Coissac, the author in 1906 of the imposing *La Théorie et la pratique des projections*, published by La Bonne Presse.” André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 47.

<sup>30</sup> Torey Liepa, *Figures of Silent Speech: Silent Film Dialogue and the American Vernacular, 1909-1916* (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 223

<sup>31</sup> *Moving Picture World* (20 August 1910): 400. See as well *Moving Picture World*, “The New Name, Photoplay” (October 22, 1910): 933.



*Moving Picture World* also warned that the new name must not be “ambiguous or clouded in the verbiage of too technical or ‘dead language’ origin ... its growth must be in the clear atmosphere of the modern.”<sup>32</sup> While some invented words may hold an arbitrary relation to their objects, “photoplay” is particularly interesting because the ontological nature of the expression bears some connection with the referent in the way the individual words combine to form an idea. “Photoplay” is made of up two separate words, ‘photo’ and ‘play’, which construct not just a third object, but also a perspective on the nature of that object (the implication of which is that film consists in recording a play or in recording profilmic reality).

As with the earlier trajectory, this one also has different levels of intention. The term ‘photoplay’ was deliberately and consciously invented with a specific purpose in mind. But then there are also many early cinema terms that are similarly structured. One thinks of “moving pictures” and “animated views.” As opposed to “photoplay,” these expressions were hastily formed, without much forethought. They are examples of sudden reflexive reactions to a complex new phenomenon that is yet to receive a formal definition. Over time, there is a “settling” on a particular name as the most dominant. This was the

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<sup>32</sup> “There Is Everything In A Name: What the Essanay Contest Means,” quoted in Torey Liepa, *Figures of Silent Speech: Silent Film Dialogue and the American Vernacular, 1909-1916* (PhD diss., New York University, 2008), 223.

case as well with film. From a collection of many terms, eventually a few terms emerged as dominant – ‘movies,’ ‘film,’ ‘cinema’.

There are then two sets of terminological trajectories: one consists of taking existing terms and assigning them new meanings, either involuntarily or, as in academic activity, with a high degree of awareness; the other consists of “inventing” terms or expressions, which also follows a similar intentional spectrum, from very deliberate as with the “photoplay,” or less deliberate, as with “moving pictures.” This grid – with its different axes – can illuminate one of the challenges presented in this thesis, which is how to situate oneself in relation to the term ‘film consciousness’.

Obviously, the ideal trajectory from an academic perspective, and the one that offers the most control over the meaning and its delivery to an audience, is either through the deliberate and self-conscious invention of a term, or through the assignment of a new meaning to an existing term. The “life of the term” – so to speak – begins though a deliberate, conscious act, in which a phenomenon or problem is encountered that requires a new name. In such a scenario, the academic explains the procedure through which a new term came into being, such as the one André Gaudreault provides in *Film and Attraction*.<sup>33</sup> Gaudreault engages in the process that Searle defines as the

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<sup>33</sup> See footnote 28 above.

basis of all acts of constructing social reality, which is declaring that “X counts as Y in C” – where X is an existing word, sign, behaviour, Y is the same word, sign or behaviour but with a different status-function, and C is the context in which Y obtains this status function.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Gaudreault asks us to regard “cinématographie-attraction” as a new paradigm of cinema in the context of early cinema studies.

With this context in mind, I would like to consider a different trajectory, particular to this thesis – that displays elements from each of these mentioned; and which therefore presents a challenge that requires developing a unique model. It involves a situation in which a term enters a vocabulary through the second trajectory – which is to say, as “invented” – but in a manner that is not necessarily intentional. The case with ‘film consciousness’ is that it gradually “nudged” its way into my own writing and thinking, acquiring a temporary, ambiguous function and meaning, *before attaining a defined function and meaning*. In such a scenario, the formulation begins to occupy a space in the imagination before there is an opportunity to reflect on it. It stands in an “indeterminate” position, ready to become an idea or concrete thought as certain facts are encountered, such as the ones presented in Chapter 1.

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<sup>34</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 43-44.

Thus, for a period of time I used the formulation with an apparent clarity in mind. But then as the term was applied again and again, in new contexts, and as my attention was turned towards the formulation itself, this clarity was put into question, resulting in a struggle to understand its meaning. Formulations or words without context are by nature difficult to define. Yet, it soon became clear that the vagueness of the term was something desirable – it “directed the attention” in ways that offered just the right distance and perspective on a particular subject, neither closing it down, nor rendering it meaningless.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, there was a moment when the formulation shifted from its latent imaginary position to another area of the imagination, perhaps because of a requirement to finally explain its meaning, such as in this thesis. There was suddenly an institutional obligation to explain the meaning of ‘film consciousness’. At that moment, it was difficult to define an approach to the question of what film consciousness referred to, after all how does one rationally define a formulation that enters consciousness through this trajectory, in which it initially seemed clear, but only for a time, but then became vague and elusive? Each of these stages in the “life of the term”

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<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Burke, “Terministic Screens,” in *Language as symbolic action; essays on life, literature, and method* (Berkeley: University of California Press). Burke defines certain terms as being “a terministic screen” that “directs the attention to one field rather than another,” in which “there can be different screens, each with its ways of directing the attention and shaping the range of observations implicit in the given terminology.”

appeared to serve a function, to advance thinking in a particular manner, in which case the means through which it attained such functions would indicate its meaning. However, this would entail a description of a conscious process that is too complex, and disordered, especially since these “usages” were never publicly defined, such as in publications, so that a history of its changing meaning could be definitively charted (otherwise, would a history of “thesis drafts” be at all salient – my feeling is not).

Moreover, consider a situation in which in the course of defining the term it is discovered, much as in Gaudreault’s own process, that the formulation *already has* a history of informal usage. How would one begin the process of defining a formulation that assumed each of these various positions and functions in the imagination, and which also had an external life, in public and academic discourse, but not really at a level that would be considered “institutional”? Does one describe the process the formulation undertook in the imagination? Is the public life of the formulation relevant? How would these public uses fit with a personal definition? These questions do not seem to have a clear answer or an accepted method of rationalization.

In going over these questions, several options emerged as potential ways of defining the formulation. One option was to define the way the formulation operated in one’s own thinking, which, as stated, seemed difficult and perhaps

self-indulgent. A second possibility was to assign an axiomatic definition to the formulation, as if it were invented on the spot, based on the particular purposes that it was given over time. This is the “ideal situation” mentioned above, because the process of explanation is more or less rational, although the history of the life of the term is cut short. A third possibility was to research the term through the technologies now available, such as search engines or databases, to see if the formulation had an existing meaning and to define the formulation from this external perspective, which would remove the subjective experience. A final possibility was to approach the formulation as if it were encountered for the first time, as a poetic construction, in which case, the goal would be to explore its possibilities of meaning based on the words found in the term (the reason “cinema of attractions” is so successful, I would argue, is because it generates just this type of reflection).

While this thesis adopted the latter option, it includes elements from the other three in order to cover a broader range of possibilities and to explain the reasoning in implementing the formulation in a particular manner. Therefore, it makes sense at *this moment*, from the perspective of this Introduction, to say that ‘film consciousness’ is foremost a *possibility of thought*, whose meaning or function depends on the way ‘film consciousness’ is interpreted and used in different contexts. These “possibilities” become actualized in terms of concepts, facts, thought experiments, and conjectures under different

conditions, but can nevertheless be described as an ensemble, as a field. This process of reflection begins in Chapter 2, “Talking Past Each Other:” Establishing a Conversation about ‘Consciousness.’

## 1. Research Justification

Part of the justification for this thesis is admittedly an act of faith that this sort of exploration into the meaning of words, in which all of the possibilities of an expression are considered, is a relevant contribution, especially an expression as elusive and evocative as ‘film consciousness’. It answers, in part, to Richard Rorty’s belief that academic activity within the humanities sometimes entails “recontextualizing for the hell of it,”<sup>36</sup> which involves examining and inventing vocabularies through which reality is “redescribed.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, even if the above accurately expresses the ethos of the thesis, there is also a more traditional academic justification. I would suggest that from the perspective of “contributing to a body of knowledge,”

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Rorty, “Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-dualist Account of Interpretation,” in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>37</sup> Rorty uses “redescription” as a “method of inquiry” (and political act) that contends with the “privileged contexts” that presume to provide access to objective truth, as Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein write in *The Rorty Reader* in defining Rorty’s ideas: “Without privileged contexts and accepted criteria, all we can do is redescribe things and compare one redescription with another.” (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 34.

this thesis unambiguously contributes to at least two of them: the study of “early film discourse” and the study “film and consciousness.” Furthermore, I believe this thesis presents an example of the process through which academic terms become knowledge, and in this regard, the thesis also contributes to the epistemology of film studies. Because the thesis adopts a pragmatic posture towards language, it hopefully also clarifies some of the key terminology – such as “film experience” – that is typically used for thinking about the relationship between film and consciousness as well.

#### *A. Early Cinema Discourses*

The first field then – early film discourse – is of increasing importance within cinema studies.<sup>38</sup> Jan Olsson, in his *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915*, synthesizes one of the problems faced in this field when it comes to early film publications, the main corpus treated in this thesis:

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<sup>38</sup> The recently published *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema* dedicates an entire section to this subdomain of early cinema studies. Gaudreault, Dulac and Hidalgo, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema*, 119-242. But it also occupies an important place within the ongoing Permanent Seminar on Film Theory, based on a relatively extensive network of universities and research groups, including the Universities of Milan, Montreal, Udine, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Concordia and Goldsmiths, the University of London, as well as GRAFICS (University of Montreal) and ARTHEMIS (Concordia University). Such conferences as IMPACT (*The Impact of Technological Innovations on the Historiography and Theory of Cinema*), held in Montreal in November 2011, are a reflection of this growing interest as well.



The interplay between cinema and daily print culture at critical junctures during the transitional era represents a discursive domain calling for analysis as a phenomenon in its own right, apart from being yet another trove of source material added to the panoply of paper sources otherwise mobilized by film historians for fleshing out film culture.<sup>39</sup>

This echoes Charlie Keil's criticism of Eileen Bowser's "transparent" use of the *Moving Picture World* in *The Transformation of Cinema, 1907-1915*:

[I]deally, sources like *Moving Picture World* should be treated as forms of discourse which, though valuable for the information they contain, must also be understood as representational instances themselves."<sup>40</sup>

When seen as "discursive domains," or as "forms of discourse," the data presented in these journals assumes a different evidentiary status. The data reflects film experience, which underlies film consciousness. While these publications offer discourse for analysis, these writings are also difficult to classify in terms of types of discourse, especially without accounting for intention and awareness. The overriding assumption, characterized in the language applied to this discourse, is that underlying its production is a "naïve consciousness," which tends to dismiss critical or theoretical concerns found in the writing.<sup>41</sup> The means of discerning this consciousness varies, but one of them includes avoiding "methodological individualism," which

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<sup>39</sup> Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles before Hollywood*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Charlie Keil, "Book Review: Primitive No More: Early Cinema's Coming of Age," *Persistence of Vision*, no. 9 (1991): 107-117.

<sup>41</sup> I will explain this assumption in Chapter 1.

privileges explanations of “social phenomena in terms of individuals and their interaction. . .”<sup>42</sup> especially those that emphasize “great men.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, in order to grasp the consciousness of early film publications, which contains substantial discourse published anonymously, particularly in the film criticism sections, it is necessary to see the “collective activity” as the most essential. This aligns with what David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson define as “group causes,” or “methodological collectivism,” which emphasize the “rules and roles, structures and routines” of institutions such as trade publications.<sup>44</sup> Early cinema works such as Richard Abel’s *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910*,<sup>45</sup> Charlie Keil’s *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (especially the section on early film criticism),<sup>46</sup> and of course the Jan Olsson book mentioned above, strike a balance between observing collective patterns and emphasizing the important contributions of lesser known writers, such as

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<sup>42</sup> Lars Udehn, *Methodological Individualism: Background, History, and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1

<sup>43</sup> Paul A. Erickson and Liam Donat Murphy, *A History of Anthropological Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 100.

<sup>44</sup> Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film history: An Introduction*. 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 6-7.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>46</sup> Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 27-44.

Thomas Bedding, W. Stephen Bush, Louis Reeves Harrison, and David S. Hulfish.<sup>47</sup>

As will be discussed in Chapter 1, the form in which the discursive data is presented in these publications is critical to the way consciousness becomes apparent to historians, incrementally revealing, as anthropologists Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing describe it, “consciousness [that] comes to know itself in and through the movement between different points of view in time and space.”<sup>48</sup> In this regard, these publications present four key characteristics favourable to describing “film consciousness:” the data is produced in regular intervals (weekly and monthly) over a sustained period of time; the data is dispersed over a range of different regions, including within sections of the journal, but also across a variety of journals; the discourse is produced by a collection of writers, many of whom remain anonymous; and perhaps most significantly, these journals operated in the absence of any competing institutions during a time of “discovery” about writing about film, which therefore encouraged experimentation with language and terminology. This spatial and temporal background thus bring slight changes, such as

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<sup>47</sup> The first three worked for *The Moving Picture World*, while Hulfish wrote for *Nickelodeon*.

<sup>48</sup> Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing write: “consciousness [that] comes to know itself in and through the movement between different points of view in time and space.” *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72.

those found in ordinary language-use, into relief, thus becoming signs of underlying, changing consciousness.

This approach shares a likeness with the one Paul Moore espouses in his study of early newspaper publications – defined as “distant readings” – which consists of an “analysis across texts, as opposed to a ‘close reading’ of the text itself.”<sup>49</sup> Moore adopts the concept of “distant readings” from Franco Moretti, who describes it as a “focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, rather than examining individual instances of consciousness, the entirety of the trade press is seen as a more global textual system generating consciousness, made up of different “regions” of film consciousness that need to be seen and analyzed individually but along a continuum.

Perhaps the most straightforward starting point for beginning to think about “film consciousness” in the context of early publications is to consider the differences in the way early journal writers apprehended the film phenomenon. This will serve as both an example of the type of problem early film publications present that required novel conceptualization, but also as an

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Moore, “A ‘Distant Reading’ of the ‘Chaser Theory’: Local Views and the Digital Generation of New Cinema History,” currently unpublished, with expected publication in *Technology and Film Scholarship: Experience, Study, History*, edited by André Gaudreault and Santiago Hidalgo (Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000): 54-68, quoted in Paul Moore, “A ‘Distant Reading’ of the ‘Chaser Theory’.

example of the way the formulation ‘film consciousness’ becomes an idea or concept in historiography. When first launched, early film journals tended toward writing about film as if it were a “transparent window” that presented an unmediated view of profilmic reality.<sup>51</sup> For these writers, the idea of film consisted of an apparatus that recorded reality, rather than participating in the construction of this reality. This concept of film corresponds with one of the “film paradigms” André Gaudreault discusses in his own work on early cinema, which he defines as “capturing and restoring,”<sup>52</sup> in which the cinematographer or camera operator records the profilmic reality found before the camera, neither manipulating the camera, nor interfering with the profilmic reality.

This paradigm, according to Gaudreault, is characteristic of early Lumière “actualities,” but also of other films from the beginnings of cinema. The other two paradigms that Gaudreault presents, “monstration” and “narration,” include some level of manipulation at the filmographic level, although not always in the case of “monstration.”<sup>53</sup> For Gaudreault, filmographic manipulations consist of “fragmentations” in the film. Although more commonly understood as “editing,” the notion of fragmentation is a more

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<sup>51</sup> Branigan uses the metaphor of a “window” to characterize two contrasting spectatorship positions, those who see through “the frame of the ‘window’” and those who see that the frame “constrains and shapes” the reality. *Projecting a Camera*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 56

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

technical distinction, in that it accounts for any kind of break in the film, whether placed there through in-camera editing, negative cutting, or film print cutting. It is also intended as a neutral distinction that avoids laying claim to the invention of editing as a narrative practice. Gaudreault concludes that “from this perspective, we might see the paradigm of capturing as a sort of horizon category, a zero degree of filming, without in the process asserting, historically speaking, that such an activity ever existed in a pure state.”<sup>54</sup>

We might imagine, then, that the way the first early journal writers regarded film is analogous to the “capturing and restoring” paradigm. This is true whether or not there were *actual* filmographic operations in the films in question. From the perspective of the writer (or spectator), it was as if the manipulations were invisible to consciousness. These manipulations included not only fragmentation, but also any sort of manipulation, including camera movements, rack focusing, panning, framing, and so forth. To the extent that these manipulations are implicated in the construction of a narrative, or in any kind of film effect, they are filmographic operations to the same degree as editing. The point, however, is that these operations were not conceptualized as filmic operations, but rather were seen as unconnected to the narrative. Rather, these elements were reflections of “mechanical perfection,” which was

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 58.

a standard distinct from the quality of the film itself.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, a tendency in early writing about film was to focus on the story or content of the film, to the exclusion of the filmographic operations, as if the camera captured these events without any other interventions. It is possible, then, to define this “lack of consciousness” of the filmographic as “zero degree film consciousness.” It is the mirror image of Gaudreault’s “capturing and restoring” in that the writer or spectator does not display or communicate an awareness of the filmographic operations.

Once this operating premise is applied to the study of early film publications, the publications are analyzable from the perspective of “increasing film consciousness,” according to the criteria mentioned. This consciousness appeared to recognize the connection between the filmographic and the film effects (whether the effect was tied to a narrative or not). In this sense, the transparent window of the frame became visible to many writers and evolved into a central theme, although not always communicated explicitly. Rather than imagining film as consisting of two different categories of effects, a recording device effect and a filmographic effect – there was a sense of appreciation and awareness that these effects formed a single, unified phenomenon named “film.” It is at this very point that one could make the statement, “here was the beginning of film consciousness,” even if, again, it is

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<sup>55</sup> “The Picture the Audience Likes,” *Moving Picture World* (11 February 1911): 310.

an arbitrary and ambiguous determination. It should be seen, merely, as a means of drawing out certain evidence that would support this idea. That it coincides with another change in film consciousness, a new “a way of existing towards film” that involves the study of audiences, further supports this hypothesis (film study and film scholarship are examples of ways of existing towards film as defined in Chapter 5, “Film Culture Awareness” as “A Way Of Existing Towards Film.”).<sup>56</sup>

There is, nevertheless, a larger context that provides a justification to the idea of regarding early writing about film from the perspective of film consciousness, which is the terminology that some film scholars have applied to the writing. As Gaudreault writes, “the names historians give to their object of study often reveal their position on it.”<sup>57</sup> In this regard, we can distinguish “objective historical facts” from the names that are applied to them, in order to see “the position” the historian has adopted. What is revealed, in some examples, is a position that denies consciousness in these writings, or at least, an interesting consciousness.

The objective facts are that between 1906 and 1910, dozens of trade film publications were launched in the United States, starting with *Views and*

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<sup>56</sup> The evidence supporting the assertion that film critics studied audiences, from which they derived some theoretical conclusions, is in Chapter 1, in the section named “Regions of Self-Consciousness.”

<sup>57</sup> Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 2.



*Film Index* in April 26, 1906.<sup>58</sup> In the next few years, several new trade journals, such as *Moving Picture World* (1907), *Show World* (1907), *Motion Picture News* (1908), *Nickelodeon* (1909)<sup>59</sup> and *Film Reports* (ca. 1910) entered the market. Additionally, already established journals such as *Variety* and the *New York Dramatic Mirror*, both of which opened film criticism departments during these years,<sup>60</sup> turned their attention to film. On the whole, these publications can be regarded as a film trade press or institution (and not just a series of individual publications).

While these journals varied in length, content, and interests, all contained various sorts of writing about film. The following are examples of scholars defining this writing (my emphases):

Example 1 (David Bordwell):

Film criticism was born from reviewing, and the earliest prototypes of the “film critic” were *journalists* charged with *discussing*, on a weekly basis, the current output of the film industry.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Renamed *Film Index* in September 1908 and acquired by *Moving Picture World* in June 1911. Annette D’Agostino, *Filmmakers in the Moving Picture World: An Index of Articles, 1907–1927* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1997), 13.

<sup>59</sup> Renamed *Motography* on August 1, 1910.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Dramatic Mirror* started publishing film criticism on May 30, 1908; *Variety* opened a section on January 19, 1907 but discontinued it between March 1911 and January 1913; *Moving Picture World* started publishing criticism under the heading of “Comments on the Film Subjects” on October 10, 1908. *Moving Picture World* is among the most prolific American trade journals in terms of quantity of articles and criticism on film and is one of the reasons it is cited often among early film trade journals.

<sup>61</sup> David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*

#### Example 2 (Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack):

The development of journalistic reviewing and its evolution into serious criticism is tied to the development of film showings to a theatre audience [...] Early pieces of this *so-called criticism* were, in reality, a combination of *reportage* (describing the film event in factual terms) and review (giving the audience, yet to see the film, advice as to its entertainment value).<sup>62</sup>

#### Example 3 (Myron Lounsbury):

These “reviews” ... were *simply plot summaries* of recent films from the major companies. Printed as useful journalistic information, *the reviews did not apply any critical standards* but left the reader to judge the scenario from the liveliness or sentiment of the action described by the reporter.<sup>63</sup>

#### Example 4 (Anthony Slide):

[M]ost early film criticism was little more than a detailed synopsis of a new film, with *no opinion* whatsoever expressed.<sup>64</sup>

While these perspectives do not constitute the entirety of opinion on these writings, they are perhaps – or at least were – representative of a conventional view on these writings. At the very least they share a perspective and terminology that raises questions of the sort Gaudreault asks,

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(Harvard University Press, 1989), 21.

<sup>62</sup> Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack, *Introduction to Film Criticism: Major Critical Approaches to Narrative Film* (New York: Longman, 1989), 5.

<sup>63</sup> Myron Osborn Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909–1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 8.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony Slide, ed., *Selected Film Criticism 1896–1911* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1982), x.

about a potential meaning in the “names historians give.” I will simply note that a “film critic” is definable as a specialist who analyzes films and offers personal opinions, insights and criticism. The film critic displays curiosity about the nature of film, and calls attention to details a public viewer usually misses. A “reporter” or “journalist,” on the other hand, is definable as a “generalist.” The nature of the profession requires a certain detached disposition, such as the desire to provide an objective account of facts, without the inclusion of personal opinions. Unlike the narrow specialization of the film critic, the reporter or journalist will only have a surface understanding of film and produce discourse that is consequent with that identity, which is to say, not “criticism.” Thus, the vocabulary adopted in the above accounts seems oriented towards erasing the presence of consciousness on the side of the discourse itself – “no opinions,” “no critical standards,” “reportage,” “discussing” “descriptions” – and on the side of the author – “journalist,” “reporter” and also “film critic” (which are placed in scare quotes). The underlying argument in the language itself is that this is a period without an interesting consciousness, and more especially, without self-consciousness. Wittgenstein might refer to it as a “language-game” intended to deny consciousness, in which all of the terms and characterizations line up in the same direction.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (1953;

Without confronting the criteria used for arriving at these labels and classifications directly, or examining the discourse in question, I would like to present a second set of objective facts: the way these very writers described themselves and described their writing. The following are all articles published during this period: “Film Criticism in the Lay Press,”<sup>66</sup> “Suggestions to a Worried Critic,”<sup>67</sup> “Advertising and Criticising,”<sup>68</sup> “Advertising, Boosting and Criticism,”<sup>69</sup> “Reviews of Films Commended: ‘The Mirror’ is Complimented for its Impartial Criticisms – Improvement in Film Advocated,”<sup>70</sup> “Critic, Producer and Exhibitor,”<sup>71</sup> “Film Criticism in the Lay Press,”<sup>72</sup> “Film Criticism,”<sup>73</sup> “The Art of Criticism,”<sup>74</sup> “Mr. Critic,”<sup>75</sup> “Film and Critics,”<sup>76</sup> “Criticising Moving Pictures.”<sup>77</sup> Each of these articles include some variation of “criticism” or “critic” in the title. This is the terminology of the period – the same period that is being described with the opposite terminology.

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repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), §7.

<sup>66</sup> *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 20 (May 20, 1911): 1113

<sup>67</sup> W. Stephen Bush, *Moving Picture World* 10, no. 10 (December 9, 1911).

<sup>68</sup> W. Stephen Bush, *Moving Picture World* 14, no. 8 (November 23, 1912): 750.

<sup>69</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, *Moving Picture World* 15, no. 14 (March 29, 1913): 1313.

<sup>70</sup> *New York Dramatic Mirror* 59, no. 1540 (June 27, 1908): 7.

<sup>71</sup> W. Stephen Bush, *Moving Picture World* 14, no. 7 (November 17, 1912): 637.

<sup>72</sup> *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 18 (May 20, 1911): 1113.

<sup>73</sup> *Motography* (August 1911): 56, repr. in Slide, *Selected Film Criticism*, 116.

<sup>74</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, *Moving Picture World* 19, no. 5 (January 30, 1914): 521.

<sup>75</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, *Moving Picture World* 10, no. 4 (October 28, 1911): 274.

<sup>76</sup> *Film Reports* (October 1, 1910): 8, repr. in Slide, *Selected Film Criticism*, 115.

<sup>77</sup> *Nickelodeon* 2, no. 4 (October 1909): 103.

When differences arise in the way a given reality is named – and especially when the difference is between the historian’s language and the language of the group being described – questions are obviously raised about the reasoning involved. Is it a question of criteria? Is it a question of not sharing the same understanding of the terminology? Is it a question of not having access to certain facts? More to the point, is the terminology more or less the same *anyway* – which is to say, does it really matter? These are all valid questions – and perhaps each of them is resolvable objectively, at least in theory. Maybe what the early writer imagined as “film critic” and “film criticism” is different than what is imagined as the same today. We do not want to fall into the trap Gaudreault describes as “the naive assumption of historicism, namely that we must set ourselves within the spirit of the age, and think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity.”<sup>78</sup>

At the same time, there is an interesting clash of descriptions, even if adopting the terminology of the time might be regarded as misleading from our perspective. Maybe it is the case that these were not “film critics” and that they did not produce “film criticism” according to some criteria. Moreover, Gaudreault advances the methodology – perhaps more than anyone within early cinema studies, or film studies more broadly – that adopting the

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<sup>78</sup> Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 36.

terminology of the period is relevant. Gaudreault's most recent formulation of the concept of "cinema of attractions," that of "kine-attractography," emphasizes the question of language both from the perspective of the historian and of the period, when writing about the "alien quality" of early films:

The irreducibility of this alien quality becomes apparent when we seek to remain conscious of the extent of the break in continuity being proposed here and succeed in making its various aspects materially present. When describing early cinema, one of the techniques we could use to clearly distinguish between the two paradigms would be systematically to use the terms and expressions current in the period in question. Spelled out, this would mean saying, for example, "manufacturer of animated pictures" instead of "film producer," "kinematographer" instead of "cineaste," etc., in keeping with usage of the day. The mental effort needed each time we are forced to make a lexical choice of this kind is a form of intellectual gymnastics that enables us to get a better and more tangible grasp of the alien quality of early cinema. Seeing Méliès and Porter, for example, as kinematographers (which they were) rather than as cineastes (which they were not) does not at all involve the same critical and theoretical framework.<sup>79</sup>

Of course, the problem with early film criticism and the way it has been defined is different than Gaudreault's. The point of departure is that early films have unique and interesting qualities that are effaced through modern concepts. Moreover, our terminology, Gaudreault argues, tends to produce a teleological narrative and false continuity of intentions, as he and Tom

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<sup>79</sup> Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, 36.

Gunning make clear in their later retrospective on the concept of “cinema of attractions” in “Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History:”

Historians of previous generations . . . had the irritating habit of considering and judging early cinema on the basis of not yet extant norms, of the only kind of cinema worthy, in their eyes, of the label “specifically cinematic quality.” It is precisely this vision that has been qualified as teleological because it has a tendency to privilege a logic of finality in the assessment of a reality, namely the cinema of 1895 to 1915 which, on the contrary, should be measured on the basis of its own successive finalities, year after year, or at least period after period.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, adopting the language from the time, and applying a disconcerting, mind-bending term to the historical object (“kine-attractography”), serves the function of rendering the films unfamiliar to our normal descriptions. Gaudreault thus “re-describes” the historical object with the language of the time in order to emphasize the “alien quality” in the films. But it also rehabilitates the consciousness of the filmmakers, by seeing them as intending to make the films in question with a specific purpose in mind, in consideration of the aesthetic style and exhibition context of the period, rather than “on the basis of not yet extant norms.”

Given this context, the purpose of applying a term such as “film consciousness” to early film criticism is threefold. First, it avoids the issue of

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<sup>80</sup> André Gaudreault and Tom Gunning, “Early Cinema as a Challenge to Film History,” in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* edited by Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 369.

linguistic equivalency between the object of study and the historian by introducing a different standard against which to judge the discourse. Secondly, it responds to the denial of consciousness by automatically inserting the term into the problematic – the language itself now redescribes the problem and directs the attention onto a broader pattern of behaviour that includes discerning the consciousness that is motivating seemingly ordinary writing. Thirdly, it takes “intention” as a serious element in the act of historical interpretation. Whether or not “film critic” or “film criticism” are accurate descriptions, the fact of the matter is that this sort of terminology was used with regularity and therefore reflects self-consciousness, which again casts the question back onto the need for a vocabulary, such as “film consciousness,” that brings this “alien quality” into focus. It is rather the approach to history that Hayden White defines as “formist”, which “aims at the identification of the unique characteristics of objects inhabiting the historical field.”<sup>81</sup> While these lines of argument are presented in Chapter 1, “Film consciousness in Early Film Trade Publications,” they are reoccurring argumentative threads throughout the body of the thesis.

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<sup>81</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 13-15.



## *B. Film and Consciousness*

The second field this thesis contributes to, I believe, is one Murray Smith defines in his survey of research on consciousness and film, when he concludes, “the relationship between consciousness and film remains largely uncharted territory.”<sup>82</sup> Smith’s survey is intended to provide a better understanding of the current state of research on the relationship between film and consciousness, but also to illustrate that film, both in the sense of filmmaking and film study, hardly seems to have contributed to the territory he imagines. The use of “imagines” is not intended as a pejorative comment in this case; it merely emphasizes that the “territory” Smith refers to lacks an institutional status. It is a territory imagined differently according to the particular definitions or ideas that someone assigns to “consciousness” and to its relationship with “film.” Smith appears somewhat certain about the fact that the territory and the types of research questions he surveys are self-evident, but this seems far from conclusive considering the diversity of definitions of “consciousness.” Still, Smith’s piece is extremely important towards establishing some necessary starting points for beginning to think about this relationship.

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<sup>82</sup> Murray Smith, “Consciousness,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 40.

The first notable fact of Smith's survey is that two different sets of film-related evidence are seen as germane to the study of the relationship between film and consciousness. The first film-related evidence Smith presents is taken from film studies, but very little research is cited. Smith includes a few recent studies which, more than being particularly noteworthy, are exemplary of the type of research Smith considers as fitting within his definition of the field of film and consciousness: the experience of sound, the experience of memory, and subliminal perceptions in the act of film viewing.<sup>83</sup> Aside from these recent examples, only Hugo Münsterberg's 1916 *The Photoplay; A Psychological Study* is included from the pantheon of film theory. Münsterberg is included because he "focused on the way in which the development of technique and form over the first two decades of cinema sought (on his view) to mimic the mental mechanisms of attention, memory, and emotion."<sup>84</sup> According to Smith, the "real successors to Münsterberg are not to be found in any body of film theory, but in particular traditions of filmmaking,"<sup>85</sup> therefore the only other "film scholars" included within his survey pertain to those offering biographical or contextual commentary about the filmmaking.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 42-44.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 44.

According to Smith, the most important and unique contributions come from unconventional cinema, arguing that the “most obvious stamping ground for the representation and exploration of the conscious mind has been the tradition of art cinema,” especially avant-garde filmmaking, which, according to Smith, has been seen as a “metaphor for consciousness.”<sup>86</sup> The argument in this case is persuasive: the experience of viewing experimental films is analogous to the way consciousness is experienced. It can be argued that experimental films manage to represent the experience of consciousness on screen. Since conscious experience is partially an experience of sensations and images, then filmmaking emerges as particularly suited to capturing and representing this quality of experience. This is perhaps most evident in the portrayal of dream consciousness in the case of surrealist and avant-garde films that portray oneiric worlds (such as Maya Deren’s films).

However, while Smith identifies a “gap” in research on the question of film and consciousness, which seems a reasonable justification for pursuing further research on the subject, such as in this thesis, the real issue his brief survey seems to raise is the lack of *conceptualization* of the relationship between film and consciousness. Two avenues are presented: either research is pursued in the way Smith conceptualizes the “unchartered territory,” or the territory is defined otherwise, in a way that conceptualizes the relationship

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 45.

between film and consciousness according to different categories, especially in terms fitting with a historical perspective. This latter alternative is the one followed in this thesis because the aim is more toward developing concepts that are operational within the historical field.

The “lack of conceptualization” mentioned above is not necessarily wrong or particular to Smith. He approaches the relationship from a valid perspective, which is from the field of “consciousness studies.”<sup>87</sup> As a field, it tends to regard consciousness as an inherent biological phenomenon. But it is also possible to approach consciousness from a cultural perspective that includes an interest in studying the relationship between consciousness and technologies, societies, and histories. While consciousness studies is interested in the biological origins and innate structures of consciousness, the humanities and social sciences tend to focus on the way consciousness develops or is experienced in *particular* circumstances. These paradigms (consciousness studies and humanities) employ the term ‘consciousness’ very differently, which complicates establishing a common ground between them. Does neuroscience study the same “consciousness” as does the philosopher, the psychologist, the historian or the anthropologist? Intuitively, the answer would seem “no” – yet each of these disciplines applies the term

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<sup>87</sup> This is a relatively new hybrid field combining philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience. Some of the leading philosopher figures include Daniel Dennett, David Chalmers, John Searle, and Thomas Nagel. Discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

‘consciousness’ in different circumstances; each lays claim to studying a phenomenon named ‘consciousness’ (this is discussed in detail in Chapter 2, “Talking Past Each Other,” which is a quote from philosopher David Chalmers about the word ‘consciousness’.)<sup>88</sup> A pragmatic perspective, such as the one favoured in this thesis, disregards whether any of these disciplines offers a “privileged context”<sup>89</sup> that employs the term “correctly.” Rather, the goal is to consider points taken from each context in order to build a more global understanding of the possibilities of the term, and therefore, the possibilities of ‘film consciousness’ as a means of exploring the field of research Smith defines.

It is perhaps indicative of the problem of conceptualization that the volume in which Smith publishes his survey, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, has a separate section for “Phenomenology,” written by Vivian Sobchack, which is widely seen within philosophy as an approach to the study of consciousness.<sup>90</sup> There is only a cursory, most likely editorially motivated, reference to Sobchack in Smith’s section, which is unusual considering Vivian Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* fits

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<sup>88</sup> David Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, edited by Max Velmans and Susan Schneider (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 226.

<sup>89</sup> See note 37 on Rorty.

<sup>90</sup> Vivian Sobchack, “Phenomenology,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, 435-445.

the definition – on the surface at least – of a major film studies work on the “unchartered territory” that is the relationship between film and consciousness. As Sobchack writes, “Experience comes to description in acts of reflection: consciousness turning reflexively on itself to become conscious of consciousness.”<sup>91</sup> This seemingly circular statement is in fact clear enough: the act of turning attention towards conscious experience, which includes the conscious experience of film, consists in the study of consciousness. Thus, the study of film experience, on the terms Sobchack defines, is the study of a relationship between film and consciousness.

However, there is good reason to exclude Sobchack’s work from a survey of the relationship between film and consciousness from the perspective Smith adopts (that of “consciousness studies.”). The reason is similar for it being mostly excluded from this thesis, except in the chapter that is specifically about film experience (Chapter 6, which outlines six different meanings of film experience). As explained in Chapters 2 and 6, Sobchack’s approach – and those like it – represents a challenge to the approaches adopted within consciousness studies and pragmatic philosophy more generally (which rather occupies the philosophical portion of “consciousness studies.”) This is because so-called “phenomenological approaches” destabilize language; stated

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<sup>91</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992), xvii.

otherwise, it is an approach that is difficult to reconcile with, or at least relate with, non-phenomenological approaches. As Sobchack writes about her own writing:

My prose is also engaged in serious punning and in a kind of dialectical play, inversions and parallelisms underscored in order to model and highlight in language the transitivity and reversibility experienced in subject-object relations in general, and vision in particular.<sup>92</sup>

The prose Sobchack defines is not specific to her, but rather seems emblematic of a genre of writing that “phenomenological approaches” espouse for methodological or epistemological reasons. There is a sense in which the writing is intended to challenge the precept of linguistic objectivity; however, in doing so, it renders the text itself difficult to comprehend. Spencer Shaw, author of *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze*, another work mostly excluded from this thesis, describes “doing phenomenology” as a “descriptive pursuit in which, as much as possible, one immerses oneself in an experience to analyze and understand it.”<sup>93</sup> The assumption – which is mostly true – is that language shapes or determines the way experience is described, although the two things (consciousness and language) seem mostly inseparable. The phenomenological solution to this dilemma, at least in the way these two particular authors approach it (but which is also sometimes

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<sup>92</sup> Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, xviii.

<sup>93</sup> Shaw, *Film Consciousness*, 3

described as “deconstructionist” for similar reasons),<sup>94</sup> is to use language in an idiosyncratic, destabilizing manner. The end result is that this approach, however much it seems to fit squarely within the study of consciousness, is irreconcilable with a more pragmatic approach that depends on ordinary language, and ordinary examples, in order to describe conscious experience.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, there is space for conceptualizing the relationship between film and consciousness from a more pragmatic approach, which includes acknowledging the relative place that a phenomenological approach occupies within a broader context. Shaw’s approach is one way of conceptualizing “film consciousness” – as a faculty or quasi-faculty (“a way of seeing”). Unfortunately, because of Shaw’s self-described phenomenological approach, it is a discourse that is limited in its ability to “maintain a conversation” (as Rorty suggests).

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<sup>94</sup> Chris Baldick defines deconstruction as “a philosophically sceptical approach to the possibility of coherent meaning in language.” Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), quoted in Peter Childs, *Contemporary Cultural Texts and Critical Approaches* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 115. Peter Childs raises the issue of “deconstruction” because it was this conceptually-heavy writing style that was the presumed target of physicist Alan Sokal’s 1996 hoax (now known as the “Sokal Affair”) that involved Sokal publishing a nonsensical text in *Social Text* and then revealing it as a hoax in the *New York Times*. See Aaron Swartz, “Sokal Affair,” in *Culture Wars: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*, edited by Roger Chapman (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2010), 615-616.

<sup>95</sup> This is the case with “ordinary language” philosophers and pragmatic philosophers, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Searle, and Richard Rorty as already mentioned.



## 2. Structure

As mentioned, the thesis is structured according to the thesis process that was followed, rather than retroactively reorganizing the thesis from a general theory to a specific case study. This is not to say that this structure was not attempted at different points – there is always the question of which information is relevant first in order to understand later arguments. I realized rather late in the thesis writing process that the general picture was best understood on the basis of the early film criticism study, where the idea of film consciousness was formed. Therefore, this is presented in Chapter 1, “Film Consciousness in Early Film Publications.”

However, the remainder of the thesis follows a more traditional structure. Chapter 2, “Talking Past Each Other,” begins by examining some of the problems encountered in defining the word ‘consciousness’. As philosopher David Chalmers writes, “those who talk about ‘consciousness’ are frequently talking past each other.”<sup>96</sup> This for the simple reason that the word ‘consciousness’ defines something slightly different for each person, such that a conversation that includes this term as a central component always contains some level of misunderstanding. Moreover, there are many “referential contexts,” in which ‘consciousness’ obtains meaning: the humanities, the

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<sup>96</sup> Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness,” 226.

social sciences, the hard sciences, medicine, and ordinary, everyday life. Depending on the particular referential context in which a given person presents an argument or discussion, certain expectations and understandings will already be present that problematize defining the word's ambiguity. Most referential contexts, by nature, assume the status of "privileged context" in which other contexts are rendered secondary (hence the importance in this thesis in relying on a dictionary in order to outline as many contexts as possible, not just a single one). The main problem is that 'consciousness' is polysemic in nature, consisting of many homonyms. It also shares resemblances in meaning with other words that refer to similar phenomenon, such as "mind," which further compounds the problem. Thus, conversations about consciousness consist of several parallel discussions that require recognizing differences in the meaning of 'consciousness', as well as similarities between different terminologies.

Chapter 3, "Consciousness' Defined," begins by defining the "semantic field of consciousness," which, as mentioned earlier, consists of the sum total of ways in which the word 'consciousness' is used intelligibly. Relying on the Oxford Dictionary of English for guidance, among other texts, this chapter presents six different definitions of consciousness. The first of these is the state of "wakefulness," found mostly in medical contexts, which defines the behaviour of responsiveness in relation to certain criteria. Therefore it is not necessarily

pertinent to a discussion about film consciousness, but important as a point of reference. The other five categories – “awareness of something” (being conscious of an external object and its properties, or an internal object, such as an image, idea or sensation), “shared defining ideas and beliefs” (similar to “ethos”), “personal consciousness” (the conscious phenomena that is seen as constituting personal identity), “global consciousness” (the faculty of consciousness, the presumed system from which consciousness emerges), and “conscious experience” (the unbroken stream of ongoing thoughts, feelings, sensations, and their qualitative nature) – are pertinent to the construction of film consciousness categories; therefore these are given more attention and applied in subsequent chapters. This chapter also includes discussion of existing expressions that use the word ‘consciousness’ in order to demonstrate that words combine with ‘consciousness’ in a particular manner in the context of an expression, and that these expressions serves as templates for constructing new expressions.

One of the most historiographically relevant “film consciousness” categories is that of “film awareness,” presented in Chapter 4 (‘Film Consciousness’ as “Film Awareness.”) This category derives from the definition of ‘consciousness’ that means “awareness of something,” which when combined with ‘film’, and the different objects this term represents, forms different ideas of “film awareness,” all of which are found in existing discourse. These ideas, or

subcategories, include “film aesthetic awareness,” and “film production awareness” (“film culture awareness” is discussed in the subsequent chapter). When studying these awarenesses in the historical field, such as in relation to a set of writers, or institutions, these categories have the advantage of already containing a “historiographic” grammar, in the sense that “awareness of something” (as opposed to “personal consciousness”) is characterized in terms of increasing and decreasing; levels; stages; ranges; turning points; and so forth. This sense of consciousness may be present in some institution or group, but remain unreported for different reasons, which therefore requires an ability to study the “indirect expression of awareness,” such as that reflected in ordinary language-use.

Used informally by such scholars as Dudley Andrew, David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson, Chapter 5 examines yet another sense of ‘film consciousness’, which falls along a continuum between “film culture awareness” and “a way of existing towards film.” Film consciousness in this chapter is defined primarily as behaviour towards film, such as film study, archiving, and preservation, which is nevertheless constituted in awareness of the cultural value of film. In fact, ‘consciousness’ in this sense is broader than just “ideas” and “beliefs” and incorporates other more elusive attributes, such as “sensibilities” and “convictions.” François Albera’s concept of “cinematic episteme” offers a point of comparison for defining the specificity of this sense

of film consciousness,<sup>97</sup> since it addresses that which underlies a knowledge of film, in the same way that “film consciousness” defines that which underlies a film movement and other concerted activities towards film. Ultimately, this definition of film consciousness was intended to describe some of the activity of early film critics, who began studying audiences, and recognizing the context-dependent nature of film effects, but without yet rationalizing this understanding into a theory (this data is also covered in Chapter 1).

Chapter 6, “The Meaning of ‘Film Experience,’” will seem, perhaps, like a detour on the way to defining “film consciousness” as an entity, but it serves several important functions. One is to review literature that is already ostensibly about film consciousness, but which uses a different terminology, namely that of ‘film experience.’ Secondly, as mentioned, an axiomatic premise in this thesis is that film consciousness, in whatever form, “belongs to a world in which film experiences occur,” therefore it is important to clarify the meaning of ‘film experience’ in this latter sense. As this chapter shows, there are many different uses of ‘film experience’ within film discourse, each designating a different area on a “continuum” of film experience. We will see that the term ‘film experience’ has at least six different meanings: “the film-viewing event,” “the psychological film-viewing experience,” “the subjective

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<sup>97</sup> François Albera’s notion of “cinematic episteme” is presented in “First Discourses on Film and the Construction of a ‘Cinematic Episteme,’” in *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema*, 121-140.

film-viewing experience,” “the remainders of film-viewing experience” (memories, sensations, feelings), the quasi-institutional category known as “the film experience,” and finally, all of the “imagined points of contact” between consciousness and film. For our interest, the last of these is the most relevant to understanding the premise that film consciousness belongs to a world in which film experiences occur, and from which “subjective film consciousness” arises, but “subjective film experience” and “film remainders” also provide useful entry points into discussions about film consciousness.

The thesis concludes with Chapter 7, “‘Film Consciousness’ as an Entity in Consciousness,” which deviates from the initial, more objective aims of the historiographic model this thesis was attempting to devise in relation to early film publications. These categories are nevertheless logical outcomes of the process of assembling different meanings of ‘film’ and ‘consciousness’. We might think of them as being more “subjective” in nature, since they require a different set of evidence in order to validate (what one scholar defines as “subjective first person reports,”<sup>98</sup> and deal more directly with a first person perspective. Thus, as an entity in consciousness, ‘film consciousness’ may refer to a “sense of self” or “identity” (explored from the perspective of Annette

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<sup>98</sup> Beja Margithazi, “‘Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows...’ The Role of Body and Senses in Various ‘First Contact’ Narratives,” *Ősz* (December 10, 2012). <http://uj.apertura.hu/2012/osz/margithazi-the-role-of-body-and-senses/>

Kuhn's notion of "cinema memory"),<sup>99</sup> a "place" in consciousness in which film memories and film experiences are stored (such as in Martin Lefebvre's concept of "imaginary museum"),<sup>100</sup> a "faculty" (as with Francesco Casetti's notion of "film gaze"),<sup>101</sup> and "subjective film consciousness," which is defined as a kind of conscious experience that each individual will define differently. It is characterized by moods, sensations, feelings, thoughts, or emotions intimately linked with past film experiences. From the perspective of the person defining subjective film consciousness, the experience feels "film-like" in some regard. This latter category of 'film consciousness' adopts Thomas Nagel's famous question regarding conscious experience ("What is it like to be a bat?"),<sup>102</sup> but reformulates it as "What is it like to have experienced film?" Any answer to this question is then a candidate for being "subjective film consciousness."

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<sup>99</sup> Annette Kuhn, "What to do with Cinema Memory?" in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, edited by Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 85-98.

<sup>100</sup> Martin Lefebvre, "On Memory and Imagination in the Cinema," *New Literary History: Cultural Inquiries* 2, no. 2 (1999): 479-98

<sup>101</sup> Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* no. 83 (4: 1973): 435-450.

## CHAPTER 1: FILM CONSCIOUSNESS IN EARLY FILM TRADE PUBLICATIONS

One of the struggles evident in early writing about cinema was that of finding an effective language for defining and talking about the increasingly complex phenomenon of film. The proliferation of words designating film or aspects of film during the period of early cinema is a potential source of confusion for historians interpreting this writing. Even film historians from the time – those living among and using the terms – demonstrated a similar level of disorientation, if not impatience. In 1899, Henry V. Hopwood referred to the abundance of names for film-related technologies as “etymological monstrosities.”<sup>1</sup> This struggle was most apparent in the many American film trade journals that began publishing in 1907. The journals collectively produced the vast majority of written attention toward cinema during these early years. Commenting on the outburst of film terminologies emerging across the globe, G. Dureau, in his 1910 article “The Moving Picture Babel,” noted: “our cousins torture themselves to understand us and we don’t understand ourselves.”<sup>2</sup> Complicating matters for those trying to follow discussions in early film discourse is that many key words in our film vocabulary, such as “director,” “shot,” “editing,” “cinematography,” “camera

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<sup>1</sup> Henry V. Hopwood, *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production, and Practical Working* (1899; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1970), 187.

<sup>2</sup> G. Dureau, “The Moving Picture Babel,” *Nickelodeon* 3, no. 6 (March 15, 1910): 35.



movement” and “art” either did not exist or were used in ways that often do not conform to our understanding of the words today. Even some terms for designating existing discourse about film follow this pattern. It is possible, for instance, to peruse a film journal from 1907, either *Moving Picture World* or *Views and Film Index*, and encounter a section named “film reviews” with texts resembling “reviews,” but consisting instead of catalogue descriptions of films published by the journal for exhibitors.<sup>3</sup> There are, in fact, signs that some film scholars have confused these pieces of writing for film reviews,<sup>4</sup> and the evidence suggests that even contemporaries found this heading confusing, with both of these sections renamed in the following years to more representative designations (*Moving Picture World* to “Stories of the Films” and *Views and Film Index* to “Descriptions of New Films”).

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<sup>3</sup> These texts can be thought of as precursors to film trailers, since the goal was to represent the story in the most persuasive and exciting form possible, often including information not present in the actual films. André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion have defined them as “novelizations” of films. “Les catalogues des premiers fabricants de vues animées: une première forme de novellisation?,” *La novellisation. Du film au livre / Novelization From Film to Novel*, eds. Jan Baetens and Marc Lits (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2004), 41–59.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley Kauffmann published one of these catalogue descriptions in his anthology on early American film criticism (of D.W. Griffith’s *The Adventures of Dollie*) as an example of early film reviews, noting: “Here is a review of [Griffith’s] first film, *nothing more than a synopsis* but included here because, unknowingly, it is a milestone in world cultural history.” My emphasis. Stanley Kauffmann, with Bruce Henstell, eds. *American Film Criticism, from the Beginnings to Citizen Kane: Reviews of Significant Films at the Time They First Appeared* (New York: Liveright, 1972), 6. Terms like “synopsis,” “descriptions,” and “summaries” have been applied on occasion to describe early film criticism, perhaps in part because of an inclusion of such texts into the category.

The distinction between two broad, sometimes conflicting conceptualizations of film determined much of early writing about film: one as a recording device, giving rise to the view that film is a transparent window onto a profilmic reality considered the locus of significance, and the other as a constructed object, an opaque window which draws attention, implicated in the process of creating narratives, effects and meaning.<sup>5</sup> Although the latter concept of film is often described through the language of art and aesthetics, it is not necessary to the recognition of film as a constructed object, even if these vocabularies play a role in casting attention on certain features of film that highlight this nature.<sup>6</sup> An example of this type of awareness of film would be the recognition that editing creates a particular set of effects or meaning, or that the image itself is an object of aesthetic interest because of a procedure – such as framing – the photographer undertook. Seeing film as a recording device implies focusing attention on the story *as if* it were a play that had

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<sup>5</sup> Several types of observations potentially display awareness of film as a constructed object. For example, noticing that discrete aesthetic elements – such as photography, setting, editing, lighting, acting and story – form part of a unified design; recognizing that such elements are purposely selected by the author (or artist) as opposed to being arbitrary; observing that images (and sounds) are aesthetically pleasurable and follow similar compositional rules as other art forms (such as painting or theater); believing the film is created and invested with powerful feelings that convey important cultural values, including transcendent notions like “truth,” “goodness” and “beauty”; and finally, that films may conceal deeper meanings not necessarily accessibly to the general public (thus necessitating explanation from specialized critics). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> In discussing Wittgenstein, Edward Branigan notes: “The purpose of aesthetic descriptions is to draw attention to specific features . . . rather than to explain the features.” In *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 322, fn 69.

been merely recorded, or on photography in terms of its ability to provide a clear view of the profilmic reality (sufficiently lit, in focus, and so forth). Much of the changing terrain of language, the appearance or disappearance of certain words, the emergence of a metaphorical way of talking about film, the development of a language of authorship, can be explained as a function of these different ways of imagining film, in which an awareness of film as a constructed object becomes increasingly manifest between 1909 and 1914.

Concurrent with this awareness of film apparent in language use was a growing self-awareness among those using and creating the language, arising from an attention to discursive activities, such as film criticism, an attention to the way films were experienced in different contexts, and an attention to the language being used for talking about film. It is unclear to what degree these distinct “regions of awareness” are related – an awareness of the constructed nature of film and self-awareness linked to the experience of writing and thinking about film – but some intersecting points seem clear enough. For instance, an understanding of film, or of any object, can be achieved through the study of the language used to define it. This is a common approach to analysis in pragmatic philosophy, and which in fact occurred in at least one example of early film discourse from 1909.<sup>7</sup> Also pertinent is the way film itself, as a technology, communication device and

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<sup>7</sup> David S. Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 5 (May 1909): 139–40.

aesthetic form, participated in creating experiences that resulted in a different way of understanding oneself in relation to the world, as the work of Francesco Casetti illustrates in his analysis of “film gazes.”<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, there is of course the essential fact that the same individuals – early writers about film – partook in both sets of awareness, creating a dialectical, back and forth relationship in which a realization in one region of awareness becomes evident in another. For this reason, this chapter is the study of a consciousness emerging in activities centering on film. The activities are divided into distinct regions for the purposes of examining some of their constituent parts, but not because such divisions actually form part of the emerging consciousness.

The concepts of film that writers used in journal discourse were usually not explicitly discussed. It is rather from an attention to the movement of language occurring in a variety of discursive domains – headings, titles, articles and reviews – that such concepts are partially revealed. It is also this same language from which arises a field of conceptual possibilities for thinking about film;<sup>9</sup> thus, charting the movement of language is, in effect,

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<sup>8</sup> Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Casetti discusses five types of film gazes that arise in the interaction between spectator and film: “partial,” “composite,” “penetrating,” “excited” and “immersive.” These gazes collectively enable individuals to negotiate the paradoxical experiences of modernity.

<sup>9</sup> The concept of “linguistic relativity,” as discussed in the Introduction, has been explored in various ways by such authors as George Lakoff, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty, and

charting the range of possible thoughts – the *cinematic episteme* to use a current term<sup>10</sup> – available to someone in a certain historical and institutional context. It is possible to think about the collective changes occurring at the level of language, then, which includes the regular activity, the “steady forms of life” from which such language grows, as the emergence of a kind of film consciousness.<sup>11</sup> The statements of individual writers, which serve as the evidence for constructing an understanding of the way film was thought about at a given time, ought to be considered as forming part of an institutional or social life, with concomitant activities, interests and ways of talking, that strongly determine the particular character of the statements. This is significant because sometimes these statements are mistakenly taken as factual representations of someone’s thoughts or, more problematically, of public thought.

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more recently in film studies, Edward Branigan. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (1953; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Richard Rorty, “Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-dualist Account of Interpretation,” in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93–110; Edward Branigan, *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> François Albera’s notion of “cinematic episteme” is presented in “First Discourses on Film and the Construction of a ‘Cinematic Episteme,’” in André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); 121-140.

<sup>11</sup> “I want to say: it is characteristic of our language that the foundation on which it grows consists in steady forms of life, regular activity. Its function is determined *above all* by the action it accompanies.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness,” ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Peter Winch, *Philosophia* 6, nos. 3–4 (1976): 404.

This chapter is interested in charting two distinct but overlapping sets of awareness apparent in early film publications between 1909 and 1914, the awareness writers displayed of film as a constructed object, and the awareness these same writers began showing of their own role in the process of determining the way film was to be thought about. The impetus of the study lies in showing that direct statements about film must include an understanding of how such statements are situated within a larger pattern of institutional thinking, a part of which is only accessible through an analysis of the way language was used in a variety of contexts. In effect, to understand the statement one must understand the social activity in which the statement occurs.

## 1. The Four Language Traits of Early Film Publications

As explained in the Introduction, the advent of film publications in the United States was probably April 26, 1906, when *Views and Film Index* was launched.<sup>12</sup> Early film publications addressed members of the film industry, exhibitors, exchanges and filmmakers. But they appealed as well to the public, which avidly read the journals.<sup>13</sup> They reported on nearly all aspects of

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<sup>12</sup> Renamed *Film Index* in September 1908 and acquired by *Moving Picture World* in June 1911. See Annette D'Agostino, *Filmmakers in the Moving Picture World: An Index of Articles, 1907–1927* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1997), 13.

<sup>13</sup> Frank Woods, in the November 27, 1909 edition of the *New York Dramatic Mirror*: “The

film: equipment and technology, patent litigations, films available for rental, pre-production information, exhibitions, production companies and personalities. They also functioned as a forum for discussion by means of readers submitting weekly questions and comments, critics analyzing aspects of the industry, and editors adamantly defending film from public criticism. They mediated one of film's most intense periods of transformation – between roughly 1907 and 1914 – with the move from single reel to feature length films, and with significant changes to film aesthetics, narrative construction, production practices, exhibition conditions and audience spectatorship.<sup>14</sup> The public status of cinema underwent a dramatic change during this time as

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*Mirror*, at any rate, is published not alone for managers and the profession but also for the great element of the public which desires authoritative information” (quoted in Kauffmann, *American Film Criticism*, 38). Other evidence suggests journals served as guides for understanding films, demonstrating their influence on reception: “we have amongst our readers a very considerable number of the general public . . . we have been told that a visitor to a theatre has actually taken a copy of the *Moving Picture World* with him or her and endeavoured to follow the film by the story.” “The Stories of the Films,” *Moving Picture World* 6, no. 14 (April 2, 1910): 502.

<sup>14</sup> Many works cover this period of transition, but perhaps the most extensive and detailed analyses of the relationship between trade publications and the film industry during these years are: Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001); and Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), especially pages 80–7 which provide a history of trade publications and a sense of their biases. Although focusing on daily print, Jan Olsson emphasizes the value of concentrating on film journalism as “a discursive domain calling for analysis as a phenomenon in its own right status apart from being yet another trove of source material added to the panoply of paper sources otherwise mobilized by film historians for fleshing out film culture.” See Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 18.

well, shifting from significant public disapproval to tentative endorsement, which the journals played a role in mediating.<sup>15</sup>

In the midst of this volatility, early film publication writers took up the difficult task of defining cinema and delineating an object of film criticism by developing a practical and standardized language of criticism that served the aims of the journals, the film industry, and the interests of the public. While these objectives were sometimes presented as clear and businesslike, the result of this intersection of ideas and interests produced by writers from different backgrounds was a great deal of experimentation on how to talk about film. It was expressed in a number of forms, among them articles dealing with new ideas about cinema, or criticism that was not always easy to understand from the point of view of trade publication aims. Although the labour of film writers at this time was grounded in routine and everyday film concerns, these modest routines produced over time a formidable body of work that introduced many ideas and vocabularies about cinema into the public domain.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> An impassioned editorial from 1911 calls on critics to “educate the public into the acceptance of the good, the artistic and the beautiful [in films].” “The Lay Press and the Picture,” *The Moving Picture World* 8, no. 2 (January 14, 1911): 60.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Abel indicates the circulation of the *Moving Picture World* “reportedly had reached 15,000” by 1914. “*Moving Picture World*,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel (London: Routledge, 2005), 647.



When compared to the rather limited sources of information that exist for studying the reception of the first decade of cinema (1896–1906), the interest of these trade journals becomes more evident. Starting in 1907, there was suddenly an abundance of evidence of how *groups of people* processed the experience of cinema – groups working within a definable trade structure to be sure, but groups nevertheless – which was diligently recorded, directly and indirectly in a variety of language forms, on a weekly and monthly basis. Significantly, the journals also operated in the first few years in the absence of any other *regular* publications on film. Such a presence gave writers freedom to experiment with format, content and style that might otherwise have been the domain of other publications or institutions. Contending with a fairly complex reality, and under the pressure of having to write *something* about film on a consistent basis, a sometimes open-ended, “thinking out loud” approach to writing about film emerged, which at times verged on philosophical or poetic reflections. In short, these film trade journals constituted a new film institution during these early years, and many of the writers embraced the opportunity to explore the film medium in ways one might not expect from a trade publication.

The language used by writers of the early film trade journals constituted a movement in language and a changing awareness of film and self. It is a movement that makes them interesting texts for study. There are four

significant traits of this language whose usage demonstrates a changing consciousness of film. These are *collectivity*, established by groups of writers; *regularity*, constituted by weekly publications; *extension*, which is their publication over a period of time; and *diversity*, stimulated by the absence of conventions or other competing film institutions. In the analyses that follow, I show how film awareness was represented and communicated in two different regions of discourse and activity: *film consciousness*, as represented in “headings and titles,” “articles” and “film criticism,” and *self-consciousness*, as represented in “metacriticism,” “audience study,” and “discourse on language”. One of the challenges of studying early film publications is in connecting these regions to form a more unified understanding of the background world of the language of early film publications. In general, it is productive to imagine trade publications as “institution-like” in terms of the way knowledge circulated from one area to another and even across journals, making it possible to understand the activity in one region on the basis of the other.

## **2. Regions of Film Consciousness**

Writers in early American film publications gradually displayed an awareness of the constructed nature of film, including the causes, creators and meaning

of films. This awareness was not usually communicated in explicit statements demonstrating such an understanding, rather it was expressed in the ways language was used over time and in specific contexts. To appreciate this awareness requires attention to the movement of language and a close analysis of terms in early film publications.

One region is quite simply the “titles and headings” of journals and sections. Changes in titles and headings often occurred without announcement or explanation, and therefore may be interpreted as a reflection of an internal process of reasoning taking place among writers and editors. A coherent logic cannot always be discerned from one title to the next, especially since often only a single word was dropped or added. But over time, in combination with other evidence, a more unified process of thought becomes apparent. André Gaudreault provides a sense of how this movement took form in his observations of the constant renaming of one journal, which, through a series of additions and subtractions from 1889 to 1919, changed from *Optical Magic Lantern Journal and Photographic Enlarger* to *Kinematograph Weekly*.<sup>17</sup> For Gaudreault, this transformation represents a move from one (or several) cultural series to another. Important changes also occurred within journals, communicating other similar internal processes of reasoning, such as the

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<sup>17</sup> André Gaudreault, “The Culture Broth and the Froth of Cultures of So-Called Early Cinema,” in André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012); 15-31.

“Film Reviews” section in *Moving Picture World*. In the very first issue, the section was named “Film Chats.” It then became “Film Reviews” and then, finally, “Stories of the Films.” Since none of these changes were ever explained, the reasoning may be interpreted, in part, through what we know occurred in other areas of the journal. For example, “Film Chats” conveys rather well the character of the eventual criticism that would be published in this journal, which was presented as “comments” (more below), and which sometimes resembled spoken language. The name “Film Chats” is continuous with our knowledge of what occurred elsewhere, suggesting this conceptualization of criticism existed from the outset, even if it was misused in this instance for presenting catalogue descriptions. The eventual change from “Reviews” to “Stories” is significant because of when it occurred – two weeks before the opening of the film criticism section in the same journal – suggesting there was already a sense of the coming confusion that would arise in presenting different kinds of texts under similar heading names.

The naming of the film criticism section in *Moving Picture World* tells an even more meaningful story. When the “Comments on Film Subjects” section was launched there was no mention of the significance of “comments” in the title. The explanation offered was “Yielding to the requests of many readers to take up *criticism* of some of the film subjects, we invited two capable newspaper

men to make the rounds of theatres with us last week.”<sup>18</sup> Once again, we learn about the background concept defining journal discourse in the heading and not the actual discourse. Finally, the other concept in the title – “film subjects” – is also significant because it is a terminology frequently used in other sections of the journal, particularly in the listings of the films available for rental. The term “film subject” seems to imply a distinction between the film and the content of the film, but this peculiarity does not become fully apparent until the journal finally settles on “Comments on the Films” in 1910. Thus, without even reading the comments or articles, or indeed any other form of discourse in the journals, a moment can be identified when a shift occurred in the way film was conceptualized as a unified object of criticism that no longer distinguished between film and story.

A second region of discourse is perhaps the most commonly cited among historians, that is, the actual group of articles that more or less directly addresses different subjects related to cinema, including the nature of cinema. There is an abundance of material in this area that can be easily read as more or less self-contained ideas which require little other context and which of course express varying degrees of awareness of film. A small sample of such articles includes “The Elusive Quality,” “Photodrama and the Child,”

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<sup>18</sup> “Comments on the Film Subjects,” *Moving Picture World* 3, no. 15 (October 10, 1908): 279. My emphasis.

“Realism,” “Photoplay Realism: An Optimistic View,” “New Functions of the Motion Picture,” “Problems in Pictures,” “The Compelling Harmony of the Whole,” and “Art in Moving Pictures.”<sup>19</sup> Although these arguments are interesting in themselves as film discourse, offering reflections on film as art, the purpose of cinema, and its future, I would like to emphasize here other features that point to the issue of language use becoming a pressing concern for writers. As many film historians know, especially those interested in finding interesting examples of early film discourse, article titles are often misleading in terms of actual content. Sometimes an ambitious idea indicated in the title is barely mentioned in the article, suggesting in some cases the presence of an intuition that has not yet found a means of expression (and thus, like journal titles and section headings, article titles also suggest a conscious process not apparent in the discourse). The preponderance of invented terms or the formulation of compound terms is a reflection of a search, sometimes conveyed with a tone of frustration directed at others (filmmakers, journals, the public), for a vocabulary or conceptual framework necessary for the expression of an underlying idea. A good example is Thomas

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<sup>19</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, “The Elusive Quality,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 8 (August 20, 1910): 398; “Photodrama and the Child,” *Moving Picture World* (July 27, 1912): 322; and “Realism,” *Moving Picture World* 18, no. 10 (December 6, 1913): 1125; Jay Gove, “Photoplay Realism: An Optimistic View,” *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 13 (July 8, 1911): 1556–7; W. Stephen Bush, “New Functions of the Motion Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 13, no. 1 (July 6, 1912): 21; “Problems in Pictures,” *Moving Picture World* 10, no. 11 (December 16, 1911): 877; and “The Compelling Harmony of the Whole,” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 2 (July 22, 1911): 103; Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures.”

Bedding's concept "moving picture photographs" (discussed more below) which combines two terms ("moving pictures" and "photographs") in search of a third idea – film understood as a recording device.<sup>20</sup> It is apparent in these texts that writers experimented, and struggled, with new ways of talking about film. This struggle sometimes met with failure or even ridicule, as Bedding himself noted ("I am often chided for my use of uncommon words"),<sup>21</sup> illustrating the extent to which language was a source of attention and concern for both writers and readers.

Another feature of these articles is the introduction of terms that do not follow standard definitions of their time, or that the authors intended in their context. The usage points to an intention that has not fully taken shape. A word that captures this tension well is "art," which normally carried the meaning of "craft," but which in some contexts seems to connote something more, namely the idea of "creation" essential to the definition of art today. To return to an article discussed in the Introduction, perhaps no text displays this better than Hulfish's oft-cited "Art in Moving Pictures," which reveals a conflict between the conceptual frameworks of art as "craft" or "creation," and that of film as recording device or constructed object. Hulfish opens his

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Bedding, "Pictorialism and the Picture," *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 11 (September 10, 1910): 566–7.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Bedding, "The Sentiment of the Moving Picture," *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 10 (September 3, 1910): 509.

discussion by presenting a dictionary definition of the word “art” in order to determine whether film fits into this category. However, the definition he presents does not yet include the notion of “creation,” something which Hulfish seems to sense is necessary. He writes, for example, of pictures expressing “thoughts” and of having “authors” – clear allusions to the idea that films are creations, not transparent windows, conveying some form of intentional meaning. But even as the article employs suggestive terms that touch on the idea of “film as art,” Hulfish’s argument is grounded in the concept of “film as a recording device.” He affirms this contradictory idea when he writes, “[Photography] should be considered in motography [roughly meaning “the recording side of filmmaking should be considered”] as merely the means for placing before the audience the thoughts of the author of the picture as embodied in changing scenes, *the art of the picture being developed fully in the scenes themselves before the motion picture camera is placed before them.*”<sup>22</sup> This excerpt also nicely illustrates the struggle writers displayed in finding an effective language for talking about film. Although each of the terms, once parsed, seem to indicate distinct things – “photography” is the process through which “motion picture cameras” produce “moving pictures,” each of which form part of “motography” (something on the order of “filmmaking”) – later in the article the same terms come to mean

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<sup>22</sup> Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” 139. My emphasis.



different things. For instance, at one point Hulfish suggests “art in a motion picture must exist prior to the photographing of the picture.”<sup>23</sup> Further on, he says, “the picture to be motographed must be studied in values of neutral shade.”<sup>24</sup> Both of these examples define “picture” as something that exists before and after the photographic process, contradicting his earlier distinction. The term “motography” is also transformed into a verb (“to motograph”) and used in a similar sense as “to photograph.” In such a linguistic situation, where many overlapping terms are presented, it is not always easy to identify the concept the author has in mind when using a particular term. This is the challenge of reading early writing about film. A linguistic terrain in constant movement is one that contains exciting conceptual possibilities, revealing in the differences, slippages and misuses, a conscious process not only of gradually becoming aware of the complex nature of film but also of actively inventing ways of thinking and talking about it.

The third region – film criticism – is perhaps the most complex because much of what occurs in this realm of language is, like the first region, stated without explanation, but additionally consists of far more complex attempts at describing films. Since conceptualizations of film are usually not mentioned in the descriptions, an analysis of the concepts requires a sort of appreciation of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 140.

the “cluster” of words entering the description that seem to share a common notion or intention, what Edward Branigan refers to as a “*grammar of an ensemble of words*.”<sup>25</sup> For instance, starting in 1909, there appear many key words we associate with the act of interpretation, such as “illustrates,” “represents,” “theme,” “suggests,” “central thought,” “inference,” “purpose,” “intention.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, a change in approach to criticism, that is, a tendency toward interpretation, is an indication of a particular type of film awareness.

Thomas Bedding’s article “Pictorialism and the Picture” (1910) offers an interesting case study. In this article, Bedding attempts to distinguish between the two already-mentioned dominant paradigms that defined much of the criticism from the period, that is, the “moving picture photograph” (film as a recording device) and the “moving picture” (film as a constructed object).<sup>27</sup> For Bedding, the creator of a “moving picture” is someone “imbued with the sentiment of his subject,” meaning a person able to understand the subject of the film through the process of feelings, which are then introduced

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<sup>25</sup> “I believe that a ‘theory of film’ may be thought of as the *grammar of an ensemble of words*, such as frame, shot, camera, point of view, editing, style, realism, auteur, performance, spectatorship, and medium specificity, accompanied by selected radial extensions of these words. I believe that a film theory is not simply a set of objective propositions about film, because “film” – that is, the grammar (the vocabulary) of the words that described film – is not fixed, but is tied to culture, value and a consensus about, for example, the present boundaries of the medium (i.e., the properties we select that presently interest us relating to the materials of the medium) as well as the present ideas that are used to ‘clarify our experience of film.’” Branigan, *Projecting a Camera*, 115–16.

<sup>26</sup> Taken from a number of reviews from 1909–10, including the one quoted below.

<sup>27</sup> Bedding, “Pictorialism and the Picture.”

into the image as a sort of truth waiting to be discovered.<sup>28</sup> A second feature of “moving pictures” is that such pictures comply with “the definite laws of composition, balance and all the rest of the elements that go to make up a picture of any kind.”<sup>29</sup> This is in “contradistinction,” Bedding argues, to photographs, which merely offer impartial recordings of things, described as “a cartographical transcript of the original.”<sup>30</sup> The third feature of “moving pictures” is that they are noticeably absent of “staginess and theatricality,” tending towards a “naturalistic effect.”<sup>31</sup> To illustrate this idea, Bedding offers a description of D.W. Griffith’s *A Summer Idyl* (1910), highlighting a scene that represents pictorialism, which indeed seems to have triggered his thinking about the idea: “A city man of Bohemian proclivities is rejected by the coquettish woman of his choice. He hikes to the country to forget his sorrow and meets and falls in love with the daughter of a well-to-do farmer. To continue his wooing he seeks and obtains employment on the farm, and *here the photographer shows us many interesting views of farm life, with Cupid in attendance.*”<sup>32</sup>

The use of “photographer” in this context calls attention for a number of reasons. It was quite rare for critics at the time to make reference to any kind

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 566.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 567.

of “causal-figure” (artist, author, creator, etc.) in the context of describing a situation occurring in a film, in the way that today one attributes the appearance of a scene to a director, which constitutes an implicit acknowledgment that the scene is the product of someone’s intentions. It also calls our attention because if one considers that Bedding is describing the film from the vantage point of a viewer watching the scenes unfold, the photographer is not responsible for the appearance of the images that follow at that very moment, whether considered in the present, which is to say, during the screening, or when considered as an entity implicated in the production of the film at a previous point in time. We might consider it a logical use if, say, there was a pan, and therefore a change in framing that occurred as a direct consequence of the photographer’s actions. But since there is a cut in the scene and an ellipse in time, it means the photographer must shift in place and time to arrive at the point where “here the photographer shows us” a new scene (unless the edit took place in the camera, or he was himself the director, which is another story). Eventually, through this process of reasoning, although one tends to see this intuitively, one arrives at the conclusion that the term “photographer,” in this context, does not make sense as a literal statement since the appearance of the scene at that moment is not directly attributable to the photographer, at least in the sense outlined.

Nevertheless, there is a way in which this usage is not entirely incoherent either, at least, it should not strike modern readers as necessarily strange. This is because “photographer” in this passage assumes a metaphorical function, not dissimilar to the way “camera,” as Branigan argues, is sometimes used precisely in moments where one attributes a change in scene to *something*, not necessarily a technical apparatus, but rather to a *presence* of some kind, often with human-like traits, such as intentions, which, precisely again, *shows* us images that are presumably presented as meaningful.<sup>33</sup> Like the “camera,” the photographer in this passage comes into existence in the process of describing the scene, since, as noted, the photographer is neither present during the screening, nor does the photographer cause the appearance of the images at that moment. Some other process of manipulation has ostensibly taken place, namely editing, between the time the photographer shot the images and the time the sequence was constructed in the manner Bedding describes. Branigan suggests that “the use of the word ‘camera’ by a spectator shows only that he or she knows a film is a construction that should not be confused with reality.”<sup>34</sup> This observation

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<sup>33</sup> Branigan quotes Dudley Andrew’s analysis of F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927) to illustrate how “camera” is employed as having human-like agency and intentions: “Later, the man, back to us, wanders toward the marsh, and the camera, full of our desire, initiates one of the most complex and thrilling movements in all of cinema.” Another example, this time from Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki’s comments on Godard’s *Le mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963): “The camera seems to want to show us how distant it is from him [Paul], in every sense of the word.” Branigan, *Projecting a Camera*, 59, 83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

fits with the general line of argument that certain words communicate awareness without necessarily stating this explicitly. What is revealed here in a sense is a “way of talking” about film, but more precisely, a way of talking about the causes of things occurring in films, which requires an intention of some kind to be logically congruent with the idea that these things are meaningful. In fact, the particular scene Bedding highlights is quite meaningful to him because it illustrates (and also seems to be the origins of) his reflection on pictorialism discussed in the same article in which this description appears.

Bedding’s example can be contrasted with another example from the period, one which introduces another word that has much the same function (formulated almost in the same way), but which suggests a different kind of awareness of film causes. In the criticism of D.W. Griffith’s *A Country Cupid* (1911), the critic uses the term “scenario writer” on three occasions to refer to the cause of a particular event:

He enters and points the revolver at her; tells her that he intends to shoot her and himself and that both will be found together. It is not until here that the scenario writer puts in a scene showing that the hero has the letter from the school teacher making-up after the quarrel. . . .

But, and here again the scenario writer showed wisdom, the idiot has no fear of the revolver and the teacher doesn’t want to shoot him. . . .

Here the scenario writer is a little weak; for measuring the time that the hero had to come to the schoolhouse in by the time the idiot spent talking to the teacher, we feel that he wouldn't have got there.<sup>35</sup>

The use of “scenario writer” and “photographer” in these contexts points to contrasting ways of imagining the causes of a particular effect observed on screen – “scenario writer” refers to a cause occurring at an earlier moment in the film production process, while “photographer” refers to an immediate cause which seems to exclude the production process, as if the film was presented at that moment as a live performance.

### **3. Regions of Self-consciousness**

In addition to these various levels of film awareness, early film publication writers displayed significant self-awareness including their identity as writers and thinkers, the place they occupied in relation to the public, exhibition and film, and their language used for the purposes of defining and making sense of film. Such awareness is evident in three distinct regions of discourse and activity. The first, alluded to in the Introduction, can be characterized as a “metacritical” discourse on film criticism. Starting in 1909, critics turned their attention to the emerging practice of writing about film, which continued as a

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<sup>35</sup> *Moving Picture World* 13, no. 15 (August 12, 1911): 375.

topic of discussion for the years to follow.<sup>36</sup> In their articles, the logic, purpose and nature of the criticism and, most interestingly, the obstacles encountered as writers, are explained. Stephen Bush's "Advertising and Criticising" directly addressed the question of objectivity raised by the fact that film producers advertised in the very journals in which their films received criticism, warning "if producers of films are under the impression that liberal use of advertising columns will in any way influence the criticisms of this paper, they are harbouring a misconception."<sup>37</sup> Maintaining independence from the interests of the industry was important because, as Bush explained in another article, "to attain its highest usefulness criticism must point out ethical errors," such as the making of "sectarian pictures" or attempts by "producers of one nationality to portray either the social life or the history of

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<sup>36</sup> In addition to the articles of this category mentioned below, the following are examples of this tendency: "The Press and the Moving Picture," *The Moving Picture World* 4, no. 12 (March 20, 1909): 325; "The Press and the Picture," *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 20 (November 12, 1910): 1124; "The Critic," *Moving Picture World* 6, no. 2 (January 15, 1910): 48; "Film Criticism in the Lay Press," *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 20 (May 20, 1911): 1113; W. Stephen Bush, "Suggestions to a Worried Critic," *Moving Picture World* 10, no. 10 (December 9, 1911).

<sup>37</sup> W. Stephen Bush, "Advertising and Criticising," *Moving Picture World* 14, no. 8 (November 23, 1912): 750. See also Louis Reeves Harrison, "Advertising, Boosting and Criticism," *Moving Picture World* 15, no. 14 (March 29, 1913): 1313. These articles were also a means of affirming the status of trade publications, as *The New York Dramatic Mirror* illustrates: "But most important. . . is the policy *The Mirror* has adopted, of impartially criticising new films as they are presented to the public." "Reviews of Films Commended: 'The Mirror' is Complimented for its Impartial Criticisms – Improvement in Film Advocated," *New York Dramatic Mirror* 59, no. 1540 (June 27, 1908): 7. Frank Woods, under the pseudonym "Spectator" regularly raised this issue in his columns "Spectator's Comments," for example, vol. 61, no. 1586 (May 15, 1909): 15.



another nationality.”<sup>38</sup> However, despite such calls for the utility of criticism, there was significant uncertainty about the precise means through which criticism was to effect change, especially considering that film was both a fixed and easily replaced object compared to other forms of entertainment. As one frustrated film critic noted: “Perhaps the film critic of a metropolitan paper will never be able to work as much havoc in the picture trade as he has done before in the theatrical line. By this edict the dramatic critic has done, or undone in the past, many productions costing thousands of dollars.”<sup>39</sup> It was on such grounds that *Motography* announced the closure of its film criticism department, concluding “criticism of a film after that film has been released, or at best just before it is released, can by no possible means help that particular subject.”<sup>40</sup> Although most critics understood that the effect of film criticism occurred over time, by affecting the production of future films, it was Louis Reeves Harrison who first clearly articulated another definition of criticism, which remains today one of its primary and more specialized functions.

Over a series of articles, “Mr. Critic” (1911), “The Art of Criticism” (1914) and “Reviewing Photoplays” (1914), Harrison argued in favor of a more

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<sup>38</sup> W. Stephen Bush, “Critic, Producer and Exhibitor,” *Moving Picture World* 14, no. 7 (November 17, 1912): 637.

<sup>39</sup> “Film Criticism in the Lay Press,” *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 18 (May 20, 1911): 1113.

<sup>40</sup> “Film Criticism,” *Motography* (August 1911): 56, repr. in Anthony Slide, ed., *Selected Film Criticism 1896–1911* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press), 116.

interpretive approach to film criticism, which included discovering a film's "vital meaning."<sup>41</sup> The turn represented a radical change in orientation. In the first years of trade journal criticism, between roughly 1907 and 1910, critics placed a strong emphasis on representing public opinion, which obviously supported a prescriptive approach.<sup>42</sup> The film industry had a vested interest in responding to public preferences and in this regard took critics seriously. Harrison challenged this imperative, arguing that "it is no longer necessary to consider the audience."<sup>43</sup> Instead, he envisioned a more personal, impressionistic criticism that emphasized "the discovery of a true spiritual element in the story."<sup>44</sup> This was a significant public statement, especially coming from a critic writing in a trade journal whose main function was ostensibly to evaluate the commercial viability of films. In any case, Harrison was on safe ground at this point. The turn toward interpretation, which began in earnest around 1910, may have been precipitated by Harrison himself,

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<sup>41</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Art of Criticism," *Moving Picture World* 19, no. 5 (January 30, 1914): 521. See also "Mr. Critic," *Moving Picture World* 10, no. 4 (October 28, 1911): 274 and "Reviewing Photoplays," *Moving Picture World* 22, no. 13 (December 19, 1914): 1652.

<sup>42</sup> "In many instances the critics seek to establish their impressions as those of the audience about them." "Film and Critics," *Film Reports* (October 1, 1910): 8, repr. in Slide, *Selected Film Criticism*, 115. Another example: "In defence of the critiques we say that they must be taken as an expression of public opinion." "Comments on Film Subjects," *Moving Picture World* 3, no. 15 (October 10, 1908): 279. *Nickelodeon* was perhaps most adamant on this point: "There is but one true test of any moving picture. If it pleases the public, it is an unqualified success. It matters not whether the subject be comic, dramatic, or educational." "Criticising Moving Pictures," *Nickelodeon* 2, no. 4 (October 1909): 103.

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, "Reviewing Photoplays," 1652.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

although we cannot know for sure since most critics published reviews anonymously.

Of course, not everyone expressed agreement with Harrison's views on film criticism. Their expressions not only give us valuable insight into the way critics at the time imagined the practice of writing about film, but also insight into the significant awareness critics had of each other. In one especially salient example, a writer from *Film Reports* actually quoted a review from another journal (*Moving Picture World*), calling the author "an amusing instance of a useless critic."<sup>45</sup> The reasons he offers for holding such an opinion tell a revealing story about the situation of film criticism around 1910. On the surface, the case is clear-cut: the *Film Reports* writer is bothered by the fact the review makes neither reference to the production quality of the film nor whether an audience might actually *enjoy* the film. An exhibitor, the writer notes, would not find such a review useful (which was one of the explicit functions of reviews). The review focuses instead on the potentially dangerous message of a particular scene – a duel – described as representing "an exaggerated notion of honor."<sup>46</sup> The fact the film is French (*Entre le devoir et l'honneur* [*Between Duty and Honor*, Éclair, 1910]) has obvious impact on the reviewer's opinion. When he writes "such pictures have little meaning in

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<sup>45</sup> "Film and Critics," 115.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in "Film and Critics," 115.

this country” it is presented more as advice to American readers than an objective observation.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the reviewer is satisfied that the message of the film will do “comparatively little harm”; since both men are killed, “the glamor of the bravado which goes with a duel” is “destroyed.”<sup>48</sup>

The critique of the review reveals the rules governing early film criticism and the inherent tension Harrison identified, that is, references to the commercial viability of films and to audience appreciation were the essential functions of criticism; the meaning or messages of films—much less so. The fact such distinctions were so clearly apparent in 1910 is a strong indication of the self-consciousness of critics. But the truly fascinating aspect of the *Film Reports* criticism of the *Moving Picture World* review lies elsewhere. What most annoyed the writer, and the likely source of the scathing tone, is that the reviewer was seen as getting the interpretation of the duel wrong: “Some people, however, like to see a duel represented, and disagree with the critic as to the merits of the custom. As a matter of fact, a view of a real French duel is interesting as a study of foreign customs.”<sup>49</sup> Leaving aside that the *Film Reports* writer sees the duel in a fiction film as “real” (which tells us something about the writer’s film and cultural awareness); and leaving aside that both seem to be arguing about categorically different things (the reviewer

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 116.

is commenting on the message of the duel, whereas the *Film Reports* writer is more interested in its educational value), the intrigue lies in what is disclosed as institutional activity: the public criticism of the opinion of another critic on the meaning or value of a particular scene in a film. There are many examples of critics of the time having different opinions about the same film, and several examples of critics referring to one another, but it is very likely this is the only example of a writer from the period actually citing the entirety of a review and engaging in this type of detailed analytical attention.

While these articles engaged in a fairly open debate about the sometimes noble purposes of film criticism, there was obviously an underlying economic imperative of affirming the value of criticism, and especially of film critics, who stood to gain more stability by engaging in a type of discourse that required expertise, and which gradually served as a founding premise for the institutionalization of film studies (becoming a building block of academic discourse, as scholars like Bordwell have identified).<sup>50</sup> Finally, it should be noted that these writers referred to their practice as *film criticism* and to themselves as *film critics*, details sometimes omitted by scholars who have implicitly denied these critics the type of self-awareness illustrated in these

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<sup>50</sup> David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

texts, often through a form of labeling the critics “reporters” or their texts “plot summaries”.<sup>51</sup>

The second region of self-awareness emerges from the critics’ practice of studying audience reception, which not only seems radically to change the form of film criticism in these years, but also the way the writers conceived of themselves in relation to film, context and audience. As representatives of public opinion, critics were initially expected to survey audience reception and to accurately report responses, but in doing so, the task proved more complicated than imagined. As one critic wrote, “it is extremely difficult for experienced critics to tell what those in front think of this or that presentation.”<sup>52</sup> This difficulty may have been partially the result of narrative cinema becoming a more absorbing experience, and films being exhibited in more upscale theaters as opposed to the rowdier nickelodeons.<sup>53</sup> Along the same lines, another *Moving Picture World* article attributed it to the internalization of reactions, noting that the audience was “in a more thoughtful mood, and their enjoyment and appreciation cannot be translated

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<sup>51</sup> Myron Osborn Lounsbury, *The Origins of American Film Criticism, 1909–1939* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, “The Highbrow,” *Moving Picture World* 9, no. 10 (September 16, 1911): 775.

<sup>53</sup> “A picture that is received in stony silence at one theatre is very often applauded in another. There are many reasons for this. The temperament and mental calibre vary with different localities.” “Commenting on the Films,” *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 15 (April 15, 1911): 814.

into applause.”<sup>54</sup> Moreover, not only were gestures of appreciation changing, but sometimes the same film produced radically divergent reactions, something which awakened critics to the complex reality of film exhibition. The following excerpt displays the level of attention critics exercised during exhibitions, almost performing the role of a researcher controlling the variables to ensure the conclusion – that audience reaction was unpredictable – was valid: “In illustration of this I may cite a peculiar instance, rarely found, of two plays by the same author, performed by the same company under the same director, and both favourably reported by the critics. The first was received in silence and evoked faint applause. The second awakened enthusiasm from the outset and an unusual demonstration at the end. The natural conclusion was that one was partially successful, while the other met with emphatic approval, yet careful inquiry among members of the audience discovered widespread preference for the unapplauded piece.”<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the notion of an accessible spectator who could be easily understood and described clashed with the data discovered in the field. In fact, awareness of the reception context extended beyond just realizing that audience reaction, once internalized, could no longer be investigated, other than through interviews, as Harrison remarks. It also included realizing that film reception

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<sup>54</sup> “The Picture the Audience Likes,” *Moving Picture World* 8, no. 6 (February 11, 1911): 310.

<sup>55</sup> Harrison, “The Highbrow,” 775.

was partially determined by the context and by the order in which the film was presented in the program: “Where vaudeville is interspersed with the pictures, the act preceding a picture has an effect on its reception. If it was a good act and applauded, the picture following may suffer by comparison. Just as frequently the contrary is the case.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it included understanding that repeated viewing of the same film in diverse contexts produced a distinctive type of film experience, thus “[the critic] often finds it impossible to agree with himself after seeing a picture again under different circumstances.”<sup>57</sup>

These experiences in the field impacted film criticism in various ways. Understandably, references to audience reactions became less frequent in the criticism. Consequently, the opinions of critics, grounded in personal impressions, were emphasized. Additionally, the two main reasons for pursuing film criticism, informing exhibitors about the entertainment value of films (which depended on understanding the audience) and prescribing changes to filmmaking practices (which required having a grasp of whether the film was good or bad, something these multiple viewings and contexts confounded) encountered some logistical difficulties. These circumstances explain, to some degree, the turn towards criticism (illustrated in the previous

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<sup>56</sup> “Commenting on the Films,” 814.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



section) that combined an interpretive approach with an awareness of the audience, although not attempting to represent audience opinions. Significantly, it also turned critics' attention towards themselves as the source of justification for offering criticism. In short, awareness of film reception affirmed the identity of the critic as a relevant part of the process of determining the way film was going to be thought about.

Finally, there are signs of a third region of self-awareness in which some writers commented on the language used for defining cinema, such as when Bedding mentions being "chided" for his use of "uncommon words." It is already common knowledge among film historians that early cinema participants used a multitude of terms to designate "film" (or aspects of film), some derived from the technology involved in the recording of the images (for example, "kinematograph," "motography"), others derived from the motion picture effect ("moving pictures," "animated pictures," "motion pictures"). All seemed to have been used at one point in journal titles. As narrative films became more important, one of the first consciously created terms to gain currency was "photoplay,"<sup>58</sup> although it never managed to replace other

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<sup>58</sup> In "There Is Everything in a Name: What the Essanay Contest Means," *Moving Picture World* encouraged the selection of a name that was going to be "clean, good, ennobling [...] and if possible, universally understood." *Moving Picture World* remained convinced that "the very life of a business [was] going to be helped or prejudiced by the result." *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 8 (August 20, 1910): 400. See also "The New Name, Photoplay," *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 17 (October 22, 1910): 933.

terms, only adding to the array of already existing designations. G. Dureau, who noted that the abundance of film terminology was contributing to a situation where “we don’t understand ourselves,” argued the point, initially, from a commercial perspective, writing “the words that express these things are today insufficient to cover the necessities of commercial relations . . . we do not even know how to name correctly the instruments, the vital mechanical parts of the apparatus of motography.”<sup>59</sup> Particularly interesting is that, in addition to arguing for the implementation of a universal, cross-cultural vocabulary, the article is an English translation of someone making all these points in his native French language, highlighting more precisely the different ways of conceptualizing aspects of film, something which has remained true between French and English to this day. One thinks of “*gros plan*” (large shot) and “close-up,” which are two different ways of conceptualizing the same basic element of film, one from the point of view of the size of the image, and the other from the proximity of the camera to the object. Thus, many French terms do not necessarily find equivalents in the English translation, creating a kind of “third language” of mistranslated terms (a genre of discourse in itself). In lamenting the number of terms for “film,” Dureau remarks: “The purchasers of ‘films’. . . employ without distinction the most varied expressions. . . ‘Have you any pellicles [sic] for

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<sup>59</sup> Dureau, “Moving Picture Babel,” 35.

sale?’ or ‘strips of pictures,’ or ‘reels,’ or ‘tableau ribbons,’ etc.”<sup>60</sup> All of these are literal translations of the French terms. Dureau especially takes issue with the “incoherence” of the professional titles of “workers in motography” such as calling the “projector” (by which he means the photographer) an “operator” (the French term for “taker of views”), a situation he found “both ridiculous and barbarous.”<sup>61</sup>

Other writers similarly turned their attention to language, either in an attempt to clarify the meaning of a particular term, or to understand the object of cinema on the basis of analyzing the existing words for talking about it. As noted, this was the case with Hulfish’s “Art in Moving Pictures” who, on the basis of examining the dictionary definition of the word “art” in relation to film, came to understand something about what made cinema specific, such as its almost magical ability to transport audiences: “The motion camera is the audience, and the audience, therefore, may be taken by the artist into any viewpoint, at any distance from cities or civilization.”<sup>62</sup> We might define this tendency as a “pragmatic” element in early film discourse, which gradually concerns itself more with aesthetic terms, and which is extremely valuable for

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” 139. The dictionary he cites is *A Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1905). There are other examples of this type of attention to words, such as Bedding’s early quote regarding being chided for his use of uncommon words.

historians interested in understanding the meaning of language at very particular historical junctures and contexts – something which normally would have to be reconstructed, especially with ambiguous terms like “art” that varied significantly in meaning. Hulfish’s own reflection on the word “art” in relation to cinema was prompted precisely because of his attention to language, noting that it was a term “used from time to time” in relation to film. This is an intriguing statement because we have very few documents today that demonstrate Hulfish’s observation. Thus, Hulfish’s attention to the language use offers us an entrance point toward describing a language reality that remains, to a significant degree, invisible to us, other than through these types of observations.

#### **4. Methodological Implications**

This chapter has attempted to establish a different approach toward thinking about early film publications. There has been a tendency to think of these journals, especially because of their status as “trade” publications, as adopting a particular set of commercially motivated concerns, conventions and approaches to film. In this scenario, criticism is often seen as consisting of summaries and critics as fairly passive reporters. Trade publications generate less excitement than, let us say, coming across the oft-cited works of Ricciotto

Canudo.<sup>63</sup> While this is indeed a productive interpretive framework, the fact these early journals consist of a *collectivity* of individuals, who produce *regular* comments, *extending* over a period of many years, and which display a *diverse* use of language, means the journals constitute a body of evidence for studying a “movement of consciousness.”<sup>64</sup> In such an interpretive framework, *everything* appearing in a journal – not just the more attractive components, such as articles – is a potential sign indicating a conscious process. An explanation, comment or even the use of a single word in one journal will enable us to understand the logic for using a particular way of thinking or approach in another. In looking at these texts together, in seeing them as representing a social world or institution, we gain a sense of a consciousness emerging along side of film. Significantly, assertions about this consciousness are justified through a substantial set of material evidence. Far too often, references are made to “experiences” in early cinema that stand on comparatively little evidence: the first hand report of a witness at a screening (the critic or reporter) or a single piece of text that provides one data point, one individual’s experience, but from which an explanation of public reception is derived.

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<sup>63</sup> Especially his 1911 “The Birth of a Sixth Art,” in *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology 1907–1939*, edited by Richard Abel (Princeton University Press, 1993), 58–66.

<sup>64</sup> See footnote 48 in the Introduction for quote and reference from Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing.

An example of this latter use of evidence occurs in Janet Staiger's study *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of Cinema*, an important methodological guide for film historians interested in early film discourses that insists on a contextual and empirically based approach for the study of film reception, but which seems to diverge from this model in one especially interesting passage that illustrates the fragility of early film criticism evidence in advancing any type of general claim about public experience.<sup>65</sup> In this passage, Staiger draws a general conclusion based on a film review of *The "Teddy" Bears* (Edwin Porter, 1907):

Evidence indicates that when those [early cinema] audiences failed to recognize an intertextual reference necessary for the plot, they might evaluate the film as unsuccessful. For example, in discussing current cultural allusions in the 1907 film *The "Teddy" Bears*, [Charles] Musser believes the conclusion of the film is a satirical reference to Teddy Roosevelt's hunting exploits in which Roosevelt was accused of going after easy targets. Musser points out that a *Variety* critic seems to have missed this joke."<sup>66</sup>

The infamous story of President Theodore Roosevelt's hunting trip occurred in 1902, in which he was later portrayed, most notably in a political cartoon, as having refused to shoot a defenceless bear, though nevertheless condoning its merciful killing. It was apparently this cartoon, and especially the endearing drawing of the bear, that spurred the phenomenon of teddy bears, to which

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<sup>65</sup> Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of Cinema* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

<sup>66</sup> Staiger, *Interpreting Films*, 121.

Roosevelt's name and legend would henceforward be associated.<sup>67</sup> Because *The "Teddy" Bears* combines several unrelated texts, requiring spectators to make connections beyond the information supplied by the film itself, it is understandable that Staiger sees the reception of the film as being especially revealing of the way early audiences negotiated intertextuality. In notes prepared for the DVD release of *The "Teddy" Bears*, Scott Simmon's offers a compelling account of the challenging spectator position the film appears to create:

Part charming fairy tale, part violent political satire, and part accomplished puppet animation, *The "Teddy" Bears* may strike us now as a bizarre mix.

In a sense, this film asked its audience to provide its unity. Many early films relied for full comprehension on viewers' knowledge of preexisting stories and popular fashions. But this one stretched the audience to the limit, asking for knowledge of the English fairy tale "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and an the [sic] incident in President Theodore Roosevelt's life as a hunter that led to the Teddy bear craze in the first place. According to the story, Roosevelt had gallantly refused to shoot a small wounded bear during a 1902 hunting trip.<sup>68</sup>

A viewing of the film clearly supports Simmon's assertion. Roosevelt is never directly mentioned or referred to, neither in titles, nor in a familiar visual icon (such as the White House) that would signal such a fact, though one notes

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<sup>67</sup> Linda Mullins, *The Teddy Bear Men: Theodore Roosevelt & Clifford Berryman*, Historical Guide for Collectors (Cumberland, MD: Hobby House Press, Inc, 1987).

<sup>68</sup> Martin Marks, <http://www.filmpreservation.org/dvds-and-books/clips/the-teddy-bears-1907>. Originally published in the booklet accompanying the DVD *More treasures from American film archives 1894-1931* (United States: Image Entertainment, 2004).

that the hunter in the film does bear Roosevelt's likeness. Near the end of the film, as Goldilocks is chased down a path by bears (obviously costumed actors), a moustached hunter, appearing for the first time in the film, suddenly enters the scene from off-screen, framed in long shot and profile, shooting several bears, and sparing the youngest at Goldilocks' request. If this scene is indeed a reference to the Roosevelt story, one could certainly conclude the film produces an information gap requiring "pre-existing" knowledge from the viewer in order to understand its connection to Roosevelt.

Therefore, Staiger's assertion that "evidence indicates that when those [early cinema] audiences failed to recognize an intertextual reference necessary for the plot, they might evaluate the film as unsuccessful" appears to depend on the following set of premises: one, that the evidence shows audiences failed to recognize the reference to Roosevelt; two, that based on this fact the film is evaluated as unsuccessful; and three, that such a conclusion offers a characterization of early audiences that is particular enough not to apply to all audiences. This is to say, why would early cinema audiences, as opposed to modern audiences, evaluate films as "unsuccessful" based on missing intertextual evidence? It seems a truism that missing the intended satire or parody of a story, whether in 1907 or 2015, will produce a vastly different reading of the film than should satire be detected. Nevertheless, this sequence of premises reveals the process through which a brief text from 1907



becomes knowledge about early film spectatorship generally. The swiftness with which this conclusion is drawn is an indication of the attitude taken towards these texts, and perhaps an assumption about the naïve consciousness producing this evidence (which renders it transposable onto the population at large).

The evidence Staiger refers to, as mentioned, is a *Variety* critic's review of the film (signed "Simi", most probably Sime Silverman, the editor), which offered the following evaluation of the hunter scene in question:

The closing pictures showing the pursuit of the *child* by the bear family [sic] is spoiled through a hunter appearing on the scene and shooting two. Children will rebel against this position. Considerable comedy is had through a chase in the snow, but the live bears seemed so domesticated that the deliberate murder in an obviously "faked" series left a wrong taste of the picture as a whole.<sup>69</sup>

Although this excerpt can be construed as evidence of someone in 1907 missing the intertextual reference to Roosevelt, it is only because Roosevelt is not specifically mentioned, which is not necessarily evidence of this latter fact. However, even if one accepts that this shows that someone in 1907 missed an intertextual reference, even if one interprets this fact as leading to a poor evaluation of the film, and even if, it should be noted, one accepts the actual comments of the reviewer as constituting the idea of "unsuccessful", all of which are necessary to support the initial claim, on what grounds does this

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<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Staiger, *Interpreting Films*, 121.

evidence represent anything other than this reviewer's point of view, keeping in mind the absence of corroborating evidence? In other words, is it possible to make a general statement about audiences based on this review? This methodological step may be justifiable in some reception studies, especially when corroborated by other similar pieces of evidence that suggests the audience saw the film in the same way, but it would also seem quite important to consider the particular institutional conditions that might motivate a critic to emphasize certain features of film, which would obviously result in a different film experience, compared to say the public.<sup>70</sup>

It is, after all, the point of view of a single writer, constrained by the institutional standards influencing trade journal criticism at the time, which included a tendency, in the United States, toward prescriptive criticism and moralizing;<sup>71</sup> that is, the trade press began envisioning itself as a sort of

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<sup>70</sup> This point about whether it is possible to take a review as a representation of general spectatorship is nevertheless complicated by one important fact: critics were tasked with the job of conveying public opinion. A 1910 article observed, for example: "In many instances the critics seek to establish their impressions as those of the audience about them." However, references to the public diminished quickly, and never really achieved the type of impressions referred to by this writer. "Film and Critics," *Film Reports* (1 October 1910): 8-9. Quoted in Anthony Slide, ed., *Selected Film Criticism 1896-1911* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1982), 116.

<sup>71</sup> Charlie Keil observes this "prescriptive" tendency in early film criticism in his study *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907-1913*, Wisconsin Studies in Film (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001). I also discuss it in "Film Theory as Practice: Criticism and Interpretation in the Early American Trade Press," in *Proceedings of the XVI International Film Studies Conference-Permanent Seminar on History of Film Theories: In the Very Beginning, at the Very End, 2009*, edited by Francesco Casetti and Jane Gaines (Udine: Forum, 2010): 83-93.

copyright bureau with the goal of undercutting the need for government intervention in the burgeoning film industry, to which the economic survival of journals was manifestly connected.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, part of the goal of early film criticism was to indicate to the film industry those aspects of film that ought to be censored in future films in light of the larger strategy of maintaining the industry independent and profitable. Thus, the emphasis on the way children might negatively receive the film seems to correspond with the intended objective that certain moral standards needed to be met in order to legitimize cinema. In fact, Sime Silverman was likely the leading expert on the impact of film on children. His seven-year-old son, Skigie, had already been “publishing” a successful, though short-lived, column of film reviews in *Variety* since December 1905. Just a week after launching his well-known trade publication, the elder Silverman sensed an opportunity to symbolically enact the motto of his magazine—that reviews would “be written conscientiously, and the truth only told...if it hurts it is at least said in fairness and impartiality” — by making his son the subject of an unusual experiment. Silverman sent his son, presumably accompanied by an adult, to vaudeville shows, which at the time included film screenings as part of the act. Afterwards, Skigie would recount his experiences to family members,

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<sup>72</sup> This interest is explicitly explained in W. Stephen Bush, “The Question of Censorship,” *Moving Picture World* (9 January 1909): 32, in which Bush provides a list of scenes that should be avoided, implicitly calling on film critics to take such scenes to task.

which would be published, verbatim, in a column titled “Skigie’. “The World’s Youngest Critic.” While intended to be humorous, another objective of the column was “to enable the artist to determine the impression he or his work leaves on the infantile mind.”<sup>73</sup> (Incidentally, Skigie’s columns apparently enraged the subjects of his criticism).<sup>74</sup>

Thus, “Simi” was actually quite a knowledgeable movie-goer, rather than a naïf, who regarded the film from the perspective of a child rather than an adult given its infantile subject matter. Moreover, it would have been surprising to find a film review of any kind in 1907 that acknowledged intertextual references or even paid attention to “implied meaning,” including the type presumably missed in this example, since it tended to concentrate on more immediate or explicit moral icons, which is to say shocking images or scenes, illicit affairs, violence, and so forth.<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, and following from this point, one questions whether it is in fact possible for Simi to have missed this reference. Mentioned earlier is the fact that the film produces an “information gap” since it does not provide explicit

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<sup>73</sup> These articles appear mostly in 1906 and include “Skigie’ Goes to Syracuse. Sees the Show at the Grand Opera House. Says it Smells Bad. Wants to Come Home” (January 6, 1906: 10), “Skigie’ at the Alhambra. Approves the Bill, But Dodges the Three Diamonds” (January 20, 1906: 10) and “Skigie’ The Youngest Critic in the World, Goes to the Family Theatre — Says the Show There is Good” (February 17, 1906: 7).

<sup>74</sup> “Skigie Wants to Know. Are his Articles Offensive?”, *Variety* (January 13, 1906): 10.

<sup>75</sup> As W. Stephen Bush implies in his lengthy list of censorable scenes in “The Question of Censorship,” 32

mention that the hunter scene refers to Roosevelt, thus creating the possibility that one could miss the reference, and consequently, not be aware the film is a satire. However, this information could have been, and almost certainly was, obtained by spectators through other channels. We already know that film lecturers at the time were responsible for filling-in just these types of narrative gaps for audiences, so it is likely that audiences were aware of the film was a satire of Roosevelt based simply on this practice existing at the time; but since no knowledge exists about the reception of this film in particular, one cannot safely conclude this information was made available through such means.

The title also provides important clues about the intended genre and possible allusions. The mere fact teddy bears are featured in the film (in particular during a spectacular animation scene) and linked to Theodore Roosevelt in public consciousness seems compelling evidence in itself that the reference would be difficult to miss, although the degree to which the public was aware of the story would obviously need to be studied. “Teddy” is also conspicuously placed in quotation marks, announcing a double meaning, especially since Roosevelt was publically known as “Teddy” and not “Theodore.” However, the truly compelling evidence is located in the very field of discourse from which the review emerged, film trade publications, which makes a lack of awareness of this reference highly improbable. As argued in this chapter, all regions of a

journal provide clues about the awareness of writers, even if a text in particular fails to make mention of a given point. Indeed, it is in studying and understanding this fairly complex field of evidence, its rules, habits, language, and range of awareness, that isolated pieces of criticism become useful historical evidence in other ways.

In this case, the most compelling evidence that it was nearly impossible for a critic operating within a film trade publication to have missed the fact the film was satire is the following: it is precisely in this way that the film was promoted. In an advertisement in the *Moving Picture World*, the film was promoted with the following text: “*The “Teddy” Bears*: A Laughable Satire on the Popular Craze” (See Figure 1).

18 THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD.

<p><b>CLASS A FILMS</b> 15 Cents per Foot Exhibition Model Kinetoscope \$115.00</p>	<div style="border: 2px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">EDISON</div>	<p><b>CLASS B FILMS</b> 12 Cents per Foot Universal Model Kinetoscope \$75.00</p>
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**FILMS and PROJECTING KINETOSCOPES**  
THE RECOGNIZED STANDARDS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

ANOTHER UP-TO-THE-MINUTE EDISON COMEDY HIT

EDISON EXHIBITION MODEL KINETOSCOPE  
Improved Take-up and Film Magazines  
\$135.00  
Improved Take-up and Film Magazines  
\$35.00  
Improved Take-up Film Magazines Each  
\$10.00

The “Teddy” Bears

A Laughable Satire on the Popular Craze

**A SURE MONEY GETTER    A ONE BEST BET**

Beautifully Mono-Tinted    Photographically Perfect  
SEND FOR ILLUSTRATED DESCRIPTIVE CIRCULAR No. 317

No. 6313. Code VEELMONDQ. Length 925 Ft. Class A. \$140.25

Send for latest catalogue and illustrated circulars

<p><b>Edison Manufacturing Co.</b> MAIN OFFICE AND FACTORY, ORANGE, N.J. Chicago Office, 304 Wabash Avenue New York Office, 31 Union Square    Cable Address, SYMOTIC, New York</p>	<p>Office for United Kingdom, 25 Clerkenwell Road, London, E.C., England</p> <p><b>SELLING AGENTS:</b> THE KINETOGRAPH CO.....41 East 21st Street, New York PETER BARTOGAL EP.....139 Fillmore Street, San Francisco, Cal. GEORGE BRECK.....550-554 Grove Street, San Francisco, Cal.</p> <p><b>DEALERS IN ALL PRINCIPAL CITIES</b></p>
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Figure 1: The “Teddy” Bears, *Moving Picture World* (March 16, 1907): 31

The promotion clearly announces the intended genre and topic of the film. Still, it remains a possibility that “satire” in this context refers strictly to the way teddy bears are represented in the film. But combined with another text, also appearing in the *Moving Picture World*, this possibility becomes unlikely. This is how the “Film Review” (which at this time, as mentioned earlier, were plot summaries manufacturers provided to the journal) described the scene in question:

An exciting chase leads over hills, through deep snow, until finally Goldilocks strikes a road, which she follows. She soon has the good fortune to meet the great hunter, “Teddy”, to whom she hurriedly explains her predicament. The bears soon come within range. Teddy takes good aim, fires, and kills old father Bruin. . .<sup>76</sup>

Considering that the hunter’s name is “Teddy” (even placed in quotation marks, thus completing the meaning of the title), the evidence conclusively shows that the film was promoted as a satire of the Roosevelt hunting story that initiated the teddy bear “craze”. It is unlikely that a spectator at the time, especially critics, would not have been aware of this extra-textual information.

The point of examining this case study, as mentioned, is not to “correct” a historical fact, that is, to establish whether or not Simi was aware of the reference to Roosevelt in *The “Teddy” Bears*, but merely to illustrate the

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<sup>76</sup> *Moving Picture World* (March 16, 1907), 31.

rather lengthy and complex process, the premises and logical steps that are required, to eventually transform a simple piece of film criticism into a substantive, albeit provisional, claim about early film spectatorship. As a portal into public experience, early film criticism stands as opaque evidence that cannot be easily separated from its original context, at least in terms of the type of consciousness it represents.

Furthermore, I believe this case study illustrates the value of focusing on consciousness. In these journals we have literally hundreds of thousands of data points that can be traced, all of which are functions of “film experience,” and which when contextualized and interpreted offer a picture of an exciting “collective experience” that displays a “movement of consciousness.” It is partially because Staiger assumes a naïve consciousness behind the review she analyzes, separated from this movement, that she proceeds to draw vast conclusions. In focusing attention on the film consciousness and self-consciousness that begins to emerge in early film publications, this broader context is foregrounded, discouraging isolated analyses.

Finally, I have identified the ways writers formulated a language and practice for understanding film. Collectively, their activities and publications show two broad trends: one was a process of becoming aware that film was an aesthetic, constructed object that contained implicit meaning, likely placed



there by a (film) creator. The other was self-awareness, an understanding of the role of the critic and of the trade press institution in the construction of the object of cinema. It is in their language that the conceptual transformation of cinema takes place, not just in the material, industrial changes occurring at the level of film production. The early publications produced a semantic field of possibilities, words invented, applied, used and sometimes discarded in a multitude of arrangements and contexts, from which theoretical possibilities and inferences about cinema emerged. Any theorizing about film depends, above all, on an existing vocabulary, an existing language, with concomitant conceptual possibilities that can be used as either references, building blocks or analytical tools. It would be accurate to suggest that in these journals can be found the advent of film theory and film study since, even though direct lines of cause and effect may not be visible, the multitude of terms and ways of talking about film entered the public domain through them, even if never fully acknowledged or referenced.

## CHAPTER 2: ESTABLISHING A CONVERSATION ABOUT ‘CONSCIOUSNESS’

With this study of early film publications now considered, in which the original idea of film consciousness was developed, it is now time to attempt a broader definition of film consciousness – a field consisting of different categories – in which the intuitive sense of “film consciousness” presented in the preceding chapter is developed and contextualized among other categories of film consciousness. However, in order to achieve this, it is first necessary to define the range of ways in which ‘consciousness’ is used to mean something.

The approach to defining the word ‘consciousness’ (and associated ideas and concepts) in this thesis is best described as “pragmatic.”<sup>1</sup> Learning about “consciousness” entails understanding the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’ in different contexts. Since the word ‘consciousness’ designates the phenomenon under discussion, these definitions provide – in sum – a broad picture of the ways of talking about consciousness, and perhaps, the ways of thinking about consciousness. One way of regarding these definitions is as a “semantic field,” which Pamela Faber and Ricardo Usón define as “a

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<sup>1</sup> The term “pragmatics” covers a broad range of approaches and interests roughly covering “the cognitive, social and cultural science of language and communication.” In the case of this thesis, the emphasis is towards defining language-use according to different contexts, whether public or academic. Jef Verschueren, “Introduction: The pragmatic perspective,” in *Key Notions for Pragmatics*, edited by Jef Verschueren and Jan-Ola Östman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub., 2009), 1.

set of lexemes which cover a certain conceptual area and which bear certain specifiable semantic relations to one another.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of the “vagueness of the concept itself,”<sup>3</sup> I believe “semantic field” is a useful starting point for thinking about the project proposed in this chapter and the next, which is to catalogue different ways of using the word ‘consciousness’ to mean a particular thing, especially in combination with an object such as ‘film’. A complete “semantic field of ‘consciousness’” – which this thesis does not offer – would consist of every way in which someone might use the word ‘consciousness’.

A second element in defining the word ‘consciousness’ is that its meaning changes according to the expressions in which it is found. If the aim of this thesis is to consider the different ways in which someone could, if interested, imagine the relationship between “film” and “consciousness” on the basis of a semantic field of ‘consciousness’, it would then be important, as well, to consider the ways in which other words (which represent a variety of objects) relate to the word ‘consciousness’. Consider, for example, the expression “national consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> Does the “national” possess the “consciousness,” or does the expression refer to a type of consciousness, such as “a consciousness

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<sup>2</sup> Pamela B. Faber and Ricardo Mairal Usón, *Constructing a Lexicon of English Verbs* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> This expression is discussed in more detail next chapter, section 7 (“Compound nature.”)

of the national” or “nationhood” that a particular person or population possesses? There is also the issue of the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’ in this expression – does it mean something as simple as “a set of shared defining ideas and beliefs,”<sup>5</sup> or is it a more complicated statement that refers to a living, collective sense of self, or even, an aggregate of all consciousness found within a nation. While the context usually – though not always – specifies the particular meaning of the expression, the issue is that expressions provide different possibilities of meaning for the word ‘consciousness’ than when the word is used alone. Moreover, it is on the basis of these sorts of established expressions that new expressions, such as “film consciousness,” are imagined and implemented. Therefore, expressions offer templates, or models, for using the word ‘consciousness’ in relation to an object.

Finally, there is the fact the word ‘consciousness’ appears within many ongoing debates and fields of research, such as “consciousness studies.”<sup>6</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> “consciousness, n.”, OED Online, June 2015 (Oxford University Press). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 01, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> There are many university programs with this name. There is also a Center for Consciousness Studies (at the University of Arizona) and the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, launched in 1994. Formed in 1998, the Center of Consciousness Studies is representative of the field itself and aims to “bring together the perspectives of philosophy, the cognitive sciences, neuroscience, the social sciences, medicine, and the physical sciences, the arts and humanities, to move toward an integrated understanding of human consciousness.” “Mission: Background,” Center for Consciousness Studies, at University of Arizona. <http://www.consciousness.arizona.edu/mission.htm> (accessed on June 30, 2015).

field of research, at first glance, might seem an obvious starting point for defining ‘consciousness’. Yet, while this field, and the debates it includes, are quite important, and relevant, it is not necessarily the best starting point for defining the semantic field of ‘consciousness’. This is because it is only one place – one referential context – in which the word has meaning. Moreover, even within that single field, there are many different ways of using the word, such that philosopher, and consciousness scholar, David Chalmers once wrote, “those who talk about ‘consciousness’ are frequently talking past each other.”<sup>7</sup>

Rather, the approach adopted in this thesis is inspired from a passage from Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, when he writes, “If I am supposed to describe how an object looks from far off, I don’t make the description more accurate by saying what can be noticed about the object on closer inspection.”<sup>8</sup> I believe Wittgenstein’s words captures the essence of the approach, which entails looking at ‘consciousness’ from “far off,” in order to determine its referential meaning in more than one context (the general thing the word ostensibly refers to in some straightforward sense, even if the phenomena itself is shown to be very complex, perhaps even indescribable). More practically, it will entail categorizing the different meanings of

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<sup>7</sup> David Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, edited by Max Velmans and Susan Schneider (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 226.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §171.

‘consciousness’, which will then serve as the basis for constructing “film consciousness” categories.

## 1. Referential Contexts

Nevertheless, it is important to further clarify the reason “consciousness studies” – or some corresponding field that is assumed as significant in relation to this word – is not the starting point, since these fields are obvious places to begin such a project. Wittgenstein, in his cryptic way, is again useful here, when he says, “Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.”<sup>9</sup> The problem with starting in any given field – and not in the neutral space imagined in this thesis, that “far off” place that some will think is an attempt at an Archimedean perspective (which I believe it is not, since I admit to being befuddled by the word in question) – is that it establishes a path, which, because of the logic of the path, masks the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’. Instead, the attention becomes focused on the issues or “problems” (more on this below) that are seen as encompassed within the parameters of the word.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., §203.

This is analogous to the situation Adam Kuper identifies in relation to the word ‘culture’, which overlaps with “consciousness” and is similarly difficult to define. In some definitions ‘culture’ encompasses all human reality, and in others, only a segment of that reality (such as when it refers to high culture).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the word creates a series of slippages of meaning that makes it difficult to actually define ‘culture’ in any practical sense. Kuper even advocates for dispensing with the word altogether, in favour of concentrating on those elements seen as constituting “culture”:

[T]he more one considers the best modern work on culture by anthropologists, the more advisable it must appear to avoid the hyper-referential word altogether, and to talk more precisely of knowledge, or belief, or art, or technology, or tradition, or even of ideology (though similar problems are raised by that multivalent concept.)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This divide between “culture” as an all encompassing term for describing human reality, or as term that describes only a part of that human reality, as Kuper explains, has a long history, beginning with the German term “Kultur” – which represented intellectual, artistic and religious facts, in contrast to political, economic and social facts. Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31. However, these different meanings of “culture” can also be dated to two well-known definitions from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The first comes from Edward Tylor, an anthropologist, who in 1871 defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London,: J. Murray, 1871), 1 The second definition comes from the preface of Mathew Arnold’s 1869 *Culture and Anarchy; an Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, which stated that culture was the “pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world,” (London: Smith, Elder, 1875 [1869]), viii.

<sup>11</sup> Kuper, *Culture*, x.

In entering a particular debate, or field, designated by the term “culture,” or “consciousness,” discussion carries forward to the particular issues that are seen as falling under the umbrella of the term. In the case of the word ‘culture’, Kuper suggest focusing instead on “knowledge,” “belief,” “art,” or “technology,” which fall under the general heading of ‘culture’, the word itself too “hyper-referential” to pin down in a practical definition. Likewise, the field of “consciousness studies” offers a series of “problems” – which then become the focus of interest. This is exemplified in a volume such as the *Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, consisting of over fifty articles on the subject from such fields as religious studies, philosophy, psychology, and biology, including an opening section entitled “Problems of Consciousness.”<sup>12</sup> The problems concern, among others, the study of consciousness in infants,<sup>13</sup> the study of consciousness in animals,<sup>14</sup> the origins of consciousness,<sup>15</sup> artificial intelligence (or consciousness in machines),<sup>16</sup> the unity of conscious experience,<sup>17</sup> “the mind-body problem” (how an immaterial phenomenon such

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<sup>12</sup> Velmans and Schneider, *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*.

<sup>13</sup> Colwyn Trevarthen and Vasudevi Reddy, “Consciousness in infants,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 41-57.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Allen and Mark Bekoff, “Animal consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 58-71.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Polger, “Rethinking the evolution of consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 72-86.

<sup>16</sup> Igor Aleksander, “Machine consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 87-98.

<sup>17</sup> Barry Dainton, “Coming together: the unity of conscious experience,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 209-222.



as consciousness emerges from a physical phenomenon),<sup>18</sup> “self-consciousness,”<sup>19</sup> and the one that seems to most concern recent philosophers, the quality or character of consciousness, which David Chalmers has referred to as “the hard problem of consciousness.”<sup>20</sup>

The Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona provides a similar list of problems, under the heading “The Problem of Consciousness,” which includes the following questions:

- What is consciousness?
- Can subjective experience be explained in physical terms?
- What are appropriate and potentially fruitful methods for studying consciousness?
- Can new methods of brain imaging help clarify the nature and mechanisms of consciousness?
- What is the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes in perception, memory, learning, and other domains?
- What are the properties of conscious experience in specific domains such as vision, emotion, and metacognition?
- Does consciousness play a functional role, and if so what is that role?

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<sup>18</sup> John Searle, “Biological naturalism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 325-334.

<sup>19</sup> José Luis Bermúdez, “Self-consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* 456-467.

<sup>20</sup> Chalmers, “The hard problem of consciousness,” 225-235.

- Can we develop rigorous methods for investigating and formalizing data about conscious experience from the first-person perspective?
- What role does subjective experience play in existing theories within modern science?
- What would be the implications of a science of consciousness for ethics and society?<sup>21</sup>

While these questions are representative of the field of consciousness studies, they also provide an opportunity to situate this thesis in relation to them. For one, there is the first question, which would seem in line with the interest of this chapter and thesis: “What is consciousness?” From the perspective of the pragmatic approach adopted in this thesis, this sort of open question is not answerable without a specific linguistic context. As the next chapter shows, there are at least five different ways of using the word ‘consciousness’, each of which display variability, even while sharing a continuity of meaning. For example, definition 4b of the Oxford English Dictionary, “a set of shared defining ideas and beliefs,”<sup>22</sup> does not seem to answer to the above question, at least directly. It is rather like encountering the question “what is cinema?” – answers will vary according to whatever a person understands this concept to mean. This “pre-understanding” is then a requisite for defining “consciousness.”

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<sup>21</sup> “Problem of Consciousness,” Center for Consciousness Studies, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://www.consciousness.arizona.edu/problem.htm>

<sup>22</sup> “consciousness, n.”, OED Online, June 2015 (Oxford University Press). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 01, 2015).

The pragmatic approach is oriented toward defining each of the “pre-understandings” that provide the conditions for answering the question. The Center for Consciousness Studies appears to concentrate on two main areas of definition: that of “subjective experience” or “conscious experience,” and “the faculty of consciousness” (which are two distinct definitions – one is the experience of consciousness and the other is the cause, structure and functioning of consciousness). Both of these areas of definition are presented next chapter (in section 5 and 6). I say “area of definition” because, as Wittgenstein writes, concepts sometimes point to a “rough area,” rather than a specific area; therefore it is sometimes the function of words to define a rough area (which does not yet provide us a definition, or sets of definitions, only the possibility that such a definition might be discovered within that area).<sup>23</sup> This is why it is often difficult to get a handle on the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’ when operating within any given referential context – the presumptions about the “general area of definition” are already settled, which requires some distance in order to describe.

Nevertheless, one of the questions in the above list seems to fit comfortably with the general tone of this thesis: “Can we develop rigorous methods for investigating and formalizing data about conscious experience from the first-person perspective?” I would argue that this thesis is an attempt to develop

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<sup>23</sup> Wittgenstein, *PI*, §71.

such a method through various approaches. One, in defining a vocabulary for thinking about the relationship between consciousness and film (Chapters 4 to 7, which concern “film consciousness”); two, in categorizing different senses of the term ‘film experience’ (Chapter 6), which are categories through which film and consciousness have been typically explored; and, three, in “formalizing data about conscious experience,” by labeling different, elusive subjective experiences that seem meaningfully related to film (mainly in Chapter 7). It will seem then that the overarching objective of this thesis is to develop a means of talking about the relationship between film and consciousness, by developing a linguistic tool, and implementing this tool through an approach I define as “thinking in terms of film consciousness” (exemplified in Chapter 8 but used throughout this thesis).

One of Wittgenstein’s points in his “labyrinth” passage (and in his body of work generally) was to show that even if ordinary language-use was easy to understand, it was difficult to explain.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the ability to explain and understand depends on the particular way one enters the conversation; particularly the way a context orients such understanding. In this regard, rather than attempt to identify each and every way the word ‘consciousness’ is

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<sup>24</sup> This echoes Christian Metz’s view that a “film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.”<sup>24</sup> This passage serves as a guiding philosophy in this thesis, except that it is applied to language instead of film. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69.

used in the *Blackwell Companion on Consciousness*, or within consciousness studies, it will sometimes make sense to identify the general “referential context” in which the word is found – the pre-understanding that is given – as the basis for defining the word. This is to say, a word is sometimes both ambiguous and clear given the particular distance adopted in relation to the word. It is clear when it points to a general “area of definition” and ambiguous when it attempts to define precisely the particular phenomena in question. Many will understand the meaning of “film studies” while at the same time observing those immersed in the field rarely agree on the meaning of “film” (yet, from a safe distance, we know that ‘film’ does not refer to “celluloid,” or “thin layers;” but we also know it means more than “movies”).

When Chalmers refers to ‘consciousness’, it is embedded within the referential context of “consciousness studies.” This does not mean the word is clear and unambiguous, only that the referential context provides a first level orientation, a horizon of problems and discussions in which the meaning of the term is considered. Therefore, defining ‘consciousness’ more broadly, to include as many contexts as possible, requires recognizing the different referential contexts in which the word ‘consciousness’ has a “life.”<sup>25</sup> It is also important to see that ambiguity exists even within a specific referential

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<sup>25</sup> Wittgenstein, *PI*, §203. “Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What* gives it life?—In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there?—Or is the *use* its life.”

context. The standard assumption – at least from the perspective of academics – is that when ‘consciousness’ is presented as a subject of interest, the referential context is more or less “consciousness studies.” Murray Smith’s chapter on consciousness in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (as discussed in the Introduction) is a convincing example, since the chapter – a survey of the study of consciousness in relation to film – is limited in scope only to the concerns of consciousness studies.<sup>26</sup> But a definition of the word ‘consciousness’ does not necessarily have to come from within that specific referential context, or from within the referential context of any one discipline. Nor does the referential context have to include the particular problems that most regularly appear as salient from the perspective of consciousness studies, such as in the list of questions presented at the Center for Consciousness Studies.

Many uses of the term ‘consciousness’ take place in every day speech. Understanding the meaning of the term does not depend on an “academic referential context” (to name the sum of all the different academic referential contexts). Most language users understand the meaning of “being conscious of your actions” or “loss of consciousness” or even more abstract ideas such as “public consciousness.” Popular psychology has also introduced the

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<sup>26</sup> Murray Smith, “Consciousness,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 39-51.

“subconscious” into ordinary speech. None of these “ordinary” uses of ‘consciousness’ (or ‘conscious’) produce much confusion, at least at the level of comprehension, yet each contributes to the broad semantic field of consciousness. If the objective is to define the meaning of ‘consciousness’, then ordinary referential contexts are important too.

Nevertheless, within the world of academics, it is possible to identify at least two main referential contexts, which corresponds with other epistemological tendencies and orientations as well. These two contexts can be characterized as “universalist” – which corresponds with consciousness studies – and “contextualist” – which corresponds with the humanities and social sciences. These are not irreconcilable contexts, but depending on the perspective adopted, a different set of problems or interests becomes relevant.

The universalist context – whether or not explicitly acknowledged – is generally about consciousness in some larger, abstract sense, such as in the above list of questions from consciousness studies. It is also sometimes seen, as with Chalmers, as the only important or relevant questions about consciousness. In fact, if ‘consciousness’ is presented without further qualification (such as in the title of Murray Smith’s chapter, “Consciousness”), the assumption is that ‘consciousness’ is going to be discussed, imagined, and

analyzed from a universalist perspective.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the problems that will be seen as interesting include “the mind-body problem” (Descartes’ dualism is often cited as the starting point), the evolutionary and biological origins of consciousness, the structure and categories of consciousness (memory, attention, awareness, qualia, and so forth), and the epistemological problems associated with the subjective character of conscious experience.

Contextualist approaches to consciousness – which is more in line with this thesis – describe, study and identify those things that either appear to have some bearing on consciousness, or appear to reveal something about the nature of a specific situation of consciousness, defined according to a culture, history, institution, nation, language, art, environment, or technology. It sometimes, but not always, answers to the question “what it is like” to have a *particular* consciousness (that of early film writers, the 1950s, a specific culture, women, children, film viewers, etc).<sup>28</sup> Consciousness in this regard is also defined in terms of a “way of seeing” or “experiencing” the world. The aim is more toward *characterizing* consciousness than it is toward defining those features that appear universal or essential, although the end result often places universal assumptions into question. Consciousness also has another

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, “Consciousness,” 39-51.

<sup>28</sup> The “what it is like” question comes from Thomas Nagel’s seminal article, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” *The Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1975): 435-450. This article is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, section 4 on “Subjective Film Consciousness.”



meaning in these situations that strongly overlaps with this one, but which is nevertheless distinct. The term is often employed to mean the shared sensibilities, values or beliefs of a particular population.

We can contrast these approaches – and identify some parameters – by comparing two volumes that carry the name “consciousness” in the title, but which have a different understanding of consciousness in mind. As discussed earlier, *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness* presents over fifty chapters on the topic of consciousness, which presumably offer a representation of the field of consciousness studies. The disciplines included in this field are, among others, philosophy, biology, neuroscience, and psychology, each of which examine or study some aspect of consciousness.<sup>29</sup> Roughly speaking, it is possible to define these research orientations as follows: neuroscience focuses on the brain and the physical causes of consciousness; psychology studies the way the mind “works”;<sup>30</sup> and philosophy, initially through phenomenology, but now through pragmatics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of language, attempts to describe the experience of consciousness,

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<sup>29</sup> According to Velmans and Schneider, “Consciousness studies’ is an umbrella term for the multidisciplinary study of consciousness in fields such as neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, artificial intelligence, and linguistics.” *The Blackwell Companion on Consciousness*, 1.

<sup>30</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

including those “structures” or properties that seem universal to all instances of consciousness.<sup>31</sup>

The Companion excludes, without explanation, sociological, historical, and anthropological approaches to consciousness, indicating that, in spite of these other disciplines studying “consciousness,” the meaning of “consciousness” differs from that of the Blackwell Companion title. Consider, for example, Hayden White’s *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, which White defines as “a *history* of historical consciousness in nineteenth-century Europe...”<sup>32</sup> Where does this ‘consciousness’ fit within “consciousness studies?” A more analogous example is Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport’s volume *Questions of Consciousness*, which adopts an anthropological perspective that clearly presents – as a standalone term – ‘consciousness’ in the title. Cohen and Rapport define the subject of the volume as follows:

A pioneering attempt to formulate an anthropological approach to consciousness, *Questions of Consciousness* explores the importance of the conscious self, and of the ‘conscious collectivity’, in the construction and interpretation of social relations and process. It raises questions the answers to which have been previously neglected in anthropology. How aware are people of their behaviour? To what extent is the consciousness of individuals modelled by the cultures and social structures within which they live? Is ‘collective

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<sup>31</sup> John Searle, Daniel Dennett and David Chalmers are recognized examples of these philosophical approaches.

<sup>32</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1.

consciousness' a fiction which may have misrepresented social process by obscuring the complexity of the social group?<sup>33</sup>

The difference between the *Blackwell Companion on Consciousness* and *Questions of Consciousness* is one of approach, which reveals, clearly, the existence of two different referential contexts: the universalist, represented in the *Blackwell Companion*, is centered on the origins, functioning and structures of consciousness, although divided internally according to the scientific and philosophical epistemologies that account for the problem of subjective experience (more on this below). The contextualist approach, represented in *Questions of Consciousness*, addresses consciousness in relation to specific social contexts or problems. The anthropological volume contains such chapters as “Amazing grace: meaning deficit, displacement and new consciousness in expressive interaction,”<sup>34</sup> “The novelist’s consciousness,”<sup>35</sup> and “Blank banners and Islamic consciousness in Zanzibar.”<sup>36</sup> There is very little overlap between these two volumes, yet both are about “consciousness” – thus the difference lies at the level of referential context. The word ‘consciousness’ points to a different set of problems and concerns that close off those which are found in the other context, in spite of

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<sup>33</sup> Anthony P. Cohen and Nigel Rapport, *Questions of Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 1995); forward.

<sup>34</sup> James W. Fernandez, “Amazing grace: meaning deficit, displacement and new consciousness in expressive interaction,” in *Questions of Consciousness*, 21-40.

<sup>35</sup> C.W. Watson, “The novelist’s consciousness,” in *Questions of Consciousness*, 77-100.

<sup>36</sup> David Parkin, “Blank banners and Islamic consciousness in Zanzibar,” in *Questions of Consciousness*, 198-216.

sharing the same name, and even the same vocabulary. It might seem this contrast is too reductive, too neatly segregated to actually be valid. Dichotomies should make any modern academic or reader naturally suspicious. Yet, consider the difference between the *Blackwell Companion's* chapter "Consciousness in infants" and *Questions of Consciousness's* "On being a child: the self, the group and the category" – which both seem concerned about consciousness within a similar age group. Both of these chapters operate with completely different bibliographies – not a single shared reference.

In keeping with Wittgenstein's labyrinth metaphor – an anthropologist will know his or her way about the anthropological volume on "consciousness" because the context and concerns are familiar, just as the philosopher will know his or her way about the Blackwell Companion for the same reason, yet the meaning of the word 'consciousness' remains in a sort of undefined position in either case, only the problems have changed.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> It might seem this contrast is too reductive and neatly segregated to actually be valid. Dichotomies should make any modern academic or reader naturally suspicious. Yet, the Blackwell Companion's "Consciousness in infants" and *Questions of Consciousness's* "On being a child: the self, the group and the category" appear to draw from different sources and carry quite different conversations. Perhaps the most striking difference – and the one that needs the least context and argument – is that while both of these chapters are about consciousness and children, neither chapter shares a single reference in common.

I would like to return then to a point mentioned earlier, which is that despite representing the field of consciousness studies, the Blackwell Companion to Consciousness had two different advisory boards, one named “Science of Consciousness” and the other “Philosophy of Consciousness” (the two book editors, Max Velmans and Susan Schneider, share the corresponding titles of “Science Editor” and “Philosophy Editor,” respectively). There is no mention in the book itself about which chapters were reviewed by which advisory board, or the reasoning behind these different boards, but while this may seem self-evident in many cases, the dividing line between “science” and “philosophy” is not always clear (such as the chapter on “Machine consciousness,” to name one).<sup>38</sup> Rather, the differences in advisory board – while not explicitly mentioned in the Introduction – is likely attributable to the following, objective fact about “consciousness”:

One distinctive thing about consciousness is that it can be studied both from “the inside,” that is, from the perspective of the conscious subject, and from the “outside,” that is, by any of the academic fields that study the mind.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, within the general referential context of “consciousness studies” there is a rather obvious, and sharp, dividing line between an approach that will examine consciousness from the “outside” and one that will examine it from

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<sup>38</sup> Igor Aleksander, “Machine consciousness,” *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 87-98.

<sup>39</sup> Velmans and Schneider, *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, 1.

the “inside” – and perhaps here lies the struggle with the word ‘consciousness’ itself. Those who study consciousness from the inside do not really recognize that there are those who study it from the outside, for the simple fact that the existence of “consciousness” is only confirmable from the “inside” (what is observed from the outside is a behaviour and different areas of the brain that are activated according to certain stimulations). It does not exist other than as an experience. Nevertheless, I believe we can use this “inside” and “outside” division – as presented within a massive, comprehensive volume on consciousness that includes most of the well known authors on consciousness today – as a starting point towards thinking about the difficulty in defining the word ‘consciousness’.

## **2. Polysemy, Brute Facts, and Synonymy**

One of the most challenging problems in defining ‘consciousness’ is the fact there is a “continuity” of meaning between the different uses of the word, which make it difficult to identify essential elements that belong to any one of them. This is the case even when the general meaning of the term seems apparent. As stated earlier, the meaning of the term, in many contexts, is often easy to grasp but difficult to explain and define. Many debates about “consciousness,” as alluded to in the above Chalmers quote (and chapter title), are de facto meta-discussions about the meaning of the word ‘consciousness’ – even if this issue is not explicitly stated.

In his *Projecting a Camera: Language-games in Film Theory*, Edward Branigan draws on the work of George Lakoff and Ludwig Wittgenstein, among others, to develop a model for thinking about the ambiguity of words. Although Branigan develops this model to define the different uses of the word 'camera', it also applies to the ambiguity of any word, including 'consciousness' (although with certain problems that are particular to the definition of 'consciousness'); therefore Branigan's distinctions are quoted here at length:

Linguists have distinguished several kinds of ambiguity, two of which are homonymy and polysemy. In the case of homonymy, two words spelled in the same way possess unrelated, or at least very distant, meanings (thus, separate lexical entries):

1. She withdrew money from the *bank*.
2. She was fishing in the river from the *bank*.
1. The dog's bite is worse than its *bark*.
2. The tree's leaves are lighter than its *bark*.

By contrast, in polysemy a word has distinct, though related, meanings, or at least meanings that are fairly close (thus, a single lexical entry):

1. She bought the *newspaper*.
2. The editor was fired by the *newspaper*.
1. He broke the *bottle* [container].
2. The baby finished the *bottle* [contents].

In this book I will discuss only polysemy and will treat a polysemous word as opening onto a special type of category that George Lakoff calls a “radial” category — that is, a category in which ambiguous meanings of a word are linked, creating, as Wittgenstein says, “a continuous transition” from one group of things to another.<sup>40</sup>

Otherwise stated, “homonymy” and “polysemy” refer to the “degree of relatedness” between definitions of the same word. This “degree of relatedness” is reflected, for example, in the way dictionaries organize entries. When relations are close, definitions are located under single lexical entries. When distant, or non-existent, separate lexical entries are created, each of which contain further sub-definitions. A word such as ‘bark’ has more than one lexical entry, for example, because the “rind or outer sheath of the trunk”<sup>41</sup> and the “sharp explosive cry uttered by dogs”<sup>42</sup> are unrelated things.

The way the word ‘consciousness’ is presented in dictionaries offers an indication of the perceived “relatedness” of the different definitions. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, all definitions of ‘consciousness’ appear under a single lexical entry. Therefore, unlike ‘bark’, every definition of ‘consciousness’ is perceived as related in some meaningful manner, even if usages of each

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<sup>40</sup> Edward Branigan, *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 101-102.

<sup>41</sup> “bark, n.1” OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15567?rskey=3YUUzz&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 28, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> “bark, n.3”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/15570?rskey=LXYfGY&result=4&isAdvanced=false> (accessed June 28, 2015).



homonym are quite different (consider the difference between “losing consciousness” and “lacking consciousness.”) Therefore, the starting point towards defining ‘consciousness’ must take into account that each and every usage is meaningfully related, which is to say, polysemous. In this sense, each homonym is potentially revealing of some dimension of “consciousness.”

Branigan’s examples (‘bank’, ‘bark’, ‘newspaper’, ‘bottle’) of polysemous ambiguity also highlight a problem that is particular to the word ‘consciousness’ (and terms of a similar nature), which alludes to the “inside” and “outside” problem in the study of consciousness. The reality that ‘newspaper’ refers to is categorically different than the reality to which ‘consciousness’ refers. Underlying any given usage of ‘newspaper’ is a material, physical reality, even if “newspaper” is sometimes abstract. Thus, newspapers are purchased as “news” printed on “paper,” but there is also the institution or general industry that produces these physical newspapers. In Branigan’s example, the newspaper “fires” the “editor.” For Branigan, this example shows that the ambiguity of ‘newspaper’ is polysemic, since both the material newspaper and the newspaper institution share a continuity of meaning. John Searle addresses this point from a different, though complementary, perspective, which further elaborates the problem:

Years ago I baptized some of the facts dependent on human agreement as institutional facts, in contrast to noninstitutional or “brute” facts. Institutional facts are so called because they require

human institutions for their existence. In order that this piece of paper should be a five dollar bill, for example, there has to be the human institution of money. Brute facts require no human institutions for their existence. Of course, in order to state a brute fact we require the institution of language, but the fact stated needs to be distinguished from the statement of it.<sup>43</sup>

For Searle, “paper” is an example of a “brute fact” and “money” is an example of an “institutional fact.” Humans agree to regard paper as “money” in certain contexts, just as humans agree to regard paper that contains “news” as “newspapers.” According to Searle, the process through which “brute facts” such as “paper” become “institutional facts” such as “newspapers” forms the basis of all social reality. Physical objects, including sounds and words, are assigned new functions based on human agreement, which then, through this same process, become candidates for new functions. The word ‘film’ is illustrative of this process. ‘Film’ initially referred to the celluloid material used in the making of “moving pictures.” The latter was eventually renamed ‘film’. But ‘film’ also refers to the institution that produces the individual films, in addition to being an art, craft, practice or concept. We have then a series of objects named ‘film’ which build, gradually, from an initial brute fact (the chemicals used in making the celluloid): the celluloid, the projected phenomenon named ‘film’, and finally the concept, institution, or practice that results in these ‘films’. For Searle, every object in the world, however abstract or conceptual, is reducible, through this process, to a brute fact that is not

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<sup>43</sup> John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 2.

dependent on institutions (or society) for its existence. Searle synthesizes the process through which words (or signs or objects) obtain functions as follows: “X counts as Y in context C.”<sup>44</sup> In this expression, X stands for a word (or anything potentially symbolic); Y stands for X’s new meaning or function; and C defines the context in which X counts as Y. The function of any sign, word or object can be described according to this formula. Thus, the word ‘film’ will count as “moving pictures” in the context of “cinema” (or in the context of a particular journal or institution).

Thus, the difficulty in defining ‘consciousness’ is not *just* that it is polysemic, but also that no “brute fact” underlies any given usage (at least not in the way that Searle defines “brute”). When it comes to consciousness, there is nothing comparable to “paper” and “celluloid” in the way it underlies “newspaper” and “film” (although consciousness is sometimes defined according to a hierarchy, as in the Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy, that begins with “sentience” and “wakefulness,” and moves to “self-consciousness,” which perhaps fits with Searle’s formula.)<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, no matter how deeply one burrows into defining consciousness, there is a moment when physical “brute facts,” such as the brain and neurons, disappear altogether – there is just “consciousness.”

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<sup>44</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Van Gulick, “Consciousness,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/consciousness>.

Some philosophers define this particular problem as one of “irreducibility.” Consciousness is not “reducible” to other phenomena – it cannot be explained as a function of other matter. As David Chalmers explains,

Trying to define conscious experience in terms of more primitive notions is fruitless. One might as well try to define *matter* or *space* in terms of something more fundamental. The best we can do is to give illustrations and characterizations that lie at the same level.<sup>46</sup>

Chalmers further elaborates on this point in a chapter named “Can Consciousness Be Reductively Explained?”:

Our grounds for belief in consciousness derive solely from our own experience of it. Even if we knew every last detail about the physics of the universe—the configuration, causation, and evolution among all the fields and particles in the spatiotemporal manifold—that information would not lead us to postulate the existence of conscious experience. My knowledge of consciousness, in the first instance, comes from my own case, not from any external observation. It is my first-person experience of consciousness that forces the problem on me.

[...] One could determine all the facts about biological function, and about human behaviour and the brain mechanisms by which it is caused. But nothing in this vast causal story would lead one who had not experienced it directly to believe that there should be any consciousness...<sup>47</sup>

It should be noted that for Chalmers, and many philosophers, the term ‘consciousness’ refers to “conscious experience.”<sup>48</sup> However, Chalmers’ point

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<sup>46</sup> Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 101

<sup>48</sup> Therefore, “conscious experience” is its own category of “consciousness,” as presented in Chapter 3, section 6 (“Conscious Experience”), but ‘consciousness’ has other meanings as

applies to most usages of ‘consciousness’. There is inevitably a moment in any definition, or analysis, of consciousness that must confront the reality that the only confirmation for the existence of consciousness comes from “first-person experience.” This fact constitutes the “brute fact” underlying all definitions of consciousness – and it therefore recasts the problem onto the “brute facts” of the language used for describing, defining, or explaining consciousness.

Some examples taken from actual discourse will hopefully highlight some of these points in practice. Each of the following excerpts, taken from the same volume, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s *Film History*, employ the word ‘consciousness’ towards different ends. In observing these usages, some broader conclusions about the definition of ‘consciousness’ can be drawn (emphasis in the following examples is mine).

1. [Emil Cohl’s] many films were often based on bizarre, *stream-of-consciousness* transformations of a series of shapes, one into another.<sup>49</sup>

2. The growth in international *film consciousness* spurred governments to fund archives that would take up the burden of systematically documenting and preserving the world’s film culture.<sup>50</sup>

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well.

<sup>49</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 52.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

3. [Satyajit] Ray's 1980s work persists in asserting that any significant action, political or otherwise, can spring only from *the consciousness* and conscience of the sensitive individual.<sup>51</sup>

4. In the country of Eldorado, a political myth is played out within the *delirious consciousness* of a revolutionary poet.<sup>52</sup>

5. American newspapers and magazines began discussing avant-garde art, and, with the arrival of Pop Art in 1962, the new experiments came to *public consciousness* as never before.<sup>53</sup>

The first example uses 'consciousness' as part of the expression "stream-of-consciousness." Like the word 'consciousness', the expression itself is polysemic. In this example, "stream-of-consciousness" is an expression that refers to the unformed contents of consciousness that seem to randomly appear in thoughts (images, words, ideas). But this example also makes clear that in addition to referring to an internal state, "stream-of-consciousness" refers to the behaviour of *acting* on this state. It is a type of activity; in this case an artistic one.

The second example, "film consciousness," is intended to mean "awareness of film." But as will be explained in Chapters 3 and 4, "awareness of [something]" also has the connotation of "conviction." It is for this reason that that the behaviour of "raising awareness" includes an element of conviction. The assumption is that "conviction" is sometimes the outcome of awareness.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 436.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 473.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 502.

Therefore, in the Bordwell and Thompson example, “film consciousness” refers to an appreciation of the cultural value of film, which leads to the behaviour of archiving and preservation.

The third example is slightly more difficult to parse than the previous ones because of the addition of “conscience” (“*the consciousness* and conscience of the sensitive individual”). The context indicates ‘consciousness’ should be read both in terms of “moral consciousness” (a humanist appreciation of morality and ethics) and as a symbol of the individual in opposition to culture or society. Thus, “political action” requires moral consciousness in addition to an individual willing to struggle against societal norms, which is the way that Bordwell and Thompson see Satyajit Ray.

In the fourth example, Bordwell and Thompson describe the poet in Glauber Rocha’s “Land in Anguish” (1967) as having a “delirious consciousness.” The meaning of ‘consciousness’ in this passage is somewhat determined by the fact the film is seen as “a surrealistic interrogation of the artist’s political role.”<sup>54</sup> There are two ways of defining “delirious consciousness” I think: one, as a temporary state of consciousness distinct from “non-delirious consciousness,” and two, as the normal consciousness that belongs to this poet.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

In the last example, “public consciousness” refers to the public’s general state of awareness at a particular moment in time. The awareness is usually about current events or issues. Unlike “film consciousness,” as used in the second example, it does not necessarily have the added connotation of “conviction.” It is more a neutral statement about the public’s level of awareness. It does however have the connotation of “collective consciousness” in the sense of a unified perspective or outlook on the world that belongs to a population, *as if* the collective consciousness were of the same nature as that of individual consciousness. Other connotations are potentially attached to this transposition from individual consciousness to collective consciousness, such as the idea that the public is a living, breathing organism that shares common sensibilities, memories, and so forth.

While these examples of ‘consciousness’ are unlikely to cause much confusion, they nevertheless show that even within a relatively small sample size (from the Bordwell and Thompson book alone), variation in meaning is significant. Secondly, despite differences in meaning, these examples also illustrate that definitions depend on a similar and overlapping vocabulary. Explaining the difference in meaning between different uses of ‘consciousness’ is not the same as explaining the difference in meaning between a dog *bark* and tree *bark*; or for that matter, the difference between *bottle* as container and *bottle* as contents. These words refer to physical objects with clearly differentiated



ontological features. The word ‘consciousness’, on the other hand, refers to various nonphysical phenomena that share resemblances and common traits that are not always distinguishable. This is true even when the meaning of the word is easily grasped in speech, as in the Bordwell and Thompson examples of ‘consciousness’. In short, *explaining* the meaning of different uses of ‘consciousness’ is more difficult than actually *grasping* the meaning, as mentioned earlier.

Another important element in these Bordwell and Thompson examples is that each of the ‘consciousness’ usages presupposes a more “global consciousness” that stands behind them and “contains” them.<sup>55</sup> This is a rather complicated problem in the realm of defining consciousness. Consider, for example, the notion of “stream-of-consciousness”. It is a process, or experience, occurring *within consciousness*. This latter ‘consciousness’ is the “global” consciousness mentioned (defined next chapter as one of the definition of the term). It is a necessary condition for there being a “stream-of-consciousness.” Another of the above examples was “film consciousness”, which refers to a particular awareness of film. This state of awareness is contained within a global consciousness. A “delirious consciousness” is a state of consciousness in which a person is temporarily mad. It might also characterize a certain kind of personality. Both of these, once again, are contained within a global

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<sup>55</sup> I discuss Lakoff and Johnson’s “container metaphor” in more detail in Chapter 7, section 2.

consciousness. If global consciousness is imagined as a territory, then all of these usages of ‘consciousness’ consist of characterizations of this territory or elements of this territory. The fact that each of these usages occupies the same territory, and that this larger territory carries exactly the same name, is a contributing factor in the ambiguity that exists between them.

There is, in fact, an equivalent to this particular semantic problem in philosophical approaches to consciousness. The “homunculus fallacy” occurs when, without necessarily realizing it, such as in an act of speech, *another consciousness* (a homunculus) is posited *within* consciousness.<sup>56</sup> This *other consciousness* (the homunculus) is the witness of internal conscious events, such as streams of images, or streams of consciousness. The homunculus thus becomes the de facto holder of consciousness. Daniel Dennett refers to this particular concept of consciousness in more cinematographic terms, naming it the “Cartesian Theatre” because it constructs a dualist image of someone – a soul, a consciousness – witnessing conscious events occurring in the brain, thus dividing consciousness into apparently physical and non-physical parts. Because this fallacy is regressive, in that the homunculus also requires an inner consciousness that bears witness to the incoming images that are observed, Dennett presents an alternate model for thinking about consciousness that also has a cinematographic dimension:

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<sup>56</sup> John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 213.

Here is a first version of the replacement, the Multiple Drafts model of consciousness. I expect it will seem quite alien and hard to visualize at first — that’s how entrenched the Cartesian Theater idea is. According to the Multiple Drafts model, all varieties of perception — indeed, all varieties of thought or mental activity — are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs. Information entering the nervous system is under continuous “editorial revision.” For instance, since your head moves a bit and your eyes move a lot, the images on your retinas swim about constantly, rather like the images of home movies taken by people who can’t keep the camera from jiggling. But that is not how it seems to us. People are often surprised to learn that under normal conditions, their eyes dart about in rapid saccades, about five quick fixations a second, and that this motion, like the motion of their heads, is edited out early in the processing from eyeball to... consciousness.<sup>57</sup>

The point that Daniel Dennett and others wish to make regarding the “Cartesian Theatre idea,” or “homunculus fallacy,” is that it is committed in ordinary speech acts, which is to say, when consciousness (in some large philosophical sense) is not under explicit discussion. Rather, it is implied in the way consciousness is spoken about in other contexts. It is a feature, one might say, of the “language of consciousness.” It is difficult to speak about things going on “in” consciousness without constructing a “container” — also named ‘consciousness’ — within which these things are taking place. It is as if both the glass and its contents were named the same. Because the standard, everyday usages of ‘consciousness’ are polysemic, and because these usages often imply a Cartesian Theatre idea, it becomes one of the challenges in

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<sup>57</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 111.

demarcating any given usage of ‘consciousness’ – of straightforwardly defining the word.

Thus far, the challenge in defining ‘consciousness’ has been focused on the ambiguity of the word ‘consciousness,’ particularly at the level of polysemy, along with the fact “consciousness” does not have any brute facts underlying it (as John Searle writes, it is “ontologically subjective,” as opposed to rocks, which exist independently of our subjectivity).<sup>58</sup> However, it is also possible to characterize this ambiguity from the perspective of “synonymy.” This approach to dealing with ambiguity has the advantage of providing a framework for making sense of academic discourse that is seemingly unrelated to the subject of consciousness, but which upon further analysis shows a strong connection. The “naïve” starting point, then, is to simply take stock of terms which definitions include either the word ‘consciousness’, a form of the word ‘consciousness’ (such as ‘conscious’), or a term which has been established as being equivalent to ‘consciousness’ in a separate definition (all emphases mine):

*Awareness*: “The quality or state of being aware; **consciousness**.”<sup>59</sup>

*Mind*: “The seat of **awareness**, thought, volition, feeling, and memory;”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 8-10.

<sup>59</sup> “awareness, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13894?redirectedFrom=awareness> (accessed July 02, 2015).

*Perception*: “The process of **becoming aware or conscious of a thing or things in general**; the state of being **aware**; **consciousness**.”<sup>61</sup>

*Cognition*: “The action or faculty of knowing; knowledge, **consciousness**; acquaintance with a subject.”<sup>62</sup>

*Experience*: “The fact of being **consciously the subject** of a state or condition, or of being **consciously affected** by an event. Also an instance of this; a state or condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected.”<sup>63</sup>

As will be shown next chapter, all of these terms – “experience,” “mind,” “awareness,” “perception” – appear in definitions of ‘consciousness’, creating a circularity of definitions. Normally, such circularity is broken through an appeal to a “brute fact” that demarcates one phenomenon from the other, but the lack of these limits the ability to draw clear boundaries between them. The following example, taken from *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (which David Chalmers uses in the introduction of *The Conscious Mind*), illustrates this problem:

*Consciousness*: The having of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; awareness. The term is impossible to define except in terms that are

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<sup>60</sup> “mind, n.1: IV, 19a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/118732?rskey=AQEhca&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed July 02, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> “perception, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140560?redirectedFrom=perception> (accessed July 02, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> “cognition, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/35876?redirectedFrom=Cognition> (accessed July 02, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> “experience, n.: 4a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66520?rskey=cuw6Xr&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed July 02, 2015).

unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means. Many fall into the trap of confusing consciousness with self-consciousness—to be conscious it is only necessary to be aware of the external world. Consciousness is a fascinating but elusive phenomenon: it is impossible to specify what it is, what it does, or why it evolved. Nothing worth reading has been written about it.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, “consciousness” is defined as “the having of perceptions” and “awareness.” As indicated above, both “awareness” and “perception” are sometimes defined as “consciousness.” Obviously this is a narrow and reductive way of looking at the problem since ‘perception’ is used differently in *The International Dictionary of Psychology* than when it means ‘consciousness’.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, this passage is an effective illustration of the problem of trying to define consciousness at all, since “the term [‘consciousness’] is impossible to define except in terms that are unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means.” Without a physical “brute fact” that grounds an understanding, the only way of confirming the validity of any given statement about consciousness is through first person experience (hence the reasons philosophers typically rely on ordinary experiences to prove facts

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<sup>64</sup> Norman Stuart Sutherland, ed., *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 95, quoted in Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> As with most family of words that define consciousness and mind, it is difficult to say precisely, but ‘perception’ in this case seems to fit with definition 3 of “perception” as found in the Oxford Dictionary of English: “The process of becoming aware of physical objects, phenomena, etc., through the senses; an instance of this.” “perception, n.” OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140560?redirectedFrom=perceptions> (accessed July 03, 2015).

about consciousness in order that the reader, or listener, confirms the statement according to experience).<sup>66</sup>

We have, then, a series of challenges in defining the word ‘consciousness’ – it exists in different referential contexts, it is polysemous, and it lacks an underlying brute fact that renders homonyms and synonyms objectively distinguishable from one another. This latter issue – of synonyms or analogous terms – will become important when examining film discourse that pertains to consciousness. These parallel discourses bearing different names than ‘consciousness’ are also given attention (such as “film gaze” or “film episteme”). The objective in the following chapter – and chapters – is to begin building the semantic field of consciousness, or rather, *a particular* semantic field of consciousness that is complementary with film.

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<sup>66</sup> Whether David Chalmers, Daniel Dennett or John Searle (to name three of the major philosophers of consciousness), but also including Thomas Nagel and Frank Jackson, and language philosophers such as George Lakoff and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the tendency is towards establishing facts about consciousness through ordinary, everyday examples that a reader can grasp and confirm through experience.

## CHAPTER 3: ‘CONSCIOUSNESS’ DEFINED

As explained last chapter, the “semantic field of ‘consciousness’” is imagined as consisting of the sum of statements in which the term ‘consciousness’ – including its variants (‘conscious’) and relatives (‘awareness’) – is used intelligibly. It is not, strictly speaking, a set of definitions. If it were possible to compile every statement that included ‘consciousness,’ from dictionaries, encyclopaedias, theoretical texts, public discourse, ordinary language, institutional definitions, science, and so on – and if it were possible to see these statements as providing the semantic grounds from which future statements that include the term ‘consciousness’ were formed – then this would be the “semantic field of consciousness,” as defined in this thesis.

In beginning the process of defining the semantic field of consciousness as a series of categories, I follow John Searle, who believes philosophical investigations should begin “naively” through a series of common sense, intuitive observations.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, this chapter uses the *Oxford Dictionary of English* as a starting point for developing categories of ‘consciousness’. The operating assumption is that a dictionary offers a representative sample of the way the word ‘consciousness’ is used in different

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<sup>1</sup> John Searle, *Mind, language, and society: philosophy in the real world* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 114.



contexts.<sup>2</sup> A dictionary also has the benefit of distilling complex ideas into brief, simple statements, which provide general areas of definition. We might contrast this approach with the specialized definition of consciousness that Chalmers quoted from *The International Dictionary of Psychology*,<sup>3</sup> which is an attempt at defining the complexity of consciousness, rather than providing a sense of the area of definition, as compared to other areas of definition also named ‘consciousness’.

A first level, “naïve” observation is that two important features characterize the word ‘consciousness’: the first, as already discussed, is that the word is polysemic; the second is that the word is “combinable” with other words to form concepts or expressions. This latter characteristic should be regarded as its own area of definitional interest. The act of combining the word ‘consciousness’ with other words produces a distinct range of meanings not

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<sup>2</sup> In developing *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, Raymond Williams adopts a similar approach in trying to grasp the different meanings of the term ‘culture’: “Then one day in the basement of the Public Library at Seaford, where we had gone to live, I looked up *culture*, almost casually, in one of thirteen volumes we now usually call the OED: the Oxford *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*.” Raymond Williams, *Key Words: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana/Croom Helm, 1976), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Already presented last chapter: “*Consciousness*: The having of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings; awareness. The term is impossible to define except in terms that are unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means. Many fall into the trap of confusing consciousness with self-consciousness—to be conscious it is only necessary to be aware of the external world. Consciousness is a fascinating but elusive phenomenon: it is impossible to specify what it is, what it does, or why it evolved. Nothing worth reading has been written about it.” Norman Stuart Sutherland, ed, *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Continuum, 1989); 95, quoted in David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press), 3.

necessarily grounded in the polysemic nature of the word ‘consciousness’. It produces a grammatical, rather than semantic, effect on the meaning. I will return to this issue in the following section. In the list of definitions below, not all of the entries found in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* are included, only those that, in retrospect, seems relevant or interesting in relation to the word ‘film’. While the brief definitions at the beginning of each category are taken from the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, the discussion below the entry, including all of the examples and conclusions, are my own attempt at elaborating the category in a manner fitting with the later objective of defining “film consciousness.” The first entry, as opposed to those that follow, is used more as a point of reference in defining the semantic field of consciousness.

## 1. ‘Consciousness’ in terms of “state of being aware.”

OED: “The state of being aware of and responsive to one’s surroundings, regarded as the normal condition of waking life.”<sup>4</sup>

This is a fairly standard usage of ‘consciousness,’ sometimes referred to as “wakefulness.”<sup>5</sup> This “consciousness” – which is construable as a type of

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<sup>4</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 5”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Van Gulick, Robert, “Consciousness”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL =

medical assessment – is an indicator, mainly, of certain behaviour that is regarded as normal and functional:

The normal state of consciousness comprises either the state of wakefulness, awareness, or alertness in which most human beings function while not asleep or one of the recognized stages of normal sleep from which the person can be readily awakened.<sup>6</sup>

The “abnormal state of consciousness”<sup>7</sup> – deviations from this normality — comprise a range of states that are “difficult to define and characterize,”<sup>8</sup> because the terms that are used for defining these states “mean different things to different people.”<sup>9</sup> Such abnormal states of consciousness include “clouding of consciousness,” “confusional state,” “delirium,” “lethargy,” “coma,” and “brain death.”<sup>10</sup> Definitions corresponding to these levels of consciousness are understandably vague. A “clouding of consciousness,” for example, “is a very mild form of altered mental status in which the patient has inattention and reduced wakefulness.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to these states are other abnormal states of consciousness that are reflected in certain expressions such as “unconsciousness” or “not conscious” (“when a person is unable to respond to

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<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/consciousness/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Suzie C. Tindall, “Level of Consciousness,” in Walker HK, Hall WD, Hurst JW, editors. *Clinical Methods: The History, Physical, and Laboratory Examinations, 3rd edition* (Boston: Butterworths; 1990); Chapter 57. Available from:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK380/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

people and activities”),<sup>12</sup> or “being knocked unconscious” (a temporary state of “unconsciousness”).

As a referential context, the medical usage of ‘consciousness’ is therefore quite different from other referential contexts, in spite of sharing precisely the same vocabulary and addressing some of the same concerns and problems. The overlap with other referential contexts is not just in the word itself, but also in the vagueness of the descriptions, which capture a range of wakefulness, or consciousness, without establishing fixed, rigid parameters.

With this “medical” referential context as a point of comparison, it is possible to see why there is no contradiction in saying that someone is both “fully conscious” (which is to say, in a “normal state of consciousness”) but also “lacking consciousness.” The “lack” is not in reference to wakefulness, but rather to a lack of awareness of certain objects, ideas, contexts, or situations in the world. The medical use of ‘consciousness’ provides a clear example of a “language game” in which the word ‘consciousness’ differs in meaning and usage as compared to, for example, an academic referential context. Yet both contexts will draw on a similar vocabulary, and perhaps, on a similar set of distinctions, in spite of sharing very little in the way of argumentative or descriptive objectives. It is more difficult to distinguish between the different

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<sup>12</sup> “Unconsciousness – first aid,” *MedlinePlus*,  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000022.htm> (Accessed July 10, 2015).

“academic referential contexts” because of overlap in interests, but as indicated last chapter, these differing aims and usages of ‘consciousness’ speak to a different overall concern, which nevertheless becomes relevant in the construction of “film consciousness” categories.

## 2. ‘Consciousness’ in terms of “awareness (of something)”

OED: “Internal knowledge or conviction; the state or fact of being mentally conscious or aware of something.”<sup>13</sup>

This is a transitive form of ‘consciousness’ that requires an object. This character of consciousness is sometimes defined as *intentionality*, which John Searle defines as “that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world.”<sup>14</sup> The particular objects of awareness vary in ontological status. They can be external objects, such as a table, person or date; internal objects, such as an idea or memory; or affective objects, such as the sensation of pain or an anxious mood.<sup>15</sup> There is of course the state of being aware of consciousness,

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<sup>13</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 1”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> John Searle, *Intentionality, an Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

<sup>15</sup> These are borrowed from Daniel Dennett’s descriptions of the different types of subjective experience, also presented in Chapter 6 on “film experience.” Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 45.

sometimes defined as “self-awareness” – where “self” assumes the status of one, or several meanings, of the term ‘consciousness’. As indicated below, in definition 4, ‘consciousness’ sometimes means “sense of self.” In other words, the expression “self-consciousness” means “consciousness of consciousness,” where these words ‘consciousness’ have different meanings. Therefore, this idea of “consciousness of consciousness” is a good illustration of the semantic challenges presented in the term ‘consciousness’. When analyzed, this expression actually contains *four* different senses of consciousness. The first ‘consciousness’ in the statement means *the state of being aware of something*. The second ‘consciousness’ either means *personal consciousness* (defined below as the totality of things that make up the individual self, including memories, beliefs, and so forth) or *global consciousness* (the “faculty” of consciousness itself). Finally, the entirety of the expression is itself a definition of *human* consciousness (self-awareness, which is to say, the fact of being aware of having the property of consciousness). Some will see this as the only essential feature distinguishing human consciousness from other states of consciousness found in other organisms<sup>16</sup> (for example, a cat is potentially describable in terms of being aware of its surroundings).

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<sup>16</sup> “*Self-consciousness*. A third and yet more demanding sense might define conscious creatures as those that are not only aware but also aware that they are aware, thus treating creature consciousness as a form of *self-consciousness*. The self-awareness requirement might get interpreted in a variety of ways, and which creatures would qualify as conscious in the relevant sense will vary accordingly. If it is taken to involve explicit conceptual self-

As the *OED* mentions, this sense of consciousness is sometimes seen in terms of a “conviction.” The notion of “raising awareness,” for example, derives its intelligibility from the fact “conviction” is conditional on awareness. The connection between consciousness and conviction often remains implicit in certain linguistic contexts, such as when David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson see the rise of “film consciousness” as leading to the practice of preserving and archiving film.<sup>17</sup>

This sense of consciousness is also particularly suited for historical description because it defines a relationship between consciousness and an object. This relationship is describable according to the following criteria: (1) “relative consciousness;” (2) “reportability;” (3) “relative strength and extension;” (4) and “stages.”

Awareness of something can be described in terms of relative consciousness or attention, in the sense that it is possible to both be aware of something and at the same time not actively attend to this awareness, or necessarily be

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awareness, many non-human animals and even young children might fail to qualify, but if only more rudimentary implicit forms of self-awareness are required then a wide range of nonlinguistic creatures might count as self-conscious.” Van Gulick, “Consciousness.”

<sup>17</sup> “The growth in international film consciousness spurred governments to fund archives that would take up the burden of systematically documenting and preserving the world’s film culture.” David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 356. The Bordwell and Thompson example is presented in more detail in Chapter 4, “Film Culture Awareness.”

conscious of it at all. Rocco Gennaro defines this as “nonsconscious awareness” or “behavioural awareness:”

First, we can say of the day-dreaming long distance truck driver that he must be aware *in some sense* of the twists and turns in the road. Otherwise, how could he have successfully completed the journey? The idea is that the long distance driver has certain internal states which direct his behaviour...

The long distance driver is ‘behaviorally aware’ of the turns in the road.<sup>18</sup>

An example of “behavioural awareness” could be film discourse – or any writing about film – that implicitly acknowledges that the film object under description is “constructed” in nature (comprised of shots, angles, editing, and so forth), while not necessarily indicating this awareness explicitly. It is then possible to track this single line of behavioural awareness as it emerges over a period of time, manifested in writing that makes reference to different aesthetic elements, such as camera movements, or an implied camera or narrator.<sup>19</sup> Although we could define just this single thread of consciousness as “film consciousness” — or “the beginnings of film consciousness” — our description need not limit itself to this thread even while acknowledging its singularity and discreteness.

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<sup>18</sup> Rocco J. Gennaro, *Consciousness and Self-Consciousness: A Defense of the Higher-Order Thought Theory of Consciousness* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub., 1996), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Bedding, “Pictorialism and the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 11 (September 10, 1910): 566–7. I discuss this article in more detail next chapter in the section on “film aesthetic awareness.”



It seems clear that all entities – as with the day dreaming driver – act on different sorts of awareness that are not actively present to consciousness. Nevertheless, while it is impossible to know the thoughts and consciousness of historical actors who – for any number of reasons – may not express awareness of things that are interesting to the historian (for example, whether a spectator or critic regards the film as art, as interpretable, or whether the narrative is comprehended), it is possible that this awareness is reported indirectly through behaviour and discourse. We can then conceivably speak about awareness in terms of “reportability.” The day dreaming driver could – if asked – describe his or her behavioural awareness. Is the same true of the film critic or early spectator if asked about the constructedness of film, even while the discourse seems to depend on this awareness? As discussed in the introduction of this thesis and in Chapter 1, the headings and titles of journals, such as the dropping of “Subjects” from the *Moving Picture World’s* weekly “Comments on the Film Subjects” in 1910 is an example of “unreported awareness” in the sense that journal writers began to see film as a unified phenomenon. It points to an internal process of reasoning that is not available to the historian.

“Consciousness of something” is also often described from the perspective of “intensity” and “extension.”<sup>20</sup> For example, a person may be *very* aware about

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<sup>20</sup> The expression “range of awareness” is extremely common<sup>20</sup> – with over six million hits as

current events, or about the history of cinema, or about the way films are made. Another person may show relatively *little* awareness, but still possess some awareness. In both cases, awareness exists, and in both cases, the awareness might function as a causal mechanism determining a particular activity. This is the case when David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson describe the style of 1970s American filmmakers, who were “characterized by ‘movie consciousness,’ an intense awareness of film history and its continuing influence on contemporary culture.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, an aspect of this sense of consciousness is that it is quantifiable in some manner, unlike other concepts of consciousness, which are typically characterized or qualified.

Finally, “awareness of something” can be described along a historical axis. The implication, as mentioned in the introduction, is that the beginning point along that axis constitutes “zero-degree awareness.” As this awareness is traced along a historical axis, the relationship between awareness and its object changes from zero-degree to something else (more intense, higher level, greater range, etc.) These moments of change (“transitions,” “transformations,” “shifts,” “turning points”), what Hayden White calls “motifs,”<sup>22</sup> are obviously attractive from a historical perspective because it

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of August 18, 2015, which shows this tendency towards quantification and spatialization of consciousness.

<sup>21</sup> Bordwell and Thompson, *Film History*, 517.

<sup>22</sup> “This *transformation of chronicle into story* is effected by the characterization of some events in the chronicle in terms of inaugural motifs, of others in terms of terminating motifs,

enables a plotting of consciousness as a historical narrative, which can then be further characterized in terms of stages.

### 3. Shared defining ideas and beliefs

OED: “Attributed as a collective faculty to an aggregate of people, a period of time, etc.; a set of shared defining ideas and beliefs.”<sup>23</sup>

This definition of ‘consciousness’ corresponds to the one Hayden White uses in the Introduction to *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, when he defines the work as “a *history* of historical consciousness in nineteenth-century Europe.”<sup>24</sup> As with many expressions involving the word ‘consciousness’, “historical consciousness” can be read in several ways. For example, a “consciousness of the historical” – meaning, roughly, an awareness or understanding of history as a mode or practice of registering the past; a second interpretation is that it means an appreciation or awareness of history; finally, it can be understood as a particular approach to the writing or recording of “history,” based on “shared and defining beliefs,” attributed to a people, period or school. We know from the study that White

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and of yet others in terms of transitional motifs.” Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 5.

<sup>23</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 4b”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> White, *Metahistory*, 1.

likely means the latter, but the intrigue of just these types of expressions is that they cover a spectrum of meanings, each drawing a series of overlapping pictures that conceal ambiguities even as the expression creates them. Other terms that cover a similar conceptual terrain as this sense of consciousness are *zeitgeist*,<sup>25</sup> *episteme*,<sup>26</sup> *imaginary*,<sup>27</sup> and *culture*.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. Personal consciousness

OED: “The totality of the impressions, thoughts, and feelings, which make up a person’s sense of self or define a person’s identity.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “The spirit or genius which marks the thought or feeling of a period or age.” “Zeitgeist, n.” OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/232756?redirectedFrom=zeitgeist> (accessed August 12, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> “This term, which Foucault introduces in his book *The Order of Things*, refers to the orderly ‘unconscious’ structures underlying the production of scientific knowledge in a particular time and place. It is the ‘epistemological field’ which forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a given time and place.” Clare O’Farrell, “Episteme,” *Michel-Foucault.com* <http://www.michel-foucault.com/concepts/index.html> (accessed September 24, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Charles Taylor defines it as “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.” Furthermore, “the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.” Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>28</sup> “The distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period.” “culture, n.” OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45746?rskey=xbbSqz&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed August 12, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 4a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

While this entry mentions the “totality” of an individual’s sense of self, it is not yet the “consciousness” that “consciousness studies” takes as its object of study. In other words, it is a contextualized understanding of the term. While there is a global phenomenon named “consciousness” that belongs to each person by definition, each person also has his or her own consciousness which encompasses personal identity or sense of self, as opposed to referring to the faculty itself. This is evident in examining a common expression such as “a loss of consciousness.” In a situation of an accident or abnormal state of consciousness in which a person is no longer awake, a common expression is to say “I lost consciousness” and not the incoherent phrase “I lost my consciousness.” The reason for the incoherency is that “my” designates this sense of term, which are those conscious phenomena that constitute and defines the identity or sense of self of a person.

It is also attributable to a collective on the same terms, the conscious phenomena that are seen as making up a larger collective identity (a group, culture, nation, etc). Moreover, the OED definition mentions three conscious phenomena – “impressions,” “thoughts” and “feelings” – but there are others. For example, “experiences,” “memories,” and “sensations.” In short, any conscious phenomena that is seen as essential to a particular instance of consciousness – belonging to a person or collective – will fit with this sense of ‘consciousness’ (in order to avoid a tautology here I will simply point out that

the ‘consciousness’ in the phrase “instance of consciousness” refers to the “global consciousness” defined below and not the personalized sense of the term indicated here). Whenever consciousness is spoken about in terms of “my consciousness” (or sometimes “our consciousness”), it is usually this sense of the word that is under discussion.

## 5. Global consciousness

OED: “The faculty or capacity from which awareness of thought, feeling, and volition and of the external world arises; the exercise of this.”<sup>30</sup>

This is the generalized, global ‘consciousness’ of “consciousness studies.” However, it is important to underline the above definition actually contains two distinct definitions of consciousness. The first is the faculty from which conscious experiences arises. The second is the conscious experience itself, signified in the “exercise of this.” Thus, both the causal mechanism and the effect are named “consciousness.” A philosopher such as Daniel Dennett eliminates this ambiguity by simply defining the “faculty” part of the definition as “the brain.”<sup>31</sup> Confusion arises because the mechanism through

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<sup>30</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 2a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Dennett, “Robert Wright interviews Daniel Dennett.” Meaningoflife.tv. (December 16, 2008.) <http://www.meaningoflife.tv/transcript.php?speaker=dennett>.

which the brain generates consciousness is physically inexplicable; therefore an intervening mechanism is posited between the brain and the conscious experience – also named “consciousness” – that links the brain with the conscious experience. This consciousness, as indicated above, is referred to as a “faculty.”

## 6. Conscious Experience

There is a usage of ‘consciousness’ that is not specified in the Oxford English Dictionary, at least not in the section on ‘consciousness’ (other than the above reference to “the exercise of this”), but which assumes a central place within consciousness studies and philosophy, that of “conscious experience.” The term ‘consciousness’ and the expression “conscious experience” are sometimes used interchangeably within certain referential contexts, as illustrated in Chalmers’s *The Conscious Mind* in a section entitled “What is Consciousness?”:

Conscious experience is at once the most familiar thing in the world and the most mysterious. There is nothing we know about more directly than consciousness, but it is far from clear how to reconcile it with everything else we know. Why does it exist? What does it do? How could it possibly arise from lumpy gray matter? We know consciousness far more intimately than we know the rest of

the world, but we understand the rest of the world far better than we understand consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

The distinction between consciousness in terms of faculty and conscious experience is precisely that of between a cause and an effect. The same term defines both domains.

Although the philosophical current of phenomenology is the most closely associated with the study of conscious experience, it is also studied from the perspective of philosophy of mind, as illustrated in some notable works such as Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?"<sup>33</sup> and Frank Jackson's "Epiphenomenal Qualia," which presented the well-known thought experiment "Mary the Scientist".<sup>34</sup> David Chalmers establishes "conscious experience" as the defining characteristic of being human.

We can say that a being is conscious if there is something it is like to be that being, to use a phrase made famous by Thomas Nagel. Similarly, a mental state is conscious if there is something it is like to be in that mental state. To put it another way, we can say that a mental state is conscious if it has a qualitative feel — an associated quality of experience. These qualitative feels are also known as phenomenal qualities, or qualia for short. The problem of explaining these phenomenal qualities is just the problem of explaining consciousness.

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<sup>32</sup> Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 4, no. 83 (1974): 436.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly*, no. 32 (1982): 130.



I will return to the issue of “conscious experience” in the last two chapters, which concern the term “film experience” and “subjective film consciousness.”

## **7. Compound nature: a “grammar” of ‘consciousness’**

The most obvious grammatical feature of the term ‘consciousness’ – and one noted in the Oxford English dictionary – is that it can be combined with other terms, namely adjectives or modifiers, to form new ideas or expressions. However, this “combining process” takes at least three different forms, each of which create different readings of the expression and therefore different possibilities of meaning.

The first of these is when ‘consciousness’ stands “as the second element of compounds with the sense ‘consciousness of —, awareness of — ‘.”<sup>35</sup> This means that expressions like “class consciousness” can be rewritten as “consciousness of class.” It is rather like unpacking the expression and organizing it in its intended order. Any compound expression that uses ‘consciousness’ will potentially have the character of being readable in terms of “consciousness of something” (“consciousness of the national”,

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<sup>35</sup> “consciousness, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

“consciousness of film,” and so forth). The meaning of ‘consciousness’ in this form corresponds with definition 2 (“awareness of something.”)

However, an expression such as “public consciousness” is not usually read or unpackaged in the above form (although some contexts might suppose this meaning). It is not read as “consciousness of [the] public” (in which someone is described as being aware of the public, or whatever public represents, such as “publicness”). Rather, the first term signifies the entity “possessing” the consciousness. The same is true of the expression “collective consciousness” or even “national consciousness.” The first term represents an entity of some sort that possesses the “consciousness.” A corollary of this reading is that ‘consciousness’ changes in meaning. It no longer corresponds with definition 2. It now means something in the spectrum of definition 4 (personal consciousness) and definition 5 (global consciousness).

This variable meaning of ‘consciousness’ – fitting within a spectrum of definitions – is an aspect of the compound expression. It draws from bits of meaning that corresponds with several definitions of the word. This “slippage” of meaning between different definitions of ‘consciousness’ – in which a new sense or usage of the term becomes present in the context of an expression – thus forms part of the semantic field of consciousness and is potentially applicable in future expressions.

A third way of reading an expression with ‘consciousness’ is when it is used “with [an] adjective specifying an area of operation.”<sup>36</sup> In such a case, the first term in the expression is no longer the possessor of the “consciousness,” as the case above; nor is the expression intended to mean “consciousness of something.” Rather, the expression itself stands for a “faculty” – a way of seeing, being, perceiving or thinking – that is regarded as forming part of consciousness, as if consciousness were dividable into discrete components committed to particular areas of concern. An example of this is “moral consciousness,” as used in the following context:

Mature moral consciousness, central to negotiating the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is understood as a way of being, an optimal path of human development, which exhibits a wholesome engagement with meaning and positive change in one’s social world and is characterized by ever-expanding circles of agency in the service of humanity.<sup>37</sup>

This does not mean that “moral consciousness” will take this meaning in all contexts, only that one of its possible manifestations is as a faculty of some sort. The formulation ‘film consciousness’ – as defined in Chapter 7 – can assume precisely this significance.

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<sup>36</sup> “consciousness, 4c.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Elena Mustakova-Possardt, “Education for critical moral consciousness,” *Journal of Moral Education* 33, no. 3 (September 2004), 246.

In order to illustrate these three compound forms, we can examine a single expression – “national consciousness” – which relies on each form in order to create different intended meanings. It should also become clear that the meaning of ‘consciousness’ is never fully limited to any single definition. It becomes a “compound meaning,” in the sense of deriving its meaning from different senses of the word.

The first meaning of the expression is that of a “shared sense of national identity,”<sup>38</sup> which is the definition Wikipedia uses (which I believe is sufficient as an example of this sense of the expression, especially since it is an expression without a fixed institutional definition). The Wikipedia entry draws from Thomas D. Musgrave’s “The Origins of National Consciousness” as its source:

A national consciousness is a shared sense of national identity, that is a shared understanding that a people group shares a common ethnic/linguistic/cultural background. Historically, a rise in national consciousness has been the first step towards the creation of a nation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_consciousness). “National consciousness”, Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_consciousness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_consciousness) (accessed August 10, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Thomas D. Musgrave, “The Origins of National Consciousness,” in *Self-Determination and National Minorities* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 2-14. The same definition is given by Benedict Anderson in “The Origins of National Consciousness,” *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 37-46.

Because “national consciousness” means “shared sense of national identity” in this context, then ‘consciousness’ necessarily means “awareness of national identity,” thus conforming to the first compound form. It is an expression that defines a population with a strong sense of national identity and also an awareness of this national identity. But this definition also draws from the third compound form mentioned above, since “national consciousness” is imagined as a faculty, which is to say, an attribute of consciousness committed to this area of operation.

The second example of “national consciousness” reveals a different, though perfectly coherent sense of the expression. Taken from a website named *Digital European Teacher Portfolio*, which “aims to develop the sentiment of ‘being a European teacher’ in our different communities,”<sup>40</sup> the glossary presents an entry entitled “national consciousness”, defined as follows:

Attitudes thought typical of nation: the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes regarded as characteristic of a nation.<sup>41</sup>

I would like to emphasize, once again, that these definitions are not presented as authoritative, but merely as examples of this way of using the expression – examples which rely on different definitions of ‘consciousness’ and different

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<sup>40</sup> “Summary of the Project,” *Digital European Teacher Portfolio*, accessed August 20, 2015, <https://detp.wordpress.com/category/summary-of-the-project/>

<sup>41</sup> “European NAC Glossary,” *Digital European Teacher Portfolio*, accessed August 20, 2015, <http://detp.wordpress.com/2009/11/08/european-nac-glossary>

forms of relating the two terms. Contrary to the preceding definition, which pertained to a shared awareness of national identity, this expression focuses on a different area, which follows from definition 3 of ‘consciousness’: “a set of shared defining ideas and beliefs . . . attributed as a collective faculty to an aggregate of people, a period of time.”<sup>42</sup> The “national” – in this form of the expression – becomes the possessor of the consciousness, and in particular, the consciousness of definition 3.

Finally, there is a usage of “national consciousness” that means, roughly, an ongoing collective sense of self and world, including of current events. This consciousness represents the moods, hopes and opinions of a nation and is used in the following type of contexts:

It burst into the national consciousness last year. . .<sup>43</sup>

Imagery that has entered the national consciousness through the media.<sup>44</sup>

In the past several years our national consciousness has been tuned into torture.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 4b”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Lucy Cavendish, “The 5:2 Diet: ‘My children force-fed me to stop my mood swings,’” *The Telegraph*, July 13, 2015, accessed August 20, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/lifestyle/wellbeing/diet/10177692/The-52-Diet-My-children-force-fed-me-to-stop-my-mood-swings.html>

<sup>44</sup> “consciousness, n.” Online OXFORD Collocation Dictionary. Accessed August 20, 2015, <http://oxforddictionary.so8848.com/search1?word=consciousness>

<sup>45</sup> Alexandra Kilduff, America’s torture fascination, *The Tartan*, February 19, 2007, accessed

The events have become part of the national consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

The “national consciousness,” in this sense, is a transient and fluctuating consciousness that is susceptible to change according to new events (in the way moods change). This is more or less the sense Frantz Fanon assigns to “national consciousness” as well (which in this particular part of the argument he dismisses, but is nevertheless an acknowledgement of its public meaning).

National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, the national is once again the “possessor” of the consciousness; however, the ‘consciousness’ now pertains to definition 4, “personal consciousness,” which was defined as “the totality of the impressions, thoughts, and feelings, which make up a person’s sense of self or define a person’s identity.” Moreover, it also adds a dash of definition 1, a general “state of being of aware,” which designates a living, breathing entity that is “in tune” to news and events.

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August 20, 2015, <http://thetartan.org/2007/2/19/forum/torture>

<sup>46</sup> “Consciousness,” Merriam-Webster.com, accessed August 17, 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consciousness>. [Dictionary’s emphasis]

<sup>47</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 148.

Thus, the grammatical or compound nature of the word ‘consciousness’ allows for different sorts of relationships with the term with which it combines. This variability causes a potential moment of hesitation in trying to seize the meaning of the expression – through which grammatical form does the expression impart or create meaning? Does the first term possess the consciousness or is it the object of consciousness? Or is the expression a concept that refers to a presumed faculty that belongs to consciousness?

Secondly, there is the fact the word ‘consciousness’ acquires “compound meaning,” which transforms the word into a referent that simultaneously points, or draws from, multiple definitions. The reason this is significant is that ‘consciousness’ is by nature semantically elusive. It rarely derives meaning from one definition alone. Once again, the process of apprehending the expression entails a further ambiguity-clarifying step: defining the meaning of ‘consciousness’.

Thirdly, there is the fact these expressions lay the semantic groundwork for future expressions that involve the use of ‘consciousness’. In other words, existing expressions rather serve as schematic templates or models, for fashioning a new expression. I believe that understanding the underlying grammar that makes these expressions intelligible – and productively



ambiguous – can serve as tools for investigating the possibilities of ‘film consciousness.’

While many will find the boundaries between these six different definitions of consciousness difficult to sustain under analysis, and these compound forms too reductive or vague for the purposes of formulating new ideas, it is the means through which previous uses – and not just future uses – of ‘film consciousness’ become intelligible. Prior to Spencer Shaw’s *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze*,<sup>48</sup> which is perhaps the first text to consciously and deliberately present the formulation as a distinct concept (and one which is rather unproductive for the purposes of this thesis as explained in subsequent chapters), there were many instances of writers reaching for this formulation without a conceptual idea in mind; which is to say the formulation was not presented as a concept or term. Its meaning and function within the text derived solely from knowledge of the word ‘consciousness’ and a sense of the way such a word combines with objects. Therefore, the project of this chapter has not been just to develop a series of categories – and measures – for “assembling” film consciousness categories, but also to understand aspect of film discourse that present ideas either on precisely these terms (‘film consciousness’) or similar concepts (“film experience”).

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<sup>48</sup> Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008).

## CHAPTER 4: ‘FILM CONSCIOUSNESS’ AS “FILM AWARENESS”

One of the first definitions of ‘consciousness’ discussed in the preceding chapter (aside from the one named “state of being aware”) was “awareness of (something).” It is not awareness in some abstract sense, but rather in relation to something else (as mentioned, sometimes defined as “intentionality”).<sup>1</sup> When this definition of ‘consciousness’ is combined with ‘film’, it produces the basic construction “film awareness” or “awareness of film.”

The term ‘film’ – like ‘consciousness’ – is ambiguous. It is not limited to an actual instance of “film” (such as a movie that physically stands before a viewer), but rather to various ideas or categories associated with the term. In defining the different approaches to cinematic specificity, Robert Stam’s *Film theory: An Introduction* offers a useful starting point for dividing ‘film’ into different areas, which can then be combined individually with ‘consciousness’.

The question of cinematic specificity can be approached (a) *technologically*, in terms of the apparatus necessary to its production; (b) *linguistically*, in terms of film’s “materials of expression”; (c) *historically*, in terms of its origins (e.g. in daguerreotypes, dioramas, kinoscopes); (d) *institutionally*, in terms of processes of production (collaborative rather than individual, industrial rather than artisanal); and (e) in terms of its

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<sup>1</sup> John Searle, *Intentionality, an Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

*process of reception* (individual reader versus gregarious movie theatre).<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, drawing and expanding on this list, we can divide ‘film’ into the following subcategories for the purpose of combining it with “awareness.” The first is “materials of expression,” which I will define as “aesthetics,” and which comprises the ideas of “film language” (editing, framing, shot scales, and so forth). Next is the area Stam defines as the “process of production,” which are the different steps involved in the making of a film, which includes pre-production, production, post-production, and usually collaborators. I will define this simply as “film production” and also include the technologies involved in the production as an aspect of this category. Thirdly is a category that is defined as “film culture” and incorporates Stam’s historical category. But it is much larger than this – it is “film history” broadly conceived, and also the perceived social and cultural value of film. Finally, there is a subcategory of film I will define as “self-consciousness,” which draws from different established categories, such as the “process of reception,” but also “film terminology” and “film discourse.” This subcategory is perhaps the most abstract, but the sense of it is that there are areas of operation that include non-filmmakers (critics, scholars, theorists, spectators) rather consciously participating in the process of defining the nature of film. This might take

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Stam, *Film theory: An Introduction* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000), 13

place in discourse, terminology, and the means through which a film is exhibited and received.

These categories are deliberately formed in order to combine with consciousness when conceived of as “awareness of something.” Of course, another film scholar might divide “film” into very different areas. The purpose of using an established film scholar like Robert Stam is to ensure that my own definitions remain within the realm of the institutionally accepted. The first three categories also follow from already existing usages of the term ‘film consciousness’ in academic discourse, although as mentioned in the introduction, not in a formal, conceptual manner.

Based on these categories of film, it is then possible to define four different types “film awareness.” The idea, as was the case in Chapter 1, is that one can describe an individual, group or period on the basis of each of these awareness, and moreover, establish these awareness as “generative mechanisms,”<sup>3</sup> such as of types of discursive statements or film scholarship.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I use “generative mechanism” in the sense Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery apply in *Film History: Theory and Practice* when discussing the “realist” study of film history as “not [about] the historical event itself, but the generative (causal) mechanisms that brought the event about” (New York: Knopf, 1985), 16.

<sup>4</sup> I take “film scholarship” to constitute the set of activities presented in Jerzy Toeplitz’s “Film Scholarship: Present and Prospective,” which includes the study of aesthetics, theory, film history and archiving. *Film Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1963): 27-37. In addition to these activities, I would also include the study of audiences (spectatorship and reception).

First there is *film aesthetic awareness*, which concerns awareness of the different aesthetic elements that constitute a film (editing, framing, etc). This was covered in some detail in Chapter 1, although not necessarily defined in this manner. This awareness can be contrasted, historically, with an understanding of film as a transparent window onto reality (which can therefore be described as a lack of aesthetic awareness). Secondly there is *film production awareness*, which concerns awareness of the technology and procedures that result in the making of a film. This includes everything entailed in ‘pre-production’ (writing, scouting, etc) and “post-production” (special effects) as well. As shown in Chapter 1, a lack of production awareness results in the mistaken attribution of causes to observed film effects (for example, attributing all final causes, including effects created in editing and photography, to the “scenario writer”). *Film culture awareness*, the third category, defines awareness of the history and social value of film. This awareness determines the collective movement towards archiving and preservation, as suggested in Bordwell and Thompson’s *Film History: An Introduction*.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a remarkable fact of film history, as shown, is that early film critics displayed – from a film studies perspective – an interesting degree of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is displayed in different domains, such as awareness of film reception, awareness of film criticism, and

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<sup>5</sup> Discussed next chapter as “Film Culture Awareness.”

awareness of the impact of film terminology on the construction of the film object (since this was covered extensively in Chapter 1, it is excluded from this Chapter). It is important to note that each of one of these examples of “film awareness” is an example of “film consciousness.”

## 1. Film Aesthetic Awareness

While I covered this category already in Chapter 1, it is worth revisiting in the context of this chapter, which attempts to establish a series of categories in a more deliberately oriented fashion. In his *Projecting a Camera*, Edward Branigan uses the metaphor of a “window” to characterize two contrasting spectatorship positions:

[F]raming in film might be likened to (i) what is witnessed through the frame of the “window,” or to (ii) what is seen to be constrained and shaped by the frame of the “window” . . .<sup>6</sup>

I would like to use this metaphor to begin thinking about “film aesthetic awareness” – which should be seen as both a category through which a particular set of evidence is studied for the purposes of drawing out this understanding, and also as a property we could assign to different historical actors, which is to say, a set of people, a writer, a period or institution that

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Branigan, *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 106.

displays “film awareness.” The window frame metaphor is useful, as well, because – like the idea of “a zero degree of filming”<sup>7</sup> – it establishes a moment of “zero degree film awareness.” When one looks through film as if it were a window frame – “witnessing” the profilmic reality as if it were recorded and screened without any intervention – then it is a case of “zero degree film aesthetic awareness (or simply “no film awareness” in some contexts). When the window frame comes into view, when it is seen to “constrain” and “shape” the view of the film content, we have then a case of “film awareness.” In practical terms, this means understanding the constructedness of film – and the role of different aesthetic choices in determining film effects (what André Gaudreault refers to as the “filmographic” aspect of film in opposition to the “profilmic,” such as camera movements, editing, framing, and so forth).<sup>8</sup>

In order to begin distinguishing the different film awareness from one another – and in order to define the material areas in which this awareness becomes manifest, such as in a journal – it is useful to think in terms of “regions of film consciousness.”<sup>9</sup> The headings and titles of a journal is one region of film consciousness, but also it is sometimes useful to regard the totality of awareness as consisting of different regions, some of which become active, or

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<sup>7</sup> André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 58. This was discussed briefly in the Introduction and refers to the “paradigm of capturing.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of regions is explained in the Introduction, in footnote number 2.

more active, in particular contexts. Thus, following the idea of film awareness as a “generative mechanism” in history, we can say that this “region” of film consciousness is significantly determinative of the nature of writing about film, among other sorts of behaviour toward film. If one possesses a high degree of film aesthetic awareness, it follows that it is reflected in some aspect of the writing, or in a particular conclusion. To give a precise example, a film criticism might make reference to the editing in the film as an element that is producing meaning, such as in the following 1912 example from the *Moving Picture World* published in the “Comments on the Films” section:

**The Highlanders’ Defiance** (Selig). – While it is difficult to repress a feeling of pride that men should be as brave as those who play the principal parts in this drama, one cannot restrain the further feeling of sorrow for those at home, waiting silently and hopefully for the loved ones who gave up their lives to defend a position from an attack by the Boers. War is glorious, when one reads about the dashing bravery and wondrous gallantry of the soldiers who do the fighting, but it takes on quite a different appearance when one sees the men fall in battle. Perhaps along with its other beneficent offices the motion picture will help the peace society advocates in their crusade against war. The graphic representation of deaths in battle, followed almost instantly by the equally graphic reproductions of the broken-hearted mourners at home will emphasize, more than mere words can do, the horrors of war, with its waste of life and money. War pictures may be thrilling, but they may convey a deeper meaning, and exert a more powerful and beneficial influence than their makers suspected.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Moving Picture World* (22 January 1910), 91.



The penultimate line of this criticism includes reference to a series of images, in the form of a “montage of attractions”<sup>11</sup> – in which the film presents graphic images of war followed by “the broken-hearted mourners.” The critic explains that this “juxtaposition” produces the idea of “waste of life and money.” Where “film aesthetic awareness” comes into play is precisely at this juncture – the fact the criticism makes reference to editing, albeit through a different terminology, shows the critic is seeing “the constraints” of the frame; in other words, the critic is displaying “film aesthetic awareness.” Moreover, it is because of this category of analysis that this fact becomes evident. Taken in isolation, it might not seem convincing, but these references to filmographic operations were rare, and therefore stand in sharp relief against the patterns of the time.

Of course, the idea of “film aesthetic awareness” already exists within film studies, although perhaps, as Branigan’s passages illustrates, under different names, metaphors or terminologies than the one presented here. Film scholars generally understand that there are relative differences in spectator awareness of film aesthetics. However, the purpose of specifying this idea in the terms mentioned, of providing it a unique category, is to give this precise

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<sup>11</sup> I’m using Tom Gunning’s definition of Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions,” “as any aggressive moment designed for maximum emotional or psychological effect on the spectator.” Tom Gunning, “Cinema of Attractions,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Cinema* edited by Richard Abel (London: Routledge, 2005), 178.

type of awareness a name, in such a manner that it narrows the scope of research and becomes a useful analytic concept.

*Indirect expressions of film awareness*

In discussing the importance of “cultural history,” Jacob Burckhardt writes in the Introduction to his late-nineteenth century volume, “The Greeks and Greek civilization:”

Cultural history . . . consists for the most part of material conveyed in an unintentional, disinterested or even involuntary way by sources and monuments; they betray their secrets unconsciously and even, paradoxically, quite apart from the material details they may set out to record and glorify, and are thus doubly instructive for the cultural historian.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, sometimes a certain kind of awareness is present within a given context, but not “reported” by the holder of the awareness. There might be different reasons for this. It could be that the person holding the awareness is not able to give the awareness a linguistic form, because the terminology or way of talking about this awareness does not yet exist. Or perhaps the structural conditions that drive awareness to the surface of attention may not be present. The editorial direction of early trade publications was oriented toward reporting about public interest in cinema and about the commercial value of certain productions (as illustrated in Chapter 1). Though, as argued elsewhere, early

writers certainly challenged this structure by writing about cinema from a variety of perspectives, including theoretically or conceptually, there was no outward pressure moving writers toward revealing knowledge of film aesthetics. Therefore, a methodology for studying “film awareness” must assume that – in some contexts at least – such awareness is expressed indirectly, as Burckhardt suggests, in an “unintentional, disinterested or even involuntary way,” either in a particular language choice, a set of behaviour, or in writings that reveal film awareness in spite of the nature of the direct evidence.

Edward Branigan’s *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* is therefore, once again, an important source for developing such a methodology. As the title of his book indicates, Branigan believes the usage of the word ‘camera’ reveals something important about the way the person sees and understands film:

A camera comes into being — we are able to place it — as we discuss and appraise our reactions to a film. A camera will appear in many places, not just in the place occupied by the physical camera. Furthermore, I have argued that our talk should be understood in relation to moves within diverse language-games; that is, within selected vocabularies tied to the ways we speak about and construct, for example, critical practices, aesthetic discourses, film theories, narrative theories, folk theories, values, and everyday discourses. To frame a camera, we must understand the formal or informal language we use to see it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Branigan, *Projecting a Camera*, 18.

There is a way of using the word ‘camera’, Branigan observes, that is strictly metaphorical; when a viewer makes reference to a ‘camera’, it is not the same camera as the one actually used during the filmmaking. Rather, in the absence of an actual narrator, the ‘camera’ substitutes for an implied author that narrates the film. Thus, when the camera is said to “show us” images or “moves” from one place to another, as if a disembodied entity, it is not the director or camera operator that is implied. Consequently, the camera assumes anthropomorphic characteristics, such as “curiosity” or “desire.” Branigan presents the example of Dudley Andrews’s analysis of F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927) to illustrate this point:

Later, the man, back to us, wanders toward the marsh, and the camera, full of our desire, initiates one of the most complex and thrilling movements in all of cinema.<sup>13</sup>

While camera movements in particular appear to prompt this “way of talking,” in which the camera moves on its own, Branigan also offers an example in which even the fixed camera is given this treatment. Commenting on Godard’s *Le mépris* (*Contempt*, 1963), Kaja Silverman and Harun Farocki’s write:

The camera seems to want to show us how distant it is from him [Paul], in every sense of the word.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 83.

Whether one ultimately agrees with Branigan's conclusions about the significance of these usages in revealing implied film theories, or "folk theories" (something less than a grand theory of film), Branigan's least ambitious point – mentioned in Chapter 1 – is perhaps the most important and interesting from the perspective of language-use and consciousness:

The use of the word 'camera' by a spectator shows only that he or she knows a film is a construction that should not be confused with reality.<sup>15</sup>

This rather simple observation is profound in its implications, especially for developing a model of film consciousness that is useful in historical analysis. It says, in essence, that ordinary language-use, when applied to film, is an entrance point into consciousness, especially in situations in which the speaker is precisely not interested in advancing a complex statement about the nature of film. To be sure, there are other ways of investigating whether a commentator recognizes the constructedness of film, but in an evidentiary environment such as early film publications, in which the emphasis is on brevity and practical commentary, such attention to word usage is invaluable toward tracing film awareness – about whether "he or she knows a film is a construction that should not be confused with reality." As Chapter 1 showed, this was the case with Thomas Bedding's article "Pictorialism and the Picture" (1910), when he offers a description of a moment in *A Summer Idyl*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 93.

(D.W. Griffith) in which “*here the photographer shows us many interesting views of farm life, with Cupid in attendance.*”<sup>16</sup>

But there are other interesting examples as well, although not necessarily of this type that matches with Branigan’s thesis. In fact, almost all of early film criticism fits within the paradigm of “indirect expressions of film awareness” – through changes in title heading, but also through the usage of certain key terms that obviously confound the author to some degree, but which in the process of addressing reveals signs of film awareness. Although already discussed in Chapter 1, David S. Hulfish’s “Art in the Moving Pictures” presents an ideal case of this form of an indirect expression of awareness.<sup>17</sup>

In this article, David S. Hulfish analyzes film according to a definition of “art,” which allows him to prescribe a series of recommendations for orienting moving pictures closer to his understanding of the concept as he understands it. This article, published in May 1909, offers several interesting pieces of information, not the least of which is a clear, direct title announcing an interest in exploring the relationship between art and cinema (as mentioned in Chapter 1, it was commonplace to find articles declaring certain ambitious ideas in the title, but which the article rather left unexplored, for different

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Bedding, “Pictorialism and the Picture,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 11 (September 10, 1910): 567.

<sup>17</sup> David Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 5 (May 1909): 139–40.

reason). One of the aspects of early film discourses we would like to understand is whether, despite many allusions made at the time, there was actually a discourse that can be identified as “film as art” in the sense we understand the concept of art today. We can point to the work of Canudo (1911), and even the legal judgement of Émile Maugras and Maurice Guégan (1907), which Gaudreault and Odin have analyzed,<sup>18</sup> as early examples of attempts to evaluate the necessary and sufficient conditions for cinema to become art. Canudo’s 1911 article is particularly direct and powerful in that he announces the “birth of a sixth art”, arguing that cinema reconciles the plastic and temporal arts, while nevertheless concluding that “it is not yet an art” because film does not “interpret” reality but rather “copies” it.<sup>19</sup> The concern with whether cinema copied or produced an altogether new representation of reality was a seemingly common concern of the trade press during these years, which often relied on comparisons with pictorial arts.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Émile Maugras, and Maurice Guégan., *Le Cinématographe Devant Le Droit* (V. Giard & E. Brière, 1908). André Gaudreault and Roger Odin, “Le Cinématographe, un « enfant prodige », ou l’enfance de l’art cinématographique” Leonardo Quaresima et Laura Vichi (direction), *La decima musa. Il cinema e le altre arti/The Tenth Muse (Cinema and other Arts, Udine/Gemona del Friuli, Forum, 2001): 67-81.*

<sup>19</sup> Ricciotto Canudo, *The Birth of the Sixth Art*, quoted in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 61.

<sup>20</sup> Charlie Keil presents many examples of this in *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 27-44.

Returning to Hulfish's analysis, one of the intriguing features is the method he employs to make his argument, using a dictionary to present a definition of art from the period and then comparing it with cinema – as he understands it. Observing that the word “art” was “used from time to time” (which fits with my own findings), Hulfish sets out to determine under which definition film might be considered art. What is interesting here is that Hulfish confirms our suspicion that – despite an equivalence in terminology and a near equivalence in meaning – the category of art manifest in this article is categorically different than the category of art manifest today; or rather, it is a category of art that is missing one of the most important senses of the modern concept. Although Hulfish's definition of art includes “craft,” “skill,” “system of rules,” and “mastery,”<sup>21</sup> it lacks the sense of “creation” most strongly connected to a modern definition, as today's Oxford English Dictionary includes:

The expression or application of creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting, drawing, or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.<sup>22</sup>

The OED then offers this valuable clarification, observing that while this sense of art was present at the time, it was nevertheless rare:

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<sup>21</sup> David Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” *Nickelodeon* 1, no. 5 (May 1909): 139.

<sup>22</sup> “art, n.1”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11125?rskey=li66sq&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 01, 2015).



Although this is the most usual modern sense of art when used without any qualification, it has not been found in English dictionaries until the 19th cent. Before then, it seems to have been used chiefly by painters and writers on painting.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Hulfish's definition of art lacks the sense of "creation" most strongly connected to a modern definition. It is this latter definition of art that has tended to excite film scholars because of the type of discourse it opens, and because it is on the basis of this category of art, one might propose, that film became culturally legitimated and academically institutionalized. Academic attention is directed at "film as art" discourse because it is in some ways the history of the institutionalization of film studies, at least in many departments in North America.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, we are interested in considering such conceptions of art in the context of trade journals. The consequences of a modern conception of art is partially found in the type of film analysis and criticism it enables, since the underlying assumption is that the meaning of film lies not so much at the surface, but rather in the imagination and feelings invested in the work. Although numerous scholars have addressed the issue of film and art, Branigan's views are particularly interesting because they include a consideration of the way a viewer approaches such a concept of film, which he defines as an "expressionist

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<sup>23</sup> "art, n.1". OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11125?rskey=li66sq&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 01, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> It is on this basis, André Gaudreault believes, that the cinema department at Université de Montréal was formed according to comments shared with me sometime in 2008.

theory of film” (as opposed to the more rational and literal “transmission model” David Bordwell proposes)<sup>25</sup>:

The underlying process is termed *expression*, a word that derives from Latin and means literally “to press out,” namely, to force outward that which is concealed within. What is present on the screen is now the residue of some other person’s or entity’s private state of consciousness. Ultimately, our task as spectators in an expressionist theory is to reconstruct through “empathy” the hidden emotions and imagination [of the film].... A special target of expressionist theories is the author – the so-called original and First Cause.... Expression theories grew from the Romantic movement of the first half of the nineteenth century and stressed the creative sensibilities of the lone individual.<sup>26</sup>

Such a concept of cinema requires, then, the identification, or at least a provisional conceptualization, of a “first cause”, in the form of an author/director, which during these early years of the trade press was still not apparent in film writing (there were some exceptions as examined in the next section, “Film Production Awareness”). Therefore, neither was there a concept of art enabling such an approach, nor was there an actual terminology for carrying out such an analysis. We are reminded here of another passage from Branigan’s work (which I quote at length because its relevance to this thesis):

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<sup>25</sup> As Bordwell explains, “The transmission model suggests that the text acquires meaning much as a conversational utterance does. The text passes from a sender to a receiver, who decodes it according to syntactic and semantic rules and according to assumptions about the speaker's intent in this context.” David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 65.

<sup>26</sup> Edward Branigan, *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 80-81.

I believe that when a critic settles on a particular radial meaning of “frame” [note: Branigan is using “frame” as an example in this context, it could be some other word, like *art*, or *director*] as the most important and “literal” meaning, he or she will discover already in place a theory of film that addresses these questions along with a special rhetoric for employing the word “frame”. I believe that a “theory of film” may be thought of as the *grammar of an ensemble of words*, such as frame, shot, camera, point of view, editing, style, realism, auteur, performance, spectatorship, and medium specificity, accompanied by selected radial extensions of these words. I believe that a film theory is not simply a set of objective propositions about film, because “film” – that is, the grammar (the vocabulary) of the words that described film – is not fixed, but is tied to culture, value and a consensus about, for example, the present boundaries of the medium (i.e., the properties we select that presently interest us relating to the materials of the medium) as well as the present ideas that are used to ‘clarify our experience of film.’<sup>27</sup>

Branigan’s comment illustrates the value of being aware of language that “fits together” in some discursive situation given an underlying theory, which sometimes depends on a key, organizing word – like “art,” or “author” – that is assumed to bear a strong relationship with reality (this is what Branigan means by settling on the most “literal” meaning, the meaning that comes closest to seeming natural, unchallenged to the user). Therefore, Branigan presents here a way of thinking about “film theory” or theory in general that focuses less on stated axioms, which are attractive to historians, and more on a collections of words that seem to operate jointly, and which *suggest* in their

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 115-16. By “radial meaning,” Branigan means “a type of ambiguity that arises when the same word appears in different language-games.” Also, when Branigan speaks of “film theory”, he sometimes means “folk theory”, a sort of implied film theory each person hypothetically adopts when confronted with a film.

usage implied axiomatic ideas. Such an approach is of course different, and intriguing, as we find new ways of tracing film awareness indirectly.

I have suggested here that Hulfish's use of a dictionary definition is significant because it establishes an understanding of the way art was understood at the time (homonyms are one the most common pitfalls in historical analysis in that they provide the illusion of shared conceptual schemes between historian and historical figure, which, as the Hulfish example shows, is sometimes not the case, at least with key words). One might point out, however, that Hulfish is not necessary for establishing this fact, since one could merely consult the dictionary of the time and compare it with the dictionary definition of today. This would miss the crucial point, in my view, that dictionaries are not necessarily reliable in providing a representation of the way language is publicly used, and secondly, in the way language might simultaneously figure more or less differently depending on the domain (as the OED indicated above). It is the fact Hulfish accepts this definition of film as art that renders it a legitimate statement of fact about the way he (and possibly other) thought about film as art.

A second interesting element of the article, tied to Branigan's notion of a "grammar of film theory", is that although Hulfish does not explicitly address

an expressionist theory of film, he strongly alludes to one in *certain language*, such as in this passage I quoted in the Introduction:

Photography...in motography should be considered as merely the means for placing before the audience the thoughts of the author of the picture as embodied in changing scenes, the art of the picture being developed fully in the scenes themselves before the motion picture camera is placed before them.<sup>28</sup>

Once again, we might be tempted here to focus on the word “author”, but it is not necessarily being used in the sense of “creator”, but rather as “camera operator”. Neither is “thought”, for that matter, being used in the sense of imagination. It seems to refer more to the image the photographer had in mind at the point of shooting. This statement seems to indicate that the audience sees what the camera operator had in mind at the point of shooting (his “thought”). Nevertheless, Hulfish insists on the idea that photography expresses “thoughts”, offering this important clarification:

In pictorial art, every picture expresses at least one thought. Sometimes but a single thought is offered; sometimes a number of thoughts having some relation are offered, one being a principal thought, around which others are grouped.<sup>29</sup>

This formulation comes closer to an expressive theory of film (not just because the word “expresses” is used). The possibility that pictures convey multiple thoughts, usually with some “principal thought around which others are

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<sup>28</sup> Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” 139–40.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

grouped”, demands an interpretive spectatorship in which references to “first causes” would be essential. Following Branigan’s line of thinking, we can imagine Hulfish’s use of “author” and “thoughts” being quite different in a situation where art was understood in an expressive sense. Certainly, we are confronted with a blurry reality, where languages (“authors,” “artists,” “thoughts,” “motography”) from different domains are being used simultaneously. This is not uncommon in situations of discourse where someone is situated at the intersection of different modes of thinking about the same object (we are, at this point, not far off from the moment when the figure of the director emerges, although very far off from an *auteur theory*). It was during these years that discourses incorporating ideas like “intention”, “first causes”, “meaning”, “directors” started to become apparent. In the “Elusive Quality”, Louise Reeves Harrison makes allusion, for example, to the notion of intention, in reference to what he thought critics ought to be doing:

If such men are not qualified by experience to judge, or lack imagination necessary to “see” what the author intends, every cog wheel in the business mechanism has been carefully set in its proper place and the main spring omitted altogether.<sup>30</sup>

This idea of film cinematography expressing “thoughts” became manifest in other writing of the time as well (as will be seen below), and perhaps a code

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<sup>30</sup> Louis Reeves Harrison, “The Elusive Quality,” *Moving Picture World* 7, no. 8 (August 20, 1910): 398.

word, eventually, for “meaning”. Finally, I would like to draw attention to Hulfish’s camera metaphor:

The motion camera is the audience, and the audience, therefore, may be taken by the artist into any viewpoint, at any distance from cities or civilization, to gain the setting of the suitable scenery....<sup>31</sup>

Branigan defines eight different cameras in his study, which spectators hypothesize in the course of viewing a film as a way of navigating the story world.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, none of these seem to fit precisely with the idea of the “camera as audience.” Hulfish’s intended idea is, I believe, fairly clear: the audience views the profilmic world through a camera pointed at different things by an “artist” (he uses “camera operator” in the above passage although using “author” previously). Branigan’s overall argument is that the very language adopted by spectators to talk about films determines how they will conceptualize the relationship between audience, film, author, and reality. Hulfish’s notion of camera is perhaps worth exploring as a metaphor particular to the period, or at least, as one of those metaphors of camera that at one time existed before disappearing. Clearly though, what we are witnessing is a writer engaged in a struggle to define cinema, which includes establishing a vocabulary for talking about its various features, a language which in some ways comes to determine the attitude adopted to toward

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<sup>31</sup> Hulfish, “Art in Moving Pictures,” 139–40.

<sup>32</sup> Branigan, *Projecting a Camera*, 65-96.

cinema at various levels. The language Hulfish is struggling with is actively revealing – indirectly – not just his sense of aesthetic awareness, but also a “folk theory” of the way the camera represents and engages with reality.

## **2. Film Production Awareness**

The types of cause-effect relationships implied in the creation of film are, generally speaking, rather more complex than many other art forms. The causal relationship between painter and painting, between writer and text, between musician and a piece of music, appears easier to grasp than the relationship between filmmaker and film. In offering a criticism of a painting or of a piece of literature, the author – the painter or the writer – are relatively easy to identify. Moreover, filmmaking requires substantial technical knowledge, which is often delegated to experts (for example, “the special effects” department). All of these overlapping stages of pre-production, production and post-production eventually come together to construct the film and to deliver a unified experience to viewers. For the observer unfamiliar with production, many of these procedures remain opaque as an ensemble. And even when clearly understood, there is significant dispute about which elements of the process (the editing, the directing, the acting) have the greatest determining influence on the overall effect. This consideration does



not include what one understands or defines as “film language,” “film aesthetics,” or “filmographic operations,” the mechanism through which a film expresses meaning and produces effects. Confronted with such a complex world of interconnected elements and creative forces, which combine to form the film experience, it is understandable that not everyone would conceptualize film causes in the same way. Today, when intention is ascribed to an individual, as opposed to structural mechanisms, that “First Cause” – as Branigan defines it above – falls on the “director,” or even sometimes, as mentioned, the “camera.” However, in early film criticism such a figure had yet to be defined. Therefore, there was initially a struggle to identify these “causal figures.”

In fact, it seems there are elements of the creation that remain invisible to spectators other than through witnessing the production or having access to personal accounts of the production. A director might play a substantial role in the editing or leave most of the decisions to the editor – a fact that remains unknowable other than through personal accounts, such as Ralph Rosenblum’s well-known *When The Shooting Stops ... The Cutting Begins: A Film Editor’s Story*. In discussing his role in the creation of *The Night They Raided Minsky’s* (William Friedkin, 1968), in which according to Rosenblum, he created the entire film almost on his own based on footage Friedkin left

him to sort through and edit entirely unsupervised over the course of a year.

Rosenblum writes:

When the film was finally released in December 1968 – to generally positive reviews – some of the critics noted that the combined use of color and black and white film was a particularly interesting innovation. In the year-end issue of *New York* magazine Judith Crist wrote, ‘Director William Friedkin proves his sense of cinema again by remarkable intersplicing of newsreels and striking use of black and white fade-ins to color.’ Crist, of course, had no way of knowing that Friedkin may not have even seen the film she reviewed.<sup>33</sup>

While the “director” is now the main entity ascribed intention in the course of writing about film (in criticism that still holds to the idea of author intention), this was not the case in early film criticism, as presented in Chapter 1. Because of this, other entities were selected, which reflect not just a sense of “film production awareness,” but also a particular way of conceptualizing and ordering the causes and effect relations that result in a film effect. For example, identifying a “scenario writer” as opposed to a “photographer” as the “First Cause,” reveals a different concept of causation – one is distantly removed from the production and screening, the other is present during production and also during the screening, as in the examples presented in Chapter 1. The importance of giving “film production awareness” a name, in contrast to “aesthetic awareness,” is it that it defines a different region of film

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<sup>33</sup> Ralph Rosenblum, *When The Shooting Stops ... The Cutting Begins: A Film Editor's Story* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 30.

consciousness, not only for the purposes of study, but also because it stands as a separate causal explanation for the types of writing found in film discourse and film criticism.

“Film production awareness” is also a region of film consciousness in another sense, if the work of Daniel Frampton in *Filmosophy* is considered.<sup>34</sup> While the director is critically regarded as the primary cause of the final film, and usually cited as such, Frampton believes that film screenings are a different order of experience in which rational constructions such as “director” are not necessarily present to consciousness as causal explanations. Rather, Frampton imagines an indistinct “film being” that serves as an all encompassing causal explanation for the “film world”:

‘Film being’ is a general term for what we understand to be the origin(ator) of the images and sounds we experience. Who or what provides the images that we see? Why do we see this character, at this moment, from this angle?<sup>35</sup>

Frampton argues, problematically, that theories about the way films become understandable to spectators – such as through narratological concepts like “enunciators” – are confusing, irrelevant, and incongruent with the actual

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<sup>34</sup> Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> “Film being is a general term for what we understand to be the origin(ator) of the images and sounds we experience. Who or what provides the images that we see? Why do we see this character, at this moment, from this angle.” Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower, 2006), 27.

film experience.<sup>36</sup> The experience of film is first order, in the sense that it consists of a direct experience between spectator and film. Theoretical explanations about the means through which film narratives become intelligible to viewers are second order, in that they are developed after the fact in a critical context that disregards the first order experience.<sup>37</sup> These second order explanations, Frampton seems to argue, are inserted as intermediaries between the spectator and the film without consideration of the subjective experience.<sup>38</sup> Frampton addresses this gap by defining the film experience on phenomenological terms – which is to say, on terms that describe the experience of film from the perspective of film viewing. This approach is problematic to the degree it extrapolates a general rule from Frampton’s singular experience; whatever is happening in Frampton’s consciousness while undergoing a film experience is not necessarily the case for everyone.

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy* (London: Wallflower, 2006), 34.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Shusterman distinguishes between first-order and second-order discourse, although not in the following manner; first-order discourse is the equivalent of criticism (such as film criticism) or some approach that allows for the playfulness of Sobchack’s approach; second-order discourse is an analysis of the first-order discourse, such as “meta-criticism.” Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 32, 202.

<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 6, section “Phenomenal or Subjective Experience,” for extended definition of “subjective film experience,” which refers to a viewer’s conscious experience *during* film screening.

Nevertheless, it is interesting that Frampton arrives at a similar conclusion than Branigan, but from a different theoretical approach: where Branigan identifies the ‘camera’ as the undefined, implied author, which is articulated after the fact, in conversation or writing, as a cause for film effects, Frampton sees the ‘film being’ on similar terms, as an all inclusive conceptualization of the various causal forces converging on that moment of experience. Rather than citing a metaphorical camera taking the viewer from scene to scene, or from place to place, Frampton’s ‘film being’ is – in a sense – its phenomenological counterpart, something that answers to a desire to causally explain the appearance of new film images as it unfolds.

Returning to the earlier example that cited a “photographer” that “shows us” scenes, it serves a causal function in explaining the film experience, even if the photographer is not responsible for actually shifting the scene: it is a metaphorical photographer that acts as the film being in the case of this explanation, in the absence of some other causal explanation (a director, editor, writer, or abstract narrator). It enables us to understand something about the way this writer imagines how films are intelligible constructions – an implied photographer, like a lecturer, shows us scenes of interest which build the story. Frampton’s supposition of a “film being” is speculative, and at times contemptuous of other spectatorship explanations, but it has the

advantage of focusing on the *feeling* of being a film viewer, and to this degree, it is an intervention on questions of film consciousness.

Nevertheless, the notion of “film production awareness” is intended to categorize an area of spectator awareness that plays a role in the construction of cause and effect relations resulting in a particular effect. The way this is revealed to outsiders is often through the choice of a particular word that indicates this awareness – director, author, camera, photographer, scenario writer, and so forth.

# CHAPTER 5: “FILM CULTURE AWARENESS” AND “A WAY OF EXISTING TOWARDS FILM.”

## 1. Film Culture Awareness

In *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915*, Jan Olsson links the rise of film journalism with the emergence of “film culture:” “In this work such discourses [those found mostly in daily press] coalesce around Los Angeles and its film culture as well as the more abstract place of films and movies within a larger cultural sphere.”<sup>1</sup> While Olsson never formally defines “film culture” – in a straightforward, axiomatic statement – it seems to mostly derive from two understandings of ‘culture’. The first, as with “film consciousness,” is when combined with a “modifying noun”:

With modifying noun: a way of life or social environment characterized by or associated with the specified quality or thing; a group of people subscribing or belonging to this.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, “film culture” refers both to the “social environment” associated with film as well as the “group of people subscribing” to this environment. It is a

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 16.

<sup>2</sup> “culture, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45746?rskey=imn2eN&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 01, 2015).

definition rooted in anthropologist Edward Tylor's 1871 definition of culture, "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>3</sup> There is a sense in which "film culture" comprises these aspects of the meaning of culture, especially in terms of knowledge and habits. Where there is "film culture," there are people united in developing a social environment that includes developing knowledge of film and activities centered on the preservation and appreciation of film.

A second definition of 'culture' relevant to understanding Olsson's usage of "film culture" is from Mathew Arnold's 1869 *Culture and Anarchy*, writing that culture consists of the "pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know . . . the best which has been thought and said in the world."<sup>4</sup> This sense of "culture" refers to a set of behaviour, activities, objects, beliefs – *within* the above broader definition of culture – that attains a certain desirable standing or place and therefore becomes the object of "pursuit." Film culture is therefore not necessarily a neutral characterization of a particular group or social environment in which film comprises the center of activity. It is also a social environment within which certain activities and discourse

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<sup>3</sup> Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art, and Custom* (London,: J. Murray, 1871), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Mathew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, quoted in Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* (Columbia University Press, 1958), 115.



function towards providing film with this cultural standing – exercising, preserving and upholding “the best which has been thought and said in the world” *of cinema*.

When seen from these dual perspectives, Olsson’s usage of ‘film culture’ is illustrative of a way of thinking about the place of film journalism in the context of early cinema, in which it nurtures and sustains discourse and activity centering on film, but with an orientation towards exalting its virtues. This can be seen narrowly, and literally, in self-congratulatory editorial comments, such as when *Moving Picture World* writes: “Truly for its progress, its splendid development, its marvellous rise and a moral influence in our civilization the moving picture owes no thanks to the daily press.”<sup>5</sup> Less evident is the aggregate of activities that these journals enabled, each of which function to sustain this vision of film culture, such as the study of audiences (as described in Chapter 1), the development of film historiography,<sup>6</sup> and the writing of film criticism,<sup>7</sup> in addition to creating a forum of discussion between readers, writers and the film industry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “The Moving Picture and the Public Press,” *Moving Picture World* (6 May 1911): 1006.

<sup>6</sup> Film historiography emerged in different forms over the course of the first 20 years of cinema. At first towards the technological apparatus, as explained in Simon Popple’s “‘Cinema Wasn’t Invented, It Grewed’: Technological Film Historiography before 1913,” in *Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema* edited by John Fullerton (London, John Libbey, 1998), 19-26; Frank Kessler and Sabine Lenk, “L’écriture de l’histoire au présent: Débuts de l’historiographie du cinéma,” *Cinémas* 21, n° 2-3 (2011): 27-47; and Santiago Hidalgo and Philippe Gauthier, “An Historical Sketch of Animated Pictures: New Perspectives on

The concept of “film culture” is presented in this chapter as a means – or gateway – into thinking about a different meaning of “film consciousness,” which encompasses a spectrum between the previous chapter’s definition – that of “film awareness” – and the last chapter’s definition – that of an “entity in consciousness.” This chapter is therefore a transition between two points – in thinking about film consciousness as signifying an awareness of some aspect of film (aesthetics, filmmaking, films) and signifying an imagined thing in consciousness (faculty, place, identity, or conscious experience) as a singular entity named ‘film consciousness’. Transitional areas – spectrums – are therefore difficult to pinpoint or define as categories, since they draw from multiple domains. However, I believe it will make sense to define *this* broad area of film consciousness as “film culture awareness.”

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Historical Discourses in Early Cinema” presented at the FSAC (Film Studies Association of Canada) in Montreal in 2010. Film historiography gradually incorporates a history of authors and directors as discussed in Santiago Hidalgo and Philippe Gauthier, “En marge de l’historiographie du cinématographe? Georges Méliès et le discours historiques sur les vues cinématographiques,” *Méliès, Carrefour Des Attractions* (Centre Culturel International de Cerisy, France, July 2011): 33-44 which highlights several early works tracing the history of George Méliès: Victorin Jasset, “Étude sur la mise en scène en cinématographie,” *Ciné-Journal*, no 166 (28 October, 1911): 33 and 35-37; Maurice Clément, “Le cinéma sur les boulevards,” *Ciné-Journal*, no 297 (May 2, 1912): 22; and John B. Rathbun, *Motion Picture Making and Exhibiting* (Chicago, Charles C. Thompson Company, 1914): 77.

<sup>7</sup> Covered extensively in Santiago Hidalgo, “Film Theory as Practice: Criticism and Interpretation in the Early American,” in *Proceedings of the XVI International Film Studies Conference-Permanent Seminar on History of Film Theories: In the Very Beginning, at the Very End, 2009*, edited by Francesco Casetti and Jane Gaines (Udine: Forum, 2010): 83-93

<sup>8</sup> See Charlie Keil, “The Trade Press: A Forum for Feedback,” in his *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 27-29.

Consider, for example, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's usage of 'film consciousness' in *Film History: An Introduction*. The first of these examples is unique in that it straightforwardly presents a definition (in this case of 'movie consciousness' which for now will be taken as an equivalent idea as that of 'film consciousness'):

During the recession [in the 1970s], however, studios also granted filmmakers the opportunity to create something like European art films. Sometimes a single filmmaker like Coppola might participate in both trends. *Both were characterized by "movie consciousness," an intense awareness of film history and its continuing influence on contemporary culture.*<sup>9</sup>

Bordwell and Thompson's definition conforms almost perfectly with "film culture awareness," which includes both awareness of film history, but also of film's cultural value. The two other examples derive part of their sense from a sub-definition of 'consciousness' mentioned in chapter 3, when awareness is seen as the source of *conviction* (which is why social movements seek to "raise awareness" – the conviction is left implied):<sup>10</sup>

The growth in international film consciousness spurred governments to fund archives that would take up the burden of systematically documenting and preserving the world's film culture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 517.

<sup>10</sup> "consciousness, n., entry 1". OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Bordwell and Thompson, *Film History*, 356.

The meaning of ‘film consciousness’ in this passage refers to consciousness of the cultural and social value of film, from which conviction to preserve film arises. This meaning is further confirmed in another section of Bordwell and Thompson’s book, in a section titled “Film Consciousness and Film Preservation” (Figure 2). Although the formulation ‘film consciousness’ is not used in the section directly under the heading, the authors allude to it, writing “American filmmakers’ new awareness of film history coincided with a growing need to safeguard the country’s motion-picture heritage.”<sup>12</sup>

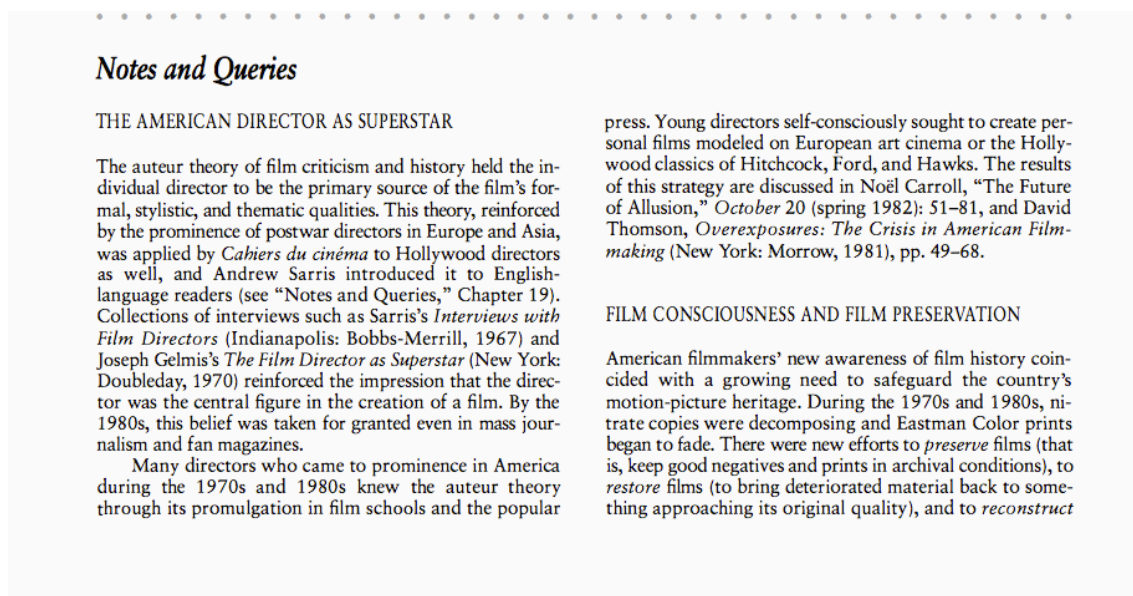


Figure 2: “Film Consciousness and Film Preservation,” David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 532.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 532.

It is interesting – in showing the polysemic nature of the formulation as well as its possibilities of meaning – that Bordwell and Thompson use ‘film consciousness’ quite differently within the same volume (and Bordwell himself, as the final chapter shows, also manages to use ‘film consciousness’ in yet another sense in another text). Notice that in the following passage the formulation has acquired not just a different connotation, along the continuum of “film culture awareness,” but also a different ontological status:

Scorsese’s film consciousness also emerges in his virtuosic displays of technique. His films alternate intense, aggressive dialogue scenes designed to highlight the skills of performers such as Robert De Niro with scenes of physical action served up with dazzling camera flourishes.<sup>13</sup>

There are several points to be made about this usage. Elsewhere in the volume, as noted, Bordwell and Thompson define “movie consciousness” as “an intense awareness of film history and its continuing influence on contemporary culture.”<sup>14</sup> The same authors also use ‘film consciousness’ on two occasions to mean this awareness, but also a conviction towards preserving and archiving film. But the above usage seems more oriented toward conceiving of “film consciousness” as a faculty that is implemented in the act of filmmaking. It includes, one assumes, a sense of film history and film culture, but it also seems, given this context, a filmmaking knowledge

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 529.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 517.

and artistic sensibility. We can deduce from this passage that great filmmakers have “film consciousness” – from which emerge “virtuosic displays of technique.” It draws from awareness of film history and culture, but it has become something else in the process, an “entity in consciousness” (which is discussed in more detail in the last chapter).

If film consciousness is imagined as “film culture awareness,” it can be manipulated to serve a rhetorical or reception purpose – at least if we consider the way the following reviewer applies the formulation. In a review in the *New York Press* of Marco Bellocchio’s *The Wedding Director* (2006), Armond White writes, “Bellocchio uses film consciousness to address social consciousness.”<sup>15</sup> The story is about a film director who falls in love with the daughter of a prince. White sees the director in the film as a proxy for the director outside of the film. In this sense, the film is intended to “to poke fun at the pretenses directors and audiences bring to the movies.”<sup>16</sup> As such, the film makes reference to Italian filmmaking history: ““Bellocchio is inspired by film culture’s influence on Italy’s daily life,” especially in “the legacy of the Italian artist-nobleman like Visconti and Fellini.”<sup>17</sup> But these references are not “about cultural hipness,” according to White, but rather, as suggested,

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<sup>15</sup> Armond White, “Quicksilver Fox,” *NY Press* (June 11, 2008), Accessed June 23, 2013. <http://www.nypress.com/article-18380-quicksilver-fox.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

they are a means of addressing “social consciousness.” Therefore, the audience’s awareness of these references – and of the particular place Italian filmmaking and film culture maintains within Italian culture – constitutes the audience’s “film consciousness.”

Unlike the preceding examples of film awareness, the category of “film self-consciousness” does not clearly follow from substituting a notion of ‘film’ into the formulation ‘film consciousness.’ Each of the previously mentioned examples of film awareness incorporates a reasonable interpretation of “film” when considered broadly – as a historical and cultural phenomenon, as an aesthetic object, and as a process that results in the making of a film. In this category, awareness is not directed outwardly, but rather inwardly; or more accurately, it is directed in both directions, in the sense that it implies recognition of the self in relation to the construction of the object of film. This film awareness is essential to the formation of a community disposed to film studies. Therefore, the presence of this awareness is noteworthy in the study of writing about film. It is continuous with film study, without necessarily being an institutional representation of such an activity (a classroom, a library, a university or institute). As defined in detail in Chapter 1, such awareness is indeed present during the period of early cinema in film

publications, which substantially precedes current understandings of when the activity of film study begins.<sup>18</sup>

We have seen thus far that when film consciousness is imagined as film culture awareness, it can serve to highlight different elements of consciousness – the consciousness of the filmmaker, of the audience, and of those engaged in activities oriented toward preserving, archiving, or even studying film. Secondly, it is sometimes imagined as something that refers strictly to a sense of awareness about certain facts related to film, but also to a faculty, which is to say, something which has become part of consciousness in some enduring or integrative sense. But as mentioned, this area of the spectrum of film consciousness presents certain difficulties in pinning down all of the different ways in which it can be used to mean. The following series of excerpts, for example, display a new orientation, which is as “turning points” or “changes” in a collective way of behaving, thinking or existing towards film; perhaps, even, it is that which underlies film movements, although not necessarily representing a film movement.

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<sup>18</sup> Dana Polan, in *Scenes of Instruction: The Beginnings of the U.S. Study of Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and Peter Decherney, in “Inventing Film Study and Its Object at Columbia University, 1915-1938,” *Film History* 12, no.4, *Color Film* (2000), 443-460, are not wrong in suggesting that film study begins *institutionally* in the late 1910s in university programs. The purpose of focusing on awareness, and “Ways of Existing Toward Film,” is to deinstitutionalize the awareness and attitude present in the study of film, such that it applies to non-traditional contexts.



## 2. Ways of Existing Towards Film

In his *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction*, Dudley Andrew describes the influence of Sergei Eisenstein's ideas on French filmmaking in the 1970s as fostering "a new radical film consciousness:"

With the massive translation projects of the late sixties, Bazin's grip on the film theory of France was loosened. Eisenstein's ideas today are heard everywhere in Paris. They dominate the major journals, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéthique*. They are evident in the dynamic cutting style of recent French movies. In short they have been integrated into, and have helped foster, a new radical film consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Several decades later, film critic Marc Gervais, defines a generation of filmmakers and film savants after the Second World War as acquiring a "mature film consciousness:"

Film reflected this process, though in abbreviated fashion. So the cinema, too, enjoyed its classical period, however briefly (some fifty years), a period that produced monuments to artistic creativity and, indeed, to the human spirit. Then came, after the Second World War, the great modernist period in which my generation acquired its "mature" film consciousness. Now, we felt, film was really daring to explore humanity's encounter with reality.<sup>20</sup>

In *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past*, contributor William J. Palmer offers the following characterization of 1980s filmmaking:

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<sup>19</sup> Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 75.

<sup>20</sup> Marc Gervais, "Movies Are Beginning to Breathe Again," *Compass* 14, no. 5 (1996): 14.

A literariness marked by films such as *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1981) and *Ragtime* (1981) proved a false start to the decade's film consciousness, but by 1982 the first real gatherings of sociohistorical film texts around contemporary life texts began. Films such as *Testament* (1983) and *Silkwood* (1983), perhaps inspired by Israel's preemptive strike against an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, actually predicted (as *The China Syndrome* had in 1979) real-life toxic disasters such as the gas leaks in Bhopal, India, that killed 3,400 people in 1984 and the Chernobyl nuclear plant explosion in 1986.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, in a recent piece covering Philippine films at the 58th Berlin Film Festival, the impact of new editing technology on Philippine filmmaking is described in terms of giving rise to a "new film consciousness:"

This "new era" of filmmaking in the Philippines brings out a new breed of young and dynamic filmmakers. This is the advent of the independent digital filmmaking. The emergence of affordable and user-friendly digital cameras and editing softwares make this rapid evolution possible resulting to a new film consciousness in the Philippines with a profound interest in festivals abroad. It is quite similar to the so-called "golden age" of Philippine Cinema in the 70's and 80's . . . <sup>22</sup>

Here we have then four examples of 'film consciousness' – from different periods and different contexts – that differ in meaning from the 'film consciousness' discussed above, but which shares a strong continuity of meaning. We might recall that an important premise guiding this thesis, with

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<sup>21</sup> William J. Parker, "The 1980s," in *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film: How the Movies Have Portrayed the American Past*, edited by Peter C. Rollins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 42-43.

<sup>22</sup> *Signis* no. 2082 (February 22, 2008), accessed August 31, 2015, [http://www.signis.net/imprimer.php3?id\\_article=2082](http://www.signis.net/imprimer.php3?id_article=2082)

respect to the analysis of ‘film consciousness’, comes from Christian Metz, when he writes, “a film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand.”<sup>23</sup> The same is true of language – the above examples of ‘film consciousness’ are not difficult to understand, but they are difficult to classify and explain, not just because of the reality indicated, but also because of the way the formulation overlaps with other semantic areas. As an informal attempt, these usages of ‘film consciousness’ roughly mean a “way of existing towards film” based on a set of shared and defining beliefs. From a historiographic perspective, this “film consciousness” is observable in collective activity, more so than in “subjective first person reports”<sup>24</sup> that provide access to the conscious experience of a group or individual, as the case with the film consciousness discussed in the final chapter.

I believe that part of the meaning of the above usage of “film consciousness” derives from the third definition of ‘consciousness’ provided in Chapter 3, “shared defining ideas and beliefs”:

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<sup>23</sup> Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 69.

<sup>24</sup> These are reports that describe subjective experience directly from a first person perspective. The term is used in this form in the following source: Beja Margithazi, “Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows...’ The Role of Body and Senses in Various ‘First Contact’ Narratives,” *Ősz* (December 10, 2012). <http://uj.apertura.hu/2012/osz/margithazi-the-role-of-body-and-senses/>

OED: “Attributed as a collective faculty to an aggregate of people, a period of time, etc.; a set of shared defining ideas and beliefs.”<sup>25</sup>

Each of the above examples refers to an “aggregate of people” (filmmakers, savants) and a period of time (the 70s, the 80’s, after the Second World War, and the 2000s). It is more difficult, perhaps, to see that the ‘consciousness’ – in these contexts – consists of a set of shared and defining beliefs, since in each case ‘film consciousness’ is used in reference to an action or behaviour that presumes it. Moreover, when Dudley Andrew writes about Eisenstein’s writings ushering in “a new radical film consciousness” – the film consciousness is not something which a person or group has to different degrees. It is finite and indivisible. In contrast, film consciousness in terms of “film awareness” is spoken about in quantifiable and spatial terms – it has a range, a level; it increases or decreases.

In other words, as opposed to being quantifiable, this usage of film consciousness is *qualified*. The accompanying modifier serves to define its nature: “new,” “mature,” and “new radical.” As characterizations, these are also not neutral. The word choice is indicative of the particular rhetorical function the formulation serves. In each case, the modifying term announces a turning point in a particular direction: from old to “new,” from

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<sup>25</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 4b”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

unsophisticated to “mature,” from conventional to “radical.” Film consciousness is presented as a desirable end point within a contained historical process.

Finally, there is an interesting categorical implication in the above passages. In order for there to be a “new film consciousness” there logically must have been an “old film consciousness” – even if that seems antithetical to the idea of film consciousness as a point of culmination. It is the nature of this accompanying language that its opposite is implicitly invoked, to some degree.<sup>26</sup> A “radical film consciousness” implies a “conventional” one; a “mature film consciousness” implies an “immature” or “primitive” film consciousness. In each case, the chosen vocabulary brings into existence a category through which behaviour is analyzable and to which is attributable a relative degree of progression along some imagined spectrum (the fact Palmer refers to a “false start” is a sign of this imagined progression, which, from his perspective, is momentarily halted during a turn toward “literariness” in the early 1980s, but which resumed with an increase in “sociohistorical film texts”).

Whatever the ultimate meaning of “film consciousness” for these writers, it minimally, and unequivocally, represents – within the historical context

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<sup>26</sup> The idea of a word implying its opposite is derived from Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-27.

referred to – an important shift from one “way of existing” towards film, to another “way of existing” towards film.<sup>27</sup> This shift might include a new sensitivity to the theoretical side of film (in the case of integrating Eisenstein’s ideas); a willingness to “explore humanity’s encounter with reality”; a turn towards “contemporary life texts;” or a “new era” of affordable filmmaking and its global impact. Therefore, while representing an end point of a historical process, it is not specific or enduring, in the sense of being the same across different contexts, as is the case with “aesthetic film awareness,” which refers to a specific awareness of film that is either present or not present to different degrees. In the hands of a given writer, ‘film consciousness’ will signify that an important change has take place at a level that is difficult to define institutionally, but which pervades a defined group and period.

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<sup>27</sup> The expression “way of existing” is taken from the OED’s definition of “state,” which is used in conjunction with ‘consciousness’: “A combination of circumstances or attributes belonging at a particular time to a person or thing; a particular manner or way of existing as defined by the presence of certain circumstances or attributes.” I believe this expression – “way of existing” – captures the external, behavioural side of consciousness. It does not refer to a subjective phenomenon, but rather to an empirically describable collective behaviour, in specific contexts, that is nevertheless binding at the level of beliefs, actions and ideas. Therefore, “film consciousness” as a “way of existing towards film” identifies a presumed consciousness underlying collective behaviour occurring at a fixed place and moment in relation to film as a response to film experience and major public events. “state, n.”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/189241?rskey=2QTxnG&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed September 02, 2015).

One concept that seems to overlap with this sense of film consciousness, as a way of existing towards film, deriving from an awakening or awareness of film culture, is that of “film movement.” However, contrasting this term with that of film consciousness, as used in the above excerpts, will show that there is enough differences between them to consider the value of thinking about certain collective behaviour in cinema in terms of film consciousness. In *Film Art*, Bordwell and Thompson provide, if not a widely accepted, then at least a direct, authoritative definition of “film movement.” According to Bordwell and Thompson, “a film movement consists of two elements:”

1. Films that are produced within a particular period and/or nation and that share significant traits of style and form
2. Filmmakers who operate within a common production structure and who share certain assumptions about filmmaking<sup>28</sup>

Both of these elements are present in the particular historical reality Dudley Andrews describes. Andrews identifies a set of filmmakers (French filmmakers in the 1970s) operating within a common production structure who produce films sharing significant traits in style (“dynamic cutting style of recent French movies”). The causal explanation is that this style is drawn from Eisenstein’s’ recently published writings. All of the typical elements associated with a film movement are present, including the importance of a

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<sup>28</sup> Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 8th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), 440.

common source of shared, published ideas. Yet – at first glance – these elements do not constitute a film movement. Andrews was aware of this in refraining to define it as such – instead it made sense to define this collective behaviour as “film consciousness,” the consciousness that might normally underlie a film movement, but which does not have the same visible and perhaps consistent structure.

In fact, there seem to be at least four significant differences between “film movement” and “film consciousness.” The first is that “film consciousness” – as opposed to “film movement” – belongs to more than just filmmakers; it also belongs, potentially, to other groups working in film-related environments (academics, archivists, historians, spectators), as Gervais’s example shows. Secondly, film consciousness does not necessarily exist within a defined “production structure.” As the Gervais’s and Parker’s example also shows, film consciousness – rather like ideology – traverses usual structuring categories, such as “nations” or “institutions.” It is a more porous idea. Thirdly, and following from this, film consciousness is a description of a reality underlying a more structured behaviour, but which nevertheless has an identity and coherency. Where “film movement” identifies an objectively verifiable social reality that exists at the “surface” of our historical attention – but which nevertheless requires analytical concepts to occasionally identify – “film consciousness” describes an area of reality that is less visible, less likely



to draw attention, but which might serve as the basis of a film movement. Finally, a “film movement” suggests a direction and purpose, often publicly indicated, such as in manifestos or writings. This is to say, filmmakers involved in film movements are more or less aware of the fact of being in a movement (a good example is the French New Wave). But “film consciousness” is not necessarily purpose-oriented; it is a terminal point, from which other ideas and behaviour might emerge.

In suggesting that “film consciousness” underlies “film movements,” but is not a movement itself, it is perhaps advisable to turn to a concept that purports to describe underlying behaviour related to film – that of “cinematic episteme.” Is it the case that this term duplicates “film consciousness”? I believe it does not; and moreover, I believe it brings into further focus further concept specificity.

Although developed over a series of texts, François Albera appears to have formally presented the notion of “cinematic episteme” for the first time in his chapter “First Discourses on Film and the Construction of a ‘Cinematic Episteme’ (2010) in the *Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema*:

We might therefore speak of a *cinematic episteme*, in the sense in which Michel Foucault uses the word, and here I will advance the hypothesis, in an analysis of a broad range of “early discourses” on film, that this episteme was built on a relationship between the mechanical (the device and its mechanical, optical and chemical workings) and the psychic (the “modern mind” subjected to the

upheavals of urban and industrial life; the various scientific reformulations around perception, intellection and affects).<sup>29</sup>

The remainder of Albera's chapter leaves the precise nature of the term unexplained, even if the study itself serves as an illustration of it. However, Albera suggests two references for interpreting the meaning of "cinematic episteme": the first is Michel Foucault's use of "episteme," and the second, indicated in a footnote, is of an earlier article in which he "introduced this hypothesis with Maria Tortajada in 'The 1900 Episteme.'"<sup>30</sup> This earlier text is then a logical starting point for understanding the meaning of "cinematic episteme", since it explains the methodology and concepts Albera applies in the text mentioned above. This first text also provides a relatively clear definition of "episteme" in contrast to other terms; in this sense it provides a more global picture of Albera's conceptual framework. In this context, "conceptual framework" simply means the particular way an author uses a set of terms even if these terms already have established institutional meanings elsewhere. Each author has a hierarchy in which a particular term is situated in relation to one another. This passage is revealing of this framework and hierarchy, since all of these terms are polysemic and interpreted differently according to individual.

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<sup>29</sup> François Albera, "First Discourses on Film and the Construction of a 'Cinematic Episteme'," in *The Blackwell Companion to Early Cinema* edited by André Gaudreault, Nicolas Dulac and Santiago Hidalgo (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 121.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, fn1, 136.

The term [episteme], coined by Michel Foucault, is problematic, partly because of the way it ‘competes’ in this chapter with notions of ‘model’ and ‘paradigm’ with which it is confused. Foucault’s *episteme* has a characteristic which distinguishes it from *paradigm* (described by Thomas S. Kuhn) and *a fortiori* from the *model*, in that it does not define a state of knowledge – whether scientific or philosophical – at a particular moment, but that which makes a theory, practice or opinion possible.<sup>31</sup>

The important question left open regards the meaning of “that” in the final phrase (“that which makes a theory, practice or opinion possible”). In the earlier chapter on film awareness, one of the arguments presented was that film awareness represented a condition for certain film discourse. “Aesthetic film awareness” and “film production awareness” are conditions for elaborating a theoretical understanding of the causal chain through which films produce effects, including meaning. In this regard, film awareness offers some detail about the meaning of “that.” It is a piece of the “cinematic episteme” puzzle. If episteme, as Albera and Tortajada assert via Foucault, is the condition – and not a state of knowledge – that makes a theory, practice, or opinion possible, then film consciousness, as film awareness, is precisely one of those explanations, especially with respect to early film discourse.

However, it seems that Albera does not necessarily have this idea of “cinematic episteme” in mind – the idea that cinematic episteme is a means

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<sup>31</sup> François Albera and Maria Tortajada, “The 1900 Episteme,” in *Cinema Beyond Film: Media Epistemology in the Modern Era* edited by François Albera and Maria Tortajada (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 25.

through which film is understood – even if the concept is definable as such. Rather, it seems that Albera is interested in defining an episteme that cinema – and its technological and artistic web of connections – contribute to producing and from which assertions about the world at large are constructed. Where the category of film consciousness is an attempt to investigate the consciousness of a spectator, critic, or writer whose attention is directed at film, expressed in acts of discourse and behaviour, Albera’s causal arrows point in the other direction: he is interested in studying the episteme *of* cinema that a spectator learns and reapplies in other contexts. In this sense, Albera’s “cinematic episteme” is closer in nature to Francesco Casetti’s “film gaze” (discussed in Chapter 7, in the section “Faculty”). They are both concepts that capture the epistemological effects (know how, ways of seeing, beliefs) of cinema on spectators, rather than serving to study the means – the episteme or awareness – through which film becomes intelligible to audiences, including critics and theorists.

Another key difference between “film consciousness” and “cinematic episteme” exists at the level of attribution – which is to say, at the level of who possesses these qualities. Stated otherwise, is it possible for someone to hold “cinematic episteme” such that it would make grammatical sense to attribute it to a group? The answer to that seems “no.” Cinematic episteme does not, in principle, belong to anyone. It is a construction of what someone imagines as

being “out there” in the world (ideas, beliefs, concepts, information from which prospective individuals or groups draw from in order to form opinions or theories). In metaphorical terms, cinematic episteme is rather like a fountain or a pool. Film consciousness, on the other hand, is something that belongs to a group or individual. It is an already acquired and defined “way of existing” that includes shared and defining beliefs, and various sets of film awareness. This “embodiment” of film consciousness is a crucial difference from the more detached notion of episteme and speaks to a rhetorical difference in the way such terms are applied, in other words, what these terms target as objects of description, even if the evidence that is used to support these descriptions is very similar. The vast majority of Albera’s writings on cinematic episteme are based on information – transformed in the act of analysis into beliefs, schemes, or concepts – contained within early publications.

In the end, we can say that the categories of film consciousness presented in this and the last chapter are fluid ideas, which are nevertheless distinct. They are not neatly segregated aspects of consciousness. It is merely helpful, I believe, to see the differences in the way the formulation is used publically and institutionally, as well as to cast attention on particular features of ordinary evidence. In addition to this, there are usages of ‘film consciousness’ that seem to assume many of these meanings simultaneously. Consider this example from 1974:

Since the cinema and print literature share so many conventions and techniques, despite media differences, it would seem logical that similar critical methods could be applied, and that the student and critic of each could benefit from familiarity with not one but both art forms. A reader with film consciousness becomes aware of the visual and aural appeals of much fine writing, and training in literature gives perspective to ones appreciation of film.<sup>32</sup>

The meaning of this usage of ‘film consciousness’ is elusive yet intuitive – it is, at the same time, an awareness of film aesthetics, of film history, of film production, and also a way of seeing and understanding, a change to the way the world is perceived, including writing. Indeed, it makes perfect sense that “A reader with film consciousness becomes aware of the visual and aural appeals of much fine writing,” since a person who has experienced film and who has become immersed in it potentially perceives details in the visual field differently than someone who has gone through the same experience.

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<sup>32</sup> Christine Mary Gibson, *Cinematic Techniques in the Prose Fiction of Beatriz* (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1974), 17.

## CHAPTER 6: THE MEANING OF ‘FILM EXPERIENCE’

The last chapters turn attention towards a more subjective understanding of “film consciousness” – as something that exists in the world as a result of film experiences. Because one of the operating premises of this this thesis is that film consciousness belongs to a world in which film experiences occur, the objective of this chapter is to define the meaning of ‘film experience’. The following chapter examines more specifically the significance of treating “film consciousness” as a unified thing or entity, as opposed to representing a relationship between film and consciousness. In examining the different ideas associated with “film experience,” it also provides an opportunity to review some of the literature that seems to overlap with the more subjective and unified understanding of film consciousness.

In fact, it is impossible to imagine “consciousness” without reference to “experience.” The relationship between “experience” and “consciousness” can be divided according to different intervals: experience *causes* conscious phenomena to become manifest, such as feelings, emotions and thoughts; consciousness, itself, *is* an experience, exemplified in the expression “conscious experience;” and experience is something that *remains* in consciousness (in the form of know-how, but also in the form of feelings,

emotions and thoughts). These different ways of using ‘experience’ in relation to “consciousness,” or aspects of consciousness, provides distinct possibilities of description, including at various intervals, but also a means of talking about consciousness more generally.

Consider, for example, the simple act of biking. The *experience* of biking (the trial or act of biking) causes certain conscious phenomena to appear (feelings, sensations, thoughts, memories). These conscious phenomena are definable, as an aggregate or totality, as *an experience* (or as “subjective experience”). Subjective experience is that which one *experiences* while engaged in a particular activity. Over the course of biking, a person gains *experience* or more specifically “biking experience.” There is now an experience that stays with this person in the form of know-how or skill. But this “biking experience” might also refer to the subjective experience that took place while biking, which is to say, the sensations and emotions during that interval of time – during that *experience* of biking. Therefore, ‘experience’ can refer to the entirety of an activity, to the act itself, to the interior world produced by the act, and to the phenomena and knowledge that remains with the individual after the activity is completed.



## 1. The Semantic Field of ‘Experience’

Most dictionary sources recognize multiple definitions of the word ‘experience.’ The Oxford Dictionary of English, for example, offers a combined eleven entries when ‘experience’ is used as a noun and a verb.<sup>1</sup> Rather than present all eleven entries, this chapter attempts to organize them into smaller groups: (1) the fact of “undergoing” an event (“to experience” bike riding for the first time, to observe an event or situation, to experiment with something); (2) the “subjective experience” in these acts of undergoing (the feelings, sensations, thoughts occurring while undergoing the event); (3) the “remainders” in consciousness, either in terms of know-how or conscious phenomena; and (4), an institutional or social category of experience that designates an ideal or typical experience in relation to an object.

### A. “*Undergoing*”

A common usage of the term ‘experience’ is for describing the act of “undergoing” (“to experience” an event, activity, emotion, etc.). Many expressions convey this sense of the term: “observing,” “making trial of,” “being exposed to,” “living through.” There seem at least three basic conditions for this usage: that there is an event, including mental or psychological events (biking, crying, thinking); that there is a passage of time

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<sup>1</sup> “Experience.” OED Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed June 23, 2013. <http://www.oed.com>.

that would justify seeing it as “undergoing” that particular event; and finally, that attention was directed at the event. It is the person describing this “experience” who obviously determines whether being at an event counts as “observing,” “as living through,” as “being exposed to,” and so forth. Otherwise, it is possible to imagine a situation in which a person is present at an event, but who, at the same time, is not experiencing the event (because attention is directed elsewhere). The conscious link between the person and the event is necessary for it to be defined as “experiencing” or “undergoing.”

### *B. “Subjective Experience”*

When undergoing an event, such as biking (or film viewing), a set of conscious phenomena is produced. This set of conscious phenomena is definable as “subjective experience” and is particular to that person. This is why two people will “experience” the same event differently; the conscious phenomena appearing in each person is different. This conscious phenomena – which is consciousness for many philosophers – is dividable into three areas, following the work of Daniel Dennett:

- (1) *Experiences of the “external” world*, such as sights, sounds, smells, slippery and scratchy feelings, feelings of heat and cold, and of the positions of our limbs;
- (2) *experiences of the purely “internal” world*, such as fantasy images, the inner sights and sounds of daydreaming and talking to yourself, recollections, bright ideas, and sudden hunches;
- (3) *experiences of emotion or “affect”* (to use the awkward term favored by psychologists), ranging from bodily pains, tickles, and “sensations” of hunger and thirst, through intermediate

emotional storms of anger, joy, hatred, embarrassment, lust, astonishment, to the least corporeal visitations of pride, anxiety, regret, ironic detachment, rue, awe, icy calm.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, descriptions of subjective experiences entail describing features from one of these three areas: experiences of the “external” world, of the “internal” world, and of emotions. If we take the aforementioned example of biking, the subjective experience could include: the feeling of the wind blowing through a person’s hair (experience of the “external” world), the memories of past biking experiences (experience of the “internal” world), and the sensations of excitement and enjoyment (experience of emotions or affect). When regarded as a set, these experiences are construable as the “subjective experience” of biking.

### C. “Remainders”

After an “experience” is completed, such as an act of biking or skydiving or film viewing, “something” remains in consciousness that is definable as “experience.” This “something” is broadly dividable into two areas: the subjective experience that remains with the person, such as images, sensations, feelings, which are recallable as memories, or even as “re-experiences” (more on this later this chapter); and a knowledge or “know-how” or skill that is connected to the original experience, or series of experiences of

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 45.

the same category. The term ‘experience’ refers to the know-how gained in the course of performing a particular activity.

The fact “subjective experience” remains in consciousness – as a memory or as some other form of presence – means it is possible to recall the subjective experience of an event without necessarily remembering the precise objective details (such as vividly recalling the experience of a movie but not the movie itself, as discussed below in relation to the work of Annette Kuhn). Secondly, this subjective experience is also sometimes imagined as an accrued or aggregate phenomena, not just a specific instance – for example, the accumulated film experiences imagined as a singular set, simply named ‘film experience’.

#### *D. “Institutional Fact”*

An experience can become an institutional or social fact when combined with an object and presented in a particular context or manner, usually preceded with the word “the”: “the teaching experience,” “the sailing experience,” “the immigrant experience,” “the Antonioni experience.” When presented in this form, the formulation implies that there is something typical, essential, or noteworthy in these experiences that is open to definition and discussion.

There are basically two forms to this category of experience. One is an “ad-hoc construction,” in which someone presents an experience with the intention of recognizing or acknowledging some essential or typical fact related to this experience, sometimes to another person familiar with the same experience. For example, two friends discuss the experience of having Philippe as a roommate. Perhaps Philippe is eccentric, messy, late paying his bills, etc. This results in the feeling of frustration. There is then something that it is like to live with Philippe as a roommate. The two friends might then refer to this experience of living with Philippe as “the Philippe experience,” because it refers to these objective and subjective elements that each recognize. In that moment, as a result of this performative act, “the Philippe experience” becomes a category of experience.

The second form has an institutional dimension. It is like the above “Philippe experience,” in the sense of defining an experience as having typical or essential traits, but with time it becomes much more entrenched as a category such that it attains an institutional or public status. Consider, the formulation “the immigrant experience.” The objective conditions might include leaving family behind, finding a place to live, finding work, finding friends who speak a similar language, learning a new language. But there is also a subjective experience, such as feelings of alienation, a sense of displacement, loneliness, or feelings of insecurity. Although those who

consider themselves immigrants may disagree on what counts as “typical,” whether in reference to the subjective experience or to the objective events, the category of experience itself – “the immigrant experience” – is acknowledged (usually implicitly) as being a legitimate category. This is precisely the usage of ‘experience’ found in a lesson plan for teachers at the Library of Congress entitled “The Immigrant Experience: Down the Rabbit Hole,” described as follows:

Relocating to a new country can be a disorienting experience. Immigrants often find themselves in a strange new world where the rules have changed, the surroundings are unfamiliar, and the inhabitants speak in strange tongues. In some ways, the immigrant experience is like the dizzying journey taken by the lead character in Lewis Carroll’s 19th-century novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.<sup>3</sup>

This account of “the immigrant experience” includes both objective and subjective elements that constitute the category: the surroundings and language are objectively unfamiliar, resulting in the subjective experience of “disorientation” and “strangeness.” Not every immigrant experience will follow this “dizzying journey,” of course, but the fact that it is presented on these terms is an illustration of this institutional category of ‘experience’. As will be explained below, this is the case with ‘film experience’, when presented as “the film experience.”

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Johnson and Linda Thompson, “The Immigrant Experience: Down the Rabbit Hole,” *Library of Congress*. <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/rabbit/> (accessed May 8, 2015). The Library of Congress offers many lesson plans for various grade levels.

## 2. Definitions of ‘film experience’

The formulation ‘film experience’ is ubiquitous in film studies, but as with the term ‘experience’, it is polysemic. The objective in this section is to establish the broadest possible “semantic field of ‘film experience’.” This process is partly based on the above categorizations of the term ‘experience’, but also on the way the term is used in film discourse. While there are many ways of defining ‘film experience’, most will fit into one of the following six categories: “film viewing,” “psychological film experience,” “subjective film experience,” “film remainders,” “the institutional category of film experience,” and “point of contact.” The same “temporal continuum” that applies to ‘experience’ also applies to several of these definitions of ‘film experience’ in that the term refers to different intervals along a continuum, each of which are justifiably defined as “film experience.”

### *A. Film-Viewing Event*

A common usage of ‘film experience’ is when it refers to the “film-viewing event” (watching a movie). It therefore corresponds, precisely, with the first meaning of ‘experience’ mentioned above, that of “undergoing,” “living through,” or “making trial of.” In his work on “filmic experience,” Francesco Casetti refers to mostly the same definition when he defines ‘experience’ as

the “act of exposing ourselves to something...”<sup>4</sup> Thus, this ‘film experience’ refers mainly to “film viewing.” It does not refer to the “internal experience” of film viewing, merely to the objective fact of an individual engaged in an activity with certain parameters: a film was presented in some format, a person attended to the film in some manner, such that it constitutes, from some perspective, an experience of the film (and not, for example, standing before a film while engaged in an entirely different activity). The requisite condition is “watching,” “viewing,” “being engaged,” although not necessarily fully attentive, nor fully immersed. There is no way of essentialising the boundary between experiencing a film and merely being present while a film is screened. In any case, ‘film experience’ sometimes refers to just this event – the act of film viewing, which includes the content that begins around the time of the opening credits until the final credits. It is of course possible to argue in favour of expanding the definition to include other elements, but it is not necessary for recognizing this category of usage. This is more or less the meaning Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White have in mind in the title of their volume, *The Film Experience: An Introduction*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Francesco Casetti, “Filmic Experience,” *Screen* 50, no. 1 (March 20, 2009): 56.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Corrigan and Patricia Barry, *The Film Experience: An Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2009).



## *B. Psychological Film Experience*

While ‘film experience’ in the sense of “film-viewing event” is an external, objective fact – referring to someone engaged in the act of viewing a film – there is also the corresponding “internal” experience of film viewing, everything taking place “within” the viewer as the film is screened. This follows from the second definition of ‘experience’ presented earlier (subjective experience), with one important caveat: it also includes mental processes that are not necessarily apparent to the viewer. Thus, this internal experience is dividable into two areas, each of which is different in nature and therefore irreconcilable at different levels. Yet, as will be shown, both are justifiably named ‘film experience’.

David Chalmers’ distinction between “two concepts of mind” is useful for elaborating a distinction between these “internal” film experiences. In *The Conscious Mind*, Chalmers discusses a “psychological concept of mind” and a “phenomenal concept of mind.” For Chalmers, “the psychological concept” refers to the cognitive faculty, reflected in such terms as “memory,” “mental processes” and “schemata.” These mental processes occur without one necessarily being aware of them, and therefore, according to Chalmers, should be treated as a distinct concept of mind:

According to the psychological concept, it matters little whether a mental state has a conscious quality or not. What matters is the role it plays in a cognitive economy.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, some aspects of the mind do have a “conscious quality.” It is conceivable that someone is aware of these phenomena (and why it makes sense to define this phenomena as “conscious phenomena”). Such conscious phenomena are often accompanied by a “feeling,” or “what it is like.”<sup>7</sup> Chalmers refers to this aspect of the mind as the “phenomenal mind.” If it can be described from a first-person perspective, then it is the phenomenal mind that is under description. For someone like Chalmers, situated within consciousness studies, this aspect of the mind represents the very essence of consciousness. Thus,

On the phenomenal concept, mind is characterized by the way it *feels*; on the psychological concept, mind is characterized by what it *does*.<sup>8</sup>

The two internal film experiences can be similarly characterized: there is a ‘film experience’ that has a particular feeling (the subjective or phenomenal film experience) and a ‘film experience’ that is beyond conscious attention (the psychological film experience).

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<sup>6</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Nagel discusses this character in the seminal essay “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” discussed as well in Chapter 7 (*The Philosophical Review* 4, no. 83 (1973): 435-450.

<sup>8</sup> Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 11.

The “psychological film experience” is precisely that which “cognitive film theory” endeavours to study. The link between the formulation itself – ‘film experience’ – and the “psychological mind” is clearly established in a 2011 article entitled, “Watching you watch *There Will Be Blood*,” published on David Bordwell’s personal website.<sup>9</sup> Written by Tim Smith, this article is a rejoinder to a previous Bordwell blog entry.<sup>10</sup> The link between the term ‘film experience’ and this psychological process is established both literally, in the sense that Smith uses the term ‘film experience’ in reference to the psychological mind, but also substantively in the implications of the argument, which connects an external physiological action, “eye movement,” with an internal experience that is definable as psychological “attention.” In examining this argument, the distinction between the two different notions of ‘film experience’ in reference to the mind during film viewing should become clear.

As mentioned, Smith’s article is a rejoinder to a prior Bordwell blog entry on the same website, “Hands (and faces) across the table,”<sup>11</sup> an analysis of a scene from Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* (2007). Bordwell’s

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<sup>9</sup> Tim Smith, “Watching you watch THERE WILL BE BLOOD,” *David Bordwell’s Website on Cinema* (February 14, 2011). <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/02/14/watching-you-watch-there-will-be-blood/>

<sup>10</sup> David Bordwell, “Hands (and faces) across the table,” *David Bordwell’s Website on Cinema* (February 13, 2008). February 14, 2011). <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2008/02/13/hands-and-faces-across-the-table>.

<sup>11</sup> Bordwell, “Hands (and faces) across the table.”

analysis, according to Smith, attempts to demonstrate the more or less commonplace view within film studies that “staging can be used to direct viewer attention without the need for editing.”<sup>12</sup> The way a scene is arranged, the movements of the actors, camera mobility, lens focus, color, lighting, and a number of other non-editing film aesthetic components contribute to guiding viewer attention, a theme that is elaborated over the course of Bordwell’s entire body of work, but especially in *Film Art: An Introduction*, written with Kristen Thompson.<sup>13</sup>

However, the fact film aesthetics, including staging, guide viewer attention has not, up to now, been established through an analysis of the mind as it engages with the film. It is presumed on the basis of narrative comprehension, itself encompassing a series of discrete mental processes. No device exists that can study “attention” (nor, for that matter, the “experience of attention”). Notice that “attention” belongs to both the “psychological mind” and the “phenomenal mind.” It is a cognitive process that takes place without being aware of it, and also a behaviour that has a conscious quality (which is to say, it is possible to describe the experience of “being attentive” or “attending to something”).

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, “Watching you watch THERE WILL BE BLOOD.”

<sup>13</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 7th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004).

Nevertheless, the act of attending in a psychological sense – that which is encompassed in the expression “viewer attention” – corresponds with certain observable behaviour that indicates psychological attention. It is possible to deduce attention, for example, from the way a person answers subsequent questions about an event (which most parents and teachers intuitively know). Or, as Tim Smith’s work shows, there is visual behaviour that strongly correlates with attention, such as where we look, how we look, and how long we look. While it is not necessary to look at something in order to be engaged in the act of attending, it is obviously presumed in the act of film viewing. Therefore, where eyesight is directed at the screen is a reasonable indication of where attention is directed, especially according to certain eye movements that are extremely quick and difficult to perceive without the assistance of a specialized instrument. As part of a larger project named Dynamic Images and Eye Movements, Tim Smith’s research therefore entails tracking eye movements during the act of film viewing:

In a small pilot study, I recorded the eye movements of 11 adults using an Eyelink 1000 (SR Research) eyetracker. This eyetracker uses an infrared camera to accurately track the viewer’s pupil every millisecond. The movements of the pupil are then analysed to identify *fixations*, when the eyes are relatively still and visual processing happens; *saccadic eye movements (saccades)*, when the eyes quickly move between locations and visual processing shuts down; *smooth pursuit movements*, when we process a moving object; and *blinks*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, “Watching you watch THERE WILL BE BLOOD.”

These eye movements can then be compared to Bordwell's analysis in order to confirm whether staging, as Bordwell sees it, guides "viewer attention." While the fact there seems a correlation between eye movement and viewer attention is the main premise guiding Smith's study, it is not one Smith necessarily questions or problematizes. This is because just as we can attend to something while not looking at it, we can also look at something while not attending to it.<sup>15</sup> It is at a more granular level that the relationship between eye movement and cognitive processes that qualify as "attending" become evident (by which I mean very quick, nearly imperceptible eye movements), but clearly an aspect of "attention" is that it can be directed "internally," towards conscious phenomena, even while appearing to look at some external object. This sort of internally directed attention carries many names, but perhaps the most common is "day dreaming:"

Over the past 60 years, researchers have assigned various names to the thoughts and images that arise when attention drifts away from external tasks and perceptual input toward a more private, internal stream of consciousness. The list includes daydreaming, thought intrusions, task irrelevant thoughts, spontaneous thought or cognition, stimulus independent thought, respondent thought, fantasy, task unrelated thought, task unrelated images and thought, internally generated thoughts, self-generated thought, absent-

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<sup>15</sup> It is possible to visually fixate a point in space and also attend to something else (something internal). Bianca De Haan, Paul S. Morgan, and Chris Rorden, "Covert Orienting of Attention and Overt Eye Movements Activate Identical Brain Regions." *Brain research* 1204 (2008): 102–111.

mindedness, zoning out, offline thought, undirected thought, unconscious thought, and mind wandering.<sup>16</sup>

Smith's study is strongest when the results show patterns across a range of viewers, indicating that psychological attention is manifest in a defined manner in relation to particular sorts of stimulation, including film. This generalization is possible, and likely, even if a percentage of the spectatorship is also engaged in daydreaming while viewing. The issue here is that there is a relatively clear boundary, within the parameters of a single mental operation, such as attention, between those aspects that are outside of awareness and those that are inside of awareness, which is precisely the point at which psychological and subjective film experience are differentiated. In other words, "attention" falls into two separate types of film experiences depending on the particular dimension of it that is analyzed (the conscious quality or the process).

It will be useful further on to return to this example, but for now it is important to merely recognize that the "film experience" Smith analyzes is rooted strictly within the "psychological mind," the part that most closely correlates with viewing behaviour. It is possible to extrapolate from viewing behaviour where attention is directed in the visual field; but it is not possible to extrapolate what the attention is producing as conscious phenomena, and

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<sup>16</sup> Rebecca McMillan, Scott Barry Kaufman, and Jerome L. Singer, "Ode to Positive Constructive Daydreaming," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013): 1.

whether attention is being placed on these phenomena, and to what degree in contrast to the following of the film or scenes. However, Smith seems mostly aware of this limitation (the key term, ‘film experience’, appears near the end of the second paragraph, indicating that Smith is operating strictly with this understanding of the term in mind):

But I expect an objection. Isn’t this sort of empirical inquiry too *reductive* to capture the complexities of film viewing? In some respects, yes. This is what we do. Reducing complex processes down to simple, manageable, and controllable chunks is the main principle of empirical psychology. Understanding a psychological process begins with formalizing what it and its constituent parts are, and then systematically manipulating and testing their effect. If we are to understand something as complex as how we experience film we must apply the same techniques.

As in all empirical psychology the danger is always that we lose sight of the forest whilst measuring the trees. This is why the partnership between film theorists and empiricists like myself is critical. The decades of film theory, analysis, practice and intuition provide the framework and “Big Picture” to which we empiricists contribute. By sharing forces and combining perspectives, we can aid each other’s understanding of the film experience without losing sight of the majesty that drew us to cinema in the first place.<sup>17</sup>

Smith’s study thus illustrates the fact ‘film experience’ is sometimes used within film studies to mean the “psychological film experience” alone. It also presents a useful pivot point between the two concepts of mind that Chalmers defines, given that “attention” is both an element of the “psychological mind”

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, “Watching you watch THERE WILL BE BLOOD.”



and “phenomenal mind.” This is to say, “attention” is also an experience with characteristic conscious qualities, in addition to being a cognitive process.

For the psychological explanation of film experience to be effective, a tacit assumption is necessary that spectator attention is focused strictly on the film, such that the relationship between film events and mental events are more or less analyzable along a temporal continuum of the same duration as the film. Cognitive film theory, combined with narratology, appears best suited to provide this kind of account because film events are then construable as “cues” that guide the attention of the viewer, triggering mental responses, such as schemata.<sup>18</sup> In effect, the film experience is narrativized in terms of a back and forth process between film events and corresponding mental events that are mutually determinative in the sense that the mental event renders certain film events more interesting to attention. Therefore, when the film-viewing experience is idealized in terms of constant attention directed at the film – in which cognitive film theory and narratology play a significant explanatory role – the “psychological mind” is under description.

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<sup>18</sup> As explained in David Bordwell’s seminal study, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), but which also a common feature of cognitive film theory generally.

### *C. Phenomenal or Subjective Film Experience*

If the “psychological film experience” refers to the mental processes outside of conscious attention while viewing film, then the “phenomenal film experience” is everything that is potentially describable from a first-person perspective. “Describable” is merely another way of saying that attention can be focused on the conscious phenomena, even if it is not easily described, or even describable in some practical, linguistic sense. It is something present to awareness and therefore describable in theory.

The “conscious phenomena” produced by film experience are of the same order as those that Daniel Dennett presents in the above section on “subjective experience,” but with the additional condition, in this case, that ‘film experience’ refers to the subjective experience occurring while film viewing, including “feelings,” “fantasies,” “images,” “daydreaming,” “thoughts,” “sensations” and “emotions.” These conscious phenomena are construable as “raw experience.” It has not yet been transformed, consciously, into anything, such as an idea, reflection, or knowledge, or interpretation. It is just what happens to appear in consciousness while watching a film, based on any number of causes: the film itself, the theatre, the audience, and of course the consciousness brought into the theatre, which includes, as Martin Lefebvre defines it, an “imaginary museum” containing “the various films and film

fragments that have touched us deeply or made a profound impression on us.”<sup>19</sup> Through whatever form this conscious phenomena appears, it is definable as subjective film experience because it is produced during this interval of time – during film viewing – with the expectation that attention is reasonably placed on the film.

An example in the field of film history, and probably the first written account of subjective film experience, is Maxim Gorky’s July 4, 1896 piece, “On a Visit to the Kingdom of Shadows.” In describing his first film experience, Gorky writes:

This mute, grey life finally begins to disturb and depress you. It seems as though it carries a warning, fraught with a vague but sinister meaning that makes your heart grow faint. You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim ...<sup>20</sup>

This account contains several passages referring to the conscious phenomena fitting with subjective film experience: the attribution of “life” to the film (thoughts); the fact it “disturbs” and “depresses” (emotions); the fact it is seen as “fraught with a vague but sinister meaning” (thoughts); that it makes the heart grow faint (sensation); “forgetting where you are” (sensation); mind and

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<sup>19</sup> Martin Lefebvre, “On Memory and Imagination in the Cinema,” *New Literary History: Cultural Inquiries* 2, no. 2 (1999): 480.

<sup>20</sup> Maxim Gorky, “The Lumière Cinematograph,” in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939*, edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 25-26.

consciousness growing “dim” (sensation). While describable as individual components, all of these consciousness phenomena, when seen as a totality, constitute Gorky’s subjective film experience. Nevertheless, as explained in the next section, this is an after the fact description of a subjective film experience; it is a description of the subjective film experience that has remained in consciousness. In fact, it would be very difficult – and probably undesirable – to describe an actual subjective film experience as it transpires while viewing, which would entail describing the film experience as the film is viewed, creating a condition that is vastly different from normal viewing conditions.

One approach within film studies towards the study of subjective film experience is “phenomenology.” I would like to briefly explain some aspects of this approach and why it does not occupy an important place in this thesis, given its link with consciousness. Those who define their approach as “phenomenological” typically write in a manner that appears to deliberately undermine the possibility of understanding – at least in a way that enables finding common ground. It is a very personal form of discourse that relies on abstract concepts, and turns of phrase, intended to problematize language. Perhaps there is a sense that the writing should reproduce or mirror – in its performance – the complexities of the very object of study it intends to elucidate, in this case “subjective experience.” It is rather the equivalent of

writing poetry in order to analyze poetry – interesting, certainly, but not conducive to a “second-order” discourse that engages with other “second-order” discourse at the same level.<sup>21</sup>

In this regard, Vivian Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* is a model example. As the title indicates, Sobchack studies “film experience,” but not the same film experience mentioned in the previous section, which is to say, psychological film experience. It is also not quite like the subjective film experience mentioned above, since the mind Sobchack places under observation does not always have a conscious quality, but it is closer to the subjective film experience than the psychological one. In any case, her study is indicative of the “phenomenological approach.” In her book’s Preface, Sobchack argues that “the appeal of phenomenology lies in its potential for opening up and destabilizing language in the very process of its description of the phenomena of experience.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, Sobchack is announcing to the reader that the forthcoming study – which uses a phenomenological approach – will switch to a different style of writing, which

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<sup>21</sup> Shusterman distinguishes between first-order and second-order discourse, although not in the following manner; first-order discourse is the equivalent of criticism (such as film criticism) or some approach that allows for the playfulness of Sobchack’s approach; second-order discourse is an analysis of the first-order discourse (“meta-criticism”), an explanatory discourse that is common within pragmatism and which is, by nature, an attempt to stay within a more accessible discourse. Richard Shusterman, *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002), 32, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992), xviii.

the reader may find “irritating,” although the larger problem is one of understanding:

The following work, therefore, is marked by a prose style that insists on interrogating “ordinary” language as it interrogates “ordinary” experience. This involves frequent hyphenation in order to force a certain form of attentiveness to what we say but hardly hear . . . My prose is also engaged in serious punning and in a kind of dialectical play, inversions and parallelisms underscored in order to model and highlight in language the transitivity and reversibility experienced in subject-object relations in general, and vision in particular. It is my hope these peculiarities will be more illuminating than irritating.<sup>23</sup>

The difference between the Preface and the remainder of the book fits, roughly, with Shusterman’s distinction between first and second order discourse. The Preface of Sobchack’s work, which is oriented toward a more standard communication, is able to offer a detached, objective assessment of the more performative writing that follows. Thus, the phenomenological approach produces the following sorts of passages, which leave out the second-order discourse necessary for making sense of its meaning:

Thus, the film experience is a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression. It entails the visible, audible, kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly, and haptically. The film experience not only *represents* and reflects upon the prior direct perceptual experience of the filmmaker *by means of* the modes and structures of direct and reflective perceptual experience, but also *presents* the direct and

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<sup>23</sup> Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye*, xviii.

reflective experience of a perceptual and expressive existence *as the* film.<sup>24</sup>

These passages are examples of Sobchack destabilizing language. It is nearly impossible to make sense of the text because of the deliberate intention of making it difficult to understanding. Nevertheless, the traits that are typical of the phenomenological approach are visible, including “mirroring,” as in the passage “it [film experience] entails the visible, audible, kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly, audibly, and haptically.” Mirroring is presumably intended to create a poetic effect, but the purpose of this rhetorical flourish is unclear.

Sobchack is not a unique or isolated case. Other works similarly and self-consciously adopt this stylized “phenomenological approach.” Like Sobchack, scholar Spencer Shaw makes a similar announcement at the beginning of his book *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (discussed in later chapters), declaring the remainder of the study “does phenomenology,” described as a “descriptive pursuit in which, as much as possible, one immerses oneself in an experience to analyze and understand it.”<sup>25</sup> The purpose of shifting styles is unclear, but the results are similar to Sobchack’s:

Film enters into flux as a capture of movement, at the point of emergence from non-visibility to visibility, from the undeveloped to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup> Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 3.

the developed, from the intricate to the extricate, from impression to expression.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, there is a “mirroring” effect that seems to serve no purpose other than to draw attention to the writing itself – as a rhetorical flourish without a clear referent. It is simply quite difficult, if not impossible, to connect these passages with other known bodies of knowledge, other than grouping these statements with others of a similar kind, such as Sobchack’s.

Of course, Sobchack and other self-named phenomenologists have a point in attempting to “destabilize” or draw attention to language. Subjective experience is by nature “messy” and open to different sorts of description. Phenomenologists tend to see language as a restrictive intermediary between consciousness (in terms of a faculty) and conscious experience (in terms of the contents of consciousness), which therefore requires a sort of disruption of the medium that is used for description, if the medium is viewed with suspicion. In this regard, there is overlap between pragmatic philosophy and phenomenology. However, the difference lies at the level of how the language problem is addressed. It seems that it requires accepting the limitations and restrictions of language in order to address some problem within it, or risk becoming unintelligible. There are some exceptions to this rule, obviously, since great writers transcend the medium in important ways – one thinks of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 26.



Walter Benjamin or Ludwig Wittgenstein, who both wrote cryptically at times, in ways that required interpretation.

However, consider the way someone like Wittgenstein treated the issue of subjective experience in his writing, in this case the experience of reading. It is revealing of the underlying difference between these approaches. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein wonders if it is necessary to understand the subjective experience of reading in order to define the behaviour of “reading out loud” as “reading.” In other words, Wittgenstein wonders how we know a person is actually reading. Is it merely the fact someone is saying words that match written words? Wittgenstein seems to argue that there is a subjective experience that accompanies the activity of reading that defines “reading.” The important point, aside from being a great example of describing subjective experience, is that entirety of the account remains within the realm of ordinary language, such that a reader is able to verify the account against personal experience:

Read a page of print and you can see that something special is going on, something highly characteristic.—Well, what does go on when I read the page? I see printed words and I say words out loud. But, of course, that is not all, for I might see printed words and say words out loud and still not be reading. Even if the words which I say are those which, going by an existing alphabet, are *supposed* to be read off from the printed ones.—And if you say that reading is a particular experience, then it becomes quite unimportant whether or not you read according to some generally recognized alphabetical rule.—And what does the characteristic thing about the experience of reading consist in?—Here I should like to say: “The words that I

utter *come* in a special way.” That is, they do not come as they would if I were for example making them up.—They come of themselves.—But even that is not enough; for the sounds of words may *occur* to me while I am looking at printed words, but that does not mean that I have read them.—In addition I might say here, neither do the spoken words occur to me as if, say, something reminded me of them. I should for example not wish to say: the printed word “nothing” always reminds me of the sound “nothing”—but the spoken words as it were slip in as one reads. And if I so much as look at a German printed word, there occurs a peculiar process, that of hearing the sound inwardly.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage, Wittgenstein shows a pragmatic, ordinary-language approach to defining the subjective experience associated with a particular activity, in this case reading; but, it is also possible to imagine a similar description of the experience of viewing film, or any subjective experience, including, as I will discuss in a later chapter, the experience of film consciousness.

#### *D. Film Reminders*

So far, we have seen that ‘film experience’ refers to the film viewing event (the act of viewing a film); the internal psychological experience (the cognitive processing occurring during film viewing); and the internal phenomenal experience (the conscious phenomena that appears during film viewing). However, once the lights dim and post-film viewing reality begins, “something” remains from these experiences in consciousness – memories, emotions, moods, images, feelings, knowledge, understanding, and so forth.

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<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §165.

The term 'film experience' also encompasses these "remainders," which are dividable into at least three groups: "subjective film experience remainders," "know-how," and "film consciousness" – keeping in mind that boundaries between such abstract concepts inevitably overlap.

Since subjective film experience is the "raw experience" of a movie event – that which transpired subjectively during the original viewing – then the "raw experience" that *remains* in consciousness is definable as "subjective film experience remainders." "Know-how" is the transformation of this raw subjective film experience into some form of knowledge that pertains to cinema-oriented activities, a theme which reappears in Francesco Casetti's body of work, as discussed below. However, "subjective film experience remainders" can eventually form into something that is not specifically knowledge, or a collection of subjective experience phenomena. There is a sense in which the aggregate of these "subjective film experience remainders" form into a particular kind of conscious state, as an enduring element of consciousness. This state is manifest in moods, feelings, sensations, but also a sense of self, or streams of thought, that seem largely connected to past film experiences, but which have assumed a distinct status. This "film consciousness" becomes activated, or present, in different moments of ordinary life, including film viewing. Therefore I define this consciousness as "subjective film consciousness," in contrast to other categories of film

consciousness. Since this category of film consciousness is discussed in Chapter 7, this section focuses on explaining the first two groups.

In the preceding section, I presented Gorky's account of a Lumière projection as an example of "subjective film experience." However, I also mentioned that the writing itself was more specifically a "recollection" or "memory" of subjective film experience. Even if Gorky's present tense description conveys the impression of being an ongoing account of subjective film experience, and even if this account provides insight into that experience, Gorky did not write the account while the subjective film experience was taking place. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Gorky describes the subjective film experience that "came to mind" while engaged in writing about it. Moreover, Gorky shaped this experience with a specific purpose and audience in mind, which therefore determines, potentially, the way the subjective film experience is presented (in Gorky's case, it was obviously important for him that readers come to see the "experience" from his perspective, which explains the second person address – "You are forgetting where you are."). The issue, then, is how to define the phenomena that "came to mind" when Gorky undertook its description. I believe it is worth considering this phenomenon as a distinct "order of experience," different than the original subjective film experience, but also different than a memory of the subjective film experience.

Annette Kuhn's work on "cinema memory" offers a valuable framework for considering this issue. For one, her work emphasizes the degree to which accounts of cinema experiences are transformed in the process of describing and relating them. The empirical evidence that Kuhn relies on consists of accounts of 1930s cinema experiences she obtained in the 1990s in a series of interviews. In Kuhn's study there is a substantial gap between the actual cinema event and the account. This is very different than Gorky's account of his film experiences, which were very recent, but Kuhn's study nevertheless provides some understanding of the differences between the act of describing subjective film experience and the experience itself.

In her work, Kuhn divides these accounts of past film experiences into three types of cinema memories: Type A memories are of films, scenes and images; Type B memories are "situated memories of films" (of the film and also of related life experiences taking place at around the time of the film); and Type C memories are of "cinemagoing" (the theatre, among other things).<sup>28</sup> A pattern that Kuhn identifies in these accounts is that they sometimes take an "anecdotal" form that "typically involves a story narrated in the first person singular about a specific, one-off event or occasion."<sup>29</sup> This indicates, as

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<sup>28</sup> Annette Kuhn, "What to do with Cinema Memory?", in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, edited by Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltreyst, and Philippe Meers. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 91.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

mentioned, that film experiences are given a narrative form depending on the context and purpose of the account. Another pattern Kuhn identifies is the appearance of “implants” in some of the memories. These are memories that have “entered their stories after the event, as a particular image has acquired cultural iconicity in later years.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, the person does not actually remember the image or scene from the film, but rather discovers the importance of the scene at a later time and then inserts this scene into the memory. These implanted memories, Kuhn explains, “lack the ‘brilliance’ of scenes from the truly remembered film.”<sup>31</sup>

While these points show that memories of film experiences assume a particular rhetorical form when recounted in certain contexts (such as when prompted or when presented in the context of a journal with a specific audience in mind), it is the following passage that seems most relevant to our interests in this section. In describing characteristics of type A cinema memories, Kuhn observes:

And yet these images are obviously still resonant, in all their intensity, in informants’ consciousness decades after the event. It is clear that in the moment of telling in the present the remembered feelings or sensations associated with these memories are in some way being re-experienced.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>32</sup> “And yet these images are obviously still resonant, in all their intensity, in informants’ consciousness decades after the event. It is clear that in the moment of telling in the present

I believe this statement is revealing for different reasons, but mainly it shows the difficulty in finding a conceptual or terminological perspective from which to define the subjective film experience that remains in consciousness in distinction from memories of film. Kuhn's difficulty in distinguishing between memory and this other phenomena is reflected in defining the same thing as "remembered feelings or sensations" and "re-experienced" feelings and sensations. This might seem like a trivial semantic point, but the implications are interesting enough to consider.

Clearly, it is possible to remember that a feeling or sensation was experienced at a particular moment without necessarily "re-experiencing" the feeling. For example, it is possible to remember that during the viewing of a particular film one felt sad. However, Kuhn means something different than memory when using the term "re-experiencing." She means experiencing the same feelings or emotions as during the original event, not just remembering that these feelings took place. Does the act of "re-experiencing" then count as a "memory?"

In the cognitive sciences at least, this sort of "re-experiencing" (of the original feeling or emotion) is discussed more in terms of its function in relation to

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the remembered feelings or sensations associated with these memories are in some way being re-experienced." *Ibid.*, 87.

memory, rather than as a distinct phenomenon, especially in terms of the quality and vividness of the memory:

Memories of our experiences are likely characterized by representations in the form of neuronal activity. Activity among a network of neurons represents a code for the experience of, say, a birthday party. When this network is activated by some cue that triggers a reexperience of that event, we are said to have recollected the birthday party. Emotional events are often remembered with greater accuracy and vividness (though these two characteristics do not always go together) than events lacking an emotional component.<sup>33</sup>

It is not a question here of disputing whether emotions and memories are linked, or if emotions and feelings are remembered, only to consider it interesting to draw a distinction between a conscious event that involves “remembering a feeling” and a conscious event that involves “re-experiencing a feeling.” These seem like different conscious events, which the term “memory” fails to distinguish, but I believe this distinction is necessary to understanding ‘film experience’ when the term is used in reference to the subjective film experience that remains in consciousness and which is potentially “re-experienced” at a later time. The point may seem insignificant, but there are referential implications in distinguishing between memories of emotional responses to film and the “re-experiencing” of emotions or sensations that took place during film viewing.

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<sup>33</sup> Tony Buchanan, “Retrieval of Emotional Memories,” *Psychological bulletin* 133, no.5 (2007): 761–779.



One difference, for example, is that a memory, or the act of remembering, often includes an intervening symbol, representation or mental image that refers to the original event, much like a photograph. Film flashbacks attempt to emulate this experience of remembering by using blurry, repetitive images, slow motion, and different sound perspectives. However, re-experiencing the same feeling as during the original event does not include any such referential content: it is the same feeling. Imagine if instead of “re-experiencing” a feeling, one “re-experienced” the visual perception of a scene. It would be the equivalent of saying that the exact scene, in its integrity, was somehow reproduced within consciousness such that there was no difference between the actual scene as originally perceived and the one that is “re-experienced.” If that were possible, it would likely not be considered a memory but rather some other sort of conscious phenomena. When a feeling is “re-experienced” it is – if we take the meaning of the term literally rather than figuratively (which is fine, in my view, as a thought experiment) – the same feeling, the same conscious phenomenon, as during the film event. This complicates an understanding of this phenomenon as a “memory.” Moreover, I believe this example regarding the re-experiencing of feelings and emotions extends to other conscious phenomena that fall under the category of “subjective film experience,” such as streams of thought and mental images.

Therefore, I would place any aspect of a “subjective film experience” that is later “re-experienced” into the category of “subjective film experience remainders.” The basic condition for fitting within this category is that the conscious phenomena that appear in consciousness after film viewing are the same as the conscious phenomena that appeared during film viewing, including images or sounds of the film that come to mind. Perhaps this is a distinction many will feel is purely semantic, but I believe it defines a sort of conscious phenomena that is not really a memory or recollection, but rather some other experience that includes sensations, feelings, flickering images, and so forth, that emulate the original film experience in some characteristic fashion the individual alone is in a position of knowing. When these “subjective film experience remainders” cease to be about a film experience in particular, but still present in some general sense, as an enduring element of consciousness, then it becomes “subjective film consciousness,” as discussed in Chapter 7, which is a conscious experience that includes moods, feelings, and streams of thought that the individual identifies as being connected to film experiences in some meaningful manner, and which becomes manifest or present in ordinary life situations, but without a specific film experience referent. Each person will characterize “subjective film consciousness” differently, but I believe that it is distinct from whatever one will classify as

“subjective film experience,” or “subjective film experience remainders,” when presented with definitions of these categories.

The second way in which ‘film experience’ refers to “something that remains in consciousness” from film viewing, is that which Casetti defines, in different ways, as a form of knowledge. Sometimes this form of knowledge is a “film gaze” that the viewer adopts and applies in other areas of life, and which, in Casetti’s case, has a therapeutic function, enabling the film spectator to “negotiate” conflicts that arise from the general experience of modernity.<sup>34</sup> At other times, Casetti defines this same type of knowledge as ‘film experience’. Casetti’s approach is in fact quite similar to that applied in this chapter. He first considers several definitions of ‘experience’ and then, on this basis, constructs a more specific understanding of film experience – although it is important to note that Casetti uses ‘filmic experience’ and not ‘film experience’. While the difference between ‘film’ and ‘filmic’ is significant, since it clearly establishes a non-essential concept of film as the object of experience, it is not essential to the explanation that follows, especially since ‘film experience’ can mean, precisely, ‘filmic experience’ in certain contexts, such as in a context where the meaning of ‘film’ is explained in advance as including that which Casetti defines as ‘filmic’ (for example, I might define

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<sup>34</sup> This argument is most forcefully presented in Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

reading a comic as a film experience, by virtue of the comic producing similar aesthetic content to film, such as shot scales or angles).<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in his article entitled ‘Filmic experience’, Casetti offers two definitions of ‘experience’. One of these was cited earlier, under the heading of “Film-Viewing Event,” as “the act of exposing ourselves to something that surprises and captures us.” The second definition is as follows:

On the other hand, [experience] relates to the act of reelaborating this exposition into a knowledge and a competence, so that we are then richer in the face of things, since we are able to master them (‘to have experience’).<sup>36</sup>

One tendency that is characteristic of Casetti in general is that he tends to add orientations to definitions as if these were essential to the definition. For example, there is a definition of the word ‘experience’ that is simply “exposing ourselves to something.” And another definition that is “a knowledge and a competence.” But Casetti adds qualifications to these neutral descriptions that either determine, or reflect, the nature of his work. Generally speaking, Casetti attempts to promote film experience as having a certain social value, and this added function enters his definitions. Thus, for Casetti, experience is

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<sup>35</sup> This is a point discussed in a presentation I delivered with Pierre Chemartin at DOMITOR on the connection between film and comics in early cinema, in which “montage” is regarded as preceding cinema in order to draw an analogy of experience between comics and film. Santiago Hidalgo and Pierre Chemartin, “Learning Film Performance through Comics,” DOMITOR, Brighton, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Francesco Casetti, “Filmic Experience.” *Screen* 50, no. 1 (March 20, 2009): 56

“exposing ourselves to something that surprises and captures us,” and the know-how that film experience produces makes us “richer in the face of things” (though not always, which is the point).

Nevertheless, we will focus on this first part of the definition in reference to seeing experience as knowledge. The utility of saying ‘experience’ rather than ‘knowledge’ is that the term ‘experience’ specifies the nature of the knowledge and where it came from. A clear example is the difference between “the experience of teaching” and “teaching experience.” The parallel implied in Casetti’s distinction would then be between “teaching experience” and “film experience” – a knowledge or know-how that derives from the experience of film. The issue is then the domain of application. This may sound confusing, but the point is quite straightforward. When one claims to have “teaching experience” it pertains to a capacity in or knowledge of teaching. However, “film experience,” as “know-how,” seems to have a different domain of application than film viewing (from where the experience emerged). This is evident by the fact nobody refers to the capacity to understand film, or to engage in film viewing, by virtue of having “film experience.” One wonders, in fact, in what context the statement “I have film experience” would make sense. It would require defining the areas of film viewing in which “film experience” – in the sense being considered – would have a bearing, in the same way that “teaching experience” has a bearing in the activity of teaching

(preparing a class, moderating discussion, etc.). I suppose one of the reasons “film experience” as “teaching experience” does not make sense in relation to film viewing is that film viewing is seen as a passive activity that is now mostly general to the population, in the same way that “I have book experience” or “I have reading experience” would not be a normal statement in most contexts.

Of course, this sort of literalness is perhaps only interesting as a thought experiment, but I think it highlights the fact the domain of reference to which this sense of “film experience” applies is not the same domain as the one which produced the “film experience,” as with the inextricable link between “the experience of teaching” and “teaching experience.” It seems fairly clear, in reading Casetti, but also in considering the meaning of ‘film experience’ more generally in film discourse, that this sense of “film experience” is a statement about a knowledge, or know-how, that is gained from the experience of film, but which applies to non-film viewing domains, in other areas of life, that have a “film-like” quality (something which Casetti elaborates on his work, such as comparing the “dizzying” experience of cross-cutting with the experience of modern transportation).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

I should note that this is an interpretation of Casetti that derives from regarding his body of work as a whole, rather than a specific statement that indicates the above, but it is a usage of ‘film experience’ that I think is prevalent in film studies generally. Casetti’s specific statements in fact provide other ways of interpreting the meaning of ‘filmic experience’ as a “form of knowledge,” but it nevertheless follows the above distinction between domains of reference (film-viewing versus non-film viewing). For example, in discussing film experience, Casetti writes that it changes the way reality is experienced:

[E]veryday vision often finds itself following the example of filmic vision, to the point of becoming a “cinematographic” vision, and of demanding of the real to become a bit “cinematographic” in order to be truly apprehended.<sup>38</sup>

Casetti pursues this line of argument to the point of suggesting that film experience, as outlined, has “reshaped the meaning of experience.”<sup>39</sup> These are all points worth considering in relation to the subject of this thesis, but this advances the argument to a point that extends beyond the parameters of this section, which is to establish what is meant by ‘film experience’ – and it seems clear that one of the meanings of the term is a form of knowledge that

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<sup>38</sup> Francesco Casetti, “The Filmic Experience: An Introduction,” 1-2. Based on a seminar given at Yale in the Spring Semester of 2007 and published on Casetti’s personal website, <https://francescocasetti.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/filmicexperience1.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2

has a “cinematographic” dimension that applies broadly, not specifically to film viewing.

### *E. The Category of Film Experience*

There is a usage of ‘film experience’ that means a category of experience, such as in “the film experience.” The meaning of ‘film experience’ in this expression differs from all of the above definitions. It has the meaning of an institutional fact or category, which includes both objective and subjective characteristics regarded as essential to the category. These characteristics vary according to person, history and changes in technology. The particular characteristics are not relevant to this section, although some are presented as examples. It is mostly a question of recognizing the existence of the category and the sorts of issues that arise in relation to this category. The example below, from a 1966 article by Michael Kirby entitled “The Uses of Film in the New Theatre,” illustrates this usage of ‘film experience’.

The film experience is not necessarily a single rectangle of light and shadow that flickers at one end of a darkened room. Call this “movies” or “cinema” – that archetypal dream world in which the spectator, seated in a near-foetal position, attempts to ignore the physical space, the other spectators, the projector’s shifting beam, to concentrate on the images and the sounds that accompany them. Of course, the movies are a film experience – and a theatre experience – but the use of motion pictures is not so limited, and theatre is just beginning to realize the possibilities inherent in film.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Kirby, “The Uses of Film in the New Theatre,” *The Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1



The difference between “a film experience” and “the film experience” in this passage illustrates the category in question. When Kirby refers to “a film experience,” he means a film viewing event, such as defined earlier in this chapter. The main condition for “a film experience” is that a film is present. However, “the film experience” is a general, idealized version of this singular event, in which certain objective and subjective traits are assumed. Thus, Kirby defines “the film experience” as “that archetypal dream world in which the spectator . . . attempts to ignore the physical space, the other spectators, the projector’s shifting beam, to concentrate on the images and the sounds that accompany them.” In other words, “the film experience” entails being absorbed by the film and losing a sense of awareness of the surrounding world.

As with many characteristics assigned to the institutional category of film experience, these “essential” traits become acutely visible in moments of crisis caused by technological changes. For example, the advent of home video revealed at least two traits that were seen as essential to the film experience. The first trait is best defined as the “indexicality” of celluloid which video obviously threatened. This point is raised, and explained in some detail, in Marc Furstenau and Martin Lefebvre’s article “Digital Editing and Montage:

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(1966): 49-61.

The Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond.”<sup>41</sup> In the Abstract, the authors explain that their objective is to “examine the impact these new interfaces [digital film editing technology and DVD technology] have on the film experience.”<sup>42</sup> Although Furstenau and Lefebvre do not agree that celluloid is any more “indexical” than video – “indexicality is not specific to photographic-based media—or to any medium for that matter . . . . *[it] is simply how signs indicate what it is that they are about*”<sup>43</sup> – the article nevertheless establishes this current of thought as prevalent within film studies. In charting the history of the misuse of the term “indexicality,” they confirm that indexicality, rightly or wrongly understood, is one of the characteristics typically regarded as essential to this category of experience.

The second trait is the sense that film should be seen in theatre. It is in this context that film is assumed to have its greatest impact in rendering spectators unaware of their surroundings, because of the scale and quality of the image and sound, and perhaps because of ritual-like, public experience of the movie theatre. Just as home video brought this belief about “the film experience” to the foreground, it is evident as well in the way regular cinemas are compared with “state of the art” theatres like IMAX. In fact, the IMAX

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<sup>41</sup> Marc Furstenau and Martin Lefebvre, “Digital Editing and Montage: The Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond,” *Cinémas* 13, no.1-2 (Fall 2002), 69-107.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. Their Emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

example is ideal for our definitional interests in a second sense: it validates the very existence of the formulation under discussion by adopting its structure in order to promote the technology. The entire description is drawn from the very category of “film experience” Kirby applied in 1966. In a section named “the IMAX experience,” the IMAX website explains that the public does not attend an IMAX screening solely to see the movie in a larger than usual format, but also because of the unique experience it produces:

It is going to the theatre to forget you’re at the movies. Sitting there, without the slightest doubt, convinced you’re someplace else. Going, in the space of minutes, to a place that’s frightening, intense, heart-rending, altogether magical – a place you’ve never been before.

IMAX grabs your senses. Visually, there is no frame. The picture’s bigger, higher, wider than your field of view. You’re no longer at the window peeking out; you’re outside among the stars. And that sensation is intensified by the sound. It’s all around you and it’s real – so much so that the whole experience is visceral. You don’t just hear and see an IMAX movie. You feel it in your bones.<sup>44</sup>

IMAX enters the conversation in a way that ties together Gorky’s seminal piece, Kirby’s characterization of the film experience, and the crisis that new technology produces, and resolves, in maintaining the belief that the film experience is primarily about emotions and losing awareness of reality. The connection with Gorky is obvious: like Gorky, IMAX emphasizes the experience through the same rhetorical trope of presenting the description in the second person. IMAX writes, “It is going to the theatre to forget you’re at

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<sup>44</sup> “The IMAX experience,” <https://www.imax.com/about/experience/> (accessed May 8, 2015).

the movies. Sitting there, without the slightest doubt, convinced you're someplace else." Over a century ago, Gorky wrote "You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim." IMAX is the cinema ersatz – it attempts to continue a fading tradition due to an increase in sophisticated home entertainment systems, high definition screens and high definition video, that has rendered the ordinary cinema experience comparatively less thrilling.

Just as significant is the fact "the IMAX experience" – which is "the film experience" in new garbs – is comprised of *both* objective elements (which is to say, in this case, physical or external) and subjective elements (subjective film experience). The chart below divides the description into just these parts:

Objective facts related to the IMAX experience	"visually, there is no frame," "the picture's bigger, higher, wider than your field of view," the loudness and quality of the sound."
Subjective facts related to the IMAX experience	"convinced you're someplace else," "frightening," "intense," "heart-rending," "altogether magical," "it's all around you and it's real."

In the same way that the IMAX experience is presented as an institutional fact, "the film experience" should be regarded as a distinct usage of the term 'film experience'. The addition of the word "the" to the formulation signals to

the reader that it is this understanding of the expression that is under discussion, even if it goes unacknowledged, which encompassed both objective facts related to the screening and subjective facts related to the way the film feels.

#### *F. Film Experience as a "Point of Contact"*

One of the operating premises of this thesis is that "film consciousness belongs to a world in which film experiences occur." The question in this section regards the meaning of 'film experience' in this passage, in contrast to those already considered: it does not refer specifically to film viewing, although it is certainly included as a possibility; it does not refer to the psychological film experience, or to the subjective film experience, or to the remainders in consciousness. It also does not refer to the institutional category of film experience discussed above. Yet, the above statement makes deductive sense: it is hard to imagine "film consciousness" without a corresponding set of "film experiences" from which the consciousness arises.

This means there is still a definition of 'film experience' that has not been considered, in spite of exhausting the definitions of 'experience' introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I believe that this 'film experience' – as opposed to those mentioned – is an undefined, hypothetical construction that is logically necessary when positing a causal relation between anything that fits

under the general heading of “people” (culture, consciousness, spectators) and “cinema” (film, film-like things). Whenever film is presumed to affect people – in whatever form one defines “film” or “people” – it is through the channel of ‘film experience’; in other words, the category exists because it is functionally necessary to a given premise – a premise which forms the basis of many works on film history – which is that cinema has an impact on people in both the short and long term.

The question, of course, is how this ‘film experience’ is different than, say, merely ‘film viewing’. And the answer, to me, is that it must necessarily include everything potentially imaginable as a point of contact between film and people: a cinema, a film club, film production, books, video jackets, and so forth. I will define, further below, eight points of contact between film and people, each of which, because of the possibilities of experience entailed in such contacts, should be regarded as “film experience.” I believe that I am merely making explicit the specific channels through which such contact occurs in order to see each of these points of contact as having a particular nature – and causal parameters – but also to highlight the fact a hypothetical, undefined ‘film experience’ is necessary to pursuing lines of inquiry that posit causal relations between film and people. In other words, we do not always understand how the cause-effect relation works, only that there is a cause-effect relation. ‘Film experience’ is a necessarily ambiguous, and messy, way

of glossing over this problem, in the absence of definitive evidence establishing such a link.

Returning to Casetti, I believe that his third definition of ‘filmic experience’ – which is perhaps the only true definition of film experience he presents (the other definitions I rather assume on the basis of Casetti presenting different definitions of ‘experience’ in order to arrive at his main definition) – fits within the general parameters of this “point of contact” definition of film experience. As stated, a tendency in Casetti is that he merges a given definition (of ‘experience’ in this case) with his interpretation of the function of that definition, so this complicates an understanding of his definition of “film experience.” As mentioned, when Casetti defines ‘experience’ as “the act of exposing ourselves to something that surprises and captures us,” he combines the neutral dimension – “the act of exposing ourselves to something” – with an orientation, quality or function that is layered on top – “that surprises and captures us.” Clearly, this latter dimension is not necessary to the definition of ‘experience’ – it is merely Casetti’s way of regarding the purpose of experience.

The same is true, then, of Casetti’s third (or only) definition of ‘filmic experience’: it has a component that is neutral and essential and then there are the parts that Casetti adds to this definition that orient the category in a

particular direction. I believe that the neutral part of the category is similar to the definition advanced in this section. In “The Filmic Experience: An Introduction,” a paper that derives from a seminar Casetti offered at Yale University, Casetti assembles the different ‘experiences’ already mentioned in previous sections of this chapter into a new construct that resembles the “point of contact” sense of ‘film experience’ discussed here, although with a more orientational perspective:

The term “experience” in general, indicates, on one hand the possibility of perceiving reality as if for the first time and in the first person (“to experience”), and, on the other hand, the acquisition of knowledge and competence which allow an individual to face reality and create meaning from it (“to have experience”). By analogy, we can define the filmic experience as that particular modality through which the cinematographic institution allows the spectator to perceive a film and to re-elaborate the perception into knowledge and competence. This is a vision that challenges the obviousness of the *scopic* activity, creating reflexive and projective relationships between the spectators and themselves and between the spectators and the world, and leading them to a “knowing how” and a “knowing that” they are seeing the film both as a film and as a reality represented.<sup>45</sup>

In spite of the complexity of this statement, the main element of the filmic experience Casetti defines is that it stands as a meeting ground between film (“cinematographic institution”) and people (“spectator”). Perhaps it is more accurate to say this “point of contact” is a “modality” – as does Casetti – in which a particular kind of exchange or activity is engaged between film and

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<sup>45</sup> Casetti, “The Filmic Experience: An Introduction,” 1-2.



people, but the preference in this section – in this thesis – is towards the most neutral and general perspective; the perspective that most simply defines ‘film experience’ as a point of contact between some notion of ‘film’ and some notion of ‘person’. Once we establish this category, it is then possible to add functions and characteristics, as Casetti does, such as when he says this point of contact enables “spectators” “to perceive a film and to re-elaborate the perception into knowledge and competence” and “creating reflexive and projective relationships between the spectators and themselves and between the spectators and the world.”

Moreover, I would like to add that my “point of contact” definition is much broader than Casetti’s. It includes every sort of imaginable definition of ‘film’, not just film viewing. Thus, in addition to film viewing, the following are also considered points of contact between film and people, and therefore instances of film experience that play a role in the construction of “film consciousness:”

(1) Film-related environments, such as theatres, museums, and video clubs;<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> It is possible to conceptualize a video club, for example, as offering a film experience that produces an understanding, or awareness, of some characteristics related to film, such as genre, synopses, advertisements, film emblems (video box images that are emblematic of some aspect of film), and so forth. An encounter takes place in this environment that contributes to the construction of film consciousness – and this is independent of actually viewing films. Of course, this environment has now been transposed to a digital platform, therefore it is question of hypothesizing differences in effects between these experiences: what is essential about the video club film experience in contrast with, for example, Netflix menus? It is not a research question that has been explored, other than from the perspective of the social experience of cinema.

(2) Parafilmic material, including trailers, posters, and DVD cases;<sup>47</sup> (3) Film discourse, such as film criticism, film reviews, film historiography, biographies, and theory; (4) “Film derivatives,” which is when “film” appears within other media, not just as a subject, but also as an analogous aesthetic, such as in comics;<sup>48</sup> (5) Film production, such as editing, screenwriting, directing, and so forth; (6) Film scholarship and all academic activities involving film (research, writing, archiving, teaching); (7) Film technology, such as the use of cameras and associated technologies (DVD players, projectors, etc.);<sup>49</sup> and (8) the social experience of cinema, such as conversations after movies, in film clubs, or engaging with curators and video club employees.<sup>50</sup> These are just some examples of situations, places or channels through which a ‘film experience’ takes place, and which has the effect of constructing some element of film consciousness (an awareness of film, an attitude toward film, a memory of film, etc).

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<sup>47</sup> Lise Kernan defines trailers as “paratexts” that “reify not only (fictionalized) past experience but also the future – the anticipated experience of future moviegoing, and even future memories of past moviegoing.” Lisa Kernan, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 16.

<sup>48</sup> The premise of my presentation with Pierre Chemartin, “Learning Film Performance through Comics,” at DOMITOR (Brighton, 2012), was that comics provided an aesthetic experience to viewers from which readers potentially gained an understanding of film aesthetics, especially in terms of framing and editing.

<sup>49</sup> As discussed, Marc Fursteneau and Martin Lefebvre consider the effects of DVD technology on “the film experience” in “Digital Editing and Montage: The Vanishing Celluloid and Beyond,” *Cinémas* 13, no.1-2 (Fall 2002), 69-107.

<sup>50</sup> Robert C. Allen, “Reimagining the History of the Experience of Cinema in a Post-Moviegoing Age,” in Maltby, Stokes, and Allen, *Going to the Movies*, 41-57.

There are probably more categories than these, or other ways of formulating them, but these eight different 'film experiences' seem to satisfy the condition of being "filmic" in nature and standing as a point of contact between a person and film. In this point of contact, a particular awareness or consciousness of film is formed. The point of contact provides parameters and possibilities of engagement – the digital film editor develops a different film consciousness (as the Fursteneau and Lefebvre article shows) than the analogue film editor, and these two individuals different than the film scholar or the video club employee. While this thesis will not necessarily demonstrate the means through which each of these points of contact present a set of parameters or possibilities, it is important to merely recognize that when the premise "film consciousness belongs to a world in which film experiences occur" is considered, it is this indefinite, point of contact 'film experience' that is imagined – which is the aggregate of all film experiences mentioned, yet none in particular.

## CHAPTER 7: “AN ENTITY IN CONSCIOUSNESS”

In an entry on his personal website entitled “Chinese boxes, Russian dolls, and Hollywood movies”, David Bordwell writes:

In the 1990s and 2000s, American cinema was hit by a rash of fancy storytelling. Filmmakers experimented with flashbacks, replays, shifting points of view, multiple universes, network narratives, and a host of other unusual devices. (Some prototypes: *Pulp Fiction*, *The Usual Suspects*, *Memento*, and *Short Cuts*.) These developments nudged me into analyzing the trend in *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, but my interest in such tricky narration goes back to my adolescent love of detective fiction and the stories of Henry James, Faulkner, and James Joyce. For me, mysteries and modernism went together.

That was especially true of 1940s movies, which I now realize loom large in my film consciousness. Many of the fractured, densely plotted movies I wrote about at length in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, such as *Murder My Sweet*, *The Big Sleep*, *In This Our Life*, and *The Killers*, come from the same era as *Citizen Kane* and *How Green Was My Valley*. So do subjects I wrote about later, such as *Mildred Pierce* and *Rope* and network pictures like *Weekend at the Waldorf* and *Tales of Manhattan*.<sup>1</sup>

In the second paragraph Bordwell uses the phrase “in my film consciousness.” This usage appears to raise new questions about the meaning of ‘film consciousness’ – what does it signify in this context in contrast to those already presented? As explained in Chapter 5, Bordwell (along with Kristin Thompson) has used the term previously to mean “film culture awareness” (the social value of film, which includes being aware of film history and the

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<sup>1</sup> David Bordwell, “Chinese boxes, Russian dolls, and Hollywood movies,” *David Bordwell’s Website on Cinema* (June 6, 2011). <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2011/06/06/chinese-boxes-russian-dolls-and-hollywood-movies/>

need to preserve film).<sup>2</sup> The above usage does not seem to have this intended meaning. The preposition “in” and the possessive pronoun “my” reveal, I believe, a different understanding of the formulation.

The following excerpt, from a different author, Spencer Shaw, appears in the Introduction of the book *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze*:

The second half of the book develops the idea of film consciousness as a unique vision of the world and as a change to human sensibility.<sup>3</sup>

This usage of ‘film consciousness’ also differs from those considered in previous chapters. In this case, the author offers an explicit definition, that of “a unique vision of the world,” which represents “a change to human sensibility.”

While different, I believe these two usages share a common denominator: “film consciousness” is imagined as a discrete, unified phenomenon that has become an “entity of consciousness.” By “entity,” I mean a thing with distinct standing, either imagined or real. The implications of this way of using the formulation – or conceptualizing the formulation – are different than those in

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 5 on “Film Culture Awareness.”

<sup>3</sup> Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 3

previous chapters. When imagined as an entity, there are new possibilities of ‘film consciousness’ – which open into different areas of discussions.

I already covered in the Introduction, and at other points, the difference between using ‘film consciousness’ to name a presumed thing in the world, “an entity,” and a concept or category that serves to render a relationship between film and consciousness describable and analyzable from different perspectives. Some of the implications of holding this “fact of the world” view – which is, essentially, as an entity in consciousness, whether enduring or contingent – is that ‘film consciousness’ comes to refer to rather concrete ideas, supported through different sorts of metaphors. In Bordwell’s case, ‘film consciousness’ is imagined as “a place” *in* consciousness where film memories and film experiences are stored.<sup>4</sup> The contents of this “place” are further presumed as integral to personal identity in some manner; from his perspective, these contents are seen as essential to Bordwell’s identity as a person and academic. This way of using ‘film consciousness’ – to refer to a place and to a sense of self – is inscribed in the “language of consciousness” discussed in the first two chapters. This chapter further elaborates on the metaphors that sustain these ideas.

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<sup>4</sup> This similar to Martin Lefebvre’s concept “imaginary museum” which I will return to below. Martin Lefebvre, “On Memory and Imagination in the Cinema,” *New Literary History: Cultural Inquiries* 2, no. 2 (1999): 479-98.

I also defined last chapter a category of film experience named “film remainders” – those phenomena that remain in consciousness after a film experience, or after film experiences. What remains in consciousness over a period of time – from these film experiences – appears dividable into at least two areas. The first area is, roughly speaking, a “form of knowledge,” or “know-how” that is applicable to the world at large, especially in relation to phenomena that is construable as “film-like.” In such a conceptualization, “film consciousness” becomes rather a faculty of consciousness – it functions to determine the way the world is apprehended, understood, rationalized, and so forth. Shaw’s usage of ‘film consciousness’ reflects this understanding of the term. Rather than “a place,” as with Bordwell’s usage, Shaw sees “film consciousness” as “a vision” – also an “entity” in consciousness – that performs certain functions, or has certain effects, within consciousness (the particular functions it performs is never really clarified in Shaw’s work, but it is conceptualized on these terms, which is the issue here). This perspective connects with other concepts in film studies that similarly regard film experiences as producing fundamental and enduring changes to consciousness, such as Casetti’s notion of “film gaze,” which will form part of the discussion below. All of these understandings of the effect of film experiences on consciousness result in the construction of some entity (vision,

gaze, etc) that represents the accrued changes – in the case of this chapter, that entity is “film consciousness.”

The second area is definable as “subjective film consciousness,” which derives, over time, from “subjective film experiences,” that raw experience of film that remains in consciousness. “Subjective film consciousness” is also an entity – in that it can be spoken about as a distinct thing – but it represents something quite different than a faculty, which is largely outside of conscious attention. “Subjective film consciousness” is a peculiar kind of conscious experience, which each individual will define differently. It is characterized by moods, sensations, feelings, thoughts, or emotions intimately linked with past film experiences, such that from the perspective of the person defining this experience, it feels “film-like” in some regard. In this chapter, I will present some conditions under which a person might come to this determination, as well as some personal examples illustrating this phenomenon.

There are then at least four interrelated – yet quite distinct – ways of using ‘film consciousness’ in terms of an entity in consciousness. The first is as an imagined “place” within consciousness “containing” film-related consciousness phenomena; the second – and connected to this first – is as an element or aspect of personal identity; thirdly, it is imaginable as a faculty of consciousness that determines the way reality is engaged with and



apprehended; and finally, 'film consciousness' is definable as a particular kind of "conscious experience." Each of these share in common that "film consciousness" is regarded as a "thing" as opposed to a concept or analytical category that expresses a relationship between a person and the object of film. This chapter will also attempt to provide a sense of the linguistic, metaphorical, and philosophical conditions that render these conceptualizations possible.

## **1. Identity**

As with the other possibilities of 'film consciousness' discussed in previous chapters, our analysis begins with examining the words in the formulation. However, this time a different meanings of 'consciousness' is inserted into the formulation. We have already seen that when 'consciousness' is used in relation to an object, it sometimes means "awareness of [something]": someone has "consciousness" of a book on a table, of a thought or idea, of an emotion, of a memory, and so forth. Thus, as argued, 'film consciousness' can mean "awareness of film," or "film awareness." We have further seen that 'consciousness' sometimes refers to the shared and defining ideas, beliefs, and sensibilities of a set of people or period, such that when combined with 'film' the formulation comes to mean "a way of existing towards film," as in a "film

movement.” Now we will consider a new meaning, presented in Chapter 3 (section 4), under the heading “personal consciousness:”

The totality of the impressions, thoughts, and feelings, which make up a person’s sense of self or define a person’s identity.<sup>5</sup>

As can be seen, this ‘consciousness’ does not necessarily refer to a single phenomenon, but rather to a collection of “conscious phenomena” that in “totality” represents a person’s “sense of self” and “identity.” The above list of conscious phenomena, constituting this totality, should be regarded as illustrative, not exhaustive. For example, it might include a memory, an experience, a sensation, or an image, such that the above definition would read, “The totality of the impressions, thoughts, and feelings, *and also, memories, experiences, sensations, or images*, which make up a person’s sense of self or define a person’s identity.” The particular conscious phenomena that are seen as defining identity are only knowable from the perspective of the individual and expressed through – as Richard Rorty defines it – a personal or “final vocabulary:”

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes

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<sup>5</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 4a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary."<sup>6</sup>

One of the words in a person's "final vocabulary" is 'consciousness', especially in expressions such as "my consciousness." The meaning of 'consciousness' in this expression differs from "identity," which is also, one might say, a word in a person's "final vocabulary." An important difference between these expressions – "my consciousness" and "my identity" – is that the latter expression includes external conditions: profession, name, ethnicity, appearance, sex and so forth. However, when someone makes reference to "my consciousness," it does not include these external conditions – it points to an imagined area of consciousness that is private, and perhaps essential, to identity, and that is not bound to external conditions. The following example, taken from an article published in *The Guardian* entitled "The English at leisure" by Simon Roberts, illustrates this usage – we will note the particular content attached to the expression 'my consciousness':

I was born in Croydon, south London, in 1974, but my formative years were spent in Oxted, a provincial town in Surrey's commuter belt. Holidays often involved walking in the Lake District or visiting my grandparents in Angmering, a retirement village on the south coast. Childhood memories, and the range of associations and images they suggest, became the starting point for *We English*. My memories of holidays, for example, were infused with very particular landscapes: the lush greenness around Ennerdale Water or the flint-grey skies and pebbles of Angmering's beaches. It seemed to me that these landscapes formed an important part of my consciousness of

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

who I am and how I "remember" England, whether I am at home or abroad.<sup>7</sup>

Since for Roberts "my consciousness" means "who he is," then "childhood memories," "associations," and "images" are the salient phenomena that bring definition to that sense of self. The importance of the word "my" (or any personal pronoun, including "our," as presented below) is essential to recognizing this usage of 'consciousness'. The meaning of the word 'consciousness' in this context is not an objective, depersonalized, or global understanding, such as with the expression "to lose consciousness." It would be absurd to say, "I lost my consciousness." We say, instead, "I lost consciousness." The pronoun in "my consciousness" thus refers to a different understanding of 'consciousness', what I'm referring to as "personal consciousness."

One way of making sense of the expression "my consciousness" in relation to a more global or depersonalized understanding of "consciousness" is to see "my consciousness" as a "token" example of "general consciousness." However, in practice, these two understandings of consciousness do not really connect at a descriptive level. The impersonal, or depersonalized, understanding of consciousness refers to the capacity to think or be aware of oneself and the world, among other features (which are discussed in more detail in the section

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<sup>7</sup> Simon Roberts, "The English at Leisure," *The Guardian* (August 22, 2009). <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/aug/22/english-leisure-simon-roberts>

below entitled “Faculty”). The personalized usage of ‘consciousness’ (as “my consciousness”) is not really a token example of this type (in large part because consciousness is not really a type of anything, just as matter or time are not types, as David Chalmers explains in the passages already cited in Chapter 2) – other than a *type of understanding* of the way ‘consciousness’ is sometimes used in these sorts of contexts (to refer to the totality of conscious phenomena that make up a sense of self).

If this manner of speaking is considered, in which it makes sense to define some memories, impressions, and experiences as a “totality” that defines “personal identity,” there is some logical semantic ground for extending this manner of speaking to an expression such as “my film consciousness.” Of course, there is then the question of what the ‘film consciousness’ in “my film consciousness” refers to – and the answer is perhaps deceptively, or naively, simple. It refers to the exact same things as the ‘consciousness’ in “my consciousness,” with the exception that it encompasses only those things that are seen by someone as film-related. When Bordwell writes about *his* “film consciousness,” he means that conscious phenomena that has remained in his consciousness and that belongs, in some especially meaningful way, to Bordwell’s identity (otherwise, he might have said the similar, but not equivalent expression “my experiences of film,” rather than “in my film

consciousness” – these different turns of phrase, while overlapping, nevertheless communicate different ideas).

There is also another dimension that is important to consider in relation to this phrase. We know the phrase refers to film-related conscious phenomena that define David Bordwell. But why does the expression lack quotation marks? Why does Bordwell not make reference to the “conceptuality” of the statement itself? Imagine if instead of “film consciousness” Bordwell had used Lefebvre’s similar concept “imaginary museum” (discussed in the next section). Surely in that case Bordwell would have placed the concept in quotation marks and offered an explanation. In this case, there is no such concern for explaining the conceptuality of the statement, in spite of the fact it is hardly used in the academic world. Yet, its intelligibility is a given. There is an intuitive sense to the expression, in this context, that does not require further explanation.

I provided one such explanation for this innate intelligibility in Chapter 3 when discussing the way compound expressions that use ‘consciousness’ borrow from an existing grammar – a grammar that is partially constructed on the basis of other compound terms that include ‘consciousness’, such as “national consciousness,” “public consciousness,” and so forth. There exists in public language, then, a “template” for compound expressions with the word

‘consciousness’, which people borrow at different times for different purposes, such that coming across a new iteration, such as ‘film consciousness’ does not cause any immediate confusion. We should not assume that because ‘film consciousness’ is difficult to explain that it is not easy to understand in many cases – because that is the case with Bordwell, to some degree.

Nevertheless, there is a second reason this expression is intelligible – and understood as linked to identity – when read in its original context. In spite of the template that renders new compound expressions that use ‘consciousness’ intelligible – not all compound expressions that use ‘consciousness’ will strike people this way. If someone says “in my tree consciousness” to define all conscious phenomena related to trees, or “in my house consciousness” to define all conscious phenomena related to houses, confusion is likely. It seems that in compound expressions with ‘consciousness’ something about the object itself renders the expression as a whole intelligible. Certainly, it is only a question of imagining a hypothetical context in which an expression like “in my tree consciousness” is intelligible, but at least, with regard to “film consciousness,” we have one real example to base an opinion on – and that from a prominent scholar in Film Studies. And the question is – why does the formulation make sense without having to think about it? Why is it already somewhat plausible that someone might say “in my film consciousness”?

My sense is that there is already a background understanding – what Bourdieu might refer to as a “doxa”<sup>8</sup> or Charles Taylor a “horizon of significance”<sup>9</sup> – that renders such an expression superficially intelligible. This “background understanding” is that films and film experiences are already generally seen as meaningfully linked to the formation of identity. Films, as opposed to cats and trees, provide experiences, and historically, public experiences, that either become part of identity or through which identity is engaged. Annette Kuhn addresses precisely this point in her study on “cinema memories.” In discussing some tendencies in “Type A” cinema memories (as discussed last chapter, that of actual films as opposed to the theatre or other situational elements), Kuhn writes:

It is as if the remembered image or scene and the body of the person remembering it are fused together in the moment of recollection, and in the feelings that the memory evokes.<sup>10</sup>

This link with identity is made clearer in Type B cinema memories, which are those “in which films and scenes or images from films are remembered within a context of events in the subject’s own life.”<sup>11</sup> In discussing this set of

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<sup>8</sup> In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu defines “the field of doxa” as “that which is taken for granted.” Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 166.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ont: Anansi, 1991), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Annette Kuhn, “What to do with Cinema Memory?,” in *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, edited by Richard Maltby, Daniël Biltereyst, and Philippe Meers. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 89.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.



evidence, Kuhn notices another related tendency that illustrates how cinema memories and identity become intertwined in consciousness:

In discursive terms, Type B memories are distinguished by what may be termed an ‘anecdotal’ rhetoric, a form of address that typically involves a story narrated in the first person singular about a specific, one-off event or occasion, a story in which the informant constructs herself or himself as chief protagonist.<sup>12</sup>

Based on Kuhn’s reading, a cinema memory becomes embedded within identity, both in terms of re-experienced bodily sensations, such as in Type A memories, but also in the way the account includes recognizing the place of cinema within a personal journey of understanding the world. This latter point is illustrated in one of the accounts that Kuhn presents in her study from one Terence Davies:

When I was seven I was taken by my eldest sister to see *Singin’ in the Rain*. Sitting in the dark brown, baroque interior of the Odeon, Liverpool, watching Gene Kelly dance with an umbrella, I entered for the first time a world of magic: the cinema.<sup>13</sup>

Kuhn’s analysis provides a further context, then, for making sense of Bordwell’s usage of ‘film consciousness’, by establishing an intuitively understood fact: that film and identity are intimately linked within modern culture, in the way film experiences form identity or accompany the formation

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 91.

of identity, or serve as turning points or markers within a personal narrative, such that film experiences become a part of a person's "final vocabulary."

## 2. Place

Thus far, I have shown that Bordwell's usage of 'film consciousness' refers to "film-related conscious phenomena" and that these conscious phenomena – because of the nature of the word 'consciousness' itself, especially in expressions such as "my consciousness" – are bound to identity. Furthermore, the intelligibility of the formulation in this context is based, in part, on recognizing a grammar of the word 'consciousness' (how it is typically used in expressions) and on a "doxa" in which the link between the formation of identity, and sense of self, is reasonably understood to intersect with film experiences. However, there is one final point to make regarding Bordwell's usage, and this regards the "spatial dimension" that these film-related conscious phenomena are given. As I mentioned at the beginning, the key words preceding 'film consciousness', in the Bordwell example, are "my" and "in." Therefore, I will now discuss the pertinence of the word "in" with respect to this usage. Bordwell imagines these film-related conscious phenomena as being rather organized, located in a "place" within consciousness. This signals yet another way of thinking about "film consciousness."

First of all, we will expand our set of examples in order to further characterize this conceptualization of “film consciousness” as a “place.” In writing about a barely remembered film from twenty years before, an *Internet Movie Database* member (IMDB) comments:

[The film] is lying around my film consciousness, shoved somewhere between “The Leech Woman” and “Sunset Boulevard.”<sup>14</sup>

Notice that the IMDB user does not say “memory” or “film experience,” but rather imagines ‘film consciousness’ as a “place” that contains a library of past film viewings.

The next two examples reflect the same usage of ‘film consciousness’, this time, however, attributed to a collective rather than to an individual. In a review of the DVD of *Bob Le Flambeur*, Stephanie Lundhall writes:

Bob Le Flambeur, perhaps because it got there first, feels much looser in the way that it approaches the mechanics of the operation and even looking at it from the perspective of 2009, when the elements of the film are so familiar that they’ve become part of the collective film consciousness, it still seems fresh and new.<sup>15</sup>

The other example is from a teacher’s (Gayle Gorman) course notes on Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960):

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<sup>14</sup> Andy Sandfoss, comments section of the *Internet Movie Database* (Accessed January 11, 2011). <http://www.imdb.com/user/ur0550290/comments>

<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Lundhall, “Bob Le Flambeur - Jean-Pierre Melville.” <http://culturazzi.org/review/cinema/bob-le-flambeur-jean-pierre-melville>.

Sam and Norman mirror each other in the motel lobby while Lila inspects Marions's motel room, one in black, one in white.

The horizontal composition of the motel split by the vertical direction of the dreaded house on hill cutting it in two. This house has become iconic, perched as it is, into our collective film consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

While these examples imagine "film consciousness" as place that either belongs to the individual or to a collective – in which film-related conscious phenomena are stored – the latter two examples also display a similar view as presented in Chapter 1 in relation to the expression "national consciousness" (it is hardly ever the case that a given usage of 'film consciousness' can be pinned down to a single category of meaning). Thus, "collective film consciousness" roughly means an ongoing, shared understanding and awareness of film and film history. Nevertheless, it is conceptualized as a place. Therefore, for now I would like to focus attention on the preposition "into" preceding "our collective film consciousness," which is the same as Bordwell's use of "in" in his example.

As some language philosophers have noted, the language that accompanies abstract ideas provides some understanding of the way the abstract idea is imagined as a physical reality. The use of "in" and "into," and even "lying around," are indicative of the imagined spatial dimension of "film

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<sup>16</sup> Gayle Gorman, "Alfred Hitchcock as Intro to Film Analysis," (Accessed November 11, 2011). <http://www.gaylegorman.com/teaching/mediastudies/hitch/psycho.html>

consciousness,” which reinforces its place as an “entity,” or “part,” or “feature” of consciousness. “Film consciousness” is rather imagined as a “room” or a “place” within a larger space. This larger space is some global understanding of consciousness. This way of imagining and locating places in relation to consciousness is constructed on the basis of a rather common metaphor that pervades ordinary language and ways of talking about abstract ideas, which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson define as the “container metaphor.”

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors orient our understanding of the world and determine beliefs about concepts and behaviour, such as “argument” or “money.”<sup>17</sup> Such metaphors are presumed in the act of speech, rather than being explicitly mentioned. For example, Lakoff and Johnson see the metaphor “Argument is War” as structuring attitudes toward argument. This metaphor pervades many expressions related to argument, thus determining, in some way, how a person engages in such an activity. The examples below illustrate the metaphor as manifest in common, ordinary expressions, although it should be noted that the authors did not have access to the Internet at the time, and therefore were limited in quickly accessible examples. Some of the examples below seem rather artificial but the point generally stands.

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<sup>17</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacked every weak point in* my argument. His criticisms were *right on target*.

I *demolished* his argument.

I've never *won* an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, *shoot!*

If *you use that strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*. He *shot down* all of my arguments.<sup>18</sup>

According to Lakoff and Johnson, “It is important to see that we don’t just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments.”<sup>19</sup> In this sense, “the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing.”<sup>20</sup> The authors further raise the point that not all cultures might view arguments in terms of war, for example a culture “where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground.”<sup>21</sup> In such a culture, the understanding of argument may result in a completely different set of actions, perhaps a collaborative approach, or where “argument” does not exist in the way we understand. This different understanding would then become manifest in the language that is used to discuss that activity (and in a sense, this different understanding also exists

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

in our language, such as when arguments are treated as buildings – a point that Lakoff and Johnson raise in a different section of their book – which allows the possibility of collaboration, rather than conflict).<sup>22</sup>

Of course, this example is not necessarily connected to “film consciousness,” but I believe it effectively illustrates what Lakoff and Johnson mean by “metaphors we live by” – which *is* connected to ‘film consciousness’. The metaphor I am drawing attention to is more elusive, and therefore less illustrative, but takes form through the same “ordinary language” mechanism as presented above. One of the “metaphors we live by,” according to Lakoff and Johnson, are “Ontological Metaphors,” which are used extensively in the way this thesis is organized as well (these metaphors are unavoidable because they sustain the very basis of communication). “Ontological metaphors” derive from, and are continuous with, the way physical objects in the world are generally treated:

When things are not clearly discrete or bounded, we still categorize them as such, e.g., mountains, street corners, hedges, etc. Such ways of viewing physical phenomena are needed to satisfy certain purposes that we have: locating mountains, meeting at street corners, trimming hedges. Human purposes typically require us to impose artificial boundaries that make physical phenomena discrete just as we are: entities bounded by a surface.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

Imposing boundaries on things serves a social and discursive function through which certain activities are engaged, including fitting abstract concepts within a hierarchy of other abstract ideas (such as when ideas are imagined as fields enclosed in larger territories and so forth). Thus, when things that lack a physical dimension are discussed, one tendency is to draw from our physical experiences in order to provide these abstract things discrete, bounded surfaces that enable the same sort of organized activity toward them; and thus “our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors.”<sup>24</sup> The act of regarding non-physical objects on these terms is extremely significant, especially in the sorts of activities engaged with in academics and in this thesis:

Understanding our experiences in terms of objects and substances allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances of a uniform kind. Once we can identify our experiences as entities or substances, we can refer to them, categorize them, group them, and quantify them—and, by this means, reason about them.<sup>25</sup>

We have, then, an explanation for why non-physical objects are treated as physical objects. We render these objects intelligible, and quantifiable, by providing them the same sorts of properties as physical objects, including establishing boundaries. But as with the “argument is war” metaphor, this

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 26.



way of treating non-physical objects is not necessarily explicit, nor conscious, it is simply ingrained in everyday language. Consider the way “life” is spoken about in everyday speech:

I've had *a full* life. Life is *empty* for him. There's *not much left* for him *in* life. Her life is *crammed* with activities. *Get the most out of* life. His life *contained* a great deal *of* sorrow. Live your life *to the fullest*.<sup>26</sup>

These are examples of the “container metaphor” in practice. But in this case, it is implied mainly in prepositions, which have the effect of transforming non-physical phenomena into ever-smaller containers, into which are placed other similar things, much like a Russian Doll. The container metaphor is powerful – and pervasive – because it derives from our very own physical nature:

Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside and an outside. But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries—marking off territory so that it has an inside and a bounding surface—whether a wall, a fence, or an abstract line or plane.<sup>27</sup>

We are simply noting that one of the ways “film consciousness” makes sense – as in the Bordwell example – is that it is sustained through an ontological metaphor, that of a container, that enables us to see it as an entity. The

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 30.

examples presented earlier illustrate this fact, by showing that the container metaphor, which have bounded surfaces with an inside and outside, structure the statements and associated ideas related to them:

*into* our collective film consciousness

*in* my film consciousness

*laying around* my film consciousness

This way of talking about “film consciousness” is not necessarily specific to this conceptualization, since such container metaphors are common in discussions about the mind, but I believe it is through this metaphor that “film consciousness” not only becomes intelligible, but also connects with other similar concepts in film studies. It is not accidental, I would say, that Martin Lefebvre, through a very different argumentative and theoretical trajectory arrives at a more or less equivalent concept, that of “imaginary museum,” in which “we keep the various films and film fragments that have touched us deeply.”<sup>28</sup> The film consciousness discussed in this section – as a “place” – is not just manifest in the way this formulation is used; it is also a concept, a way of imagining where film experiences end up in relation to consciousness, through which some effect is implemented, and through which our thinking about these experiences are organized.

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<sup>28</sup> Lefebvre, “On Memory and Imagination in the Cinema,” 480.

### 3. Faculty

There is a current of thought in film studies that regards film experiences as producing a measurable, or definable, effect on consciousness, therefore becoming an integral entity in consciousness. This “entity” is seen as having an impact on the way the world is apprehended and experienced. Different terms are used for defining it, but many derive from “ocular” metaphors.<sup>29</sup> Francesco Casetti, for example, defines it as a “film gaze.” Adopted over a period of time, the film gaze is then reapplied in other areas of life. Casetti’s argument is of course substantially more complex than this, but the causal arrangement is rather straightforward: film experiences produce effects on consciousness; these effects are imagined as a single, enduring entity in consciousness; this entity is seen as performing a set of functions, including the way the world is experienced. It is then a question of naming the “entity” or “element of consciousness.” Casetti names it “film gaze,” for various reasons,<sup>30</sup> but it carries other names too, according to the writer.

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<sup>29</sup> The preponderance of eye metaphors is a fact Martin Jay refers to as “ocularcentrism.” Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Casetti writes, “we must not forget that film, from its inception, was first and foremost identified and publicized as a marvellously *optical* device. . .” The visual dimension of Casetti’s metaphor addresses this aspect of film and brings the focus onto questions of film aesthetics, style, and technology as elements connected to the gaze and the way it impacts consciousness. Francesco Casetti, *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2.

For example, as mentioned, Spencer Shaw defines it as a “vision” (named ‘film consciousness’). Annemone Ligensa characterizes film “as a form of perception,”<sup>31</sup> and of course there is John Berger’s popular notion of “ways of seeing,” which while not necessarily about film, encompasses the effects of visual culture as a whole, writing, “It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world . . . The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.”<sup>32</sup> A “way of seeing” consists of beliefs, awareness, perception, and knowledge acquired from images, and thus “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.”<sup>33</sup> All of these ocular characterizations, including the “film gaze,” share in common the belief that exposure to visual culture, including films and film derivatives, produce observable changes in consciousness. The particular label used to name this entity reflects something about the nature of the causes that produces the entity, thus the reliance on ocular metaphors, and also something about the way this entity is imagined as functioning in consciousness: the cause of the entity is film experiences (and thus visual experiences) and the effects of this entity become manifest in the sense of vision.

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<sup>31</sup> Annemone Ligensa, “Film 1900 as Technology,” in *Film 1900: technology, perception, culture*, edited by Klaus Kreimeier and Annemone Ligensa (Indiana University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>32</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

But there is another characteristic reflected in the terminology, which is that these ocular terms are deliberately vague, unspecific and evocative. The precise cause and effect relationship that results in the entity, and the precise function this entity plays in consciousness, is difficult to pinpoint. It is not really possible to build a reductive causal argument, in which a clear causal relation is established between film experiences, the entity in consciousness, and future behaviour and experiences. Even if we allow that there is a clear causal link between film experiences and future behaviour, including subjective experiences, it is still difficult, if not impossible, to explain the conscious processes in which this entity figures. We only have access to the “inputs” (film experiences) and “outputs” (behaviour). Therefore, the vagueness of the name reflects this lack of knowledge, leaving it an open question about how precisely the entity functions.

So there are two significant problems then in discussions about this mysterious entity that film experiences construct; one, it defines an unknown, and perhaps, unknowable process in consciousness; and two, it represents a cause-effect relationship between “inputs” and “outputs” that is too variable, and elusive, to reduce to specific causes and effects. At the most basic level, we know that film experiences have an impact on consciousness, just as all experiences have an impact, but the specific process through which this impact is implemented, and the eventual behaviour that arises is hard to

grasp, except, I would suggest, at the level of subjective film experience – or “subjective film consciousness” – which is at least describable from the perspective of each individual (discussed in the next section).

Obviously, given the subject of this thesis I have a preference for naming this entity ‘film consciousness’, although unlike Shaw, I cannot say if ‘film consciousness’ is a “vision.” I do know that, given the ensemble of arguments presented in this thesis, it makes logical and semantic sense to name an imagined set of film-related conscious phenomena that become a part of consciousness as “film consciousness.” I would say there are at least three reasons for adopting the term; one, it avoids the “ocularcentrism” of the other concepts which tend to overstate the degree to which it is possible to demarcate this entity from other aspects or areas of consciousness; two, it creates a meaningful link between something that is felt and experienced and something that is imagined as causing that experience, by creating a terminological continuity between them (the experience is named ‘film consciousness’ and the cause of this experience is named ‘film consciousness’, a point discussed in the final section of this chapter); and three, the formulation establishes a link between the other categories of “film consciousness” discussed in this thesis and chapter, fitting with the approach named in the Introduction of this thesis as “thinking in terms of ‘film

consciousness', which involves thinking about a single problem from multiple perspectives sharing the same terminology.

The first question to examine, then, is why Shaw's usage of 'film consciousness' makes semantic sense, in the same way that Bordwell's usage of 'film consciousness' made intuitive semantic sense, not just conceptual sense. Shaw's usage of 'consciousness' derives its sense from the fifth definition of 'consciousness' discussed in Chapter 3, named "global consciousness" (which is my own label for practical purposes):

The faculty or capacity from which awareness of thought, feeling, and volition and of the external world arises . . .<sup>34</sup>

This is a rather common definition of 'consciousness' – it names an imagined faculty that is essential to all humans. Other terms reflect the same basic idea that consciousness is "a system,"<sup>35</sup> "a capacity,"<sup>36</sup> or sometimes, "the

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<sup>34</sup> "consciousness, n., entry 2a". OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> Ari N. Schulman covers many of these computer-like terms in "Why Minds Are Not Like Computers:" "People who believe that the mind can be replicated on a computer tend to explain the mind in terms of a computer. When theorizing about the mind, especially to outsiders but also to one another, defenders of artificial intelligence (AI) often rely on computational concepts. They regularly describe the mind and brain as the 'software and hardware' of thinking, the mind as a 'pattern' and the brain as a 'substrate,' senses as 'inputs' and behaviors as 'outputs,' neurons as 'processing units' and synapses as circuitry,' to give just a few common examples." Ari N. Schulman, "Why Minds Are Not Like Computers," *The New Atlantis* (Winter, 2009). <http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/why-minds-are-not-like-computers>

<sup>36</sup> I presented the full definition in Chapter 2. Norman Stuart Sutherland, ed., *The International Dictionary of Psychology* (New York: Continuum, 1989), 95, quoted in

brain.”<sup>37</sup> It is the thing (“consciousness”) from which conscious experience arises (also named “consciousness”). As explained in Chapter 3, this is rather confusing because the word ‘consciousness’ is used to define both the cause and the effect: ‘consciousness’ refers to the faculty and also to the product of the faculty. For this reason, the second ‘consciousness’, the one that is the product or outcome, is sometimes defined as “conscious experience,” but the term ‘consciousness’ is often used interchangeably. In short, the word ‘consciousness’ will sometimes refer to the faculty, and sometimes it will refer to the experience the faculty generates. I refer to the first – the faculty – as “global consciousness.”

What happens then if we apply the above definition of ‘consciousness’ – as a faculty – to the formulation ‘film consciousness’ as we have in previous chapters? The effect is to transform the formulation into a term that refers to a “faculty” of consciousness and which gives rise to conscious experience, also named ‘film consciousness’, that is characterized by certain features (film-like features, discussed in the next section.) The previously mentioned terms, “gaze,” “vision,” “perception,” or “way of seeing,” thus refer to this imagined “faculty,” which is regarded as a structural component of consciousness. The formulation ‘film consciousness’ thus establishes the same kind of causal link

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Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Dennett presents this view in an interview with Robert Wright. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ss0aCWpNzSM>



between a cause (the faculty) and effect (an experience) as the word ‘consciousness’. It enables us to think about certain kinds of conscious experience – those that we relate to film and which we name ‘film consciousness’ – as coming from a place in consciousness – a faculty – that is also named ‘film consciousness’.

However, it is unlikely that anyone would accept that ‘film consciousness’ is a “faculty” in some enduring sense on the same order as “consciousness.” After all, it is a construction – a useful construction, in my view – that establishes a link between a perceived cause and effect, but it is a construction just the same. It is awkward, and perhaps counterintuitive, to imagine ‘film consciousness’ as a faculty – but what about if we see it as a “form of consciousness?” This latter expression serves as a bridge between something – a faculty – that is imagined as fixed and enduring and something that is “faculty-like,” but transitory, and more importantly is linked to the same semantic field as global consciousness. The Oxford Dictionary of English in fact regards this usage of ‘consciousness’ as a subcategory of the above definition of ‘global consciousness’:

As a count noun. A state or form of consciousness.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “consciousness, n., entry 2a”. OED Online. June 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39477?redirectedFrom=consciousness> (accessed July 10, 2015).

When imagined as a “form of consciousness,” the nature of the entity in question contains all of the same properties as global consciousness, but with the crucial difference that it is contextual and transitory. It is also, potentially, a faculty that is adopted and used for specific purposes. In order to gather a sense of the semantic nature of this expression – “form of consciousness” – we can consider some actual examples.

Scholar Natasha Hurley, in an interview about the circulation of “unpredictable” texts in culture, including film texts, observes:

The circulations of these texts create forms of consciousness that are not easily visible. They institute new ways of thinking. They create communities. They give us a glimpse into a kind of complexity that we still do not have a name for.<sup>39</sup>

For Hurley, a “form of consciousness” is essentially a “way of thinking,” but one which is not “easily visible.” In “From Film and Television to Multimedia Cognitive Effects,” Lucia Lumbelli draws an even clearer connection between this expression (“form of consciousness”) and film:

However, this fundamental aspect was also stressed by theorists who are in favour of the new forms of consciousness introduced by cinema. Kracauer (1960) claimed that “unlike the other types of pictures, film images affect primarily the spectator’s senses,

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<sup>39</sup>Natasha Hurley, “Research Profile,”

<http://www.efs.ualberta.ca/en/Research/ResearchProfiles/PastResearchProfiles/NatashaHurleyResearchProfile.aspx> (accessed August 15, 2015)

engaging him physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually.”<sup>40</sup>

Both of these examples give a sense of the expression’s meaning, which is essentially a statement about new “ways of seeing” or “thinking,” in the John Berger sense of the term. Therefore, a “form of consciousness” more or less encompasses features of global consciousness, like awareness, thoughts, feelings, and so forth, but it is given a particular character in relation to a time, place or people. A “form of consciousness” is merely a particular instance of global consciousness, but defined according to its relationship with an object. Thus, when regarded as a “form of consciousness,” ‘film consciousness’ refers to those features that belong to global consciousness, such as awareness, thoughts, feelings, which have been affected by film experience over time. It is more open-ended, yet specific, than “vision” in this regard, because it encompasses the same set of features as global consciousness and is not limited to the visual domain.

Another definition of ‘form’ further clarifies the potential meaning of ‘film consciousness’ in terms of a faculty. Anthropologists Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing write:

Forms are the means by which individuals come together, negotiate continuing relations and affiliate into groups. Through a sharing of

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<sup>40</sup> Lucia Lumbelli, “From Film and Television to Multimedia Cognitive Effects,” in *Understanding Multimedia Documents*, edited by Jean-François Rouet, Richard Lowe and Wolfgang Schnotz (Springer, 2008), 224.

language and other formal, classificatory systems, individuals are able to meet in regular and routine interaction: are able to make 'society'. . . Forms do not become things-in-themselves; they do not live their own lives. Rather it is individuals who continue to lead their lives through them.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, another way of imagining 'film consciousness' as a "form of consciousness" is as something that exists independently of any given individual, and as a function of particular objects and activities, such as cinema, through which individuals "lead their lives through them." In such a conceptualization, 'film consciousness' is also a means through which people form relationships in the activity of film (through the shared experience of film viewing, for example).

Obviously, I am only providing broad contours in this case, a way of thinking about the meaning of 'film consciousness' as a "faculty" (or form of consciousness) based on usage, grammar and semantics. It is, as mentioned, continuous with other concepts in film studies, although distinct because of the fact it forms part of a larger conceptual framework in which it makes sense. Therefore, I would like to explain how this conceptualization potentially works in the context of an analysis, through the example of Francesco Casetti, who uses "film gaze" instead of 'film consciousness' in order

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<sup>41</sup> Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing define this concept as follows: "Consciousness comes to know itself in and through the movement between different points of view in time and space." *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 188.

to designate this entity or form of consciousness (I will provide my own examples in the next section).

In his *Eye of the Century: Film, Experience and Modernity*, Casetti studies the role cinema played in “negotiating” the complex experiences of modernity. The first decades of the twentieth century mark the introduction of new urban environments, modes of transportation, communication, industry and social norms that transformed a sense of time, space and self-understanding. While this new environment gave rise to new, exciting opportunities and sensations, it also brought conflicting and disorienting experiences. Casetti argues that cinema filters these experiences and reproduces them in ways that reconcile the contradictory effects. The result is the construction of a negotiating “gaze” that the spectator appropriates and employs in his or her own ordinary life. In other words, the audience adopts a form of consciousness through which individuals come to live their life and engage with the world around them. To be sure, as mentioned above, the precise mechanism through which this process of negotiation occurs, in which film experiences attain this status, is complex and open to substantial interpretation. Nevertheless, Casetti presents a series of links that can be regarded as causally related.

For example, Casetti conceives of the relationship between cinema and modernity as a back and forth dialectic process, exemplified in the key concept

of “film gaze” constituting the central concern of his study. The gaze is characterized according to a number of features that make it an important cultural form at the time it emerged. For instance, it is a gaze that displays “synchronicity” (being “in tune”) with its time.<sup>42</sup> It is a technology and art form that absorbs the concerns of the period and reflects them back onto the spectator, through myths, and aesthetic strategies, that resolves (or negotiates) the underlying tension. As Casetti argues, cinema reflects “the issues of emerging social orders” and “negotiates” the paradoxes of modernity by uniting “conflicting stimuli in an age torn by strife and dilemma” and then “offering them up in their mundane, yet at times touching and magical, everydayness.”<sup>43</sup> Film’s “gaze” incorporates each of these three features of cinema, though the latter function, as “negotiator”, emerges as the most essential in Casetti’s argument.

The strategy Casetti applies is identifying a fact about modernity, usually in connection with some aspect of cinema, through an array of evidence, including “reviews, analyses, essays, prophecies, political speeches, ironic reporting, drafts of laws, literary pieces and so on”<sup>44</sup> from the period. This fact could be, for example, the “intensification of nervous stimulation,” which, according to a 1903 publication by one of the first sociologists, Georg Simmel,

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<sup>42</sup> Casetti, *Eye of the Century*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

is characteristic of modern city life. With this scheme in mind, Casetti then finds examples of film that serve to produce, through particular aesthetics, a gaze that manages to address this “intensification of nervous stimulation.”<sup>45</sup> The implication, in Casetti’s argument, is that film experiences expose spectators to the repetition of certain stimulations, which in turn creates a virtual “crust” that protects spectators from similar stimulations found in ordinary modern life.<sup>46</sup> Casetti uses the example of Griffith’s films, which produced “dizzying” effects in spectators through crosscutting. In becoming habituated to crosscutting, and the dizzying effects, a spectator is then able to negotiate similarly dizzying effects of modern life.<sup>47</sup> There is a definite logic in Casetti’s argument that manages to render this causal link between abstract concepts and film aesthetics, if not believable, at least plausible.

In addition, such arguments are supported in other studies that examine changes to consciousness on the basis of the nature of some new technology. For example, in *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*, John Thompson writes:

The use of technical media provides individuals with new ways of organizing and controlling space and time, and new ways of using space and time for their own ends. The development of new technical media may also have a profound impact on the ways in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 115-116.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 120.

which individuals experience the spatial and temporal dimensions of social life.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, it is not entirely without merit to suggest that ‘film consciousness’ as a “form of consciousness,” retains a lasting structure and permanence that goes beyond a local context, even if this is difficult to accept. In short, when Casetti applies the term ‘film gaze’, it could very well be described as a “form of consciousness,” and more precisely, as “film consciousness,” which encompasses a structural change in consciousness, and also a form through which individuals “lead their lives.” In Casetti’s model, this film consciousness has definite objectives. It serves an important social function that manages to justify the social and artistic value of film. It gives film an explicit, positive and enduring purpose that goes well beyond entertainment and the specific historical context he studies. Although, when regarded on these terms, film consciousness need not serve any useful function whatsoever, it is just simply present.

#### **4. Subjective Film Consciousness**

So apparent was the impact of film on consciousness to early film critics that by 1911 W. Stephen Bush noted the extent to which it occupied an important place in film publications:

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<sup>48</sup> John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 22.



The power and intensity of the moving picture, its direct, yet subtle and lasting influence on the mind and memory, have often been dwelt upon in these columns . . .<sup>49</sup>

In this concluding section of the thesis, I would like to consider a final way of thinking about ‘film consciousness’ – and perhaps the most personal way – that carries over from W. Stephen Bush’s 1911 acknowledgement about the impact of film on consciousness.

Thus, in addition to “personal consciousness” and “global consciousness,” there is the last definition of ‘consciousness’ presented in Chapter 3, “conscious experience.”<sup>50</sup> When considered from this perspective, ‘film consciousness’ becomes a converging point, or point of integration, for the other categories and sub-categories of film consciousness already discussed. This “conscious experience” is the outcome of the “faculty of film consciousness” and includes content emerging from an imagined “place” or “location” in consciousness. It will also seem to have the character of being an essential part of identity. However, the defining character of this ‘film consciousness’ – in terms of conscious experience – is that it has a particular subjective feeling that will vary from person to person in terms of character. This feeling becomes present in ordinary, daily life, perhaps triggered by external events such as film viewing, but also by other types of encounters,

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<sup>49</sup> W. Stephen Bush, “New Aspects of the Moving Picture,” *Moving Picture World* (Oct 14, 1911):105.

<sup>50</sup> Chapter 3, Section 6.

and is identifiable only from the perspective of the individual. It will seem to that individual that a particular experience, connected to film in some capacity, feels qualitatively unique or distinct. In such a case, it will seem as if this experience is more precisely “film consciousness,” or to reformulate it in distinction from other examples considered, “subjective film consciousness.”

We can begin by considering what it means to say “conscious experience” in terms of a “particular feeling.” In 1974, Thomas Nagel published a now essential paper within the field of consciousness studies named “What is it like to be a bat?” The problem posed in this paper is recognized today as the “hard problem of consciousness,”<sup>51</sup> but perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the argument is the way Nagel chooses to frame the problem, which offers a question applicable to other areas of experience:

Conscious experience is a widespread phenomenon. It occurs at many levels of animal life, though we cannot be sure of its presence in the simpler organisms, and it is very difficult to say in general what provides evidence of it. (Some extremists have been prepared to deny it even of mammals other than man.) No doubt it occurs in countless forms totally unimaginable to us, on other planets in other solar systems throughout the universe. But no matter how the form may vary, the fact that an organism has conscious experience at all means, basically, that there is something it is like to be that organism. There may be further implications about the form of the experience; there may even (though I doubt it) be implications about the behavior of the organism. But fundamentally an organism has

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<sup>51</sup> David Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, edited by Max Velmans, and Susan Schneider (Malden, MA: Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 226.

conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is to be that organism—something it is like for the organism.<sup>52</sup>

One of Nagel's goals in this paper is to problematize "physicalist," "materialist," or "reductive" theories of mind, which are explanations that tend to dismiss or ignore the fact "global consciousness" includes a subjective dimension that is invisible to epistemologically objective study.<sup>53</sup> There is no way of knowing or confirming the existence of this subjective dimension other than by actually having oneself the property of "conscious experience". As quoted from the Dictionary of Psychology definition in Chapter 1, "The term ["consciousness"] is impossible to define except in terms that are unintelligible without a grasp of what consciousness means." This is of course unlike other elements of the universe, which can be analyzed into progressively smaller and smaller components whose relationship with the whole is clearly established. Thus, conscious experience stands outside of an epistemologically objective framework. Nagel's account clearly illustrates that when 'consciousness' is used to mean "conscious experience," it represents a problem that is nearly beyond rational comprehension:

Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless. The most important and characteristic feature of conscious mental phenomena

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 4, no. 83 (1973): 436.

<sup>53</sup> John Searle argues that consciousness forms part of an "ontologically subjective" reality and therefore cannot be studied from "epistemologically objective" approach. John Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 8.

is very poorly understood. Most reductionist theories do not even try to explain it.<sup>54</sup>

A vital limitation, then, in the study of conscious experience is that it is only describable from a first person perspective. In this regard, we can say that the “film consciousness” described in this section is only describable, and knowable, from a first person perspective. Thankfully, the history of film reception includes this sort of evidence, what one film scholar has named “subjective, first-person reports.”<sup>55</sup> Because the description is directed at the experience as opposed to the film itself, these reports provide insight into subjective experience, as discussed last chapter in relation to Maxim Gorky.

I already began to draw a distinction between “subjective film experience” and “subjective film consciousness” last chapter, but in this section I will attempt to go further. As discussed, “subjective film experience” refers to the subjective experience occurring while viewing a film, which is to say, all of the conscious phenomena, thoughts, images, feelings, present to consciousness while viewing a film. “Subjective film consciousness,” on the other hand, is not limited to the conscious experience of film viewing. It refers, rather, to a more enduring conscious experience that is potentially manifest in ordinary life. It is also a conscious experience one might define as part of identity, as coming

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<sup>54</sup> Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”, 436.

<sup>55</sup> Beja Margithazi, “ ‘Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows...’ The Role of Body and Senses in Various ‘First Contact’ Narratives,” *Ősz* (December 10, 2012). <http://uj.apertura.hu/2012/osz/margithazi-the-role-of-body-and-senses/>

from a certain place in consciousness, or in term of a faculty. When examined subjectively – which is to say, when conscious attention is placed on “subjective film consciousness” it will “feel like” a distinct experience that is related to film in some enduring manner. Only a person who experiences film consciousness will ultimately decide if it fits this condition (being distinct, feeling as if it is connected to film). It is then a question of characterizing this conscious experience.

In fact, the intrigue of Nagel’s argument, as mentioned, is that he formulates a question that contextualizes and particularizes “conscious experience.” This is a recognized strategy in philosophy. A general problem sometimes requires a specific, narrow question in order to answer the general question by limiting the parameters to an area or issue that is seen as essential. When Alan Turing wanted an answer to the question “Can machines think?” he formulated a more limiting and contextual question that implied an answer to the general one: “Are there imaginable digital computers which would do well in the *imitation game*?”<sup>56</sup> The “imitation game” involves someone attempting to deduce or guess whether it is a computer or a human that is answering a question. The advantage of this question is that it dismisses the meaning of “thinking” and focuses on the question of human behaviour. A computer could hypothetically fool an observer into thinking it is human for reasons that are

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<sup>56</sup> Alan Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind* 59, No. 236 (Oct., 1950), 442.

particular to that observer, such as the things an observer will come to see as being human as opposed to a computer.

By the same token, Nagel does not seek to define “conscious experience” according to a list of necessary and sufficient conditions, such that is possible to conclude, on the basis of these criteria, that a particular organism may have conscious experience, or something close to it. Rather, he suggests that if there is something that it is like to be that organism, then conscious experience is present. This is the “necessary” part: that there is “something that it is like.” This question can be further applied to the different performances, moments and identities of a given organism: what it is like to be a father, what it is like grow old, what it is like to drink wine, what it is like to read. All of these experiences have corresponding subjective qualities that indicate conscious experience, which require the ability to express and describe this experience through a language and vocabulary. This “what it is like” feeling – according to those who engage in debates about the evolution of consciousness – is regarded as “mysterious,” because it appears to serve no particular evolutionary function.

It still seems utterly mysterious that the causation of behavior should be accompanied by a subjective inner life. We have good reason to believe that consciousness arises from physical systems such as brains, but we have little idea how it arises, or why it exists at all. How could a physical system such as a brain also be

an *experiencer*? Why should there be something it is like to be such a system?<sup>57</sup>

As discussed in Chapter 2, Chalmers ultimately regards “consciousness” (in terms of conscious experience) as a fundamental aspect of the universe, along the lines of matter or space.<sup>58</sup> It cannot be defined or reduced to an explanation of some further element that stands behind it. As Chalmers says, “The best we can do is to give illustrations and characterizations that lie at the same level.”<sup>59</sup> While these characterizations do not “qualify as true definitions, due to their implicitly circular nature,” Chalmers believes “they can help to pin down what is being talked about.”<sup>60</sup> What, precisely, then are characterizations of conscious experience?

Conscious experiences range from vivid color sensations to experiences of the faintest background aromas; from hard-edged pains to the elusive experience of thoughts on the tip of one’s tongue; from mundane sounds and smells to the encompassing grandeur of musical experience; from the triviality of a nagging itch to the weight of a deep existential angst; from the specificity of the taste of peppermint to the generality of one’s experience of selfhood. All these have a distinct experienced quality. All are prominent parts of the inner life of the mind.<sup>61</sup>

Nagel’s “what it is like” question is then intended to elicit answers that bracket conscious experience in every context. Thus, if we take the answer to

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<sup>57</sup> David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press), xi.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

be “film consciousness,” then a Nagel-like question could be, “what is it like to have experienced film”? Any answer to this question will naturally point in the direction of “subjective film consciousness,” and moreover, any answer will constitute a characterization that helps “pin down what is being talked about.” We have a question then that opens the discussion in a particular direction that allows for a broad range of experiences and situations to provide answers.

I will first consider some general aspects of “what it is like” to have consciousness, what John Searle defines as structural features of consciousness. Drawn from a history of discourse on consciousness, and personal observations, these are features that belong to almost all “normal” instances of conscious experience (Searle notes exceptions, such as the “split brain phenomena” or even the possibility of cultural differences).<sup>62</sup> Any person who directs attention toward consciousness will presumably recognize the following features.

There is, first of all, the basic fact that “[h]uman consciousness is manifested in a strictly limited number of modalities.”<sup>63</sup> By “modalities,” Searle means our five basic senses (sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing), the “sense of balance,” bodily sensations such as “proprioception,” and what Searle calls

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<sup>62</sup> John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 130.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.



“the stream of thought,” which is rather like the “stream of consciousness,” or what just generally seems to take place in consciousness while “thinking.”

The stream of thought contains not only words and images, both visual and otherwise, but other elements as well, which are neither verbal nor imagistic. For example, a thought sometimes occurs to one suddenly, “in a flash,” in a form that is neither in words nor images. Furthermore, the stream of thought, as I am using this expression, includes feelings, such as those generally called “emotions.” For example, in the stream of thought I might feel a sudden surge of anger or a desire to hit someone or a strong thirst for a glass of water.<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, all consciousness will become manifest – or determined or experienced – through these limited modalities. Another feature of consciousness is that all of our conscious states “come to us as part of a unified sequence.”<sup>65</sup> This unity has two dimensions, “horizontal” and “vertical” (Searle is aware of using spatial metaphors in this case). The horizontal dimension refers to our ability to hold a string of thoughts or speech together as part of a single conscious event, in which the first part of the string is “kept in mind” as the rest of the string unfolds: “For example, when I speak or think a sentence, even a long one, my awareness of the beginning of what I said or thought continues even when that part is no longer being thought or spoken.”<sup>66</sup> The vertical dimension refers to “simultaneous awareness of all the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

diverse features of a conscious state.”<sup>67</sup> For example, all of the features of our stream of thought and sensory information (sight, smell, etc) are experienced as a unified whole, rather than as discrete elements:

I do not just have an experience of a toothache and also a visual experience of the couch that is situated a few feet from me and of roses that are sticking out from the vase on my right . . . I have my experiences of the rose, the couch, and the toothache all as experiences that are part of one and the same conscious event.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, Searle notes “we have little understanding of how the brain achieves this unity” (keeping in mind this was written in the 1990s, but it is a point Searle has not revised since then).<sup>69</sup> However, he says this issue has been given different names, depending on philosopher or field: “In neurophysiology it is called ‘the binding problem,’ and Kant called the same phenomenon ‘the transcendental unity of apperception.’”<sup>70</sup>

The feature of “intentionality” – which refers to the fact our conscious states, such as thoughts and emotions, are almost always about something, whether real or fantasy – predates phenomenology, but is most closely associated with this movement within philosophy.<sup>71</sup> An example of a conscious state that is

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> According to Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, “Although ‘intentionality’ is a technical term in philosophy, it stands for something familiar to us all: a characteristic feature of our mental states and experiences, especially evident in what we commonly call being ‘conscious’ or ‘aware.’ As conscious beings, or persons, we are not merely affected by

not necessarily about something is “anxiety,” which is not always directed at anything in particular. But most everything else has the character of intentionality. Searle here makes the observation that “all intentionality is aspectual.” By this he means that all conscious experience is “perspectival,” which is to say, is always from a point of view. But in spite of an overreliance on visual metaphors to make this point generally, Searle notes that this perspective applies to all sensory experiences:

Perspective and point of view are most obvious for vision, but of course they are features of our other sensory experiences as well. If I touch the table, I experience it only under certain aspects and from a certain spatial location. If I hear a sound, I hear it only from a certain direction and hear certain aspects of it . . . Noticing the perspectival character of conscious experience is a good way to remind ourselves that *all intentionality is aspectual*. Seeing an object from a point of view, for example, is seeing it under certain aspects and not others. In this sense, all seeing is “seeing as.”<sup>72</sup>

When an object is perceived within our “perceptual field” (what is available to be perceived from our visual perspective), it remarkably always appears “as a figure against a background,” a notion emphasized within Gestalt psychology:

For example, if I see the sweater on the table in front of me, I see the sweater against the background of the table. If I see the table, I see it against the background of the floor. If I see the floor, I see it

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things in our environments; we are also conscious of these things.” Ronald McIntyre and David Woodruff Smith, “Theory of Intentionality,” in *Husserl’s Phenomenology: A Textbook*, edited by J.N Mohanty and William R. McKenna (Washington, D.C.: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology and University Press of America, 1989), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, 131.

against the background of the whole room, until finally we reach the limits of my visual field.<sup>73</sup>

However, Searle argues “what is characteristic of perception seems to be characteristic of consciousness generally.”<sup>74</sup> Several of the features of consciousness Searle discusses seem connected to or derive from this observation. The first is that “attention” can be imagined as a “field of attention,” in which there is a “center of attention” and a “periphery of attention.” What this means in practical terms is that conscious experience consists of multiple, simultaneous experiences of different stimulations, thoughts, and inputs from our senses. As mentioned before, we experience all of these as a unity, as a singular conscious event. However, only one of these will be at the “center of attention,” while the rest will still be felt, or sensed, but on the “periphery.” Searle has given many examples of this over the years, but a simple example would be the act of writing while sitting. The activity of writing is at the center of attention, but one also senses the fingers touching the keyboard, the sounds of the keyboard, and the sensation of sitting in the chair. Almost as a spotlight, it is possible to shift our attention to any of these experiences and sensations on the periphery at a moments notice. Suddenly, the sensation of the fingers on the keyboard is at the center of attention, while everything else moves to the periphery. The act of shifting attention is partly

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

an act of “will power,” as Searle explains, but might also be triggered by external events (a sharp sound, for instance).

Following this, it is possible to imagine the different objects in our field of attention as demonstrating traits similar to the perceptual field, in the sense that there are perceived boundaries: “whatever I focus my attention on will be against a background that is not the center of attention; and the larger the scope of the attention, the nearer we reach the limits of my consciousness where the background will simply be the boundary conditions.”<sup>75</sup> This point is not as intuitive as the others and requires some conceptual – and not just experiential – validation. I personally do not experience “boundaries” in my consciousness, although I do experience a “center of attention” and a “periphery” when these terms are not used literally. But I think Searle’s point is made clearer through another structure of consciousness, which does make intuitive sense, and which completes the “boundary condition” idea (one hopefully notices at this stage that all of Searle’s points, and indeed, all statements about “what consciousness is like,” are validated only, and exclusively, through the personal experiences of the readers he addresses; which is why Searle, and most consciousness philosophers *today* rely on ordinary experiences as justifications, as opposed to the heavy rhetorical style

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

of some phenomenologists in film studies, who demonstrate less of an intuitive connection with the ordinary experiences of reality).

This other feature of consciousness is one Searle defines, variously, as “situatedness” or as “the boundary of consciousness.”<sup>76</sup> The idea is in fact quite straightforward, and from experience, true. No matter the particular activity engaged in, or what is within the field of attention (either on the periphery or center), people continue to have a basic sense of who they are, where they are, what time of the day it is, and other elements of their own history, both recent and in the past. In other words, people recognize that consciousness is located “somewhere” specific according to these different characteristics, “but the location may itself not be at all the object of consciousness.”<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, this boundary or situatedness only becomes apparent in “cases of its breakdown:” “There is, for example, a sense of disorientation that comes over one when one suddenly is unable to recall what month it is, or where one is, or what time of day it is.”<sup>78</sup> In this particular regard, Searle’s point that all attention has a “boundary” is easier to grasp – this boundary entails a sense of knowing some basic aspects about oneself and where one is and what has recently transpired. When this boundary breaks

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<sup>76</sup> Searle’s terminology evolves over time. In some works, he uses “boundary conditions” and in others “situatedness” to mean the same thing (both terms are used in *The Rediscovery of the Mind*).

<sup>77</sup> Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, 139.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

down, consciousness itself breaks down in a fundamental way, to the point where we might say of someone who is unaware of these facts that they are no longer conscious of themselves or of the surrounding world, even when they might very well be conscious of what stands before them, or still engaged in consciousness-like behaviours and experiences.

A feature that Searle returns to frequently that ties many of these structural features together, and which is itself a structure of consciousness, is that of “mood.” For example, when discussing modalities (senses and stream of thought), he indicates that each “can occur under the aspect of pleasant or unpleasant.”<sup>79</sup> The way we interpret, or feel, the character of these modalities (a pleasant or unpleasant smell, a pleasant thought, etc) is sometimes beyond “any form of intentionality,” meaning that there is something innately pleasant or unpleasant about certain experiences (such as smells). However, the pleasantness or unpleasantness will vary “with certain sorts of associated intentionality.”<sup>80</sup> As Searle says, “pain can be simply experienced as painful.” However, “If one believes the pain is being inflicted unjustly, it is more unpleasant than if one believes it is being inflicted, for example, as part of a necessary medical treatment.”<sup>81</sup> Therefore, sometimes this aspect of modalities depends on context and sometimes it is a function of something

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

else (biology, for example). The point Searle wants to make, however, is that, one way or another, this aspect (of pleasant or unpleasant) is there; it is a part of consciousness, and this is most true, or apparent, when it comes to “mood.”

With mood we approach more directly, perhaps, the perplexing question of “what it is like.” Many of the above features of consciousness are rationalizable because of spatial and temporal metaphors that provide a necessary, but perhaps misleading, sense of structure. We can imagine attention and awareness as a “field” with “boundaries,” “centers,” and “peripheries,” organized in “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions. We can further imagine a “perspective” and a “location.” All of these terms are metaphors that enable a description of something that actually has no extension in the physical world at all. The feature of “mood” problematizes this rational vocabulary in a way that gets at the problem of “what it is like” – which is that sometimes, and perhaps very often, we experience things that are beyond the capacity of words to describe, precisely because it lacks referential content. Thus, Searle writes:

A mood, by itself, never constitutes the whole content of a conscious state. Rather, the mood provides the tone or color that characterizes the whole of a conscious state or sequence of conscious states.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



In other words, a mood lacks the sort of “content” that is given to analytic description, or even words, but the certainty is that it is always present in one form or another:

We certainly are not always in a mood that has a name in a language like English. At present, I am neither especially elated nor especially depressed; I am neither ecstatic nor in despair; nor indeed am I simply blah. Yet it seems to me there is what one might call a “tone” to my present experiences. And this seems to me to be properly assimilable to the general notion of mood. The fact that my present experiences have a somewhat neutral tone does not mean they have no tone to them at all. It is characteristic of moods that they pervade all of our conscious experiences.<sup>83</sup>

As with the boundary conditions, or situatedness, moods become apparent to attention during sharp changes, “When one’s normal mood is radically shifted either up or down, either into an unexpected elation or depression, one suddenly becomes aware of the fact that one is always in some mood and that one’s mood pervades one’s conscious states.”<sup>84</sup> This “up” and “down” characterization of mood is – incidentally – one of the “metaphors we live by” according to Lakoff and Johnson.<sup>85</sup> In other words, it is still possible to ascribe an “orientational” dimension to mood, although it does not “feel” spatial as with the other examples mentioned. It is interesting to observe that in spite of being spatial, some metaphors are actually experienced as spatial, because of the way we experience consciousness (as having extension and boundaries),

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>85</sup> Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 15.

while some spatial metaphors are more aptly symbolic (although there is a physical correlation with feeling up or down in the way we walk and look). Nevertheless, some moods are neither up nor down and have no describable spatial characteristic, a state of boredom for example, or nostalgia. The important point is that mood is a permanent feature of consciousness, whether or not it is describable, and whether or not it has intentional content (although an intentional content could serve to explain a mood, such as winning a game).

Finally, there is that conscious experience everyone is familiar with and which defies rationalization, especially, one might say, in activities that require focused attention. I raised this point in the section on psychological film experience, which is a microcosm of the problem of psychological, or cognitive explanations of the mind, which are limited to examining mental processes rather than experiences. As we know, it is possible to be engaged in watching a film but also thinking about something else entirely. Those who promote cognitive film theory are aware of this issue in the experience of certain types of filmmaking, such as Art films, which create a deliberate distance or detachment in viewers. But it is simply a fact of consciousness that there is nearly always, as Searle describes it, “overflow” in conscious experience:

Conscious states in general refer beyond their immediate content . . .  
In such a case the immediate content tends to spill over, to connect  
with other thoughts that in a sense were part of the content but in a  
sense were not.<sup>86</sup>

Searle means, in part, that experience of engaging in an activity, perhaps in a very directed activity, such as a conversation, when suddenly a word, or an image produced by a word, or anything triggered by the conversation, produces a new stream of thought, even while the conversation continues in the same direction as before. It rather feels like the mind is wandering, moving from association to association, and in some cases resulting in a moment of realization unrelated to anything in the conversation. Therefore, it is an experience that cannot be known to outside observers, or even hypothesized, based on trying to understand, for example, the effect of film on viewers, in which a one to one relationship is posited between a film element and cognitive element over a given sequence of time. Yet, “overflow” is present in all cases. When it is presented to outside observers, it is possible, as with Martin Lefebvre’s work, to construct an explanation for some of the outcomes of this overflow event. This aspect of “overflow,” Searle notes, is not just manifest in the experience of thoughts through the form of “associations,” but also in acts of directed attention or perception, such as when someone is asked to describe what they see:

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<sup>86</sup> Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, 137.

For example, as I look out the window now at the trees and the lake, if asked to describe what I see, the answer would have an indefinite extendability. I don't just see these as trees, but as pines, as like the pines of California, but in some ways different, as like in these respects but unlike in those, etc.<sup>87</sup>

In other words, describing a complex – or even straightforward – visual scene containing a range of objects can result in a broad, potentially indefinite, description, because description is bound to associations that are particular to the conscious overflow of the individual.

We have in Searle then some understanding of “what it is like” to have conscious experience; it is now then a question of combining some of these elements with our discussion about “subjective film consciousness” in order to create a descriptive vocabulary for rendering “subjective film consciousness” visible, and intelligible, with reference to the different understandings of film consciousness already presented. In this regard, I would like to speak frankly about my own experience. It is not an extraordinary experience, rather an ordinary, fleeting moment that arrived and left in a “flash,” but which nevertheless is an example of “subjective film consciousness.” It answers to the question “what is it like have experienced film?”

All of the “elements of film consciousness” discussed in this chapter are ultimately “ways of talking,” or should be regarded as such; ways of rendering

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 140.

an aspect of conscious reality intelligible through a particular terminology. I would like to expand on this point before presenting a personal experience. The first example (the one labeled “identity”) shows that ‘film consciousness’ refers to the totality of film-related consciousness phenomena that is regarded by an individual as being essential to identity – those film experiences which left an impression or which revealed something essential about oneself or which marked a journey toward self-definition. Annette Kuhn’s study indicated that “cinema memories” become embedded in identity and are bound to it in ways that makes them inseparable in the course of describing a past cinema event. Martin Lefebvre also offers an account of film experience that highlights this connection with identity. In defining the means through which spectators construct “figures” – a mental operation that involves creating a memory of an event – Lefebvre uses the metaphor of an “imaginary museum:”

We each possess inside us a sort of imaginary museum of the cinema where we keep the various films and film fragments that have touched us deeply or made a profound impression on us.<sup>88</sup>

The notion of “imaginary museum” therefore combines two “elements of film consciousness” discussed in this chapter: it is a “location” which contains past film experiences, or film fragments, but it is also linked with identity, because it is precisely the identity of the individual that determines which fragments

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<sup>88</sup> Lefebvre, “On Memory and Imagination in the Cinema,” 480.

retain a lasting place in the museum. Lefebvre's example is similar, if not identical in many respects, to the way Bordwell uses the term 'film consciousness' when he says that 1940s movies "loom large in my film consciousness." Even though both terms point to the same reality, Lefebvre's expression is more deliberately an "academic concept." It requires explanation and has certain rhetorical objectives in mind. On the other hand, Bordwell's usage of 'film consciousness' is presented without explanation, without quotation marks, or without drawing attention to the "conceptuality" of the formulation. It is intelligible without further explanation, and moreover, it feels "familiar." I believe this is an important fact.

With the exception of this section on conscious experience, every category of film consciousness presented in this thesis so far has been accompanied by examples drawn from everyday discourse. These have been examples, mostly, of people using the formulation 'film consciousness' in the course of describing something film-related, as with Bordwell on several occasions. They are mostly usages without a deliberate conceptual component. It is a formulation drawn from a public language, because 'consciousness' forms part of a public language, either as a standalone term, or as part of a series of known expressions, such that coming across 'film consciousness' in a passage does not raise any issues about its meaning. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, when it comes to 'consciousness' it is easier to understand than it is to explain, and

the same is true of 'film consciousness'; it is easier to understand in context than it is to explain. The fact 'film consciousness' goes unperceived as "conceptual," as in the case with Bordwell and the many other examples, is precisely one of the aspects of the formulation that is most perplexing.

This is in contrast with "imaginary museum" which is a deliberate attempt at formulating a concept, and one that would not be found in regular usage without the author clarifying the meaning. Bordwell would not use it in the same context as the above passage, unless specifying the meaning of the words, or placing it in quotation marks, as a special category of concept. The formulation 'film consciousness' is situated somewhere between the specialized, and the ordinary and familiar. It is a formulation that could be used without imagining it as ambiguous or complicated, yet it is unquestionably difficult to explain once it becomes the "center of attention." I think one of the interesting qualities of 'film consciousness' is precisely this public character; it points to a familiar place that is at the same time extremely difficult to verbalize.

Lefebvre's concept is therefore an academic representation of an idea that appears to be understood rather intuitively, which is that film experiences end up somewhere, in some sort of defined space, with a tangible impact on identity and consciousness. Where Lefebvre goes further is in studying the

means through which such a “container” of film fragments within consciousness interacts with film viewing and film interpretation. In such a model, a viewing experience entails an interaction between images already “stored” in the museum and the film images “entering” consciousness. The combination of these two sets of images (those already there and those entering) creates unique impressions, associations and relationships, which determine responses to film in the form of commentary, criticism, interpretation, feelings, and ascription of meaning.

The third example I offered of ‘film consciousness’ was that of a “faculty” of ‘film consciousness’. As with Searle and his description of the structure of consciousness, there is already a “language-game” for precisely these sorts of statements about consciousness, which render it intelligible through metaphor, in this case visual, as opposed to spatial, metaphors. Film experiences are seen as constructing an operational faculty within consciousness – “a vision,” “a gaze,” “a way of seeing,” “a perception,” and so forth. This new element of consciousness is henceforth regarded as playing a determining role in the way reality is “seen.” When Spencer Shaw defines this “vision” as ‘film consciousness’ there is once again no need to further explain how this formulation could come to mean ‘vision’. It is part of the “language of consciousness” that ‘consciousness’ can be used to mean ‘vision’ in this sense, in terms of “a new consciousness” or a “form of consciousness” that expresses



the idea of a “new way of apprehending reality” (or some equivalent expression) as result of film experiences.

All of these usages of ‘film consciousness’ are clearly different, yet each shares in common a family resemblance, through a semantic connection that creates a continuity of meaning. When ‘film consciousness’ is applied to a particular situation of analysis, to “conscious experience,” it draws from each of these meanings of ‘film consciousness,’ to create a continuous but changing perspective of the many different ways of imagining the relationship between ‘film’ and ‘consciousness,’ none of which encapsulate the totality of the experience, but which, rather, “pins down” in some logical way the phenomena under description. This “logical way” – what I refer to as “thinking in terms of ‘film consciousness’” – involves bringing to bear all of the “categories of film consciousness” into a unified description, in which the parts relate to a whole, but without discontinuities, without acknowledgment of a separation between these different conscious phenomena, regarded as one unified thing named ‘film consciousness.’ This will hopefully be made clearer with an example.

Several months ago, I was walking down an alleyway, hand in hand with my daughter, when I noticed a set of metal stairs and ladders descending from a second floor balcony. It was the sort of ladder that “slides down” in case of

emergency. The sight of these ladders seemed to trigger a moment of “overflow” that I believe is definable as “film consciousness,” or what I take it to mean at this point (since it is always evolving and changing). I point out that this example of conscious experience did not occur in a cinema or in a film-related context, such as reading a book about cinema. It took place in the middle of an ordinary day, without the slightest relation to an actual film event.

As I observed these stairs, a “flash” of “film images” entered my stream of thought. These film images shared in common that they were drawn from “alleyway chase scenes.” It was not a film scene in particular, but rather a type of scene; some images of a hand extending toward a ladder, some images of a ladder sliding down rails, some people making an escape up the ladder, other people chasing behind. There were also images of chases on the rooftops interspersed with these ladder images. The sequence of images was not necessarily in a logical temporal order. To use Searle, it had a vertical and horizontal unity; all of the images were apprehended and understood as a singular idea or conscious event. I have little idea, now, how long this conscious event lasted. It might have been a few seconds, or a split second; it also probably lasted longer than it might have normally because it became a focus of attention.

The experience of these film images was accompanied by certain thoughts. For example, I had the thought that film scenes disproportionately overrepresent the number of “alleyway-ladder-rooftop” chases that take place in reality, followed by the thought that this must be something “cinematic”, a type of scene that is particularly attractive for visual and narrative reasons. If I could segment the experience into intervals, I would say that the first part, the moment the actual ladders triggered a set of film-like images to enter my stream of thought, lasted only a few seconds. The second interval, which included these same images, in addition to the above-mentioned thoughts, was also just a few seconds long. By the time I looked forward, with my attention back toward walking down the alleyway, the second interval was nearly complete. When I think about the question, “what is it like to have experienced film?” I would say that this sort of experience answers the question, it is a particular kind of conscious experience interwoven into the day, related to past film experiences, that includes a stream of thought that not only contains film images, but is somehow presented in film-like terms, as a sort of atemporal montage. It lingers in the imagination and then disappears. It is impossible for me to determine if it has an actual impact in some domain of life, a “way of seeing” for example. Nonetheless, I would assume that every person that has experienced film has these sorts of events

in everyday life. Calling it “film consciousness” is a first step toward understanding it as an element of consciousness, as an aspect of modern life.

This interval in ordinary life can be considered from two perspectives: it can be ignored as inconsequential, or it can be taken seriously as an important element of consciousness, as something which is clearly there for reasons that are film-related and which connect with everyday experiences in spite of the absence of film itself. It is true that the experience resulted in analytical thoughts, such as remarking that alleyway chases are particularly cinematic, or that they overrepresent reality, both of which could serve as the basis of a more prolonged analysis that engages with cognitive film theory, or with an ideological perspective. But I am not speaking about this aspect of the experience; I am limiting myself to thinking about those few seconds as “something-in-itself.”

This is where the formulation ‘film consciousness’ begins to assume another function. If I start thinking about this experience in terms of ‘film consciousness’ I can start to segment the experience into pieces that make familiar sense. For example, I will ask myself where these film images come from? And I will say “film consciousness.” What I am imagining here is a place in consciousness where these film images and fragments are located. Insofar as these images appeared, and subsequently combined with thoughts about

them, which is to say, triggered a manner of thinking, and a conscious experience in relation to and through these images, I would like to say that “my film consciousness” was activated at that moment. It came into play as a faculty; it produced the film consciousness I then experienced. Finally, I certainly felt, at that moment, that this film consciousness represented a part of my identity, an unmistakable aspect of the landscapes I traverse, like the English author writing about the impact of landscapes on his consciousness. Except that in my case landscapes are not limited to physical landscapes, but also to those found in film, which are combined with landscapes of the world when film consciousness brings them into relation.

Once this sort of thinking is engaged, the thinking about a conscious event in “terms of film consciousness,” it should become clear that the event becomes evermore diffuse. It is not a question of pinpointing a single thing, a single phenomenon or moment, as “film consciousness,” but rather in regarding this wave of experience as a totality, as a feeling that this is appropriately defined as such, that includes variations and natures that draw from the meanings of ‘film consciousness’.

Of course, there seems a missing step in this process of thinking, as if it should be necessary to generalize from this example some “truth” or theory about film consciousness that is applicable broadly. However, as much as

possible, I have attempted to avoid this approach in this thesis, focusing instead on rendering the field of film consciousness visible. Rather, each category or type of film consciousness considered in this chapter, and in this thesis, is a starting point towards going further. In the case of subjective film consciousness it is obviously the most personal, but I have tried to present some of terms for coming to describe a feeling that is elusive, but, based on the preponderance of the expression 'film consciousness' obviously present within modern culture.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have attempted to follow through on two “calls for further research” from recognized film scholars. One from Jan Olsson, speaking about the need for treating early film publications as a “discursive domain,”<sup>1</sup> and the other from Murray Smith who noted that the relationship between film and consciousness constitutes an “unchartered territory.”<sup>2</sup> Developing a methodology that established a link between these two fields and which defined a “field of film consciousness” has been, I believe, another contribution to film studies. This field consists of various “categories of film consciousness,” some of which are more disposed to historiography (such as “film awareness” and “a way of existing towards film”), while others serve to identify various entities in consciousness (“place,” “identity,” “faculty,” and “conscious experience”). More globally, these categories of film consciousness each represent individual areas of research with concomitant questions and criteria, but which nevertheless exist on a continuum that the key term ‘film consciousness’ brings into constant rhetorical relation. In this regard, it follows that there is an approach defined in this thesis as “thinking in terms of film consciousness,” which involves simultaneously drawing from elements

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905 to 1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Murray Smith, “Consciousness,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film*, edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 40.

of each of these categories in order to examine the relationship between film and consciousness in a given set of data from multiple, overlapping perspectives. In this conclusion, I would like to briefly summarize the findings in each of these areas, as well explain the limitations, strengths and weakness of the argument presented.

In terms of early film publications, I have investigated and examined a range of sources and materials, mostly presented in Chapter 1, but also discussed in other chapters, that shows a “movement of consciousness” during the years between 1907 and 1912 when film trade publications first appeared. This movement of consciousness, seen as the beginnings of “film consciousness” (defined in this case as a “set of shared defining beliefs,” “a way of existing towards film,” different sorts of “film awareness,” and perhaps, even, a new of “way of seeing” cinema) is manifested in attitudes taken toward film criticism (film interpretation), changes in terminology and language-use (in the naming of film and film aesthetics, as well as in the identification of authors), a recognition of the constructedness of film (“film aesthetic awareness”), the study of audiences, and in the self-definition of the writers and film criticism institution. Some of these facts, while appearing in other studies,<sup>3</sup> receive a unified consideration in this thesis, as well as a particular perspective

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned in preceding chapters, the works of Jan Olsson, Richard Abel, and Charlie Keil, among others.



focusing on consciousness. Not all of the data appearing in these publications necessarily fits within a “trade press” explanatory model – which is to say, there was more freedom and experimentation than one might expect. Writers were engaged in a process of defining the very nature of the object of cinema as well as the place of critics and criticism within this process.

The approach adopted towards film publications has been to divide them according to regions of activity (or regions of consciousness). Consequently, it is possible to study one region based on knowledge gained from other regions, such that the overall effect is to regard each set of data as constituting, or representing, some element of consciousness that is – surprisingly – as important as the evidence that is usually taken as more salient (such as lengthier articles, or film criticism). More specifically, I divide journals into two broad areas of consciousness comprising different regions. One area of consciousness, which concerned film aesthetic awareness, includes the regions of headings, titles, articles, advertisements, and film criticism. The other area is definable as self-consciousness, and concerns the activities of critics, such as the study of audiences (which in turn provides self-knowledge), awareness of terminology, and discussions about the profession itself. Once seen from this perspective, every data point becomes relevant to the study of film consciousness, not just a particular article, or section, that is especially

striking based on surface motifs (for instance, in mentioning a key term, such as “art,” which while certainly relevant, only offers one part of the picture).

In this context, I contended as well that Janet Staiger – who has argued most strongly for a contextualized approach to the study of historical evidence – commits a methodological error that reveals an operative assumption about these publications, which is that the writers hold a “naïve consciousness.” In one example from her seminal study *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992), Staiger extrapolates a general conclusion about early film spectatorship based on a review of *The “Teddy” Bears* (Porter, 1907) that shows this naïve consciousness extends to the audience. While this conclusion was based on several logical errors, the main issue, ironically in her case, was the decontextualization of the evidence. It is because the data is assumed to be a factual representation of thinking that it is transposable to other consciousness of a similar kind (that of early film spectators, who are also imagined as naïve.) If we would not assume, for example, that Canudo’s thoughts on film are representative of the population as a whole, why then would the writings of a single author operating within a trade publication be taken as representative? The answer, I believe, is the belief of a naïve consciousness.

Thus, seeing early film publications from the perspective of film consciousness has methodological import. First, it provides a deeper and richer context for interpreting early film discourse, by interconnecting the different regions of activity. Secondly, it rehabilitates the consciousness of the writers, rendering them more complex entities engaged in an intense process of self-definition and struggling with defining the nature of cinema. Thirdly, it renders all data relevant and interesting because it now refers to a global category that encompasses it (film consciousness). Finally, it breaks from the approach to early film publications that searches for “discourse of interest” (film criticism, film as art discourse, film theory, film historiography, and so forth) severed from the broader context. Indeed, it seems important to think of film publications in terms of consciousness since each region contributes to an overall implied theory of cinema that is not fully expressed in any given region. It is useful, perhaps, to see this as “collective intentionality,” a concept that John Searle uses to define thinking or actions that contribute to a larger objective but which itself is merely an incomplete piece of the puzzle (thus, each player in a football game is engaged in executing a single action that forms part of a larger play, but none of which reveal the play).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “In addition to singular intentionality there is also collective intentionality. Obvious examples are cases where I am doing something only as part of our doing something. So if I am an offensive lineman playing in a football game, I might be blocking the defensive end, but I am blocking only as part of our executing a pass play. If I am a violinist in an orchestra I play my part in our performance of the symphony.” John Searle, *The Construction of Social*

The second field of research conceptualizes the relationship between film and consciousness according to different categories. On the whole these categories can be seen along a continuum representing an imagined field of film consciousness. I have tried to provide as much detail as possible to these categories in order to differentiate them from one another, but also to give a sense of the problems and questions that are particular to each. A further distinction was drawn between regarding the formulation as referring to a concept or analytic category, through which evidence is considered, or as referring to an existing entity (a unified, indivisible fact of the world or consciousness). These categories are “film awareness” (consisting of “film aesthetic awareness,” “film production awareness,” and “film culture awareness”), a “way of existing towards film,” and an “entity in consciousness” (in terms of “identity,” “place,” “faculty” and “conscious experience”). In developing these categories, three domains of evidence and discourse were considered.

The first domain consisted of a presentation of the issues relating to the definition of ‘consciousness’ as well as defining a “semantic field of consciousness” (presented in Chapters 2 and 3). The challenges involved in defining consciousness include the polysemic nature of the term, the different, sometimes overlapping referential contexts in which the word is meaningfully

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*Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 23.

used (consciousness studies, humanities, medical environments, and in day to day life), the resemblances it shares with other terms (mind, perception, cognition, awareness) which creates parallel discourses that are nevertheless about the same general phenomena, and most difficult of all, that no “brute facts” (as John Searle defines it) underlies consciousness. This latter fact means that consciousness is only confirmable from a first person perspective and according to David Chalmers is an irreducible element of the universe (along with time, space, and matter). As mentioned, there is the further issue that ‘consciousness’ gains different meanings in the context of compound expressions, in which the term ‘consciousness’ usually draws from multiple senses of the term, thus forming hybrid definitions.

In confronting these challenges, it made sense then to focus on the language side of the question as opposed to the phenomena side. However difficult it is to define ‘consciousness’ for the above reasons, it still remains that the word is successfully used every day. Therefore, the first order of work was to define “areas of definition” within which the ambiguity or nature of the term or phenomena is defined and debated. As Wittgenstein writes, sometimes the purpose of words is to indicate “roughly there.”<sup>5</sup> These rough areas of

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<sup>5</sup> “[Gottlob] Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything with it. But is it senseless to say: “Stand roughly there”? Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §71.

definition, each of which correspond with a category or subcategory of film consciousness, were “wakefulness,” “awareness of something,” “shared and defining beliefs,” “personal consciousness,” “global consciousness,” and “conscious experience.” These categories thus served as semantic starting points for developing the field of film consciousness.

The second set of evidence consisted of actual uses of ‘film consciousness’. As it turns out ‘film consciousness’ is an expression that is used with some frequency, both in public and academic discourse. Although the vast majority of these examples do not use the formulation as an institutional or defined concept, they nevertheless represent a sense of the way one might apply the term as well as some clues about how to define a concept. Bordwell, for instance, has used it to mean at least four different ideas – an awareness of film culture, a sense of film aesthetics, a faculty, and a place in consciousness bound to personal identity. That it keeps appearing in Bordwell’s vocabulary without formal definition is much like a Barthesian “punctum”<sup>6</sup> – it calls attention, perhaps to an area of thinking or field that is still in the process of being defined, and for which there is not yet an adequate name. Moreover, there seem to be many different contexts and situations in which it is logical, and appropriate, to name a particular thing ‘film consciousness’ or to see a

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 51.

particular phenomena from the perspective of this terminology. In labelling these different things ‘film consciousness’ and in placing them into the same basket, so to speak, an obligation is created to find the thread that connects them. Thus, the main challenge in this aspect of this thesis has been solving that puzzle – why is it that so many different phenomena are nameable as ‘film consciousness’? What binds these different phenomena together? The frequent usages of the formulation provide some of the evidence towards answering these questions.

A third set of evidence is scholarly works and discourse. These include film theorists and film scholars that have explored these questions from the perspective of their own particular conceptual framework and terminologies. Among others, extensive attention was given to Edward Branigan’s *Projecting a Camera: Language-Games in Film Theory* (in which he develops a model sometimes applied in this thesis for interpreting certain key terms as reflecting implied theories or understandings of film), various works of Francesco Casetti (in which he defines “film experience” and “film gaze”), Annette Kuhn (with her key concept of “cinema memories”), and François Albera’s notion of “cinematic episteme.” I also drew from the works of various language philosophers and writers, including Ludwig Wittgenstein (whose emphasis on ordinary language serves as a general guide), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (whose “container metaphor” and ontological metaphors” help

explain some usages of film consciousness), and many consciousness philosophers who provide insight into the “structure of consciousness” (most especially, as presented last chapter, that of John Searle who identifies at least ten features common to all conscious experience).

I would also suggest that the thesis represents itself a contribution to knowledge by showing the process through which words become academic concepts. In the Introduction I presented the different trajectories of terms but also mentioned that the trajectory of ‘film consciousness’ within this thesis should be seen, as well, as an example of a formulation (any formulation) attaining academic functionality. The approach was to regard ‘film consciousness’ as having its own ontological nature, which requires various strategies in order to interpret and begin constructing meaning, thoughts, conjectures and categories that logically followed as outcomes.

In the Introduction, I made reference to one of the quotes I most appreciate from Ludwig Wittgenstein: “If I am supposed to describe how an object looks from far off, I don’t make the description more accurate by saying what can be noticed about the object on closer inspection.”<sup>7</sup> When considering the value of this thesis from an academic but also a personal perspective, I have the sense of having studied ‘film consciousness’ from afar, as if laying out the pieces of a

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<sup>7</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §171.



puzzle in order to see the different possibilities of the formulation. I believe the value is above all in this endeavour (in the Introduction, I also cited Hayden White's approach to history, which he defines as formist, which "aims at the identification of the unique characteristics of objects inhabiting the historical field."<sup>8</sup>) However, like two sides of a coin, this approach presents some shortcomings. Perhaps the value of future research projects will be precisely in taking one of these categories and providing a "closer inspection," although I would argue that at least in terms of the way early film publications were treated, such an inspection was provided. But certainly, I see the greatest challenge this thesis overcame was in developing an approach to defining 'consciousness' and defining a formulation that appears prevalent in discourse. Thus, I see this thesis as a first step – defining the field of film consciousness – on the basis of which further research into any one of these categories is now possible. As Richard Rorty says, sometimes the purpose of inquiry is to "keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth,"<sup>9</sup> and in this regard, I believe the thesis met this objective.

More specifically, I would like to conclude by explaining why it is that 'film consciousness' is destined to remain an intriguing formulation to continue

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<sup>8</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 13-15.

<sup>9</sup> "[T]he point of edifying philosophy is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth." Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 377.

thinking about and using in research. One of its most unique features is that it is deliberately non-essential – it will vary according to any definition of consciousness that is inserted into the formulation, thus continuing to generate new categories of film consciousness. Secondly, and more subjectively, there is a difference between writing with defined terms, such as those defined in this thesis as film consciousness categories, and “thinking with terms,” which is a distinct order of experience from writing because it is shifting and impermanent (although writing with nonlinear text editors sometimes emulates that experience).

I would suggest that one of the ways in which a formulation like ‘film consciousness’ “directs the attention” is as follows. If definitions of terms are imagined as two decks of cards, one containing a set of cards with different definitions of ‘film’, and the other a deck containing cards with different definitions of ‘consciousness’, then a rational process, such as that applied in this thesis, entails taking a definition from each deck and combining them. The result, as shown, is a series of categories named ‘film consciousness’. However, this process becomes muddled in thinking. When a situation arises in which it will make sense to use ‘film consciousness’, the meaning assigned to the formulation is analogous to the “deck of cards” model, that of combining two definitions of ‘film’ and ‘consciousness’, but rather than rationally selecting individual cards from a deck of definitions, and combining them

objectively, the process is more akin to taking bits and pieces from several different cards, forming unique, transient ideas of film consciousness that make sense within very peculiar contexts. This was the case in Chapter 1 when I applied the formulation more or less “intuitively” to early film critics. In the end, the way it was used corresponds with some of the categories that were subsequently rationally devised, such as film aesthetic awareness, but there were also aspects that did not necessarily rationally follow – such as self-consciousness, or in the development of new terminologies, which nevertheless felt as if these should fit within a film consciousness concept in spite of there being no clear semantic link.

Even in writing a substantial concentration and effort is required to demarcate the different usages of ‘consciousness’ homonyms. The act of thinking with a particular formulation in mind does not necessarily provide an opportunity to demarcate homonyms clearly and conclusively, which means that the combination process entailed is less rational, drawing from a more elusive and diverse set of definitions. The result is that ‘film consciousness’ – in the way it functions in the imagination as opposed to the more external, rational construction of categories – is applied without a singular, consistent meaning. In allowing it a space within consciousness, it retains a “poetic dimension,” which pushes against boundaries of a limiting idea and which adapts to new contexts both in the way someone might define

'consciousness', but also in the particular data that will call attention to consciousness. It is a formulation, then, that should continue to capture the imagination of writers, as already shown in the many examples presented in this thesis.

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