

On the Silver Globe

Research question: “In what ways does “On the Silver Globe”
showcase film as a reflective system rather than a narrative
sequence?”

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Abstract

The main focus of the following text is to analyse the film “On the Silver Globe” based on its cognitive, rather than narrative impact. By thoroughly investigating how cinema can act as a reflexive field instead of a sequential pathway of events, placing the spectator as an active, logical consumer and defining film as a multi-faceted medium which doesn’t always follow a strict chronological foundation, the academic work proposes an outlook linked to why interpretive requirements do not exist in a vacuum and eventually leads to an answer to the research question: “In what ways does “On the Silver Globe” showcase film as a reflective system rather than a narrative sequence?”.

Introduction

The paper rigidly explores the key aspects of the movie “On the Silver Globe” (1988) directed by Andrzej Żuławski, which is an adaptation of “The Lunar Trilogy” written by Jerzy Żuławski from 1903 until 1911. The film tells a story of three astronauts - Marta, Piotr and Jerzy - who accidentally find themselves on an unoccupied planet and begin forming a brand new society. The community derives itself around primitive and barbaric behaviours, which bubble up to the surface as the explorers’ humanity slowly perishes. Once Jerzy, the man that the tribe views as a demigod, dies, the illusion of stability crumbles. As the years pass, another astronaut, Marek, is sent to the planet as a researcher. Once he finds himself amidst the inhabitants, they deem him a messiah. He plays into the role and leads the tribe towards a grand failure, which ultimately helps them realize that he’s an interloper rather than a saviour. As a result, he ends up being brutally stoned and crucified.

The academic work also examines how the film correlates to the Mind/Brain paradigm analysed in Elsaesser and Hagener’s “Film Theory”. It does so through showcasing that the spectator is constantly manipulated by the non-linear form of the plot. Due to the movie’s unorthodox timeline, as well as factors like erratic dialogue and unreliable narration, the communication between the observer and the screen is misbalanced; the viewer is unable to determine whether their role ends at surface-level observation, or rather extends beyond that and they can be deemed as active participants in the story. Additionally, the paper elaborates on how the claims made above disprove the idea that cinema’s monumental priority is to follow a strict narrative pattern and instead reveals the importance of film as a cognitive field.

Lastly, it is crucial to mention the film's interrupted production by the hand of the Polish Communist Ministry of Culture (operating from 1944-1989) in 1977. Due to the fact that the film criticized the current political climate and how it portrayed power and subversion as a dangerous tool, the director was forced to withdraw from filming. The reason might've also been that Żuławski faced previous consequences for his lack of artistic censorship.

Additionally, it has been speculated that his unconventional approach to managing actors and aggressive camera work may have interfered with the boundaries incorporated by cinematographers at that time, especially science fiction ones. When Żuławski got permission to finish his film in the late 1980s, he decided to add snippets of him strolling through Warsaw and speaking about the abrupt termination of his project in 1977. This demonstrates that the viewer is pushed towards reflection rather than pattern recognition and further connects to the point that the film isn't rooted in strict narrative progression, but instead follows a peculiar path where the spectator isn't bound to fully grasp the chronology of the story.

The relationship between cognition and film -

Anis Pervez

1.1. How can cognition be defined?

In an entry from the Bangladesh Film and Television Institute Journal, a researcher Anis Pervez defines cognition as a psychological process used to organise knowledge, rooted in various anthropoid phenomena such as: memory, perception, language, communication, etc. (Pervez, 2015, p. 581). The author also adds that cognitive theory doesn't represent the brain as a machine created solely for turning inputs into outputs, but as a sovereign network which examines the initially detected actions and forms an autonomous, composite conclusion. To paraphrase, the human mind is able to manufacture a logical deduction by relying on a multilayered web of implications.

1.2 Film as a perceiver-centered medium

Furthermore, the journal explores how film becomes a source of substance and significance only after the spectator themselves assigns a certain value to it (Pervez, p. 589). This means that the viewer is able to interpret a fragment of a movie through a wide variety of concepts at their disposition and hence decide how the final rationalisation constructs their perception. Only after that process is completed are we able to truly tell how impactful the film is.

The Brain Paradigm - “Film Theory”

2.1 The role of film as Mind/Brain + censorship

The book brought forth by Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener in 2009 called: “Film Theory”, delves into how cinema can be examined by relating it to the human brain. The way the authors view it, film isn’t just a way of artistic expression, but it could also be recognized as a cognitive mechanism. What that roughly demonstrates, according to Elsaesser and Hagener, is that cinema is significantly less simplistic than most individuals might deem, since the impact of a film doesn’t dissolve once it has been consumed, but it evolves into a larger receptive network (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2009, p. 151). The interpretation of a cinematic work isn’t bound by time limitations and its rationalisation is a process which affects the identity, consciousness, and, in isolated cases, even the morality of the spectator. A conclusion drawn from a film becomes a part of self and affects the mind by which it has been dissected.

If we look at film from that particular perspective, certain aspects of it become more discernible, one of these aspects being censorship. The authors state that in the case where a film is banned or the access to it is strictly controlled, its content might be viewed as staggering enough to cause a distress amongst society or become weaponised against the easily influenced (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2009, p. 151).

While this is true, the rationalisation of ideological ramifications doesn't necessarily have to relate to propaganda. In certain scenarios, a film is censored simply because its criticism of the mass' view becomes uncomfortable to those in power, which ultimately means that its impact, and therefore further societal conceptualisation, would make way for commonly distributed disruption. This point therefore showcases that cinema isn't just influential enough to ignite thorough evaluation amongst the receivers, many of which wouldn't have access to it otherwise, it also represents the human brain as a tool which can distinguish between the good and the evil by perceiving art through a lens of logic and rationality rather than sheer emotion.

2.2 The manifestation of cinema as an extension of the mind

In Elsaesser and Hagener's "Film Theory", the authors introduce us to the idea further analysed by Eisenstein, where a cinematic sequence disattaches itself from its physical form and therefore becomes a metaphorical tool (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2009, p. 151). Eisenstein claims that a shot's final impact isn't rooted in its initial visual perception, but rather emerges through an accumulation of previously gathered stimuli and evolves into a broad and definitive conclusion within the spectator's mind (p. 152). This essentially means that the viewer's brain isn't a passive receiver, but an active contributor to how the visual/perceptual sphere becomes conceptualised.

Based on the information provided above, it is easy to interpret film as a ground of extensive reflection. The way the scenes are presented in a seemingly chaotic, pattern-less order, may actually be an indication of a deeper meaning, which the viewer is allowed to discover only after their brain filters out surface level stimulants and transforms them into a well-structured conclusion. For instance, a montage of a character's suffering encapsulated through hectic sounds and hostile camera movements might not entice the spectator at first, however it can later become a decisive link between initial perception and lead towards rationalisation. The observer will not instantly grasp the full scope of the scene, but once they overcome the initial shock/confusion connected to it, their mind will transfigure its alleged barbarity into a complex web of reflexive deductions.

2.3 Deleuze's idea of a movement-image

The book "Film Theory" introduces another crucial concept within the chapter which describes cinema as Mind/Brain. According to Gilles Deleuze, images can be divided into two subtypes: movement-image as well as time-image (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2009, p. 159). The movement-image concept claims that a character's human body is the epicentre of actions/feelings, often extremely violent ones, which form the spectator's perception and act as a catalyst for how they interpret specific situations (p. 159). As a character is pushed to experience emotions through the power of manoeuvres/gestures rather than verbalisation, the spectator understands that perception is communicated through actions, but that these actions are also rooted in that perception. This phenomenon is recognized as a sensory-motor chain, which ultimately states that the character's movements and reactions immensely affect how a given situation is processed and vice versa. It's vital to note that in this scenario, it isn't just the observer who perceives the character's bodily mechanics and forms a perception about them; it's also the character themselves acting accordingly to how they interpret their state.

Additionally, according to this theory, timing throughout a movie is subdued by its motion, therefore it cannot be defined with utmost precision. This matter poses yet another interesting point, which defines time as non-sequential and chronology as subsidiary. Since according to the movement-image concept, motion is seen as the dominant aspect of film, even shots such as flashbacks, memories, hallucinations or dreams, which might seem unfathomable and strike the spectator as odd time-wise, fit perfectly into a field of perception built on the basis of mobility. Essentially, movement is its own form of analysis and time, while helpful, isn't required to be taken under rigid consideration in this case.

“On the Silver Globe” as a cognitive field

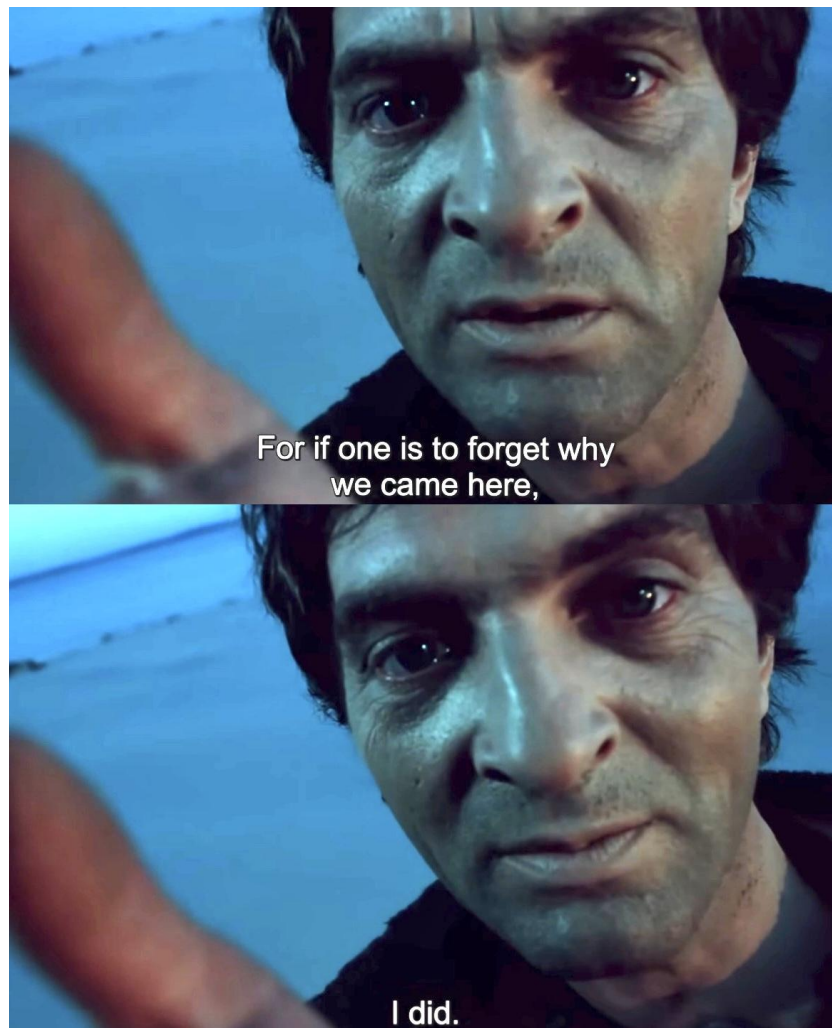
3.1. The spectator’s role throughout the film

Whilst analysing the film: “On the Silver Globe”, it is absolutely critical to mention its approach to the viewer; how they’re treated, what they perceive, why their brain becomes an active participant.

Most importantly, the line between the spectatorial and narrative sphere becomes disrupted multiple times throughout the film. For instance, a major part of the plot includes hand-held camera footage, which is supposed to represent the lost researchers’ video entries after their ship crashes on the uninhabited planet. This part of the cinematic work could be categorized as a narrative tool and not as an opportunity at drawing cogent conclusions if it weren’t for a key factor: language.

The reason why language triggers a cognitive reaction is due to the fact that Jerzy, the character who records the tapes, seems to address not only the other researchers remaining on Earth who are supposed to retrieve these video materials, but also seems to view himself, other astronauts and the spectator as a collective. His words are meant to reach both the characters within the story itself and the onlooker.

A quote serving as an example of my previous point would be: “For if one is to forget why we came here, I did”. This type of ambiguous language used by the man pushes the viewer to their cognitive limits, since it starts off by describing a single individual, yet somehow ends up referring to multiple human beings. In short, Jerzy’s character appeals to the spectator’s brain as opposed to other receptors because we aren’t able to decipher what he means by using only our eyes or ears; the final output has to be preserved through a process of careful logical inspection, which can be granted only by the human mind.



Żuławski, A. (Director), (1988), *On the Silver Globe* (1988), 00:28:29

3.2. Splintered chronology

Another major component which makes “On the Silver Globe” a perfect fit into the Mind/Brain paradigm is the fact that its chronology is demanding, if not nearly impossible to decipher at times. While the film operates on a fairly standard timeline during its initial stage, it later develops into a non-sequential and enigmatic plethora of actions, some of which the spectator is supposed to treat more like an interpretive challenge rather than a concise, narrative-driven story.

The main indicator of that is the way that the film incorporates various styles of shots. The movie is an array of scenes such as: handheld video diaries (as mentioned prior), monologues and time skips. Even though most films use these tools as a way of establishing a stable storyline, “On the Silver Globe” heads towards a path of challenging the spectator into a more demanding way of thinking. Once all of the styles listed above are thrown together into a giant melting pot of perplexity, the viewer doesn’t have another choice but to observe and rationalise. The film does not just bewilder the receiver; it uses blatantly dissimilar editing techniques to put together a montage without an effortless ground for interpretation and therefore pressurizes the watcher to contemplate.

Whilst these factors aren't definitive criteria connected to the disarrangement of time, "On the Silver Globe" is characterised by hectic montage and a lack of a solid chronological background, which suggests that the film isn't meant to be examined from the perspective of a specific time frame. It does not follow a harsh, time-based order and its essence doesn't rely on how thoroughly the chain of events is built. This proves that cognition doesn't require a firm, chronology-based background to be activated. Furthermore, it showcases that cinema can reject a common sequential pattern and still remain a strong source of logical interpretation.

3.3. Movement as a tool of rationale

The final concept which classifies Żuławski's creation as a reflective system is the motion and dynamics he uses in order to peak the spectator's analytical interest. "On the Silver Globe" is often referred to as a unique encapsulation of the science fiction genre, one of the primary reasons being how hectic the acting is, which is considered unusual for this particular category of cinema (Birkholc, 2019).

The acting incorporated into the film places the characters in an evidently constant state of hysterics, which isn't just visible through their facial expressions, but mostly noticeable due to their excessive body language. The movements seem almost grotesque with how violent and chaotic they appear. These motions often include: twitching, shaking, nodding and crawling. If we consider the human body as the center of motion and the mind as the center of rationalisation, we are able to state that the way in which the character expresses their movements is simultaneously their personal interpretation and conceptualisation of a situation they find themselves in. That is to say, a movement isn't necessarily an emotionally charged reaction, but it can also be seen as a process of contemplation embedded into our brains which causes a motor response.

This point correlates to the previously mentioned idea of the sensory-motor chain, since the spectator isn't just witnessing how a character reacts in a specific situation, they observe the process which leads to their personal rationalisation of it as well. Additionally, a character's demeanor allows the viewer to further assess their gestures, not as a form of emotional expression, but rather as an extensive process of discovering the truth and coming to terms with it.

Conclusion

To conclude, “On the Silver Globe” demonstrates film as a reflexive system since its striking lack of chronology, unique editing choices, hectic acting, cultural background, use of language and the spectator’s active participation in its rationalisation veers away from the standard configuration of cinematic patterns where narrative continuity and chronological correspondence often dominates the hierarchy. Żuławski’s work aims to push the watcher to their cognitive limit and builds a perfect environment for an analysis rooted in logic or a lack thereof. The spectator’s mind becomes an active receiver, but instead of being pushed onto a previously established path of reflection, they absorb the main components of a cinematic work and form an independent perspective characterised by logic and amplified by the art of deduction.

Declaration of originality

I hereby declare that I produced the course work independently and that I have not submitted it in any other module.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored, textured background. The signature is stylized, starting with a large 'N' followed by a 'p' and a large loop.

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