

Film and the Transcendental Imagination: Kant and Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* From, *Imagination, Philosophy, and the Arts*, ed. Dominic Lopes and Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 2003). pp. 245-258

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Cinema... is able to record time in outward and visible signs, recognizable to the feelings. And so time becomes the very foundation of cinema as sound is in music, color in painting, character in drama.

Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*

Recently, in philosophical analyses of film, there has been much discussion of the imagination. Philosophers, such as Richard Allen, Gregory Curry and Murray Smith, all make use of a theory of the imagination to explain, in varying ways, our relation to the objects depicted in moving pictures projected onto a screen. These philosophical approaches tend to refer to findings from cognitive psychology and are often presented as alternatives to psychoanalytic approaches to film in which the film is supposed to be an 'imaginary signifier' that acts as the viewer's unconscious.

The imagination does seem to be a handy term for explaining how the mind works when we

watch a film since it connotes a faculty we use when we relate to objects not as they are in themselves, but as images that provoke our fancy and require an aesthetic stance. However, although references to the imagination as what enables us to put ourselves in the place of another (Smith 1997), or as what enables us to think that we are seeing something real (Allen 1997), or as the unconscious faculty that is put into play when experiencing a film, do in fact articulate functions of a particular form of cognition, these uses of the imagination are not specific to watching films. Our capability to put ourselves in the place of another or to have our unconscious put into play is what makes fiction in general effective, and our ability to imagine seeing something is also used in painting and photography.

There is, however, a theory of the imagination that can explain the particular way the mind works with regard to the moving image. This is Kant's theory of the transcendental imagination in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Unlike the theories used by contemporary philosophers of film, Kant's theory has the distinction of describing the imagination as the faculty that determines time. Even more strictly than music, film requires the control of time. A certain film will always take the same time, and although what a viewer sees in a shot can vary, how long the viewer looks at the shot cannot. Nor can the order in which the shots are seen. A film exists *only* in a fixed form of time. This is different from other art forms, all of which can be coherently presented in different amounts of time. Since what is essential to film is its control of time and this is one of the factors that distinguishes it from other art forms, Kant's theory of the imagination is well suited to explain what is specific to the experience produced by film.

I believe that Kant's theory of the imagination can be used as an alternative to both

psychological and psychoanalytic theories of film. Such a way of understanding film is desirable since it enables us to describe the objective properties of cinema that create meaning regardless of any psychology the viewer may or may not possess. Kant's theory of the imagination can do this because it considers the imagination to be a *transcendental* faculty of the mind. By 'transcendental,' Kant means an *a priori* faculty of the mind that makes cognition possible. For Kant, if experience is to be possible at all, we *must* possess those transcendental faculties that provide the basis for this possibility. What is transcendental is therefore a necessary constituent of experience. It is contrasted with what is empirical or psychological in our experience and hence merely contingent. Kant articulates this distinction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. He writes,

The imagination is...a faculty for determining the sensibility *a priori*...in accordance with the categories....Now insofar as the imagination is spontaneity, I also occasionally call it the productive imagination, and thereby distinguish it from the reproductive imagination, whose synthesis is subject solely to empirical laws, namely those of association, and therefore contributes nothing to the explanation of the possibility of cognition *a priori*, and on that account belongs not in transcendental philosophy but in psychology (Kant 1997: B152).

The 'productive,' or transcendental imagination for Kant is thus what makes possible our sensible experience in the first place. It does this by creating, in accordance with the *a priori* rules, or categories, of thought, the original temporal forms that structure experience. It is not the faculty we use when we happen to make certain associations between the various

sensations we receive. That faculty is what Kant calls the empirical, or reproductive, imagination.

In this paper, I argue that by looking at film with regard to Kant's theory of the transcendental imagination we can explain our meaningful experience of film as what is made possible by specific temporal forms. In order to do this, I will have to show that unlike in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the imagination is guided by the 'categories,' *a priori* rules for the construction of the objects of our knowledge, in the case of film, the imagination is guided by different rules that make possible our experience of the particular objects of film. In what follows, I first explain Kant's theory of the imagination and how it accounts for the possibility of film as a form of art. I then use Alfred Hitchcock's film, *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), as an example of the imagination at work in constructing a film by focusing on some of the temporal forms that are present in the film; music, suspense and metaphor. I conclude with some brief comments concerning the role of the transcendental imagination with regard to historical time and the possibility of interpreting film with regard to its historical context.

KANT'S THEORY OF THE IMAGINATION

Suppose you are a film editor and you find on your editing table two separate frames. One is of a ship upstream. The other is of the same ship downstream. In what order do you splice these frames together? This, of course, is Kant's famous example from the *Critique of Pure Reason* where he argues against Hume's skepticism about the existence of causal relations. For the

skeptical Hume, “all events seem entirely loose and separate;” as if they were pieces of film randomly spliced together. “They seem conjoined, but never connected” (Hume 1993: 49). Kant wants to argue that there are necessary connections and causal relations in our experience, and that Hume is wrong. Kant’s point is that for it to be possible to have any experience at all, for things even to seem conjoined to us, they must first be organized by forms of thought that are necessary and *a priori*. So Hume, in Kant’s view, just by saying that he has experience of events in the first place, has in fact already presupposed the necessary connection in these events.

Experience must take place in time. For Kant, representations must first be arranged in time, or given a temporal form, in order to constitute a coherent experience. It is the imagination in its transcendental function that provides us with the original forms of time that make possible a unified experience out of the haphazard impressions our senses receive. Kant explains the workings of the imagination in the following passage,

Now it is obvious that if I draw a line in thought, or think of the time from one noon to the next, or even want to represent a certain number to myself, I must necessarily first grasp one of these manifold representations after another in my thoughts. But if I were always to lose the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the preceding parts of time, or the successively represented units) from my thoughts and not reproduce them when I proceed to the following ones, then no whole representation and none of the previously mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most fundamental representations of space and time, could ever arise

(Kant 1997: A102).

For Kant, our sense impressions of the outside world are isolated perceptions, appearing to the mind one after the other. It is as if our mind were a camera taking successive snapshots. Kant argues that if there is no additional mental faculty to retain these snapshots and reproduce them next to the current one, for all we would know, we would be seeing the same thing over and over; the same point, for example, and never see that it was part of a line. We would have just one representation before the mind and not be able to think something about it and consider it as a part of a coherent object or event.

Kant describes the imagination as the “faculty for representing an object even without its presence in intuition” (Kant 1997: B151). It is thus what enables us to recall or reproduce a representation and place it next to the present one so that we can construct a whole object out of many successively apprehended perceptions. In order for it to be possible to make these coherent objects, the imagination, in its transcendental function, must first create a figure or ‘schema’ of time in which representations must be placed in order to be thought of as connected in the first place. It does this in accordance with the basic rules, or *a priori* categories, of thought. Take, for example, Kant’s schema of time for the category of causality. What must time be like, in order for someone to be able to make the judgment, ‘if I do one thing, then something else will happen?’ Kant’s answer is that time must be viewed as successive. So succession is the schema of time according to the category of causality. Or, what must time be like in order to make the judgment that something is a substance that remains when its contingent attributes change? Time must be viewed as persisting. Thus persistence is

the schema of time according to the category of substance (Kant 1997: A137/B176-A147/B187). Kant's point against Hume is that if we are to perceive a succession of events, if, for example, we are to order our representations successively in time so that the ship downstream comes after the ship upstream, this can only be done under the guidance of the rule of cause and effect. Thus, against Hume, there must be a necessary connection, or rule, governing the events we experience or else we would not be able to experience them as temporal events, or experience them at all, in the first place. The imagination is thus what creates the unified temporal forms in which experience is possible.

A KANTIAN THEORY OF FILM

I will now argue that films can be seen as products of the imagination, understood in the Kantian sense – as a series of representations that are organized in time according to rules. By looking at film in this way I want to show how temporal forms make possible the meaningful images that occur in film. The imagination that I am referring to is not the particular imagination of the viewer who watches, or receives, the film. Indeed, Kant calls the transcendental imagination 'productive,' since it is what *produces* a unified appearance, or image, in a specific schema of time (Kant 1997: A123). Nor is it the particular, subjective, imagination of whomever makes the film. Along with Kant, I am not referring to a form of the imagination that is part of our subjective psychology, what, in the commonplace sense of the word, creates our whimsical fantasies. I therefore do not mean what Dr. Hartz, in *The Lady Vanishes*, means by the word when he says that Iris must be imagining things. Instead it is a universal ability that works according to rules in order to make any temporal experience possible.

But, someone might object: when the imagination is guided by rules, for Kant, this is in order to create coherent objects of knowledge, and hence avoid Humean skepticism. But here we are not considering film as an object of knowledge, but as a form of art. According to Kant, only when the imagination is *free* from guidance by rules and is at play, does it have an aesthetic relation to an object. It is thus incorrect to refer to rules of the imagination when trying to explain our aesthetic relation to an object (Kant 2000: 241). My response to this is that what I want to show, with regard to film, is that there can in fact be rules to this play that are different from the rules of thought that Kant explicates in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In this way, my understanding of film with regard to Kant's theory of the imagination is consistent with Kant's view of the imagination in both the first and third *Critiques*. In fact, in the third *Critique*, Kant never says that the imagination acts in an irregular or arbitrary manner when it is involved in producing a judgment of taste. He states only that the imagination is not subject to the particular rules of the understanding, as it is in the first *Critique* where the categories determine how the imagination is to schematize time. Thus Kant writes that, in a judgment of taste, the imagination is "free and yet lawful by itself" and "lawful without a law" (Kant 2000: 241). However, despite the fact that (or rather because) Kant's theory of aesthetic judgment does not include a theory of time, it is worthwhile to ask what schemas of time the imagination would create in its freedom from the laws of the understanding. The answer to this question, I suggest, would be a Kantian theory of film; a theory of the forms of time created by the imagination according to rules other than those articulated in Kant's theory of knowledge. What follows should therefore be understood not only as an application of Kant's philosophy to the study of film, but also as an interpretation of Kant that addresses the question of the nature of time in his aesthetic theory.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant's notion of experience is restricted by a particular conception of time. This is time as what can be represented by a continuous straight line (Kant 1997: B154, A169/B212). For Kant, therefore, time cannot be suspended, nor can different moments of time, each of which are defined by the distinct representations they contain, overlap (cf Kant 1997: A99). But perhaps, with regard to the experience presented in a cinematic work of art, there are *a priori* concepts *other* than the categories that guide the imagination to create other images of time *in addition* to those that Kant lists in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. These could be categories that make open, interrogative judgments or metaphorical judgments possible, for example. The form of time in which interrogative judgments would be possible would be one in which time is suspended; the 'line' of time is broken and a moment is left hanging in isolation. The form of time in which a metaphorical judgment would be possible, such as one that states that the wheels of a train are the wheels of thought, would be one in which two moments of time overlap in order to construct a new object different from what is represented in each moment.

Such filmic schemas of time are revealed during those moments in a film when the Kantian cognitive form of the imagination is in a crisis with regard to the regular line of time and the standard rules of thought. The imagination is unable to follow the normative rules of thought in order to construct the figure of a recognizable real object. Free from these rules, however, the imagination comes up with forms of its own. As with many of Hitchcock's films, *The Lady Vanishes* highlights and comments on problems specific to the medium of film itself. I believe that this film can be understood to be commenting on the very problems that can arise with

regard to the cognitive function of the imagination. The resolution of such problems is indicated within the *form* of the film medium itself. In my discussion of *The Lady Vanishes*, I will therefore refer to the drama that is presented in the film to illustrate the philosophical problems related to the imagination. It should be kept in mind, however, that I am using this film as an example of general processes that are at work in all movies. These are the processes by which imaginative forms of time make it possible for film to have meaning in the first place.

I should also note that, although discussions of time in film are usually analyses of film narrative, this is not my concern here. A narrative is “a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (Bordwell and Thompson 1990: 55). The study of narrative in film involves figuring out how the images presented on the screen in a certain order work to tell a story whose content often must be inferred from these images. In this way, the study of narrative is about time because it concerns how the events that happen on screen in a certain order and length of time can represent or refer to events that happen in a different order and duration of time. The study of narrative in film therefore considers film with regard to how it represents time. In my discussion of time in film, however, I am not concerned with the representation of temporal order and duration, but with how particular forms of time in film can create objects or events that have certain aesthetic properties that produce meaning such as the abstract or explicit meanings, symbolic or implicit meanings, or symptomatic or repressed meanings, with which an event is attributed (Bordwell 1989: 8-9). To the extent that most films are narrative films, the forms of time that I am discussing will occur in narrative films.

Nevertheless, I am not discussing the forms of time that make the chain of events in a narrative possible, but those that make these events capable of providing us with aesthetic experience.

The following analysis of *The Lady Vanishes* will not be quite a ‘transcendental deduction’ of the categories that ground temporal forms in film. But it will show that underlying both our experience of suspense and the jarring and intensified experience of unusual metaphoric images in film, there are particular temporal forms that make these experiences possible.

THE LADY VANISHES

The Lady Vanishes is the story of Iris Henderson who meets Miss Froy, an old governess and music teacher, at a Tyrolean inn and shares a train with her on the way to London. When Iris wakes up from a nap, her companion has vanished. No one on the train seems to have witnessed Miss Froy. A brain surgeon on the train, Dr. Hartz, tries to convince Iris that she is “imagining things” due to having been knocked on the head at the train station by a falling flowerpot. Finally, Iris receives support from the charming yet flip Gilbert, a musicologist, and together they discover that Miss Froy is concealed under bandages as Dr. Hartz’s patient. Miss Froy reveals to Iris and Gilbert that she is a spy trying to smuggle back to London the secret clause of a treaty encoded in a piece of music. She entrusts this tune to Gilbert in case anything should happen to her, but ultimately she makes it safely back to London.

This film is about memory and time. The main action of the film, which takes place on a train, is framed by scenes that involve music, especially the tune that is the secret code. In these scenes, music, which according to Kant expresses not concepts, but “aesthetic ideas of a coherent whole of an unutterable fullness of thought” (Kant 2000: 329), presents a challenge to

the Kantian view of imagination and memory. For Kant, the transcendental imagination has to do with placing mental representations in a temporal order according to rules, not with rhythm and harmony, the variations in duration in which representations occur in time. How, then, does one commit something to memory for which there is no original concept, or code, by means of which one can recall it again for later use? At the beginning of the film, we see Miss Froy at her window in the Tyrolean inn trying to memorize the tune played below by tapping her hand at regular intervals and thus submitting the tune to the measure of time, encoding each moment with a phrase of notes and abstracting the general rhythm of the melody, so that the imagination will have a rule by which to recall this piece of music. But even this is difficult, since other music is being played at the same time in the room above. In *The Lady Vanishes*, not only is there a code in the music within the film, but the code, or rule of the film itself, is music. Indeed, the connection between time and music is illustrated at the beginning of the film by the singing cuckoo clock. By placing the code of the secret treaty in music, the film indicates that it is possible to have rules embedded in the play of time. This can be seen in film's capacity to play with the regular structure of time and still have these irregular forms of time have meaning and not be mere arbitrary fantasy. Such rhythms are produced by the varying lengths of time in which images are shown on the screen as well as the inter-cutting or repetition of images. Such rhythm does not necessarily relate the events in a story, but it does indicate the degree of tension and significance with which shots are to be attributed.

In the final scene of *The Lady Vanishes*, in the government office in London, Gilbert is unable to remember the tune because he presently has another in his mind – the wedding march, since he and Iris have just become engaged. Here, the problem concerns how to recall something

when something else is already occupying one's mental attention. This is a problem that Kant's theory of the imagination is unable to handle. For Kant, the imagination serves to combine different representations into a unified object. But two songs cannot be so combined, one thinks of one or the other. For Kant, the imagination cannot superimpose one form of unity upon another – especially one temporal structure, such as a song, upon another song. Hence it is impossible for Gilbert to recall one tune with another already in his mind. Gilbert panics, his imagination is in crisis, but the tension is resolved when the tune is heard in the background (mirroring the beginning of the film in which the music plays over the opening credits) and Gilbert discovers that Miss Froy has made it safely back to London and that it is she who is playing the tune in the next room. This tune carries over to the final credits of the film, indicating that film, as a form that can play with time as can music, can resolve crises that occur when the imagination works with a straight line of time.

Bounded by the scenes with music is the train ride during which most of the film takes place. The train is like the strip of film and the train of thought. These require respectively tracks, gates, or the intuition of time for their movement. Just as, in Kant's philosophy, our experience is limited by the linear form of time, the movement of a train is limited by the tracks on which it runs, and a film is limited by the strip of celluloid that runs through the projector. In *The Lady Vanishes*, the train is made to represent the destructiveness of the passage of time and the fragility of memory. As what hurtles towards its end without stopping or taking the time to recollect anything it might have left behind, the train becomes the vehicle that makes it possible for Miss Froy to vanish into the past, and persist only in Iris's memory. As what must be kept on time, the train is what ensures that Iris's recollection of Miss Froy not be verified; the

British cricket fans lie and say they never saw Miss Froy in order to prevent a delay of the train. And, as the passage of time in general, the train represents what makes Miss Froy forgettable to the passengers on the train, her gray old age.

How does the film *The Lady Vanishes* work within the limits set by the line of time on which each moment must ever recede into the past? In fact, it is only on the train that Iris's problems occur. Miss Froy vanishes. Is Iris's memory of Miss Froy of a real object, or of a subjective fantasy? How is it possible to decide one way or the other? Indeed, it is hard to know whether an isolated representation of something is real or not when it is not connected with anything else in one's experience. One can only know whether what one remembers is real if it can be connected with something else. According to Kant, this connection is achieved when the imagination connects representations according to a rule. For Iris, her experience of Miss Froy is isolated – especially since no one whom she asks seems to have shared her experience. This puts her in a state of great agitation as she strives to connect her memory of Miss Froy with something present – hopefully Miss Froy herself. Here, again, the film reveals a crisis of the imagination. Just as the trees that the train passes by recede irretrievably into the background, and the earlier scenes of the film are irretrievably wound back up on the film reel, what was once present on the train is now gone. Without the imagination to recall this image and guarantee its persistence in time, and hence the substantiality of Miss Froy, her reality is in doubt and is assumed by others to be a product of Iris's fantasy or particular subjective imagining. Iris becomes an easy subject for the dubious psychoanalytic theories of the evil Dr. Hartz. Similarly, since there is no real object that persists 'behind' the fleeting objects projected onto the screen, the way one recalls past shots is subject to the play of the imagination. A film

must therefore have its own rules for making its images memorable so that they persist as significant for the film even when they are no longer present on the screen. Hitchcock excelled at this with his creation of MacGuffins. These are ordinary objects endowed with vital importance within the film often by means of visual tricks, such as illuminating the glass of milk in *Suspicion*, but also by means of having the camera actually linger just a second longer on such objects, as with the money in the newspaper in *Psycho* or even the playing of the tune in *The Lady Vanishes* (Truffaut 1984: 138, 143).

In Iris's search for evidence that would confirm the objectivity of Miss Froy, her imagination gropes to find some representation that could be connected with what she remembers. It is this searching of the imagination that ultimately makes the film suspenseful. But the film becomes suspenseful only to the viewers. The characters in the film are merely in a state of agitation. This points to the difference between the story narrated by the film and the temporal forms created by the film. It is only when the images in the film are displayed in a particular way to the viewer that they become suspenseful. I believe that *The Lady Vanishes* becomes suspenseful at a very specific moment. This is when a representation of Miss Froy appears on the screen and we are waiting for Iris and Gilbert to become conscious of it. This representation is Miss Froy's name, which she had previously spelled out for Iris in the condensation on the train window. Seeing this now would surely prove that Iris's memory is correct. What makes this scene suspenseful is the typically Hitchcockian element of suspense. The audience knows something that the characters in the film do not know, but that they would want to know, once such a fact became available. The experience of suspense, which takes the form of the future interrogative judgment, 'will they see the writing?' requires that this object of suspense be

taken out of, or suspended from, the regular line of time, and hover just above it. However, the question is not merely 'will they see the writing?' but 'will they see it *in time*?' before their meal is finished and they leave the dining carriage. The suspenseful object is thus determined as something that exists in a rapidly contracting form of time. Suspense is therefore the 'bending' of time by the imagination as it strives to connect an event that it represents as occurring in the future with one that is represented as present. The suspension of the object is due to its being seized from its context of significance which is in the future and made to hover over the present, thus contracting the line of time. Even if the suspenseful object is one of dread, like a bomb under the table that is about to go off, but which one hopes will be deactivated, suspense still takes the same form of an imagined future event.

Noël Carroll has defined suspense, as I have, with regard to a film's setting up a question whose answer is anticipated. But in order to distinguish suspense from mere anticipation, Carroll explains that the suspenseful situation has psychological urgency, and this is because the outcome of the anticipated event has moral value. According to Carroll, suspense occurs either when evil is the likely outcome of a situation or when what is morally good is the unlikely outcome of a situation (Carroll 1996a: 101). Perhaps this is right, although there are quite a few counterexamples to Carroll's theory (cf. Knight and McKnight 1999: 107-123). My aim, however, is to emphasize the temporal form of suspense, which Carroll does not, but, incidentally, Hitchcock did, as the necessary condition that makes possible any psychological attitude towards the film that might also result.

Suspense is what happens when the imagination tries to create a form of time in which an event

can happen sooner, by imagining a future object or event and trying to connect it with the present one. In the case of the bomb that is expected to go off, suspense is felt not with regard to the bomb's explosion, but with regard to the actions that would prevent the explosion, which are hoped to happen very soon. What is the schema of time created by the imagination that makes it possible for such a suspended object to be thought? This would have to be a form of time that makes the future hover over the present. In such a form of time two different moments would exist next to each other, but not be continuous. Not only does Hitchcock achieve this temporal form by means of his presentation of shots; he also represents this form with a spatial image within a shot by having the word 'Froy' appear from above as Gilbert pulls down the window. It then hovers between Gilbert and Iris as they flirt. For the whole scene, this object, even, and especially, when it is not pictured on the screen, is associated with the anticipation that both Gilbert and Iris will notice it. The climax, when Iris finally notices the writing, is a highly compressed moment of suspense. The word disappears and appears again on the window, as if it is not written on the train and moving along with it, but as if it were impressed on it from outside. This represents the attempt to impose onto the present a time outside of the regular flow of time. The train and the straight line of time prevail, however, and the writing disappears when the temperature changes as the train moves through the tunnel. The imagination has failed to present to Iris the object of her memory. Nevertheless, hope does arrive in the next scene when the cook throws garbage from the train. The tea carton that Miss Froy had previously given to a waiter, and that Iris has mentioned to Gilbert, falls back upon the window. The smudge that remains signifies that a connection has actually been made, and Gilbert is convinced that Iris is telling the truth.

Another form of time that occurs in film and that indicates that the imagination is working free from the rules that Kant presents in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is what I will call film metaphor. A metaphor can be generally defined as the transference of one concept onto another in order to create a new concept or to transform one by means of the other. Along with Noël Carroll, I understand a ‘film metaphor’ to be what occurs when disparate elements “are visually incorporated or amalgamated into one spatially bounded homogeneous entity. Elements are fused into a composite, but nevertheless self-identifiable, construct thereby visually indicating that these elements are elements of the same entity” (Carroll 1996a: 213). If we see film as the product of the imagination in the Kantian sense by means of which representations are placed in a temporal order according to rules in order to produce a coherent form of experience, then filmic metaphors are those in which a representation is superimposed upon another in order to alter experience. The form of time here is one in which the past overlaps with the present. After Iris has accepted defeat in her attempt to prove the existence of Miss Froy and slumps in her seat in resignation, the train compartment becomes suffused with the remembered image of Miss Froy. The image of Miss Froy merges with that of each passenger in the compartment. Miss Froy *is* the contents of the train. Indeed, she is also the content of the film. She is an image isolated on the track of time and hence left behind – as the train in the film itself is left behind when Dr. Hartz severs the compartments. Like film itself, which does not necessarily represent any real object, the concept of Miss Froy within the film cannot be connected with any single real object. Hence, her image can be projected onto *anything*. The crisis of the imagination that occurs when what I am calling a filmic metaphor is produced, happens when the imagination tries to recall something for which there is no complete schema, or rule, for recollection. Indeed, when Iris does produce a schema of Miss Froy by stating her physical

characteristics; her oatmeal suit, her blue scarf, etc., the image that is presented to her is still not the real Miss Froy, but Miss Kummel instead. In such situations where there is no complete rule by means of which we can recall what we want (or even really know what we want to recall in the first place), the imagination can only think of this particular thing *as* something else, by connecting it with something it in some way resembles. The overlapping, or metaphor, that results, is then also unique. It is the only way this memory can be articulated. The rule for this attachment of one image to another is thus not that of the concept of the object. Instead it is the *reason* for why the object is memorable in the first place (cf. Kant 2000: 352). Miss Froy is memorable precisely because the memory of her is so dubious and fleeting. She is thus recalled as part of the train. As the schema for suspense is the temporal form of a future suspended over the present, so the schema of film metaphor is the present suffused with the past.

HISTORICAL TIME

Another form of time that is presented in film is historical time. Indeed, often the reason why a film is memorable is its relation to historical events. What makes something memorable is how it is marked by the form of time in which it first becomes a possible object of thought. For Kant, the rules for constructing an object in time are indeed the same rules for remembering the object. We remember empirical objects because we have attained concepts of them by means of the basic categories of thought, which are the rules that guide the transcendental imagination in constructing an object in time. I have argued that images that appear in film are memorable because they are made to stand out from, or disrupt, the regular flow of time that one

experiences when watching a film. But moments in a film, or even the entire film itself, can also be memorable with respect to how it appears with regard to the background of the historical moment in which it was made. Again, I will use *The Lady Vanishes* as my example. *The Lady Vanishes* was made in 1937 and released in 1938. 1937 was the year in which Chamberlain met with Hitler in Munich and agreed that Germany would occupy the Sudetenland. The film in which Iris struggles to get help for the vanished Miss Froy can easily be interpreted as an argument for British involvement in international affairs. The film begins with an avalanche, which alludes to Chamberlain's speech in 1937 in which he warned that an "incautious move or loud exclamation may lead to an avalanche" (Fuchser 1982: 81). The 'pacifist' in the film has the ominous name of Todhunter (death hunter in German). Headlines referring to the cricket match read 'England on the brink,' and the connotation is clear. *The Lady Vanishes* can thus be interpreted as implicitly being about the mood of England at a specific historical moment. The mood is one of suspense with regard to what Hitler will do next and hope that intervention will not be necessary. This hope is determined primarily by the memory of the British people of the devastation of the First World War – and it is this memory which affected Chamberlain's decisions and were the basis for his policy of appeasement.

Is there a form of historical time that is produced by the transcendental imagination? This would be a form that determines the possibility not of the experience of objects, but of historical events. As Yirmiahu Yovel puts it, for Kant, "history is the domain in which human action is supposed to create a progressive synthesis between the moral demands of reason and the actual world of experience" (Yovel 1980: 6). This particular Kantian view considers history as the time in which the progress of human morality is enacted. But if, for Kant, reason is

outside of time and hence outside of the world of experience, how can reason, which gives us the 'highest end' of humanity, morality, actually be connected with empirical temporal experience? In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant argues that taste enables us to make the transition from the sensible world to the moral world of reason. This is so because in judging what is beautiful, the imagination is free from the rules of the understanding and hence from the rules that limit it to images of what can be empirically known. In this way, the mind becomes capable of thinking of its purpose beyond the world of sensible nature; the morally good. Kant writes, "taste as it were makes possible the transition from sensible charm to the habitual moral interest without too violent a leap by representing the imagination even in its freedom as purposively determinable for the understanding and teaching us to find a free satisfaction in the objects even without any sensible charm" (Kant 2000: 354). But what is the temporal form that the imagination creates when it is free from the rules of understanding and is not used for the cognition of natural empirical objects? This would be a form of time that could indicate our relationship to the 'highest good,' that is, our place in history. Although Kant himself hardly mentions time in his *Critique of Judgment*, I suggest we understand the aesthetic form of time, not as the regular line that Kant describes in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, but as it is presented in film, where moments can overlap, repeat, occur rapidly or slowly, and hang in suspense.

In film, then, the imagination can mediate between reason and time. The rules that guide the imagination here are not those that make knowledge possible, but those concerning the moral relationship of a society to a historical situation, be it one of hope or an obsession with memory. In other words, the way that a film deals with time to create forms of possible experience is also what makes it possible to interpret films as historical documents, revealing

the relationship to its own time of a particular society. One can think here of the postmodern use of time in Jim Jarmush's *Mystery Train* (note the title) or the use of time in Tarkovsky's film about exile, *Nostalgia*. Indeed, it is through film, I believe, that the imagination can present us with a piece of history. And it is by understanding film as a product of the imagination in the Kantian sense, as containing temporal forms constructed according to rules, that it can first become an object that can be interpreted as having any psychological significance. The rules that guide the imagination, however, do not have quite the same status as Kant's a priori forms of cognition. Since the object they construct is not the object of natural science with which Kant was concerned, but is instead a cultural product, the rules the imagination uses are not transcendental in the strong metaphysical sense of what must hold true in all places and times. Instead, with regard to film, they are the rules that make possible the particular experience of each culture. In this way, the imagination is a universal and necessary condition for the possibility of experience in general, but the rules it uses and hence the forms of time it constructs can differ from culture to culture.

By looking at cinema with regard to Kant's theory of the imagination, it is possible to avoid the psychological arguments intrinsic to both the analytic cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches to cinema. The empirical psychological approach has led Gregory Currie, to write, "we need an account of what is sometimes called the proper functioning of the imagination: a biologically oriented theory that explains the adaptive benefit we gain from having the capacity to imagine" (Currie 1995a: 142). To my mind, this scientific approach is a good way to kill whatever is special about film and the aesthetic experience it provokes. Noël Carroll has argued that cognitive theories are better explanations of film than are psychoanalytic theories because

their explanations presume that the viewer is responding to a film in a rational way and that there is a rational explanation for the way we experience the cinema (Carroll 1996b: 65). According to Carroll, it is only when a rational explanation cannot be provided that we need a theory to explain what now presents itself as irrational behavior; this is when we turn to psychoanalytic theory. Yet, it is also possible that what has to do with art and our aesthetic response to it is precisely what cannot be explained rationally, or at least with regard to our conscious beliefs and desires. In this way, Carroll is begging the question of whether cognitive theories really are best suited to explaining our response to the cinema. Psychoanalytic approaches to film, however, are often too ungrounded. Although many of these interpretations are fascinating, they rely on the assumption that the particular aesthetic element in film is based on its relation to the unconscious and the fantasies it produces. Since it is hard to prove that there really is any unconscious faculty that governs the production of these fantasies, psychoanalytic theories, as theories of film, tend to lack credibility. Kant's theory of the imagination, I believe, can provide the basis for an approach to film that gives us general rules for explaining what makes film meaningful as an art form and also helps us to understand the particular meaning (or range of meanings) of a film with regard to its historical context.

There are also historical reasons that justify using Kant's theory of the imagination to understand the cinema, and Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* in particular. Even though Kant died in 1804, his philosophy was very much alive at the beginning of the 20th century when film itself was coming into its own as a form of art. In the 1930's what we now call the split between analytic, or Anglo-American, and continental traditions in philosophy, had just begun to solidify. This was the division between the logical-scientific view of philosophy represented

by Carnap and the existential-historical view represented by Heidegger (see Friedman 2000: 129ff). At the center of this divide was the issue of the correct interpretation of Kant, especially with regard to his distinction between sensible and intellectual faculties – precisely the distinction that, according to Kant, was to be mediated by the faculty of the imagination. Carnap, and the analytic tradition that followed, focused exclusively on Kant’s view of logic and his analysis of the intellectual faculty. They dismissed the role of Kant’s sensible faculties and consequently the imagination that was supposed to bridge the gap between the understanding and sensible intuition. Heidegger, on the other hand, saw Kant’s philosophy as essentially that of the imagination, and hence denied the delicate balance between sensibility, thought and the imagination that Kant articulated. At issue, generally stated, was whether philosophy was to be a discipline that would ensure the objectivity of the sciences or whether it was to be a discipline that could articulate the subject’s experience of the world. My suggestion is that since philosophy in England in the 1930s was defined exclusively with concerns of logic and science, the study of the imagination had to find its home elsewhere. This was in the newly emerging art form of film that was produced by directors such as Hitchcock. Indeed, now that analytic philosophers are currently beginning to address film, they reveal their roots by their neglect of the Kantian theory of the imagination.

Notes

- 1 Of course, these forms of time could also pertain to the temporal structures of other art forms. My argument here, however, is that they are essential to film.

- 2 See (Truffaut 1984: 72). Hitchcock says: “The ability to shorten or lengthen time is a primary requirement in film-making. As you know there’s no relation whatever between real time and filmic time...Sequences can never stand still; they must carry the action forward, just as the wheels of a ratchet mountain railway move the train up the slope cog by cog.”
- 3 See Noël Carroll’s discussion of film metaphor (Carroll 1996: 213). Carroll describes film metaphors as those in which disparate elements “are visually incorporated or amalgamated into one spatially bounded homogeneous entity. Elements are fused into a composite, but nevertheless self-identifiable, construct thereby visually indicating that these elements are elements of the same entity.”
- 4 See Michael Friedman (Friedman 2000: 129ff). I see my own paper as being in the spirit of Cassirer’s reconciliation between the analytic and continental traditions that Friedman recommends.

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