A Cinema of Modernist Poetic Prose: On Antonioni and Malick

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Abstract

In his essay "The 'Cinema of Poetry'" (1965), Pier Paolo Pasolini claimed that cinema might be apt for exploring a 'poetic' style, because the medium has an "irrational nature". Due to a slippage of terms, however, Pasolini does not so much come to define a 'cinema of poetry', but he will examine the conditions of a 'free indirect discourse' in cinema instead. As a consequence, I will follow John Orr's suggestion to read the essay as an attempt to draw analogies between cinema and the poetic prose of modernist fiction. Examples of ('hardcore') free indirect discourse in literature, taken from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, will be read in tandem with scenes from films by Michelangelo Antonioni and by Terrence Malick.

Résumé

Dans son essai "Le 'cinéma de poésie'" (1965), Pier Paolo Pasolini a affirmé que le cinéma pourrait être apte à l'exploration d'un style 'poétique', parce que le medium a un 'caractère irrationel'. En raison d'un glissement des termes, cependant, Pasolini n'en sera pas pour autant venu à définir un 'cinéma de poésie', mais à la place il aura examiné les conditions d'un 'discours indirect libre' dans le cinéma. En consequence, je vais suivre la suggestion de John Orr de lire l'essai comme une tentative d'établir des analogies entre le cinéma et la prose poétique de la fiction moderniste. Des exemples de ('hardcore') discours indirect libre dans la littérature, empruntés à *La Promenade au phare* de Virginia Woolf, seront lus en tandem avec des scènes de films de Michelangelo Antonioni et de Terrence Malick.

Introduction

One of the many charms of the film essays written by European critics like Ricciotto Canudo, Jean Epstein and Béla Balázs in the 1920s – the decade of the so-called 'silent film aesthetics' – is their effort to explore the affinities cinema may have with other art forms than literature and theatre. In America, these latter two arts were considered closely adjacent to film because of their narrative potential. As beloved sources of inspiration for film, literature and theatre offered a seminal impetus for the institutionalization in America of the "cinema of narrative integration" from 1917 onwards.[1] Several European critics and filmmakers, however, tended to downplay cinema's propensity to storytelling, aspiring to advocate the cinema as a full-blown art form.

Perhaps the most conspicuous attempt to bypass the influence of literature and theatre was Canudo's characterization of cinema as the "seventh art" in a well-known essay from 1923.[2] According to him, the cinema was a synthesis of three rhythmic arts (music, dance, poetry) and three plastic arts (painting, sculpture, architecture), excluding literature and theatre as if to save the cinema from the clutches of narrativity. Taking the mixture of rhythmic and plastic qualities as a challenge, quite a number of visual artists – Fernand Léger, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy – turned to cinema in the hope to find 'kinetic solutions for pictorial problems' the (static) canvas could not unriddle (Wollen, 97). Others were particularly intrigued by the rhythmic aspects of cinema. French director Abel Gance famously defined film as the "music of light", hence emphasizing that the rhythm of editing in his *La Roue* [*The Wheel*] (1922) was more important than the actual story. Gance did the editing of this film without any aids or machines and "I cut absolutely as if one image was a violin, another was a flute, a third an oboe, that's to say, everything was organized in my head according to this concept of the musicality of light" (qtd. in Abel, 332).

In his essay "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*" (1924), Jean Epstein refers to Gance's film to argue that when the cinema provides a new, mobile perspective in time, as in the close shots of the racing train wheels from *La Roue*, a "higher moral value" can be acquired (317). Such shots can reveal movements and pick up coincidental cadences which

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[1]   The idea that theatre and literature were neighbouring arts to American film can among others be derived from the term 'photoplay' as a common expression for film – as in Hugo Münsterberg's study *The Photoplay* (1916) – and Sergei Eisenstein's retrospective, but apt description of D.W. Griffith as the cinematic equivalent of the novelist Charles Dickens.

[2]   The essay "Reflections on the Seventh Art" was a follow-up to an essay from 1911 in which Canudo had announced the 'birth of the sixth art'.

are hidden to the human eye. Ideally, they augment the senses, encouraging the viewer to experience to see the world afresh.[3] In the essay, Epstein claims that such cinematic *photogénie* can offer us the "heightened awareness" which, he thinks, is the prerogative of poetry (318). On top of this, he concludes that cinema is "poetry's most powerful medium" (318). Similar ideas also resonate in Béla Balázs' work *Visible Man, or The Culture of Film* (originally *Der sichtbare Mensch*, 1924) in which he attributes a lyrical charm to the close-up. The play of facial expressions in cinema is "a form of lyricism that is incomparably richer and full of nuance than literary works of whatever kind" (Balázs, 33). When a close-up shows every shade of feeling in minute details, it expresses the "director's sensibility. The close-up is the poetry of the cinema" (41).

Both Epstein and Balázs used poetry – or its adjectives poetic or lyrical – as points of reference to suggest the 'polyphonic play' of cinema. In their laudable attempts to elevate cinema to the status of an art form, their employment of the term poetry, however, is not properly substantiated, not to say, quite whimsical. Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay "The 'Cinema of Poetry'" (1965) can be taken as a famous successor to this legacy of Epstein and Balázs. Despite the fact that Pasolini has met serious and, admittedly justified, criticism because of a few "curious turns" in the arguments of his text (Rhodes, 147), it would be a sheer pity to skip over some of his valuable insights. Parts of his essay can help us to elucidate some conditions of a film style that perhaps should not be called 'lyrical' or 'poetic', but rather 'double-voiced'.[4] If it may be too ambitious a task to clearly define a 'cinema of poetry', it seems promising to draw the more modest analogy, as John Orr has suggested, between such a 'double-voiced' cinema and the poetic prose of modernist fiction (6).

The irrational nature of cinema

Unlike the writer of prose who derives his words from a dictionary, Pasolini claims, no such specifically cinematographic idiom is available for the filmmaker: "There is no pigeonholed image, ready to be used," the Italian director writes (39). In addition to the absence of an official visual dictionary, cinema lacks a prescribed grammar and syntax.[5] Insofar as it is not

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[3]   See Farmer for a more elaborate description of Epstein's poetics.
[4]   Though the term 'double-voiced' recalls the work of Mikhail Bakhtin on 'double-voiced discourse', I will not pursue this connection any further.
[5]   There are two different approaches to criticize this argument of the presumed lack of a film grammar. The one stance may be to insist that there is, at the core of cinema, (some sort of) a film language with its own syntax and lexicon. The other stance is to argue that if a specifically cinematographic idiom is absent, as Pasolini

an explicit experiment, the sentences in a novel do not deviate much from linguistic conventions, for example as regards the order of words. Such particular requirements do not apply for cinematographic images. Film can potentially enter into infinite connections and make unexpected associations: no rule forbids that a (long) shot of a tree is preceded/succeeded by the close-up of an ant, a cup of coffee, a piano, an alien or whatever. Because of this infinity, film is akin to (free) poetry in the opinion of Pasolini. Further, a film image always shows itself in the present tense. In the concise paraphrase by Orr of Pasolini's argument, "the present is transformed into the past by the very feature of editing, yet the past still appears as present in filmic projection for the audience by virtue of the immediacy of the image" (10).

Since there is no ready-made grammar or syntax and because of the immediate presentness of the film image, the nature of cinema is principally irrational according to Pasolini. In theory, film language is as illogic as a dream, but the historical practice has taught us that filmmakers prefer to rely upon certain conventions that have already been developed in other films. In the great majority of films, stylistic techniques are employed in the service of the story. If a specific object is of interest for the plot, then a classical film always takes care to show this object in (medium) close-up to prevent the spectator from missing the crucial detail. It is more customary to have an establishing shot first and only then a (medium) close-up instead of the other way around. Even though the language of cinema has developed into a "language of prose," Pasolini maintains, "the fundamentally irrational nature of cinema cannot be eliminated" (42). Cinema is marked by a "double nature" (43): as a supplement to the prose-like, narrative conventions, cinema does not betray its unorthodox articulations, which show themselves in a strikingly subjective style. Although Pasolini acknowledges that "pure expressivity" is not possible, since the filmmaker works with images, drawn from the material world, his plea is to explore a style which is as subjective as possible. For him, such a style is potentially poetic and the work of Michelangelo Antonioni is presented as one of its blueprints.

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does, then a true comparison to prose/poetry will lack ground. Pasolini ultimately thinks that this problem can be circumvented, but Christian Metz considers it an insurmountable obstacle (204) and therefore he summarizes his own position on Pasolini's essay as a "mixture of approval and argument" (214). In a novel, Metz states, we have the linguistic unit 'dog' to recognize a dog, but in a film we have a shot that has a visual analogy to a real dog. These 'dogs' are not alike: the first is linguistically coded, the film shot is not. There are cinematographic codes, indeed, Metz argues, such as various types of montage, but they are another kind of codification than the aforementioned shot of a dog. These codes do not merge with visual analogy, but are superimposed over it (214-15)

Formally excessive film style

Halfway "The 'Cinema of Poetry'", Pasolini indicates that he is intrigued by the "obsessive framing" (48) in the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni and that he is struck by his so-called *temps mort*, the "technique of making characters enter and leave the frame" (48). In the case of *temps mort*, the camera still dwells even after the characters have departed. The films Antonioni made in the 1960s – *L'avventura*, *La notte*, *L'eclisse*, *Il deserto rosso* – are extraordinarily innovative at a formal level. As Seymour Chatman has analyzed, Antonioni's stringently composed frames draw inspiration from graphic design and the slow rhythm lend some of his films almost the same level of stillness as a painting. The meticulous and overcareful composition of his shots at times resembles the "pure and regular geometry of abstract art" (Chatman 118).[6] As a consequence of the exceptionally steady shots in Antonioni's films, characters become reduced to elements in often desolate surroundings. The protagonists seem no more than "extras" against the backdrop of empty landscapes or (modern) architecture.

So far, so good, it seems, but near the end of the essay, in another turn in his argument, Pasolini really lays his cards on the table. While he seemed concerned to delineate a formal trajectory of what he termed a 'cinema of poetry', such a sketch was for him predominantly a means to a political end, which, as he admits himself, is perhaps too utopian. He had hoped that a formally excessive film style could contribute to a truly politically subversive cinema. Since such a style may prevent the spectators from identifying with the characters, however, there is a serious risk that the viewers will categorize the characters as mere outsiders, "as abnormal, neurotic, or hypersensitive, etc." (53), that is, as deviant from the norm. It never escapes from Pasolini's suspicion, as John David Rhodes observes, that in such a case, the style of visual excess and formal exaggeration he advocates ends up as only "an aesthetic registration of bourgeois class-consciousness" (154). Since registration does not equal subversion, Pasolini fears that a poetic cinema can also misfire and that such a new cinematic style can fail to be a "welcome carrier for a political consciousness" (Rhodes 155). He has only a very faint hope that cinema can withstand serving the "exquisite 'flowers of the bourgeoisie'" (Pasolini 53). Orr has remarked that a representation of bourgeois neurosis of abnormality can also be taken "as a symptom of class decadence under advanced capitalism"

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[6]   Antonioni also explores the specificity of cinema by constantly alternating between the flatness of scenes and depth of field, Chatman has analyzed. By using the telephoto lens Antonioni seems to reduce the setting to two dimensions, flattening his characters against walls and buildings. Suddenly switching to the wide-angle lens creates, by contrast, a particularly deep perspective.

(8), but such a critique does not suffice for Pasolini who ascribes himself in the essay a "Marxist morality" (53). This is the proviso that has to be made on account of Pasolini's project: Since the endeavour of a revolutionary political cinema may be too utopian, we are, at least from the perspective of a Marxist, only left with the lesser good of a formalistic innovation, which I will below continue to elaborate upon.

Free indirect discourse

When Pasolini asks himself the question how cinema can be poetic, there is a confusing slippage of terms, for he rephrases the question into "is the technique of free indirect discourse possible in cinema?" (44).[7] In case a writer wants to represent the subjective perspective of a particular character, Pasolini explains, he can make his narrator use either interior monologue or free indirect discourse. Interior monologue, in the definition of Pasolini, implies that the language of the narrator and the character may well be identical, because they have more or less the same age and belong to a similar economic or social class. Adopting the perspective of such a character may result into a change in style – more colloquial perhaps – but not in language. With free indirect discourse, the narrator's text is crosscut with the language of the character. If he is a rude, low-class type, then some hoarse terms may slip through, which explicitly indicates that the world is interpreted from the angle of the character. The challenge Pasolini has set himself is how to articulate such a technique of free indirect discourse in cinema.

His observation that an initial codified language is missing in cinema is a major difficulty. With words a narrator in a novel can clarify that a peasant sees the world differently than he does, since language is, says Pasolini, a formidable "instrument of differentiation" (47). The filmmaker lacks this instrument and in case his "*activity cannot be linguistic; it must, instead, be stylistic*" (47, italics in original). Consequently, Pasolini claims, style is the only vehicle a film director has at his disposal in order to suggest a class-specific vision of the world as well as a character's subjectivity.

In the case of a literal 'point-of-view shot' we see what the character sees: the camera coincides with his eyes. If he would suddenly look around, the camera would do as well. The

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[7]   Because of this slippage, the use of the term 'poetry' will remain largely unspecified in the essay. Poetry seems to function as a container for the absence of pre-fixed (grammatical) conventions.

indirect version would have the camera imitate the vision of a character. Imagine the situation when a drunk character is shown out of focus. The camera does not coincide with his eyes, but the blurred contours as well as dazed and confused impression of the shot are unmistakably an expression of his state of mind. The film narrator itself is not drunk, but mimics the horizons of a drunkard. One can speak of a strictly iconic motivation: the stylistic devices correspond with the content. The cinematographic technique of out of focus restricts itself to a representation of the experience of the character. In the case of an indirect point-of-view shot is the vision of the narrator irrelevant, since he makes himself subservient to the perception of the drunkard. The free indirect point-of-view shot is more complex, for the status of the shot has to be ambiguous, by definition. Since its concept is modeled after the technique of free indirect discourse in literature, let us take a step back to prepare us for the analogy with modernist prose fiction Orr has brought to our attention in commenting upon Pasolini's essay.

Cases of free indirect discourse have always existed in literature, but I would allege that the technique has been explored to the full in the writings of modernist authors like Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf. When we read in the beginning of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) this description of Mr. Ramsay: "He was incapable of untruth ..." (10), it is left to guesswork whether only Mr. Ramsay thinks so himself or the narrator takes this description seriously as well (the latter might use the expression in an ironic way). The unclear status of the statement is a result of the fact that it is presented as narrator's text, while the typical and quite solemn phrase – incapable of untruth – might be a way the stiff Mr. Ramsay would describe himself. This would then be a case of an inference of narrator's text with the specific wording by a character. To paraphrase Pasolini, the narrator reanimates an expression of the character without quotation marks.

At the same time, it is a chief characteristic of *To the Lighthouse* that the two main female characters – Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe – are particularly sensitive to the people which surround them. Their own thoughts and impressions can merge in one and the same sentence with their sudden intuitive awareness of the deliberations of other characters, without clear demarcations. This is one instance how the external narrator describes Mrs. Ramsay's talent: "... at the moment her eyes were so clear that they seemed to go round the table unveiling each of these people, and their thoughts and their feelings, without effort like a light stealing under water (...) It was as if she had antennae trembling out from her, which, intercepting certain sentences, forced them upon her attention." (116). And thereupon the

narrator gives "proof" of Mrs. Ramsay's intuition and capacity of reading minds: she "knows" that her husband is beginning to be uneasy, and that he wants somebody to say this or that, and that everybody is starting to feel uncomfortable, and so on. On the one hand, the attitude of the external narrator in *To the Lighthouse* is remarkably uncertain, constantly using expressions like "it seems" and "as if". On the other hand, Mrs. Ramsay as well as Lily Briscoe are said to have a solid idea of what is going on in somebody else's minds, and hence, a range of musings and thoughts enter in a fluid exchange with the women as mediators.

Two aspects are striking in the case of a ('hardcore') free indirect discourse, as practised by Woolf. First, it is undecidable whether a certain phrasing exposes the vision of the character and/or the perspective of the narrator. Second, a certain expression can be attributed to a specific character, but it might as well evolve from the character's ability to read another one's mind.

Free indirect point-of-view shots

In an interview with Oswald Stack, Pasolini qualified his film *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964) as "violently contradictory" (qtd. in Stack 87), both a mixture at the narrative level and a mixture stylistically. This hodge-podge, he claims, is the result of a split perspective: "I, a non-believer, was telling the story through the eyes of a believer" (qtd. in Stack 86). The figure of Christ represents Catholicism, whereas Pasolini describes his own position as "mutilated religious," seeing something sacred in even the most humdrum objects and events (qtd. in Stack 77). This possible tension between the character's vision and the filmmaker's world view – or to be more precise, the world view of the external narrator – provides the principle frame for Pasolini's discussion of the free indirect point-of-view shot.

The cinematic equivalent of a free indirect discourse can best be explained with a particular scene from a film which Pasolini himself uses as a case study, *Il deserto rosso*. A long shot shows the female protagonist Giuliana sitting next to a cart full of gray fruit in the streets of the industrial city of Ravenna. The shot is famous, partially because Antonioni actually had his crew paint every piece of fruit gray instead of using a photographic trick. The peculiar discoloration of the fruit can be interpreted as the narrator's way of commenting on the dreariness of Ravenna or, if you admire the aesthetics of brick and factories, on the

pictorial beauty of the city.[8] There are no optical effects or clues which indicate that external focalization conforms itself to the vision of the female character, but the option is valid nonetheless. The more since Giuliana is a psychologically instable woman who has tried to take her own life a few weeks ago. The causes of her moods remain a mystery, however: has she become neurotic because of the modern-looking gray factories spewing toxically yellow smoke plumes out of their pipes, or is it simply not in her nature to adapt easily to new surroundings? (Cameron and Wood 122) The fruit's grayness can then possibly be seen as underscoring her alienation. A combination might even be more plausible: the unusual color is both an expression of the woman's despondency and a visual translation of the narrator's worldview. As a result, this scene from *Il deserto rosso* is based on ambiguous focalization.

If the double layered nature of shots makes us wonder how to interpret the image – something ugly is represented as if beautiful – then free indirect discourse makes us wonder to whom an image is to be attributed: Is the image filtered by the perspective of a character and/or the narrator? Hence, Pasolini's idea of the free indirect discourse in cinema presumes a convergence of the two views: the neurotic's disturbed vision of the world might as well be substituted entirely for the narrator's "own delirious view of aesthetics" (Orr 4, original italics omitted).

This reading of a scene of Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* is to be taken as an example of ambiguous focalization on the visual track. It can be seen in analogy to the first aspect of free indirect discourse from Woolf's fiction: the perspective of the character is possibly merged with the one of the narrator. For an example of the second aspect, when free indirect discourse is used to suggest a fluid exchange among the internal musings of characters, I will turn to the cinema of Terrence Malick. On the one hand, his films stand out because they at times tend to complicate the effect I described on the basis of the scene from Antonioni's film. On the other hand, his films are exceptional because of an interaction between the visual and the auditive track, hence multiplying the range of discourses, in the vein of modernist fiction.

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[8]   In showing the world of industry and factories with shots of orange antenna towers and chimneys silhouetted on the skyline, Antonioni also aimed to appeal to their "extraordinary esthetic beauty", Chatman claims (119)..

An inextricable amalgam

Whereas Antonioni focused upon the neurotic decadence of the contemporary bourgeois with a view on industry that is both depressing and eye-catching, Malick zooms in upon bygone historical periods – early seventeenth century in *The New World* (2005) or the early twentieth century in *Days of Heaven* (1978) – and time and again, in rural settings. Only his fifth feature *The Tree of Life* (2011) which won him the Golden Palm at the Cannes film festival, contains scenes in some present-day city with skyscrapers towering over people, albeit the majority of sequences in this film takes place in the 1950s in a rural habitat in Texas with green pastures.

His films are narrative, no mistake about that, but the stories are told obliquely. To appreciate Malick's film one has to let oneself be immersed in his particular film style, which is as unmistakable as a fingerprint. The camera in *The Tree of Life* tends to look down in the scenes shot in the city, but it betrays a constant urge to an upward glance in the episodes set in the small-town, incessantly trying to catch some sunrays shimmering through tree leaves or over someone's shoulders. His camera can be compared to the binoculars of the typical birdwatcher. Like the curious lover of nature, Malick scrutinizes the environment at the expense of a consistent plot. Neither bug can crawl on a leaf nor a butterfly can pass by without the camera having spotted the creature. There is some logic in this permanent attentiveness of the camera, since in several of his films, the characters enter new areas and consequently, they are keen on every signal within the space they occupy. The soldiers in *The Thin Red Line* (1998) have to scrutinize the environment when they try to conquer a hill on an unfamiliar island. In *The New World* English sailors set foot in an unexplored territory.

Perhaps most salient is the scene in *The New World* when captain John Smith invades the wilderness, on his guard for danger. The camera circles around as if it coincides with his eyes gazing sharply, but while the camera is panning suddenly the captain himself appears in the frame. Initially, the camera seemed to identify with the main protagonist totally, but on second sight this identification is only partial, since the camera moves independent as well. This tentative interpretation requires further refinement, however. The option is legitimate to presume that the sudden appearance of captain Smith in the frame might be attributed to an off-screen character. For soon thereafter, the captain is beset by men with spears from many directions. Hence, the status of the panning shot oscillates not only between the suggestion of sharing the captain's perspective and the gaze of the camera (that is, external focalization by the visual narrator), but it could also be the piercing vision of a yet unseen character, about to

attack the captain. The meaning of such shots is twofold if not threefold: both a registration of the inhospitable nature by the narrator and an attempt to convey the vision of either the protagonist or his anonymous opponent. This triple effect is one of the attractions of Malick's cinema and is at least as complicated as Antonioni's variant of ambiguous focalization.

In *The Tree of Life* the camera is observing as usual, but a different logic reigns here. Jack looks back upon his childhood before the tragic death of his younger brother and in retrospect, the sites of his youth become more paradisiacal than they were. His years as a recalcitrant kid are shown in a series of incidents which highlight his anger at his harsh father. Usually, the style of a film underscores the content: action is shown via fast-paced editing or music emphasizes the sentimentality of a scene. Conventionally, identification with characters is mediated by stylistic means: their proximity to the camera or their dark moods are expressed through colours and lighting. *The Tree of Life* turns these conventions inside out.

The film displays a mismatch between story and style. Jack is represented as a young kid, angry at his father, and the conflict with him is the dominant narrative crisis. Except for the "jagged, elliptical cutting," which, as Michael J. Anderson suggests, underscores the boy's dread of his father's unpredictable flights of rage, the style of the film does not reproduce this harshness. On the contrary, the style radiates a certain gentility thanks to the beautiful cinematography, using only natural light. Thus the style seems to emphasize Jack's belated identification with the perspective of his caring mother, who was dealt such a heavy blow upon receiving the news on the death of her second son. She is a graceful and self-sacrificial character who could enjoy the little wonders of life with her kids around. In retrospect, these scenes were taking place "before the Fall," before death struck the family. The re-experience of this small Eden is not expressed on the level of the plot, but is underscored by smooth camera movements, its aesthetically framed shots and the attention to details: the brief moment the mother floats in the air; the play of light and shadow when she hangs the laundry or the shot in which lantern light reflects in a puddle of water. The mother's whispered declaration in voice-over "Love every leaf, every ray of light" is, so to speak, stylistically translated to the screen. Whereas story privileges the son's clash with the father, the cinematography evokes a belated tribute to the mother. Seen this way, *The Tree of Life* owes its amazing achievement to Malick's relentless effort to create an amalgam of perspectives.

Divergence between voice-over and image

In addition to this amalgam, the visuals in Malick's films are often short-circuited with text. Conventionally, a voice-over in cinema is used as a means to understand the images or to fill in gaps in the plot. Malick uses voice-over excessively, but the effect is not to illustrate the shots, but to articulate a tension between the spoken words and the images. In his first two films, *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven*, the voice-over belongs to young girls who are a bit too naive to fully understand the roughness of the world they inhabit. In *The Thin Red Line* there is a mixture of voices of several soldiers. As Michel Chion argues in his analysis of the film, some characters have received the "gift of an inner voice," but completely "at random" (54). Moreover, the voices are unconnected to the exact moment into which they are edited. In the absence of a link between voice and viewpoint of the camera, the spoken text "provides a free, often atemporal commentary" (Chion 56). This atemporality is occasionally expressed via the typically poetic device of the apostrophe: the spoken texts seem to address an imaginary audience, since there is no one to respond to. At the end, one of the soldiers says in voice-over, not specifying the "you" he is talking about: "Where is it that we were together? Who were you that I lived with? The brother. The friend. Darkness, light. Strife and love. Are they the workings of one mind? The features of the same face? Oh, my soul. Let me be in you now."

The use of apostrophe in this voice-over example is a device which is adopted from poetry. The way voice-over relates to images, however, is specific to the cinema, but in Malick's case, this manner is ground for seeking parallels with poetic prose. The most prominent voice-over is by Witt who states that he will never be a true soldier, at least "not in God's world," but he says he has seen "another world." He never really explains what this other world is, but in the urge to move away from the actual events of war, we may surmise that the camera offers us glimpses of this "other world," beyond representation. The film is thus split between the interests of "this world" full of war violence and the idyllic suggestion of an "other world." This split is time and again recalled by Witt's cryptic voice-over which even continues after he has died. We still hear him speak, but due to his passing away his voice also resonates beyond the character. In conjunction with the quirky camera, which follows a rhythm not dictated by the war story, this can be taken as an equivalent to the poetic prose of a modernist author like Virginia Woolf.

Malick achieves a similar effect in his films thanks to, first, an ambiguity as regards the status of the shots, and, second, an insoluble tension between text and image. The environmental shots in *The Thin Red Line* can be interpreted as the visual narrator's fascination with the capriciousness of nature. If the shots are read, however, as glimpses of an "other world," then the visual narrator proves himself subservient to Witt's hallucinatory vision. Not only can the shots be taken either way, but the sound-image dialectic adds further complexity to the riddle: since Witt has died, we can wonder whether the voice-over refers to what he has envisioned while still alive or are the images an expression of his posthumous vision? The shots are a matter of ambiguous focalization (much like the example of Antonioni), but since the voice-over does not solve enigmas, but further complicates them, the relation between text and image is not one of correspondence, but rather one of divergence. As happened in *To The Lighthouse* with its fluid exchanges of deliberations from narrator to the mind of a character, reading the psyche of another character, one might say that, correspondingly, the cinema of Malick offers free indirect discourse to a superlative degree as well.

The tension between text and image is a recurring device in his films. In *The New World*, the romance of the white captain and the Indian girl is suggested in voice-over dialogues as idyllic, devoid of jealousy and possessiveness: "For this is love, my sweet, that makes our two souls one." While the voice-over emphasizes the romantic unison, the story itself is about a violent encounter between white adventurers and the Indian community, rupturing the mystic idyll of the lovers. In *The Tree of Life*, the father, the mother, the oldest son and occasionally the middle son, all four – or rather all five, because we hear a young Jack and an older Jack – have different attitudes towards life, but their voice-overs are mingled in the film. They do not narrate concrete events, but at times they express invocations, to the deceased brother and/or the Lord: "How did I lose you?" "What was it you showed me? Always you were calling me" or "Brother, keep us, guide us, to the end of Time." The distance that separates the characters – father and mother, father and son, brother and brother – is partly bridged by this random and non-hierarchical array of voice-overs, coalesced around the loss of the boy. Whereas the story lays bare the disintegration of the family, the voice-overs, marked by grief, suggest the possibility of a belated togetherness.[9]

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[9]   A number of critics is annoyed by the "sentimentality" of *The Tree of Life* and criticized the film for its overweening spiritual ambition. It is 'essentially a religious work' in which 'Malick goes one on one with God,'

Conclusion

Even though I have singled out Antonioni and Malick in this article, many more names of directors could have been mentioned to offer interesting varieties of free indirect discourse in the cinema. Several triads from different nationalities can be named: the Russian Vsevolod Pudovkin, the Danish Carl-Theodor Dreyer, the French Abel Gance from the silent era (suggested by Metz, 206), the French Jean-Luc Godard and the Italians Antonioni and Bernardo Bertolucci from the 1960s (examples used by Pasolini), the American Robert Altman, the Australian Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*), the German Werner Herzog (*Aguirre*) from the 1970s (suggested by Orr), the Hungarian Béla Tarr, the Japanese Naomi Kawase, the Russian Aleksandr Sokurov in more recent times.

Pasolini's attempt to propose Antonioni's cinema as an illustration of free indirect discourse was absolutely legitimate, but I followed Orr in indicating that this does not suffice to qualify this as a case of a cinema of poetry. An analogy to the poetic prose of modernist fiction is more to the point. I interpreted a specific scene from *Il deserto rosso* as an example of ambiguous focalization on a visual track, in which the perspective of the character is possibly merged with the world view of the narrator. This merging results from the absence of markers that give the viewer a clue to whom the vision is to be attributed – it is the visual variant of not using quotation marks where they may possibly have been apt.

In addition to this example, I read the cinema of Malick in tandem with Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, known for a meandering style that fluidly travels from the one character's telepathic vision to another one's mind. This practice is reproduced in the cinema of Malick. Time and again, his titles articulate the ambiguity of scenes, mixing, as in *The Tree of Life*, Jack's conflict with the father at the level of the story, with an apparent tribute to his mother through a genteel style. His wonderfully lit films are characterized by a careful cinematography and free-floating voice-overs, constantly evoking questions like: "who sees?" (the narrator and/or a character), "who speaks/thinks?" and "how does the reflexive voice-over text diverge from the accompanying images?" Ultimately, Malick's cinema owes its enchantment, as well as its parallel to the poetic prose of Woolf, to the permanent withholding of clear-cut answers to these questions.

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as J. Hoberman wrote. While I can go along with this criticism, this article is meant to put a different emphasis: the suggestion of a reunion coincides with Mrs. Ramsay's endeavours to prevent the family from falling apart.

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