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Dear All,

It's likely that we each want – or feel that we need – something different from our NIAS seminars. In my case, rather than help with the answer to a number of specific questions posed in advance, or hints as to a large-scale (re-)structuring and focusing of a project as a whole, I'm mainly looking for the inspiration deriving from questions, comments, and ideas arising 'spontaneously' from a transdisciplinary audience. Including from those for whom this will be unfamiliar territory, and, for this reason, may have valuable pre-theoretical insights to share. I'm also interested in any and all resonances my project and its methodology may have with your work.

In brief, my NIAS research is centered on an in-progress book that is fundamentally interdisciplinary. I engage with film and media theory, literary theory, aesthetics and the philosophy of art, and semiotics in the Saussurean and naturalist/cognitivist traditions, in order to rethink the practice and theory of reflexivity in cinema and the moving image, more broadly. Overall, I'm as concerned with the 'what,' 'where,' 'when,' and 'how' questions of reflexivity in cinema, as with the 'why,' in the sense of its ultimate purposes and values. Although I will, of course, address the latter, including in relation to the effects on spectators of reflexivity, and the purpose/value of reflexivity in particular films and bodies of work.

My plan for the seminar is to begin with an introduction to reflexivity and its study as occurring throughout the arts and sciences, and why it interests me. Then, moving on to cinematic reflexivity, specifically, and its theorization – upon which I will make a few pertinent observations – I will provide a brief overview of the main features, strands, and themes of the book as a whole. Before spending the rest (and majority) of the seminar talking about what I'm working on at the moment. Namely, defining cinematic reflexivity and understanding what it is in-itself, so to speak, along with related issues. This ties in with some changes I have recently made to the book's structure and coverage in terms of the first few chapters (see below).

I'm relatively, and I emphasize *relatively*, confident about the main substance of the book. At least its primary arguments, concepts, distinctions, and so on, together with its coverage. Part of this confidence stems from the fact that I've been actively thinking about the topic for a number of years and have previously written on some aspects of it. What I've been relatively less confident about, at least until the last few months, is the structure and presentation of the book *as a book*. Specifically, its first chapter, as the most general, i.e., least concerned with analyzing particular reflexive forms, effects, styles, individual works, and so on. It is this first chapter of the study that I'm currently working on.

My original plan was to spend all or most of the first chapter critically surveying existing theories and concepts of reflexivity in film, followed by a second chapter (now omitted) on 'alternative approaches,' including those originating outside of film studies. For reasons I'll discuss during the seminar, I've changed this fairly recently. The first chapter is now focused on my previously mentioned search for a new and better definition, and through it, a better theorization – i.e., more systematic, comprehensive, less reductive, etc. – of cinematic

reflexivity in general. It is in this context that I'll be discussing the strengths and weaknesses of a (smaller number) of existing ideas and approaches. Whereas in the 'new' second chapter (previously the third), I will move on to presenting a new, intermedial typology of reflexive forms in cinema and other arts. Prior to addressing, in the current third chapter, the affective, emotional, and immersive dimensions of reflexivity in films, which is a major aspect of the study and where I see a good deal of its necessity and originality residing. There I will identify and discuss four basic types of emotion and affect that reflexivity may generate or amplify: 'fiction' emotion (about represented characters and events); 'artefact' emotion (about the work as a work, e.g., its style, intentions, and achievements); sensory-affective feeling (centered on a film as an audio-visual experience); and 'cinophilic' (and 'fandom') emotion (centered on the love of cinema, its history, culture, and traditions, on the part of spectators).

This is the current planned table of contents:

Reflexive Cinema: Rethinking Self-Consciousness, Affect and Intermediality in the Moving Image. Oxford UP (2024??)

Introduction: Reflecting on Reflexivity

*Chapter One: Back to Basics: The Cognitive-Semiotic Foundation of Reflexivity

Chapter Two: Reflexive Forms and Functions in Cinema: A New Typology

Chapter Three: Circuits of Feeling: Reflexivity as Affect, Emotion, and Immersion

Chapter Four: On the Inside Looking In: Environment and Enclosure as Metacinema in David Lynch's 'Los Angeles Trilogy' and *Twin Peaks: The Return*

Chapter Five: Cinema in the Mirror of Art: Charting Intermedial and Trans-art Reflexivity

Chapter Six: Self-Reflexivity as Plot, Play, and Performance in the Films of Jacques Rivette

Conclusion

*As a side note, I'm not very happy with the first part of the first chapter title ("back to basics"). If anyone has a suggestion for an alternative phraseology this is very welcome!

To give you a sense of the book as a whole, its topicality, main aims, arguments, and reference points, I've copied in part of the original book proposal (**see below**). Displaying some of the hyperbole characteristic of book proposals – when one is in the 'trying to convince that this is new and important' stage of a project – this is now almost two years old but still representative for the most part.

Finally, just to give those who are interested a further flavor of the scholarly discourse on reflexivity in cinema and related topics, I'm sending some selected, pre-proofed excerpts from a rather lengthy piece I've recently finished (**see the circulated PDF document "Recursive Reflections."**) This will be published in an edited collection on reflexivity coming out next year. One of the more (meta-)theoretically oriented chapters in the volume, it critically assesses some existing conceptions of reflexivity through the lens of various classifications, and types of classifications, of reflexive features of films that have been proposed since the 1970s. In the process – and as included in the excerpts – I differentiate reflexivity proper from other related, and sometimes conflated, features of films. I also

introduce a new typology of what I am calling ‘reflexive forms’ (as also outlined in the proposal), which I’ll be elucidating in more detail in my book. This said, quite a bit of the piece is introductory and expository in nature. ***Since I will not be presenting on what is discussed here, save for a few references (e.g., to ‘environmental’ reflexivity), I view the excerpts as entirely optional rather than necessary reading for the seminar. It is also suitable for skimming.**

Thanks!

Book Proposal

The first wide-ranging English-language study of the ramified topic in over three decades (since Robert Stam’s *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*, 1985), this book reconceives moving-image reflexivity and related subjects (self-conscious style and narration; direct address; enunciation; metalepsis; fictional world-making and experience), from a twenty-first century standpoint. In addition to engaging with cutting-edge developments in film and media theory, like my 2015 *Film Worlds: A Philosophical Aesthetics of Cinema* (Columbia UP), it will build new and significant bridges between ‘continental’ and analytic/cognitive theoretical and philosophical approaches that are usually pursued in isolation from each other.

Context, Key Ideas and Originality

Reflexivity (or *self-reflexivity*) entails a film drawing attention to aspects of its nature as a work and as an experience – and, by extension, processes of filmmaking and viewing, screen history and culture, and properties of moving-image media. Major technological and cultural changes in the moving-image, and larger audio-visual, environment since the turn of the millennium, impacting on the ways in which films are made, experienced, and analysed, have prompted new questions as to the *identity*, *specificity*, and *future(s)* of cinema. Ambitious contemporary filmmakers have re-appropriated older reflexive forms and techniques, and created new ones, in order to address these realities from within, or alongside, their cinematic narratives. Against this background, the twin aims of this study are (1) to critically reassess traditional, often piecemeal, and sometimes problematically reductive/over-general understandings of cinematic reflexivity; and (2) to offer alternative concepts and categories that provide for a more comprehensive, systematic, and flexible account of reflexivity throughout the history of moving-image media, including post-millennial reflexive practices in all of their diversity of form and purpose.

The past ten years have seen a notable re-visitation of reflexivity in film and media studies, including in the contexts of (a) digital image making and viewing in a “post-cinema” environment (Shaviro 2010; Mulvey 2011); (b) established, and more recently emerging, reflexive *styles*, *genres*, and *sub-genres* of narrative cinema and documentary, such as contemporary “complex cinema” and the “puzzle film” (Buckland 2009; Kiss and Willemsen 2014), the Hollywood film about Hollywood (Cohan 2020), the found-footage and “diegetic-camera” horror film (Heller 2014; Turner 2019), and the contemporary essay film (Corrigan 2011); (c) postmodern and “post-classical” Hollywood cinema (Konrath 2010; Elsaesser 2012); and, (d) “metacinema,” metafiction, and metalepsis (Gennette 2014), as part of a wider interest in transmedial narrative processes found across cinema, literature, comics and graphic novels, video and computer games, and other forms (Wolf 2009; Thoss 2015).

Yet despite this recent interest – and the ubiquity of the term and concept in film studies and criticism, more generally – there has been surprisingly little expansive theoretical analysis of cinematic reflexivity. Most prominent among extant theorisations are what have been labelled “political modernist” (Rodowick, 1988) and “ideological formal” (Plantinga, 2018) accounts of film form and representation that emphasize spectator *distantiation*, *alienation*, and *ideological critique*, and transpose the theories of Bertolt Brecht, Louis Althusser, and the Russian Formalist concepts of de-familiarization and estrangement to cinema (e.g., ‘Screen’ theory and French ‘apparatus theory’). In spite of their insights, relevance to some films/styles, and continuing influence, I challenge these as overall/exclusive conceptions. Against the widely held assumption that reflexivity (at least in its more

‘serious’ forms) is inherently anti-immersive, in fostering medium awareness and critical distance, my account stresses its psychologically *absorptive*, *affective* and *phenomenological*, as well as cognitive-semiotic and potential ideological-critical, dimensions. Accordingly, I conceive reflexivity as a major category of cinematic meaning, a vehicle for artistic style and expression, and an object of affective/emotional experience in many moving image works.

More specifically, as part of my dual-aspect view of cinematic experience, I will be showing how and why, despite its extra-narrative status, reflexivity may *encourage and strengthen* imaginative and emotional engagement with filmic fiction on the part of viewers, rather than necessarily precluding or weakening it, as often assumed. And that a film’s periodically interrupting, foregrounding, and commenting upon, its fictional world of characters and events is best conceived not in the traditional negative, or subtractive, fashion. That is, as taking *something away from* the experience of a narrative film – in the form of a fictional reality dispelled, a veil lifted, an illusion broken, etc. – which is otherwise preserved in non-reflexive works. Rather, and partly owing to the *ontological and imaginative stability* of fictional worlds even in the face of reflexive foregrounding, it is the significant addition of another dimension of meaning and experience. These arguments will be supported by ideas concerning the ‘two-foldedness’ of visual representation, including cinematic representation, developed by the philosophers Richard Wollheim (the ‘seeing-in’ and ‘seeing-as’ representation distinction) and Kendal Walton (mimesis and engagement with fiction as “make-believe”), and film theorists such as Victor Perkins.

The last work of seminal French film semiotician Christian Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation or The Place of Film* – only fully translated in 2015 – is another key conceptual and methodological reference point for my study, which I will be among the first in English to analyse in detail. I defend Metz’s and David Bordwell’s overlapping critique of excessively anthropomorphic accounts of “enunciation” (i.e. speech or address) applied to film narration, and endorse and expand upon Metz’s alternative, textual pragmatic and speech-act based understanding of reflexivity as a process of “*impersonal enunciation*,” i.e. a film’s direct, self-referential address of viewers. Working in close conjunction with style, this “metadiscursive” process does not depend on posited implied narrators, or narrating agencies, and is instead attributable to the film itself. The enunciative devices through which “certain parts of a [filmic] text speak to us of that text *as an act*” (Metz, 10), include character’s/actor’s direct address of the camera; voice-over and “voice-in” narration; inter-titles; the use of the screen as a palimpsest; objects signifying the cinematic apparatus; mirrors and other reflective surfaces in *mise-en-scène*; and the film-within-the-film. Consistent with my *world-in* and *world-of* films distinction (Yacavone, 2015), such devices allow films to convey something to viewers on semantic planes which would not be possible from within the confines of their diegesis (fictional worlds), alone.

While expanding upon some of Metz’s key insights, my analysis is by no means confined to a semiotic and ‘textual’ model of reflexivity as enunciation. Instead, it builds on other complimentary image and sound-based concepts in film theory, art theory, and the philosophy of film and art, relevant to cinema as a matter of illustrative ‘showing’ as well as ‘saying,’ i.e. to films as artistic experiences, as well as texts and objects of cognition to be ‘read’ and understood. Reflexivity as here theorized therefore necessarily involves what exists around, above, and below, story and narration (narrowly defined), together with functioning in and through it.

Confined neither to *modern* (or *modernist*), nor *post-modern* cinema – notwithstanding the influential forms of reflexivity developed and employed in these contexts – reflexivity is a moving image phenomena which, I argue, must be understood in the wider context not only of 20th century (and earlier) literary and theatrical practices and theoretical discourses, but visual art practice and theory (e.g., Mitchell on ‘metapictures’). This includes modern painting, early 20th century avant-garde art, and Pop and post-Pop art, all of which have influenced (and in some cases, been influenced by) various reflexive cinema practices (e.g. in the films of Godard, Antonioni, Suzuki, Greenaway, and numerous experimental filmmakers).

A key feature of this study is an original *typology of reflexive forms* in screen media, as distinct from individual reflexive *devices* and from general reflexive *modes* (e.g. the “didactic” and “playful” modes Stam identifies). Rather than merely descriptive, these historical, stylistic, and transmedial categories provide a more systematic means of analysing and interpreting reflexive

aspects of individual works, including in dynamic relation with other cognitive, affective, and stylistic features, as well as reflexivity in other arts. These new category types include:

- *environmental*, i.e. represented space and location-based reflexivity
- *intermedial* and *trans-art* reflexivity, including **process*, **product*, and **nested* sub-types, as overlapping with what Paisley Livingston (2008) terms “artistic nesting” in films; and Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “seed-image” and “mirror-image” forms of artistic process and product-based reflexivity
- *generic* reflexivity (including the self-conscious genre hybridity Jim Collins, Rick Altman, and Bruce Isaacs analyze as “genericity”)
- *creator-centered* (or *authorial*) reflexivity, pertaining to the work, style, life and persona of a film’s maker/s
- *performance-based* reflexivity (involving casting, acting style, and other performative dimensions of cinema)
- *metaleptic* and *meta-fictional* reflexivity, as focused on narration, and narrative and ontological levels with films
- *the film-within-the-film*, a special category in being both a specific device in narrative cinema and a more general form (including **fictional*, **documentary*, and **found-footage* sub-types)
- *versionary reflexivity* (generated through sequels; remakes; alternative versions; and theme-and-variation structures/presentations within films)
- *twenty-first century hyper-reflexivity*, characterized by a particularly disorienting and affect-centered proliferation of individual reflexive devices, motifs, and themes (as found in films such as Kauffman’s *Synecdoche, New York*, Lynch’s *Inland Empire*, and Carax’s *Holy Motors*)

With respect to these reflexive forms, and more generally, while the book’s primary focus is on narrative cinema, broadly defined (employing illustrative examples from films by Keaton, Hitchcock, Godard, Antonioni, Cassavetes, Almodóvar, Haneke, Kauffman, Ming-liang, Kiarostami, among other directors), I will also be discussing reflexive features of some experimental, essayistic, and docufictional films [(e.g. works by Snow, Gordon, Marker, Varda and Oppenheimer (*The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*)); and episodic television (e.g. *The Wire*; *Twin Peaks: The Return*, *Westworld*). Two chapters are devoted to more in-depth analysis of reflexivity in the films of David Lynch and Jacques Rivette, centered on its affective and immersive dimensions, and overlapping *environmental*, *metacinematic*, and *intermedial* forms. Here and elsewhere, I bring contemporary affect and intermediality theory (e.g. Shaviro 2010; Brinkema 2014; Pethő 2011; Wolf, 2009, etc), as well as more cognitive approaches (e.g. Plantinga 2009, 2018; Grodal 1997) to bear on reflexivity.

In the broadest terms, this study is rooted in the capacity of films to provide new ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking about the world, and about cinema and related forms and media, simultaneously. Reflexivity, self-reference, and ‘recursion,’ are not only integral to many film and art works, but have been increasingly posited as being at the center of consciousness, thought, and language (cf. Douglas Hofstadter’s *Gödel, Escher, Bach* and subsequent works; Michael C. Corballis’s *The Recursive Mind*; etc.); of social interaction and identity (cf. Erving Goffman’s pioneering work on reflexive ‘frames’ of behavior); and of complex information systems and their reflexive feedback loops. In theorizing moving-image reflexivity, where relevant I draw on some this multidisciplinary work crossing psychology, sociology, philosophy of mind, and information theory.