

**Sculpting in Time:  
temporally inflected experience of cinema**

In a famous sequence towards the close of Sergio Leone's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) the three central characters stage their final showdown. They stand in a broad triangle, on a circular patch of parched ground. Nearby sits the makeshift cemetery that hides, buried among the teeming bodies of Civil War dead, the booty each seeks. The standoff lasts several minutes, in which the film alternates wide views of the scene with close-ups of the characters' hands, holstered guns and faces. The tension ebbs and flows with the soundtrack: first tentative guitar as they take their places; then soaring trumpet as the scene for the confrontation is set; silence, broken only by the cawing of the crows; then back to the trumpet and strident strings, as the decisive moment approaches. Leone complements the changing musical rhythms with visual ones. As the sequence unfolds, the shots get shorter – not uniformly, but so that ever briefer shots are scattered among the rest. Towards the climax the shot changes are so rapid that no viewer could fail to notice them. The result, I shall suggest, is to alter our sense of time's passage. But which time? The time of the projected images (which is also the time in which we watch them), or the time of the events those images portray? The answer, I propose, involves both, since the two intertwine. Temporal form and temporal content meld, forming an amalgam.

It is a commonplace that many artworks are interesting in part because of the ways in which their content and their form relate. Unfortunately, it is also often unclear what the contrast between form and content is supposed to be. To avoid both banality and obscurity, I will frame my claims in more specific terms. The phenomenon that interests me is found only in certain visual arts. The arts in question – drawing and painting, sculpture and film – are those that allow for a particular visual experience, 'seeing-in'. The phenomenon – *inflection* – occurs when that experience takes a particular, and surprising, form. When inflection is itself distinctively temporal in nature, we arrive at my topic.

I proceed as follows. In the first section, I present the idea of inflection in the context of still pictures. Section two turns to film, where, if inflection occurs at all, it is likely to take temporal form. I lay out the conditions that must be met if cinema is to exhibit temporal inflection before turning, in section three, to whether those conditions are met. If correct, the argument thus far shows that film might display inflection in the form described. But does it? In the final section I return to *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* to argue that it does.

## §1 Inflected seeing-in

### *1.1 Seeing-in*

To present the idea of inflection, let's set film aside for the moment, and begin with still pictures. Where there are pictures – at least representational pictures – there is seeing-in. Seeing-in is a distinctive experience, one it is characteristic of representational pictures to sustain. Consider figure 1.



It may take a while to make sense of this picture. At first, we see only marks. Then, suddenly, we make out the man in them. Or perhaps things are the other way round: having seen the man at once, as we continue to look at the marks they cease to give us him, and become merely an abstract pattern of black and white. Either way, there are two ways to see the picture: as a mere slew of marks; or as making visual sense, in such a way as to present us with a man. On this second option, we still see the mark as marks. But they bear a distinctive organisation, one that enables them, somehow, to make a man visible to us. This second experience is seeing-in.

Of course, figure 1 is special in that it is relatively easy to see it as mere marks. But that is the only way in which it is special. Every picture that depicts anything at all does so, in part, in virtue of the fact that we can see that thing in that picture. Seeing-in is the experience in which we grasp what pictures depict.

For present purposes, the following definition will do:

**Seeing-in:** the experience in which the content of pictures is given to us, in which we are both visually aware of the differentiated surface before us and visually aware of (something like) what the picture depicts.

Thus seeing-in is grasping content, in experience. But, more than this, it involves simultaneous visual awareness of two distinct kinds of thing: the marks composing the picture, and what they depict. There is much debate about the nature of this second awareness. Our awareness of the marks is simply veridical seeing: we see them to be before us. Is our awareness of the depicted object much the same, differing only in not being veridical? (See Gombrich 1977, Lopes 2005, Newall 2011.) Or is it a form of visual awareness fundamentally different in nature, not even claiming to show how things actually are (Hopkins 2012)? And how do the two awarenesses relate? These debates need not detain us. All that is needed here is the idea that seeing-in is visual awareness twice over, once of the picture, and once of the depicted.

## *1.2 Separation*

Why does my little definition of seeing-in say that what we see in the picture is ‘something like’ the object depicted? The answer lies in the following phenomenon:

**Separation:** sometimes what it is appropriate to see in a picture P differs, in certain limited respects, from what P depicts.

Here is an example. Since it is insensitive to the colour of what is before the lens, black and white photography doesn’t depict its objects as black and white. (It simply doesn’t specify their colour.) Nonetheless, it is at least arguable that we see black and white things in such photos. For what are the alternatives? One is that we see the things in these photographs to be the colours we know them really to be (cf. Wittgenstein 1977: section 117). That, however, seems to underplay the difference between our experience of these pictures and that we have before photographs in colour. The difference doesn’t reduce to the fact that one set of marks are seen to be coloured, the others not: only the colour photos show us the colours of the scenes visible in them. The only other option is that our visual experience of black and white photos is neutral with respect to the colour of what we see in them. But, while some forms of visual experience can certainly be neutral in this way (e.g. dreaming), we might wonder whether it’s possible for seeing-in to be so, at least when what we see in the pictures varies in respect of properties closely related to colour, such as tone; and where the marks themselves bear (achromatic) colours that vary systematically with those other properties.

These considerations are not conclusive. They do, however, at least make live the possibility that we see black and white things in these images, because there is in effect no alternative available to us. If that experience is compulsory, it is certainly appropriate. But, even so, the pictures do not depict their objects as black and white. Thus we have here at least a possible example of Separation. What we see in these pictures is, by and large, depicted by it; but there are aspects of the scenes appropriately seen in them – here, the achromatic colours – that are not part of their

depictive content.<sup>1</sup>

### *1.3 A natural assumption*

We are now in a position to frame a natural assumption. We see things in pictures, and in doing so are aware of both features of the picture and features of whatever it depicts. To give a description of a particular experience of seeing-in is to fill the gaps in the schema:

S sees \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.

In filling the first gap, we list features of the depicted item. In the case of figure 1, for instance, we'd describe a man, smiling, wearing a hat, against a background of passing clouds. In filling the second gap, we'd describe the picture, most importantly mentioning the colour and distribution of the marks that compose it. If we sought a more comprehensive characterization, we would have to say rather more about the man, and rather more about the marks in which we see him. Still, however comprehensive we seek to be, the natural assumption is that in filling either gap we will never have to make reference to what fills the other. We can describe the man in tremendous detail without mentioning the marks; and we can, at least in principle, capture the precise nature of the marks without mentioning the man. Hence the

**Natural Assumption:** the objects of the dual visual awareness involved in seeing-in – what is seen in the picture and features of the surface itself – can always be specified independently of one another.

### *1.4 Inflection: the assumption overturned*

This is where inflection comes in. For the idea is that there are cases for which the natural assumption fails.

**Inflection:** seeing-in for which what is seen in a picture needs

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of Separation, and other examples, see Hopkins 1998 ch.6 – or below, section 2.

characterizing by reference to features of that picture (conceived as such).

While the assumption may be true of most seeing-in, it is not true for all. In some cases, features of the picture, i.e. of the surface really before me, permeate the scene visible in that surface in such a way that a complete description of that scene has to refer to features of the surface in which it is seen. Vehicle and content mingle in our experience, so that the former ‘inflects’ or colours the latter.<sup>2</sup>

An example may help. Consider Rembrandt’s pen and ink sketch of Jan Cornelisz Sylvius (figure 2). Rembrandt captures Sylvius’s hand gesture particularly well. The upward thrust of his left hand is clearly visible. But to see it one must see the ink strokes that depict the hand as themselves driving upwards. Indeed, the hand itself seems to be both body part and rising splash of ink. Thus what is seen in this picture is a hand composed of rising ink. Since what is seen in needs characterising in part by reference to properties of the picture’s surface, we have here inflection.



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<sup>2</sup> I take the idea of inflection from Michael Podro (1998) and Dominic Lopes (2006), though the account given here differs from, and in my view clarifies, the formulations they offer. The Rembrandt example to follow is also Podro’s – though the description of it is my own. For more on the phenomenon and the literature on it, see Hopkins 2010a.

We could resist this conclusion only by dividing what we see, placing the upward turned hand with the scene visible in the marks, the inky splash with features of the picture's surface. We see the hand in the inky splash, but the two are not more closely related than that. However, a further feature of the picture blocks this move. To grasp the full effect of the gesture's upward thrust, we need also to see it as contrasting with the adjacent downward cascade of Sylvius's robe. Again, the fall of the cloth seems shot through with the movement of the ink that represents it. Now try seeing the two sets of ink marks, the downward driving ones that represent the robe and the rising ones representing the hand, as merely features of the surface. To do so dampens the upward thrust of the hand. The strokes composing it now rise in the same plane as that in which the strokes composing the robe descend. The movements of the two are in tension, and work to cancel each other out. A proper visual appreciation of the hand's upward rise requires that this tension be avoided. That can only be achieved by seeing the hand-strokes in a very particular way. They pick up on the downward thrust of the robe-strokes, as if they were the same fluid rebounding off a resistant surface. But they do not fight against the motion of the robe, by flowing back in the direction from which it came. Rather, they continue its force by flowing not only upwards but outwards, towards the viewer. Fully to see the upward turned hand in the picture, we must see the movement of the ink strokes as occurring not on the marked surface, but in the space visible in it. A full description of the hand cannot dispense with reference to this movement seen in the surface. But since it is movement of ink strokes, the hand cannot be fully characterised without reference to features of the surface itself.<sup>3</sup>

When our experience of pictures is inflected, we are presented with items that are very strange. What we see in the picture combines features of the non-pictorial world – the sorts of object and property that we might, at least in principle, see face-to-face – with features drawn from the surface in which it is seen. The result crosses levels, mingling the level of vehicle with that of content as nothing encountered beyond the pictorial

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the ink isn't really moving, and we don't see it as (literally) doing so. We might take talk of movement literally, in which case it is a property the ink is only imagined to have. Or we might take it as a metaphorical or elliptical description of some property the ink really possesses, and which is seen as before me.

realm could do. It is not very plausible that such strange objects are what these pictures depict. Rembrandt did not represent pastor Sylvius as a trans-level, impossible object. So it is fortunate that we have the notion of Separation at our disposal. For all that the drawing depicts Sylvius as an ordinary, if impressive, man, what we see in it goes beyond that, in various interesting, indeed deeply exotic, ways. And this experience is not merely one we can have before the picture, but is one it invites, and thus makes appropriate. We must see it this way, if we're to appreciate the force of the preacher's gesture.

### *1.5 Inflection and other phenomena*

Inflection must be carefully distinguished from certain other phenomena. It is not enough that pictorial experience involve awareness of two distinct objects, the picture and what is seen in it; for that is just seeing-in, inflected or not. Nor is it enough to add some sense of *how* the picture supports awareness of the depicted object. We are indeed sometimes aware of this, but our being so in no way challenges the natural assumption. Nor, finally, is it enough for inflection that sometimes the picture shares features with what is visible in it, and that we see as much. That is true: a round object may be seen in a round part of the picture, a blue object in a blue part, and so forth. But this phenomenon – *Overlap* – falls short of inflection. For while in *Overlap* we need to characterize the scene visible in the picture by reference to features that are in fact features of the picture's surface (roundness, blueness, etc.), we do not, in characterizing that scene, need to refer to features of that surface *conceived as such*. It is enough to speak of roundness and blueness, and is of no consequence that they are also features of the picture.

In fact (and this will matter later), *Overlap* is not merely distinct from inflection, but inimical to it. For how can features of the vehicle permeate features of the content seen in it, when the two already match? If the picture is a particular shade of blue, and what is seen in it is also that shade, then the two realms (vehicle versus content, picture versus what is seen in it) are already too similar for the second to be distinctively inflected by the first. Any contribution the colour of the marks made would, as it were, be lost in the matching property the scene visible in them already exhibits.



### 1.6 More on what inflection involves

Before leaving inflection in still pictures, let's get a little clearer about how exactly it operates. Dominic Lopes (2006: ch.1) has a nice distinction between three kinds of pictorial feature. The first is simply a matter of what can be seen in the picture. Lopes calls this *Scene*. (In discussion of cinema that word already has a different meaning – see §3.1. Capitalising Lopes's term helps avoid confusion between the two.) The second kind, *Design*, comprises those features responsible for Scene's being visible in the picture. The third, *Surface*, is simply all other visible features of the picture's surface.

**Scene:** whatever is seen in a picture P

**Design:** the visible features of P responsible for Scene's being visible in it

**Surface:** any other visible features of (the depicting surface of) P

In figure 1, for instance, Scene is a man smiling, wearing a hat, clouds in the sky behind, etc. Design is a matter of the shape and colour (black or white) of the patches that make up the picture. Had those marks been different, what is visible in the picture would have been, so they are responsible for its being visible there.<sup>4</sup> Surface features are perhaps relatively few in number in this case, but one example is the size of the image as a whole. You see how large it is (on your computer screen, or in the printout you have made). But its size does not determine Scene. Make it bigger or smaller as you please, what you see in it remains the same. (The man you see in it does not change size.) Other cases suggest a wider range of Surface features: for instance, the texture of the paper on which a sketch is drawn, the cracks in the lacquer on an old oil painting, or the glossiness of a photograph printed on high sheen paper.

Inflection involves Scene being inflected by other features of the picture. What does the inflecting: Design, Surface or both? Before answering, note a complication. Inflection makes a difference to Scene, to what is seen in the picture. But Design is

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<sup>4</sup> True, perhaps the black marks could have been, say, blue, without altering what we see in figure 1. But had some of the black marks been white, that would certainly have affected Scene.

relative to Scene: Design is what is responsible for a given Scene being visible. (Since Surface is the complement of Design, it too is relative to Scene.) So to inflected and uninflected Scene will correspond different Design properties. (Perhaps these two sets of Design properties match. The point is that it would be premature to assume so.)

Suppose, then, that we ask our question – can only Design properties inflect? – about Design for inflected Scene. Then it's trivial that the answer is 'yes'. Since what we then see in the picture needs characterizing by reference to a feature of the picture's surface, F, how can F not be responsible for our seeing that there? Matters stand differently if we instead frame our question for Design taken independently of inflection. That is, are the only properties that can inflect Scene those that are also responsible for uninflected Scene being visible in the picture? Now a positive answer is not trivial, or even correct. True, many Surface features (that is, features that do not figure in Design, prior to inflection) are probably too far removed from Scene to be able to inflect it. Examples might be the grain of the paper or the craquelure. It hardly follows, however, that this will be true of *every* Surface feature. While inflection is often by features that would otherwise anyway count as Design, it seems possible that sometimes it is by features that would otherwise belong to Surface.

## **§2 Temporally inflected cinematic seeing-in: the idea**

### *2.1 Cinema, seeing-in and awareness of the medium*

Cinema is, in important part, a pictorial art. Films are composed of moving pictures. No surprise, then, that films support seeing-in. When we watch them, we are visually aware both of the moving images before us (lights projected on a reflective cinema screen, or patterns of illumination on the TV or computer) and of something else: the events the film represents.

Admittedly, some have been tempted to deny this (Arnheim 1957, Allen 1995). On this view, when watching a film we are aware only of the events represented. Of Lopes's three kinds of feature, we see only Scene. Design and Surface elude our perceptual grasp completely, so that we no longer see anything before us but the depicted events. Movies sustain the perceptual illusion that those events are

unfolding before us. They are *trompe l'oeil* pictures of moving objects.

Such a position is very implausible. It certainly doesn't fit our experience of black and white film, and I doubt it fits our experience of any. We do see the Design and Surface features of movies. We see, for instance, the size of the projected image as a whole, and its flatness, even under those viewing conditions most likely to hide these features – the conditions that movie theatres do their best to create (Hopkins 2010b).

However, there is a grain of truth in the illusion view. Films may not be illusionistic, but their Surface features are relatively few in number and their Design features are relatively hard to see. Taking Surface first, what is there, beyond the size and flatness of the image? Unless something has gone wrong with the equipment, all other visible features of the cinematic image are consumed in determining what we see in it – that is, they constitute Design. But turning to Design, we are aware of relatively few such features for film, compared to many still pictures. We don't, for instance, see the size or shape of particular patches of projected light: in general our visual awareness is confined to the size and shape of things visible in them. As Skywalker and Vader fight, we see their differing sizes and shifting shapes as they struggle, but not the relative sizes or shapes of the light patches in which they are seen. (There are notable exceptions – see Abell 2010 for an example – but in general the point stands.)

Now, even this grain of truth is enough to present a threat to inflection in cinema. The few Surface features that films possess seem not to be of the right kind to inflect what is visible in them. Flatness and size of image are in this respect like the grain of the paper of a drawing, or the craquelure of an oil painting. And, while movies may bear Design features suitable for inflecting, they cannot play that role unless they are features we see. The prospects for inflected cinematic experience look dim.

## *2.2 Temporal inflection: the idea*

There is, however, a group of Design properties of which we are visually aware. These are temporal properties of the moving images. They include duration – of shot, scene or even longer stretches of the film; and the order in which shots, or

scenes, are shown. Given that we're aware of such features, perhaps they sometimes inflect what we see in the movie. That, at least, is the idea I want to explore:

**Temporal inflection in cinema:** sometimes, what is seen in the moving pictures before us needs characterizing by reference to temporal features of those moving pictures (conceived as such).

The development and defence of this idea will take the rest of the paper. I begin by refining it, through refining our sense of what we see in film.

I said that when we watch a movie, we are aware both of the moving images and of the events they represent. In fact, matters are more complicated. Traditional fiction film is made by photographing a complex set of events involving actors on sets, lighting, props, etc. Those events themselves represent other events, those in the story the film tells. Moreover, these elements in the making of traditional photographic fiction film sometimes show up in the experience of filmgoers. So we can distinguish, not two, but three levels, each of which, at least sometimes when watching movies, we see:

The <b>moving images:</b>	the pattern of light on the screen before us	}	Scene
The <b>events filmed:</b>	the events the camera recorded		
The <b>story told:</b>	the events making up the tale narrated		

Suppose we are watching a showing in a movie theatre of *No Country for Old Men* (Joel and Ethan Coen, 2007), and in particular the scene in which Woody Harrelson's character visits Llewellyn Moss in hospital. We see the lights projected onto the flat screen before us, forming an image of a certain overall size (the moving image). We see in those projections the visit the overconfident gunman pays Moss (the story told). But, at least when we concentrate on such matters, we also see Harrelson acting the gunman, and Josh Brolin playing Moss. If we didn't see these things, how could we appreciate the acting?

In my view, while we can see Harrelson playing the gunman, we do not have to do

so. Some of the time, we cease to see the events filmed, and simply see, in the moving images before us, the story told – the gunman and his visit, not its acting out (Hopkins 2008). But whether or not the second level above drops out in this way, in what follows my focus will be exclusively on levels one and three. What I want to know is whether temporal features of the moving images ever inflect the story told. (Other forms of inflection may be possible – inflection of the events filmed by the moving images, perhaps even inflection of the story told by the events filmed. Perhaps some such inflecting even takes temporal form. However that may be, such phenomena are not my topic.)

One last refinement is needed. What is (appropriately) seen in a movie need not be exactly what it represents. After all, the story the film tells is a function, not just of the moving pictures, but of the accompanying sound (both what the characters say and extra-diegetic features such as voiceovers), devices such as intertitles (‘Texas, 1885’; ‘three years later’, etc.), and the inferences viewers are invited to undertake to make sense of the tale. Often the events the movie explicitly shows us are only a subset of those it relates. Others might be merely described by characters or intertitles, or implied by those events we are shown. (In *No Country for Old Men*, we arrive at the scene of the protagonist’s death only some time after the fatal shootout.) And even those events that are explicitly shown are generally shown only in part: a conversation being reduced to the key exchanges, a wedding ceremony to the exchange of vows. As director David Fincher puts it, filmmakers are trying to enter the scene as late as possible, and leave it at the earliest opportunity (interview, *Front Row* BBC Radio 4, 15.12.11.).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the three tier model above is a little misleading. The level of the story told divides in two:

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<sup>5</sup> So not all of what the film represents is seen in it. This is not Separation. Separation involves a gap between what we see in a picture and what it depicts. Here the gap is instead between what is depicted by the movie (and seen in it), and what it represents in other ways.

The <b>moving images</b> :	the pattern of light on the screen	}	Scene
[The <b>events filmed</b> :	those events that the camera recorded]		
The <b>story told</b> –			
The <b>Shown</b> :	those elements in the tale narrated seen in the moving image		
The <b>Rest</b> :	other elements in the tale narrated		

Within the story told, it is only The Shown that is seen in the movie. (For traditional photographic fiction film, Scene divides into The Shown and the events filmed.) So only those elements in the story told could be inflected by temporal features of the moving images.

### *2.3 Four conditions on temporal inflection*

This identifies the levels across which inflection, in the form that interests me, would have to occur. It would be inflection of The Shown by features of the moving image. Which features would be involved? Those doing the inflecting must meet three conditions. Since our interest is in a distinctively temporal form of inflection, they should (i) be temporal. Obviously they must (ii) be properties of the moving image. While we might expect them to be Design properties, our discussion in §1.6 suggests we should leave open the possibility that they not be, prior to inflection. (As 1.6 noted, once inflection has occurred, it is trivial that the inflecting property counts as Design.) Finally, since Overlap between such features and Scene is inimical to inflection (§1.5), they should (iii) not be closely matched by any properties of The Shown, prior to inflection. (Again, once inflection has occurred, it is trivial that Scene bears properties closely related to, because somehow involving, those that inflect it.) To these conditions at the inflecting level, that of the moving image, we can add one condition at the level inflected, the story told. It will be hard for temporal features of the image to inflect Scene, unless Scene itself has some temporal aspect. Thus, (iv) prior to inflection, what we see in the image (The Shown) better already bear some temporal properties (though not, of course, properties that prevent (iii) being met).

These conditions on temporal inflection are merely necessary. Unless they are met,

we can conclude on theoretical grounds that the phenomenon does not obtain. In the next section I argue that the conditions are indeed met by cinema. But what theory allows, practice may fail to exploit. In the final section, I ask whether any of our experience of film is in fact temporally inflected.

### **§3 Are we aware of suitable temporal properties of film?**

When watching film, are we aware of properties that meet the above conditions? I present the case for thinking so, raise an objection, and then offer a reply.

#### *3.1 The case for*

Of the four conditions, I take (iv) to be least problematic. We constantly see temporal properties in film. We see duration: for instance, that it is taking the hero a while to climb the fence, and that at this rate the dogs will get to him before he makes it over. And we see order: that the guy in the black hat shot first. What we see in film is a world soaked in temporality.

The meat of the task lies in showing that we are also aware of suitable properties of the moving image, properties meeting (i) to (iii). Here is the case for. As noted in the last section, while many properties of the moving image are not salient to filmgoers, temporal properties are an exception. The central examples are duration of shot, and of scene; and the order in which the various shots and scenes are shown. We are, at least sometimes, visually aware of these features. We notice change of shot, or shift of scene, and we certainly see the order in which shots and scenes are shown. These properties clearly meet (i). The question, then, is whether they meet (ii) and (iii).

We might worry that properties of shot and scene are not, as (ii) requires, features of the moving image, because they are really properties of the events filmed. Isn't a shot something that a camera takes, and isn't a scene something actors turn up on set to 'do'? This worry is misplaced. We can, without equivocation, speak of shots and scenes in films that are works of pure animation or pure CGI. Since in these cases there need not be any events filmed, shot and scene cannot be features of such

events.<sup>6</sup> Rather, shot is a matter of continuity in the point of view from which the moving image shows the events visible in it. Continuity does not mean stasis: the point of view can alter without breaking the shot, as when the picture ‘follows’ a character through a space. The shot changes only when the point of view from which a given event is shown alters discontinuously, for instance suddenly shifting from showing a character from the front to showing her from behind. And something similar is true of scene. That is a matter of continuity of action. The scene changes when the picture ceases to show one event, and begins to show another that is spatially or temporally discrete. So understood, shot, scene and their temporal properties have nothing essential to do with the events filmed.

Of course, the argument for (ii) must do more than show that these features do not belong to the events filmed: they must not be features of the story told either. But here too a case can be made. Take shots first. There need be nothing in the story told corresponding to shots. As the shots shift in the final showdown in the Leone, there is no reason to think anything changes in the world the film represents. True, we might be tempted to read some shots as corresponding to the glances the three gunfighters cast at each other. But that cannot be right for them all, if only because some are from points of view no character occupies, such as just behind and below one gunman’s holster. (And in fact, it does not seem true of many, since most are too close up, and too straight-on, to be presentations of any character’s point of view.) Certainly in film more generally the vast majority of shots do not capture the visual experience of occupants of the world of the story. In general, then, duration and order of shot look to meet (ii). And since there is nothing in the story told that might bear properties matching those of duration and order of shot, (iii) also looks secure.

What of duration and order of scene? Here the outlook is less promising. It is true that the events we see in a film need not correspond, in order or duration, to the events that make up the tale told. The film may show only a few minutes of a wedding that takes far longer, and may show this in flashback, after showing the

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<sup>6</sup> This is taken for granted in some film theory. See, for instance, Prammagione & Wallis 2008: 134.



divorce that, in the order of events related, comes later. However, we have distinguished, within the story told, between those events seen in the film (*The Shown*) and those conveyed by other means (*The Rest*). That distinction forces us to refine our question. Do the parts of the film in which we see the events making up *The Shown* differ, in either order or duration, from those events? Now it is much less clear that they do. In the five minute sequence showing the wedding, we see five minutes of wedding. And perhaps what we see in the film is *a divorce followed by a wedding*, for all that we correctly surmise that in the story the wedding precedes the divorce.

This last might be disputed. Even so, the facts here are uncertain, with the result that it's also unclear whether duration and order of scene meet the conditions on temporal inflection. Given this, from now on I set them aside, and concentrate on duration and order of shot. It is these last that will anyway be crucial to the Leone example, to which I return in section 4. First, however, we must confront a challenge. Perhaps even duration and order of shot do not meet conditions (ii) and (iii) after all.

### 3.2 *The case against*

Shot, as characterized above, involves perspective. Shots change when one perspective on the events visible in the moving images before us is replaced by another, discontinuous perspective. Now, while 'perspective' can mean various things, here the phenomenon is purely spatial. Perspective is a matter of the spatial relations between an object, or set of objects, or events involving them, and some point in their surroundings. The various directions in which various parts of those objects lie from that point together constitute a perspective (Hopkins 1998: ch.3).

A perspective in this sense is involved in ordinary vision. When we see things in the flesh, we see them as lying over there, some parts to the left, some to the right, some higher, some lower. These terms make sense by reference to the point from which our visual experience shows us the world, our point of view. That point is not itself seen, at least not the way the objects it shows us are. Nonetheless, it is implicit in all our visual experience, as that in relation to which everything seen is shown.

Something parallel is true of pictures. A picture shows what it depicts from a 'point of view' within the picture space. Everything depicted in the picture, everything visible within it, is given as lying in certain directions from a point. That point is itself merely implicit. It is not depicted the way the objects shown are, since it is not visible in the surface. Nonetheless, it is the point in relation to which everything else depicted is shown. It is, therefore as much a part of the world of the picture, the way the picture represents things as being, as any of the things visible in it.

All representational pictures, moving or still, capture a perspective in this way. Put otherwise, every picture shows what it depicts from some point of view. Further, what we see in every picture is: its object, from a certain perspective. Thus, when we are aware (as we always are) of the perspective involved in a picture, at root this is a matter of Scene, of what is seen in that picture. Scene cannot be fully characterised without reference to the point from which everything else it involves is shown.

However, if perspective is a feature of Scene, then, so it might seem, will be duration of shot. Shot is continuity of perspective, duration of shot is the length of time for which such continuity persists. We have just said that perspective is a matter of Scene, and we earlier noted that we see temporal features such as duration and succession in film. Thus we are in a position to give a very economical account of what our awareness of shot duration consists in:

[A] We see in the moving pictures before us *the persistence, for a certain duration, of a certain spatial arrangement: O from a continuous perspective p.*

Here 'O' stands for some object, objects or events; and 'p' stands for the point, or continuous path through such points, from which, in seeing-in, they are implicitly presented.

[A] treats shot duration as a feature of Scene. It thus undermines the idea that duration of shot meets both (ii) and (iii). For if [A] is the whole story about our awareness of shot duration, (ii) fails – shot duration is not a feature of the moving

image. And if [A] is only part of the story, and that awareness is also of some other duration, one that does indeed belong to the moving image, then that second duration is matched by a duration we see Scene to have – so (iii) fails.

Moreover, if so for shot duration, similarly for shot order. Experience of shot order will consist in awareness of order in certain spatial arrangements visible in the moving images: O from one perspective, then O from another discontinuous perspective, and so on. This is order among elements in Scene. Neither shot order nor shot duration meets both (ii) and (iii).

### 3.3 Reply

In rebutting this challenge, let's begin with duration. In place of [A], I propose the following account of our awareness of length of shot:

[B] We see before us, persisting for a certain duration, moving pictures in which we see: *O from a continuous perspective p.*

We are aware of shot duration as a feature of the moving images before us, not as a feature of what is seen in them. One shot ends and another begins when there is discontinuity in the perspective from which those moving images present the depicted objects. Perspective is indeed an aspect of Scene. Even so, what is experienced as taking a certain amount of time is not some perspective, but the images in which things are shown from that perspective.

Here is one way to think of the issue between [A] and [B]. A shot is a kind of window onto the world of the story told. Each window reveals how things are in a segment of that world, a segment limited by the shot's duration. [A] construes these windows as themselves part of the world they reveal: we experience the shot's duration as a feature of an element in Scene, the continuous perspective from which the objects and events are presented. (Even though that perspective is not itself seen in the movie, it is implicit in what is seen therein.) [B] holds otherwise. Duration of shot is duration of the moving images in which we see the story told. Those pictures are not themselves part of the world we see in them (not even implicitly). For [B], shots are windows, open for a certain duration, *on* the world they reveal; for [A]

they are windows *in* that world.

Why prefer [B] to [A]? [A] is certainly coherent. Indeed, there are cases for which it may be right. Consider point of view shots. When a shot captures a character's experience of a scene, sometimes the duration of the shot is the duration of that experience. The shot begins and ends with her visual scrutiny of the scene. Her experience is indeed a window in the world of the story, one that is open for only so long. Since that experience is part of the world the movie shows us, the shot's duration is duration in the world being shown. If cinema viewers not only know all this, but experience things this way, here matters are just as [A] claims.

However, [A]'s claim is not limited to point of view shots, but is quite general. Even where a shot does not capture some character's experience, [A] claims that our awareness of its duration is awareness of the duration of some element in the world visible in the movie. We experience the duration of these shots as the length of time for which some other window in that world is open. Since it cannot be identified with the experience of any occupant of that world, this window is objective. It centres on a continuous perspective. And its duration is a matter of how long, in the world of the story, objects and events are presented at that perspective.

To see what's wrong with this view, consider the parallel issue for space. Shots have spatial as well as temporal limits: only so much is shown in a shot at any given moment. Sometimes we are visually aware of these spatial boundaries. It is not just that we see only so much in the moving images before us, or that we see only so much moving image. Often, we are also aware that what we see extends beyond our current grasp. For instance, we see the street in the moving image, but also see it as stretching beyond those parts we currently see. (Perhaps someone has just entered from the left and exited to the right.)

In giving an account of our awareness of this limit, we face a choice parallel to that between [A] and [B]. Is it awareness of some limit within Scene, or awareness of the extent of the moving image? Here, however, the latter is clearly the better option. With sufficient ingenuity we could find some feature of Scene to provide the boundary. As introduced above, perspective is a matter of the directions in which

parts of objects lie from some point in their environment. We could treat the spatial limit here as some limitation on the range of directions figuring in a given perspective. That limit would be a feature of Scene, a boundary within the world of the story beyond which nothing could, at any given moment, be presented. But why develop such a construct, when a simpler account is to hand? Our awareness of the limit on what is visible in the moving image is simply our awareness of the spatial extent of the image itself. The image before us, at any one moment, only extends so far. We see its boundary. We cannot see in it anything lying beyond that boundary. What we can do, however, is to see things as extending beyond that boundary: the limits of the image are not the limits of the world whose image it is. As far as spatial limits go, the shot should be conceived as a window *on* the world of the movie, not a window *in* that world.

As for space, so for time. Awareness of the temporal limit on shot is awareness of the duration of the pictures through which the events are shown, not the duration of some perspective in Scene. Perspective – the presentation of things as related to a point of view – is indeed experienced as a feature of Scene. But in general the spatial and temporal limits on what is so presented are experienced only as features of the image itself. Point of view shots aside, the right account of our awareness of shot duration is [B].<sup>7</sup>

Thus shot duration meets (ii): it is experienced as a feature of the moving image. Moreover, it also meets (iii) – we experience no corresponding feature of Scene. For we have rejected the only candidate for that feature, in rejecting [A].

If this is the right way to treat duration of shot, I think it will hold for shot order as well. Compare these accounts of awareness of shot order:

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<sup>7</sup> There may be other exceptions. Consider the sweeping ‘fly-arounds’ made familiar by *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and its derivatives. These are not point of view shots. Nonetheless, to engage fully with their dizzying effect, we may have to experience the perspective as *shifting rapidly within Scene space*. This may in turn require us to experience the duration of the shot as a whole as a feature of that continuously moving perspective.

[C] We see in the film *one spatial arrangement: O, from a continuous perspective p, succeeded by another: O, from a perspective p2 discontinuous with p.*

[D] We see before us moving pictures in which we see: *O from a continuous perspective p* succeeded by other pictures in which we see: *O, from a perspective p2 discontinuous with p.*

The choice between these two closely parallels that between [A] and [B]. The considerations favouring [B] over [A] equally support [D] over [C]. To a succession of perspectives we should prefer a succession of pictures capturing perspectives.

#### §4 Back to examples

##### 4.1 *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly*

If the argument of the last section is right, the background conditions for temporal inflection in film are met. We are, in watching film, aware of properties suited to inflect Scene, here in the guise of The Shown – those elements in the story told seen in the movie. However, it hardly follows that the phenomenon occurs. Does it? Are there examples of temporal inflection in film?

At this point let us return to the standoff in *The Good, The Bad & The Ugly*.<sup>8</sup> This is the final showdown between three characters we have followed over the course of a long film. Good, bad or ugly, we cannot be indifferent to their fates. Now one will at last win the gold, and at least one must die. As the moment of truth approaches, features of the moving images, and especially the shot changes, help bring home the momentous nature of the events portrayed. The film invites us to experience the passing of these crucial minutes somewhat as the characters themselves do, as they gamble everything on their outcome.

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<sup>8</sup> The relevant sequence can be seen in its entirety here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?X=XP9cfQx2OZY>. The passage that particularly interests me runs from around 3 minutes in to around 7'35".

How does it do this? As the pictorial rhythm alters, with ever shorter shots, time passing within the scene is fragmented. The result is that the whole is divided into more parts than its overall duration would seem to allow. Thirty seconds in the showdown is split, by the shot changes, into fragments that seem to add up to more. As a result, while in some sense the action accelerates towards its climax, in another respect time seems to slow, more being wrung from every passing minute. The effect is a cinematic gesture towards the heightened sense of time's passage that the characters themselves feel.

If this is to count as inflection, it must not reduce to two other phenomena. One is our feeling the emotional tension. That is brought about partly by the nature of the events depicted, partly by the accelerating rhythms and increasingly strident tones of the music. The parallel rhythm of the shots also contributes. The result is to leave the viewer attuned to the crisis, and anxious as to its outcome. This effect, while important, is not inflection. For rising emotional tension is primarily a matter of how we feel, not how things look. Insofar as it does alter what we see, it does so by directing our attention to complementary features of the scene – for instance, signs of tension in the characters themselves. Since these can be described without reference to features of the images in which they are seen, inflection is not here in question.

The other phenomenon is illusion. The tricks Leone plays with shot length have a long history. Abel Gance used them as early as 1922, in *La Roue*.<sup>9</sup> A train, its driver in the despair of love unrequited, accelerates towards destruction at the end of the line. As the sequence unfolds, the shots become ever shorter. Views of the rails, the cab, the unhappy man and his victims, still ignorant of the danger, are interspersed with shots of the wheels spinning, in an every more frenzied merry-go-round. According to André Bazin (1958: 24), the result is a visual illusion. We see in the images wheels turning ever faster, when in fact their speed remains the same. If we were to splice the shots of the wheels into an unbroken sequence, the rate at which they turn would not seem to change.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?=-O58GMFjwqd4>, especially 3'10" to 3'40".

This phenomenon, while clearly visual, is not inflection either. We can describe the illusion without reference to the shots in which it appears: the speed of the wheels looks to increase, when in fact it is constant. Similarly, if the showdown sequence is to involve inflection, it must involve more than mere illusion. The visual effect must not be simply that the events shown in one shot look to last longer than they really do; or that the sum of the durations of the events shown in each shot is greater than the duration the showdown as a whole seems to take. For all this, however unusual it may be, can be described without reference to shot length. Here, as in the case of the Gance, we could capture the effect merely by elaborating Scene. No reference to properties of the images themselves is needed.

If our experience of the Leone is to be inflected, image and Scene must somehow intertwine. But how? To answer, consider the real life phenomenon the sequence mimics, the way time seems to slow in moments of great consequence. Time seems to dilate, so that a period of given duration  $\delta$  somehow accommodates more than such periods ordinarily do. No doubt the source of the effect is heightened anxiety, or some other form of emotional energy. That increases our attention to the non-mental world, so that we notice more aspects of it; and electrifies the mind, so that our thoughts become more densely packed. In both ways, we are alert to more events – mental events of thinking or noticing features of the world, and worldly events noticed. Taken alone, however, alertness to more events is not enough. We might experience more events simply because we observe for longer, or the individual events themselves take less time. For time to slow, we must experience more events, of constant duration, within a period that itself is experienced as no longer than its equivalent in normal lived time. Only then will that period seem to accommodate an abnormal quantity of temporal content. Events that together require longer than  $\delta$  somehow, without themselves contracting in duration or thinning in number, fit into a period experienced as  $\delta$ . (Clearly, for this to occur we must have a bead on duration that is not simply that given by tracking the number and duration of the events that fill it. Perhaps there is a clock to watch, perhaps we monitor our own bodily rhythms.)

The case of the Leone, I suggest, is broadly similar. Here we experience a given



period within the shootout sequence as of normal duration. That is, for some period of Scene time that really has duration  $\delta'$ , we experience it as lasting that long – as being as long as other such periods the movie has shown us. (Here it is easy to see what provides our ‘bead’ on this common duration. The moving images that portray a period of duration  $\delta'$  will themselves take  $\delta'$ , and what reason is there to deny that we are aware of how long the images before us last?) We are also aware of that period as encompassing certain events – glances between the protagonists, twitches of trigger fingers, switches of cheroot from one side of the mouth to the other, and so forth. As the sequence unfolds, the duration of those events remains unchanged. (A briefer shot of a twitch is not experienced as a shot of a briefer twitch.) But there is a sense in which the number of those events seems to increase. Not that we see more events in later periods of duration  $\delta'$  than in earlier such periods. We do not fall prey to the illusion that more is happening in Scene than is really doing so; and, if we did, the situation would not involve inflection. Rather, we experience the number of events through the filter of the increasingly numerous and frenetic shots through which we are shown them. As Sylvius’s hand seems to thrust upwards with the movement of the ink out of which it is composed, so the events in Scene seem to multiply with the fragmentary shots that present them. It is hard to frame the effect satisfactorily in words, but, if we were to try, we should say the following. What we see in the later parts of the sequence is *events multiplied by the momentary shots that present them*. The upshot is that Scene time is also inflected in such a way as to dilate. It seems slower, but not straightforwardly so. (Not even in the ‘straightforward’ way exhibited by cases of time dilating described above.) It is stretched in a way that can only be captured by reference to the fragmentary shots through which we are shown it.

This description is perhaps somewhat obscure, but should that deter us? Inflection involves the intermingling of Design or Surface and Scene, to create visual objects the like of which we never encounter beyond the pictorial realm. Our visual vocabulary has developed to describe the kinds of objects and features we encounter in ordinary vision, or at least might encounter in more exotic face-to-face visual experience. It should be no surprise if that vocabulary strains to capture inflected phenomena.

I have described three phenomena: the Gance illusion, the slowing of time in non-cinematic experience, and the temporal inflection exhibited by the Leone. While our interest is only in the third, it may help to tabulate them.

**Gance:** a decreasing period (shot length) is on each repetition occupied by component events (rotations of the wheel) that are, while in fact ever fewer, experienced as constant in number.

Upshot: the wheels seen in the moving images seem to accelerate. (Illusion)

**Dilating time:** a constant period (of duration  $\delta$ ) is on each repetition occupied by component events (thoughts, noticings and events noticed) that are experienced as of constant duration but increasing number. The result is a mismatch between our sense of the period as  $\delta$  and our sense of its component events as summing to  $>\delta$ .

Upshot: time seems to slow (the later  $\delta$  periods dilate, to accommodate more temporal content).

**Leone:** a constant Scene period (of duration  $\delta'$ ) is on each repetition occupied by component events (twitches, glances, etc.) that are experienced as of constant duration but increasing number-multiplied-by-momentariness-of-shot. The result is a mismatch between our sense of the period as  $\delta'$  and our sense of its component events, filtered through the fragmentary shots, as summing to  $>\delta'$ .

Upshot: Scene time seems to be slowed by the shortening shots through which it is presented.

A rather different worry about this description is that it is simply not true to our experience of the film. At times I share this doubt myself. However, even if that is right, the example can still serve some purpose. It gives us a sense of what, in concrete terms, cinematic inflection would be like. Perhaps the Leone sequence does not fall out as my description suggests, but at least we now have a better (because less abstract) sense of what it would be for *some* film sequence to do so.

#### *4.2 Why temporal inflection matters*

Perhaps it will seem eccentric to have spent so long marking out the space for inflection in cinema, if there is uncertainty even in my mind about whether my central example occupies that space. I close with two responses to that charge.

First, it is worthwhile asking whether there is temporal inflection in cinema because, were it to occur, that would be of some significance for the art form. As noted at the outset, inflection falls under the general category of interesting relations between form and content, relations that are a central source of interest and value in the arts. Moreover, the particular form of inflection I have in mind would in all likelihood be the special preserve of cinema. Only the pictorial and sculptural arts involve inflection in any form, and among them only cinema is an art of time.<sup>10</sup> Thus temporal inflection promises to be a phenomenon of paradigmatic artistic interest that is unique to film.

Second, there is independent reason to think that cinema does stand in some distinctive relation to time, a relation the notion of temporal inflection might at least in part capture. This is a connection that has drawn various theorists and practitioners. Among them was the great Russian director Andrey Tarkovsky, from whose artistic autobiography (1987) I take my title. I do not pretend that Tarkovsky would have recognized his thoughts in the position offered here. He did, however, consider film's connection to time to be central to its artistic interest. And, if only by happy accident, his title does provide an apt slogan for the idea of temporal inflection. For there can be inflection wherever there is seeing-in, and we certainly see things in sculpture.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> What of theatre? That is an art of time. Perhaps it involves something like seeing-in. Even if so, its resources for manipulating time seem to be a subset of those available to cinema. (What, for instance, is there in theatre to correspond to the shot?) We would thus expect cinema to outstrip theatre in its capacity for temporal inflection.

<sup>11</sup> Podro (1998) takes his examples of inflection from both painting and drawing on the one hand and sculpture on the other, without even really bothering to mark the distinction.

I suspect that if we are persuaded that cinematic inflection ever occurs, we will then begin to find the phenomenon more widely. And I would hope that some of the examples would be more striking still than the Leone. For sometimes an entire movie seems to engage our sense of time's passage, in ways that might be illuminated by bringing the idea of inflection to bear. Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1972) is one example. And some of the films of Tarkovsky himself (I am thinking in particular of *Andrey Rublev*) might be others. If these are indeed examples, inflection is integral to some of the greatest masterpieces of cinema. Arguing for that, however, would be a task for another day.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I have been greatly helped by comments from Thomas Jacobi; the editors; and audiences at the White Rose Aesthetics Forum, New York University, CUNY Graduate Center, Dartmouth College, Auburn University's conference on Film, and the University of Fribourg's workshop on experience and time.

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