Marco Bellardi*
The cinematic mode in fiction

Abstract: This article focuses on the imitation of film form in cinematic novels and short stories on the level of narrative discourse and introduces the concept of 'para-cinematic narrator'. The author compares the temporality expressed by verbal tenses in literature and the temporality expressed through film semiosis. The connection between film and literary fiction is explored in terms of foreground and background narrative style. It is argued that the articulation of narrative foreground and background – i.e. the "narrative relief" (Weinrich 1971) – in film form tends to favour the foreground style, and that such narrative relief is 'flattened' due to the "monstrative" quality (Gaudreault 2009) of the medium. This flattening is remediated in strongly cinematised fiction and conveyed through the use of verbal tenses. The imitation of montage and specific cinematic techniques is conceived, consequently, as a separate feature that can integrate into this remediated, para-cinematic temporality. Finally, the author recalls the concept of "mode" in genre theory (Fowler 2002), which describes a "distillation" of traits from one genre to another. With the category of cinematic mode the remediation of basic traits from film to literary fiction can be framed in terms of genre-related discourses.

Keywords: para-cinematic narrator, monstration and narration, narrative relief, cinematisation, remediation

1 Introduction

Cinematic fiction is a cross-category of fictional narrative texts in which the medium of film is implicitly imitated to varying degrees. It includes a range of works such as Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese falcon* (1930), Elio Vittorini's *Uomini e no* (1945), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie* (1957), or James G. Ballard's *The 60 minute zoom* (2006 [1976]), where cinematisation is most prominent. However, cinematised narration can also be substantially limited to imitation of

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montage, as in Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and Antonio Tabuc-chi's *Piazza d'Italia* (1975), or appear locally in the narrative, as in some passages of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997). Although the subject matter has recurrently been investigated over the years (e.g. Cohen 1979; Spiegel 1976; Clerc 1993; Ivaldi 2011; Seed 2012 [2009]; Rajewsky 2002), some further clarification is still needed, as it is not clear under which circumstances one is entitled to speak of cinematisation of writing.

Some of the most frequently repeated, but also stereotypical, features of cinematic writing include: present-tense narration, the montage in general, a 'certain' visual quality of the texts, the camera-eye narratorial situation, a 'dry' dialogue, and the use of specific cinematic techniques such as travelling, pans, and zooms. It is arguable that any of these features, if taken singularly, may trigger cinematic reading, even though they are likely the most relevant ones that confer a cinematic aura to a given text. I contend that these features need to interact and be combined with the temporal configuration of the text to result in strongly cinematised fiction. Otherwise, they will merely signal a more limited cinematic dimension of the text. The availability of the literary narrator to imitate the cinematic narrator, thereby becoming para-cinematic on the discursive level, seems of paramount importance to convey cinematic traits. Para-cinematic narra-tors have been free to imitate specific cinematic techniques creatively and aim at incorporating a filmic rhetoric; however, as moving images flow in filmic time, such literary narrators have necessarily remediated filmic temporality in order to convey a strongly cinematic, and not merely 'visual' or 'pictorial', component in the narration.

My treatment of cinematic fiction is based on the concepts of remediation and "retrograde remediation" (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of film in written texts.[1] More specifically, I deal with the topic in terms of the "intermedial reference" (Rajews-ky 2005; Rajewsky 2010; Wolf 2011) to the film form on the part of writers. I focus in particular on film as a narrative device, and on cinematic language as one fundamentally codified by classic montage theories and the Hollywood model.[2]

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1 "Retrograde remediation" occurs when "a newer medium is imitated or even absorbed by an older one" (Bolter and Grusin 1999: 147). This is the case with literary fiction and the newer medium of film. Retrograde remediation follows the same formal logic of immediacy and hyper-mediacy applying to remediation of older media by newer media.

2 I am well aware that non-narrative and non-fictional films exist. However, non-narrative, non-fictional, and documentary films have had a limited impact on writers' styles compared to narrative films. Similarly, the hybrid genre of docufiction seems to have had a more limited impact as far as the cinematisation of writing is concerned because the basic 'grammar' of filmmaking had already been codified in previous years, especially with Hollywood continuity editing, and

Moreover, cinema and literature can also be dealt with in terms of modes; a mode being defined broadly as "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (Kress 2010: 79). The mode, in fact, is conceptually different from both the "qualified" and "technical" media (Elleström 2010: 25–30) that display it (e.g. the audiovisual is a mode; cinema and television are qualified media that display it, but also technical devices).[3]

In this article, I shall frame the imitation of film as a (narrative) medium in literary fiction on a discursive level, and subsequently investigate temporality in film and fiction; I shall point to the concept of "narrative relief" [*Reliefgebung*] (Weinrich 1978) as a useful one to assess the cinematisation of writing; and I will finally point out the connection between the concept of mode in social semiotics and in genre theory. This connection illuminates the contribution of the film form to literary styles and frames it in terms of genre. A plausible assessment of the issue in terms of genre-related discourses is timely, as cinematic fiction does not constitute any subgeneric group of texts but is particularly elusive, cutting across multiple genres and styles. The concept of mode stemming from genre theory works as a unifying category, enabling us to discuss works from disparate genres, periods and movements under the same umbrella term. It thus resolves this difficulty and describes an important vector steering the evolution of literary fiction in the twentieth century.

2 The narrator in film and cinematic fiction

Whereas in literature the presence of an agent organising and recounting the story for the reader, even when concealed, appears to be quite obvious and established, at least since Stanzel's studies (1971 [1955], 1984 [1979]), the matter has long been debated in relation to cinema. In literary fiction, we tend to perceive a natural 'voice' speaking throughout the text; film form, instead, somehow "speaks cinema" (Jost 1987) – it 'speaks' by means of objects, figures, and ambiences that have been previously prepared, framed in moving images, and put in a sequence for a meaningful purpose. However, some narratologists have considered the postulate of a cinematic narrator of no use and pushed this notion outside the domain of film narratology. Performed stories and dramatic represen-

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due to the comparatively limited number and circulation of docufictional films against the enormous diffusion and success of fictional feature-films throughout the ages.

3 Therefore, by cinema as qualified medium I also mean both analogic and digital cinema, as well as its relation with both the big screen and the small screen of television.

tations would be non-narrated and therefore imply no narrator.[4] Another group of narratologists have insisted on the need to posit a superior agency in film narrative.[5] Many of them have reworked Laffay's (1964) idea of a *grand imagier* [great image-maker] shaping film narration. Metz (1973, 1974 [1968]) had already addressed the issue of the narrator in terms of *énonciation* and pointed out that, in cinema, the problem is that the narrator has no spatial collocation (or deixis): apparently, the filmic narrator is not coincident with the camera.[6] Chatman (1990: 133) put forth the notion of an extradiegetic "presenter" of stories in film. Similarly, Gaudreault (2009 [1988]) proposed the awkward but enlightening notion of a "film mega-narrator" that would be the result of two functions contributing to its semiotic system: "monstration" and "narration". This is the key conceptualisation to assess cinematic novels and short stories on a formal level.

In Gaudreault's model, a film cannot but be a fact of diegesis;[7] film narrative is conveyed by a narrator; "there are no stories without a storytelling instance" (Gaudreault and Jost 1999: 45). More precisely, as Gaudreault demonstrates, building upon the studies of film historian Tom Gunning (1991), three sub-instances, or sub-functions, operate in film form: the "profilmic monstrator", the "filmographic monstrator" and the "filmographic narrator". The profilmic monstrator is the function responsible for the *mise-en-scène* (e.g. setting, lights and so on), and for this reason can first be considered as the cinematic equivalent of the theatrical monstrator; it reflects a 'putting in place'. But the profilmic monstrator also carries out a transformation on reality due to its mechanical apparatus, frame by frame: it bears the traces of the physical act of camera recording. The filmographic monstrator, on the other hand, is the function responsible for the 'putting in frame', it involves camera mobility, angle, focal length, aperture size and perspective. Whereas the profilmic monstrator is fundamentally the same in

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4 Following Genette's first insight (1972, 1983), the concept of narrator cannot be applied to film. Similarly, Henderson (1983), Bordwell (1985) and Branigan (1984, 1992) have countered the idea of the cinematic narrator as it seems too closely derived from literary narratology.
5 Such agency has been given different labels: "intrinsic narrator" (Black 1986), "ultimate narratorial agency", "supra-narrator" (Tomasulo 1986: 46), "superordinate instance" (Lothe 2000: 30), "filmic compositional device" (Jahn 2003), "organising consciousness", "heterodiegetic narrator" (Fulton 2005: 113), and "audiovisual/visual narrative instance" (Kuhn 2009).
6 See Schlickers's (1997, 2009) use of the term "camera" to express a more sophisticated narratorial function.
7 For Gaudreault (2009: 8), the opposition between mimesis and diegesis is "the hole in the net of narratological theory" because "for Plato mimesis was not, contrary to what is too often claimed, in opposition to diegesis. Rather, it is simply one of the forms that diegesis can take". Similarly, "mimesis and diegesis are not opposite categories in Aristotle either. Aristotle, with inverse reasoning to Plato's, saw diegesis as one of the forms of mimesis".

theatrical representation, the filmographic monstrator is an all-cinematic function. The interaction of these two functions allows the profilmic to be shown, and constitutes the film mega-*monstrator*, which is the function responsible for the 'putting into film': as Gaudreault explains (2009: 94), "this second-level form of monstration, filmographic monstration, is distinct from the first level, that of simple profilmic monstration, in that it too, in a sense, is able to inscribe the *viewer's reading*; it too is the work of an *intermediary gaze*". Hence, the filmographic monstrator is a crucial function that is inherent in the filmic mode.

Monstration is an initial and basic form of narrative that is very obvious in early films. What creates complex narratives, then? In Gaudreault's model, this is fulfilled by the filmographic narrator, who is responsible for the 'putting in sequence' – i.e. the montage. With montage, however rudimentary it may be, the filmographic narrator manipulates time and triggers more articulated temporal relations. As part of the editing, montage is part of the post-production process: thus, the filmographic narrator is able to detach itself from the contingent reality in order to express complex narratives, including manifold refined intellectual overtones (Eisenstein's theory of montage is an example) and extradiegetic sound. Therefore, film diegesis is the product of a compounded agency that relays the narrative through the complementary acts of monstration and narration. Such extradiegetic, overarching and non-personified agency is found in the film mega-narrator, whose notion reflects that of fundamental narrator in literary narratology.[8] In Gaudreault's model, one primary extradiegetic narrator underlies literary and filmic narrative, reflecting the fundamental act of enonciation. Accordingly, any agent relaying framed or sub-narratives, as well as all homodiegetic and autodiegetic narrators are "delegated narrators" (Gaudreault 2009: 116). The problem lies in linking para-cinematic narrative strategies in literary fiction with the imitation of the narratorial function in film. To do that, one needs to go deeper into the range of possibilities at the cinematic narrator's disposal.

The fundamental narrator organises the amount of information to be relayed on the basis of different narrative strategies. If the questions 'who knows?' and 'who speaks?' notoriously pertain to focalisation, the questions 'who sees?' and 'who hears?' pertain to "ocularisation" and "auricularisation" of narrative, as Jost

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8 Gaudreault's fundamental narrator (and the mega-narrator in film) should not be confused with the notion of implied author. As Bortolussi and Dixon (2003: 76) point out, "the narrator is constructed on the basis of the text, while the author representation may also be influenced by extratextual information concerning the historical author". Gaudreault's fundamental narrator, which is quite an abstract entity, is fully textual (whether it is drawn from audiovisual or verbal narration), whereas the implied author is not.

put it (1987, 2004) in relation to film.[9] Focalisation determines the cognitive relation between narrator, narratee and characters displayed locally or throughout the narrative; ocularisation and auricularisation in film determine what is provided by the cinematic narrator and conveyed to spectators. Jost has notoriously distinguished several categories of ocularisation and auricularisation, which boil down to two possibilities: *zero* ocularisation / auricularisation, when the spectator sees or hears the storyworld directly without any mediation by the character; and *internal* ocularisation / auricularisation, when the spectator sees or hears what a character sees or hears.[10] Combinations are obviously possible. Notably, auricularisation in film is often 'anchored' to ocularisation. Zero auricularisation, on the other hand, is far more unusual in literature than in cinema, since there is no sound in literature, but a very limited 'selection' of specific sounds that the narrator conveys for descriptive purposes and attaches to the character's perception.

These critical terms suitably give an account of the relation between the act of narrating, the storyworld, and the extratextual recipient. Continuous inference based on ocularisation is implied in spectatorship and exploited for disparate stylistic effects in literary fiction, but the point is that "ocularization does not always go hand in hand with focalization" (Jost 2004: 79). The interaction of specific focalisations, ocularisations and auricularisations is perceivable, for example, when we follow a character whilst being introduced into a house where he or she has never been. If only intradiegetic sound is provided, focalisation tends to be internal (we know what the character knows), but usually in these cases the filmographic monstrator alternates all kinds of ocularisation (the character seen at a distance, over-the-shoulder shot of him or her observing the rooms, a POV shot, the image of a detail, etc.). Yet the same scene would turn to zero

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9 For a recent and comprehensive survey of the concepts of 'point of view', 'perspective' and 'focalisation', see Niederhoff (2009a, 2009b) and Hühn et al. (2009). With regard to focalisation, I follow the Todorov-Genette line: in zero focalisation the narrator displays a broader knowledge than that of characters; in internal focalisation the narrator displays a knowledge equal to that of a given character; in external focalisation the narrator displays a smaller knowledge than that of characters (Genette 1972: 206–211).

10 Jost distinguishes several categories of ocularisation and auricularisation. In zero ocularisation note for example the common cases of *masked* enonciation, and the cases of *marked* enonciation when the camera or monstrator displays or even emphasises its enonciation, as in aerial travelling ending up in close-up. In internal ocularisation note that *primary* internal ocularisation is the sub-case of POV shots displaying traces of someone who is looking at something (e.g. optical deformations, effects of movement, body parts in over-the-shoulder shots); *secondary* internal ocularisation is the sub-case of the image of a character looking at something followed by the image of the object that is looked-at, and thus involving montage.

focalisation if the spectator already knows something that the character does not (because of the montage), or if extradiegetic music signals impending danger. An obvious example that includes all of these dynamics of focalisation, ocularisation and auricularisation is in the famous tower sequence in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958).

The difference between focalisation and ocularisation is crucial to understanding cinematic fiction too, for it allows us to go beyond old, misleading tenets. As has repeatedly been said, when characters are represented 'from the outside' and no access to their thoughts is given, and so readers are forced into a condition of cognitive disadvantage, this technique would supposedly imitate the normal condition of film spectatorship. Following these assumptions, one might presume that cinematic fiction and camera-eye narratives are the same and are based on external focalisation, which is an oversimplification.[11] Certainly, external focalisation is a possibility in novels as well as in films, and it has been exploited in objective (or behaviourist-style) narratives, such as Federico De Roberto's *Processi verbali* (1990 [1889]), or Ernest Hemingway's *The killers* (1993 [1927]). Yet the parallel between external focalisation, film diegesis and camera-eye narrative situation in literature does not hold. This is because knowing (focalisation) and perceiving (ocularisation / auricularisation) are completely different aspects of narrative communication and reception. In fact, films are basically never entirely in external focalisation; on the contrary, large portions of film diegesis normally unfold in zero focalisation and zero ocularisation, and make use of most other combinations, except in cases of extreme narrative experimentations.[12]

On the level of theoretical analysis, the key factor to assess the cinematic quality of written texts thus seems to be their capacity to transmit ocularisation by following a filmic visual rhetoric. Clearly, this is only another turn of phrase to

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11 One of the limits of the concept of 'camera-eye' stems from its having been created within literary narratology (cf. Spiegel 1976; Stanzel 1984). Thus, the camera-eye technique has too often been evoked without a precise comparison between film narration and verbal narration being made. In this critical context, it has been used as a metaphor which simply refers to the cinematic camera and describes perspective effects or the narrator's impersonality; however, as Stanzel pointed out (1984: 232–236), camera-eye narration can also be found in the internal perspective of a strongly depersonalised character (e.g. *La jalousie*), as well as in figural narration and interior monologue.

12 The awkwardness of an adaptation like Robert Montgomery's *The lady in the lake* (1947) is almost completely due to a continuous POV shot causing a clumsy effect of persistent friction between the unnatural, unbearable external focalisation and the rather realistic internal primary ocularisation.

assert the theoretical impact of the concept of filmographic monstrator. Focalisation is not a determining factor in assessing the cinematic quality of literary fiction, but only contributes to sustaining certain aesthetic effects. Specific ocularisations, instead, may be crucial clues since they reflect the remediation of the filmographic monstrator's activity in fiction. Moreover, a certain internal fragmentation that mimics the "discontinuous continuity" (Cohen 1979) of the vast majority of narrative films is crucial in cinematic fiction; this is determined by the filmographic narrator in a considerable number of montage films, regardless of the different stylistic uses of montage throughout film history, and can be considered a para-cinematic feature in literary fiction.

To summarise these first observations, in comparing written to filmic narratives, in search of broad formal influences on the part of cinema, a privileged area of analysis concerns the range of expressive possibilities of the filmographic monstrator and their transcodification into words. Furthermore, a second level of issues arises when considering the other function responsible for information and time manipulation in cinema: the filmographic narrator. In this respect, the notion of camera-eye is inadequate to fully understand the remediation of film form in fiction. In cinematic fiction the interplay of cinema-derived functions (film monstration and film narration as translated in written narratives) engenders a more complex narrating or 'presenting' instance that normally avoids making comments and pretends to act like the film mega-narrator, thereby reformalising it.

3 Temporality in film

A closer look at the articulation of time and narrative rhythm in films and novels will resolve another determining theoretical issue. In fact, "monstration takes place in the present: it is impossible to have shown by showing" (Gaudreault 2009: 84); but if the filmographic monstrator is forced to stick to the present, to the here and now of the scene, then is the present tense a necessary condition for a written story to activate a cinematic sensation in the reader's mind or is it just one possibility? An interesting parallel between audiovisual and written forms can be made as far as rhythm and narrative segmentation are concerned. If in cinematic novels a para-cinematic agency appears to determine a certain textual organisation, one has to assess the extent to which texts can do what films can do, especially in terms of temporality and immersion. Unfortunately, this point has been rather neglected in many studies in favour of a restricted focus on visual aspects of the cinema-literature connection. The question I aim to answer is whether the configuration of verbal tenses can make a written narrative more

cinematically perceivable. Before answering this question, it is necessary to study which temporality is expressed by the film form.

Regarding 'reading' time, film and literary fiction are not significantly different, because both convey narrative through the present time of our lives and represent a storyworld that is placed at a certain temporal 'distance' from us. Both are 'in the present' simply because their functioning is activated in the present. Clearly, a fundamental difference pertains to the experience of films and books, because film 'reading' is regulated by the forced running time of the movie, whereas lines on a page can be read according to as many individual readings as there are readers. Gianfranco Bettetini (2000 [1979]: 13–14) explained film time in terms of *dureté*, in the double meaning of hardness and duration. The film *dureté* entails that, as spectators, we are subjected to the cinematic flow of images quite (but not completely) passively, whereas, as readers, we actively set our own flow of reading, even though page reading cannot actually be too fast or too slow.[13] Therefore, cinema and written narratives show certain differences in reading time whilst also sharing a primarily important feature: to paraphrase Sartre (2008: 48), both media are 'peculiar spinning tops' that exist only when put in movement by humans. Human experientiality is necessary, for it allows to fill the gaps in the narrative (Chatman 1978: 28) and construct the storyworld (Doležel 1998: 203); moreover, it articulates the difference between the real object and the "aesthetic object" (Ingarden 1967: 304): a closed book or a film reel have, so to speak, no time – they remain mere objects, potential narratives.[14]

On the other hand, as far as time expressed by film narration (or discourse time) is concerned, in the early years of film theory Balázs (1970 [1945]: 120) conceived the images in silent films as having no tenses and, consequently, as unfolding in a sort of present tense. In the 1960s, Mitry (2000 [1963]: 194) pointed out the "constant alternation" between actualisation and presentification, between a present "actually happening" and a present "which has already happened". Similarly, Metz (1974: 108) claimed that the image is "*always actualised*", and pointed to a fundamental difference between the filmic image that is "always in the present", and the film as a whole that is "always in the past" (1973: 68). Deleuze, moreover, pointed out that present time is inextricably intertwined –

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13 Occasional slowdowns or accelerations of reading time may apply to both films or written texts and, clearly, spectators and readers nowadays are also allowed to pause, jump back and forth, re-watch or re-read films and books as they please: however, these possibilities are unimportant in the present analysis, which concerns the imitation of intrinsic features of film in written narratives.
14 On experientiality see Fludernik (1996) and, recently, Caracciolo (2014). See also Ryan's "principle of minimal departure" (1991: 51) and Walton's "principle of charity" (1990: 183).

hanté [haunted], he says (1985: 54) – with both past and future. Consequently, it is widely accepted nowadays that the filmic image fundamentally mediates between the actual present of its signifier and the distanced time (no matter how long) of what is signified. By privileging the singulative event,[15] film form conveys an impression of reality and simultaneity that maintains our immersion in the storyworld. Therefore, the present tense seems inherent in film. In effect, Gaudreault's mega-monstrator is tied to isochrony: it "analyses" the profilmic "by providing the viewer only what *presents* itself to the camera's gaze or, in any event, what is accessible, at *present*, to this gaze. Like any good monstrator, it does not have the right to modify time" (2009: 94–95). The issue of the present time and tense is key; it significantly pairs with, even linguistically, Chatman's emphasis on the "presenter" of film narrative. The presentation/presentification is particularly evident in the early single-shot films that astonished the audience of the time with their immediacy. From this point of view, film form partially shares a quality of oral discourse. This is obvious as soon as one recalls, with Gaudreault, but also with Gregory Currie (2010: 6), that narrative communication is an act of enonciation, i.e. an act of diegesis.

However, because of the fragmentation of montage and the discontinuous continuity that it creates, time relationships in film are to be constructed inferentially and dialectically. Therefore, unlike staged narratives where, apart from the possible division into acts, time maintains the same temporal continuity of reality, in montage films the law of temporal progression is more or less disrupted and time inference is the product of narrative convention. Moreover, unlike written narratives where space is usually not reproduced photographically, filmic space is considerably informative and dense due to the monstrative quality of the medium, and immediately shown and perceived, even if the space only reproduces a part of the storyworld that has to be inferentially completed by the recipient.[16] Thus, whereas in literature space is completely reconstructed mentally and time is expressed, or even 'explained', through verbal tenses and deictics, represented time in film has to be construed primarily through represented space. Consequently, time is spatialised or, in other words, a function of space: temporal understanding is the output of spatial inputs. Time comprehension in film is substantially left to the spectators' inference much more than in written narratives. By watching a single shot we are normally able to infer key elements of

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15 On the concept of "singulative" see Genette (1972: 146). The filmic image is inherently singulative (Rondolino and Tomasi 2011: 40).

16 See also Herman (2002: 264) on this point.

diegetic time (year or epoch; season; time of day; age of characters and so on). When montage intervenes, we make sense of the association of images also by understanding how much time has passed between an image and another. As spectators, we are continuously called to connect the (audio-)visual narration temporally by grasping spatial-visual data.

I argue that in cinematic fiction such filmic temporality is remediated to varying degrees. But how can we connect and compare the marks of temporality expressed by these two media? There are several *planes* of understanding time that apply to both audiovisual and written narratives, mirroring Hjelmslev's semiotic articulations of form, substance, expression and content:[17]

(1) the natural present where the moving image and the written text interact with the recipient's mind by means of their physical support, the screen or the page organised in lines ('substance of expression');

(2) the temporal configuration of the narration ('form of expression'), conveniently conveyed through grammatical marks (especially verbs and adverbs) in written texts, as well as by the coexistence of presentification and temporal distancing enacted in film diegesis;

(3) the intradiegetic or storyworld temporality ('form of content'), where all sorts of time manipulation (analepses, prolepses, summary, ellipsis, simultaneity, etc.) are carried out for creative uses; and

(4) time represented through images or written words and signified in the storyworld ('substance of content') with varying degrees of precision – 'early morning', 'late afternoon', 'three o'clock', 'a day', 'last year', '16th September 1999', etc.

Now, my discussion concerns (2). Regarding the temporal configuration of narration, film form is particularly elusive because the mega-narrator is not free to articulate narration by means of a range of tenses or expressive marks of temporality as literary and oral narrators can, but is especially limited and imprecise (unless voice-over or captions anticipate or explain what is happening on the screen). This is because presentification (and immersion to a certain extent) is guaranteed by the monstrative quality of film discourse, the inescapable feature of its form of expression. In film form, single 'pieces' of monstration convey the perfect coincidence of story time and discourse time (i.e. the scenic time); simultaneously, the filmographic narrator manipulates such a presentification. However, as presentification seems inescapable in film, one might conclude that the present tense is the effective tense of cinematic writing, also if we consider the fact that screenplays are normally written in the present tense. In fact, film form

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17 See Hjelmslev (1961); see Chandler (2017: 64–67) for a useful introduction to his theory.

forcibly draws the storyworld into the present. It *presents* it. And yet, because film as a whole is always detached from natural time and the story is narrated, "the illusion of the present tense produced by our viewing of the shot is thus, decidedly, a mere simulacrum of the present" (Gaudreault 2009: 87–88). As Vanoye (1989) had also understood, the filmic image is not in the present tense, even though it unfolds in the present for the spectator. Filmic narration is expressed through a narrator not only by "speaking cinema", as Jost puts it, but by speaking in the present and in the past at the same time.

This appears more clearly when considering cases of coincidence between running time and fictional time in classics such as Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) and Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952). Famously, *Rope* was accurately elaborated and edited to mask the numerous cuts and to seemingly unfold in a single long-take; *High Noon* shows a clear montage but almost maintains the coincidence of running time and fictional time, also increasing the suspense effect through a number of clock images or dialogues about the lack of time. In these cases, monstration is certainly most prominent, but the story is at least minimally distanced by the precise fact of being recounted, of being a piece of diegesis. Another example of confusion between temporal levels is in Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). The narrative is not a record of events as they occur, but an account, a retelling of what happened to Professor Borg the day he was awarded an honorary degree.

I therefore suggest a parallel between the temporality expressed in literary fiction through a range of verbal forms and the temporality expressed in film form through the 'monstrative' chain of moving images; but I also argue that:
1) the present tense is not a sufficient category to determine cinematic writing; and
2) the cinematic mode in fiction allows (or can be triggered by) the use of different tenses.

4 The narrative "putting-into-relief" in film and fiction

The narrative strategies deployed in literary fiction can be dealt with in terms of background and foreground style, building on past insights from scholars such as Eric Auerbach (1953 [1946]). In particular, the alternation between background and foreground style has also been linked to tenses and framed in terms of "narrative relief" (*Reliefgebung*) by Harald Weinrich. Instead of considering tenses separately as non-equivocal sources of temporality, Weinrich examines

their mutual cooperation and logical interaction, because tenses are textual marks that also trigger narrative positioning, emphasis and rhythm. His analysis in *Tempus* (1971 [1964]),[18] the foundational study of textual linguistics, has nothing to do with cinematic novels specifically; however, it proves instrumental in assessing the cinematic mode in fiction. I introduce it here as a heuristic device.

Weinrich first makes clear that his analytical approach focuses on the text as a whole. He denies the centrality of the sentence against other morphological elements of verbal discourse. His approach first undermines a possible analogy which, at times, is used to assess the cinematic quality of texts: I refer to the analogy between the sentence and the single filmic shot, which seems rather detrimental.[19] Indeed, there is no criterion to support the claim that one sentence equals one shot. Even if full stops can be regarded as strong textual marks regulating discursive rhythm, there is no logical necessity in saying that full stops indicate changes in the 'framing' of scenes (not to mention when the textual passages at hand do not convey an impression of the scenic at all). Consider the following excerpt:

> Il riflesso sul mare si forma quando il sole s'abbassa: dall'orizzonte una macchia abbagliante si spinge fino alla costa, fatta di tanti luccichii che ondeggiano; tra luccichio e luccichio, l'azzurro opaco del mare incupisce la sua rete. Le barche bianche controluce si fanno nere, perdono consistenza ed estensione, come consumate da quella picchiettatura risplendente. (Calvino 1992 [1983]: 883)

> [When the sun begins to go down, its reflection takes form on the sea: from the horizon all the way to the shore a dazzling patch extends composed of countless, swaying glints; between on glint and the next, the opaque blue of the sea makes a dark network. The white boats, seen against the light, turn black, lose substance and bulk, as if they were consumed by that splendid speckling.] (Calvino 1994: 11)

This excerpt from Calvino's *Palomar* is composed by two sentences, but how many shots may be observed? It is not clear why the full stop should be more determining in this respect than commas, semicolons or colons (particularly colons: one may suppose that a colon entails a pause or a transition so that the following elements seem to be 'taken' at a closer distance). This is impossible to

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18 Weinrich's study has never been translated into English. Therefore, the English translation of the original categories proposed by Weinrich in German are mediated here by the Italian (and French) edition (Weinrich 1978), from which I quote. A short presentation of Weinrich's categories in English can be found in his article *Tense and time* (Weinrich 1970).

19 An example is in Seed (2012: 76), who comments on Hemingway's style in these terms: "the sentences – each one a 'shot' – give a staccato montage". Seed's book, however, proves insightful and valuable for a multitude of reasons.

ascertain, and speculation is rather futile as well. And what about ocularisation? Jost (1987: 25–26) seems to share Weinrich's view in championing an approach to the sequence of images in the narrative as a whole, because "comme le récit, l'ocularisation ne prend son sens qu'avec la succession de photos" [just as the narrative, ocularisation makes sense only by the succession of photos]. A methodology that focuses on the single sentence to draw conclusions about the literary translation of filmic shots is misleading if not profoundly wrong. Moreover, the sentence seems to be the very articulation of discourse that should not initially be compared with the filmic shot. As filmic shots represent states or actions of beings, a provisional parallel may be made with noun phrases and predicates, if anything. As Metz (1974: 65) pointed out, the filmic image, in turn, can be considered equivalent to one or more sentences, and a filmic sequence is a complex segment of the film discourse. However, the most productive comparison is foremost the 'text', which clearly collects the interplay of a number of features, be it written or audiovisual. In this respect, the tense configuration stands out for my purposes.

In Weinrich's theory, verbs follow the categories of "commentative" tenses and "narrative" tenses (1978: 23). In most texts, tenses are found in combinations and transitions, although some of them gain a particular relevance. In Italian, my native language, for example, the main commentative tenses used in non-fictional discourse and non-narrative communication are the *presente* and *passato prossimo*; the main narrative tenses, which are absolutely dominant in most written fiction, are the *passato remoto* and *imperfetto*. A similar subdivision holds true in relation to the specific tenses used in French, Spanish, German, and English.[20] The use and interaction of commentative and narrative tenses reflect what Weinrich (1978: 37) calls the "commented world" [*besprochene Welt*] and "narrated world" [*erzählte Welt*]. By comparing literary texts (e.g. Maupassant, Pirandello, Hemingway and others) he points out a further fundamental subdivision: that of *foreground* tenses (in Italian: *presente*, commentative; *passato remoto*, narrative) and *background* tenses (*passato prossimo*, commentative; and *imperfetto*, narrative).

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20 In Weinrich's complete classification, Italian tenses follow this subdivision: commentative tenses – presente, passato prossimo, futuro, futuro anteriore; narrative tenses – trapassato prossimo, trapassato remoto, imperfetto, passato remoto, condizionale presente, condizionale passato (1978: 79). Similar classifications apply to the five languages analysed by Weinrich, with significant differences regarding English: in English, in short, all tenses formed in combination with the present participle have the function of expressing the narrative or commentative background; the simple past expresses the narrative foreground; the present perfect is fundamentally a commentative tense (Weinrich 1978: 94–105, 168–169).

Let us keep our focus on the "narrated world" for the moment, where stories are normally told in the past. Weinrich (1978: 125–190) deduces the category of "narrative relief" or "putting-into-relief" from narrative texts.[21] Historically, the putting-into-relief accounts for the need of writers to create a background against which to emphasise the main events of the narrative. Stories can be written with a strong penchant for background tenses, as in the great realistic novels of the nineteenth century, when authors aimed at giving a wide sociological or psychological picture through their narratives, and the background tenses dominate. Otherwise, they can be narrated through a more insistent use of the foreground tense to give more immediacy. The narrative relief sufficiently explains the relation between tense articulation and narrative strategies in most cases. However, Weinrich does not explore those narratives that unfold through commentative tenses, because they have been a minor group in the history of literature. Yet, present-tense narratives have actually been written since the Middle Ages, and have grown in popularity during the twentieth and twenty-first century, while an increasing number of narratives have been written in commentative tenses in contemporary literature: the case of Albert Camus' *L'étranger* (1942), which is conducted in the *passé composé*, is exemplary. As these texts normally satisfy all requirements of complex narratives, it is rather problematic to relegate them to the boundaries of the "commented world" simply because the narration is led through commentative tenses: the storyworld is not merely commented but narrated by commentative tenses. Moreover, their tense configuration often mirrors a similar articulation (background / foreground) that is also observable in the "narrated world".[22] This change of paradigm and narrative technique grew in popularity during the 20th century. Many novels challenge Weinrich's classification. The boundary between the commented world and narrated world is by no means insurmountable in literature.

An attempt at using Weinrich's observations to describe narrative relief in films was made in the 1970s by Bettetini (2000: 112). However, some of his conclusions were arguable: on the one hand, he pointed out that some films, which may well pertain to different genres and different styles, aim at eliminating the narrative relief. Films such as Nanni Moretti's *Ecce bombo* (1978) or classics such as Carl T. Dreyer's *La passion de Jeanne D'Arc* (1928) or Robert Bresson's *Un*

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21 It must be specified that the concept of foregrounding does not have the same meaning as in literary stylistics.

22 In Weinrich's insight (1978: 236) there is no real subdivision in background and foreground in the commentative tenses. The Italian *passato prossimo*, as well as the French *passé composé*, the German *Perfekt*, the English *present perfect* and the Spanish *pasado compuesto*, are rather retrospective tenses in the group of the commentative tenses.

condamné à mort s'est échappé (1956) would be examples of minimal narrative relief; and in opposition to these examples, Hollywood style would be characterised by a tendency toward creating an evident narrative relief. Moreover, he grounded his interpretation in a direct translation of Weinrich's spatial metaphor (the relief) into the cinematic practice and jargon:

> In audiovisual media, the relation of metaphorical spatialisation linked with the notion of 'relief' is normally enacted through a real spatial differentiation [...]. The background is spatially and geometrically background; the foreground is foreground. (Bettetini 2000: 113; my translation)

This assumption is problematic: important narrative events can also be rendered through long shots: this is the case with all transitions to long shots of explosions in most action movies, or the case of the camera distancing itself in an execution scene. The link with spatialisation has to be bracketed, and Weinrich's metaphor must be interpreted as such. Narrative foreground is separate from photographic foreground and visual perspective. The narrative relief has to do with the narrative as a whole and describes the rhythm of the narrative syntagmatic.

A comparative approach based on narrative relief is useful to understand cinematic fiction if taken more radically: whereas in novels and short stories the narrative foreground (signalled by foreground tenses) designates relevant events standing out from a background of narrative summaries, digressions and comments, in film, on the other hand, most events gain relevance due to the monstrative quality of the medium, and the entire narrative ultimately ends up being *pushed towards the narrative foreground*. This is the illusionistic and immersive power of cinema. Whether essential or irrelevant to the plot, narrative events seem to be shown substantially on the same level: the narrative relief, which describes the range between the background and foreground, is never truly eliminated; rather, it tends to be *flattened*, as it were. The flattened narrative relief of film form matches and interacts with different styles, allowing for disparate outcomes. Compare the opening sequence of Sergio Leone's *Once upon a time in the West* (1968) with Eisenstein's famous 'Odessa steps' sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). In the first, we see three men who are evidently waiting for a train. Their waiting is focused through marginal actions (catching a fly, drops of water gathering on a hat, cracking knuckles), which are completely irrelevant to the plot (but are extremely important in conveying a suspended atmosphere). Certainly, intense close-ups also overinvest actions here in order to trigger the audience's suspense (focalisation is straightforwardly external). This beginning takes an enormous span of seven minutes to unfold. The mixture of heat, boredom, tension and a disquieting atmosphere clearly emerges and is pushed towards the narrative foreground. As a happy coincidence, Eisenstein's sequence,

where instead a key event is recounted (again with close-ups, highly fragmented montage, but this is not entirely relevant now) takes the same amount of time. Focalisation is internal here (the crowd is focalised, spectators understand what the crowd understands), and Eisenstein's style is certainly quite different from Leone's. However, in relation to the narrative relief expressed by the film as a medium, the flattening or levelling towards the foreground is significant in both.

Films can obviously be different in narrative articulation, rhythm, narrative relief, and they can belong to different *regimi narrativi* [narrative regimes].[23] However, the generalised flattening of the narrative relief in film form mirrors its unyielding presentation/presentification, its monstration. In short, it reflects its impossibility not to show something, which for the very fact of being put-in-frame is automatically put into the narrative foreground to a certain extent. Digressive, irrelevant, peripheral elements in film automatically gain an excess of meaning-making (so evident in avant-garde and experimental cinema or, say, in Antonioni); alternatively, these elements come to be reduced and re-absorbed within what is linear, relevant, and central (the typical traits of Hollywood's paradigm). In filmic narratives, therefore, there is very little diegetic background, no matter which genre a certain film belongs to and how much action it contains; almost everything tends to be narratively relevant (partially because almost everything has a production cost). Bettetini's examples paradoxically strengthen this perspective. In very weak or simple narratives, negligible events gain a surplus of interest because they become catalysts of unprecedented attention; on the contrary, in Hollywood style the predominance of action and the centrality of the story cannot help but reflect the narrative foregrounding, regardless of the specificity of singular shots (i.e. the ocularisation). It goes without saying that the flattening of the narrative relief has nothing to do with carelessness, or stylistic 'flatness', or a lack of rhythm in the film as a whole. However, regardless of how the narrative relief is actually articulated in specific films, in a comparative perspective with literary fiction the range of such 'relief' in film would always prove consistently reduced, especially when drawing a comparison with the great novelistic tradition up to the first decades of the twentieth century.

The flattening of the narrative relief in cinema has to do with its intrinsic narrativity, its "narrative pressure" (Chatman 1980: 126). In cinema, the articulation of a basically fragmented temporality in the forced continuity of the running time produces a generalised flattening of narrative foreground and background.

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23 Casetti and Di Chio (1990) describe four types: *regime narrativo forte* [strong narrative regime], *regime narrativo debole* [weak narrative regime], *regime di anti-narrazione* [anti-narrative regime], *regime metanarrativo* [meta-narrative regime].

Given the two-fold temporality expressed by film, where past and present coalesce into the specificity of the film's moving image, the cinematic mode in literature, in turn, must include a mirroring of this temporality and the narrative relief that it derives from. Therefore, a strong condition for literary fiction to gain an effect of 'filmic' is the flattening and putting-into-the-foreground of the narrative, by means of a suitable articulation of the verbal tenses. A written narrative text deriving such structural feature is potentially cinematic, regardless of the imitation of specific cinematic techniques. Conversely, a marked narrative relief frustrates the imitation of cinematic techniques in written narratives and tends to limit the cinematic dimension of texts. Accordingly, both internally-focalised present-tense narratives (e.g. Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie*) and externally-focalised past-tense narratives (e.g. Hammett's *The Maltese falcon*) may result in cinematic narratives when foreground tenses largely prevail; fictional narratives that alternate between commentative and narrative tenses, first-person and third-person narration (e.g. Vittorini's *Uomini e no*) may express a flattening of the narrative relief and cinematisation under certain circumstances, especially when a clear visual rhetoric or the use of montage also emerges; finally, third-person narratives that largely unfold in background or retrospective tenses tend to lose a fundamental feature of the cinematic mode, despite the manifest imitation of some cinematic techniques (e.g. Tabucchi's *Piazza d'Italia*).

5 Conclusion. The cinematic mode

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, two different meanings of 'mode' serve my critical perspective, one coming from social semiotics and multimodality theory, and the other from genre theory. It is particularly interesting, then, to reconsider the concept of mode that Alastair Fowler outlined in the 1980s in his influential *Kinds of literature* (2002 [1982]). He observed that literary *modes*, in comparison with historical *kinds*, *genres* and *subgenres*, are a "more elusive generic idea" and imply "that some of the non-structural features of a kind are extended to modify another kind" (Fowler 2002: 106–107). Thus, the mode also gives account of socio-cultural transformations:

> External forms rapidly change. All kinds have also been linked to social institutions, along with which they have become obsolete – or, as we say, 'outmoded'. The modes, however, appear to be distillations, from these relatively evanescent forms, of the permanently valuable features. (Fowler 2002: 111)

Fowler's literary category of mode can be extended theoretically to other arts, but it fundamentally describes a process pertaining to a single art, as it is primarily

linked to the tradition of its forms and genres: it does not seem to explain whether the same process can occur crosswise, from art to art. However, this definition of mode is key to assess cinematic fiction. Building further on Rajewsky's perspective on intermedial references, the inclusion of para-cinematic traits in literary fiction can thus be assessed as a distillation of common formal and rhetorical traits of film, inasmuch as the film can be taken as a 'kind' of art that interplays with the literary field. Moreover, following the multimodal approach of social semiotics, cinematisation may be treated as "transduction", that is "the process of moving meaning-material from one mode to another – from *speech* to image; from *writing* to *film*" (Kress 2010: 124–125). Adaptations of novels, for example, are transductions. Yet, adapting a story (even with very significant differences in the plot) from book to film, and transferring only generic crystallizations (Fowler's meaning of modes) from a group of medially-related works to another, are different activities entirely. Conversely, it is one thing to produce a novelisation of a film and another to produce a cinematic novel drawing on recognisable features of the film form. Cinematic fiction, therefore, is a cross category in literature that results from a formal transduction of the filmic mode. In simple terms, the 'cinematic' or 'filmic' is an additional ingredient of written narratives that the coming-of-age of film form has opened up. It is a possibility of 'colouring', a stylistic option.[24]

In this framework, the category of mode in literature describes thematic and tonal qualities and includes, for instance, "such forms as the heroic, the tragic, the comic, the lyrical, the picaresque, the elegiac, the encyclopaedic, the satiric, the romance, the fantastic, the pastoral, the epigrammatic, the didactic, and the melodramatic" (Frow 2015: 72) – and, I add, the 'cinematic'. As the picaresque mode can be found in certain adventure novels, or the gothic mode in some crime fiction, the cinematic mode is similarly observable in a range of works of fiction that still retain their particular, and more easily recognisable, generic and subgeneric traits (*The Maltese falcon*, for example, belongs to the subgenre of hardboiled fiction). In other words, such 'distillations', or modes, can be obtained from medium-related crystallized kinds – within literature, within painting, within cinema, etc. – but also from crystallized qualities of media, with a different array of influences and formal suggestions at stake. As a consequence, when different arts interact, a given medium and a given medium-related genre can be reduced to a mode in Fowler's meaning and included in another medium and

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24 Fowler (2002: 112) speaks of a "modal coloration". See also Frow (2015: 73), who advocates Fowler's model: "*mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification, or 'colouring' of genre".

medium-related genre. For example, one can consider photorealistic portraits in terms of a photographic mode included in a specific subgenre in painting; or, generally speaking, of literary or pictorial modes in cinema, and so on. Building on Fowler's insight, the approximation and the 'as if' effects are produced by the modulation (i.e. the distillation) of medial characteristics. Ultimately, the mode in the literary theory of genre can be fundamentally extended to encompass and describe, in terms of genre-related discourses, the intermedial references put forth by Rajewsky and the 'as-if' effect they are able to trigger.

Narrative film has indeed become a player in the 'game' of the spread of narrative content and has introduced new narrative and aesthetic conventions. Because of its power of attraction as a qualified medium, cinema has rapidly gained the status of cultural institution and, far from becoming obsolete, has rapidly generated a number of modal implications that have been readily re-elaborated by receptive writers. By adapting Fowler's theoretical model, it should be possible to describe what has been repeatedly mentioned as 'cinematic' as a latent mode included in some twentieth-century and twenty-first-century fiction. Therefore, the historical articulation of media and genres, in which the cinematic mode is included, has much to do with the "cinematic desire" (Cohen 1979: 49) and the search for "immediacy" already seen as grounded in cultural dynamics that precede the cinema (Bolter and Grusin 1999). It seems thus that the cinematic mode in fiction has explicitly expressed a number of tendencies in literature that had already been operating for a long time, linked with different epistemological bases. Once available as a technology and recognisable as a qualified medium, the cinema has sustained and emphasised those tendencies by means of its specific conventions and ways of shaping, structuring, and transmitting contents to readers. In the process of intermedial imitation by writers, its basic features have been 'distilled', drawing on a general, but evolving, notion of film form.

To conclude, in the theoretical framework of genres, the process of retrograde remediation of the film form in literary fiction gives rise to the cinematic mode in fiction. The cinematic mode thus describes what remains of the film form when the external form, or substance of expression, or "material modality" (Elleström 2010: 15–16), is removed: it is a principle of suggestion. On the level of narratological analysis, the cinematic mode is connected with the narratorial function; therefore, I propose to replace the imprecise category of "camera-eye", which only accounts for the monstrative function of the mega-narrator's compounded entity, with the more flexible notion of *para-cinematic narrator*, which more transparently renders a layered concept, given that:

    1)   it implies the *interplay of non-splitting functions* (monstration and narration) as conceived by Gaudreault (*cinematic narrator*);

2) it implies a literary *approximation* (*para-*) by imitation to this overarching cinematic function – so that the prefix also accounts for the intermedial reference which is enacted, as well as the 'distillation' of generic and medial features in terms of 'mode';

3) it implies an *additional feature* (*para-*) that overlaps but does not cancel the intrinsic features of literary narration, which remains consistent with expression through words – so that the prefix also accounts for the intracompositional relation which is enacted, as well as the 'colouring' function relating to the concept of 'mode' in genre theory.

The cinematic sensation in novels or short stories that seem to unfold 'like a film' is triggered by the diegetic activity of a para-cinematic narrator and a flattened narrative relief. In other words, the para-cinematic narrator is the outcome of the remediation of a film-specific feature into a different medium. This is the consequence of a new cinematic approach to literary writing on the part of certain modern and contemporary authors, and the implication of the cinematic mode in literature.

Film and literature

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Rope. 1948. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA.
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