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## How to Capture Offers of Filmic Effectiveness

*AKIRA III* as an Aid

### 1 Premises

My contribution<sup>1</sup> to the multi-faceted subject of this volume lies outside the usual purposes of digital tools, since I am not interested in recording singular aspects of films in an isolated way (e.g. the automatic detection of cuts, characters, faces, scenes, or developments of action). Quite the reverse, I am concentrating on film in its entirety as a work (of art) with a more or less complex composition.

The central question arises: what are the conditions under which digital tools can improve our cataloguing of the development of filmic effects of widely different sorts? I will be brief about the actual presentation of the software *AKIRA III*, which can be viewed on my website ([www.phil.uni-mannheim.de/romanistik/romanistik3](http://www.phil.uni-mannheim.de/romanistik/romanistik3)), in favour of an elaboration of the practical situations which the software has been developed to analyse:

An audio-visual text as a work of art is only effective or functions by means of its entirety (“Gesamtgestalt”). It is created in a more or less synergetic way according to the simultaneity of the perceptible and successiveness in time. According to “Gestalttheorie”, the hypothesis, “the whole is more than the sum of its parts” is valid not only in detail for a melody, but generally for all phenomena of memory, imagination and will, for example. Fragments are also expanded to form a whole.

The degree of comprehensibility is correlated with a film’s ability to motivate the spectator’s realization, or even more his collaboration with the development of the “inner film.” Central to this is the ‘completion’ which spectators make on their own, albeit guided by the film. Sign-directed participation beyond the automatic interpretation (“Umsetzung”) of signs, which I called *sympraxis* (Kloepper 1985), is above all based upon the motivating pleasure while watching a film.

Through this, unconscious forms of knowledge which the individual has more or less developed according to more or less common socio-cultural con-

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1 I would like to thank Rick Apgar and Birgit Olk for translating my text into English.

texts are activated. This gives rise to the problem of intersubjectively checkable determinations about the origins and consequences of filmic effects.

In this respect it is not a question of replacing the spectator's subjectivity by means of automatic digital tools, but rather to support it, to make it more profound, and – most importantly – to make it intersubjectively accessible and comprehensible for others. A tool serving this purpose is first of all a prosthesis for anyone who wants to record in a reflective way what is more or less unconsciously produced or may produce effects within us.<sup>2</sup>

These hypotheses imply a further dimension, which is known intuitively by anyone who has dealt extensively with effective forms of aesthetic communication or follows famous artists in the 20th century like Brecht, Eisenstein or Valéry, who correctly emphasize the fact: An approach, be it analytical, interpretive, or one that models the offer of effectiveness, does not destroy the effectiveness of a work of art, but possibly increases it according to a film's or text's complexity or the conditions of its reception. Therefore with regard to film or literary classics, pleasure gradually increases with time. The more the work of art succeeds, by means of its composition, in sympractically involving the spectator in the realization of the complex, semiotic text, the more economical its use of aesthetic means can be.<sup>3</sup>

A factor as basic as attentiveness makes clear that during reception conscious and unconscious, as well as voluntarily and involuntarily working faculties can be used and have to be considered if we want to model effects. Through attentiveness, processes of perception and cognition are selectively directed, activated and intensified, and by the transfer of units into different

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2 Since G. Bateson (1973) we know that due to psycho-economical reasons our actions and their conditions can easily be transferred into a system of unconscious control ("habit" in Peirce's terms), the more important and therefore more frequently or significantly they are used. P. Wuss (1999) has discussed this phenomenon very thoroughly. Another example are stereotypes, which can be recognized automatically by a competent spectator, so that the film director can rely on the fact to create further effects.

3 This argument, which in theories of art can be traced back to antiquity, receives an extremely astute expression in the work of Jan Mukarovsky, following the tradition of Russian formalism and Prague structuralism, with respect to the correlation between temporary aesthetic ends in themselves, the arrangement of all extra-aesthetic values employed by the work of art, and the offer made to the processing subject "to involve himself/herself" (1967: 103, 123). Periodically, the directed co-authorship of the addressee, already demonstrated by Plato in his *Symposium*, is rediscovered in the Age of Enlightenment (e.g. Diderot, Kant), Romanticism (Novalis, Baudelaire) or by authors influenced by phenomenology (Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre). See also Kloepper/Landbeck (1991).

kinds of memory, they can be recalled in spite of a limited capacity for memory (e.g. by repeating a melody that evokes memories of a particular scene).

Finally, during the development of our tool a central problem arose: How can we model the simultaneity and successiveness of offers of effectiveness which appear in multiple visual and acoustic means in such a way that the potentially resulting complexity remains easily comprehensible?

## 2 Motivation: How to Make a Strong Intuition Provoked by a Film Comprehensible

It is often pointed out that even the best digital tools – including those discussed in this volume – can only serve as aids or supports which can help us to model filmic communication. Of course, eyeglasses, telescopes and cameras are – as far as they are compensating for weaknesses – nothing more than a “prosthesis”, like script, gramophone or all kinds of pictography. At the same time functioning as media, they open up new dimensions of human productivity. This is also true with regard to the prosthesis introduced here, which may help us to heighten the potential of films. It is – or at least it is supposed to be – a means of enhancing the spectator’s creative faculties.

The experience that initiated my interest, and from which the tool got its name, may illustrate my point. Disagreeing with usual interpretations of Akira Kurosawa’s film *Rashomon* (1950), I repeatedly watched the film during the 1970s, searching for evidence against the predominant hypothesis, which considered it an early post-modern film that revealed four apparently incompatible views of the world (Kiefer 2002). At court, the three central characters – the robber, the knight, and his beautiful wife – each tell a different story of their common experience: the knight outwitted by the robber who more or less takes his wife through violence, and the knight’s death. Which of the three killed him? Was it the robber at the end of a fair fight, his wife, no longer able to bear his contempt, or does he commit suicide in despair over the events? What they narrate is shown to the spectators in the images of their memories. There are actually four different stories, since a farmer, an accidental witness, also tells what he saw. Do these four people no longer live in a *common* world but in their exclusive constructs, in separate universes, as is maintained by the literature on the film? Suddenly I found a clue: in all key scenes the respective central figure and the leitmotif determining his or her life is characterized by different music. In the fight between the heroic knight and the witty robber for his noble wife, as observed by the farmer, there are only acoustic effects: the warriors lying in wait for each other, panting nearly like dogs, snapping at each other, biting and rolling in the leaves. At this point as well as at the end of the

film, the different views collapse into the common, fundamental base of the inhumane or the primal.

This was my hypothesis: The music colours each view of the world with a corresponding belief or conviction. Each of the three stories has to prove itself true under the decaying gate of an ancient temple, if they are not – as a cynical tramp maintains – simple lies or subjective visions, shaped according to one's own interests (a very post-modern perspective). The robber, the knight, his wife, and the farmer tell their stories differently only with respect to the part that affects their pride. They seek respect and do not bear contempt. Their point of view is characterized by this premise. When it falls away, because they admit to their weaknesses – like the farmer who concealed his theft in court – the melody of destiny (*Bolero* motif), composed to characterize them and to create unbearable suspense ends. With this, Akira Kurosawa had directed my intuition. Unconsciously, I understood the borders of these increasingly compatible views. The melodic shading made the main characters' guiding motifs of life and the trajectory of their lives subliminally experienceable. This ultimately led to the new conviction: truth exists and there is goodness in people, who, unlike the three main characters, are not prisoners to a belief which leads to madness if they fail to admit the contradictions between it and real experience, and if they refuse to accept the possibility of change or reversal, rather seeing only murder or suicide as alternatives. But can I prove my view against the opposing interpretations?

Through acoustic characterization, Kurosawa directs, or even manipulates, both the characters and, according to their unconscious inclinations, the viewers. My entirely subjective "joining in the play" (*Mitspielen*) can easily be re-experienced intersubjectively, if one paradigmatically isolates each character's musical theme and listens to each successively. We are thus directed to experience the conditions which motivate the lives – more precisely the four trajectories – of these people and are called upon to accept these as possibilities and finally to overcome them. (Kloepper 2007). T. S. Eliot maintains, "The end is where we start." And H. von Förster confirms: "The cause lies in the future."<sup>4</sup> A film's aim is the realization of our inner film, which – at least as far as successful traditional works are concerned – follows a hierarchy of goal determinations.

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4 See Nadin (2002: 11 ff.) against all forms of "Cartesian determinism" and in favour of a theory following Peirce as far as the discovery of communicative "energies" is concerned.

### 3 From Aesthetic Theory to the “Prosthetic” Argument

How can we represent what we – guided by the filmic offer – perform simultaneously and successively in our consciousness? In the 1930s, Sergej Eisenstein answered this question by stating it should be written down in the same way as a musical performance is in a score. Should the film director proceed according to an aesthetics of production, like a composer who writes down the notes and their respective realization in terms of meter, melody, harmony and rhythm for the strings, drums, choir and soloists one beneath the other on a timeline? If this approach made sense, film directors of the last one-hundred years would have tried to do so. We can start, however, from an aesthetics of reception, i.e. from the perspective of the addressee. What are the “symphonically” experienceable “attractions” (Eisenstein in his early work) or effects and clusters of effectiveness? Eisenstein advises us to imagine this as a multi-dimensional spherically opening book, like a hypertext.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, we wanted to create a tool with which anyone – schoolchildren, university students, or film experts – is able to create one’s own modelling of a film. At the same time, it was to allow the user to predefine score patterns for use or further development by others. Therefore we were not to presuppose any technical programming skills. The solution is demonstrated by Goethe on his journey to Italy: Whenever he reached the limits of his drawing abilities, he simply wrote on the spot in a tree something like “fantastic bird.”

First of all it is important to add to the film a model of a possible score. Doing this, we start from the radical pragmatics of Peirce, who considers even the act of perceiving as a more or less complex, more or less unconscious drawing of conclusions according to anthropological universals and historical socio-cultural habits. We have learned them to be able to act in the world. They are equally necessary for our ability to understand a film, and for the aesthetic skills required for inter-medial energy exchange (e.g. knowledge of all kinds of literary, photographic, and musical traditions). This knowledge is used specific to genre and style and is gathered in key images or larger units building up to key scenes. To remember a film, we sometimes only need a few central images like those from *Rashomon* in Figure 1.

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5 See Kloepper (2003) on a semiotic approach of film theory, and Kloepper (2002) on Eisenstein.



Figure 1. Central images from Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*

Like a soundtrack, all kinds of tracks can be arranged one below the other parallel to their succession in time. Units within the tracks – scenes, sequences and single takes – can be cut and marked by colours. So, after getting an insight into the fundamental structure of *Rashomon*, I thought: if an overview can be achieved in this way, then it immediately becomes evident what the four stories have in common, what is characterized by the “melody of life”, what leads to self-deception, and under which conditions truth may be experienced. It is in the second part of the farmer's narration, in which the three “heroes” loose all their pride, in which they reveal their inner conflicts, are scared to death, no longer able to fight, and in a moment of insanity break down because of the burden. The fragments of narration and perception become transparent with regard to their correlation (their meaning) as well as with regard to their value (their sense), when we are able to communicate our unconscious intuitive co-acting. So, Akira Kurosawa guided me towards the concept of my annotation tool, which I started to develop decades ago with the help of skilled programmers and decided to call *AKIRA*.

In many respects, film studies have to deal with the same problems as literary studies or other areas of scholarship: how can the particular effect on the spectator, who perceives a work of art under more or less individual conditions, be “intersubjectively” communicated to others? All forms of art make particular use of human imagination, but while book readers can make notes of their observations directly in the book, there is no such way with film, even though its handling has recently become much easier. The ideal of every film scholar – the film editing tool – is now available to all. But does this provide us with appropriate means to raise the effects offered by films in order to make them communicable for analysis, interpretation or any form of teaching?

Therefore, *AKIRA III* has to make comprehensible the immense field between an “aesthetics of innovation” on the one side and an “aesthetics of repetition” (including stereotypes or even serial redundancy) on the other (see Lotman 1972, Wuss 1999).

## Aesthetics of Innovation

Sometimes a film not only refuses any automatic kind of understanding of filmic, cultural or universal signs, but at the same time creates a kind of need or compulsion to fill the unknown or complete the gap (Kloepper 1982). To illustrate this argument, let us consider the beginning of *The Sea Inside* (*Mar adentro*, 2004; dir. Alejandro Amenábar). It is a film about internal “filmic” narrations which form human memories and imaginations about the future, and which give meaning to our lives. The film opens with a black screen, slowly illuminated by an expanding rectangle. A voice invites us to imagine an ideal place.<sup>6</sup> The process of denying any deictic orientation regarding time and setting or causes, perpetrators and victims of the action, forces us to continue the process of reception, to suspend the attribution of meaning, and to stick with an unvarnished impression. Such a structure invites assumptions. It works like a question.

If we consider a film as an offer of effectiveness in the course of time, and therefore as a process, it is not appropriate to interpret such scenes with hindsight, from our knowledge of the end of the film. That would make us ignore the dynamics of effects, which may lead from frustration to curiosity, from uncertainty and dizziness to doubt and especially to the stimulation of our guessing instincts. The instinct called abduction was added by mediaeval philosophy as a fundamental complement to in- and deduction.

Apart from the usual navigational functions, we have to be able to mark certain scenes. While we are watching a film on our computer, *AKIRA III* allows us to set marks with the cursor or to save a corresponding image to the hard drive (see Figure 2). Moments experienced as particularly striking or strange for their departure from the norm can be summarized in a text window with brief or extended notes detailing assumptions or hypotheses. Simple marks or key images may later be corresponded to the complementary moment of uncertainty or recognition. They work like answers to our questions or fulfilment of our anticipation. This results in our first assumptions about the rhythm of a film. It is the area of guidable *intuition*, i.e. conclusions whose causes temporarily evade our reflexive interpretation, especially when our unconscious interpretation of affordances is in reality increased by aesthetic means. The habits of automatically drawing conclusions may use anthropo-

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6 I discussed this film in more detail (Kloepper 2007), partly because it plays with the possibilities of imaginations (remembering, interpreting, anticipating), which can make life to appear worthwhile or undignified, or even lead to the conviction that suicide can be considered the highest form of humanity.





lematic starting point, the development of the conflict up to the crisis, the turning point and the solution as a result of the heroic deed).

Such patterns, which can be marked with different colours (which we cannot illustrate here), can be noted in a more or less detailed way in the form of parts from individual acts or chapters all the way down to scenes, sequences, takes or even single frames.<sup>7</sup>

For teaching purposes, especially with films that have unusual structures, *AKIRA III* allows to direct the learners' attention to genre and the styles of particular epochs or directors: everything that can be arranged in front of the camera, microphone and at the editing table, starting with casting, make-up, even down to the scenery.

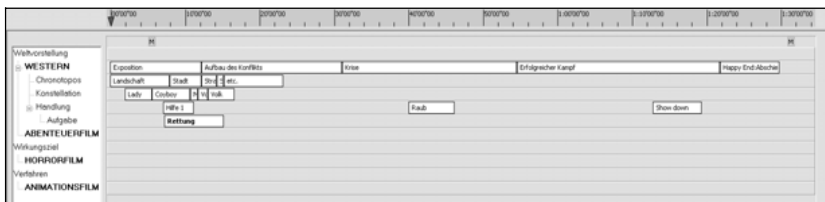


Figure 3. *AKIRA III* score pattern: genres

#### 4 Dynamics of Film Semiosis: The Economics of Co-Production of the Inner Film

It may have become apparent that *AKIRA III* can be helpful for teaching film. With the help of tracks and parts it is easy to mark sequences and visualize and communicate their filmic, dramatic or diegetic aspects of composition, as well as their offer of effectiveness. Depending on the goal, the division (creating of parts) of the different tracks may range from a rough survey to a detailed analysis (e.g. individual sequences). In this connection the structure and hierarchy of the tracks (for example by creating sub-tracks) can correspond to the concentration of aesthetic means or offers of effectiveness in the form of clusters. Teachers have the opportunity to formulate assignments for their students in individual tracks. The answers to these tasks can be given in additional tracks which can be accessed via a password. The penultimate, in my opinion decisive, advantage for teaching film is the possibility of transferring tracks (including their parts and texts) from one analytical file into another. This not only facilitates working in groups, but over the course of time the analysis of a

7 We chose the MPEG-1 video format, which allows work with individual frames.

film can proceed up to more elaborate subdivisions. In this way, collective knowledge can be integrated into tracks and parts (for example research in intermediality or cut frequency, see Yuri Tsivian's paper in the present volume). As already mentioned above, every user can adapt the analysis pattern to his or her individual needs, to expand or change tracks, parts or texts, to use different colours to highlight something striking like rhythms, etc. Perhaps the most interesting feature of *AKIRA III* is the screen presentation, which allows the user to create play lists of selected parts, playing them in any desired order, which means to reorganize them to a certain extent. This simplified "editing tool" helps the user to test how and in which order aesthetic means have effects, e.g. on montage sequences, turning points, etc.<sup>8</sup> That way, as far as the film's central theme is concerned, the effect of the montage within the complete work is revealed. The presentation function also facilitates lectures, permitting the speaker to present scenes illustrating or emphasizing the argument in the order of one's own choice. The screen presentation can be interrupted, for example for comments, and later continued.

Guiding the consciousness of individuals which according to their socio-cultural background constitute a film's audience is effected on the micro level by clusters that impress the spectators' short-term memory. The simultaneity of filmic means appealing to sensory perception, which can be stored in working memory for only a matter of "seconds up to minutes," can deeply intensify their effectiveness through concentration ("chunks", see Birbaumer/Schmidt 1996: 527 f., 571 ff). The transfer into long-term memory can again be increased through repetition, consolidation and controlled handling. This explains for all art forms, especially those operating in multiple dimensions of space and time, why the appropriate methods have to be created, tested, researched and why ultimately new models have to be established. This leads us to the opposite extreme, the area deliberately excluded from film analysis as "intuitive" and "subjective."

More important than the assistance of *AKIRA III* in the detection and teaching of automated and codified filmic processes is the revelation of successful, unconscious processing. Naturally, the size of this area depends on the level of developed competence. Processing can happen implicitly (procedural) or explicitly (declarative); the borders between the two vary according to the chosen theory of memory or processing system. Put more simply, we notice perhaps that something occurs within us, but in most cases we are not able to put into words what was or still is going on within us. We *are* involved in the

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8 See Kuchenbuch (2005: 178 ff.) for an analysis of *High Noon*.

process of semiosis, but cannot *have* it – especially not in a reflected way. This leads us back to the beginning.

Our inner film depends on our systematically motivated will to supplement the film's perception and processing by our personal (individual) contribution. The "moving picture" only makes the pictures "move" because the number of frames per second exceeds our ability to separate them. Our imagination surrenders to the "attractions" of works of art, but only if we do not refuse and look away. Vice versa, the desire to be attracted, to draw conclusions, or to get involved, to immerse oneself in a stimulation that stirs up the deepest layers of our memory, can itself be stimulated, directed or even manipulated. As Bateson (1973) noted nearly a century ago: it is only by deep crises or great works of art that the deepest habits can be changed. This is the reason why we have chosen the challenging film *The Sea Inside*. Very few people have reflected on the growing problem of suicide with the necessary depth. Especially out of the experience of euthanasia and suicide in the face of brutal, dictatorial violence in Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, and nowadays at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere, there is great reluctance to break through the orthodoxy, for instance of Christian associations, in dealing with this subject.

All the film's characters are against the wish of the central character Ramón Sampedro to bring his life to an end after 28 years of total immobilization from the neck down. With each character, the film in an unbroken rhythm makes an offer to stop short for some seconds. What is his or her relationship to Ramón? Why is his behaviour time and again surprising to them? Why does their affection for him become more intense in new ways all the time? When we highlight these scenes only, it becomes evident why especially the four women that love him are for such a long time unable to respect his decision, let alone help him end his life. The director puts us into the role of "creative co-producer" to get an idea of their motivating visions, which we may experience by our inner performance. This permits us to view things from their perspective and to behave according to their values. This is only valid according to the aesthetic premises of freedom and competence.

The simple marking or labelling of images that correspond to moving, astonishing, puzzling, baffling, and unsettling scenes reveals in a completely evident way the distinctive features and a framework:

- The musical characterization of the life story of each figure (track 1) builds up, together with particular camera effects (track 2 with sub-tracks), colour effects and montage, an intensive priming. The creation of our expectations is closely linked to an intensive detection of structures; the priming, however, always begins with music.

- Since the disabled main character can only use his mouth and his eyes as direct means of communication, his mediated “prostheses” play a central role: an apparatus that enables him to write with his mouth, a telephone he is able to dial and answer via a rope that he can grasp in his mouth, communication in the house by whistling, and finally a radio and television which are used interactively in the film and up to the climax of his filmed death when he addresses the legal authorities and us directly (track 3).



Figure 4. *AKIRA III* score of *The Sea Inside*.

- The film is determined by mediated performances in the multiple sense of the word: What caused (visualized in memory) his accident? What could love be like between him and Júlia, who is equally affected by an incurable degenerative illness, if only ...? Consequently, on the screen there are three kinds of envisioned images (track 4): in an unmarked way we participate in the daily scenes of a village in Galicia, in Barcelona and in the little seaport of Beuro as well as on the paths between them. His memories are multiple, always linked to the sea and particularly the accident up to the fulfilment of his death and his translocation to the ideal: a gorgeous beach on the Seychelles and the desired encounter with Júlia.

According to the rich tradition of rhetoric and especially the work of Bakhtin (1930: 70 f., 163 f.), the subject matter of an artwork is the dynamic task to which we are enabled by the semiotic process. Therefore, the “technical apparatus” of its realization is more than the sum of its informative (referential) meanings in the strict sense of the term, but at the same time encompasses our individual, sign-directed actions (sympraxis), which include the dimensions of evaluation and sense. Only by this are we able to explain why especially in successful aesthetic communication all dimensions of the mind (emotion, will, reason) are used in a synergetic way. In Amenábar’s extraordinary film, the im-

ages direct us towards the performance of our inner film, during which we may change our convictions. It is not a matter of suspending the taboo of death and dying, but to accept active support of a death with dignity as an important act of humanity. We are thereby directed to tolerate the extreme contrast in the hero's life, the disparity between his mental vitality, attraction, dignity, and affection for the widest variety of people and his physical immobility. Precisely because of Ramón's love for the life he imagines for himself, and for people – infinitely deep, vast and multiple like the sea, the origin of all life – and because of the strength of his imagination, his family and friends have difficulty accepting his personal sense of a lack of dignity.

The composition corresponds to a complex association with our imaginative capabilities in such a way that we are directed through the figures and the aesthetics down into the microstructure to a "learning by imitation or modelling" (Städtler 2003). The larger the gap between us and the psyche of the protagonist in his existential decision, the greater, more intense, more effective the following must be:

- a) the concentration of means to provoke the spectator's transference into someone else's situation in the form of imaginative sympathy (lovers, friends) or antipathy (legal authority, church, "big brother" with his orthodox moral) and
- b) the filmic offer of elicitors and with these cues that provide the spectator the possibility of freeing himself from "persuasive stereotypes," of tolerating uncertainty, and finally of confirming acceptance of the voluntary termination of life. In the score these scenes show a highly functional load.

From the scenes in which the spectator's conditioning is assumed and he or she is led into a first moment of insecurity or even doubt, up to the sequences of explicit confirmation, there is an ever-increasing intensity of the filmic offer, to immerse oneself into someone else's situation, to develop tolerance and adopt external conditions and finally to expect a positive ending.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to briefly sketch the composition tracks that comprise the now relatively easily groupable filmic offers:

- The immersion by means of primary emotional qualities into different dimensions of evaluation plays with different forms of sympathy and antipathy, for our attitudes change – in so far as we can, want, or permit ourselves to get involved – dynamically and adaptively.

- Offers of effectiveness involving the will with possible effects ranging from curiosity to the unconscious development of hypotheses (abduction) are in most cases paired with an initial moment of astonishment, like in the scene when Ramón suddenly seems to move his hand, gets up, moves to the corridor, takes a run-up ... and – like he always does – flies out of the window above the hills to the sea.
- The cognitive conclusion is carried out equally through distinctly exacting offers from simple riddling situations up to refined consequences, which presuppose a certain degree of learned competences. Ramón's father, for example, appears only a few times and very briefly, but judging from the few seconds of farewell, when his hand touches the imprint of his son in the deserted bed, we can understand that he accepted the final turn of destiny.

I call this film polyvalent, because it offers, depending on the different conditions of the addressee, a similar, yet also variably rich or deep gesture to be carried out. This also implies that it fulfils the "autodidactic" principle providing the spectator with the clues for its comprehension during the course of the film. Therefore it can be assumed that in all probability *The Sea Inside* will become a film classic that will still be effective when our societies have perhaps decided to create the conditions for death with dignity.

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