

Shane Denson; Therese Grisham; Julia Leyda

## **Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D** 2016

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13482>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version  
Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

### **Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Denson, Shane; Grisham, Therese; Leyda, Julia: Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D. In: Shane Denson, Julia Leyda (Hg.): *Post-Cinema. Theorizing 21st-Century Film*. Falmer: REFRAME Books 2016, S. 933–975. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13482>.

### **Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung - Nicht kommerziell - Keine Bearbeitungen 4.0/ Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

### **Terms of use:**

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0/ License. For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



## 7.3 Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

BY SHANE DENSON, THERESE GRISHAM, AND JULIA LEYDA

**Therese Grisham:** I want to start by referring to our last roundtable discussion on the post-cinematic, last fall, in issue #10 of *La Furia Umana* (reprinted in this volume).<sup>[1]</sup> Principally, we discussed the first two *Paranormal Activity* movies (Oren Peli, 2007; Tod Williams, 2010), in which the action is displayed to us and relayed to the characters through home surveillance (and “sousveillance”) cameras installed in the family’s house. I’m interested in going further with our thoughts on the post-cinematic here, in part owing to Steven Shaviro’s idea of “post-continuity,” which he defined in his 2010 book, *Post-Cinematic Affect*:

I used this term to describe a style of filmmaking that has become quite common in action films of the past decade or so. In what I call the post-continuity style, “a preoccupation with immediate effects trumps any concern for broader continuity—whether on the immediate shot-by-shot level, or on that of the overall narrative.” (“Post-Continuity”)

In a paper presented at the 2012 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference, Shaviro elaborates on this concept:

Post-continuity is a style that moves beyond what David Bordwell calls “intensified continuity,” and in which there no longer seems to be any concern for delineating the geography of action by clearly anchoring it in time and space. Instead, gunfights, martial arts battles, and car chases are rendered through sequences involving shaky handheld cameras, extreme or even impossible camera angles, and much composited digital material—all stitched together with rapid cuts, frequently involving deliberately mismatched shots. The sequence becomes a jagged collage of fragments of explosions, crashes, physical lunges, and violently accelerated motions. There is no sense of spatiotemporal continuity; all that matters is delivering a continual series of shocks to the audience. (“Post-Continuity”)

Examples of the post-continuity style can be found in recent movies by Michael Bay and the late Tony Scott. However, rather than decry post-continuity as “the decline and fall of action filmmaking,” as Matthias Stork calls it in his video essay “[Chaos Cinema](#),” Shaviro concludes:

In classical continuity styles, space is a fixed and rigid container, which remains the same no matter what goes on in the narrative; and time flows linearly, and at a uniform rate, even when the film’s chronology is scrambled by flashbacks. But in post-continuity films, this is not necessarily the case. We enter into the spacetime of modern physics; or better, into the “space of flows,” and the time of microintervals and speed-of-light transformations, that are characteristic of globalized, high-tech financial capital. Thus in *Post-Cinematic Affect*, reflecting on Nevelidine and Taylor’s *Gamer*, I tried to look at the ways that the post-continuity action style is expressive of, as well as being embedded within, the delirium of globalized financial capitalism, with its relentless processes of accumulation, its fragmentation of older forms of subjectivity, its multiplication of technologies for controlling perception and feeling on the most intimate level, and its play of

both embodiment and disembodiment.

Shaviro indicates that we need to talk more about the aesthetics of post-continuity styles in order to link them to post-cinematic affects:

there is much more to be said about the *aesthetic sensibility* of post-continuity styles, and the ways that this sensibility is related to other social, psychological, and technological forces. Post-continuity stylistics are expressive both of technological changes (i.e. the rise of digital and Internet-based media) and of more general social, economic, and political conditions (i.e. globalized neoliberal capitalism, and the intensified financialization associated with it). Like any other stylistic norm, post-continuity involves films of the greatest diversity in terms of their interests, commitments, and aesthetic values. What unites, them, however, is not just a bunch of techniques and formal tics, but a kind of shared *episteme* (Michel Foucault) or *structure of feeling* (Raymond Williams). It is this larger structure that I would like to illuminate further: to work out how contemporary film styles are both expressive of, and productively contributory to, these new formations. By paying sustained attention to post-continuity styles, I am at least trying to work toward a *critical aesthetics* of contemporary culture.

With Shaviro's work as backdrop, I want to think about other aspects of contemporary filmmaking: digital technologies, the formal properties/ styles of recent movies, and their relations to post-cinematic affect.

To begin our discussion, it strikes me that the functions of cameras have changed, or at least their ubiquity, or perhaps their meaning in the post-cinematic episteme. I think we thoroughly discussed the cameras' functions of immobility and unlocatability in the *Paranormal Activity* movies and how these features can be understood. The two films that right away come to my mind in which I see a distinct change in the function of the camera

are *District 9* and *Melancholia*. At the risk of being reductionistic, but for brevity, in classical and post-classical cinema, the camera is subjective, objective, or functions to align us with a subjectivity which may lie outside the film, this last as in Hitchcock. We have something altogether different, I think, in movies such as *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009), or differing from that, in *Melancholia* (Lars von Trier, 2011).

For instance, it is established that in *D9*, a digital camera has shot footage broadcast as news reportage. A similar camera “appears” intermittently in the film as a “character.” In the scenes in which it appears, it is patently impossible in the diegesis for anyone to be there to shoot the footage. Yet, we see that camera by means of blood splattered on it, or we become aware of watching the action through a hand-held camera that intrudes suddenly without any rationale either diegetically or aesthetically. Similarly, but differently as well, in *Melancholia*, we suddenly begin to view the action through a “crazy” hand-held camera, at once something other than just an intrusive exercise in belated Dogme 95 aesthetics and more than any character’s POV, whether we take this latter as literal or metaphorical. How do you understand the figurations of these cameras in the two films? And beyond defining them and thinking about why they occur, can we generalize at all about ideas of the camera as character (without it actually *being* a character—I would say it is a-subjective, I guess) in movies you would include as “post-cinematic”?

**Shane Denson:** First of all, thanks for having me in the discussion, and thanks especially to Therese for organizing the roundtable and for getting things started with this first set of questions. In reply to these questions, I’d like to start, somewhat generally, by suggesting that the unlocatable/irrational camera in these films “corresponds” (for lack of a better word) to the basically nonhuman ontology of digital image production, processing, and circulation. It’s somewhat difficult, I think, to specify the precise nature of this correspondence without suggesting causal relations and/or authorial intentions that are far from obvious in the context of

contemporary media. So I hope that my comments won't be taken as implying either that the functions of the camera in post-cinema are simply determined by the technologies at work or that these correspondences are simply (i.e. straightforwardly) allegorical and reducible to the conscious decisions of filmmakers. Having said that, there are significant resonances across all of these levels of articulation.

### **Production**

To start with, digital image technologies institute a break with human involvement and interest at just about every level: most fundamentally, they occasion a break with the material analogy previously obtaining between the camera lens and the lens of the human eye, the correlation of which is severed by the intercession of humanly non-processable data. (And with my use of the word “correlation,” I am intentionally trying to invoke the notion of “correlationism” as introduced by Quentin Meillassoux and employed by the speculative realists more generally; while the advent of digital technologies may not be a necessary and sufficient condition for a break with correlationism, I think it's safe to say that there is a strong historical tendency linking them. In this vein, one of the great virtues of Steven's work on post-cinematic affect, I think, is to provide some much-needed historicization—and attendant material specificity—to the speculative realist project.)

### **Processing**

Moreover, and closer to the specific context of (post-)cinema, there is a break with the human hand/eye involvement in celluloid-based cinematic editing processes (nonlinear editing being, in large measure, a break with the physical and phenomenological parameters of embodied agency as they are instantiated at the cutting table—a break that occurs regardless of the tributes paid to this phenomenology in the interface design of digital editing and compositing software applications, which in both professional and amateur variants continue, in the name of usability, to emulate physical apparatuses, control knobs, scrub heads, etc. despite the

thoroughly numerical basis of all corresponding operationalities). In this sense, we might say that the much discussed break, in digital cinema, with photographic indexicality—often conceived in basically epistemological terms—is in fact only one of several such breaks, which are not restricted to cognitive and evidentiary domains but instead involve broadband impacts across embodied capacities, sensory relations, and pre-personal affects. (Steven’s work, from *The Cinematic Body* to *Post-Cinematic Affect*, helps to uncover these broad sites of transformation, demonstrating why a narrowly technical focus on changes in editing practices will necessarily provide an incomplete account of the changes encompassed in the move to a regime of properly post-cinematic media; as I have suggested elsewhere—see my “Discorrelated Images” and “*WALL-E* vs. Chaos (Cinema)” —it is precisely in this respect that Steven’s concept of post-continuity, which highlights changes in editing techniques without pretending that this is the sole or central site of transformation, remains superior to purely formal accounts such as Matthias Stork’s notion of chaos cinema.)

### **Circulation**

And then there’s the totally inhuman circulation of images today, which, in the forms of surveillance, social media (and related Web applications), and other sites of accumulation, exchange, and dissemination, impinges upon humans in various ways (both expanding and attenuating human agencies), but which despite and indeed precisely in this impingement remains in many ways indifferent to human needs, interests, and even senses (think, for example, of automated recognition systems that gather data with and without our knowledge or consent, and which may or may not alert some human “user” when a particular event takes place or a certain pre-defined data threshold is crossed, but which continue capturing, generating, reproducing, processing, comparing, compositing, transposing, and transducing images without human input or intervention, proceeding by means and in forms not directly accessible to human perception or control). Various cultural or creative practices,

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

from Internet memes to post-cinematic filmmaking, can be said to reflect, interpret, or “mediate” such processes; sometimes these acts may result from conscious decisions (as in films that allegorize or explicitly exhibit a self-reflexive awareness of our contemporary media situation), but they certainly need not. Again, the resonances at issue here go far beyond the narrow bandwidth of human consciousness.

In outlining these three non-exclusive and non-exhaustive sites of change, I have intentionally chosen terms that encompass but are not restricted to their narrower correlates in the realm of (pre-digital) cinema: filmmaking, editing, and distribution. What I am trying to suggest in this way is the general expansion and transformation of, rather than a simple break with, cinematic techniques and technologies of the image, which correspond to the cultural practices and embodied sensibilities of the current transition to a post-cinematic mediascape. More generally, these transformative expansions (from filmmaking to image production, from editing to processing, and from distribution to circulation) mark displacements of the human agents responsible for the respective areas: filmmakers/directors, editors, and distributors/marketers/producers, among others. The spectator, too, is displaced—no longer situated as a coherent subject in relation to a film as a closed or coherent object of spatiotemporal perception, but instead addressed as a subset or contingent intersection of streams in a larger pool of affective, intentional, financial, technological, and sensorimotor flows. In other words, the emotional and cognitive relations between classical films and their spectators give way to a very different configuration: the narrowband subject-film relation, while not abolished, is now less central, situated within a larger domain that corresponds in part to the many screens and settings of consumption today, many of which compete with one another in real time. The movie screen no longer commands total attention but anticipates its remediation on TV and computer screens and, moreover, knows of its coexistence alongside smartphones, tablets, and social media, which may occupy viewers’ perceptual, tactile, and



affective attentions simultaneous with their “viewing” of a film. Clearly—and finally coming around to the focus of Therese’s question—the camera is a central fulcrum, and hence a site of central importance, in terms of coordinating, relaying, or concretely mediating the new relations between post-cinematic productions and their diffuse addressees, between “the cinema screen” and viewers’ positions within a larger environment of post-cinematic screens, and more generally between post-cinematic media and the displacements or peripheralizations of human agencies to which they correspond.

Due to the transitional powers it exerts on our established media systems or regimes (most centrally, here, on what we call the “cinema”), the post-cinematic camera necessarily produces highly paradoxical situations, such as we glimpse in phenomena like computer-generated lens-flares on the “lenses” of virtual cameras in digitally animated productions: these at once emphasize the plastic “reality” of (“pro-filmic”) CGI objects, while they simultaneously highlight the artificiality of the film itself by emulating (and indeed foregrounding this emulation of) the material presence of a (non-diegetic) camera. The “realisticness” of computer graphics is here attested to, and measured in terms of, the ability of computational technologies to simulate the conditions of pre-digital cinematic production: centrally, the material co-presence of a pro-filmic object, a camera, and the physical interplay of light on its lens—none of which in fact materially (or non-computationally) exists. The paradox here, which consists in the realism-constituting and realism-problematizing undecidability of the virtual camera’s relation to the diegesis—wherein the “reality” of this realism is conceived as thoroughly mediated, the product of a simulated physical camera rather than defined as the hallmark of embodied perceptual immediacy in the absence of a camera or other mediating apparatus—points to some crucial issues with respect to the affective functionality of post-cinematic cameras more generally (that is, both the virtual and the materially embodied cameras employed in the mediation of the post-cinematic).

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

To bring this around to Therese's suggestion that the camera comes to serve as an "a-subjective character": I want to suggest that the whole problematic undecidability of the irrational camera's relations to diegetic and non-diegetic subject-positions, as outlined in Therese's question, corresponds to the multileveled breaks and displacements of human phenomenology that I outlined above. Accordingly, we might say, the post-cinematic camera is not so much situated as a problematic or irrational character within a given film (though this certainly does occur); rather—or rather more characteristically for post-cinematic filmmaking—the choice of the camera's specific perceptual modality and functionality (its problems, uses, relations to and foregrounding of various aspects of the foregoing) in fact comes to define the overall "character" or general affective quality of the film. This corresponds to the transformative expansions I described above, and it marks a move from the viewer's emotional involvement with intrafilmic characters to a multimodal and not exclusively narrative, visual, and intentional engagement with the qualitative character of the film itself, conceived not as a closed unit of spatiotemporal/perceptual "content" but as an integral and evolving part of the larger post-cinematic environment. In other words, where the characters in classical cinema provided the central focus and occasions for dramatic interest in a story-world that unfolds according to its own internally defined logics, and where the camera served alternately to disclose this world in the manner of a transparent window or, more exceptionally, to announce its own presence as an (uncanny or self-reflexive) object of perception, the radically indeterminate cameras of post-cinematic filmmaking serve (in the manner of the "sousveillance" referenced in the last roundtable discussion on the *Paranormal Activity* series) to displace the characters, to take them out of the center of perceptual attention and instead situate them marginally with respect to a total environment of inhuman image production, processing, and circulation—and to situate us as viewers accordingly.

This dual or reflexive operation is enabled precisely by the camera's irrationality, its undecidable position between the diegetic and the

nondiegetic, or between the world on the screen and the screen's place in our world, which is similarly pervaded by these post- or nonhuman technologies of the image. Thus, there is a reversible relation between the post-cinematic diegesis and the nondiegetic ecology of our post-cinematic world, and it is occasioned precisely by a camera that no longer situates us as subjects vis-à-vis the film-as-object, but instead institutes a pervasive relation of marginality, where everything is marginal to or contiguous with everything else. This corresponds to a specifically post-cinematic mode of address: the camera no longer frames actions, emotions, and events in a given world, but instead provides the color, look, and feel of the film *qua* material component or aspect of the world—of our world: one that, either directly or metonymically through mechanisms of *sousveillance* and the like, impinges upon and involves us in some way, but not centrally as the main or core concern of the film. The camera's presence thus defines the affective quality of the film (and of the world) more so than the affective quality of our investment in it: as a function of the camera, the film/world itself exudes threat, fear, excitement, panic, or enticement, but in such a way as to mark, in stark contrast to classical Hollywood, our own involvement in these affective relations as contingent, non-necessary, and hence open to the distraction of competing interests, other media, and other screens. The film-world itself exhibits fear or other affective qualities that we may, but need not, share in. This "character" of the camera becomes, in effect, the central object of the film, taking the place of character-involvement as the motor of classical interest (and "suture"). But the objecthood of such filmic "character" is just as problematic as the a-subjective quality of the camera, because the affective quality of the film envelops (or fails to envelop) us, but in any case it refuses to let us serve as the center or crux of such affect. The post-cinematic camera, in short, modulates the affective character of the wider world; it does not bracket that world out or substitute one of its own making; it remains indeterminately contiguous with every level of the contemporary real, including the physical, the imaginary, and the virtual.

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

Accordingly, the dis-correlation of spectator-film relations by no means rules out our active involvement with the film and the camera's images: in fact, it expedites the proliferation of engagements beyond the film proper. To be sure, processes of transmedialization and attendant fan practices need, I think, to be thought more precisely in relation to the affective qualities of post-cinematic productions, their correlations to media-technological changes and the revised role of the camera, and the processes by which films leverage these transformations to infect us with their affects, turning us, in effect, into automated propagators of said affect in our engagements with the films online, in wikis, forums, etc. which carry their affects forward, as an act of serialization that is independent of any explicit sequels, and so on.

*D9* embodies these dynamics of the irrational camera and its affective modulation of the contiguous world, rather than the classical encapsulation of a separate filmic world, in precisely those mechanisms singled out by Therese in her question. That news-reportage camera, which reappears at times impossibly and “without any rationale either diegetically or aesthetically,” as she quite fittingly puts it, hearkens back to the same dynamics of undecidability which propels the seemingly simple CGI lens flare discussed above. Like the technically gratuitous lens flare, *D9*'s irrational camera creates a feeling of authenticity precisely through impossibility, simulates direct affective involvement through hypermediation. The paradox here does not alienate us from the film but, conversely, works in favor of establishing a closer contiguity between the film and our own confusing and irrational lifeworlds, where news media, surveillance cameras, satellite imagery, GPS, social media, and other (often invisible) channels for the production, processing, and circulation of post-cinematic images, increasingly collude on a daily basis to generate what must seem like impossible views: if not views from nowhere, then at least perspectives that are inexplicable in terms of the phenomenology of human embodiment.

Again, I am not suggesting that the film should be read as an allegory of such processes, but with its tale of the main character's progressive

dehumanization, it certainly lends itself more readily to such readings than does *Melancholia*, I think. Another significant difference between the two films can be detected in the fact that *D9's* irrational camera, and the proximity it establishes with the nondiegetic world of our extra-cinematic experience, works logically toward the preparation of a sequel (even if Blomkamp has no plans to make one), while *Melancholia*, with its unrelenting consummation of the end-of-the-world scenario, would seem categorically to preclude any form of continuation. Nevertheless, the film's "crazy" camera, as Therese puts it, not only fails to correlate neatly with any intra- or extra-filmic POV; it also reveals things to us that demand but adamantly resist explanation—and in this way it acknowledges and provokes extra-filmic continuation, as an aspect of the essential contiguity between post-cinematic diegetic and nondiegetic formations, indeed, as a basic fact of life today. The paradox cannot be overemphasized: the world ends; no one wakes from a dream; it's over. And yet it goes on: we are forced—as the film knows we will be—to go online and seek a plausible explanation for the camera's revelation of, for instance, as one random example, a nineteenth hole on a golf course that, as is repeatedly and inexplicably emphasized in the film's dialogues, only has a standard eighteen holes. The film, it would seem, displays an acute awareness of its inevitable afterlife in the databases of imdb, in Wikipedia articles devoted to film-related trivia, in minute analyses of continuity problems and such on Facebook, twitter, and online forums, all of which now constitute a basic fact of contemporary reception, which has long since ceased ending in movie theaters. The film provokes continuation, along with allegorical readings and the like (which will also be traded online), even while signaling its complete and total resistance to narrative continuation and its utter indifference to human significance. Tellingly, the melodrama of the film's first part ends with a recognition of the triviality of its petty human dramas, marking in this way a rejection of classical spectatorial involvement *via* emotion and character-identification, ultimately denying us the comfort of empathy with its characters; instead, it displays a world of optional affect that can, but need not, infect us. The

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

film's narrative leaves us more or less cold, even as the film itself may affect us deeply. People die—and not the people we expect to be the first to kill themselves; but beyond a feeling of mild surprise, there's not much else. Formally—and not simply allegorically—the film modulates depression as a means of mediating the apparent triviality of emotion and sentimentality in the post-cinematic world. The irrational camera corresponds to this basic indifference and disconnection of human interest. The camera's and viewer's (at least this viewer's) indifference to the characters is in fact the filmic/affective “character” of the film, as a part of the wider world, that the camera helps create. This, I propose, is a characteristically post-cinematic mode of articulating (i.e. parsing and conjoining) affect as alternately attached and free-floating, individuated and impersonal, and as pertaining to any of the contiguous worlds that the irrational camera brings into contact.

**Julia Leyda:** In the previous roundtable on the *Paranormal Activity* films, we discussed the implications of the home video and security surveillance cameras for the films' meanings and their interesting co-location within the popular horror film genre and avant-garde film movements such as *Dogme 95*. While it was an interesting test case for definitions of the avant-garde, I ended up feeling convinced that the very fact of the formal overlapping between pop horror and avant-garde film was telling, more as evidence of the ubiquity of post-cinematic affect and post-continuity technique than as any kind of mainstreaming of avant-garde aesthetics. To paraphrase Steve's work on post-cinematic affect, the *PA* movies, the indie SF urban fantasy *District 9*, and the work of more artistically-minded auteurs such as Lars von Trier, represent in different ways how it feels to live in the digital age of late neoliberalism. So in a sense I want to stretch that to include how camera work blurs, sometimes literally, how we look at this world and through whose eyes. Movies like *PA 1* and *2*, and the ones now under discussion, *D9* and *Melancholia*, generate affective cognates for 21st-century life, encouraging us to observe, sympathize, and perhaps identify with the characters and situations captured by their

cameras. Maybe examining the camera work more closely can be one way to get to a “critical aesthetics of contemporary culture” that Steve calls for in his post-continuity paper.

### **District 9, POV, and Politics**

*D9* is all about POV. We are positioned as viewers of the story of Wikus, the private contractor working for the Halliburton-like firm MNU. But we are also gradually encouraged to sympathize with Wikus as he develops from a xenophobic corporate tool into a more humane person, sensitive to the predicament of the aliens. Part of that development in his character appears to be the result of his own biological metamorphosis from human to alien-human hybrid—only by literally becoming (part) Other is Wikus able to see things from the alien perspective.

The movie combines faux news footage with more conventional non-diegetic camera work in what appear to be different levels of externalized POVs. Some shots involve characters in direct address to the camera, with a lower third superimposed over the image of news readers or mockumentary interviews with various experts and family members of the involved characters; hand-held, battlefield cinematography, signaling the presence of a camera crew accompanying Wikus and the other MNU contractors as they serve eviction notices to aliens; and footage that appears to be from fixed surveillance cameras. But these scenes of diegetic camera work frequently give way to non- or extra-diegetic camera work that isn't explained, in scenes where we know there is no actual film crew or surveillance camera; in this sense, some of the camera work is in the familiar mainstream film style of the invisible camera revealing events that we otherwise would have no way of seeing.

This constant shifting between diegetic and non-diegetic, as Shane puts it, “modulates the affective character of the wider world” in which we are increasingly integrated into media circuits, social networks, and digital, nonhuman modes of representation and communication. In my latest

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

viewing of *D9*, what must have been my third time, I didn't feel disrupted or confused in any way by the seemingly random interweaving of diegetic and non-diegetic; I'm used to it, just as, while I am having face-to-face or telephone conversations, composing emails, and watching movies or television shows, I can be interrupted (more and more seamlessly) by notifications from apps like Gmail, Twitter, Blogger, Google+, and so forth, on my PC, smart phone, or simultaneously on both.

But the other significant kind of shift in the movie is in the story: Wikus's transition, physically and mentally, from a xenophobic human to a hybrid human-alien forced to recognize his moral responsibility to others. In the movie's overtly political messages the aliens stand in for oppressed racial groups; in his hybridity, Wikus comes to embody the refutation of speciesism as a way to critique the institutionalized oppression of non-white groups under the militarized regime of South African apartheid. Like the camera work, Wikus's point of view shifts back and forth between that of a technocratic contractor supporting the superiority of humans over aliens and that of an empathic person who recognizes the aliens' personhood. He vacillates between altruism and selfishness when he steals the spaceship from the alien Christopher, but in the end he enables Christopher's escape to the mother ship, even though it means he must wait at least three years for his return to Earth (if he returns at all). His shift also encompasses a rejection of his earlier loyalty to his company, MNU, which apparently performs various contracted services for the government, including the militarized security forces, reminiscent of Blackwater or Halliburton in the US war in Iraq, tasked with delivering the eviction notices to thousands of aliens in the tent city of District 9. Is this a secondary albeit utopian gesture to suggest that a non-corporate or even anti-corporate world is possible?

### **Melancholia, Melodrama, and POV**

In sorting out my ideas for this discussion, I posted a partial review of *Melancholia* on my blog; later Steve sent me his unpublished essay on



it, as well. My comments focus mainly on the film's generic oddities as a woman's film about the end of the world, particularly the shift within the movie from Justine's half, Part 1, to Claire's, Part 2. The two halves are defined by their titles' reference to one sister or the other, and also by their distinctly different color palettes. I find this technical attention to color—through the ostensibly Dogme-approved use of only situational lighting as well as costuming and *mise-en-scène*—provocative and elusive. It reminds me of the way many 1950s melodramas use color, which has been studied by critics over the years (see Haralovich), and which is painstakingly reenacted in Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (see Higgins). Shot mostly in the nighttime incandescent interiors and lamp-lit exteriors without additional lighting, the Justine part of the movie is drenched in golden light, which matches her and her bridegroom's straw-colored hair and the ostentatious luxury of the wedding party. The second part, Claire's, is primarily shot during the day in muted natural light, producing mostly a bluish or pallid color palette, to go with the subdued, darker tones as hope drains away and Claire collapses, realizing that her big fancy life is going to be dashed to ions just like the rest of the planet. In a final reversal of roles, Justine cares for Claire and Leo, inventing the magic cave made of sticks which demonstrates how illusory any sense of safety really is, while at the same time actually comforting them (and us).

The cinematography in both the gold and blue parts of the movie, as well as in the prologue, is often breathtakingly beautiful, a fact only partly countered by the self-consciously wobbly handheld camera work that dominates Justine's part and appears to a lesser extent in Claire's. As Steve points out in his paper on post-continuity, though, what may have had a particular aesthetic resonance when foregrounded in the avant-garde context of Godard or even Dogme 95 films has become relatively normalized within the visual styles of reality television and YouTube videos. For me, the shaky camera, rack focuses, and jump cuts during the party did seem to correlate with Justine's shaky mental state, but after a short time I adjusted to it and no longer noticed it, as may many viewers

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

who are not trying to foreground the visual style. The irrational camera (in Shane's definition) here produces what Steve aptly names a relational and unstable space, rather than the clearly delineated and bounded space of classical cinema, which in this movie is appropriate to the sisters' irrational frames of mind and the shaky family relationships, as well as the radically unstable space of Earth itself as it explodes in collision with the planet Melancholia (Shaviro, "*Melancholia*"). The eventual meeting and collision of the two planets, blue and golden in the special effects sequence, echo the often destructive bonds among family members in a melodrama such as those of Claire and Justine; though pulled toward one another, they are ultimately destroyed.

As Steve writes about the two sisters, they are not opposites or types—they are women characters in a family melodrama, complete with the conventional big house, condescending husband, and unresolved problems. Both women recognize the expectations placed on them by family and society, and they deal with those expectations differently—Justine fails to live up to them and refuses to pretend, while Claire clearly wants to fulfill them, but tries and ultimately fails to conform to a *châtelaine* role as caretaker of husband, parents, sister, and son along with the huge house and servants (see also Shaviro "*Melancholia*"). *Melancholia* is post-cinematic in its incorporation of 21st-century visual styles and its reek of finance capital's golden one percent, even as it culminates in an evocation of the meaninglessness of love or lucre in the face of the death of humanity and the Earth itself.

But I find it fascinating that 20th-century social issues such as race and gender continue to permeate both these films.

**TG:** First of all, thanks for your detailed replies, Shane and Julia. What strikes me immediately is the different takes you have on these two films. I would like to add to the discussion by clarifying my own position on the parts of the first question, so you will know why I asked it. It's a

very specific question, unlike the broader questions I asked in our first roundtable discussion on the post-cinematic for *LFU*.

I am excited at the idea of looking at the use of various film techniques in movies that are post-cinematic partly because I teach my students that a technique is a formal device for helping to create meaning in film, but that the meaning of a technique is always tied to its contexts, which are philosophical, social, historical, industrial, institutional, and so on. This is why I don't like to use, without augmentation, Bordwell and Thompson's *Film Art*; its considerations are purely formalist. When we talk about the post-cinematic, even though cinema, television, and older media forms are still with us, of course we are also talking about an epistemic shift. Defining this shift is still an open project, which Steve has begun with his book. Therefore, film techniques will often "mean" something different in the post-cinematic than they did in cinema. My idea of "meaning" here is closer to Steve's idea of "affect" than it is to signification or representation; hence, my cheat quotes. To be brief regarding uses of the camera and also the narrative elements in *D9* and *Melancholia* which Julia discusses in her response:

Julia, you say *D9* is "all about POV." My own perspective is that it has a classical narrative structure. In this, it is closer to recent animation films such as *Coraline*, *Ratatouille*, *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, and so on, than it is to post-cinematic affect. Interestingly, classical narrative structure seems to have landed in fantasy and sci-fi films today. We come to root for Wikus, who starts out as a feeble liberal bureaucrat who embodies the prejudices of apartheid. As he metamorphoses, he becomes a hero. That is a brilliant aspect of the movie: we find him heroic when he is no longer human. He never wholly becomes alien, either, at the end retaining his human memory. We "identify" with him as he is in metamorphosis. When I first saw the movie, I thought of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, by contrast. As Gregor becomes not-Gregor, we align ourselves more and more with his family, the locus of reproduction of the forms of life in

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

Kafka's episteme, which of course is Kafka's point. Wikus is a figure in flux, but for us, wholly sympathetic. This is a movie about clear heroes and villains. But the narrative and uses of the camera diverge from each other.

The "hand-held" battle sequence isn't just about the usual fight (or chase) in which the viewer is meant to share in suspense or anxiety. We've already seen a good deal of the film as ON film (better said, digital camera), from the very beginning. We therefore can't help but get the idea that the fight sequence is being filmed. (I'm not referring to our individual experiences of the movie here, but to its formal logic). But it isn't being filmed diegetically. And if the camera is being used, say, as it is in classical or post-classical films, I don't see it. There, we aren't meant to notice it, just to absorb the tension; or if we do notice, it is to analyze it and classify it as a generic technique. In *D9*, I think we ARE meant to notice, because the change in cameras is abrupt and occurs inside the sequence itself. The idea, to me, is that even those moments which seem impossible to shoot, which cannot be filmed, will be filmed; images *are being collected*, period. Likewise with the sudden blood splatters on a camera that previously was not present. Suddenly, it obtrudes in the shot. My students always say it's clear; it's all being filmed by someone candidly and turned into a documentary, which is *D9*. The illogic of this doesn't bother them at all. But to me, it's as if a camera is there in the diegesis without it being a character's or a film crew's or yet again an objective camera. This is why I called it "a-subjective" in my question. This way of using the camera seems to me to belong distinctively to post-cinematic affect.

Unlike you, Julia, I did not see the camera techniques you mention in *Melancholia* as correlating only with Justine (or Claire), neither her external nor internal views or her shaky mental state. Rather, I see these techniques as a-subjective; the space—unstable and shifting, not really landing anywhere, and continually having to readjust itself—as the condition for possibility. Now, that condition of possibility is something certainly associated with Justine, as you say, but it's more than Justine,

and it's not Justine. It's the whole world, if you will, which is coming to an end. Justine is a destructive force, but not a globally destructive one. The condition for possibility, or in other words, potential as a latent force of transformation, then, seemingly can't be actualized in any way before the world ends, but this potential is atemporal. Potential cannot be filmed according to pre-existing film language, or perhaps at all, but it is suggested here by the very instability of the camera in what otherwise we might perceive as a women's melodrama that uses generic camera techniques. Potential remains beyond any narrative rationale, as a-subjective and a-rational, a force that traverses us and our lives in the neoliberal capitalism and ostentation of the rich shown so eloquently in the film. This is something I love about *Melancholia*. It's very hopeful. The uses of the camera contribute to that sense of hope.

**SD:** I just want to comment briefly on the foregoing, and especially on the differences of perspective that have been articulated so far. Indeed, and perhaps somewhat oddly in retrospect, these differences did not stand out as starkly to me as to Therese, who wrote: "What strikes me immediately is the different takes you [i.e. Julia and myself] have on these two films." While I certainly recognized some clear differences of emphasis, I was not struck by any irreconcilable differences. Now, this might be chalked up to an overly conciliatory personality, I suppose, but in light of Therese's very lucid contouring of some basic tensions between a perspective that is more or less narrative-focused and one that is less and less so, I think it's worth exploring what kind of communication is possible between these viewpoints.

First of all, I find myself generally in agreement with Therese's argument that, in *D9*, "the narrative and camera diverge from one another"—and that, as she quite nicely puts it, "even those moments which seem impossible to shoot, which cannot be filmed, will be filmed; images are being collected, period." This type of camera—which is more omnivorous than omniscient—corresponds to the nonhuman production, processing,

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

and circulation I pointed to earlier, and I do think its employment in this film renders problematic Julia's statement that "we are positioned as viewers of the story of Wikus." To say that it is problematic, though, is not to say that it is wrong; indeed, the increasingly problematic nature of our "positioning"—rather than the absence of any such positioning—is a central characteristic of the shift to post-cinematic media, I think.

What kind of problem, though? I agree with Julia that the post-cinematic camera is not problematic in the same way as avant-garde cameras have typically been. In particular, the "divergence" between narrative and camera is not (typically or necessarily) announced in a Brechtian sort of "alienation effect" that would make us aware of the fact of narration/mediation. And yet, I think, there is much to be said for Therese's diagnosis: "Potential remains beyond any narrative rationale, as a-subjective and a-rational." So while we do indeed come to sympathize with Wikus, there's something more going on. Julia, quite understandably, points out that what I've termed the irrational camera does not interfere with this sympathy: "I didn't feel disrupted or confused in any way by the seemingly random interweaving of diegetic and non-diegetic; I'm used to it. . . ." So am I, and like Julia, I see a correspondence between this normalization of the irrational camera and the constant interruptions we experience as we juggle multiple devices, applications, and other would-be recipients and channelers of our attentions. For me, though, this correspondence, and its increasing invisibility, complicates our positioning by the camera and our attendant sympathy with a character like Wikus. Therese highlights one of the narrative correlates of this complication—that our sympathy grows as Wikus becomes less human. Indeed, Wikus's transformation, and his transitional, unsettled position between the human(e) and the inhuman(e) corresponds quite neatly to the irrationality of the camera, which is both within and without the diegetic world. The fact that this camera work does not necessarily get foregrounded in our attention is part of what differentiates it from the avant-garde. There is no "alienation" as a cognitive/perceptual operation of shock (or recognition of the camera's

mediation); rather, “alienation” (both Wikus’s and our own becoming-alien) takes place on a decidedly pre-personal and hence unconscious level: Wikus’s changing genotype mirrors the changes in our embodied, sub-perceptual being or habits of comportment that are occasioned by, among other things, the technical infrastructure of the digital lifeworld, which supports the very normal, everyday sort of attention-dispersal described by Julia.

Again, the irrational camera stands “next to” and not “against” the worlds it brings into contact: it precisely establishes contiguity between the quotidian world and the diegetic, making them interchangeable rather than strictly opposable. Because it does not transcend, contradict, oppose, or shock but rather connect, this sort of camera does not preclude an identificatory engagement with the story, its characters, their moral dilemmas and developments. This remains a potential, I think, of post-cinematic film. And yet this potential is no longer, as it was in classical cinema, the core concern around which films revolve, and which they must at all costs actualize in the form of emotional (and quasi-personal) engagement. Even this potential, then, that is, the potential for narrative-oriented identification, would seem to situate itself “beyond any narrative rationale, as a-subjective and a-rational.” This is at least in part because the points of contact, the basis for identifications between us as real-world viewers and diegetic characters like Wikus and Justine, are precisely those dispersed, often shaky and unfocused, blurry and brief forms of perspectival engagement shared in common by the irrational, post-cinematic camera and our broader post-cinematic lifeworlds. We don’t necessarily foreground the (now normalized) irrationality of the camera or the bond it establishes for us with the characters and their world, but the resulting invisibility does not produce anything like the classical bond of “suture,” because post-cinematic identification and narrative engrossment are predicated materially on this fact of dispersal rather than the classical camera’s concentration and bundled captivation of perceptual attention. Rather than alienation and cognitive dissonance,

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

this decidedly non-avant-garde sort of self-reflexivity operates on the basis of a robustly material resonance between the inside and the outside, the diegesis and our everyday reality. The irrational camera's function is to serve precisely as a resonance chamber, and this, I would claim, is the basis for its subtly problematic "positioning" of us vis-à-vis contemporary diegetic and nondiegetic worlds.

**TG:** We are looking at current movies from the perspective of what distinguishes them from films of the 20th century, so at the irrational camera or at post-continuity. The fact is, as Steve mentions in his talk on post-continuity, his students don't necessarily notice violations of continuity, and as Julia has responded here, viewers don't notice the presence of cameras that don't make sense; they often fill in a logic that isn't there, or the absence of logic doesn't bother them, particularly if they grew up on these types of films. My students, as I mentioned, just assume that an invisible character is diegetically filming what will become *D9*. I recall, too, that my students in a course on film aesthetics a few years ago didn't notice violations of continuity in John Woo's *The Killer* (1989). I had to point out violations of the 180-degree rule. Even though students understood the concept, they didn't think the violations made any difference to their understanding of spatial relations. These ways of seeing have been with us for a lot longer than we have allowed here so far. Is it the widespread or extreme use of them in movies today that is noteworthy?

This is by way of introducing the fact that I find it difficult to talk about "post-millennial" aesthetics, and to attribute them to digital technologies. At the same time, I see that digital technologies have a vast potential that filmmakers could exploit for creating new aesthetic forms. I think, however, that most movies now use digital technologies without exploiting that potential, or use it to simulate older forms. Another way to state this, perhaps, is to say that the function of digital techniques is to allow audiences steeped in watching movies like *Transformers*, *Avatar*, and so



on, to “re-experience” cinema, or more accurately, to experience “it” for the first time. This is the most obvious dimension of why Scorsese shot *Hugo* using digital 3D cameras and digitally simulated early Autochrome color found mainly in photography. His project was to bring people face-to-face with the “birth of cinema” (actually, his focus is on the birth of the trick film) in a way that his documentary, *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (made for television in 1995) does not, simply because the latter makes use of archival footage, the kind of stuff my students in History of Cinema are crushingly bored with. If I were to choose a 1950s educational film to show beginning students how to use the library and its resources, I couldn’t be doing any worse. I have no criticism of *Hugo* on this score, and may use it as a teaching tool.

I do have a problem, however, with its “conservatism,” not just on the level of its content, which belongs to no film history textbook I would use, because it lacks any awareness (unlike Scorsese’s documentary) that there were ever any innovative women directors of early film (for instance, Alice Guy-Blaché as the director to make the first narrative film). *Hugo* has been called Scorsese’s most personal film to date. I’m a little sick of “personal films” which use the term “personal” to ignore anything the director finds inconvenient or troublesome to acknowledge. My criticism doesn’t dwell on the excruciatingly archaic choice to offer up yet again women characters as help-meets and domestic partners who double as the spectacular image. If this is a “nostalgia film,” as Fredric Jameson sees the nostalgia film, then it really does obliterate history, in an important sense, in favor of cultural stereotypes of the past. These criticisms notwithstanding (and I do think gender, class, race, and sexuality in relation to the post-cinematic need to be theorized, don’t get me wrong), maybe the thing I notice most about *Hugo* is its huge (ahem) budget—which means it had every conceivable digital technology at its disposal. Yet all Scorsese could think of doing with that technology was to create a Bazinian nightmare of lurid color, exaggerated motion through artificially deep space, in which figures suddenly protrude distortedly at

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

the viewer (a memorable moment is the Doberman Pinscher's nose), and so on. Clearly, the counter-argument is that his subject requires these maneuvers, to go along with the pastiche of historical detail and reference he employs to introduce viewers to his history of pre-cinematic and cinematic forms. These are combined with a classical narrative separated into vignettes meant to refer to the short films of the early era, in which everything ends happily for everyone and in which the automaton, presaging filmic motion (and being an oracle itself writing of things to come) plays the key role.

But, the digital Autochrome color, calibrated to use with the color ranges of the Alexa 3D cameras (from Paramount's promotional materials: making *Hugo* was the first time Scorsese used 3D, the first time a feature was shot completely using 3D cameras, and the first time these cameras were used to make a feature film altogether) resembles less the autochrome experiments by the Lumière Brothers and less still the hand-colored frames of Méliès's films, making me think simultaneously of the colors we associate with a variety of animated films and an amped-up Technicolor of the 1950s. As with every American nostalgia film discussed in the literature, *Hugo*'s most privileged moment, I contend, is not pre-cinema or early cinema, but the 1950s and the myth of American innocence, which films from the fifties themselves give the lie to, and some contemporary films such as Haynes' *Far From Heaven* problematize irremediably. (In the case of *FFH*, the fifties are also used to show us how, unfortunately, we seem to be stuck filmically and socio-politically in a very similar time.) As for Scorsese's relationship to this time period: he required everyone working behind and in front of the cameras to watch the first 3D movie he watched as a child: this was André de Toth's *House of Wax* (1953). But it wasn't enough. The cast and crew also had to watch Hitchcock's *Dial 'M' for Murder* (1954), *Kiss Me, Kate* (1953), and *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). What goes together better than a desire for the "lost object" of the 1950s in American nostalgia films and the "lost innocence" of childhood, with which it is often coupled?

This is my starting-point for thinking through the aesthetic project of *Hugo*. To go further, my first question is, what is 3D good at and for? Scorsese says, “What I discovered working in 3D is that it enhances the actor, like watching a sculpture that moves. It’s no longer flat. With the right performances and the right moves, it becomes a mixture of theater and film, but different from both. That is something that has always been exciting to me. I’ve always dreamed about doing a film in 3D” (from *Cinema Review*, “*Hugo*”). His reference to a much older art form, sculpture, has made me think about how 3D film is not like sculpture at all. Forget movement for a moment. The difference is of course inherent: sculpture is three-dimensional; film gives the illusion, here enhanced and exaggerated, of three-dimensionality. In the absence of a critical vocabulary to articulate Scorsese’s visual style, I have deliberately resorted to art-historical vocabulary, that of painting. The most striking analogue I find is in hyperrealism. The aesthetic of hyperrealism, briefly stated, goes beyond that of photo-realism since it does not simply reproduce, in high-resolution, photographic realities, but focuses on both subjects and details, veering into the fantastic by imbuing details with the subjective, emotive, or impossible. This seems to me to be a perfect rationale for the employment of 3D in *Hugo*, which focuses on every “real” or “imagined” detail of the train station as Hugo Cabret moves through it (much, if not most, of the film is from his POV), and is interested in the subjective and emotive detail of moving through space, ultimately landing on the close-up.

American film quite often contains an element of nostalgia. But in 2011, a whole slew of American movies was released whose aesthetic structures exhibit a yearning for earlier, cinematic forms, using digital technologies to “make them new” for contemporary audiences. *Rango* longs for the western; *The Adventures of Tintin* for film noir; *Puss in Boots* for the swashbuckler. *Hugo* and *The Artist* (the latter not American, but made in Hollywood and abundantly referring to the history of Hollywood films) re-create founding moments of cinema itself. This fact alone underlines our definitive entry into the episteme of the post-cinematic.

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

I have just begun to think all of this through, but for now, I will say that *Hugo's* digital techniques of production and post-production are at odds with its formal properties: the film combines innovations in digital 3D technologies with a classical narrative, a love of paraphernalia presaging cinematic motion, and a hyperrealistic aesthetics of movement, space, color, and pattern. Scorsese ultimately suggests that he is the “father” of the digital trick film, a contemporary Méliès, and that *Hugo* is his most elaborate example so far. *Hugo* is offered to us as a founding moment in the history of film; nevertheless, its aesthetics, despite their technical innovations, hearken back to a world in which older technologies—and older forms of social authority—persist.

**JL:** I agree with Therese on the way that *Hugo's* conservatism hits all the bases of the nostalgia film without any of the potentially disruptive reframings of pastiche, as Richard Dyer has elaborated it. For me as well, the 3D and the oversaturated colors were incongruous, their apparently “new” technologies clashing somehow with the antiquated feel of the movie produced by its historical setting, its traditional story formula, and its near-total erasure of femaleness.

The old-time feeling comes from the quasi-Dickensian tale of the orphan boy living secretly in the hidden passageways of the train station, narrowly escaping from the vicious station inspector and various other (male) antagonists, pining for his lost benevolent father (he never knew his mysterious mother), and uncovering hidden secrets of the earliest beginnings of cinema. The *mise-en-scène* underscores the solitude and precariousness of *Hugo's* existence, contrasted with the warm, fuzzy flashbacks to his loving father (the very huggable Jude Law) practicing his awe-inspiring craft of watchmaking and other fine mechanical work. *Hugo* eventually locates the paternal figure of Méliès who in the end embraces the boy, the automaton, and the legacy of his early film work. The orphan child recurs in so many works of children's literature and cinema as a safe way to allow child viewers to imagine independence

without having to choose to abandon their parents. This formula allows the child character to live on his own (it is usually a boy) while still honoring the sainted memory of the deceased parent(s), enjoying the adventures and excitements of the adult world without the restrictions and protections of a mother or father. The children in the audience can thus vicariously experience this independence without the actual dangers and sorrow of losing their own parents. *Hugo's* plot doesn't depart one jot from that rote path, and it seems to inspire sympathy as well as envy, so that child viewers might not entirely want to live Hugo's lonely life, however exciting.

But the absence of the mother, a hallmark of this kind of boy's adventure story, here also resonates with what Therese points out in the movie's elision of the women of early cinema as well. The girl Isabelle is also an orphan but is sheltered and kept ignorant of some important things in the world (movies mainly, and the identity of her guardian). Méliès's wife is portrayed as passive in her acquiescence to her husband's bitterness, keeping his secrets and trying to protect him from discovery. That the ending of the film shows Isabelle as the author of the book that will become *Hugo* implies a curious combination of female creativity and submission: we have seen her as a voracious reader with an active imagination and intelligence, yet the book she writes is Hugo's story, not one of her own invention. Scorsese's patriarchal story of cinema has almost no place for women, except as assistants, comforters, and muses to the male geniuses. That female actors have spoken out against protesters at the last Cannes festival, demonstrating to call attention to the miniscule number of women filmmakers and thus their relative invisibility in awards competitions, only shows how deeply internalized the patriarchy of the film industry remains in so many of its professionals, male or female, in the 21st century. Perhaps needless to say, *Hugo* doesn't pass the Bechdel test (yes, there are two named female characters, but they rarely speak to each other, and never about anything other than men).

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

The other film Therese mentions in connection with this reawakening of nostalgia for early cinema is *The Artist*, which operates, as she says, in some quite similar ways to *Hugo*. It also encourages us to sympathize with a once-successful film artist now in decline, it mobilizes familiar story formulas to generate pathos and sympathy, and it also expresses ambivalence about female power (in the world? in the industry? in the home?). A few of my ideas here draw on my brief blog post about *The Artist* from 22 Dec. 2011 (“*The Artist*”).

Rather than a child’s adventure novel, the story can best be summed up in my own film-historical context as *Sunset Boulevard* meets *Singin’ in the Rain* meets *A Star is Born*. The washed-up old silent star and the “peppy” young New Woman, or flapper, star are perfect fodder for a pastiche of those old storylines and mises-en-scène. Yet the techniques of the film, at least as I recall it, don’t seem particularly post-cinematic: it was made on film, shot in 4:3 and slightly speeded up to mimic old silents. Yet I agree with Therese that it is post-cinematic in affect—as Steve’s conceptualization holds that post-cinema is also characterized by its affect, the ways in which it produces and portrays the feelings of living in the 21st century. As Shane mentioned earlier and as Charlie Bertsch points out in *Souciant*, we can easily read *The Artist* as a film about today’s movie industry as much as a nostalgia film about early Hollywood. It’s rooted in the structures of feeling that characterize our moment in film history: increasing digitization in production, post-production, and distribution; anxieties about where the industry and the art of cinema are headed, and a perhaps understandable tendency to look back fondly on a Golden Age of movies when (we might assume) things were better and simpler and clearer.

Yet as Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, the ideological implications of a backward-looking nostalgia for a past golden age has always existed: every generation of Western civilization has lamented the loss of a previous era, going back all the way to ancient

Rome, when Romans too looked back to ancient Greece. Williams's point is also that such golden age thinking has always been conservative, yearning for a golden age that actually wasn't nearly as perfect as those who invoke it in the context of critiquing new developments would have it. I actually think that the recent Woody Allen film *Midnight in Paris* provides a great illustration of this: the young writer of today is delighted to time-travel to the roaring 20s of Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald, yet, while there, he meets another time-traveler who longs for the earlier golden age of the 1890s, and when he visits that era he meets others who long for a still earlier bygone golden age. Whatever its flaws, this film shows the dangers of idealizing the past as a way to escape or disengage from the present (see also my blog post "*Midnight in Paris*"). *The Artist*, on the other hand, completely buys into this golden-age way of thinking, and encourages us to do so, showing as it does the human costs of the technological changes in the film industry, such as the introduction of sound.

Interestingly, though, the female protagonist, Peppy, is not a passive sidekick but an aggressive, ambitious professional who quickly achieves stardom and reaches out to Valentin out of affection for him and, perhaps, also a bit of nostalgia for the fading silent era itself. The flapper, or Modern Girl/Woman, constituted a threat to Western society in the 20s and 30s, as she represented women's sexual and social assertiveness that flew in the face of patriarchy and the previously complicit roles women played in their own oppression. Yet, *The Artist* encourages us to see Peppy from Valentin's eyes, as she (and her generation) displaces him (and his generation). Their age difference is emphasized repeatedly, and he eventually resigns himself to a kindly uncle role and accepts her superior position in the star hierarchy. The film reproduces this dynamic for the audiences, as we are meant to feel affection for the Hollywood of Peppy's generation, the early talkies, as well as Valentin's silents; both are ancient history, bygone golden ages from our contemporary perspective.

In terms of gender, I also notice that when the "left-behind" near-obsolete

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

character is male, we are meant to sympathize, but when she is female, we don't. In *Singin in the Rain*, the female star Lena is ridiculed and left behind as the male star Don successfully adapts to the talkies and reinvigorates his career along with his protégée and sweetheart, Cathy. Yet we are not meant to feel any sympathy for Lena—she is the butt of the movie's jokes; Valentin, on the other hand, is a tragic figure, more like the James Mason character in *A Star is Born*. In *Sunset Blvd.*, too, Norma Desmond is only slightly sympathetic, constructed as pitiable and vain.

**SD:** I want to pick up on a few things in Therese's remarks on *Hugo* and the current wave of nostalgia films and relate them—as a way of framing a response and continuing our discussion—to some thoughts I have about the connections between seriality (a major focus in my current work) and the post-cinematic. I'll start with Therese's statement that she “find[s] it difficult to talk about ‘post-millennial’ aesthetics, and to attribute them to digital technologies.” Though my earlier comments might perhaps give a different impression, I do think that Therese is right to say this:

1) First, if we can talk about a post-cinematic aesthetics, this is neither decisively limited to productions from the 21st century (Therese mentions John Woo's *The Killer* from 1989), nor is this aesthetics itself particularly “post-millennial” in its formal or thematic predilections (digital technologies are often used to present very classical narratives, as was already the case with *Toy Story*, and contemporary films often do so in an outright nostalgic manner and with a revisionistic eye towards the 20th century and its properly cinematic forms of mediation, as Therese argues with regard to *Hugo*).

2) As to the second part of Therese's statement, moreover, I agree that it would be wrong to “attribute [post-cinematic aesthetics] to digital technologies” if, by saying that something is “attributable” to something else, we understand anything like “is causally determined by.” I don't believe that the use of digital technology is either a sufficient or a



necessary condition for the kinds of things we have been discussing as post-cinematic. That is, many of the formal and expressive techniques that would seem to characterize post-cinematic aesthetics are possible (and have been realized) without the use of digital technologies, while many digital productions do not display them. That being said, it's still possible that there's a deeper sort of connection: I have pointed to the technical disconnection of the digital image from human vision as a factor that "resonates" in the aesthetic choices of contemporary filmmakers and in the effects they have on contemporary viewers. What I have in mind here is not a strictly linear causal relation but instead a diffusely material and properly affective sort of interrelation among the technical infrastructure of our environment, the things we make in that environment, and the ways those things affect us. Assuming that this kind of view makes sense, then I think we can consistently say that certain tendencies of post-cinema may be older than and are not directly attributable to the advent of digital technology, but that the increasing reach of the digital (both in our everyday lives and in the production contexts of contemporary media) does indeed catalyze these tendencies—not alone and as the sole determining factor, but as part of a world undergoing far-reaching medial-material transformation. The post-cinematic, in this view, would refer to the affective-aesthetic regime that emerges in the wake of this change or, to put it another way, the media-aesthetic embodiment of our era's ongoing transitionality.

Now, I think that the staging of obtrusive violations of old codes (and here we can think of examples from contemporary sci-fi, action, or "chaos cinema") constitutes one way of responding to sweeping changes, but nostalgia is definitely another. As Therese points out, many recent films "exhibit a yearning for earlier, cinematic forms, using digital technologies to 'make them new' for contemporary audiences." They "re-create founding moments of cinema itself. This fact alone underlines our definitive entry into the episteme of the post-cinematic." I like the perspective that Therese opens up for us here, because I think it allows us to perceive

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

the co-existence, within the post-cinematic, both of novelty and of that novelty's inscription into a larger narrative, history, or line of aesthetic and media-technical innovation, update, or renewal. My observation might seem rather banal, I guess, because any demonstration of novelty is forced in some way to recognize what has gone before and to demonstrate a perceivable difference from it. Early moving picture exhibitions were concerned to demonstrate such novelty, as were early talking pictures against the background of silent film (think of *The Jazz Singer*: "You ain't heard nothin' yet"); the same can be said for color and widescreen processes (as in the opening sequence/prologue to the 1956 version of *Around the World in 80 Days*, which opens with Méliès's *Le Voyage dans la lune* and subsequently marks it as "primitive" as the curtains are pulled back further and further to reveal the unprecedented dimensions of the new, modern screen). *Jurassic Park* does something similar with respect to its unveiling of novel, computer-generated dinosaurs, designed to wow spectators offscreen as much as the diegetic onlookers. And of course *Toy Story* was not "just" a classical narrative, but a big-budget display of the possibilities of computer animation. But if this trajectory of bigger, better, faster continues to inform films that we might want to claim as post-cinematic (like *Transformers* or *Avatar*, to take two examples mentioned by Therese), the backward-looking tendency of recent nostalgia films is no less concerned to negotiate the meaning of today's media changes.

What I'm getting at is that, if post-cinema can be conceived as a novel form of emergent, affective response to the medial-material transformation of the world, as I claimed above, this in no way implies that the fact of such transformation is unprecedented (though its precise historical quality may indeed be unique); indeed, such transformation has been the condition for a wide range of filmic (and other medial) phenomena. As a result, it should not surprise us that post-cinema responds in vaguely familiar ways to such change—either through ostentatious innovation, thus repeating a central gesture of modernity, or through acts of repetition (nostalgic or otherwise) that themselves aim to update or renew the old. In very

general terms, such interplays of repetition and variation, which seek to create something new by way of revisiting something old, form the basic stuff of seriality (see, for example, Umberto Eco's "Interpreting Serials"). And while post-cinema's broad expressions of novelty and/or nostalgia may not fit our usual conceptions of what constitutes a "series" (apart from the many film series—from *Transformers* and *Paranormal Activity* to *Ice Age* or various superhero franchises—which we might want to look at in terms of the post-cinematic), I think it makes good sense to think the post-cinematic and seriality in close relation to one another.

Serialization has been a central method by which modern media have sought to cope with their own transformations (including their initial emergences, their competitions with and distinctions from other newly emergent media, their internal diversifications and transitional periods, etc.). Roger Hagedorn once pointed out that "[w]hen a medium needs an audience, it turns to serials" (29); an ongoing tale is an effective way to hook consumers, to motivate them to invest in a new medium like radio or television, to encourage them to "stay tuned," and thus to secure the medium's future. Moreover, when an established medium changes or responds to changes in its medial environment, it may also engage in a type of serial activity, restaging familiar narratives and thematic materials as a means both of bridging the gap or rupture of media change, while simultaneously marking novelty against a familiar background. For example, I have argued that Frankenstein films—from Thomas Edison's 1910 one-reeler to James Whale's classic early talkies, on to Hammer's Eastmancolor Gothic and Warhol's 3-D monstrosities, and up to recent CGI instantiations of technical creation—constitute a higher-order series (a series not at the level of narrative but of mediality) that tracks and negotiates media changes by way of an interplay between repetition and variation (see my *Postnaturalism*).

To generalize even further, I would suggest that seriality itself constitutes a central (higher-order) medium in which the world of modernity—the

world consolidated in the nineteenth century through industrialization and its serialized production processes, including a commercialized serial culture—observes itself undergoing medial-material change. (Clearly, this is a big claim, and it is at the center of my ongoing research in the context of the DFG Research Unit “Popular Seriality – Aesthetics and Practice”; for a very brief sketch of the connections I perceive between seriality, media transformation, and modernity, see my “Seriality and Media Transformation”).

So this is generally how I would try to confront the tensions of novelty and nostalgia, or to account for what’s new about digital-era aesthetics as well as what it has in common with older tendencies. Placing post-cinema in this large arc of serial negotiations of medial-material transformation enables us, I think, to avoid the vulgar reductionism that Therese rightly warns against (the idea that post-cinema can be attributed directly to digital technology), while simultaneously allowing us to recognize the centrality of media-technical change and novelty (above all, the spread of digital technology in all areas of life) in post-cinema’s continuation of this key tendency of probing, by means of serial repetition and variation, the contours of the world in motion. As I said before, I see the post-cinematic not as a simple break—and certainly not just a technologically determined break—but as a transformative expansion of pre-existing media forms in accordance with a rapidly changing lifeworld.

But what, more concretely, do seriality and serialization processes have to do with the post-cinematic? How, in other words, does seriality tie in with post-cinema as a means or correlate of its affective probing of our world’s (and our own) medial-material transformation? I’ll try to make a case briefly for several links, including formal-aesthetic connections to what I’ve talked about in terms of uncorrelated images, irrational cameras, and the resulting indistinction of contiguous worlds, as well as some more broadly cultural connections obtaining at present.

As I mentioned above, we find explicit serialization tendencies in a great number of post-cinematic film franchises: *Transformers*, *Batman* and other superheroes, digital animation series, etc. Today, there are film series wherever we look, and many of them are filled with the irrational cameras and continuity violations that we have discussed here as characteristic forms of post-cinematic film. Of course, these franchises—many of which exhibit strong tendencies towards a revisionary nostalgia for childhood heroes and playthings—are not restricted to the filmic domain but participate in larger transmedial franchises in our so-called “convergence culture.” They take place, therefore, in the larger contexts of transnational capital and digital convergence trajectories—that is, precisely in the dispersed medial-material domain of post-cinematic affect. A bit less globally, I suggested before that we should try to rethink contemporary transmedia production, along with attendant fan practices, in terms of post-cinematic affect, and I think that seriality/serialization may provide exactly the link that’s needed to do so. Seriality is one of the key principles of transmedia storytelling, as Henry Jenkins and others have described it: stories unfold episodically, but across a variety of media, in order to effect the non-linear construction of a narrative world. Now, what’s interesting to me about this, in relation to some of the things I’ve been arguing about the post-cinematic, is that for such processes of world-building to work, transmedial franchises have to avoid classical encapsulation (for instance, the narrow film-spectator relation) and instead create proximity and contiguity between a variety of media, as well as between diegetic and nondiegetic worlds, which readers/spectators/media-users slip into and out of repeatedly in the course of their serial consumption of a transmedial production. As I argued before, the irrational camera of post-cinematic films is an instrument for creating precisely this sort of contiguity, and so it is only natural that there would be some overlap between transmedial seriality and the techniques of post-cinema.

As the basis of this overlap, we can say that the irrational camera—which, as I argued with respect to *District 9* and *Melancholia*, is indeterminately

liminal with respect to diegetic and non-diegetic realms—is formally analogous to a typical character type present throughout the modern history of popular serial narration: the Janus-faced figure who maintains a public and a private face, or who is split between moral and criminal, human and animal, or technological and monstrous facets of his or her being. Creating contiguity and facilitating passage between contiguous medial and material worlds has been one of the central functions, or self-reflexive significances, of the double, liminal, and secret identities that have populated serialized productions from Eugène Sue’s *Mysteries of Paris*, to the countless plurimedial restagings of Frankenstein, Tarzan, Batman, or Superman, and continuing up to the serialized self-enactments of Bowie, Madonna, and Gaga (see my “Object-Oriented Gaga”). Such liminality resonates, as I argue in my current research, with the very practice of serial reception (which is often mobile, episodically segmented and interrupted, and hence split between “real” and fictional or “imagined” worlds) and with the proliferation of outgrowths in transcultural, transnational, and transmedial serial forms—and attendant manners of relation (for example, the dispersed “communities” of media-based fandom). Contiguity—between installments, between fact and fiction, between real and imagined geographies, between media in pluri- and transmedial cultural forms—is the precondition for all such serial phenomena. And this contiguity, which need not, but can, lead to explicit serialization practices, is centrally at stake in the irrational post-cinematic camera. Through it, and even in the absence of explicit serialization processes that would tap into it, an implicit or virtual seriality erodes the self-sufficiency, coherence, and closure of classical cinematic productions, uprooting and resituating all filmic products in a dynamic and processual flow of affect, which is expressed in cross-medial openness if not sequelization—for example, in *Melancholia*’s almost taunting openness to online discussion and dissection, despite its categorical preclusion of narrative continuation. The post-cinematic camera corresponds, therefore, in a rather unexpected way to the serialization tendencies of contemporary convergence culture.

As a result, finally, it's not just in post-cinematic film that we find the irrational camera and its dis-correlated images, but across today's highly serial audiovisual media landscape. Video games, both as a matter of aesthetic design and due to glitches and material-technical limitations, might be seen as embodying a relatively long (certainly not just "post-millennial") history of the dis-correlated image, one that could be queried to expand our view of post-cinematic media. But also what Jason Mittell refers to as "complex TV," I'd like to suggest, is in many ways precisely post-cinematic TV, both in the very general sense in which all contemporary media (as a result of convergences and erosions of medial boundaries that put all media, at least minimally, in contact with all others) must be counted as post-cinematic, but also more specifically, in terms of the adoption of post-cinematic camera techniques and image forms. Consider a recent episode of *Breaking Bad*. (I'll try to do this without any serious spoilers, but anyone still catching up on the series might want to jump ahead to the next paragraph to be on the safe side.) "Say My Name," the seventh episode of the fifth season, opens on a desert road, where we witness a meeting between the heads of two regional methamphetamine rings. The conversation, filmed in a manner suggesting that a gunfight could break out at any moment, is interspersed with extreme long shots which, for some unexplained reason, exhibit a blurry smudge on the top right of the frame, almost as if a finger had partially obscured the camera lens. (I was reminded here, at least, of what happens when I'm not careful taking pictures with my smartphone.) This perspective is repeated several times, and the smudge is present each time, but the reason for it is never cleared up. Does it indicate that the meeting is being filmed surreptitiously? Is there a hidden surveillance camera? In the middle of the desert? In any case, the topic of surveillance dominates the episode—both the DEA's surveillance of local drug operations and the meth crew's counter-surveillance of the DEA. Later in the episode, a microphone is removed from an agent's office by one of his close acquaintances—the same man who put it there, and who unbeknownst to the agent has been involved for some time now in producing high-grade crystal meth.

## Post-Continuity, the Irrational Camera, Thoughts on 3D

When the agent returns with a cup of coffee for his friend/the spy, there is an abrupt (though perhaps not overly conspicuous) cut to a somewhat awkward camera angle: the two men are shown from the perspective of a wide-angle lens hovering close to the ceiling in the corner of the room, precisely where a surveillance camera would conventionally be installed. It is not revealed, though, whether or not incriminating acts were caught on tape, and the status of the camera, whether diegetically existent or purely non-diegetic, is left unclear. This uncertainty is aggravated by the episode's repeated use of a technique that has become something of a visual trademark in *Breaking Bad*: nonhuman/object-oriented POV shots, e.g. from the impossible perspective of a basin into which chemicals are dumped, or from that of a safety-deposit box into which thousands of dollars are shoved. This disconnection of the image culminates in the episode's concluding scene, when one man shoots another, chases him to a river and finds him bleeding to death. There is a moment of regret, expressed in a final dialogue and filmed in accordance with classical continuity principles—until suddenly the shot/reverse-shot eyeline matches give way to a strangely disembodied perspective vis-à-vis the river, too high up to belong to one of the men, not high enough or far enough away from their position to be distinctly not-theirs. This, the final image, is accompanied by the sound of the dying man's body slumping off the log he was sitting on. The river keeps running. And so does the meth business and the cash it generates, as we learn in the next episode, "Gliding Over All." Here, indeed, disconnection is related not just to surveillance (and to death) but also to globalization (as the logistical infrastructure of a transnational corporation is used to ship meth around the world, thus expanding the local drug empire) and to the humanly unfathomable accumulation of capital that accompanies it: a pile of money—literally too much to count and incapable of laundering, hence useless and for all intents and purposes meaningless (covered with a tarp and sprayed regularly for silverfish, thus reduced to a mere physicality)—reveals disconnection to be an affective condition of the larger medial-material world.



Why do post-cinema's irrational cameras find their way into contemporary television? Again, such cameras create contiguity: serial forms (and narratively complex TV is characterized by its increased seriality) have always been subject to conditions of contiguity, as they are consumed in parallel to the real world of viewers, readers, other recipients. In contemporary TV, as Jason Mittell has pointed out (in terms originally formulated by Neil Harris to describe the exhibition practices of P. T. Barnum), an "operational aesthetic" splits attention between diegetic and discursive levels as a way of packing the segmented/continuing dynamic of serial unfolding (and the parallelism or contiguity of fact and fiction, diegesis and extra-diegetic mediality it enables) into the shows themselves. This resonates strongly with a post-cinematic contiguity and the cameras that produce, process, and circulate it through the medium of dis-correlated images.

Ultimately, I think it is in the confluence of visual techniques, serial forms, transmedial settings, the conditions of contemporary capitalism, and media-technical changes in the wake of digital convergence that we find the larger significance of post-cinematic aesthetics in any medium: the irrational camera is just one instrument or expression of a world involved in a material self-probing, conducted through assertions of novelty and nostalgic yearnings alike, consistently revealing that compartmentalization has eroded and contiguity has become a basic condition of life.

**TG:** This has been a great discussion. Shane, thank you for expanding your initial focus so eloquently on film techniques and how they work in the context of other media forms and seriality. I think your interdisciplinary project is really important for theorizing post-cinematic affect further. And thank you, Julia, for your thoughtful and detailed commentary on gender and post-cinematic affect in relation to the conservative and patriarchal tendencies perpetuated in contemporary movies, particularly those which have received what is called "universal critical acclaim."

Thank you both for participating in this discussion with me.

### Works Cited

Bertsch, Charlie. "Hollywood Counter-Reformation." *Souciant*. 10 Feb. 2012. Web. <<http://souciant.com/2012/02/hollywood-counter-reformation/>>.

Denson, Shane. "Discorrelated Images: Chaos Cinema, Post-Cinematic Affect, and Speculative Realism." *medieninitiative*. Weblog. 22 June 2012. <<https://medieninitiative.wordpress.com/2012/06/22/discorrelated-images-chaos-cinema-post-cinematic-affect-and-speculative-realism/>>.

—. "Object-Oriented Gaga." *O-Zone: A Journal of Object-Oriented Studies*. 27 Nov. 2012. Web. <<http://o-zone-journal.org/oo-frequency/2012/11/27/object-oriented-gaga-by-shane-denson>>.

—. *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014. Print.

—. "Seriality and Media Transformation." *medieninitiative*. Weblog. 9 June 2012. <<https://medieninitiative.wordpress.com/2012/06/09/seriality-and-media-transformation-goserial/>>.

—. "*WALL-E* vs. Chaos (Cinema)." *medieninitiative*. Weblog. 19 July 2012. <<https://medieninitiative.wordpress.com/2012/07/19/wall-e-vs-chaos-cinema/>>.

Eco, Umberto. "Interpreting Serials." *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 83-100. Print.

Hagedorn, Roger. "Doubtless to Be Continued: A Brief History of Serial Narrative." *To Be Continued: Soap Operas Around the World*. Ed. Robert C. Allen. London: Routledge, 1995. 27-48. Print.

Shane Denson et al.

Haralovich, Mary Beth. "All that Heaven Allows: Color, Narrative Space, and Melodrama." *Close Viewings: An Anthology of New Film Criticism*. Ed. Peter Lehman. Tallahassee: Florida State UP, 1990. 57-72. Print.

Higgins, Scott. "Orange and Blue, Desire and Loss: The Color Score in *Far from Heaven*." *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All that Heaven Allows*. Ed. James Morrison. London: Wallflower, 2007. 101-13. Print.

"Hugo." *Cinema Review*. Web. <<http://www.cinemareview.com/production.asp?prodid=6753>>.

Leyda, Julia. "The Artist (2011)." Screen Dreams. Weblog. 22 Dec. 2011. <<http://fade-away-never.blogspot.de/2011/12/artist-2011.html>>.

—. "Midnight in Paris (2011)." Screen Dreams. Weblog. 2 Dec. 2011. <<http://fade-away-never.blogspot.com/2011/12/midnight-in-paris-2011.html>>.

Shaviro, Steven. "Melancholia, or, The Romantic Anti-Sublime." *SEQUENCE: Serial Studies in Media, Film and Music* 1.1 (2012). Web. <<http://reframe.sussex.ac.uk/sequence1/1-1-melancholia-or-the-romantic-anti-sublime/>>.

—. *Post-Cinematic Affect*. Winchester: Zero, 2010.

—. "Post-Continuity." Paper delivered at SCMS Boston, 2012. First published on Shaviro's blog, The Pinocchio Theory (<<http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=1034>>), a revised version appears in this collection as "Post-Continuity: An Introduction."

Stork, Matthias. "Chaos Cinema: The Decline and Fall of Action Filmmaking." Video essay. Press Play. 22 Aug. 2011. Web. <<http://blogs>>.

[indiewire.com/pressplay/video\\_essay\\_matthias\\_stork\\_calls\\_out\\_the\\_chaos\\_cinema](http://indiewire.com/pressplay/video_essay_matthias_stork_calls_out_the_chaos_cinema)>.

### Notes

[1] This roundtable discussion was first published in the online journal *La Furia Umana* 14 (2012): <<http://www.lafuriaumana.it/index.php/archives/41-lfu-14>>. [offline]