

Vortrag A New Image? A New Image? From Postclassical Cinema to Postcinematic Film

Thank you very much for the invitation and for the kind introduction.

Thank you in particular to

Today, I am going to talk about what I consider a major shift in the history of film, that in turn reflects a major shift in the larger media landscape. What makes it difficult to talk about this shift is the fact that it is still in progress – we don't have any historical distance to it yet. So this shift is something that we are experiencing right now, and it is still unclear to what degree this shift will have changed film aesthetics in the end. In my talk, I will discuss some more traditional films, some advanced films, and at the end of my talk I will present a film that is very different from what we usually call "a film"; but because this shift is still in progress, in the end it will remain open to what degree that film is just an experiment, an aberration in the history of film, or to what degree this is film is actually an example of a new contemporary film aesthetics that fundamentally changes what film is.

My talk will be, at least in part, summarize some aspects of a new book of mine that will come out this summer. The title translates as "From Image to Affect. On the Aesthetics of the Postcinematic".

This book deals with contemporary film aesthetics ranging from European art house films to Action Movies, but it is also a contribution to an ongoing international debate in cinema studies about the relevance and the specific possibilities of cinema to reflect and comment upon the present age, at a time, I might add, when cinema, unlike for the most part of the Twentieth Century, is not the dominant visual media anymore.

In the Twentieth Century, film has shaped more than any other medium our global visual language. And today still every student of cinema, no matter if he or she studies script writing, cinematography, editing or directing, still learns the rules of filmmaking developed during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Moreover the rules and possibilities of

cinematic language still shape many forms of visual expression beyond cinema – Television, Advertising, Computer Games, private Home Movies, and many of the contributions to internet platforms like YouTube.

Nonetheless, while cinema has been the ‘key medium’ of a now already historic modernity, it is certainly true, that cinema today, at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, has lost its predominance and has been superseded by digital media as the most prolific and important media of our time. Film is not the defining medium of our times any more, and in addition to that, changes within the culture and economy of film itself have called into question the very definition of film – once identified with cinema, film companies’ revenues today don’t come from the box office as much as they come from home entertainment and ancillary markets like computer games, theme parks, merchandising, and television.

While the status and the economy of film changed enormously over the last decade or two, the even more drastic change might be the becoming-digital of film itself. For most traditional theories of film, for proponents of so-called classical film theory like André Bazin in France and Siegfried Kracauer in Germany, the analogue nature of film, or, as you can say within the framework of semiotics, the indexical nature of the cinematic image, has been of extreme importance for their understanding of film. For these early film theorists the analogue and photographic foundation of film guaranteed its close and undissolvable relation to physical reality itself. However fantastic a *story* might have been, film always maintained some traces of the real, of the actual reality in front of the camera.

[Clip San Francisco 1906]

The fascination with films like these results from the fact, that film captures moments from reality, in this case a reality lost forever – because this short film was, as far as we know, shot only hours before the great earthquake in San Francisco in 1906, and only hours later, much of what we see here ceased to exist, and not few of the people we see here might have been dead, victims of one of the most devastating earth quakes in the history of the US, killing 3000 people and destroying 80% of the city of San Francisco.

So the value of this little film comes from the fact that it preserves a past forever lost, that it captures an uncontrived moment of the real.

This fascination of the real within film is not limited to documentary film, but it includes fiction film as well. A little later I will show you a clip from a Malayan film called “Bunohan”, that you will probably know. This is a fiction film, and I watched it in part as a fiction film, but at the same time I watched it as a documentary, because it involuntarily captures something about the landscapes and the life in this rural part of Malaysia close to the Thai border.

In this sense, every film entails a connection to the material reality, that leaves its traces even in a fiction film, and these traces are only extinguished in animated film and in a film that is created entirely digital.

So, as I said, for many theorists the affinity between film and the real results from the analogue photographic foundation of cinema that makes it impossible for even a fiction film *not* to preserve some elements and aspects of the real.

And this has everything to do with the technological basis of film.

In analogue film, light reflected from objects is inscribed onto a photosensitive strip of film. Therefore film retains a physical relation to the real world.

In digital cinema and photography, still reflections of light are stored on a chip, but as data, in form of a code, whereby the physical image becomes immaterial. The code just contains the necessary information to re-create a visual image, but unlike the analogue negative, the digital code itself is not a physical trace of what has been in front of the camera.

From the perspective of a director or a cinematographer, there might be no fundamental difference between analogue and digital film – both being just instruments at your disposal, with digital cameras and postproduction giving you just a little bit more freedom to shape the image according to your wishes.

But for many film theorists this became an important issue, because it could be said that the shift from analogue to digital alters the very nature of cinema.

I wanted to mention this debate, but it is only the background, not the focus of my talk today. Today, I am not so much interested in the very nature of film, and the changes brought by the digital per se, but more in the possibilities of artistic expression and the visual aesthetics of film. And in this regard there are differences – of course – but there are also many continuities between analogue and digital cinema.

The shift within cinema that I will talk about today, is the turn from Classical Cinema, closely associated to the Hollywood studio system of the 1930s to 1950s, to Postclassical Cinema, beginning with the New Hollywood Cinema of the late 1960s and the Special Effects aesthetics of the blockbuster cinema of the George Lucas – Steven Spielberg – generation of directors and films like “Jaws” and “Star Wars”, to contemporary Postcinematic Film, associated with the process of digitization and the increasing importance of digital media, but not limited to this. As I will explain in more detail later, the Postcinematic for me is not identical to Digital Cinema, but it is a step in the evolution of filmic expression, that takes into account – and is a reflection of – the proliferation of digital media from the internet and social media to smart phones and digicams.

The idea I am pursuing is, that while cinema may have been superseded by digital media as ‘key media’ of our culture, more than any other medium, cinema has reflected upon and – to borrow a term that gained a lot of importance in media studies in the past years – ‘remediated’ the cultural shift to the digital, not least by way of its own digitization.

Although not clearly divided into separate chapters, my talk will be structured along these issues:

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[Folien Gliederung]

In my talk today, I will discuss the historical development from postclassical to postcinematic film in order to identify the ways in which cinema has registered this digital shift, the changing media landscape, and the new digital reality of our present by way of a new aesthetic and new ways of expression.

[Folie]

These **new ways of expression** include the **destruction of a coherent point-of view**, a **growing 'elasticity' of filmic representation**, the **'malleability' of every single frame within post-production**, the **de-naturalization of perception**, for example by way of introducing more and more "hypermediated" images that exhibit traces of their own mediality and technological nature, the increase of re-mediated images, that come from different sources and media and that are integrated into film, and finally the **proliferation of images-within-images and screens-within-screens**. This is just a first overview, I will talk about this in more detail a little later and also present some examples. [nächste Seite]

[Folie]

Some Expressive Features of the Image in Postcinematic Film:

- Destruction of a Coherent Point of View
- "Elasticity" of Filmic Representation
- "Malleability" of Every Single Frame by way of Digital Post-Production
- The "De-naturalization" of Perception
- The Proliferation of "Hypermediated" Images
- Increase of Re-mediated Images from other Media (Computer Games, Television, Internet, Diagrams, Computer Graphics)
- The Proliferation of Images-within-Images
- The Proliferation of Screens-within-Screens]

Of course, all of these points are very closely connected, they are, in fact, not so much different points in general, but rather different ways to describe a more general development within film aesthetics.

However, these stylistic features and elements of film aesthetics are connected to an array of theoretical questions:

[Folie Theoretical Question]

How does the paradigm of the Postcinematic help film to address pressing issues of our society, in the field of the political, the epistemological, the economical? How do the audiovisual images of cinema represent the invisibility of the digital? How does film comment upon the dominance of the digital in our culture? How do the audiovisual images of cinema represent the invisibility of the digital? Does the shift to the 'Postcinematic' lead to a new type of image, to new insights, to a new understanding of reality and to new forms of affective experience in cinema?

These are some of the questions that are the background of my current research interests. I will not be able to fully address all of these questions in my talk today, but these theoretical issues describe the horizon of some of the questions I will talk about today.

And I hope I brought enough examples, film stills and film clips, to keep you interested. But, if you are true contemporaries, even if you are interested in my talk, you will be distracted to a certain degree, and being interested will not prevent you from checking your emails, your twitter messages or your Facebook page in between my talk. And this is already one important characteristic of our present age, that is an important point for my argument: when cinema, or even television were the dominant media, you would go to the cinema at a particular time to watch the movie, or you would switch on the television at a particular time to relax or to watch the news. In this way, use of media was limited - temporally and spatially.

Not so today – with laptop computers and smart phones, both results of the process of digitization, media became pervasive. You don't so much use media anymore, you live with them constantly.

This penetration of our culture and our lives by digital media is an important background to what I am talking about today, as I will ask how these changes in our media ecology are re-mediated and reflected within the older medium of cinema.

Or to put it differently: I believe that the changes in the cinematic language that I am interested in are a result - and a reflection - of the current changes in the mediascape.

Some of the films that belong to the aesthetic paradigms of the postclassical and postcinematic have been criticized by film critics as being superficial, hollow, and suitable only for a public suffering from attention deficit disorder. And I will give you an example of such a criticism in just a moment.

Now, I want to defend the films in question or – more general – the cinematic aesthetics in question on the grounds of its innovative power, its importance and its ability to reflect and comment upon our historical presence.

But before presenting my defense, I would like to give some space to the prosecution. I am going to show you a clip from a video essay that some of you *might* know, because it has been discussed vividly in those parts of the blogosphere that are dedicated to film when it came out in August 2011. It is by a German Film Student studying in Los Angeles, and it's called "Chaos Cinema". The quality of the clip isn't very good, but you will still get the gist of it.

Clip Chaos Cinema 1

This video by Matthias Stork, that he followed with two further installments, "Chaos Cinema 2 + 3", contrasts different modalities of action cinema, that in turn are symptoms of a shift from the postclassical cinema of the late 1960s to contemporary blockbuster cinema.

The popularity of this video essay has probably more to do with its innovative *form* than with the quality of its thesis, because it seems to me to be a rather crude and conservative criticism of contemporary cinema in the name of a sanctified notion of good filmmaking.

But when this came out, the video essay was still a rather new way of engaging critically and analytically with the audiovisual image by means of the audiovisual, and this contributed a lot to its broad reception.

And even today, almost four years later, examples of video essays convincing in form *and* content are still a rarity.

For Matthias Stork, the shift he describes is not a continuous development, but entails a major evolutionary break. It is not that action cinema became ever more faster and more spectacular – the real break for Stork lies in the shift from what film scholar David Bordwell called “intensified continuity” to a new step in aesthetic evolution, one that Stork himself calls “Chaos Cinema”. This term already is a kind of criticism in itself, of course. Who are we to enjoy chaos?

Following a suggestion by Steven Shaviro made in his book on “Postcinematic Affect” in 2010, I prefer to call this new step in the evolution of cinema, and not only action film, “postcontinuity”, which I consider to be the characteristic style of postcinematic film.

[Folie]

Analog Film		Digital Editing + Digital Post-Production	Fully Digital Film Production
CLASSICAL CINEMA ca. early 1930s-1955	POSTCLASSICAL CINEMA ca. mid to late 1960s	POSTCINEMATIC FILM Post-Millennial Film, ca. 2000-	
Continuity Editing	“Intensified Continuity” (David Bordwell)	“Chaos Cinema” (Matthias Stork) “Postcontinuity” (Steven Shaviro)	

I will focus on the aesthetic shift from the Postclassical to the Postcinematic, but I wanted to point out how this relates to the technological shift of digitization of film. Of course, the history of analog film is much older than the paradigm of Classical Cinema, and the Digitization of Cinema began quite late during the Postclassical Period, starting with digital, non-linear editing and then encompassing more and more aspects of postproduction, especially the so-called digital grading of the image, that allows filmmakers to alter the light, colour and atmosphere of every single frame of the film at little cost. The fully digital film production, where filming itself is already digital, is a rather late phenomenon, with George Lucas' "Star Wars Episode 2" (2002), Michael Mann's "Collateral" (2004) and David Fincher's "Zodiac" (2007) being prominent early examples.

However, as is always the case with schematics about cultural phenomena, this schematic is much too simple. For example, analog film still persists, because even as films are edited and even projected more and more digitally, many films are still shot on 35mm film stock.

Also, many features of continuity editing still persist in postclassical and postcinematic film until today, that's why, as I mentioned before, film students today still have to learn all the rules of continuity editing.

On the other hand, as Lev Manovich in his book about "The Language of New Media" and others pointed out, with digital cinema many techniques of early cinema and even pre-cinematic image technologies returned to contemporary film, because the manipulation and manual re-working of every single frame is actually closely related to the hand-coloring and tinting process in early cinema.

In his book he writes:

[Folie Manovich]

"The privileged role played by the manual construction of images in digital cinema is one example of a larger trend – the return of pro-cinematic moving-image technologies. [...] These techniques are re-emerging as the foundation of digital filmmaking. What was once supplemental to cinema becomes its norm; what was at the periphery comes into centre. Computer media return to us the repressed of the cinema."

So Lev Manovich suggests that in the newest kind of cinema something re-emerges that has been contained and suppressed by classical Hollywood cinema, where image technologies that draw attention to themselves were frowned upon and limited to particular special effects, like stop-motion-animation, for example.

Additionally, as Tom Gunning in his articles on early cinema, and I myself in a book on Corporeal Experience in Cinema, have pointed out, the spectacular blockbuster and special effects aesthetics of contemporary action cinema is in many ways a return of the early cinema of attractions that dominated cinema in the years until 1907, that is, before cinema became a predominantly narrative medium. Special effects as attractions of visibility are abundant in contemporary cinema and mimics early cinema's fascination with pure visual attraction independent of any narrative trajectory.

So, keeping in mind that the historical relations are much more complicated and diverse than this chart suggests, let us nonetheless move to a more detailed description of the changes involved.

Storcks video essay locates the postclassical particularly in a certain kind of action cinema. But within the history of action cinema, he spots two distinct stages.

In his characterization of the first stage of contemporary action cinema, Stork relies on David Bordwell's notion of "intensified continuity". Bordwell, eager to stress the continued importance of the aesthetic parameters of classical cinema, saw in postclassical cinema not so much a departure from older principles, but an intensification of already existing modes of expression.

Bordwell names four major characteristics of intensified continuity:

[Folie]

First, a more rapid editing, as evidenced in a generally shorter so-called "average shot length" (ASL).

Secondly, rapid switches between bipolar extremes of lens lengths, changing quickly between wide and close shots.

Third, a reliance on close shots instead of a meticulous shot composition in medium or wide shots.

And fourth, a wide-ranging camera movement.

Admittedly, all of these aspects can point to a loss of compositional subtlety of the cinematic image, and yet I think it is wrong to see this development in the wholly negative way Storck and Bordwell suggest, nor do I think that this is already a sufficient description of the changes in postclassical and postcinematic film.

Bordwell's sole focus on 'style', and even more, within the category of style, on a set of very few stylistic features, leads to a rather limited view of the changes in the history of cinema. It is also ideological, as it seems more interested in maintaining intact an obsolete idea of the 'classical' that is perpetuated into eternity by ignoring vital changes in the cinematic modes of production, expression and reception.

Folie/Zitat

Bordwell insists on the purely formalist claim that – I quote – “nearly all scenes in nearly all contemporary mass-market movies (and in most ‘independent’ films) are staged, shot, and cut according to principles which crystallized in the 1910s and 1920s.”

While this may be true when you just formally analyze a film on the level of single shots, this narrow view is unable to account for the major changes in the regime of the visual and the notion of filmic representation itself that take place with the shift to the Postcinematic.

Bordwell has to limit his view to very few expressive aspects of film in order to maintain the idea, that in contemporary cinema there is basically nothing new under the sun. In the meantime, in his blog Bordwell has since entertained the idea that there are some films that might have discarded with the very idea of continuity itself, and he refers to the films of

Tony Scott as an example, but he remains unable to describe this other than as a kind of loss or even fault on the side of the filmmaker.

In any case, as the images and clips I am going to show you in a moment will hopefully demonstrate, Bordwell's parameters of description are way beyond the point and unable to adequately describe the changes in contemporary cinema's visual regime.

Other than Bordwell himself, who sees contemporary cinema just as a variant of classical Hollywood, Stork in his video essay at least acknowledges the existence of a new style, that significantly departs from the classical style and from intensified continuity, although for him this move leads to nothing but – chaos!

While the intensified continuity of earlier Action films is just an amplification or acceleration of established aesthetic principles of Classical Hollywood Cinema, Chaos Cinema is 'postcinematic', in that it abandons the rules of spatial and temporal continuity that shaped the language of film, and replaces it by a dynamic, that seems to owe more to Computer and Video Games, to Music Videos, and to other forms of media beyond cinema.

For him, the blockbuster cinema of Michael Bay or Tony Scott is not an augmentation of the classical style, but a "perversion".

He particularly criticizes, that this type of cinema gives up any intelligibility of the action in front of the camera, instead opting to overwhelm the spectator by a visual overload of excessive imagery. Sudden and unmotivated changes between wide shots and extreme close ups, unmotivated jump cuts, unmotivated flash pans, a shaky hand-held camera, an editing so rapid that we are unable to consciously understand what we are seeing, are some of the features of this type of cinema.

These films trade "visual intelligibility for sensory overload," leaving it to the soundtrack to provide a semblance of continuity.

Here is another quote from the video essay, summing up Stork's critical assessment:

[Folie]

“Chaos cinema apes the illiteracy of the modern movie trailer. It consists of a barrage of high-voltage scenes. Every single frame runs on adrenaline. Every shot feels like the hysterical climax of a scene which an earlier movie might have spent several minutes building toward. Chaos cinema is a never-ending crescendo of flair and spectacle. It’s a shotgun aesthetic, firing a wide swath of sensationalistic technique that tears the old classical filmmaking style to bits. Directors who work in this mode aren’t interested in spatial clarity. It doesn’t matter where you are, and it barely matters if you know what’s happening onscreen. The new action films are fast, florid, volatile audiovisual war zones.”

What such action movies, according to Storks view, sacrifice, is the spatial integrity of the image and the intelligibility of what is happening in front of the camera.

Now, while there are certainly good and bad action films at any point in modern film history, and while I might not be a particular fan of the Michael-Bay-Transformer-style of action cinema, I do not share Storks view that there is a steady decline in the art of the action movie, or any other type of movie, for that matter.

Because of his conservative understanding of art and his narrow understanding of the purpose of cinema, that equals David Bordwells in this respect, Stork is unable to fathom the aesthetic intentions of this type of cinema and the aesthetic possibilities it offers.

What he fails to understand is, for example, the fact that cognitive intelligibility is not necessarily the only goal of cinema – or of art in general. This kind of kinetic, hyperbolic cinema he describes in his video essay, rather strives for a visceral, sensual experience. If it succeeds, this style evokes a bodily sensation in the viewer that is very specific to cinema. My book on cinematic perception focusses exactly on this type of corporeal, visceral and sensual experience that cinema offers – an experience that happens below and beyond the cognitive and that does have little to do with narration for example, and much more with a kinetic and intense visual style.

But my focus today is a different one.

I quoted Storks video essay so extensively not because I share his view, or because I want to criticize it for its own shortcomings in terms of understanding contemporary cinema, but because without really noticing it, and without making it explicit, Stork touches upon deeper issues that concern me today. Issues, that have a philosophical dimension that reaches beyond the scope of Storks analytical concerns.

These deeper issues have to do with the notion of continuity itself, with the question of the image, and with the relation between image and world. In total, what is at stake here, is not so much a question of style in contemporary action cinema, but the more fundamental question of the scope and function of the cinematic image in contemporary digital culture.

Let me present two examples from very different areas of film production that can exemplify this.

The first is an example from experimental French art house cinema, the second from a Hollywood action movie.

[Folie La vie nouvelle]

The first scene is from Philippe Grandrieux's Film "La vie nouvelle", which translates as "The new life", a film that for me, although from 2002, still embodies the most advanced stage of a genuinely cinematic research of new images and new modes of expression. I would like to show you a dance scene from that film, where you can watch how the energy of the dance gets a hold of the image itself.

[Clip Grandrieux: La Vie Nouvelle, 2002]

I chose this clip, because in the course of this scene, you can actually witness a change in the understanding of the image that manifests itself in the image's material quality.

At some point, I would claim, the image, is unable to represent what is happening in front of the camera, and instead merges energetically with what it presents – the represented and the representation become one, the cinematic image not showing something anymore, but just presenting itself as an ever-modulating, energetic, material image.

Although coming from a French auteur director and not from commercial Hollywood cinema, like action cinema, this film addresses the spectator primarily on a visceral and sensual level. And like the action cinema that Matthias Stork complains about, we are unable to cognitively “understand” the spatial configuration of the scene. It does not even pretend to present a space that is in front of the camera and independent of the camera – rather, the filmic space is a creation of the camera and the filmic apparatus.

The view in this film does not mimick the supposedly objective perception that guides the design of the image and the editing in classical Hollywood cinema. But the image in “La vie nouvelle” is also no longer simply anchored in human subjectivity, but it moves beyond the scope of human perception.

This type of cinematic aesthetics also moves beyond the unity of body, image and consciousness, that phenomenology has pointed out as the foundation of filmic representation. I am mentioning this in case some of you are familiar with phenomenological film theory, that has become more and more important in recent years as a means to focus on and describe the sensual and perceptual experience cinema provides.

Rather, this type of aesthetics creates an autonomous image, independent of human perception, independent of the constraints of human experience, a total cinematic image of something that is not part of any possible experience in the world - it is, rather, a purely cinematic experience, created by cinematic technology.

The body in the image here ceases to be an object of representation, like the body in classical cinema is; instead, the body turns into an energetic force that affects the representation itself, to a point where the image loses its reproductive ability, and its representational agenda, and becomes the site of an invention, an invention of a new type of body-image, that we did not experience before. As an embodied spectator, we not so much watch or look at this image as we resonate with it on a corporeal, visceral level. Whatever meaning this scene or this film might have, it is a meaning not located in the cognitive, in something we can or should interpret, but in the visceral experience itself.

Invisible forces materialize in the image of this film as distortions, as blurrings, and as a loss of form. Philippe Grandrieux’ cinema in general, and “La vie nouvelle” in particular, is not dominated by the logic of characters, action and representation, that governs classical

narrative cinema, but by a logic of rhythm, texture, modulation, intensities, forces, and visual noise. It is, in short, a kind of cinema, that is very close to the visual aesthetics that French philosopher Gilles Deleuze has described in his two books on cinema – originally published in the mid 1980s - as well as in his book on painting.

It is only now that we have a kind of cinema and a kind of cinematic image, it seems, that makes explicit and puts into the forefront, what Deleuze saw as the potential of cinema very early on: namely its ability to create wholly new images, not governed by a logic of representation.

Now, you might say that this is an example from an auteurist, even experimental European art house cinema, that does not have much to do with the type of cinema discussed and criticized, for example, in Storks video essay.

So let me move to another example that is very much in the center of his concerns, namely the work of the late director Tony Scott.

[Folie Tony Scott Domino]

Let me show you a clip from his Film “Domino” from 2005, one of his visually most advanced films.

[Clip Domino, 2005: Datei 01 -13:22' – 17:13']

I can only hope that you agree, after seeing this outside of its usual commercial blockbuster context, that much of what I said about the French experimental film also applies to Tony Scotts film.

Matthias Stork complained, that the new action cinema, that “Domino” is an example of, is unreadable, that it overwhelms us and does not allow us to understand the spatial configuration and the action in front the camera anymore.

While this is true, my point is, that this image follows a whole other agenda. What we have here is an image that is no longer dependent on the profilmic event. While this holds true to cinematic images in general, classical Hollywood cinema operated differently, always claiming implicitly the primacy of the action over the image, that only follows the action: within continuity principles the construction of the image is guided by the goal to give us an easy and uninterrupted access to the action; even the necessary breaks between shots should be seamless transitions that do not irritate our perception.

This then, Tony Scott's "Domino", is Postcontinuity aesthetics at its most articulate: We are irritated by almost every single image. Every frame puts itself in front of the action instead of disappearing behind it. This aesthetics makes explicit a constant potential of cinema, but one that remained largely dormant in classical narrative cinema.

Classical cinema not only tried to construct an uninterrupted continuity from shot to shot, it also implicitly claimed a continuity between world and image: the image only presented what was already happening independently of the cinematic apparatus.

Postclassical cinema, on the other hand, moving from 'intensified continuity' to 'postcontinuity', revokes this continuity between world and image, putting more emphasis on the image itself than on the world it presents.

By way of an array of different techniques, Tony Scott creates a type of image, that I consider to be paradigmatic of the current aesthetics of the postclassical cinema.

Surprisingly, Tony Scott's aesthetic relies much less on the postproduction process as you might think when you see his films. A lot of the distortion and manipulation is done on set, while filming. Scott often uses old hand-cranked cameras that allow him to alter the speed of the film in the camera freely and shooting seamlessly at different frame rates, resulting in images that are speeded up, slowed down, blurred or that have an excessive sharpness. Hand cranked cameras also allow him to move the film forward and backward, layering images through repeat exposure right there while filming, not by way of combining images in postproduction.

He uses high speed reversal film stock in order to achieve the grainy image, a heightened luminosity, and a strong intensity of certain colors, especially yellow, red and green. Scott then uses machines to process the film that are not made for this type of film stock, in order to create a certain haptic texture and hyperreal color scheme.

All of these techniques make Tony Scott's films prime examples of a postclassical cinematic aesthetic. Ironically, he not only shoots on 35mm film stock, but most of the image manipulations that are typical of his films are achieved through rather old-fashioned, analog special effects technologies, not through digital post-production, although many films that exhibit a similar visuality will typically be examples of a heavy digital grading and post-production process.

But while his technology is not primarily digital, the image typical of Scott's films is, I would claim, an image that very much operates in the shadow of the digital. The digital infuses, so to speak, the visuality displayed here. The experience of digital visuality, where each pixel can be manipulated separately, seems to be the precondition of such an aesthetic.

In postclassical cinema the cinematic image is a clearly mediated image, that shows the traces of its technological roots. More than any other director, Scott's films display a visuality that exhibits its technological origin and that subscribes to a de-naturalized perception.

Some have described this as a form of abstraction, reminiscent of experimental cinema. Others have called this style "impressionistic", in reference to the early 20th century style of painting that tried to capture the world not as it is, but as it presents itself in our embodied human perception.

But while I don't see much of a reference to natural perception in Tony Scott's film, but rather images marked by a technological, non-human perception, I agree that it is almost a painterly style that is at work here – this is unsurprising, in a way, as Tony Scott actually has received a formal education as a painter in art school, before turning first to advertising and later to film.

[Folie Scott quote]

Actually, Tony Scott supported this view himself, stating that “filmmaking is like painting... every stroke or every colour impacts another and you build film on the canvas and you get ideas from the last stroke.”

The signature image of Tony Scott, if you will, departs significantly from classical cinema in that it seems to be dissociated from itself – it is an image that cannot be one: it is an image, that is constantly split from itself, unstable, schizophrenic.

In order to demonstrate this, I would like to show you some more stills from “Domino”.

[Images Tony Scott: Dissociated Images]

As is the case in Philippe Grandrieux’ film “La vie nouvelle”, the logic of representation – that is: the world understood as something that exists independent of the image and that can be *re-presented* visually, does not apply here. Everything we see is clearly the result of technological operations. It is a hypermediated image, that carries the traces of its own technological operations instead of hiding them.

Everything we see does not present itself as an independent reality, but as the effect of technology.

At the same time, the cinematic image at hand here is anything but stable. It is in constant flux, modulating perpetually. With ‘modulation’ I mean, that this is not a visual manipulation of something that has a stability outside of the image, but the constant re-modelling of something that only exists as an image.

While the filmic image of postclassical cinema is not dependent on a preceding reality, it also does not stand for itself, it does not claim to be complete, whole, and hermetically closed, like the image of classical cinema. It also opens up to other media images: images from television, computer screens and other technological devices penetrate the visuality not only of Tony Scott's films. It is actually a pervasive phenomenon across contemporary cinema. I will show you an extreme example of this at the end of my talk.

But before this, let me show you a quite different example, a short scene from the Malaysian Film **Bunohan**, that will hopefully illustrate this point.

[Folie Bunohan]

For the most part, this film by Dain Said from 2011 follows not only the rules of continuity editing, but it also does not exhibit any of the features of postclassical visuality. This should also demonstrate, by the way, that most films are not postclassical per se or completely abandon continuity for a postcontinuity style. Rather, postcontinuity more often than not is a matter of particular sequences, scenes or even images. Only in few films it becomes absolutely pervasive.

In Bunohan, the switch to a postclassical, hypermediated style is narratively motivated by the fact that this particular scene is a kind of flashback. But it is a type of flashback that clearly belongs more to a Postcontinuity aesthetics than obeying the logic of the continuity style.

[Clip Bunohan ca. 1:02]

I suppose that most of you will have seen this film, as it was not only very successful commercially, but also gained a number of awards and was nominated for the Academy Award in the Best Foreign Film category in 2013.

But I only want to talk about this particular scene, that is detached from the rest of the film. This scene is a kind of flashback, presenting images from the past, not from the temporal presence of the film's narration.

What we see in this flashback are hypermediated images, displaying traces of a range of different technological media.

So the visuality of the image is coded in a contradictory way: we have glitches that are reminiscent of old VHS video tapes. There is a black line running through the frame that is typical for the appearance of monitor images when filmed by a second camera. There seems to be dirt on the lens, which reminds us of amateur equipment and non-professional, private home movies filmed on vacation. The changes between scenes recall slides running through a slide projector, but the images are moving. There are out-of-focus images, in the way that is typical of the bad reception of terrestrial television images. We have images that are speeded up, like in a video that is not so much *watched* as *scanned* by a viewer.

Distorted television images end the flashback sequence, yet the memory images we saw cannot logically be television images, because we are witnessing personal memories, nor could the manifold technical markers that the images display, all come from television. Instead, this scene alludes to an array of image technologies and media in a diffuse and contradictory kind of way.

So what is interesting about this scene? Of course, on one level, this is just a simple device to make a moment of reflection and memory visually more interesting, an attempt to keep the audience's attention by changing the nature and the material quality of the image. For a moment, we are irritated, asking ourselves 'What is this?' and 'Why does this look this way?' without being able to put these questions fully to rest: They look like tv images, they look like home movie images, etc., but within the film's diegetic world they are neither.

But on another level, we can ask what this means beyond the scene's function within this particular film. I would claim that devices like the one we have seen points to and acknowledges the simple fact of a media saturated world that we live in and the way media images occupy our memory: when we evoke personal memories, we see them in front of our eyes like a film, like television, like a home movie, like a video tape. This scene gives expression to the importance of media for our lives and our personal memories. This scene attests to the fact that I mentioned before: the fact that we no longer use media at a particular time and place, but that they permeate and accompany our lives constantly instead as a result of the digitization and mobilization of media.

This kind of infection of the cinematic image with other media images , which has always been contained and limited in Classical Cinema, but became pervasive in Postclassical Cinema, is in itself a reflection of a changing media landscape, which, as Canadian scholar André Gaudreault said in a book on digital cinema, is now in “a generalized state of Intermediality”.

But this intermediality does not take place so much in the form of a circulation of themes, motifs, stories, etc. but on the more material level of image design, on the level of the image’s plasticity and visuality.

Gaudreault further describes the current state of the media landscape like this:

[FOLIE ZITAT GAUDREULT]

“Isn’t the present-day media landscape characterized by flux, contamination, interconnection and a propensity to the reticular”, where images *from* different media and *in* different media connect, bounce off of each other and reconnect constantly

(André Gaudreault, Philippe Marion: The Kinematic Turn. Film in the Digital Era and its Ten Problems. Montreal 2012, p. 5)

This pervasive contamination of media images from different sources that nowadays is so visible in film as well, pays tribute to the growing importance of media in our culture, to the total penetration of our culture by media images – and as a result the cinematic image itself becomes contaminated by other media.

The scene from Bunohan pays tribute to this state of affairs, making the additional point that even our most personal memories are permeated by media images now, and by technology.

A film series that also pays tribute to this state of affairs is the Paranormal Activity series of so-called Found Footage Horror Films. This film series deals with various image technologies that become dominant in its various parts. In Paranormal Activity 1 a single digicam is the most prominent technology that produces the film’s images. In Paranormal Activity 2 it’s a home surveillance system with a range of cameras. In Paranormal Activity 3 it’s a

combination of a more professional camera and a surveillance system. In Paranormal Activity 4 a camera phone and a laptop's webcam produce most of the film's images.

Let me show you some stills from part 3 and 4 of the series in order to show how the images of the film are not only mediated heavily by a range of technologies, but how in these films, that are already re-mediations of non-cinematic image technologies, the images are once more re-mediated within the narrative itself, because regularly the images of the films are re-watched and put under scrutiny within the film itself.

[Stills Paranormal Activity 3+4]

So what we see as the film's image in one moment, is repeated on a monitor the next moment – the film is re-mediated within itself.

In addition to that, and this makes this film series so postcinematic on the level of style, the technological minimalism of the Paranormal Activity films does not leave room for the most basic cinematic operations: there are no shot-reverse-shot patterns, there is no structured montage that would connect establishing shots and close ups, there is no composition within the frame, and hardly any camera movement. There is only an impersonal, mechanized gaze that dominates these films.

Although I am aware that I would need to discuss much more examples in detail to fully proof my point, I want to summarize my argument more systematically now.

As I said before, for me the shift from the Classical to the Postclassical and the Postcinematic is not just a matter of style, but a more fundamental change in the understanding of the cinematic image.

So this is a map of the changes that I see at work:

[Folie Tabelle 1 + 2]

Classical Hollywood Cinema	Postclassical Cinema	Postcinematic Film
Continuity between shots	'Intensified continuity'	'Postcontinuity'
Editing follows the (realistic) space and time of the story-world	Film experiments with space and time through non-linear editing; Editing takes 'liberties' in the construction of cinematic space-time	Film shapes its own space and time by digital editing and post-production; The continuity rules do not disappear but lose their central importance
Editing directs our attention in the best possible way to follow the story	Editing becomes disorienting in particularly intense sequences (e.g. action sequences)	- "musical", rhythmic editing - rapid editing preventing us from understanding cognitively what's happening - incomprehensible becomes the goal of certain scenes
Form follows content:	Form becomes content	Form is dissociated from content
Equilibrium between form and content	Form dominates our perception	Form and effect overpowering content
Narrative understanding as the central goal	An aesthetics of astonishment and of special effects	Visceral impact and sensual experience as the main goal
Identity between 'world' and 'image': image and world are 'in sync'	Autonomy of the image vis-à-vis the fictional world: image and world are out-of-sync	Image independent of the world it presents: image and world are disconnected from each other
The cinematic image is complete and stands for itself	The image acknowledges its own mediality	- Constant 'Re-mediation' (images from other sources become part of the film) - 'Hypermediation' (images

		show their technological nature openly)
The cinematic image is self-contained	A self-referential image becomes the norm, the image opens itself up to other images	Media convergence, intermediality becomes pervasive, media contaminate each other
Image = Truth	The truth of the image is put into question; A growing disbelief in the veracity of the image	- The cinematic image under attack by a range of images from different media sources - other media images compete with the cinematic image as the embodiment of a true and objective view of the world
A stable ontology of the fictional world: the camera gives access to a world that is supposedly independent of it	The ontology becomes unstable: The camera interprets and interferes with the fictional world	The ontology becomes elastic and flexible: The fictional world is clearly dependent on the visuality of the film and the operations of the camera

What Peter Langford wrote in an article on Sam Peckinpah's postclassical Western "The Wild Bunch" from 1968, has fully blossomed only in contemporary postcinematic film: namely, that we are confronted with a temporally distorted, destabilized image presenting a dislocated, decentered and dynamised space.

Ultimately, the postcinematic is not a change of style, but a new regime of visuality, born out of a change in production, technology, economy, expression and lived experience, manifesting itself by a different relation between world and image, and, at the end of the

day, in a different world-view, one that we get a glimpse of in recent films, but that we are not able to fully articulate yet.

When we ask for the cause of this development, I would point to three major sources:

[Folie]

- The introduction of digital, nonlinear editing
- The influence of music videos
- The influence of a saturated, pervasive media environment

Let me finish my talk with a last example, a Canadian short film called “Noah” from 2013.

[Folie Noah]

Again, some of you might know it, because it went viral on the internet after it premiered at the Toronto Film Festival. I would like to end my talk with this film, as it embodies a kind of an end point of the development that I have been describing. But at the same time it embodies the impossibility, I would say, of the cinematic ever becoming totally postcinematic.

[Clip Noah]

In this 18 minute short film by Patrick Cederberg and Walter Woodman, the fusion between the cinematic and the digital, in form of a computer screen, becomes absolute – or so it seems. The film as a whole is a product of the constant intermediality of our media culture that I mentioned before. The cinematic completes its turn to the postcinematic in that it becomes one with the visuality of the computer and the logic of social media.

The film might trigger a very particular kind of ‘forensic reception’ where you might want to check out the protagonist’s friends list on Facebook, where you might follow the links that he clicks, or where you stop the film in order to check out the iTunes playlist.

[2 stills Noah]

Please not that in a very different way from what I have been saying about Tony Scotts “Domino”, the cinematic image in “Noah” is as well an image that is constantly split from itself, unstable, schizophrenic, but not because of any distortion within the visuality of the film, but because of its multiplication of screens-within-the-image.

In Noah, film seems to mimick the computer screen to a point where the cinematic itself vanishes completely.

And yet, this is still a movie, I would claim. As you know, there are actually computer programs that will record everything that is happening on your computer screen and will turn it into a movie file. But the result would be very different from what we have here. This is not just a computer screen-turned-film, it is a film in itself for at least three reasons:

First, the soundtrack: what we hear is not just the internal sound of the computer and the programs running on it, but we hear the sound of the keyboard – so we actually hear the sound of a real object in space, something that you would not hear if you just let a program record your activities on the computer.

Second, there is a switch halfway into the film, not just between different windows on screen, but between the computer screen and the screen of a mobile phone, so the attachment to the one computer screen is not absolute in “Noah”.

And third, there is a minimal amount of camera movement and zooms across the computer screen, evidence of the cinematic re-mediation of the screen image.

Still, “Noah” seems to be the perfect embodiment of a postcinematic aesthetics. The film points to the very extreme possibility of film’s loss of identity. While watching film on a computer screen as become the norm already, here the computer screen becomes the cinematic image.

Yet I would claim that, particularly if you watch “Noah” on the television or on a cinema screen – and this is where the film has been presented originally – it leaves you with a desire for a different, more cinematic image.

As interesting as the film might be as an experiment, the almost total absence of the cinematic makes you actively miss it, like other examples of the postcinematic do not.

The totally hypermediated visuality of “Noah”, I would claim, leaves you longing for an unmediated, complete, uninterrupted, stable and self-contained cinematic images. At the point where film leaves behind the cinematic most clearly, we become aware of the loss we experience. It makes us aware of our desire for the ‘classic’ cinematic image, uncompromised by digital or other media. It makes us aware, that the cinematic is, in some way, irreplaceable. The pleasures of the self-contained cinematic image cannot be fully simulated or substituted by other media.

And this desire might be satisfied best, by the uninterrupted, focused and intense reception that we experience only on the big screen and in the cinema – or is this just a hopeless romantic of cinema speaking?

Let me come to a close

What I have presented to you is merely a framework within which we can think about the status of the cinematic image in relation to contemporary image production and about the status of cinema within our media culture.

At the same time, I hope the few remarks I made about specific films have demonstrated that the more theoretical questions are directly linked to media practices and our experience of film today, and that the larger framework can productively be connected to the analysis of specific films, specific scenes or specific images.

My own fascination with the debate on the ‘Postcinematic’ comes not the least from the fact that it moves easily between the micro-level of analysis and larger, theoretical and even philosophical questions about the nature of the image.

Thank you very much!