LITERATURE AS FILM

Strategy and Aesthetics of ""Cinematic"" Narration in the Novel I'm Not Scared by Niccolo' Ammaniti
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1. INTRODUCTION

In dealing with Ammaniti's "cinematic" narration, distinctive primarily of his novel Io non ho paura, various authors have hitherto mainly referred to short sentences, flexibility and modularity of a plot line, paratactic "American" syntax,\(^1\) textual visualization of camera motion ("framing"), temporally sequential organization of narrative, fast narrational rhythm and similar.\(^2\) All of these authors share a universal insight into the basic trait of "cinematic" narration, which became Ammaniti's main narrative procedure. Their actual concern is the "cinematic" technique of literary narration or, more precisely, insistence on creating the mental images within reader's mind. This is achieved by a precise and simple description of objects within the characters/narrator's visual field. For example, the optimal length of the description of objects which a character sees in front of him should equal the time one needs in a real situation to shot a glance at all these objects and perceive their distinctive features. Going into details exaggeratedly would disable the gaze's mobility, hence mental images created as a consequence of minute description would become pronouncedly static, i.e. noncinematic.
Here is an example of a typical “movie shot” from a novel I’m not scared:

The house was falling to pieces and the roof had been roughly patched up with tin and tar. In the farmyard there was a heap of rubbish: Wheels, a rusty Bianchina, some bottomless chairs, a table with one leg missing. On an ivy-covered wooden post hung some cows’ skulls, worn by the rain and sun. And a smaller skull with no horns. Goodness knows what animal that came from.

A great big dog, all skin and bone, barked on a chain.

Behind the house were some corrugated iron huts and the pigsties, on the edge of a gravina.⁤

This description is perceived as markedly neutral. What we learn from it does not exceed the spatial range of character’s visual field. Only the sentence Goodness knows what animal that came from can be considered as being superior to the description, since it brings forth a minimal authorial comment of the described situation and, at the same time, functions as quickly as the pronounced thoughts and therefore does not question the mobility of gaze and “shot’s” impeccable visual objectivity.

Though the paratactic style is an essential point of reference in Ammanit’s narrative strategy, film theoretician Paolo Brandi warns of a fact that “cinematographic” procedure in the description of protagonist’s visual field had been present in literary history ever since the early twentieth century avant-garde tendencies,⁶ gaining aesthetic relevance in the 1950s French "nouveau roman", that was known also for its indicative name "école du regard", suggestive of the visual interpretation of literary text.⁷ If we accept Brandi’s journey into the past and situate the beginning of “cinematographic novel” into the era of historical avant-gardes and its golden age in the 1950s France (Michel Butor, Alain Robbe-Grillet et al.), we are still left with a question: does the Ammaniti’s ekphrastic procedure comprise peculiarities that are closer to comprehending film as a medium possessing its numerous specifics, besides the most obvious one—the very images’ mobility? In order to argument this, we shall refer to some indicative points of discussion on what truly distinguishes film as a medium, and what differs it from, for example, literary work or other narrative media. In this manner we can better perceive visual and cinematic predispositions of Ammaniti’s literary style.
2. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INTERMEDIA ENCOUNTER BETWEEN FILM IMAGES AND LITERARY TEXT

Deepening the knowledge on what we really see when we watch a film has been especially contributed by two disciplines within film studies: analytical film philosophy and cognitive film psychology. These two disciplines have yielded the exceptionally significant contributions to the scientific study of film and to the singular interpretation of particular works. In this endeavor, these disciplines used primarily "film itself," i.e., they attempted to establish what is that differs the medium of moving pictures from other visual media and which are its original creative potentials. Gregory Currie and George Wilson have, among others, endeavored to discern the layers of culturally conditioned film interpretations from those characteristics that are immanently cinematic, or as Currie would put it, medium specific. In his programmatic work titled *Image and Mind*, Currie attempts to establish a plausible philosophical and cognitive theoretical apparatus in order to offer more rational interpretative model, significantly moving away from and actually totally opposing Deleuze's approach to film as a phenomenon whose real meaning lays beyond itself. In this manner, Currie challenges the heritage of the great theories of humanities risen from structuralism, and accuses disciplines such as psychoanalysis, and especially semiotics, for approaching the film analysis as a *film-is-like-something-else* phenomenon. Currie disputes the great theories' right to include film within a treasury of cultural products via unique (post)structuralistic interpretive methods. On the one hand, his arguments include definitive nonreducibility of film's cognitive nature to the structures of speaking language, while on the other hand they point at the delusions of Lacanian psychoanalysis.  
Paradoxically, it is precisely semiotics that helps Currie in establishing the basic differences between film and (written/spoken) language, this being a distinction between the sign's denotative and connotative dimensions. The literary text allows the clear delineation between a denotative plan of narrative, targeted at setting forth the facts on characters and action, and the connotative level of expression or figurative meaning. Whereas in film, connotative and denotative aspects are concurring, and denotation is always expressive, i.e., totally retracted into connotation. This is where the major semiotic postulate comes
from, claiming that literary language is symbolic, while the cinematic language is mimetic.7

In other words, now entirely following the Currie’s trail, this means that what we see on a film screen is mainly what we should and could have seen, and that the analysis of the particulars of film “language” has to be based on the autochthonous descriptions of what we are seeing. A difference between cognitivist Currie’s theses and poststructuralism generally is that the American philosopher’s analytical scope grasps only the immediate visual experience, while semiotics presumes the rules of visibility in advance, demanding that we handle the knowledge on images. The identicalness of signifier and signified in film, of connotation and denotation, has led many that dealt with difference between literature and film to a conclusion that, when it comes to literature, we are talking about “evoking,” while with cinematography it’s about “showing.” Inasmuch, the cinematic images would be the analogue of reality and would be limiting the subjective interpretations, while literary works would be stimulating mental projections, that are very personal and therefore inevitably arbitrary.8 In the case of Currie’s example, it is obvious that the analytical philosophy of film used the aporia of images and text, literature and film, along with particulars and universalities of specific artistic languages to solve a much broader problem of (in)applicability of great theories of humanities to the representational practices of moving pictures, where the language of literature and spoken language became the symbols of peculiar theoretical totalitarianism that reduced the entire mankind’s cultural history to a linguistic sign.

Herein, we do not want to get involved with a discussion between cognitivists and poststructuralists by apriori accepting or rejecting their theses, but to consider whether it is possible, and under which conditions, to approach the structure of literary text in the same manner in which one would approach the analysis of cinematic piece’s structure. Why do I hold such a discussion to be productive and what are the general expectations from the intermedia collision of image and text? Instead of attempting to once more affirm a thesis on the fateful referentiality of cinematic “language” to the spoken language, and of cinematic narration to literary narration, therefore the themes that have been exhaustively covered by Christian Metz and Seymour Chat-
man, I find it more intriguing to submit a thesis on the influence of moving pictures on literary work. Actually, I would like to theoretically consider the consequences of a relation between image and text, when mental images stimulated by literary work are not just “evoked” but also “shown” by imitating the cinematic techniques. Besides Currie’s theses, in this matter I will be assisted by George Wilson, who claims that the principal psychoanalytical positions on the film’s basic illusory nature are not tenable. Wilson is relevant to this discussion because he believes in the autochthonous representational practices, developed within the framework of film medium. Consequently he goes on proving that the application of actual cinematic techniques produces concrete, clearly discernible meanings. The cognitive capacities offered by film camera and editing technique are summarized in his thesis on “imagining seeing,” which he considers to be equally applicable to literary texts as well. The issue here is equaling the ontological statuses of a film viewer and a book reader. That is, the fact that the viewer really sees something (on film) does not make him any closer to the (fictive) event than the reader who has to make an extra effort and “imagine seeing,” in order to visualize the fiction of a story he reads.

Wilson claims that both the viewer and the reader equally imagine seeing. The viewer imagines that what he sees could be possible in a reality that is other than his present reality, while the reader imagines and sees images that correspond with his experience of seeing “real” images and of the imaginational horizon in general. Film demands the conscious imaginative surrender to on-screen fiction, where the viewer and the viewed are separated with a firm epistemological barrier. We simply know that what we see is a fiction, merely resembling the reality. Wilson claims that our capacity to see (i.e. imagine, in his terminology) on-screen occurrences with understanding doesn’t depend so much on our inherent capacity to cognize something visually, as much as on our imaginative potential.

In like degree, the capacity to visualize images and link them into the narrative wholes would be closer to the conventions of visual presentation, implying culture, knowledge and, why not, semiotic systems. Consequently, our relation to film is not one of complete immersion into the “reality” “of its fiction, but of a conscious surrender to being seduced by a continuing sequence of motion pictures. Therefore,
this surrender is voluntary. Not only does it not happen on a level of unconscious cognition, it seeks our conscious help in order to become completely realized as a cinematic fiction. It requests our recognition of certain cinematic procedures that, accordingly, become necessarily conventionalized into the systems of meaning.

In Niccolò Ammaniti’s novel I’m Not Scared we can recognize a systematic literary adaptation of those specifically cinematic procedures that are essential for conventionalizing the filmic meaning. Among those, an important position is occupied by the ontological status of film’s character/subject in relation to a status of viewer/observer. The creative use of position and direction of camera motion, along with framing the visual field, are some of the most significant medium specific tools in the cinematographic production of motion pictures. Ammaniti’s cinematographic technique of writing the literary text is primarily made of constantly coercing the reader to visualize mental images from the offered descriptions. The reason for this is that the author programatically omits situations that cannot be rendered visually or narratively, such as the characters’ comprehensive inner psychological states or the descriptions of the situations outside of character’s momentary visual field. Since the novel’s narrative structure enables us, through internal focalization, to know of the characters only what they know of themselves, their visual fields become crucial in discerning the narrative course. In this manner the visual field, enabled by Ammaniti’s technique of framing and directing the perception, becomes leveled with that which Jerrold Levinson calls perceptual enabling, whereas the mental images we create while reading the text are equivalent to Wilson’s imagining seeing the fictional action on film. Though at this point I am already willing to claim that with Ammaniti this is a sort of “language iconization” and “text becoming film,” I am not prepared to equal spoken/written language and the language of film. Rather, accepting Currie’s and Wilson’s argumentations, I shall advocate their general separation, albeit with the concrete specific examples of the inflections of literary text caused by film’s influence. Relying on the insights of cognitive psychology and analytical philosophy of film, we can formulate three theses to be elaborated, as they essentially define Ammaniti’s literary style in the novel we are referring to:
1. the issue of the film viewer’s ontological status presents the crucial philosophical problem in defining both the particulars and universals of cinematic experience, as well as the principal differences between spoken language and the language of film;
2. imagining seeing has to be active (i.e. consciously operationalized) when observing any media’s fictional product;
3. literary work can have “cinematic” character if it succeeds in a paradoxical intent of imitating the film’s actual specific qualities.

3. GEORGE WILSON: THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF VIEWER/READER AND SUBJECTIVE SHOTS AS MENTAL IMAGES

My introductory point was that the thing enabling film fiction, i.e., enabling the events that indeed happened in front of a film camera to be experienced as fictional by viewer’s mind, demands us to refrain from additional questions that could disturb the usual and generally acceptable convention of film fiction. For example, one of the most frequent and most trivial questions we ask and hence, tentatively, endanger cinematic illusion is: “How was it possible for actor to throw himself from the twentieth floor and still survive?” Of course, we all know it was the merit of special effects, and we are aware that everything happened “only in film.” Drawing on the notorious examples of film image’s seduction, such as the above mentioned, George Wilson presents an essential epistemological divide between the constructive and perceptual levels of cinematic effects. On one hand there is, to phrase it in semiotic terms, an indexical record of events which (more or less credibly) happened in front of the film camera during the shooting. On the other hand we have a somewhat altered version of the same event: an actor who remains alive during the film’s constructive (production) phase, dies in a perceptual phase, along with a fact that the time that took days in constructive phase, disappeared in a flash in a perceptive phase, etc. For Wilson, the constructive constituents of film are motion picture shots, while perceptual elements are movie story shots. In view of all this, if we wish to surrender to film fiction, we have to concentrate on imagining seeing only the movie story shots:
In other words, it cannot be that, in watching a fiction film, the viewer imagines seeing a motion picture shot of the portrayed events, because imagining this would entail imagining that it is fictional, in the movie or for the viewer, that a motion picture camera was present in the fictional circumstances and that it photographed the events before its lens.¹⁶

Deeply rooted in the culture of gaze, the perceptual aspects of cinematography are, influenced by the unconscious or learned cognitive reactions to image, ever since the time of camera obscura and illusionist painting.

Therefore, an image visualized in the mind can never be separated from a real image, as the former will always remain a reflex of the real embodiment that physically already happened in front of our eyes once. If the real or, as we termed it, constructive image precedes the imagined i.e., perceptual image, then we can say that both of them precede the third kind of image, one that arises as a fruit of imageing the text. The latter, in an analogy with preceding two kinds, could be termed the mental image. Wilson demonstrates that images which are the products of literary/textual imageing demand the reader to imagine seeing what he actually does not see and that, similar to the case of a film viewer who surrenders to the integrated action of constructive and perceptual images, mental images give rise to a resembling logical problem. As a reader, I am not allowed to ask questions on the physical conditions of certain text’s origination, and on the relation between author and text, since by doing that I disturb the ontological status of “my” reality against the reality (within) text, making them both untenable.¹⁷

What differs film from other media to such a degree are the imageing techniques at its disposal. Though theoretically unlimited in number, in practice these are very precisely defined and clearly differentiated procedures that help us imagining seeing exactly what the film’s author had in mind as the targeted creative statement. In order to clarify his thesis and, in a way, release film from the frequently ascribed features of “manipulativeness” and “seductiveness,” Wilson addresses the cinematographic technique of subjective shots, first by applying extensive analyses to extricate it from clearly technical implications of film craft. Then he compares it with the viewer’s cognitive and perceptual reactions. Later on I shall use cinematic methods (motion picture shots, constructive images) that help viewers to imagine, for example, a subjec-
tive visual field of main character, or his interior psychics states (movie story shots, perceptual images), as a connection to the mental images in literary work. Before that, let us consider Wilson’s division into the five kinds of subjective shots. These are:

1. veridical point-of-view shot
2. subjectively inflected shot
3. subjectively saturated shot
4. impersonal subjectively inflected shot
5. unmarked subjective inflection

With the veridical point-of-view shot we are talking about maximal identification of fictional character’s visual field with a viewer’s visual field which is limited to a film screen. This is the simplest and also the paradigmatic case of subjective shot, since the fictional character’s capacities of visualization and viewer’s imagining seeing mainly coincide. In other words, if both could occupy the same physical space (if film screen would “disappear”), they would stand on the same spot, with their gaze oriented in the same direction.

With the subjectively inflected shot, the character’s and viewer’s points-of-view remain identical. However, the perceptual image which the viewer sees on a screen reveals yet other information on a physical or psychic state of fictional character. For example, if the fictional character is drunk and one wishes to transfer his subjective sense of vertigo or the blurry sight, the image seen by a viewer will also be blurred, camera motion can imitate clumsy movements, etc.

By further insisting on equating the character’s and viewer’s points-of-view the unique point-of-view ceases being a relevant measure, because in the case of the third category according to Wilson’s division of shots, namely the subjectively saturated shot, the film’s viewer no longer has insight into a real visual field of fictional character, but solely into his mental images. In other words, now the viewer sees that which the fictional character imagines to see. The subjectively saturated shots are most often those when the character begins hallucinating or sees things that the other characters in the film do not see, the latter resulting from the shot’s thorough “subjective saturation,” causing us to abandon film’s fictional reality and surrender to the new, hallucinatory reality of a main character.
This is the shot where the viewer has been left without the possibility of autonomous gaze outside the character's fictional reality. For this reason, the viewer's imagining seeing is literary directed by what the actual character, in his radically subjective perspective, is capable of seeing.

The fourth, *impersonal subjectively inflected shot*, is actually not subjective in a real sense of the word, because the "subjective" and the "inflected" in it do not match. In other words, character's visual field is different from the film viewer's visual field. Nevertheless, due to a specific and designated cinematic technique, the viewer has an impression of "seeing" through the eyes of a film character or, at least, of feeling that which the character should be feeling at a given moment. Wilson wants to draw our attention to a fact that the impersonality of the point-of-view does not mean the author is emotionally neutral toward either the characters or the viewer. Also, the subjectivity in the subjectively impersonal shot is much more than a mere standard category of cinematographic procedure. As we shall see, it is with the help of standard cinematographic procedures that the film can inflect (or influence) the style of literary narration.

The fifth kind of subjective shot, *unmarked subjective inflection*, is the most remote from what we deem to be a shot or sequence in the term's narrower connotation. Wilson's notion of the "unmarkedness" of inflection is used here because neither the fictional character nor the film's viewer are aware of what are they actually seeing. Only by the film's end will they be able to explain cause-and-effect "diversions" in the narrative course. Unmarked inflection is most often used exactly for those unexpected cuts and forward-backward shifts in action when, in the film, we imagine we are seeing earlier the action that happened later in the world of fictional character, or vice versa. Shifts are not only temporal in character, since total narrative epistemological twists occur just as frequently. The acclaimed examples of such films include *Vanilla Sky*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Memento*.

4. NICCOLÒ AMMANITI: NARRATION AS THE "SUBJECTIVE FRAMING" OF THE CHARACTER

Ammaniti's novel *I'm Not Scared* is told as a first-person narrative of Michele Amitrano, a ten-year old boy. The action evolves during the
1970s in Acqua Traverse, a village in the south of Italy. The untroubled Michele’s childhood gets interrupted after his accidental discovery of a storeroom in an abandoned house, where he finds a boy somewhat younger than himself, completely starved, exhausted and frantic due to many days spent in a dark cellar, with no fresh air or daily light. Soon after this horrible discovery, Michele finds out that the other villagers, including his parents, are involved in kidnapping and capture of the boy.

Michele reveals this secret to his friend. However, the spiral of violence quickens as the friend betrays this to his own parents, endangering Michele besides the unfortunate captured boy. An almost idyllic start of the novel, with a suggestive atmosphere of open spaces and a sense of sticky sultriness of Italian south now transforms into crime suspense and a main protagonist’s battle with time as he tries to rescue the kidnapped boy. In a furious finale, Michele sacrifices himself to save the boy’s life, but ends up wounded by the bullet that his own father shot. The narrative is structured by a series of linear autodiegetic accounts of the main character and by the very consistent inner focalization.

At this point, I would like to expand theses outlined in the introduction by affirming that the author’s treatment of subjective angle of the main character Michele Amatrano is what actually makes Ammaniti’s cinematographic style an authentic literary-film procedure (this is where the quotation marks become superfluous). The visuality of novel I’m not scared is not made up only of descriptions of Michele’s visual field (as we have noted before, this is actually an ordinary literary technique from the twentieth century), but of a whole range of subjectivizations, wherein the points-of-view incessantly change, only to emphasize more the centrality of main’s character’s position, his physical and emotional reactions. In my opinion, the key argument for this claim lays with nearly total applicability of Wilson’s typology of subjective shots to the dynamic rhythmization of situations, and with shifting the point-of-view in regard to a desired effect: slowing down or quickening of the action, drawing attention to protagonist’s emotions, situating the action within a wider spatial context, narrowing and directing the visual field, and similar.

Let us consider the part of the book where Michele surreptitiously watches TV news and for the first time learns the identity of the captured boy, along with a fact that all of the adults in Acqua Traverse are involved in kidnapping:
I craned my neck over the sofa and nearly had a heart attack.

Behind the newsreader was a picture of the boy.

The boy in the hole.

He was blond. Well washed, his hair neatly combed, smartly dressed in a checked shirt, he was smiling and clutching an engine from an electric train set.

The newser went on: "The search goes on for little Filippo Carducci, son of the Lombard businessman Giovanni Carducci, who was kidnapped two months ago in Favia. The carabinieri and the investigating magistrates are following a new trail which is thought to lead..."

I didn’t hear any more.

They were shouting. Papa and the old man jumped to their feet.

The boy’s name was Filippo. Filippo Carducci.

“We are now broadcasting an appeal from Signora Luisa Carducci to the kidnappers, recorded this morning.”

“What’s this cow want now?” said papa.

“Bitch! You fucking bitch!” growled Felice from the back.

His father cuffed him round the head. “Shut up!”

Barbara’s mother seconded him. “Silly idiot!”

“For Christ’s sake! Will you all shut up!” shrieked the old man. “I want to hear!”

This description produces a very clear mental image. Michele is in the back of the room, observing the situation in his visual field from a position that enables him the optical surveillance of entire interior. He sees television that is presently broadcasting the news and people sitting around the table, also watching the television, and he witnesses their quarrel. We see everything Michele sees in this moment, from the same angle and the same situational overview. We could say this is a static master shot of the interior, to be followed by the narrower framing of characters involved in plotline. Ultimately, we can imagine that happening, because when the quarrel begins, particular characters’ replicas would probably be “filmed” in closer shots than the Michele’s first “establishing shot.” However, even the descriptions of these medium to close-up shots of the quarrel would not influence the fact that, in that moment, the reader sees together with a novel’s narrator/character. Since his views correspond with ours (readers’), this is a graphic literary example of the veridical point-of-view shot.
In his novel, Ammaniti uses a method which George Wilson does not mention in his typology of subjective shots. My term for this method is *the extended subjective shot*. This shot is about creating the mental images that aspire to be equivalent to the cinematic technique of shifting between shot and counter shot, since such shifts establish an optimal rate between subjectivity and objectivity of cinematic (in our case literary) narration. The extended subjective shot alternates with the veridical point-of-view shots which the film protagonist sees subjectively, i.e., those which the viewer (reader) sees together with the protagonist, and those others where the film protagonist is the object of someone else’s (i.e. viewer’s or reader’s) gaze. This is still a subjective shot, since it maximally concentrates at the protagonist, but is nevertheless extended by some objectivizing insights that provide us with the additional information on character’s psychological state (pleasure, confusion, panic . . . ) or the situation in his surrounding which, in the given moment, is either outside his visual field or immediately eludes him.

An example of combining the veridical and extended subjective shots occurs when Michele goes to see little Filippo and, on the way, has to hide from an approaching car. To ease discernment, the small letters mark the parts that we are seeing together with Michele (credibility), while the capital letters mark the parts when we are imagining seeing him expressing his fear and doubt (extension—counter-shot):

I was nearly there when a thick red dust cloud appeared on the horizon. Low. Fast. A cloud advancing in the wheat. THE SORT OF CLOUD THAT CAN BE RAISED BY A CAR ON A SUN-BAKED EARTH TRACK. It was a long way off but it wouldn’t take long to reach me. I could already hear the drone of its engine.

It was coming from the abandoned house. That was the only place the road led to. A car curved slowly round and came straight towards me.

I didn’t know what to do. If I turned back it would catch up with me, if I went on they would see me. I must decide quickly. It was getting closer. Maybe they already had seen me.

As we have already mentioned, the second type of shot, *subjectively inflected shot*, is the one when we imagine seeing together with the pro-
In a moment when his visual field is to a certain extent perceptively deformed (under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, vertigo, blow to the head and similar). Ammaniti uses this kind of inflection in a form of short narrative digression that bears very little influence on otherwise furious narrative tempo. In almost all the instances, he applies it in combination with veridical and extended subjective shots. Subjective inflection is marked by italics:

Papa threw himself on Felice, grabbed him by the arm and pulled him off mama.

**FELICE ROLLED OVER ON THE GROUND AND I ROLLED OVER WITH HIM.**

I banged my temple hard. A kettle started whistling in my head, and in my nostrils I had the smell of that disinfectant they use in the school toilets. Yellow lights exploded in front of my eyes.

Papa was kicking Felice and Felice was crawling under the table and the old man was trying to restrain papa who had his mouth open and was stretching out his hands and knocking over the chairs with his feet.

*The hiss in my head was so loud I couldn’t even hear my own sobs.*

This example of alternating the subjective shot, objective counter-shot and subjective inflection in “editing” discloses how removed is Ammaniti from the cinematographic technique that would comprise a mere description of protagonist’s visual field. In a nearly programmatic fashion, the Italian writer demands from his readers to create mental images by using their own cognitive capacities, those that are usually automatically applied while watching the film.

Besides those already mentioned Ammaniti applies narrative digressions in *I’m Not Scared* that are quite comparable with subjectively saturated shot, though we do not experience them as “cinematic” interventions in the term’s narrower sense. Actually, the subjectively saturated shot is, by definition, very personal. Therefore, even on film, it is being experienced as slowing down the action or the literarization of film’s pictorial essence. In our case, subjective saturation occurs in those moments when Michele, with no doubt whatsoever in the truth of his own visions, describes his fight with monsters that regularly hounded him as he was falling to sleep. In that moment, all the other cinematic procedures cede their place to the subjectively saturated Michele’s vi-
sions, which continue to function as consistent stories within a story, in one instance stretching over several pages.

A very graphic example of impersonal subjectively inflected shot seems to have been applied at the very end of Ammaniti’s novel. Michele, shot by his own father, lays in the latter’s arms, while noise and reflectors of police helicopters surrounding the crime scene create a whirlwind of emotions, mixed with unbearable pain and the sense of fear:

I opened my eyes.
My leg hurt. It wasn’t the leg that had been hurting before. The other one. The pain was a climbing plant. A piece of barbed wire twisting round my guts. Something overwhelming. Red. A dam that has burst.
Nothing can check a dam that has burst.
A roar was increasing. A metallic roar that grew and covered everything. It throbbed in my ears.
I was wet. I touched my leg. Something thick and warm was smeared all over me.
I don’t want to die. I don’t want to.
I opened my eyes.
I was in a whirl of straw and lights.
There was a helicopter. 

On regaining consciousness, Michele opens his eyes and at that point the images turn surreal. A metaphor of pain, portrayed through a climbing plant and barbed wire, belongs to a visual field of none of the characters but still (or actually for this very reason) penetrates deeply into Michele’s subjectivity, demolished by the tragic event which he was unable to grasp. Here, a difference between the before described subjective saturation and impersonal subjective inflection is that in the first case the character totally loses connection with his reality (fictional to ourselves), while in the latter his phantasmagoric world still penetrates and clashes with the “real” world of novel or film.

Philosophers and theoreticians of film, such as Currie, Wilson and Bordwell, have written hundreds of pages of well-argued analyses proving the autochthonic of “the language of film,” as opposed to all the other languages and sign systems. Communicating via image, when used within the complex structures of narrative film, is subject to human cognitive capacities and the universal laws of perception. As we have seen
in George Currie’s argumentation, the important difference between (cinematic) image and (literary) text is that the textual statement is comprised of a series of interrelated concepts, words and sentences which, in a certain sequence, produce the meaning open to precise denotation. Conversely, a single film shot can produce unlimitedly comprehensive connotational descriptions. Ammaniti’s narrative style is made of employing the connotative dimension of written text and consequently shows signifying precision, primarily to describe what the main character sees and hears. Even in cases when the writer wishes to portray main character’s introspection or imagination, he does so by describing Michele’s hallucinatory visual and auditory experiences. In other words, Ammaniti writes literary text that stimulates the reader towards the intensive creation of mental images. Nevertheless, these images are simultaneously reduced to what can be “seen” through denotative level of written language, because in the case of this book, one reads only of what the main character sees and hears. The visual reading of novel I’m not scared, as suggested here, reveals the aesthetic potential of concrete artwork as a possibility for questioning the inveterate relation between (cinematic) image and (literary) text.

NOTES

1. See Guido Bonsaver, “Raccontare all’Americana: Io non ho paura tra autobiografie letterarie e soggettiva cinematografica,” in Narrativa italiana recente / Recent Italian Fiction (Torino: Trauben and Trinity College Dublin), 53–73.


5. Brandi claims that the visuality of text in French nouveau roman evolves from the textual interpretation of film camera’s capacities: “È come se la realtà presentata nel romanzo fosse vista attraverso il mirino della macchina da presa: l’obiettivo cattura tutti gli elementi che ha davanti a sé, li registra scru-
polosamente e li trasferisce con la medesima scrupolosità sulla pagina, dove ricompare ogni elemento, ogni oggetto, ogni dettaglio che intenzionalmente o accidentalmente occupava l’ipotetico spazio della ripresa. C’è un fuore visivo che sovrasta ogni descrizione letteraria tradizionale, una proliferazione di effetti ottici, un’esuberanza di raffigurazioni spaziali che mira a registrare tutto ciò che è realistamente presente in una scena; allo stesso tempo tutto ciò che è presente nella narrazione è rigorosamente visivo” (Ibid., 166–68).

6. One particularly damaging consequence of the psychoanalytic paradigm has been the tendency to think of film as an essentially illusory medium, capable of causing the viewer temporarily to think of the film world as real, and of himself as occupying a place of observation within that world. . . . The second assumption of traditional theorizing about film is the semiotic assumption: that there is a fundamental commonality between pictures and language. This is a belief that goes along with the rejection of the hopelessly old-fashioned view that, while words operate by convention, pictures operate by similarity. On the semiotic view, all representation is conventional, and the idea that pictures might in some sense be like the things they picture is part of a benighted ideology of realism. Gregorie Currie, Image and Mind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xv–xvi.


8. Ibid.


12. Along somewhat different lines, Currie—being a true cognitivist convinced in the representational specificity of film medium—places more trust in the act of seeing than in the culturaologically appropriated knowledge on (cinematic) images. Therefore, he argues it is not possible to see film without defining the perspectival relation between ourselves as viewers and onscreen occurrences: “there is no such thing as nonperspectival seeing. . . . To imagine seeing it is to imagine seeing it from the point of view defined by the perspectival structure of the picture” (Currie, 178).
13. On the issue of localization in film and literary work, I wrote more extensively in the above mentioned essay "Kadriranje teksta" (see note 9).

14. In addition to theses by Seymour Chatman on imaginary film presenter (shower, according to Chatman), Levinson posits an ontological difference between images we see on a film screen and the action which we recognize via those images as the peculiar second level of perception: "The presenter (shower) in a film presents, or gives perceptual access to, the story's sights and sounds; the presenter in film is thus, in part, a sort of perceptual enabler. Such perceptual enabling is what we must implicitly posit to explain how it is we are, even imaginarily, perceiving what we are perceiving in the story, in the manner and order in which we are perceiving it. The notion of a presenter, whose main charge is providing a perceptual access on the fictional world, is simply the best default assumption available for how we make sense of narrative fiction film." Jerrold Levinson, "Film Music and Narrative Agency," in Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies, ed. David Bordwell and Noël Carroll (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 248–82.

15. These syntagms are used by French iconologist Hubert Damisch to point toward the growing interdependence and reciprocal influences between image and texts. The reference is drawn from Damisch’s commentary at the exhibition Sans commune mesure, Pompidou Center, Paris, 2002.


17. Of course, this principle can be legitimately challenged through the conscious authorial manipulation of reality levels, such as the very frequent postmodern metafictional interventions into a narrative course.


19. In this manner, subjectively inflected shot becomes a site of another interesting overlapping that cannot be dealt with here extensively: namely, the viewer's perceptual image (blurred screen) is overlapping with a fictive character’s mental image (blurry sight and vertigo).


21. Ibid., 63.

22. Ibid., 141.

23. Ibid., 199.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


