

**Illusions for life:**

**On the importance of illusions for our life and the role of cinema in creating these illusions**

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# *Illusions for Life*

On the importance of illusions for our life  
and the role of cinema in creating these  
illusions

Sylvie Magerstädt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of the University of Westminster  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Thesis Abstract

The relationship between art, illusion and reality has been part of philosophical debate for centuries. With the increasing use of digital technologies in modern cinema, this debate entered a new dimension. This thesis aims to discuss the notion of illusions as a system of stories and values that inspire a culture similar to other grand narratives, such as mythology or religion. Cinema thus becomes the postmodern 'mythmaking machine' par excellence in a world that has increasing difficulties in creating unifying concepts and positive illusions that can inspire a culture and give hope. I will argue that illusions have always been a crucial element of culture, and my hypothesis is that they are not necessarily a sign of people's naivety or unconscious manipulation as has often been argued but a conscious choice, deriving from a longing for positive inspiration. This longing is particularly strong in times of ideological crisis, when other institutions fail to provide relief and guidance. This seems to be emphasised by the fact that in the last decade, at a time of deep ideological crisis, mainstream cinema has seen a significant revival of grand mythic epics.

The thesis focuses on three key aspects: the area of belief, illusion and the creation of myths; the relationship between realism and illusion; and the possibilities of modern cinema in relation to these aspects. I chose to base my research project on continental philosophy rather than classic film theory or analytic philosophy in order to stimulate a new debate in film studies and philosophy that links traditional aesthetic concepts with contemporary thoughts on society and cinema. To begin with I draw on theories by Nietzsche, Kracauer and Deleuze to unravel the interesting similarities in their works, such as the redemptive capacities of art and the acknowledgement that illusion/art/cinema is always closely related to the state of the society that produces them. This is then applied to recent Hollywood epics, namely *The Lord of the Rings* (P. Jackson, 2001-04), *Troy* (W. Petersen, 2004) and *Avatar* (J. Cameron, 2009). Here I argue that rather than being mere escapism, mainstream cinema can have an important function in providing postmodern culture with important illusions, which is significantly facilitated by new digital technologies. The thesis concludes that these technologies present new creative opportunities for filmmakers and philosophers alike.

*“We have art in order not to perish of the truth.”*

Friedrich Nietzsche, Will to Power, §822

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I also had the opportunity to present papers at a conference in Budapest, organised by the European Network of Cinema Studies (NECS), where I gave a talk on theories on digital cinema and realism, which inspired chapter 3 and 5. Thanks also to Bangor University, which invited me to a conference on *Religion, Spirituality and Faith*, where my paper 'Cinema as Religion' stimulated an inspiring debate. Most recently, I spoke at the *3rd Film-Philosophy* conference at the University of Warwick on *Troy* and digital storytelling, which is part of my fifth chapter. I would like to thank both organisers and participants of these events for the opportunity to discuss ideas and receive valuable feedback on my ideas.

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Sylvie Magerstädt,  
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## Prologue: Introduction and Background

In the summer of 2002 I completed my MA dissertation on the philosophical basis of Gilles's Deleuze's cinema books, where I discussed the ways in which Deleuze uses the theories of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche for his analysis of cinema. This interesting project brought up a variety of further questions that could not be answered within the scope of this work and suggested a more in-depth research project. One of the problems that arose was Deleuze's apparently dismissive attitude towards modern Hollywood cinema, or what he perceived as the mainstream. As an enthusiast for this cinema I wondered why he seems to assume that a critical and thorough analysis of modern cinema should be confined to art cinema and experimental film. In addition, I had also previously written an essay on Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*,<sup>1</sup> and was somehow surprised that Deleuze, despite discussing Nietzsche's theories at length in his second cinema book, makes no mention of this first of Nietzsche's works, which so directly discusses our relationship with art and aesthetics and its importance for our life.

While these questions were lingering in my head, I came to notice in the following years a sudden flood of historic epics, with Hollywood blockbusterfilms like *Troy* (dir. W. Petersen, 2004), *Alexander* (dir. O. Stone, 2004), *King Arthur* (dir. A. Fuqua, 2004) and *Hidalgo* (dir. J. Johnston, 2004) all coming out in one year. I started wondering about the reasons for this surprising new interest in a type of film that seems to have been a distinct feature of the 1950s but has rarely been made since. There were of course the odd exceptions throughout the years, in the Nineties for example the historic epics *Dances with Wolves* (dir. Kevin Costner, 1990) and *Braveheart* (dir. Mel Gibson, 1995), but we could argue that these productions were largely driven by the individual interests of their respective main actor, who tellingly also take on the role of the director.

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<sup>1</sup> Magerstädt, S. (2001). Der tragische Gott – Über den Begriff des Dionysischen in Nietzsches 'Die Geburt der Tragödie'. Munich: GRIN.

When subsequently working in the scriptwriting department of several TV production companies in Germany, through which I developed an increasing interest in the art of storytelling and its importance for narrative cinema, I started looking at stories not so much as literary texts that are to be interpreted in linguistic or analytical terms, but as a common set of ideas that is told from generation to generation. I began thinking about the ways in which cinema continues this tradition of storytelling from ancient myths, via religious narratives to contemporary popular culture. Moreover, these ideas became more and more connected to the questions regarding Deleuze's view on Hollywood cinema and Nietzsche's notions of art and life that I have been struggling with since the completion of my MA dissertation. Finally, they resulted in a more specific hypothesis that became the basis for this thesis.

My hypothesis, therefore, is that illusions (cinematic or otherwise) have always been a crucial element of human culture. Moreover, they are not a naivety or unconscious manipulation but rather can be a conscious choice, deriving from a natural creative instinct and a longing for positive inspiration. This longing is particularly strong in times of ideological crises, when traditional systems such as religion or myth are perceived as failing to provide universal concepts. As a consequence, we are looking for other creative practices to produce these ideas. Here the cinema with its universal narratives is particularly equipped to create these unifying illusions. This can be exemplified in the revival of mythic and historic epics in the last decade, which reflects the anxieties of this generation and its longing for universal myths.

There are two crucial terms in this statement that require further definition. Firstly, I use the term 'illusions' in a very broad sense to characterise universal stories and myths – meta-narratives. Moreover, in contrast to more common uses of the word, which often associate it with negative connotations such as manipulation and false beliefs, I will use the term in a more positive sense throughout this thesis to describe a system of ideas and values that inspire a culture. Nevertheless there will be notions in the thesis that reflect the more problematic side of illusions in relation to dominant ideologies, not least to distinguish the positive illusions favoured here from the more negative aspects.

The second term – crisis – is more difficult to define. In general, the term not necessarily refers to dramatic and sudden changes but is used to define a development in society that causes insecurity and scepticism, the loss of unifying ideas and universal beliefs. Although all three writers discussed in this thesis refer to a certain state of crisis in relation to their aesthetic theories, the individual definitions differ significantly. For Nietzsche, crisis is mostly related to a deep, personal and spiritual unease, a loss of certainties and the acknowledgement of nature's cruel and unpredictable side. Nevertheless, he also applies this concept to modern society at large as I will discuss in the first chapter. For Kracauer, crisis is more directly linked to tendencies in society. It is less individual and more related to the political and social sphere. In connection to cinema, his notion of crisis is also linked to our connection with the physical world around us, which gives the original spiritual idea of crisis a materialist spin. How these two spheres can be connected will be discussed when looking at Deleuze's theories and digital cinema. Unlike Nietzsche and Kracauer, who describe the loss of binding norms and unifying concepts as a gradual process that has affected post-enlightenment society, Deleuze explicitly names the Second World War as the event that shattered the old system of images and beliefs presented in cinema. What all three writers have in common is the notion that the vast majority of individuals in our modern or post-modern world is lacking ideological and/or spiritual certainties, ideas to hold on to, which he or she is longing for.

In addition to these two terms the notion of redemption will play a significant role throughout this thesis. Again for Nietzsche, the term has a strong spiritual and personal emphasis, whereas for Kracauer the term has a rather materialistic component as we will see more in detail in the following chapter. Whereas in Kracauer's concept of redemption, the cinema reunites us with the world, Nietzsche's notion of redemption saves us from despair. Finally, Deleuze rarely uses the term redemption to the same degree but speaks more general about 'reinstatement of belief'. However, what all three have in common is that redemption describes a process that brings back to us a sense of unity and belief, which seemed previously lost.

This thesis, then, looks at the way in which cinema, like myth and religion before, continues to create these ideas and stories that can provide meaning for our life. Moreover, with the new digital technologies we are now able to produce these grand illusions on a more convincing level than ever before. In summary, I argue that at a time when our need for illusion seems to be particularly strong, the seemingly endless possibilities of digital technologies to create new modal worlds and epic myths, led to a revival of cinematic epics in the last decade. Despite taking works of continental philosophy as my basis, the question is not so much how cinema simply engages with philosophy. Rather, I will approach film as part of a system of ideas that enables human beings to understand their world, be it in mythological, religious, philosophical or cinematic terms.

Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, no theorist has yet acknowledged the value of Friedrich Nietzsche's first book *The Birth of Tragedy* and its aesthetic concepts for an analysis of cinema. The very few scholars who mention Nietzsche in the context of film, such as Deleuze and Frampton, all focus on the notions of truth and morality developed in his later writings. I also revisit Siegfried Kracauer's writings on film, focussing on his *Theory of Film*, which has not yet received the recognition it deserves. I argue that most critics of his work have focussed on his concept of photographic realism and thus overlooked the more subtle and interesting questions, Kracauer poses with regard to cinema's connection with our culture. I acknowledge that I will take certain liberties in the use of Kracauer's theories and often take his statements as an inspiration to develop further lines of thought rather than providing an explicit exegesis of his work. This is largely owed to the fact that several of the points that I consider relevant and interesting for my thesis are developed by Kracauer more as an afterthought and not discussed as in-depth as other parts of his writings. Nevertheless, I hope to show that this attempt can be fruitful in finding ideas in Kracauer that go beyond the common reception.

### Historical developments in the relationship between film and philosophy

Of course there has been previous interest in the connection between cinema and philosophy. One of the earliest theorists of cinema, Hugo Münsterberg, discusses the psychological affects and aesthetic dimensions of cinema in relation to theatre in his final work *The Photoplay* (1916). He suggests that cinema has a unique possibility in using a variety of visual representations, which allow it to present emotional and mental states in a way that other art forms cannot.

A few years later, Jean Epstein argues for a subjective, experimental style of cinema in his first book *Bonjour cinéma* (1921). For him, cinema should move beyond merely rehashing historic, social and romantic narratives and attempt a more impressionist and poetic style of representing reality. His interest was primarily in the visual components of the images and as a filmmaker he created unique pieces of art, always trying to escape the boundaries of classic narrative cinema. Yet aside from his criticism of narrative cinema, he was also one of the first film theorists to draw connections between cinema and philosophy. In an essay first published in 1930 he notes that

“The cinema is a particular form of knowing, in that it represents the world in its continuous mobility, as well as a general form of knowing because, once it addresses all of the senses, each will be able to surpass its physiological limitations. No more than twenty years have been spent on tentative research, and we can already measure the significance of the change that the cinema – in its expression of the external and internal movement of all beings – has brought to bear on our thinking. Even now we correct ourselves according to a reality where time never stops, where values only exist so long as they vary, where nothing exists except in becoming, where a phenomenon without velocity is inconceivable.”(Epstein, 1993, p.64)

The idea that cinema changes our way of thinking is an important notion for my thesis, but Epstein’s criticism of narration and his strong emphasis on style are in stark contrast to my discussion of stories and their importance for cinematic illusions.

Whereas Münsterberg, Epstein, Bazin, Kracauer and more recently Cavell have all discussed cinema in its relation to other art forms, mainly photography and

theatre, other scholars, such as Christian Metz have examined cinema from the perspective of semiotics and psychoanalysis and argued we could read films as language consisting of signifiers that need to be decoded.<sup>2</sup>In addition, many theorists have focussed on specific genres and individual filmmakers, rather than looking at cinema in connection with storytelling and mythmaking.

Since I started this project in 2005, the area of film and philosophy has developed significantly. Despite the growing interest in this area, a truly interdisciplinary study about the way in which cinema creates universal ideas and concepts is still in its infancy and there is currently no consistency with regard to the directions in which the field develops.

Thomas Wartenberg, one of the scholars currently working in this field, places himself in a 'moderate' area of film and philosophy.<sup>3</sup> He argues against an 'extreme' take on film as thinking, which he sees in theorists such as Mulhall and Frampton, in his latest book *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (2007). Nevertheless, he acknowledges that films can 'do philosophy', but he is generally sceptical that they have a 'mind' of their own as Frampton argues. (Frampton, *Filmosophy*, 2009). For Wartenberg one of the problems is that film and philosophy seem to have different basic concerns, especially when taking commercial Hollywood cinema into account that is according to Wartenberg less interested in producing knowledge and primarily interested in making money. This notion implies not only a much generalised understanding of philosophy, but also a rather simplified view of Hollywood cinema. As I will show throughout this thesis, the simple fact that Hollywood cinema aims to make money does not automatically exclude any possibility for creating more universal concepts and ideas. Nevertheless, Wartenberg (2007) recognises "that films are capable of

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the theories by Münsterberg, Bazin, Kracauer and Cavell: See Colman, F. (ed.). 2009. *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*. Durham: Acumen.

More details on Jean Epstein can be found here: Aitken, I., (2002). *European film theory and cinema: a critical introduction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

<sup>3</sup> He discussed his theory and argued for a moderate approach towards film and philosophy in contrast to what he called the more extreme or radical positions of Mulhall and Frampton in his plenary paper *Cinematic Philosophy: Defence of a moderate position*, presented at the Film-Philosophy conference at Warwick University, 2010.

giving philosophical ideas a liveliness and vivacity” (p.4) that many philosophical texts are lacking and thus may help people to better understand philosophical concepts and engage with them in a more open-minded way. One of the problems with his theory is Wartenberg’s focus on finding philosophical concepts in individual films instead of looking at cinema in general.

Stephen Mulhall takes the more ambitious route and argues for cinema’s capacity to provide a truly unique way of thinking. He initially developed his ideas in his book *On Film* (2002), in which he offers a profound and illuminating study of the *Alien* series. Later, he refined his ideas in his paper ‘Film as Philosophy: The Very Idea’ (2008). Here, he criticises the fact that many scholars either simply try to apply previously developed philosophical theories to the examination of cinema or to analyse film from the perspective of a distant observer. Mulhall argues that by doing so they fail to recognise cinema’s ability to create philosophical ideas within its own framework. He writes that film can develop “a discourse which acknowledges [...] the ways in which its words are interwoven with other words, responsive to the world and capable of being projected into new contexts [...] in ways that illuminate both words and world.” (Mulhall, 2008, p.10). What he claims here is that films are by no means always entirely unconscious about their contexts, but mostly present a certain self-reflectiveness by which they position themselves within the context of a filmmaker’s oeuvre, a specific genre or a social discourse. Mulhall further suggests that we should allow our experience of films to teach us “what ethics, art, imagination, emotions and thinking might be” and ultimately “what philosophizing might be”. (Mulhall, 2008, p.13). Consequently, Mulhall argues that the formal reasoning of philosophy may not be the only way of creating concepts and that we should be open to the suggestion that film can discuss ideas in a different way, that is by representing us with images and models of these ideas.

This notion of cinema as creating ideas and images links to Deleuze’s view of film and philosophy, which he laid out in an interview in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the

Seventies.<sup>4</sup> He remarks that Jean-Luc Godard has a nice formula: *Ce n'est pas une image juste, c'est juste une image*<sup>5</sup> and suggests that

“philosophers should say that too, and practise what they preach: no sound ideas, just ideas [...] because **sound** ideas are always ideas which conform to dominant meanings or established slogans, they are always ideas which verify something, even if that something is in the future, even if that future is revolutionary. Whereas ‘just ideas’ corresponds to what is in the making in the present, it’s a stammering of ideas, something that can only be expressed in the form of questions, questions of the sort which tend to be difficult to answer. Or else which show something utterly simple and obvious” (Deleuze, 2000, p.125, emphasis in original).

This statement seems very relevant to my thesis insofar as it aims to raise questions that cannot always be easily answered. The films discussed in the second part of the thesis seem in many ways ahead of suitable philosophical theories and pose questions that challenge the philosophical discourse not only about film but also about us and our world. In that sense cinema does teach us a new way of philosophising, as Mulhall suggests.

Another interesting contribution towards the current debate is Irving Singer’s recent book *Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film* (2008). Here, he discusses cinema as a medium that creates modern myths by combining philosophical and aesthetic concepts. His notion that cinema continues “the mythmaking function of traditional religious culture” (Sinnerbrink, 2010, p.378) is interesting, although his analyses focus on exceptional filmmakers such as Cocteau, Fellini and Kubrick, which is in contrast to my attempt to move away from this elitist focus on particularly renowned authors towards a more general discussion of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Not all these theories could be incorporated into my research and I made a conscious choice to focus on very specific philosophical theories, the reasons for this selection will hopefully become clear throughout the thesis.

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze, G., 2000. On Sur et sous la communication: three questions on six fois deux. In: Wilson, D., (ed.) *Cahiers du Cinéma. Volume 4, 1973-1978*. London: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Cited by Deleuze from Godard’s film *Vent d’est* (1969)

### Scope of research

This thesis does not directly follow the aforementioned approaches in film studies but aims to find its own trajectory to develop new ideas. More specifically, I decided not to look at psychological aspects of spectatorship, approaches from philosophy that 'read' films as language or look at the ways in which they present a certain authorship. Rather, I chose to focus on the idea of art as a redemptive power, as portrayed in various ways in the works of Nietzsche, Kracauer and Deleuze. Bringing these three thinkers and their respective ideas about illusion, art and reality together will allow me to connect traditional philosophical concepts to new developments in modern mainstream cinema. The approach of this thesis is to think about cinema from a point of view rooted in continental philosophy, but it also brings together ideas from other areas such as religious studies, classical film theory and scriptwriting. Similarly, when analysing individual cinematic examples, I treat them as significant insofar as they are symptomatic for a certain tendency in mainstream cinema at large that reflects developments in society, incorporating religious and philosophical ideas. Therefore, these films do not simply illustrate individual theoretical discourses but more general ideas about the relationship between storytelling and illusion.

The two key ideas informing this thesis are the notion of redemption and belief on the one hand and the development from movement-image to time-image on the other. These aspects are connected insofar as the argument is as follows. Firstly, we need something to believe in, but in order to be able to do so we, secondly, need to have a sense of realism and truthfulness. Finally, this truthfulness is significantly improved by the possibilities of modern digital technologies, such as computer generated images and digital editing. The philosophical theories on art, redemption and belief enable me to create a philosophical framework, while Deleuze's model of the movement-image analyses the images and narratives of mainstream cinema, which according to him are crucial in creating a system of truth and believability. The focus here is on the storytelling function of cinema and its ability to create necessary illusions, which is supported by the visual component of the film in a way that may make it all the more influential than previous illusions.

## Structure of work

Several more specific research questions result from my initial hypothesis and preliminary research. The primary question is: Are illusions a necessary part of our life? If yes, how does cinema, in particular mainstream Hollywood cinema, contribute to its creation? Resulting from this are the further questions: what are *necessary* illusions and how are they created apart from the cinema? How does cinema compare to other “illusionist” systems? In fact, what are *real* images? Furthermore, what has changed – artistically and culturally – since the invention of cinema? In which way does modern technology influence the creation of illusions?

Although both parts of the thesis are very distinct in their content, they are more closely related than it may appear on first sight. The aim of my thesis is not simply to apply the philosophical theories introduced in the first part, to the analysis of the films in Part II. Rather, whereas the first part develops the necessary foundations for an understanding of the cinematic theories presented in Part II; the film analyses in the second part demonstrate the practical relevance of these philosophical concepts. Thus, the films *continue* the debate developed by philosophy in their own terms and by doing so provide us with new insights and ideas that in turn inspire new ideas in philosophy. Here I hope to find the right balance between the formal requirements of a thesis in producing sound and well-structured arguments and the very idea that film-philosophy inspires us to depart from this traditional systematic approach and to allow the films to express their own ideas in the form of questions and images.

Based on the overall structure of the thesis, the methodology of this work will be a combination of a more theoretical textual analysis and critical film analysis. As the area of illusion and cinema is vast and complex, I have defined three central aspects in this discourse, on which I will focus in my following examination: the relation between cinema and mythology/religion; cinema and realism/reality; and modern cinema and digital technologies. Bringing these aspects together instead of treating them independently as previous theorists have done, allows me to

show how these aspects link up to create philosophical concepts in the post-modern digital age – illusions that are necessary for our culture.

In addition, I have structured the analysis of relevant background literature around the selected key writings by Friedrich Nietzsche, Siegfried Kracauer and Gilles Deleuze, which are each central to one of the above mentioned themes. This allows me to discuss the philosophical aspects of each work in its relevance to cinema as well as showing the connections between the theorists. I will then develop these essential similarities further in the second part of the thesis and discuss the philosophical concepts in relation to the analysis of the cinematic examples.

The first part of the thesis, then, aims to provide an overview of the current debates that can be related to the problem of illusion. To gain a profound basis for my examination of illusion in its relation to Hollywood cinema I will look at philosophical discourses as well as approaches from film studies. The first three chapters focus on specific key areas and each chapter evolves around one of the key theorists. The first chapter is based on Nietzsche's ideas on myth, illusion artistic creation. This is followed by Kracauer's notions on realism and the cinema. Finally I will look at Deleuze's cinema books which describe cinema's development from the movement-image to the time-image. This work forms the basis for my analysis of the most recent tendencies in mainstream cinema. In addition, each chapter will also review recent literature that provides further insights in the respective topic. By analysing these key areas, of cinema's relation to myth and religion, concepts of realism and the influence of modern digital technologies that links the two, this first part seeks to provide the groundwork for further discussion of modern mainstream cinema in the second part of the thesis.

More specifically, chapter one examines a selection of mythological, religious and ideological approaches to cinema that look at cinema as part of our cultural and social sphere. I will argue that by comparing cinema with myth and religion rather than with traditional art forms such as literature, photography and theatre, we can gain a new perspective on cinema and its metaphysical functions. The chapter will look at the way in which illusion has been interpreted and explore the role of the

narration in the creation of myths and illusions. Here, the notion of storytelling is particularly helpful in linking religious narratives and myths with cinematic creations. The first part of this opening chapter starts with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical concepts on art and his theories on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Drawing on ancient Greek culture in his first work *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche argued that human beings always had an instinctive drive to create illusions – either in the form of myth or art, which enabled them consciously to deal with the cruelty and unpredictability of daily life. Following his thoughts, aspects such as 'superficiality' and the focus on appearance become a conscious choice based on the acknowledgement of reality and not a naïve attitude of "not wanting to know". I suggest that these ideas can be applied to the analysis of the role of cinema, too; especially Nietzsche's idea of art as the creation of truth, a truth that is no less an illusion *necessary* for human existence. Following Nietzsche's notion that we create illusions to redeem us from the cruelty of reality as well as his acknowledgement of artistic drives in nature; the second part of this chapter analyses more contemporary ideas on the relationship between myth, ideology and cinema. Here, I will examine theories that discuss the subject from the perspective of film studies and sociology as well as from a theological point of view, which will enable me to discuss the subject from various angles.

Subsequently, chapter two looks at concepts of perception and illusion in relation to cinematic realism and challenges the connection between realism and reality. Initially, I will investigate Siegfried Kracauer's idea of cinema as the *redemption of physical reality* as stated in the very title of his book *Theory of Film* (1961). In this work, Kracauer wrote about the decline of belief systems as well as binding norms mankind is facing today. He also goes as far as to speculate, if cinema could be the way out of our lack of belief, caused by science, in reuniting us with the world around us. In addition to this, Kracauer seems to be the first who distinctly discusses cinema in a context of mythology and faith. This chapter will further focus on his ideas on realism, ideology and illusion and show that there is more to Kracauer's concepts than his comparisons with photography and photographic realism, which have often been criticised as naïve and vague. Although several of Kracauer's ideas may at first seem contradictory to Nietzsche's concepts discussed in the first chapter, I aim to demonstrate the elementary similarities in both

theoretical concepts. The second part of this chapter then proceeds to later concepts of cinematic realism and perception mainly by André Bazin. In addition, a recent essay by sociologist Dirk Baecker approaches realism as a form of communication and links Kracauer's theories to those of Gilles Deleuze, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter three, then, explores concepts of contemporary cinema based on Gilles Deleuze's concepts of the movement-image and the time-image. The first part follows the transition from the classic cinema of movement to a modern cinema of time. The emphasis of this analysis will be on the movement-image, its relevance for Hollywood cinema and the specific characteristics that link it to a system of believability and truthfulness. I will also raise the question if the movement-image really has lost its importance as Deleuze seems to suggest. In addition I will look at specific aspects of the time-image that may have influenced mainstream Hollywood cinema. At this point, I also intend to work out the specific connections Deleuze draws between cinema, perception and belief systems. One of the most interesting ideas in this context is Deleuze's statement that "we no longer believe in this world" (Deleuze, 1989, p.166). He then goes further by suggesting that it is the role of modern cinema to reinstate our belief in this world. After analysing both images and further relevant aspects of Deleuze's writings on cinema I proceed on to the contemporary aspects of cinema. In this context, I will discuss how Deleuze's ideas can be developed further with regard to the growing influence of digital technologies on cinema, as well as the new challenges this impact poses for theorists. In addition, I will also look at the influence Deleuze's theories had on recent theorists, particularly in the area of film-philosophy. Here, I will focus on Daniel Frampton's work *Filmosophy* (2006).

Finally I will apply the previously discussed aspects to digital cinema and introduce several theories that deal with the impact of computer generated images and digital technologies on our conception of aesthetics and realism in cinema. As we will see, the importance of new technologies lays not only with the technical aspects of image creation but also significantly challenges traditional concepts in film theory as well as philosophy. Therefore, this chapter finally brings together the previously defined key aspects and discusses notions of realism and the

creation of myths in its connection with digital cinema. These initial three chapters will thus lay out the theoretical framework for my subsequent investigation of contemporary Hollywood cinema in its relation to illusion and reality in the second part of this thesis.

The second part of the thesis will continue the ideas from previously discussed writings and analyse the relevant aspects more in detail in relation to contemporary cinematic examples, which appear to be representative for our relation between cinema, reality and illusion. Here, I will defend my claim that Hollywood cinema, rather than being mere escapism, can have an important function in providing post-modern culture with important illusions. In addition, mainstream Hollywood cinema has an influence on large parts of society and thus seems more relevant for my research question about universal ideas and concepts that reflect on and influence society at large. This second part follows the structure of the first one insofar as each of the chapters highlights one of these key areas, such as myth and illusion in chapter four, realism and illusion in chapter five as well as digital technology and illusion in chapter six. Nonetheless, all these chapters will incorporate the theories by the aforementioned key writers and emphasise the connecting elements in their theories. The aim is here to develop these key concepts further and apply them to the analysis of some significant examples of Hollywood's most recent epic cinema. The reason for my particular choice of films is that I think each of them represents a certain aspect of my theories, such as belief and redemption in *The Lord of the Rings* (dir. P. Jackson, 2001-03), realism and classic myths in *Troy* (dir. W. Petersen, 2004) and digital technologies and storytelling in *Avatar* (dir. J. Cameron, 2009). On the other hand, all three films simultaneously also refer to the other aspects of this thesis. Moreover I will explore the philosophical theories developed in the first part in its direct relation to contemporary cinema and see how they might be able to provide us with insights and inspiration for future debates in contemporary philosophy as well as film studies.

The overall question is why the last decade has seen such a dramatic rise in mythic and historic epics and how this relates not only to technological developments, but also to an on-going ideological crisis in modern Western society. Philosopher

Eric Bronson has argued that according to Nietzsche, it is the role of the artist to proclaim happiness, especially in situations that seem to be hopeless. He adds that an “artist looks at the pain of this world and does more than reproduce our world. She adds to it, enriches it, enlivens it [...]”. For Nietzsche, the artist can only exist in times of crises. It is the darkness that he lights.” (Bronson, p.77). This supports the idea that especially in the last decade, in a period of significant political, economic and social insecurity; cinema had a particularly strong output of mythic and epic narratives.

The notion of the movement-image, developed by Deleuze, will also play a key role in this part of my thesis. This does not mean that the idea of illusion, belief and redemption becomes secondary. On the contrary, according to Deleuze, this specific type of image constitutes a *system of truth*. I therefore want to explore the reasons for the status of the movement-image as *being truthful*. Moreover, I want to find out how the movement-image itself has developed and what influence this has on the believability of films. How do the post-modern feelings of uprooting, of being lost and overstrained, as Deleuze describes in relation to the situation after World War II that significantly influenced post-war cinema, relate to our age of globalisation and electronic media? In general, I want to examine the validity of the movement-image to explain contemporary mainstream cinema and ask if the advent of the new digital world has had an impact on its “truthfulness”.

In chapter four, I initially investigate the notion of myth, belief and redemption as presented in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (dir. Peter Jackson, 2001-03, USA/NZ). This film epic is not only relevant with regard to its widespread influence on the audience and its devoted followers but also because of its way to recreate mythic and religious narratives. I will discuss these films with regard to their mythic and religious dimensions within the story and as a film itself, but also compare its narrative to other mythic epics, such as the *Star Wars* series (dir. G. Lucas and others, 1977-2005) and discuss how the cinematic storytelling helps in creating alternative worlds that are capable of providing concepts on which people base their system of beliefs. Both epics have shown a new dimension of creating illusions, through their epic stories, their way of producing images as well as the

devotion they receive from large parts of the audience.<sup>6</sup>Initially, the first part of this chapter will review theories of redemption, mythic structures and the ways in which different narratives – such as epics and fairytales – create meaningful illusions. This includes an examination of Nietzsche's ideas regarding the link between happiness and suffering and the notion of the redemptive power of artistic creation. In this context, I will also look at Deleuze's notion, that cinema should reinstate our belief in the world. It is important to note that I will talk about epic narratives in cinematic terms rather than as a literary genre, as cinematic epics include are not as clear-cut as literary epics and can include a variety of other narrative structures as will be shown in the analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*.

The second part of this chapter analyses Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* more in-depth and compares the mythic elements of its story with those of other mythic narratives. In this context, I will discuss aspects such as the universe the film creates, the element of the hero's journey, and the eternal conflict between good and evil. Attention will be paid to the use of set-design and the general influence of the visual component of the film on its narrative. This provides the basis for a study of the films as cinematic epics, independently from their literary predecessor. In addition, I will explore in which way the films reflect the elements of the classic movement-image, such as binary relationships, the impression of wholeness and action-driven narratives that draw the audience in the story and allow them to 'believe' in the world on screen. Based on this idea, I will further look into the way in which the film creates concepts of the world relevant to people beyond the cinematic experience. In this context, I explore how the redemptive power of the film translates into metaphysical solace for the audience and helps us in creating unifying concepts for our own world. Moreover, I will analyse how crucial aspects of the movement-image relate to religious and mythological aspects of redemption by looking at the two narrative lines that

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<sup>6</sup> In 2002 more than 70,000 people in Australia have declared in the census form that they are followers of the Jedi faith, the religion created by the Star Wars films. Although the Australian government eventually did not recognise it as a religion, I think this example shows quite well, how far fan-cult may go. See: 'Jedi 'religion' grows in Australia'. [online] BBC. Available from: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/2218456.stm>> [Accessed 13 February 2006].

underline the overall story. Besides the theories of Nietzsche and Deleuze, the chapter will also discuss aspects of storytelling and mythic narratives.

Chapter five will explore Deleuze's concept of the action-image more indepth, based on a comparison between Wolfgang Petersen's 2004 epic *Troy* with its 1950s predecessor *Helen of Troy* (dir. R. Wise, 1956). The main question is here, how the movement-image can achieve a system of truthfulness and believability and how its most characteristic aspect – the action-image – has survived in contemporary mainstream cinema. As the focus point of this chapter is on the revival of historic epics in the last decade, I will also examine Kracauer's remarks about historic themes, which he sees as 'uncinematic'. Nevertheless, I aim to prove that the attempt at realism in the more recent examples brings them closer to his ideas of 'cinematic content'. In the second part of the chapter, I will analyse the two versions of the historic myth around the Trojan War. Based on the assumptions of all three key writers, which claimed that art/cinema reflects the issues and beliefs of a society, I compare the 1950s epic *Helen of Troy* with the contemporary version. The aim is to illustrate a shift in the attitudes towards realism, in the visual representation as well as in the narrative. Firstly, I will examine how modern concerns about war and ideological crises influence the narrative. As Judith E. Bernstock (1993) asserted in her essay 'Classical Mythology in Twentieth-Century Art: An Overview of a Humanistic Approach':

"The idea of war has been a constant element in the lives of contemporary artists, either as an existing phenomenon or as the threat of nuclear disaster. Understandably, several modern artists have looked to Homer's Iliad for inspiration, and have identified with its legendary heroes embroiled in the Trojan War, the paradigm of all wars." (p.156).

Secondly, I will look at the changes in the movement-image and the increasing influence of elements of the time-image on the creation of cinematic myths. The hypothesis will be that while maintaining the general model of the movement-image, certain features of the time-image actually help enhancing the overall impact of the story and create a more reflective mood within the action-driven narrative. By playing with its own qualities and using them in more creative ways, the movement-image thus manages to renew itself and maintains its believability instead of descending into simple clichés.

Comparing the two epics, I also try to uncover why the particular genre of historic epics has been so popular at certain times and see how its revival relates to social and cultural changes. In this way I try to prove my hypothesis that the need for grand epic narratives is particularly strong in times of ideological crisis and that contrary to Deleuze's prediction, the cinematic influence of the movement-image has not ceased after the Second World War. I will further show how the new possibilities of technologies have had an influence on the way stories are told and modified the narratives of the new epics of the last decade.

Consequently, chapter six then looks at the most recent developments in digital cinema and continues the debate on the increasing link between movement-image and time-image. Looking at the latest trends in digital cinema, such as 3D technology and completely digitally created feature films, I explore how this further pushes the boundaries of the movement-image by apparently shifting the focus from the story towards the images. The question is also, how digital technology can develop from being a mere tool that at best enhances a story into a crucial element *of* the story. The basis of this chapter will be Deleuze's suggestion that we may need a new set of images for the electronic age. In contrast, I argue for an increasing mix of movement-image and time-image.

The second part of this chapter then focuses on the most recent milestone in digital development, namely James Cameron's *Avatar* (dir. J. Cameron, 2009, USA/UK). Here, I will investigate the significance of its hypermodern imagery, its rather conservative narrative as well as its impact on a contemporary audience that is increasingly influenced by a video game aesthetic. In addition, I will also look at philosophical questions regarding the blurring between actual and virtual as well as evaluating the influence this has on the narrative structure of modern action epics. Deleuze had seen the shift from actuality to virtuality as crucial for the time-image, which further seems to shift the focus in its direction. As he wrote in his second cinema book, the "direct time-image is a phantom which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom. This image is virtual, in opposition to the actuality of the movement-image. But, if virtual is opposed to actual, it is not opposed to real, far from it." (p.40). This final

chapter will therefore have a closer look at this aspect and its influence not just on cinematic images, but also on philosophical concepts, such as the link between body and mind as well as fragmentation and our perception of reality. The chapter concludes that digital technologies can present new creative opportunities not only for filmmakers, but also for philosophers in providing a new dimension to create new possible worlds and thus stimulating new ways of thinking.

All films analysed in the second part are not simply seen as unique and outstanding examples of recent Hollywood cinema, but have a direct connection to the philosophical concepts developed in Part I. In this way, the films reflect not only tendencies in cinema, but also in modern thinking. The chapters show the line of thought from the more traditional mythic ideas of redemption towards the ultimate move beyond the physical boundaries that present us with ideas of spirituality and rebirth on an entirely new level. On the cinematic level, we look at the rising influence of the time-image, but at the same time we see how the movement-image manages to renew itself. As a consequence, the ultimate model for contemporary cinema may lie in a composition of both, which reflects the increasingly blurred boundaries in a variety of other fields, such as actual/virtual, human/machine and mind/body. In this way it also encourages us to blur the boundaries of theory by moving beyond analysing contemporary cinema either in terms of film theory or philosophy alone, but as film-philosophy.

In summary, the thesis supports the idea that illusions are a necessary part of our culture and illustrates how the revival of grand epic narratives in mainstream cinema in the last decade is linked not only to technological developments but to a distinct development in the social sphere. As filmmaker Martin Scorsese once remarked in an interview, cinema answers “an ancient quest for the common unconscious. [it fulfils] a spiritual need that people have to share a common memory.”<sup>7</sup> In that way, cinema becomes the ‘mythmaking machine’ par excellence in a world that has increasing difficulties in creating unifying concepts and positive illusions that can inspire and give hope.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *Vanity Fair*, March 2006, p.134

**Part I:**

*How real is reality?* – On the relation of  
reality, art and illusion

## Chapter One:

### ***From dream factory to cathedrals of pop culture – mythological, religious and ideological approaches to cinema***

As outlined in the introduction, in this opening chapter I will discuss the relationship between art, ideology and religion and see how this relationship can be applied to cinema. I start my quest with an analysis of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and the unique approach he develops towards the connection between art and life. Here, I will look at the redemptive qualities of cinema, the importance of creativity and artistic instincts in our interaction with the world and the role of stories in our belief. I will further examine Nietzsche's criticism of rationality and his concept of wisdom as a higher form of knowledge.

I then proceed to more recent studies in this field that directly relate the ideas of illusion and belief to cinema. In this context I will discuss *Screening the Sacred* (1995) by Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr., a study that analyses the existing religious, mythological and ideological approaches to cinema. They also describe the importance of storytelling in all aspects of the creation of myth and storytelling and emphasise that it is not only the so called art-house cinema that is able to interpret religious and ideological themes but defend that mainstream Hollywood cinema has an important place in our society. Whereas Martin and Ostwalt analyse the subject area from the perspective of film studies, John C. Lyden's book *Film as Religion* (2003), examines the relationship between cinema, myth and religion from the perspective of theological studies. He also acknowledges the role of storytelling in the development of religious ideas and criticises similar to Martin and Ostwalt the often limited approach in this field which only focuses on certain 'intellectual' films.

At the end of this chapter, I will have a closer look at Richard Allen's work *Projecting Illusion* (1995). Here, I will focus particularly on his critique of ideological theory in relation to cinema and his notion that the cinematic illusion requires an active spectator that participates in the illusion. Similar to the previous writers he states the importance of the narrative in the creation of convincing cinematic illusions. His ideas about illusion, cinema and its role in our life link all theories to

the concepts of Nietzsche developed in the first part of this chapter. I will thus show how the storytelling function links cinema with myth and religion as well as demonstrate the redemptive qualities that can result from artistic creation.

### 1.1 *Why we need illusions* - Nietzsche's philosophy of art

Unlike the other theorists discussed in this thesis, Friedrich Nietzsche did not have the possibilities to discuss cinema directly. Nevertheless I shall demonstrate, why I consider his theories not just relevant but crucial for my analysis of the illusive power of cinema. Although the main focus will be on Nietzsche's first work *The Birth of Tragedy*, I will also introduce several ideas he discusses in later writings. Despite finding a variety of references to Nietzsche in writings on cinema, for example in Deleuze's work, this first work on ancient Greek art and culture remains largely ignored by scholars discussing Nietzsche in relation to cinema.

Even though Nietzsche studied classical philology and had a profound knowledge of ancient Greek culture, he never seemed to be interested in simply theorising historical facts and writings. It was rather the fascination of what he perceived as the Ancient Greek life style, which was strongly influenced by Romanticism. His concept of Greek culture also becomes the counterpart to his perception of Christian culture, which he increasingly condemns throughout his entire work. Yet Nietzsche's discussion of Greek culture is not just interesting as symbolic antithesis to Christianity. Moreover, it is the strong link between society and belief, between everyday life and mythology, which makes it so relevant for this thesis.

Reading *The Birth of Tragedy*, it soon becomes clear that this study is not primarily a philological examination of the genealogy of Attic tragedy, but rather a philosophical discourse about the origins and reasons of art in general. Throughout the book, questions about the reasons and justifications of artistic practice are developed into questions about the way we can justify our life. In his *Attempt at Self-Criticism*, an introductory chapter that Nietzsche added to a later

edition of *The Birth of Tragedy*, he describes his writings as an *Artists-Metaphysic*. More specifically, Nietzsche (1999) explains that the purpose of this work was not only “to look at science through the prism of the artist,” but also to look “at art through the prism of life.”(p.5). This connection he draws between art and life will be crucial for my further examinations.

Moreover, ideas of belief and ideology are separated from the area of morality and ethics and discussed in aesthetic terms, which do not automatically involve a value judgement. This is highlighted in the aforementioned introduction, where Nietzsche emphasises the anti-moral aspect of his work. Nietzsche (1999) claims that “art and not morality – is the true metaphysical activity of man” and further notes “that the existence of the world is justified [...] only as an aesthetic phenomenon” (p.8), a statement that appears several times in his book. This point is important for my analysis as it may help us to understand aspects of Hollywood cinema independently from evocations of the manipulative and immoral character of films. In Nietzsche’s later theories on judgement, for example in *Beyond Good and Evil*, the concept of art as an alternative perspective towards life will also become ever more relevant.

As Judith E. Bernstock (1993) has shown in her essay on twentieth century visual art, painters such as Francis Bacon, Giorgio de Chirico and Mark Rothko were strongly influenced by their reading of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and his interpretation of the subject of myth and redemption. Bernstock argues that many artists of that time used mythological imagery and ideas to provide a common ground of understanding, which is accessible to everybody and that the painters named above have been influenced by Nietzsche’s description of a worldview that is based on the artistic forces of the Apollonian and Dionysian. This further supports my ideas about the relevance of mythic concepts in the interpretation of our world, which I will discuss in this thesis. Moreover, Bernstock also writes that mythological themes seem to become especially relevant in times of social and political disorder; that is in times of crisis as I have suggested in my initial hypothesis. As mentioned in the introduction, these crises can take place on various levels – political, social or personal – as well as differ in scope. As social crises are often not unique, mythic narratives often help to put emphasise

reoccurring themes in our experience of crises. According to Bernstock, artists often use mythic themes to demonstrate a continuum in human experience, representing primordial elements, such as grief, fear and violence. Bernstock (1993) writes that for artists the “timeless tragic subject matter of the myth has been the means through which they can express universal and eternal concerns.” (p.156). This idea of universal experiences that can be understood throughout history will be particularly evident in the representation of the Trojan War in cinema, which I will analyse in chapter five. There I will demonstrate how strong an ancient myth can be influenced by the times in which it is told.

In general, *The Birth of Tragedy* can be divided in three parts or themes. In the first part, Nietzsche examines the two antipodal concepts in art that are represented by the Greek deities Apollo and Dionysos. Here, he looks at the interaction of the Dionysian with the Apollonian as well as the development of Greek culture and more specifically the attic tragedy as a result of this duality. The second part investigates the reasons for the decline of Greek tragedy, which for Nietzsche coincides with the decline of Greek culture and mythology in general. Nietzsche holds the emergence of optimistic science, symbolised by the figure of Socrates, responsible for this waning of mythic concepts. His idea is that the substitution of myth and tragic culture by enlightenment and optimistic science brings about a variety of negative consequences. This notion returns later, in the writings of Kracauer and Deleuze, albeit in different forms. The third part of *The Birth of Tragedy* discusses the options for a rebirth of tragic art through a new form of music theatre, represented essentially by Richard Wagner. After Nietzsche’s break with Wagner, he became sceptical of this possibility, but there are several ideas about the way in which tragic art could be revived, which I consider relevant in relation to cinema. My analysis of *The Birth of Tragedy* will roughly follow this structure and aims to link each aspect to our discourse on cinema and illusion.

To begin with, the term Dionysian is very significant for Nietzsche’s entire philosophy, as he uses the name rather as a metaphor than in its strict sense related to the Greek god Dionysos. More precisely, Nietzsche unites a variety of themes from Greek mythology under this name, such as the barbaric and titanic.

(See: *Birth of Tragedy*, section 4). At this point, his main aim is to express the wild, natural, free spirited, but also brutal connotations of these terms.

Moreover, Nietzsche also employs the name Dionysos to express other aspects of his theories, especially to create a contrast to Christian culture and morality. As already noted, Nietzsche largely uses Greek culture and myth as an antithesis to Christianity. This is manifest in a statement from the above mentioned self-criticism that prefaces *The Birth of Tragedy*. Here, Nietzsche (1967) describes his choice of terminology as follows:

“It was *against* morality that my instinct turned with this questionable book, long ago; it was an instinct that aligned itself with life and that discovered for itself a fundamentally opposite doctrine and valuation of life – purely artistic and *anti-Christian*. What to call it? As a philologist and man of words I baptized it, not without taking some liberty – for who could claim to know the rightful name of the Antichrist? – in the name of a Greek god: I called it Dionysian.” (p.24, emphasis in original).

It is therefore important to keep this metaphorical approach in mind when discussing Nietzsche’s theories on Greek tragedy. The advantage of this liberal use of terminology is, however, that it can be discussed beyond its historical, philological applications as metaphors for a distinct characteristic of artistic practice that not only applies to ancient Greek culture, but to art in general. As a consequence, it can similarly be applied to cinema.

In addition, he also draws the connection between art and illusion by stating that “Enchantment is the precondition of all dramatic art.” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.44). Nietzsche thus begins his analysis of Greek tragedy with a general study on our relationship with art. According to him, every human being has artistic powers which we show for example while dreaming. The connection with dream also frequently occurs in cinema, which of all art forms seems to come closest to our

experience of dream.<sup>8</sup> For Nietzsche dream becomes the model for all visual arts. He further states – contentiously – that even when we are dreaming, we are always able to decide if it is a dream or not. The interesting point about this aspect is that Nietzsche here emphasises the conscious aspect of image creation. Images are not simply brought upon us by some external source, but we actively and creatively participate in their creation. This view also applies to my claim that illusions in general are something that people actively create, or at least participate in their creation. In this way we can argue that cinema cannot simply be seen as a medium that dupes the audience with an illusion based on its own ideology, but it always needs the active participation of the viewer. I will return to this point at the end of the chapter when discussing the theories by Richard Allen.

For Nietzsche, myths and some works of art, such as the Attic tragedy, function in nearly the same way as dreams. Like dreams, they are not intended to entertain us but have a “healing” function. Even though Nietzsche does not explicitly use the term “healing” at this point, he describes artistic illusions as something that saves us from the recognition of the deficiencies of everyday life. Moreover, similar to his description of dreams he also points out that the activity of creating illusions is not a naïve one, where people are duped by illusion, but a pro-active and conscious process of creating illusions.

Based on this link with dream, Nietzsche deduces that, all artistic tendencies have their origin directly in nature, that is to say are instinctive and elementary to our life. He further emphasises that we are just a part of nature, which is constantly creating an incredible amount of images. Our main activity is to discover or use the images nature provides, and eventually we realise that we are just one of them. In other words, “we may well assume we are already images and artistic projections for the true creator of art, and that our highest dignity lies in our

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Jean-Louis Baudry has argued that watching a film is similar to dreaming as it provides an experience of regression in which the spectator finds the self reflected in the primitive, infantile state. See his essay *Ideological effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus* in Baudry, L. & Cohen, M. (eds.), 1999. *Film Theory and Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press. In addition, *Cinema Dreams. Projection. Imagination. Vision*, 2009, a collection of essays edited by W. Pauleit, et al, discusses a wide variety of aspects in the discourse of the dreamlike qualities of cinema. German edition. CD-ROM with English version and film clips. Berlin: Bertz and Fischer.

significance as works of art” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.32). When we assume that we are all part of a universal artwork then it is easy to understand how artistic creation as natural impulse can develop various outlets. In that sense art, mythology and even religion are not entirely different, but are all in a way systems of complex images and ideas that are embedded in compelling stories or illusions. The difference between them is in the details and messages, but not in their essence. Therefore, it is also important that for Nietzsche art is not something that is added to our life through civilisation but an essential part of it.

The ideas about dream and illusion are not only relevant for our interpretation of art. What is more, they also have a direct implication for our view of the world. As Nietzsche (1956) writes, the reflections about dreams and art have led many thinkers to the assumption that “our everyday reality, too, is an illusion, hiding another, totally different kind of reality.” (p.20). Nevertheless, for Nietzsche this is not automatically a criticism of our perception of reality. On the contrary, both levels are essential to human life. On the one hand, the acknowledgement of this other, darker reality is important for our understanding that there is a *need* to create another, lighter illusion of reality. In relation to ancient Greek culture Nietzsche (1999) describes that phenomenon as follows:

“The Greeks knew and felt the terrors and horrors of existence; in order to live at all they had to place in front of these things the resplendent, dream-born figures of the Olympians. That enormous distrust of the Titanic forces of nature, that moira<sup>9</sup> which throned, unpitying, above all knowledge [...] all this was constantly and repeatedly overcome by the Greeks, or at least veiled and withdrawn from view, by means of the artistic middle world of the Olympians. In order to be able to live, the Greeks were obliged, by the most profound compulsion, to create these gods.” (p.23).

Nietzsche’s claim that illusions and myths are not only something that has been added to society because people did not know better, but a necessity that was created out of a profound understanding, is a thought, which may help us understand why so many people in our modern enlightened times feel a longing

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<sup>9</sup> In Greek mythology, Moira is ‘fate’ or ‘necessity’, a power to which even the Olympic gods have to submit. See: *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. 1996. London: Cassell Publishers.

for illusion, even when this illusion is ‘only’ a film. I will explore this concept further throughout the following chapters.

The cruel and unpredictable world, which is reflected in Greek mythology, is also the basis for the rise of the Attic tragedy. According to Nietzsche, the latter is neither created out of a desire to present a copy of everyday reality nor merely fantastical. His claim is that the mythological background was as real to the ancient Greeks as the physical reality they perceived around them, so there was no need to make a distinction between the two. In other words, the boundaries between myth, reality and fiction were much more fluent.

In addition, Nietzsche claims that mythology like art is *created* by man and for the same reasons, namely to explain, deal with and structure everyday reality to provide us with a reason to live. He writes that the “same drive which calls art into being to complete and perfect existence and thus to seduce us into continuing to live, also gave rise to the world of the Olympians in which the Hellenic ‘Will’ held up a transfiguring mirror to itself.” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.24) This notion of transfiguration is important when Nietzsche claims that myth and tragedy – ancient storytelling – is not meant to be simply a way to create an account or image of reality, but to overcome it. Nevertheless, Nietzsche makes also clear that this transfiguration, through art or myth, does not delude our perception of reality. On the contrary, it points us towards the tragic aspects of life and makes us both see the cruelty of the world and realise the necessity for the world of illusion and appearances at the same time.

This duality in the nature of myth is according to Nietzsche represented by the two opposing principles of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Dionysian element refers to the unpredictability of nature and the suffering that manifests our reality, whereas the Apollonian presents the world of illusion and appearances.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Dionysian element is the one that unites us with nature and temporarily frees us from the restrictions of civilisation. “Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature

which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.” (Nietzsche, 1967, p.37). However, the Dionysian aspect of culture also shows us the cruel, wild and unpredictable side of our life. Here, Nietzsche also unites ideas of older aspects of Greek mythology, such as the dark realm of the Titans, with the more recent notion of the Dionysos myth, which was initially not part of the Greek Pantheon<sup>10</sup>. According to Nietzsche, the Dionysos cult with its wild, orgiastic elements reintroduces the original ground of suffering that has been covered by the Olympic deities.

In turn, this then requires the power of the Apollonian to maintain the balance. For Nietzsche, the artistic element personified in the god Apollo presents the antithesis to the figure of Dionysos and its wild cults. According to him, “the power of the epic Apollonian spirit is such that it transfigures the most horrible deeds before our eyes by the charm of illusion, and redemption through illusion.” (Nietzsche, 1956, p.78, transl. by F. Golffing).

[At this point I want briefly to draw attention to a significant problem I came across while reviewing Nietzsche’s writings, namely the considerable differences in the translations. While these differences often are a matter of style, they become crucial for my analysis when Nietzsche speaks about the concepts of illusion and redemptions as in the quoted passage. In the original work Nietzsche uses the German expression “Erlösung durch Schein”(1994b, p.168), which is in the English versions translated with “release through semblance” (1999, p.61, translation by R. Speirs), “redemption through appearance” (1995, p.42, translated by C. P. Fadiman) or “redemption through illusion” as above by Golffing and similarly by Walter Kaufmann (1967, p.45)<sup>11</sup>. Especially the translation by Speirs loses the unique point of the statement, apparently trying to implement a

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<sup>10</sup> There are several theories about the origin of Dionysos, but he is generally described as coming from Asia Minor, from Persia or even from as far as India. Therefore, Dionysos brings a variety of new philosophical concepts to Greece, which were previously unknown to Greek culture, such as orgiastic cults. For more information on this subject, see for example Grant, M., 1989. *Myths of the Greeks & Romans*. London: Weidenfels & Nicolson.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Kaufmann later shifts between the words redemption and release, even if the German term used in the text remains the same, which makes the reading even more confusing.

“neutral” translation. But Nietzsche uses the term Erlösung = Redemption very consciously with all its religious and moral connotations throughout his work, which the term “release” does not reflect. Additionally, the German word “Schein” is even more difficult to translate or explain in English as it involves the terms appearance, illusion, semblance as well as shiny, bright and luminous, depending on the context but simultaneously implying the other nuances. Nietzsche (1999, p.16) for example plays with the latter meaning when he explains that the name Apollo is derived from the Greek origin as “*the luminous one*”. As the bright and shiny connotation also involves the element of superficiality and mirroring, he refers to Apollo simultaneously as the “sun-like” god of beauty, appearances and illusion. I will thus use several translations throughout this paper, depending on which I perceive as the most suitable one in the particular instance.]

The notion of *redemption through illusion* brings us to a crucial term in our debate about illusion and cinema, the notion of redemption. As described in *The Birth of Tragedy*, the soothing characteristics of artistic creation gives us reasons to live and prevents us from drowning in desperation. Nietzsche (1967) states that the more we become aware of the power of the two competing artistic drives and their longing for redemption through illusion, “the more I feel myself impelled to the metaphysical assumption that the truly-existent and primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory, also needs the rapturous vision, the pleasurable illusion, for its continuous redemption” (p.45). What Nietzsche describes here is the profound joy *of* and need *for* this redemption through illusion.

In contrast to the Apollonian world of images and harmony, Dionysian music and dance symbolise for Nietzsche a kind of original language, in which nature can express itself freely. This “language” is instinctive and universal, not individual. As a consequence, this expression of the Dionysian in its pure state will lead to the abolition of the individual by uniting man with the world. Only the power of the Apollonian and its emphasis on the principium individuationis saves us from fully losing ourselves in this Dionysian bond with nature. When discussing Deleuze in later chapters, we will link this idea about the unity between man and the world to cinema, and see how Hollywood cinema in particular aims at creating a universal worldview while still maintaining the role of the individual in it.

There are strong reasons for maintaining the significance of the individual and balancing the Dionysian insight into nature with the Apollonian world of harmony and illusions. The awareness of nature as an all-powerful unity also points to the irrelevance of our own existence in the greater scheme of things. This always bears the risk that we eventually fall into lethargy and lose our will to exist altogether, an idea that was developed by Schopenhauer in his pessimistic philosophy.

According to Nietzsche, reflection about our own existence can paralyse us; only positive illusions encourage us to act. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche (1999) compares Dionysian men with Shakespeare's Hamlet:

“both have gazed into the true essence of things, they have acquired knowledge and they find action repulsive, for their actions can do nothing to change the eternal essence of things; they regard it as laughable or shameful that they should be expected to set to rights a world so out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion” (1999, p.40).

What distinguishes the Dionysian Greeks from Hamlet is that they had the Apollonian element of illusion as a redemptive power.

It is important to note that not only does the Dionysian need the Apollonian element as a balance, the Apollonian world of illusions need the Dionysian world as its base and inspiration. In that sense, Nietzsche (1999) writes that the duality “shows us that the whole world of agony is needed in order to compel the individual to generate the releasing and redemptive vision and then, lost in contemplation of that vision, to sit calmly in his rocking boat in the midst of the sea.” (p.26). This shows that the illusions do not simply replace the more dire reality behind it, but that they can only be generated upon *the awareness* of the abysmal grounds of life. We are therefore not dealing with a naïve attitude of “not-wanting-to-know”, but a conscious realisation of the necessity of illusions. So, both the Dionysian and the Apollonian are involved in an eternal circle of destruction and creation, eternal becoming. Our metaphysical solace is then “that in the ground of things, and despite all changing appearances, life is indestructibly

mighty and pleasurable” and “goes on ineradicably behind and beyond all civilization” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.39). This shows how Nietzsche applies his initial thoughts on art to a wider discussion about the importance of illusions for our life.

According to Nietzsche, the Greeks were lucky insofar as they had their art as a healing influence, because art “alone can re-direct those repulsive thoughts about the terrible or absurd nature of existence into representations with which man can live” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.40). Art thus redeems us from despair by means of the “*sublime* – the taming of horror through art; and the *comedy* – the artistic release from the repulsion of the absurd.” (Nietzsche, 1993, p.40, emphasis in original). This might also help us to explain why both aspects – the epic-sublime and the comedy – are represented in the most popular genres of Hollywood cinema. Deleuze will discuss both aspects in relation to his action-image, as I will demonstrate in chapter three.

Following his analysis of the duality of artistic powers, Nietzsche examines the reasons for the decline of the Attic tragedy, which he sees as symbolic for the decline of Greek culture and tragic myth in general. According to Nietzsche, this decline was essentially caused by the advent of optimistic science, represented by the figure of Socrates and brought into tragedy by the plays of Euripides. Both these characters represent for Nietzsche the demystification and rationalisation of life through science and logical thinking, which subsequently destroys not only myth but also art, which loses its power to enchant and thus to redeem us. This notion in particular also influences the later theories by Kracauer and Deleuze and it will therefore be present throughout this work.

Whereas the antagonists of the first part of *The Birth of Tragedy* – Apollo and Dionysos – co-existed in a harmonious unity, the opposition between tragic spirit and optimistic rationalism, represented by Socrates, is exclusive. Nietzsche claims that the downfall of tragic Greek myth is exemplary for the destiny of all religions – they are doomed as soon as people try to theorise them. More specifically, he argues that religions die when their mythical premises are systematised, which in turn means that people lose their intuitive sense and understanding of a myth and

replace it by claiming a historic, i.e. “rational”, foundation for their religion. The problem with this shift is that without myth “all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy; only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement. Only by myth can all energies of fantasy and Apolline dream be saved from aimless meandering.” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.108).

What is more, the loss of mythological concepts also results in the loss of positive illusions about the future and the existence of mankind. Nietzsche (1999) states that along with tragic myth “the Hellene had given up his belief in his immortality, not only his belief in an ideal past, but also his belief in an ideal future.” (p.56). If we can no longer believe in our world and have hopes for the future, this also has an effect on our happiness and inspiration. We may well get on with our life, but we will not have any higher ideals to aspire to. This secularisation of myth is represented in an interesting way in the modern epic *Troy* (2004, dir. W. Petersen), which I will discuss in chapter 5. The main problem Nietzsche sees here is that although science tries to explain the world to us by destroying the ‘false beliefs’ of the mythological foundation, it is not able to provide us with a consoling explanation for the unpredictability and cruelty of life, which would compensate the positive illusions myth gave us. As Nietzsche (1999) writes:

“one also finds a profound delusion which first appeared in the person of Socrates, namely the imperturbable belief that thought, as it follows the thread of causality, reaches down into the deepest abysses of being, and that it is capable, not simply of understanding existence, but even of correcting it. This sublime metaphysical illusion is an instinct which belongs inseparably to science, and leads it to its limits time after time, at which point it must transform itself into art”. (p.73).

What we can draw from this quote is Nietzsche’s observation that certain areas of life are inaccessible from a scientific point of view and can only be explained by more elusive means. Therefore art will be our final saviour that provides us with universal, spiritual concepts for our life – by creating them.

The shift from feelings and experiences to abstract thinking and logical models is another aspect of this new rationalism. The loss of sensual experiences and intuitive wisdom, however, also means that we are losing our connection with

nature. The tragic human is replaced by the theoretical human. Yet, whereas the Apollonian art of illusion saved the Dionysian man from agony, the theoretical man, e.g. Hamlet, does not have this solace. It is, however, not the case that this idea about redemption and solace condemns knowledge *per se*. Rather, the contrast is made between rationality as scientific-logical knowledge and wisdom as tragic-spiritual knowledge. According to Nietzsche (1993) there always comes a point where we ought to ask, “Is that which is unintelligible to me necessarily unintelligent? Might there be a realm of wisdom from which the logician is excluded? Might art even be a necessary correlative and supplement to science?” (p.71). The crucial idea that I derive from this statement, is that spiritual wisdom that includes art and illusion is not simply a *subtraction* of knowledge, something that is less real, but could also be seen as an *addition*, a form of deeper knowledge that provides more profound insights. This deeper insight – tragic knowledge – can be terrifying at times and therefore art is needed “both as protection and remedy, if we are to bear it.” (Nietzsche, 1993, p.75). The contrast between wisdom and knowledge will also play a significant part in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as we will see in chapter four.

The advantage of wisdom is further that it does not contradict mythological ideas or tries to rationalise them, but respects these stories as symbolic ways of interpreting life. Therefore wisdom or tragic knowledge can provide us with models for the aspects of life that cannot be explained by science. In this sense, wisdom and art are closely related and not oppositions, as both are based on intuition and creativity and are looking for a deeper meaning behind the rational categories and explanations. This is why for Nietzsche one of the most significant achievements of ancient Greek culture was that it declared wisdom and not knowledge as its highest purpose.

Another aspect of wisdom is that in contrast to scientific knowledge, wisdom takes a more universal approach to describe the world, thus avoiding a fragmented – and limited – view of the world. The notion of fragmentation is further developed by Kracauer and I will discuss this subject in more detail in the next chapter.

Wisdom, however, is not concerned with the examination of details and singular effects, but regards the world and its creatures as a whole. As Nietzsche (1999) expresses it, “wisdom is not deceived by the seductive distractions of the sciences; instead it turns its unmoved gaze on the total image of the world” (p.87). This perspective is also important for both Kracauer and Deleuze in their discussion of cinema, as we shall see in the rest of this thesis.

A statement that is particularly suitable to be applied to cinema is Nietzsche’s notion that our “metaphysical delight in the tragic translates instinctive, unconscious Dionysiac wisdom into the language of images: we take pleasure in the negation of the hero, the supreme appearance of the Will, because he is, after all, mere appearance, and because the eternal life of the Will is not affected by his annihilation” (Nietzsche, 1999, p.80). We not only take pleasure in Happy Endings, but also in tragedies, especially when they provide us with a sense that even though these tragic things happen, life goes on and people live to tell the story. Besides, this further reflects the previous argument that both the deeper understanding of Dionysian wisdom and the superficiality created by Apollonian illusion, is necessary to give life balance.

In Nietzsche’s later writings, the aspect of illusions as an essential part of our life becomes increasingly relevant, even though the focus shifts from aesthetic considerations to a critique of morality and judgement. Greek culture, however, remains the model for Nietzsche’s philosophy in general. The notion of superficiality plays an essential part in his thought. Nietzsche interprets this superficiality not as trivial and ignorant, but as a superficiality resulting from a deeper knowledge of the world. In his preface to *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche (2001) summarises this thought as follows: “Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live: what is needed for that is to stop bravely at the surface, the fold, the skin; to worship appearance, to believe in shapes, tones, words – in the whole Olympus of appearance! Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity!” (p.8). To our common understanding of superficiality, this seems absurd, but it becomes clearer when we recall the interdependence between Dionysian wisdom and Apollonian illusion, where not only the world of appearances is needed to redeem us from

suffering, but also the profound knowledge of suffering is needed to inspire and create the illusions.

Nietzsche subsequently applies his belief in the importance or even necessity of illusions to his critique of a system of judgement. He claims that our problem is not so much the erroneous assumption that we are able to decide between true and false but the fact that we derive ethical judgements from this presumption, such as “right” and “wrong”. Since Nietzsche here supports the assumption that there are no absolute truths and everything is open to interpretation, our moral judgements have no foundation. He denies the idea that there exists an independent and objective structure in the world and that there are corresponding relations between the world and our description of it.

In his work *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche questions the conditions under which we decide what is true or false. He poses the question, what “compels us to assume there exists any essential antithesis between ‘true’ and ‘false’? Is it not enough to suppose grades of apparentness and as it were lighter and darker shades and tones of appearance [...]? Why could the world which is of any concern to us – not be a fiction?” (Nietzsche, 1990, p.65-66). Even though he does not link this statement directly to his earlier aesthetic works, it is easy to see how the notion of our world as fictional yet nevertheless useful relates to his previous theories about art as a necessary part in the creation of our perception of the world.

According to Nietzsche, the only criteria for making judgements about our world are in which way they are useful and life-affirming. This perspectivist conception of truth has always been present in what we call common knowledge, which is usually developed under functional aspects. In Nietzsche’s (1990) words, he “who has seen deeply into the world knows what wisdom there is in the fact that men are superficial. It is their instinct for preservation which teaches them to be fickle, light and false.” (p.84). Therefore, we can well discuss illusions in terms where they are positive and inspirational or negative and manipulative. The argument is therefore that illusions are not necessarily negative in contrast to a reality that is positive, but can be interpreted in various ways. As outlined in my introduction, I

aim to focus on the positive aspects of illusion throughout this thesis although more critical aspects will also be introduced towards the end in chapter six.

Nietzsche not only criticises the way in which society has treated illusion as something that needs to be overcome. He also claims that as soon as we destroy the world of illusions, we consequently also destroy our ideal of reality. This in turn abolishes the possibility for any form of judgement as we have no ideal concept to which we can refer. This is exactly what optimistic science has done, and as a result people have lost their unconditioned belief in the world. However, belief seems to be the only possible way to deal with our world. Nietzsche (1990) points out that:

“for the purpose of preserving beings such as ourselves, such judgements must be believed to be true; although they might of course still be false judgements! Or more clearly, crudely and basically: synthetic judgements a priori should not ‘be possible’ at all: we have no right to them, in our mouths they are nothing but false judgements. But belief in their truth is, of course, necessary as foreground belief and ocular evidence belonging to the perspective optics of life.” (p.42)

A century later, Deleuze will claim that people have lost their belief in the world and it is the role of cinema to reinstate this belief. Before discussing Deleuze’s theories more in-depth in the third chapter, I will look at several contemporary writers that link cinema to other belief systems, such as myth, religion and ideology.

## 1.2. Cinema as modern myth – contemporary approaches towards the relationship between art and faith

As we have seen, the connection between art and belief has been noticed long before the invention of cinema. Yet the power of the cinematic illusion, the cult surrounding individual films and the experience of going to the cinema has subsequently also drawn the attention not only of film scholars but also of researchers in the fields of philosophy, cultural studies and theology. The aspects of this discourse range from religious symbolism in films to the ritual acts of

cinema going. For my examination, I want to focus on three works that all contribute to the debate from different angles. By connecting these studies to Nietzsche's theories in the first part of this chapter, we will gain a deeper insight into the religious and mythic qualities of cinema, supporting my hypothesis about the importance of illusions. The first two works discussed will look at the links between cinema and religious studies, whereas Richard Allen's book, discussed at the end, looks at cinema from the perspective of ideology and philosophy.

One of the most interesting studies that have contributed to the current debate is *Screening the Sacred. Religion, Myth and Ideology in Popular American Cinema*(1995).<sup>12</sup> Even though the book includes a very wide range of topics, the general approach to cinema is from the perspective of film studies. Nevertheless, in his introduction to the volume Martin criticises the fact that both film scholars and theologians have largely ignored the connection between the two domains. The result is that so far little research in this field has been carried out. In addition, the studies that deal with the subject have mainly focussed on art films as if to say that only 'intellectual' cinema can have religious elements. In line with my reasoning to look at mainstream Hollywood cinema, Martin suggests that popular culture most immediately reflects the tendencies in modern society and gives us an idea about what the majority of people is interested in. Thus, it is not only interesting but also important to look at popular mainstream cinema and take Hollywood's impact on modern culture seriously. More specifically Martin argues that since Western religious traditions, "have had a tremendous impact upon Western culture and all of its art forms, theological scholars are positioned to make many valuable insights about the modern Western art of Hollywood film." (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p.6). In that way he argues for a more interdisciplinary approach to the field that sees cinema as a cultural phenomenon alongside religion, myth and ideology, which inspires a debate that brings scholars from various disciplines together.

Following these three aspects, the book divides the current debate in mythological, theological, and ideological approaches towards cinema. Martin and

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<sup>12</sup> A collection of essays published by Joel W. Martin and Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr.

Ostwalt suggest that analysing both the convincing and problematic aspects of each approach might enable us to find a fourth way, which brings all these aspects together. However, they leave this task for other scholars to do. I hope that my research might contribute a valuable step in this direction.

According to the definition given by Martin and Ostwalt, myth exposes both the *ideas* and *ideals* of a culture. After creating the myth, the original story, we develop rites to keep our attention focussed on the sacred, such as systems of purity to help us deal with negative aspects of life and superior beings to which humans can relate. Cinema has continued this practice and “Hollywood has filled these basic forms with a tremendous variety of contents, projecting onto screens a rich diversity of myths, rituals, systems of purity, and gods for us to contemplate.” (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p.6). Based on that, we can say that mythological approaches to cinema define religion and religious activity in a very broad sense and mainly focus on universal archetypes and stories.

Mythological approaches have been very popular in film analysis as well as filmmaking. In particular, the theorist of myth Joseph Campbell has had a significant impact on various filmmakers, such as George Lucas, who used his ideas as a basis for his *Star Wars* (1977-2005) films. I will come back to his theories in the fourth chapter when talking about mythic representations in *The Lord of the Rings* (dir. P. Jackson, 2001-2003). Martin & Ostwalt claim that when discussing cinema and religion in this very broad sense, “religion can be defined in a nontheological manner as the quest of humanity for contact with the sacred.” (1995, p.9). Somewhat like Nietzsche’s notion of myth, the book argues that mythic stories enable people to explain the powers that create and rule their world and they provide societies with foundational prototypes that function as eternal models for life.

Nevertheless, Martin and Ostwalt also criticise this approach as often ignoring the historic and social influences on individual subjects and meanings and thus reducing religion and myth to its archetypal essence. Despite that criticism, however, it is emphasised that “Popular movies are cultural standard-bearers; they carry with them the values, beliefs, dreams, desires, longings, and needs of a

society and, thus, can function mythologically.” (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p.68). We will see in the second part of this thesis how films can not only reflect tendencies and values of a society, but in turn also influence the audience’s understanding of universal values.

Unlike mythological approaches and their broad interpretation of religious activities, theological approaches in film studies mostly examine the influence of specific religious traditions on cinema. This reaches beyond simply spotting religious symbols in a given film. Theological criticism also draws on general religious themes, such as good and evil, hope and redemption, and the way these themes are implemented in films. Martin and Ostwalt (1995) even go so far as to claim that one could argue that the very nature of a narrative is religious as it “contains within itself a structure that confronts the reader with that which is transcendent and beyond mundane experience and grants meaning to human experience by exposing it to the sacred realm, the realm of realities beyond human control.” (p.16). Although I do not fully agree with this claim as it is dubious if that can really be applied to all types of narrative, it is nevertheless interesting to consider the claim that since religion requires stories and cinema is a form of storytelling the link between religion and cinema can be a potentially fruitful one.

The statement also points to a significant development in the way we perceive religion. According to Martin and Ostwalt, cinema allows us to see and experience things that were previously inaccessible for people. They suggest that cinema may undermine traditional structures of formal religious practice, but at the same time it can also enhance other aspects of religion, such as providing general worldviews and ideas that structure our life as Nietzsche had suggested in relation to ancient myth. In consequence we could claim that even though “theistic theology has been called into question, archetypal myth thrives as never before, appearing on screens everywhere, reaching millions in major motion pictures.” (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p.66). Here, the focus seems to shift from the ritual practices and theological interpretations towards the foundational myths and stories.

These archetypal myths are by no means exclusively the domain of scholars choosing explicitly mythological approaches, but also an important domain of

theological studies. The argument is here that films can present universal “truths” and stories, which are intended to present the values and beliefs of a specific religious tradition. These films do not need to present these narratives in an obvious way, such as the Bible epics of the 1950s. Films can also have a religious function when they interpret these religious themes in a modern, everyday context and in a less explicit manner. Martin and Ostwalt (1995) want to demonstrate “that religion, thanks in part to cinema, is reaching more people than ever. As viewers look towards the screen, they are “seeing” religious themes, theologies, morals, myths, and archetypes represented in a visually compelling medium their ancestors never experienced.” (p.68) Their assumption is that religious symbols and values are a crucial part of popular culture and in this way continuously influence contemporary debates.

Finally, ideological criticism of cinema discusses religion in relation to its effects on politics and society. This can be seen in Marxist film theory, which is largely based on the theories of Louis Althusser as well as in discourses in social studies that refer to criticism of mass culture, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer among others.<sup>13</sup> As far as ideological criticism in general is concerned, the study criticises that religion has actually moved out of focus for most critics in postmodern society. The main focus of film theory that takes this approach has moved towards consumerist, capitalist ideology and its manipulative nature. Hollywood’s dominant system is here seen as the archetype of this ideology, and has often led to a dismissal of mainstream films from the outset, on the ground that they are simply created to make money. Yet according to Martin and Ostwalt this approach ignored the potential positive impact those films may have on a number of people.

In his concluding chapter, Ostwalt argues that since films seem to present a combination of archetypal myths and ideological implications, they might be a very effective tool to express specific values and beliefs, because cinema can affect the audience both consciously and unconsciously. He notes that it “is not the case that religion is fading with the secularization of society; rather, religion is being

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<sup>13</sup> See for example: Adorno, T., 1991. *The Culture Industry*. London: Routledge.

popularized, scattered, and secularized through extra-ecclesiastical institutions.” (Martin & Ostwalt, 1995, p.157). This argument suggests that cinema as a secular and popular tool might help in bringing back religion to everyday life, in a more diffused, but also more omnipresent way. Nietzsche had claimed in relation to founding myths that they must be omnipresent but unnoticed, to be truly able to benefit our life and cinema’s power of creating these omnipresent illusions seems to be the medium to reconnect us with these founding myths.

This idea is further developed in *Film as Religion* by John C. Lyden (2003). In this work, he analyses the relationship between cinema and faith from the perspective of a theologian. Similarly to Martin and Ostwalt, he states that film theorists as well as theologians have long failed to notice just how much people draw their ideas and worldviews from sources that we would not commonly call “religious”. Moreover, religion has often been discussed in opposition to culture and art. Lyden, however, suggests a different approach. Although art and religion are not identical they are both equally part of culture. Despite that claim, Lyden is not satisfied with simply examining religious tendencies in films, but wants to put cinema itself alongside other religions and mythological systems.

Moreover, his book aims to show in which ways cinema performs religious functions, but he does not want to substitute religion by cinema. In this context he looks at ways in which film can offer “methods for dealing with suffering and injustice, and how it presents an alternate reality in which we participate during the viewing experience. The viewer may be well aware of the artificial nature of this filmic reality, and yet it still has the power to affect the way we think and act in the reality that exists outside the cinema.” (Lyden, 2003, p.4). This notion of a conscious awareness of an illusion has been present throughout this chapter and Lyden continues this line of thought by suggesting that just because we know that a story is fictional, this does not imply that it cannot inspire us in any way, quite the contrary.

As a basis for his theory, Lyden provides an extensive overview of research related to the question of cinema and religion. For example, he draws interesting parallels between the concept of a *belief-ful realism* which tries to find the *ultimate in*

*the concrete* developed by religious scholar Paul Tillich and the cinematic concept of realism in the works of Andre Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. What these film theorists have in common with Tillich's notion of realism is that "they viewed the task of film to be the disclosure of 'reality' rather than the creation of an alternate world of fantasy to which the viewer retreats to escape the real." (Lyden, 2003, p. 24). This is true in parts, but neither Kracauer nor Bazin fully deny cinema its capacity to create alternative worlds. How this creative aspect relates to the perception of realism in these writers will be discussed in the following chapter.

Again like Martin and Ostwalt, Lyden also looks at Joseph Campbell as well as Clifford Geertz's theories on myths. Lyden aims to encourage a view of myth and cinema that does not simply regard mythology as an irrational idea promoted by the dominant authority to maintain its power, but as narratives that present the ideas and values of a community. He argues for a more qualified discourse of the relevance of Hollywood cinema and supports the Nietzschean notion that myths are the basis and background of our culture.

Lyden criticises scholars such as Geertz that define religion in opposition to art as a practice that simply creates alternative worlds of fantasy, whereas religion on the other hand tries to explain our world as it is. In contrast to Geertz, Lyden (2003) argues that religion "does not simply describe the world, and art does not simply provide imaginary illusions – both are involved in the complex relationship between the ideal and the real, in that both offer a worldview as well as an ethos." (p.48). Although he recognises that the spiritual world provided by religion may create a stronger sense of "reality" than the fictional world of films, he suggests that in both cases the audience enters a ritual space to experience an alternate reality. In addition, Lyden believes that neither cinema nor religion simply present an alternative reality, but also draw a connection to our everyday reality. He notes that we "desire alternate worlds because we find our own imperfect; but such desires to flee also entail a desire to return, renewed and refreshed, to the everyday." (Lyden, 2003, p.53). Thus he claims that even though cinema is not structured in the same way as "official religions", it may function like religion and can so be regarded as a religion. The connection Lyden draws here is that cinema like religion offers a link between our world and another world by "offering both

models for and models of reality. These two aspects – worldview or mythology, and ethos – together express a vision of what the world really is, and what it should be.” (Lyden, 2003, p.54).

Lyden suggests that the primary purpose of religion is to help us deal with the chaos of life and provides meaning and measures to structure and explain our reality. That again recalls Nietzsche’s theories on the importance of mythology in providing illusions that give life meaning and hope despite suffering and injustice. Lyden (2003) claims that religion recognises “the inescapability of ignorance, pain, and injustice on the human plane while simultaneously denying that these irrationalities are characteristic of the world as a whole.” (p.42). While this resembles Nietzsche’s characterisation of the tragic myth insofar as it relates to the idea of simultaneously acknowledging and overcoming of the tragic elements of life, it differs by implying that these tragic elements are not a necessary and universal part of life.

Based on this depiction of religion, Lyden argues that films give us a set of symbols and values that may fulfil the same function. In that sense cinema simultaneously provides models *for* and models *of* reality. Especially in relation to Hollywood cinema, Lyden argues that films generally present a world in which good defeats evil, which does not necessarily mean that we always get a perfect happy ending, but that it leaves us with the general feeling that justice and order do exist. In other words, the “world presented by films tends to be neater, more orderly, and has satisfactory endings (usually) in which vice is punished and virtue rewarded, families are reunited, and lovers mate for life.” (Lyden, 2003, p.45). Nevertheless, Lyden acknowledges that the variety of topics and genres of popular film suggest that there exist not just one specific set of religious ideas and structures, which is then employed by cinema, but a broad spectrum of ideas, values and rituals.

Discussing several genres and films, Lyden comes to the conclusion that a strong degree of realism is not always necessary for an audience in order to connect with the illusion on screen. The “alternative reality” can well be an exaggerated and idealised version of our world. In his analysis of Spielberg’s work, especially his

children's films, Lyden argues that we must get away from an elitist thinking that assumes films only have quality if they leave the audience confused and unsatisfied. He states that we all like "images of hope and ideality, even though we know they are fantasies, because they inspire us with the idea that things could be better." (Lyden, 2003, p.201).

This can also be seen in the *Star Wars* films, which promoted values such as resisting fear and hate, cherishing friendship, faith and loyalty, as well as aspects of redemption through love and forgiveness. Even though these portrayals may seem like prosaic versions of 'true' religious values, they can provide a value system that affects many viewers far beyond the cinematic experience. Lyden also notes that these films have often been talked about as simply promoting consumerism but he suggests an original reading in which the films may in contrast imply a critique of selfish materialism, for example in the *Star Wars* series, where the values of friendship and self-sacrifice overcome the imperialistic ambitions driven by power and commercial interests. He further argues that although "cultural criticism may point out to the immense profits derived from associated toy sales as the real motivating values for the filmmakers, this does not reduce the film's message to materialism any more than the greed of a hypocritical televangelist can reduce his Christian message to materialism." (Lyden, 2003, p.225). This emphasises the general value of Lyden's book: it challenges the assumption that all commercially successful mainstream films are simply outputs of Hollywood's machinery, whose primary concern is to make money and therefore not worth a serious study about the possibilities of creating profound meanings. Thus, Lyden inspires a fresh discourse on the relevance of mainstream cinema and the illusions it creates for our life.

Finally, Richard Allen's book *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the impression of reality* discusses the various aspects of illusion, from optical tricks to ideological criticism. Here I will focus on the latter aspect. The most relevant claim in relation to this project is Allen's demonstration of the conscious participation of the spectator in the process of creating the cinematic illusion.

In general, Allen argues that the discourse on illusion and reality in film theory is not just logically incoherent, but also based on false assumptions. His twofold criticism follows Nietzsche's model of illusion, although Allen does not draw this connection. On the one hand he challenges the hypothesis that the audience is a passive object on which ideology is imposed and on the other hand he questions if we are able to perceive an *objective* reality that is not influenced by those ideologies. Allen then argues - somewhat like Nietzsche -that first, all our knowledge of the world is based on certain illusions about reality and second, people are no naïve victims of those illusions, but actively participate in producing them.

Allen challenges various discourses in film theory, such as auteur theory and ideological criticism, and argues that they are often based on false premises. In relation to ideological criticism, he states that film theory often failed to acknowledge that even though all cultural and social exchange is based on values and norms, this does not necessarily mean that people lose their freedom to decide or that their entire life is dominated by those ideologies. In addition, Allen criticises the assumption that ideological beliefs are ipso facto false beliefs. Allen argues that although this *might* be true, it is *not necessarily* true and therefore this assumption is not a valid basis for criticising ideology in general.

He further evaluates the concept that the audience does identify itself with the camera and becomes the eye of the camera, which leads to the strong connection between the spectator and the objects of the film. Allen argues that this identification is not necessary for the experience of the cinematic illusion and an emotional response to it. Therefore, none of those theories provides a sufficient explanation for how individual viewers react on a film.

Finally, Allen examines psychoanalytical models that compare the cinematic illusion to dream. Allen suggests that since we are awake while watching a film, these illusions function rather like daydreams or fantasy. Their impact on us may be less intense than dreams and requires a greater amount of active participation from the ego. He emphasises that our emotional engagement with a film is independent of the degree in which we believe the illusion or identify with the

events on screen. For Allen this misconception is the most significant letdown of psychoanalytic film theory. Nevertheless, he does not want to dismiss psychoanalytic concepts in film theory in general, but he insists that there has to be the acknowledgement of a conscious and active element when discussing the experience of cinematic illusion.

Subsequently, Allen develops his own theories to interpret the role of illusions in cinema. For him, the audience deliberately enters the filmic experience, which in turn provides him with what Allen calls 'Projective Illusion'. He characterises this form of illusion as follows: "while we know that what we are seeing is only a film, we nevertheless experience that film as a fully realized world." (Allen, 1995, p.4). Allen further describes projective illusions as a form of sensory illusion as it entails a variety of parameters that are not limited to the visual, but also include sound-track, movement and our awareness of off-screen space. If all those elements are perfectly balanced, we will create an optimal illusion. He points out, however, that this "experience of projective illusion remains a voluntary activity in a crucial sense, for it still involves looking, and looking – in contrast to merely seeing – is something that we actively do" (Allen, 1995, p.106). Here, Allen emphasises the active participation of the audience in the creation of the illusion, which I suggest closely resembles the way in which Nietzsche describes the role of the audience in relation to Ancient tragedy as well as in the creation of myths in general.

It may thus not surprise us that narration plays a crucial role for Allen in the creation of cinematic illusions. He argues that the strict subordination of space and time to the causality of the story in Hollywood narration is a perfect example for a perfect illusion. The use of genre conventions further maximises the projective illusion, as these conventions present a framework of themes, images and conventions that are easily understandable. The audience can thus directly and instantly engage with the film instead of having first to decode the message and the environment. The main advantage of Hollywood cinema is thus the "relatively impersonal systematic, formulaic character of Hollywood narration, whose rationale is to maximize the spectator's experience of illusion." (Allen, 1995, p.38). Nevertheless, Allen acknowledges that even though the notion of illusion is

strongly related to Hollywood cinema, it also accounts for films that define themselves as artistic or experimental. The influence of the narration on the illusion is that it usually helps to sustain the illusion over time, such as in mainstream cinema, but other factors such as sound and images can still create a projective illusion of their own.

Crucially, however, Allen emphasises that although cinema presents us with strong illusions which can affect us emotionally and ideologically, he also concludes that when “we experience projective illusion in the cinema, we may believe that the experience is real, or suspend our disbelief, but we do not believe that the illusion is real.” (Allen, 1995, p.139). Thus he makes clear that we are always consciously aware of the fiction and never mistake it for reality. The realism of a film does not automatically relate to our perception of reality and we do not need to believe that something is real to find it realistic. Nevertheless, realism is an important notion in relation to belief, which I will explore in more detail in the following chapter.

### Summary

In this chapter I initially discussed the role of artistic practice in our life and the way in which universal myths and stories influence our culture. As Nietzsche has shown, these stories, which are presented in art and mythology, are not simply manipulative or pure entertainment; they are an essential part of our life.

Following Nietzsche’s idea that we are active participants in the creation of illusions, the contemporary theories analysed in the second part of the chapter also challenge the notion of a naïve and passive audience, as well as the assumption that mainstream cinema merely manipulates us with false beliefs. As the works by Martin and Ostwalt, Lyden and Allen have shown, when talking about modern culture it is important to take mainstream Hollywood cinema seriously and consider the impact it has on our culture and our belief systems. Each of these works has emphasised different aspects of the current debate on belief, cinema and illusions. Based on these theories I argue that the approach I

develop throughout this thesis unites the mythological perspective that reads myths as universal stories and archetypes, with the theological approach, which looks at the ways in which films discuss religious themes, as well as the ideological approach that links cinema with social and political developments in our society. All these different aspects will be relevant for the films discussed in the second part, for example the Christian themes and Nordic myths that underline *The Lord of the Rings*, Greek mythology and the belief in fate, which is so crucial for the narrative of *Troy* and the fusion of naturalistic myths with contemporary social and political ideologies, which we find in *Avatar*. As this chapter has shown, notions of belief are significant when discussing the influence of cinematic illusions on our life. In the next chapter I will analyse the role of realism in the creation of believable illusions.

## Chapter Two:

### *The realm of the real* – Concepts of reality, perception and cinematic Realism

After having discussed cinema and its relationship with belief in the previous chapter, I will now continue to explore the connection between reality and cinematic realism. This subject is related to the previous one insofar as theorists such as Richard Allen and Gilles Deleuze have pointed out that a certain degree of realism, particularly in Hollywood cinema, is crucial in supporting the narrative and thus the believability of the illusion.

Moreover, the debate on illusions is also linked to the debate about our perception of reality as we have seen in Nietzsche's above mentioned writings. With regard to cinema, it is important to note the difference between realism and reality. I will discuss throughout this chapter, in which way we can argue that cinema either reflects our everyday reality or presents us with a fictional world that can nevertheless be realistic. It can be argued that the question of realistic representation has occupied filmmakers as well as theorists since the very beginnings of the medium. From the outset, cinema developed in two directions, Lumière's attempt to use cinema as a great tool to document real life events, and Méliès on the other hand, who saw cinema as a chance to create new and exciting artistic illusions. As we shall see, contemporary cinema aims to combine both aspects.

The term 'realism' itself poses problems, as Richard Armstrong (2005) points out in his book *Understanding Realism*. He argues that the term implies a connection with reality, when in fact it is simply a mode of artistic representation, similar to impressionism or expressionism. Thus, although the visual component of realistic cinema bears a closer resemblance with the images we are familiar with from our reality; neither the story nor the context of the images has to be necessarily related to our reality. This crucial point will be further discussed throughout this chapter. Based on this assumption, we must keep in mind that the so called realistic cinema is as artistic or artificial as other forms of cinematic representation.

In film theory, many theorists have talked about the problem of cinematic realism, most notably André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, both of whom will be analysed in this paper. Yet, whereas most of Bazin's theories are widely known and discussed among film scholars, I think that Kracauer's writings have not received the attention they deserve. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on Kracauer and aim to review his theories on cinematic realism with regard to their relevance for our exploration of the importance of illusion. Kracauer's writings are particularly interesting with regard to the latter aspect as he not only examined the connection between cinematic images and reality, but also discussed cinema in a wider context of ideologies and as a reflection of general tendencies in society. Besides examining Kracauer's final work *Theory of Film* (1961), I will also use several texts by contemporary film scholars, such as Miriam Hansen and Heide Schlüppmann and Jeremy Gaines, which have also tried to bring Kracauer's works back into focus.

As mentioned in the introduction, the connection Kracauer draws between cinema and illusion is not unproblematic and I will take certain liberties in applying his theories to my idea of a revival of cinematic myths. It is particularly the notion of myth that is for Kracauer linked to a negative – and manipulative ideology – which according to his earlier writings supported the rise of Fascist ideology.<sup>14</sup> Yet, as I hope to show throughout this chapter, there are aspects of his theories that lend themselves to a new discussion of illusions in a positive sense as a utopian idea that can inspire hope in the individual rather than deceive the masses. What interests me most is the very idea prevalent in Kracauer's writing that cinema – in particular mainstream cinema – reflects moods and tendencies in society. Thus, I will try to analyse in the first part of this chapter, what it is that makes cinema so unique and how – despite Kracauer's critique of myth as ideology – there may be a scope for defending a revival of Hollywood cinema that takes a more critical approach e.g. by integrating more aspects of realism and individualism into its portrayal of historic plots as I will show in chapter five.

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<sup>14</sup> References can be found – implicit and explicit – throughout his earlier work *From Caligary to Hitler* (1941), most notably in his analyses of historic plots such as the portrayals of King Frederic the Great; as well as his discussions of Fritz Lang's *Nibelungen* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1927). I will briefly return to the latter film later in this chapter.

In the second part of this chapter I shall briefly look at Bazin's theories of realism as they will also be relevant for chapter three. Here, I will pay particular attention to Bazin's notions, which soften the common conception of his theories as being purely focussed on realism. Following this analysis, the final paragraph will examine a more recent work on cinematographic realism by Dirk Baecker. In this essay, the author looks at cinema as a form of communication and discusses how cinematic realism influences the way we communicate. Moreover, Baecker also links Kracauer's theories to those of Gilles Deleuze, which will be discussed in chapter three.

### 2.1 Seeing is Believing – Kracauer and the redemption of physical reality

Siegfried Kracauer's general theories are hard to summarise since he produced an extraordinarily varied oeuvre. Born on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1889 in Frankfurt, Germany, he published his first article in the arts section of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* at the age of 18. In the same year he started his studies in architecture, concluding with a PhD on smithery and worked subsequently in various fields, such as journalism, architecture, social studies as well as in film theory. This short biographical note shows that Kracauer can be considered more as a generalist than a specialist when it comes to film studies. This is reflected in his writings, as his methods are sometimes inconsistent and he looks at a variety of aspects and speculations about society when discussing film. This point has often been the main criticism brought up in relation to Kracauer's theories, e.g. from his former Frankfurt colleague Theodor Adorno, but I would like to show the value of his thoughts despite his sometimes sloppy methodology.

Kracauer also worked as a film critic in the 1920s, which is relevant insofar as many of his later analyses of specific films are largely based on the knowledge he gathered at this time. After his emigration to the USA in 1941, Kracauer published his first study on film, *From Caligari to Hitler*, a work which describes the psychological situation in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s as they are reflected in German cinema. According to Kracauer, the German cinema of this period

foreshadows the rise of the Nazi regime. The problem with this work is that many films Kracauer analyses in this work were not actually available to him at that time, so that he solely relied on old notes and reviews he wrote earlier as a critic. This distance makes his film analyses vague and speculative at times, a problem that continues in *Theory of Film*. Yet despite having its limits with regard to an in-depth analysis of the individual films, Kracauer's work here already shows an extraordinary sensitivity toward the ways in which films reflect their social context – consciously and more so unconsciously. As Thomas Y. Levin (2005) pointed out in his introduction to *The Mass Ornament*, a collection of essays written by Kracauer during the 1920s and 1930s, rather than focussing on the aesthetic values of cinema (and photography), “Kracauer focused instead on their diagnostic value as social facts, reading photography and film (prior to any specific content) as material expressions of a particular historical condition” (p.20).

Scholars have struggled with *Theory of Film* and it has often been dismissed as focussing on a naive concept of realism. Miriam Hansen (1993), describes *Theory of Film* as “an irritating book-with its pretence of academic systematicity, its liberal-humanist sentiment and bland universalism, and its grandfatherly and assimilationist diction, to say nothing of the disagreements one might have with its approach to film” (p.438). Her main point of criticism is that his writing is inconsistent and contradictory in part, yet Hansen argues that the main reason for this is not Kracauer's lack of qualification but the historic background against which the book was developed. Therefore, she strongly defends the value of Kracauer's writings despite her introductory critique and I will introduce her thoughts more in detail later in this chapter.

Similarly, Schlüpmann and Gaines argue that Kracauer's writings received such a negative overall reception within film theory, that valuable points in his analysis remain largely ignored. They state that before “it even had a chance to have a full impact, the [...] *Theory of Film* became the object of a systematic misunderstanding that studiously ignored the criticism the book itself levelled against ‘naive realism.’” (Schlüpmann & Gaines, 1991, p.111). This aspect of Kracauer's notion of realism will be crucial throughout this chapter and also play a significant role in chapter five. In their essay Schlüpmann and Gaines, like Hansen, emphasise the

historical context of Kracauer's writings. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

The title of Kracauer's major work *Theory of Film: the redemption of physical reality* already implies the role Kracauer assigns to cinema. By using a challenging term such as 'redemption' it is clear that Kracauer chooses an unusual perspective to analyse cinema. Unlike other classic film theorists, Kracauer evaluates cinema philosophically, as a medium suitable to explain the relationship between man and the universe. This approach is no doubt influenced by his background in social studies and continental philosophy. In Kracauer's (1961) words: the "cinema itself is set in the perspective of something more general – an approach to the world, a mode of human existence." (p.xi). Based on this initial statement, we can already see that Kracauer does not treat cinema simply as a form of artistic expression or "mere" entertainment, but as a medium to express philosophical and ethical ideas about the world. In this way, his concepts can be easily linked to the theories developed in the first chapter, which aimed to present cinema as a system that reflects the ideas and anxieties of a society, similar to religion and mythology.

Crucially, Kracauer does not only focus on "artistic cinema" but appreciates the value of mass art and its role in society. This is in stark contrast to many of his former Frankfurt colleagues, such as Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin. Although he shares many of their criticism of modern society and its ideology, his overall outlook is more optimistic. Levin argues that

"Adorno and Horkheimer, confronted with the threat of Fascism, see only the bleak prospects of historical regression. Kracauer, while in no way naively utopian, still holds open the possibility that the enlightenment could overcome its own paralysis and rescue itself from the petrification of *Ratio*. Unlike some of his Frankfurt colleagues who insisted that autonomous art offered the sole remaining preserve for the enlightenment project, Kracauer held almost exactly the opposite position, insisting that 'the path leads directly through the center of the mass ornament, not away from it'. (2005, p.19)

This shows the attempt in Kracauer's earlier writings to take mass culture serious and to find a solution to society's problems within its possibilities not outside it.

This thought continues in *Theory of Film* and may help us in understanding the importance of cinema in “redeeming the world”. Nevertheless, Kracauer’s approach to analysis shifts significantly between his earlier and later works. Levin (2005) describes the development from Kracauer’s earlier writings to the film theories of *From Caligary to Hitler* as a shift from an initially “theologico-messianic and philosophical reading of mass media” to “an analysis centered on their ideological function”, which was motivated by the “increasingly problematic political function” of the latter. (p.23) One could argue that in *Theory of Film*, he in many ways returns to this earlier approach, focusing not so much on the aspects of propaganda and manipulation, but rather tries to discuss cinema in more general, philosophical terms.

Despite the preliminary connections Kracauer draws between cinema and photography, he acknowledges that cinema has a unique ability to recreate reality. For Kracauer, the extraordinary position of film lies in its power to record the physical world around us, which as a consequence makes it possible to reveal this world to us. This, however, does not only relate to worlds that we would not always be able to access, like foreign places or different milieus, but also includes our own everyday life. According to Kracauer our own daily reality consists of endless phenomena which we would hardly be able to perceive, because they are either too small or too irrelevant for us to notice. Yet, captured on film they suddenly become apparent to us. Kracauer argues that as a medium, the constant movement of the images and their ephemeral nature best reflects the characteristics of material life itself. This emphasis on everyday life is also important in relation to a notion of crisis in Kracauer’s work. For him, the problems we face are mostly unconscious and rather linked to continuous developments in our society than major global events. He writes that we “must rid ourselves of the delusion that it is the major events which have the most decisive influence on us. We are much more deeply and continuously influenced by the tiny catastrophes that make up daily life.” (Kracauer, 1998, p.62) This is in contrast for example to Deleuze’s theory discussed in chapter three, when a spiritual and ideological crisis is clearly linked to the events of the Second World War, as we will see in the next chapter.

In relation to my hypothesis, the most interesting part of Kracauer's book is probably its epilogue, *Film in Our Time*. In this final chapter Kracauer summarises his ideas and develops his argumentation further towards the more general concepts of art and life. Here, he also departs from his initial discussion of realism based on photographic referentiality and proceeds to a more universal concept of film as a way of understanding our world. More precisely, Kracauer describes the people of the twentieth century captured in a universe that has lost its ideological coherence. Kracauer here uses the term ideology in a very broad sense, including any form of belief system or universal idea, in contrast to his earlier works, in which he uses ideology in its explicit socio-political sense.

Not unlike Nietzsche Kracauer blames the encroachment of modern science for this loss of meaning. As we have seen in the previous chapter, rationality and science are blamed for destroying spiritual art as well as illusion and in doing so, destroying our connection with nature. Kracauer similarly moans the loss of unifying concepts, his ideal society being medieval rather than the Greeks Nietzsche refers to. Levin (2005) writes that “Kracauer’s highly romanticized vision of a utopian Middle Ages, which he describes as a ‘unified culture’ that was ‘saturated with meaning.’ forms a striking contrast to his reading of modernity, which he considers above all in terms of its spiritual lack, indicting it for its estrangement from the absolute and its want of a master narrative.” (p.13) This search for master narratives will be a key argument of this thesis, although I will depart from Kracauer’s criticism and in many ways in order to explore a more positive route this might take.

In the final chapter of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer places himself within a philosophical tradition of continental philosophy which looks at life itself as a powerful entity, an idea that according to Kracauer derives from the Romantic Movement and is then revived by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Bergson. In this passage, he directly links his theories with those of Nietzsche, and talks about the flow of life portrayed in cinema, not just in the story but also due to the medium itself. Another aspect that unites the two thinkers to a certain degree is Kracauer’s notion of the surface reality and the superficiality of the medium, which I will discuss further down.

Kracauer describes the state of modern people as being cut off from both the spiritual and the physical world. In short, the reasons for the first are the general loss of ideologies and universal concepts, the second aspect is based on what he calls abstractness. This dual loss means that we are ever more desperate in looking for something to make sense of our existence. In addition, cinema seems to be the way out of both dilemmas, at least temporarily. More precisely, Kracauer (1961) states, there is no doubt that “many among us suffer, consciously or not, from being exposed, helplessly, to these influences. So we look for compensations. And film, it appears, is apt to afford temporary relief [...] There the frustrated may turn into kings of creation.” (p.171). This statement could be interpreted as a pure escapism function of cinema, but I want to show that for Kracauer the connection is more profound. Therefore, I will next look more closely at both aspects – the loss of binding norms and abstractness – and their connection with cinema.

As said, Kracauer notes two different causes for the lack of meaning in modern life. The first reason is that modern society is at risk of losing, or has already lost, its cultural traditions, which established a set of norms and values according to which people lived. Kracauer argues that our beliefs, ideas and values no longer have the same authority they had in the past. The relations between our “inner universe” and the physical reality are no longer as self-evident, real and powerful as they used to be in earlier times. He claims that ideology is no longer integrating and religion and myths lost not only their relevance for our belief system but also their authority to structure our everyday reality.

The second point Kracauer makes is that we live in an “age of analysis”, which means that we tend to prefer abstract thinking instead of concrete physical and mental experience. He describes this state as *abstractness*. Abstractness in Kracauer’s sense is opposed to concreteness and refers to the inability of modern people to perceive things in their wider context. For him, our life is split in fragments, we are alienated from nature, and we consume effects without any awareness of their causes.

This concept can also be linked to Nietzsche's notions of knowledge versus wisdom. The difference is that abstract thinking does not allow for the same kind of "deeper knowledge" of the world that other concepts based on belief can provide. Here, Kracauer (1961) notes that we have not just lost our ancient beliefs but have "at best a shadowy awareness of things in their fullness"(p.291). That means that we no longer perceive the world as a whole but only in fragments and pieces. The idea of the perception of a whole is also crucial for Deleuze's understanding of mainstream cinema and I will return to this point in the next chapter. Whereas Kracauer criticises the false concreteness of myth in his earlier writings<sup>15</sup>, he is much less explicit about this in *Theory of Film* and his concept and criticism of myth is much vaguer.

Rather than just blaming the rise of rationalism and science in general, as Nietzsche had done, Kracauer points out two specific causes for our state of abstractness. One is the emergence of psychology and the other is relativistic reduction. According to Kracauer, psychology takes life into its pieces by describing it as a system of various attitudes combined with behaviour patterns. He claims that "the specific content of the values surrounding us is psychologized away and the realm to which they belong sinks into limbo" (Kracauer, 1961, p.293). In other words, psychoanalysis for Kracauer splits human beings in their fragment, analyses every layer on its own and loses the perspective of the whole. It can be objected that this is a rather reductionist view of psychology as well, excluding more contemporary holistic approaches to psychology. Nevertheless, we can draw from this statement a certain tendency to focus on specific aspects of a problem rather than looking at the complex social environment, which is a point that deserves further discussion.

The second reason – relativistic reduction – is for Kracauer the result of our increased social mobility and a permanent input of information, which has been

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<sup>15</sup> See Levin's introduction to *The Mass Ornament* and Kracauer's essays in the book itself

made possible by the mass media.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, people realise that every aspect of their life can always be seen from a different angle. The problem with this approach is that by doing so, we tend to question *everything* we perceive and find it increasingly hard to believe in *any stability* in our life. According to Kracauer (1961), the result of this relativism is that people's "confidence in absolutes is wavering. At the same time the broadening of their horizon challenges them to try to compare the different views and perspectives pressed home to them." (p.293-294).

Of course it can be argued that the fact that people are now more likely to question things and view their theories from different angles does not need to have a negative outcome *per se*. However, the positive aspects of challenging one's own perspectives and the possibility of making informed choices instead of simply assimilating inherited views – aspects that Kracauer would find encouraging for most parts, bear the problem that the sheer mass of possible choices disables us finally to make any choice at all.

What is more problematic is that in addition to simply being overwhelmed by the number of options, there is also the risk of missing the point when we eventually find a spiritual, religious or ideological concept we can relate to. Kracauer (1961) notes that we may not actually capture "the very essences of the diverse value systems to which we are exposed [...] The wider the range of values and entities we are able to pass in review, the greater the chances that their unique features will withdraw from the scene." (p.294). That means in practice that when we finally engage with an ideology or spiritual concept we tend to understand this system only in a rather superficial way. This in turn means that the comfort and support it can provide us with is also only superficial and can thus vanish in an instant.

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<sup>16</sup> Kracauer's notion here virtually demands to be reviewed in the light of globalisation and the World Wide Web, because the situation of constant information overload by mass media, the internet and global mobility has without doubt dramatically increased since the fifties, when Kracauer was writing.

From the two preliminary characteristics of modern society – loss of unifying concepts and abstractness – Kracauer deduces a third symptom of the current situation of our society. He states that our circumstances are not just defined by a loss of binding norms and increasing abstractness, but also by the fact that it subsequently becomes increasingly difficult for us to explain and understand the mechanisms and processes that constitute both our modern world *and* our own life. Kracauer (1961) suggests that our “world has grown so complex, politically and otherwise, that it can no longer be simplified. Any effect seems separated from its manifold possible causes; any attempt at a synthesis, a unifying image, falls short. Hence a widespread feeling of impotence in the face of influences becomes uncontrollable for eluding definition.”(p.171). What Kracauer describes here is that people feel lost in the world, because they are lacking not just unifying belief systems but also concepts which allow them to outline their situation and their world within a wider context that offers some orientation.

In this context it is important to note that Kracauer makes clear that we cannot simply replace a belief system with something else, something more “rational”, e.g. humanist ethics. He argues that if the influence of religion becomes weaker, that of ethical concepts or even customs becomes weaker, too. In other words, the fading influence of religion and mythology also jeopardises the power of other normative systems, which were thought to be a “replacement” for the first. Kracauer here argues that because non-religious normative systems follow similar structures as religious beliefs in the way they provide structuring ideas and unifying concepts, the weakening of religious value systems also means that people may lose their faith in the possibility of universal concepts in general.

This general loss of all forms of (ideological or spiritual) orientation leads Kracauer to the assertion that our society has lost its ideological cover. More significantly, we seem to be aware of it, at least subconsciously. Kracauer writes that it “is indeed, as if the atmosphere were impregnated with a feeling of uneasiness about the absence of unifying incentives that would set meaningful goals and thus contour the horizon.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.290). This is for him the reason why so many people are desperately looking for alternatives. Yet this

desperate search eventually causes the next problem, because there are so many different ones, which brings us back to our problem of relativism.

The interesting part about Kracauer's analysis is his claim that the more people lose their belief, their *will to believe* seems to grow stronger. This drives them towards experimenting with all kinds of alternative ideological systems. Kracauer (1961) also notes that many of the modern ideologies or spiritual movements "are regressive in the sense that they revert to fashions of thought and argument preceding the scientific revolution" (p.291), such as archaic myths and pre-capitalist ideas of community. This seems to show a longing for something that has long been lost. Whereas this criticism of society's need for illusion is strongly criticised in earlier works, e.g. in *From Caligary to Hitler* and *The Salaried Masses*, one now has the impression that Kracauer seems to accept this more as a general condition of human nature and reflects upon the possibilities of reinstating some sort of belief, if not in grand unifying concepts than at least in the world around us.

As mentioned before, most "substitute ideologies" do not offer the same normative power as the former belief systems. The problem is that the two factors – lack of binding norms and abstractness – are interwoven. So as long as we focus on abstract thinking we will never be able to recreate and truly re-establish belief in our life. Thus Kracauer concludes that the actual problem is not so much our relationship with unifying concepts but the *conditions* under which we can access those concepts or beliefs. Kracauer (1961) notes that we "would on principle have free access to them were it not for the abstractness of our approach to things in and about us. It is this characteristic of modern man's mentality which frustrates his attempts to escape from spiritual nakedness." (p.296). This is the point where Kracauer links his general philosophical ideas on our society to his notions of cinema as a medium to redeem physical reality as the subtitle of his final book suggests. Kracauer's material concept of redemption as outlined here is very different from the spiritual-individual concept of redemption Nietzsche talks about, yet the ultimate consequences are similar. Both aim at liberating us from "the spiritual nakedness" and providing concepts to understand the world around us.

The important aspect of abstractness is that abstractness is not only destructive towards our belief systems but also influences our perception of reality. Kracauer (1961) argues that “our way of thinking and our whole attitude toward reality are conditioned by the principles from which science proceeds. Conspicuous among these principles is that of abstraction”; and further down he adds that while “scientific operations become more and more esoteric, the abstractness inherent in them cannot but influence our habits of thought.” (p.292). Our whole thinking is so influenced by science that we similarly perceive everyday reality just as processes and not as *life as such*, as a whole, organic entity, which I briefly mentioned above. In other words, we care much more about the methods than about the causes and meanings, as we have no longer a perspective on the whole.

In relation to cinema this aspect is the most relevant insofar as it gives us an opportunity to explain how cinema might be able to reinstate “belief”. More than simply providing us with an “alternative” ideology, myth or story, in which we can believe, cinema changes the *conditions* under which we access these unifying concepts. In other words, Kracauer assigns cinema the power to reunite us with the world we are living in. Similar to Nietzsche’s notion of the superficial illusion created by art, Kracauer sees the way out of the dilemma of modern existence not in digging even deeper into the fragments and layers of our life, but in returning to a unifying illusion that allows us to engage with our life as a whole. He suggests that maybe the way to rediscover the shadowy contents of inner life “leads through the experience of surface reality? Perhaps film is a gate rather than a dead end or a mere diversion?” (Kracauer, 1961, p.287).

As we have seen before, this is a similar idea to Nietzsche’s, especially when he speaks about Ancient Greek society and the role of art, in particular the Greek tragedy, in creating this “surface reality”. Kracauer assumes that although true belief may be irreversibly gone, we can still establish an immediate contact with the surface of things rather than relying solely on abstract statements made by science. The question Kracauer poses is how can we gain access to this reality if we are not normally able to perceive them? According to him, film has enabled us

to regain this access because it has the ability to “not only isolate physical data but reach their climax in representing it” (Kracauer, 1961, p.298).

In Kracauer’s view, cinema has two different purposes to fulfil. The first is to actually help us *to see* the world we live in. For Kracauer the cure against abstractness is actual *experience* of concrete things. As described above, our common view of the world consists of a series of fragments rather than a meaningful continuity. Here, cinema has the unique capacity to present a world to us that we would otherwise not be able to see and so it “redeems” physical reality for us. More specifically, Kracauer (1961) notes that cinema’s “imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.” (p.300).

This is closely related to the “surface reality” mentioned above, because the majority of films present us with an overview by “reducing” a story or an event to its essence, instead of showing us every unimportant detail that would normally occur in everyday life. By doing so, we can see things in a wider perspective and focus on general ideas rather than individual details. Film, and in particular mainstream cinema, is about universal concepts, even when these concepts are reflected in individual destinies. Even banal mainstream films are able to expose “the reality of the world as a metaphysical void.” (Levin, 2005, p.20). They can be even more successful in doing so than so called artistic films as they portray the tendencies in society mostly unconsciously and thus more unmediated. Kracauer therefore does not regard cinema as a *provider* of a new kind of ideology or religion, but rather as a *medium* in its very basic sense, which helps us to liberate ourselves from the conditions of abstractness. Although he acknowledges that “we may still not be able to cast anchor in ideological certainties, yet at least we stand a chance of finding something we did not look for, something tremendously important in its own right – the world that is ours.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.296).

Moreover, Kracauer (1961) believes that in “recording and exploring physical reality, film exposes to view a world never seen before [...] which cannot be found because it is within everybody’s reach.”(p.299). What he suggests here is that all the details of everyday life, such as streets, people, places, etc. become so

common to us that we no longer consciously notice them, so that they remain practically invisible to us. Here, we need cinema to assist us, because “were it not for the invention of the film camera, it would cost us an enormous effort to surmount the barriers which separate us from our everyday surroundings.”(Kracauer, 1961, p.300). Thus, film enables us to see things that we did not, or even could not, see before. More precisely, Kracauer (1961) states that film “effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual nonexistence, by endeavouring to experience it through the camera.” (p.300). The notion of experience is crucial here, as film allows us to perceive the world on screen with a variety of senses, emotionally as well as rationally and gives us a concrete experience of wholeness which goes beyond a rational perception of a story told on screen. The film viewer “finds himself in a situation in which he cannot ask questions and grope for answers unless he is saturated physiologically.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.300).

However, all the above mentioned aspects of film do not apply to all styles and genres with the same intensity. Therefore, Kracauer also specifies the basic criteria cinema has to fulfil to give us the experience of physical reality. I now turn to the specific requirements and images Kracauer suggests in order to answer the question: what makes a film particularly “cinematic”?

One of the most problematic parts in Kracauer’s writing is his interpretation of what is the “true art” of filmmaking. One can easily get the impression that for Kracauer film is first and foremost a “documentary” medium, which limits the artistic influence by filmmakers. More precisely, he claims that film is not a creation of an artist in the same way other arts are, e.g. paintings. The role of the filmmaker is primarily to *document* and *represent* the material he finds and not to *create* them. Whereas other works of art only “consume” the raw material and then transform it into whatever they want to express, films are “bound to exhibit it. However purposefully directed, the motion picture camera would cease to be a camera if it did not record visible phenomena for their own sake” (Kracauer, 1961, p.x). Even if that is the case it is not evident why this would exclude the

artistic perspective *per se*. It only seems to suggest that visible phenomena can in some way *subvert* the intentions of the filmmaker.

Kracauer (1961) further argues that along “with photography, film is the only art which leaves its raw material more or less intact. In consequences, such art as goes into films results from their creator’s capacity to read the book of nature.” (p.x). That means that the role of the filmmaker in its closest sense is limited to “reading” nature, of exploring and making visible what nature presents to him. If a filmmaker tries to transform the raw material nature provides and turns it into a piece of art he runs the risk of destroying cinema’s unique ability to show us the world as a whole and free us from the abstractness of our everyday reality.

Kracauer’s criticism of artistic influences in film is not entirely clear cut throughout his *Theory of Film* as there seem to be contradictions between the individual chapters and the epilogue. Thus his arguments can be best understood when including ideas from his earlier works. What Kracauer mostly objects to is not so much the fact that a filmmaker makes certain creative choices. He is, for example, an admirer of Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* (1925), which can be argued to be very stylistic. Nevertheless, Kracauer calls this cinema truly progressive because montage techniques and other artistic features are here used to emphasise social realities rather than distracting from them. (Compare: Levin, 2005) In contrast, he criticises Fritz Lang’s style (most notably in his analysis of *Metropolis* but also in his critique of *Nibelungen*) for distorting social problems by turning the masses into merely ornamental figures, the aesthetic thus superseding the ethical-human. (Kracauer, 1947). The interesting aspect in Kracauer’s criticism of Lang’s ornamental style and other parts of German pre-war cinema is that he claims by portraying workers, soldiers etc. simply as a mass, these people are losing every trait of individuality. While this is a valid point regarding this type of cinema, the question will be how this criticism can be applied to the modern cinematic epics and their emphasis on the individual.

Another aspect in Kracauer’s criticism on artistic influences is that he argues at this point, art is not primarily problematic because of its style and interpretation but

because it presents us with the impression of a whole, which is false. As Kracauer (1961) writes, “Art in film is reactionary because it symbolises wholeness and thus pretends to the continued existence of beliefs which “cover” physical reality in both senses of the word. The result is films which sustain the prevailing abstractness.” (p.301). This point conforms to his conception of myth outlined in *The Mass Ornament*. However, towards the end of *Theory of Film*, Kracauer seems to mitigate his argument by claiming that the crucial thing is for cinema to create simply *an impression of reality* by whatever means necessary. He now seems content with cinema to redeem a “notion of wholeness”, even if this is only a superficial one.

Apart from this, his major objection to artistic tendencies in cinema is when films trying too hard to imitate another medium, e.g. theatre and literature, rather than using its own unique capabilities. This becomes evident in Kracauer’s distinction between *cinematic* and *theatrical* films. For him, only the first is really able to discover and productively use the new possibilities cinema provides, such as crowds, street scenes, everyday occurrences and movements in space and time. Theatrical cinema on the other hand is still caught up in the traditional concepts of theatre, which Kracauer perceives as too abstract. It is important to note that Kracauer’s distinction between truly cinematic and “artistic” or theatrical films is not related to a division between documentary and fictional film. It refers to both, although the problem might be more obvious in the latter. Fictional films as well as documentary films are influenced by both realistic and formalistic tendencies. Kracauer, however, suggests that the less a fictional film tries to emancipate itself from the realist tendency, the more “cinematic” it is and thus the more true to the medium. We will see in chapter five, how contemporary Hollywood epics seem to aim in this direction, even when dealing with classic literary and historic narratives.

As mentioned above, Kracauer regards film as a medium that can provide us with the experience of physical reality and enables us to see our world by reconstructing the wholeness of reality. This idea of the redemption of physical reality is not dependent on the question of whether the content of a story is real or fictional, but refers to a variety of stylistic elements. According to Kracauer

there are certain elements in all stories that do not just belong to the individual film itself, but also refer to a more universal concept or idea. These elements

“may try to reconstruct the past, indulge in fantasies, champion a belief, or picture an individual conflict, a strange adventure [...] No doubt it is intended to advance the story to which it belongs, but it also affects us strongly, or even primarily, as just a fragmentary moment of visible reality, surrounded [...] by a fringe of indeterminate visible meanings. And in this capacity the moment disengages itself from the conflict, the belief, the adventure, toward which the whole of the story converges. A face on the screen may attract us as a singular manifestation of fear or happiness regardless of the events which motivate its expression.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.303).

Kracauer calls these specific elements or images *moments of everyday life* and argues that they have more power the more subtle and “true” they are. He further argues that films in general have two ways of confronting our perception with the visible material reality. Images either confirm our notions of reality or they do not. For Kracauer, the problem lies in the latter, because even though there might be an inconsistency between the represented reality and our idea of it, film sometimes uses what Kracauer calls “confirmative images”. The problem with those images is that they “are as a rule called upon not to authenticate the truth to reality of an idea but to persuade us into accepting it unquestioningly.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.306). That means that these films are first and foremost trying to make us *believe*, not enabling us to *see*. The problem here is the *order*. In Kracauer’s understanding, the belief we lost a long time ago can only be recovered if we *first* recover our connection with the world surrounding us. Belief should be the *result* of seeing, of a deep understanding; otherwise belief remains random and superficial.

This is where Kracauer’s theories can be linked to our discussion in the previous chapter. Belief systems should not simply be created out of a naive not-wanting-to-know attitude but out of a profound insight in the world as a whole. This is the concept of wisdom Nietzsche talks about and which will also be relevant for the films discussed in Part II. Films which are in Kracauer’s sense true to the medium will not try to move from a set idea to the material world to then implement that idea but rather “set out to explore physical data and, taking their cue from them, work their way up to some problem or belief. The cinema is materialistically minded; it proceeds from ‘below’ to ‘above’.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.309). Thus, film

should not simply provide us with ready-made ideas but give us the *material* to *create* and *discover* them for ourselves.

Despite Kracauer's preference for realistic tendencies in film he also analyses a range of other topics. Of particular interest here are Kracauer's theories about fantasy and history as cinematic subjects. His analysis here refers both to the content and the style of the films. Originally Kracauer dismisses history and fantasy as truly cinematic subjects, because he argues that as soon as a filmmaker works in these areas the focus shifts away from the basic realistic properties of the medium. In other words, a filmmaker "seems no longer concerned with physical reality but bent on incorporating worlds which to all appearance lie outside the orbit of actuality." (Kracauer, 1961, p.77). Interestingly, the problem is less with the realistic representation, but with the actuality of the story. Thus, the problem is more apparent in historic films than in fantasy films. Kracauer's argument is that films dealing with historical topics enter a world that is *per se* completely artificial since it is outside our actual reality, whereas at least some fantasy could be imagined to take place in the here and now and could thus be part of our actual reality. Therefore, they *must* appear staged and theatrical. However, Kracauer (1961) also admits at an earlier stage in his book that "strangely enough, it is entirely possible that a staged real-life event evokes a stronger illusion of reality on the screen than would the original event if it had been captured directly by the camera." (p.35). This statement shows that the *realism of the imaginary world* is in fact of higher importance than the *reality* of the story itself.

Apart from this, we can also find aspects in historical films, which Kracauer describes as typically cinematic, such as the representation of crowds, violence or chases. As Kracauer (1961) notes, we just need to think "of the mass movements and chases in the historical part of *Intolerance* or the superb chariot-race in [...] *Ben Hur*. The spectator may be so thrilled by the chariot race that he forgets history in his actual sensations." (p.80). What Kracauer suspects is that while the real historic events must have been hard to perceive in their wholeness, because the spectators were paralysed by the cruelty or greatness of the event, the representation of the event on screen provides a chance for a better experience of the whole. However, he criticises that all "these episodes are plainly intended to

overshadow the artificiality of the pictorial reconstructions and re-establish a maximum of immediate physical existence” (Kracauer, 1961, p.80). But is this not exactly what film should intend to do if it tries to be as *realistic* as Kracauer wants cinema to be? I will further discuss this point in particular in chapter five when looking at contemporary versions of historic epics. I will argue that the tendency to present historical films not just as episodes from the past but as events relating to our life is strongly increased by the modern technologies used in the production of recent historical epics, so that the actuality of the on-screen events is more significant than the historicity of the plot.

Surprisingly, Kracauer has a more positive attitude towards fantasy in film, despite his preference for realism. His point is that unlike historical films, fantasy films do not necessarily have the problem of actuality and may as well pretend to take place here and now, even though this here and now takes place in a parallel universe. Kracauer (1961) argues that if films are “mainly built from ‘realistic material’, the ‘relational’ factor ceases to be a decisive issue. In other words, it no longer matters much whether or not fantasies lay claim to the same validity as physical reality; provided they concentrate on real-life shots, they conform to the basic properties of the medium.” (p.90). This notion will be particularly relevant in chapter four, when analysing the representation and impact of the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy on people’s belief in fictional worlds.

In summary, Kracauer’s theories raise a variety of interesting questions regarding cinema’s potential to redeem our connection with the world and our belief in it. He also shows the connection between realism and belief and the unique potential of cinema to reflect the spirit of its time. Next I shall look more closely at several theorists who discuss Kracauer’s theories in relation to its historical and social development.

Miriam Hansen’s essay ‘With Skin and Hair: Kracauer’s Theory of Film, Marseille 1940’ (1993) has a very positive attitude towards his theories on cinema, despite the aforementioned criticism about Kracauer’s writing style. She tries to read the *Theory of Film* in relation to its earlier drafts and points out that Kracauer’s concepts of film are by no means simply grounded on a naïve conception of

realism for which he was so often criticised. Hansen (1993) suggests that Kracauer's film theory "approaches the cinema from the problematic of the subject, as both a practical critique of bourgeois fictions of self-identity and a discourse for articulating the historical state of human self-alienation" (p.444). This suggests that the general dismissal of Kracauer's theories on the grounds of his notions of realism is missing the more important point, an argument I have supported in my analysis above.

Despite looking at various genres and elements of cinema, his theories should be read less as a traditional contribution to film theory and more as a philosophical study that acknowledges the unique power of cinema to contribute ideas to a social and philosophical discourse. Hansen also discusses Kracauer's concept of redemption, which for her points to the motif of discovery that is linked "to the recording and inventory function of film, the messianic motif of gathering and carrying along [...] the material world in all its fragments and elements" (Hansen, 1993, p.448). This notion of the material world is crucial in our understanding of Kracauer's concept of the cinematic. As I have pointed out above Kracauer is not as obsessed with photo-reality as commonly assumed. Hansen adds that for Kracauer the question is not so much "reality or realism, but rather materiality", particularly a process of materialisation that "presumes a cognitive interest directed, paradoxically, against the imposition of conscious, intentional structures on the material world" (Hansen, 1993, p.453).

Hansen suggests that the emphasis for Kracauer in comparing film and photography is not because of the referentiality or indexicality of the photographic image, but rather its temporality, its snapshot character. Our reality is not untouched and objective; it is an *alienated historical reality*, especially after the Second World War. According to Hansen (1993) "the materialist gaze reveals a historical state of alienation and disintegration" for Kracauer, and gives "the lie to any belated humanist efforts to cover it up and thus promoting the process of demythologization." (p.453). Despite this bleak statement, Kracauer has not given up hope in the possibilities of cinema even after the catastrophe of the Second World War, although the "utopian motif of the last-minute rescue", which Kracauer discusses in his earlier writings on film, is "generalized into a more

modest project of redemption, of film's task to pick up the pieces in the petrified landscape of 'physical reality'." (Hansen, 1993, p.468). I will argue in the second part that even modern Hollywood epics tend to be more critical towards their own myths, although this may not in all cases supersede the influence of a Hollywood ideology that still believes in the idea of last-minute rescues.

For Hansen, one of the key elements in Kracauer's theory is the concept of immediate experience, which also includes shock experience. Hansen points out that people's longing to communicate with the depths of their body and soul through suffering and shock, has a long history in human society. It is a concept we discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the Ancient tragedy. According to Hansen (1993), Kracauer now "relates the cinema to the historical proliferation of the shock experience with modern technology and the emergence of the urban masses, and the erosion of traditions that used to protect people against shock." (p.459). In that sense, film can go beyond the protective cover of Apollonian appearances and present us with the abyss of a Dionysian worldview. Yet film also returns to a concept of redemption that does not ignore the dark background, but still enables some belief in the future.

This concept can also be found in Schlüpmann and Gaines's essay 'The Subject of Survival: On Kracauer's Theory of Film' (1991). Here they argue that seen in historical context, Kracauer's *Theory of Film* presents a new form of perception that refers to the ambivalence of nature itself, which is on one side destructive and on the other survival and recreation, a notion that strongly recalls Nietzsche's concept of nature particularly when discussing the elements of the Dionysian.

Referring to an earlier essay, which Kracauer wrote on photography, Schlüpmann and Gaines analyse Kracauer's comparison between film and dream. They suggest that the latter's notion of dream is not those of psychoanalysis based on Freud, but rather based on Kafka. It is a play with the fragments of nature or everyday reality and it involves a claim for realism. Whereas the Freudian dream concept only claims that dreams are made up of the remains of a reality, Kracauer sees the dreamlike quality of film in mediating between two realities, the dream reality on one hand and the everyday reality on the other. "Film fuses the real fragmented quality of nature exposed in photography with the real distractedness of human

society that is revealed in the cinema audience.” (Schlupmann & Gaines, 1991, p.117).

Schlupmann and Gaines further note that in Kracauer’s later theory, he departs from the concepts of fragmentation and distraction and instead focuses on its opposite – continuity. This can be seen in the fact that Kracauer asserts that film has the ability to show life in motion, present the world as a whole and thus redeem “reality” for us. Thus, film is particularly equipped to represent what he calls “the flow of life” (p.273), the most cinematic of all contents. Fragmentation, however, is still the element that best describes our situation and which demands a new continuity. Schlupmann and Gaines (1991) state that it was only after the war that Kracauer’s theory “regarded film [...] as the new signature of an age in which it is no longer the experience of the remoteness of meaning that is significant, but rather the remoteness of ‘physical reality’.”(p.122). However, this focus on physical reality can according to Schlupmann and Gaines also be read as a sign of resignation. In that sense, although cinema is able to lead history out of contemplation, it can only do so by leading it into a present that denies history. Thus they argue that the basis for Kracauer’s materialistic aesthetics is ambivalent.

## 2.2 Realism, not Reality – Kracauer, Bazin and contemporary film theory

In his famous essays on film, published as an anthology titled *What is Cinema?* (1967), French film scholar André Bazin discusses a variety of objects related to cinema, the majority with regard to cinematic realism. However, Bazin’s concept of realism is not solely based on the idea of the camera as a medium to *record* everyday reality thus reducing the artistic impact. On the contrary, Bazin emphasises from the outset that creating the *impression of* realism is a very artistic and therefore artificial process that goes beyond simply “reading the book of nature” as Kracauer had claimed.

In one of his first essays Bazin characterises cinema as “the creation of an ideal world in the likeness of the real, with its own temporal destiny.” (Bazin, 1971a, p.10). He notes that the myth surrounding the invention of the cinema as well as

other technical media in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is based on a trend towards a reproduction of reality, or what Bazin (1971a) calls an integral realism, “a recreation of the world in its own image, an image unburdened by the freedom of interpretation of the artist or the irreversibility of time.” (p.21).

In this essay, he also distinguishes the early days of cinema from its later development, arguing that whereas in the beginning, films largely reflected what the director intended to say, modern filmmaking has an increasingly higher degree of realism (through sound and colour) so that the image itself “has at its disposal more means of manipulating reality and of modifying it from within.” (Bazin, 1971a, p.40). This statement suggests that despite the efforts of filmmakers, cinematic representation tends to subvert the intentions of the filmmaker by developing a ‘life of their own’. This statement also shows that by making the images more realistic, they also become more believable and as a consequence more able to influence our perception of reality.

In the second volume of his writings, Bazin explicitly criticises a realism that is purely recording “real” images. He describes it as one of the merits of Italian Neorealism that “it has demonstrated that all realism in art was first profoundly aesthetic.” (Bazin, 1971b, p.25). In addition, he also emphasises that it is just as challenging to *capture* a representation of our reality as it is to *create* an entirely illusionary world. The amount of creative work that has to go into it is the same.

In general, film tries to give the audience a perfect *illusion of* reality, within the limits of its story, style and technical capacities. According to Bazin, this is the aspect that divides cinema from other art forms, such as painting and poetry, which put the emphasis on the artistic style and aesthetic and the way they alter reality. Of course there are exceptions in certain films, which equally focus on style rather than creating an illusion of reality. The majority of cinema, however, aims at realism. Nevertheless, Bazin (1971b) clearly states that “realism in art can only be achieved in one way—through artifice.” (p.26). This statement points out a fundamental contradiction within the medium cinema. Bazin writes that the *creation of reality* is always based on choice, which is at the same time necessary and unacceptable. The first is the case because film as an art always presumes an

artistic choice, unacceptable because it is always done by sacrificing a certain amount of reality.

Not surprisingly, the level of reality that is conveyed by the film image depends on the genre and style. The result is that at the end of a process of subtraction “the initial reality there has been substituted with an illusion of reality composed of a complex of abstraction [...], of conventions [...], and of authentic reality.” (Bazin, 1971b, p.27). This illusion is necessary, but it also carries the risk for the audience to lose its awareness of an actual reality, so that everyday reality becomes an element of cinematic representation in their mind. Here Bazin warns that we perceive reality more and more as a mediated reality, and similar to Kracauer’s previous notions regarding art in film, it then becomes increasingly difficult to perceive a “pure” reality. However, as Nietzsche had argued, there has never been such a thing as *pure reality or truth*, as our conception of reality has always been based on necessary and profound illusions.

In a more recent essay discussing cinematic realism, Dirk Baecker follows this line of thought and suggests a new approach to realism – as a form of communication. By shifting the problem of reality to the level of communication, Baecker argues that there are certain limitations to capacity of films to communicate reality and these limits then produce a very specific kind of reality.

Baecker refers to Kracauer as one of the theorists who have described cinema as a tool to both register and reveal realities that were previously out of focus. When communicated, this process alters reality and it “becomes a different reality, consisting of itself plus its registration and revelation.” (Baecker, 1996, p.561). He further argues that one of these realities revealed by films is the reality of communication. Cinema exposes human emotions by translating them into behaviour, which produces a unique cognitive, behavioural psychology. This preference of behaviour is a tendency of cinema that Gilles Deleuze describes as particular to American cinema and which I will further discuss in the next chapter.

After introducing the reality of cinema as a form of communication, Baecker qualifies this communication in so far as it is not actually communication proper.

That means that the communication of films is at best a delayed communication as it is a one-sided presentation of images to the audience. And while films are not “communication but awaiting communication, they produce their ‘impression of reality’.” (Baecker, 1996, p.564). According to Baecker, cinema fictionalises reality and consequently dismisses the question of the unreal. In this way, the “impression of reality dissolves into the communication of reality” (Baecker, 1996, p.565).

Accordingly, cinema can be described as a picture of the world that is at once perceived and mass-communicated. Even though we are aware and cautious towards the fact that the world presented to us by mass media such as cinema is a communicated world and therefore selected and modified, we are still willing to accept it as it is. Baecker (1996) writes that we “observe how perceptions that translate into behavior deeply both trust and mistrust the mass-communicated reality they experience, and yet you are prepared to go ahead with your own experiences received by mass communications, your disbelief in experiences included.” (p.566).

Different kinds of films may employ different strategies in dealing with cinematic reality; for example Hollywood blockbusters try to emphasise belief by suspending disbelief whereas art films might opt to address the problem of disbelief directly. Yet, despite this, none of these films can get away from the images. Baecker (1996) states that “the faster the world changes, the more chances there are to select a reality one can, for just a moment, believe in.” (p.568). He further suggests that the essential process of selection actually makes the images more “realistic”, as the editing of a film usually does not destroy the impression of reality but rather adds “more reality” to the images.

In that sense the “cut does not function by cancelling the reality of the shot before, but by adding some more reality, some different aspect, to it.” (Baecker, 1996, p.571). As a consequence, we finally experience a reality of which we know that it is unreal, but still cannot help but accepting it as real while watching. Baecker here refers to Deleuze and his concept of a spiritual automaton, which I will discuss in chapter three as well as in the second part of the thesis, by

suggesting that our ability to link images and sounds do not allow us to dispose of the reality a film creates.

On the other side, Baecker turns to Kracauer, who characterises film as a combination of determinate sequences of images and indeterminate structure of the image itself. Baecker (1996) writes that a film can “tell a rather tight story, thus conveying the impression of an unavoidable fate; yet any of the episodes of the movie has to be permeable with respect to a surrounding world.” (p.572).

In conclusion, Baecker notes that all the aforementioned elements describe film as a medium that is produced by communication, a medium that stages and encourages communication, yet actually is no communication itself. According to Baecker, cinema *shows* communication but it does not *communicate*. In his words, it “is only insofar as they are shown that movies communicate a reality, which consists of their own fading into the making of a temporal, if not timely, distinction between reality and fiction.” (Baecker, 1996, p.576). Baecker finally states that analysing cinema from the perspective of communication also means emphasising their reality as a fictional product, and for him this is the only possible way of looking at our actual world.

### Summary

As we said at the beginning, Kracauer claims that we live in an age characterised by a decline of normative systems as well as the abstractness and fragmentation of everyday reality. Cinema can provide compensation for this state not only by stimulating our imagination or providing us with a substitute reality, but by reuniting us with material reality. More precisely, Kracauer (1961) believes that film can affect the way we perceive our environment by bringing the material world to us, because cinema “not only records physical reality but reveals otherwise hidden provinces of it” (p. 158).

However, to enable us to rediscover and experience physical reality and thus regain *belief* in our world, film has to focus on showing us the material world as

*raw* as possible and avoid an explicit discourse of issues of morality or belief, which would be artificial. Yet, although Kracauer favours realistic tendencies in film, he also acknowledges that “cinematic” images can be found in other genres, such as fantasy or historic films. In addition, several scholars discussing Kracauer’s work point out that the primary value of Kracauer’s writings is not so much his description of cinematic realism, but his discussion of cinema in a wider social and historic background. In this way, I consider Kracauer’s theories a worthwhile contribution to our question if illusions are a necessary part of our life and the way cinema contributes in their creation.

Bazin’s theories further acknowledge that despite favouring realism in film, this does not contradict the idea of fiction and artistic creation as all cinematic representation will always be just an illusion of reality.

Finally, Baecker suggests that by communicating an impression of reality, cinema dissolves the boundaries of our reality and thus dissolves the boundaries between reality and fiction. This corresponds to Nietzsche’s dictum that the world can only be understood as an aesthetic phenomenon.

In the next chapter, I will look at the ways in which Gilles Deleuze discusses both Nietzsche’s ideas and the role of cinematic realism in the creation of a system of belief. Analysing his theories regarding cinema, realism and belief, we will also expand our exploration on cinema towards recent tendencies in contemporary Hollywood films by considering the influence of modern digital technology.

### Chapter Three:

#### ***Back to the future?* – Contemporary cinema and the new challenges for theorists**

After discussing the relationship between cinema and belief as well as its role in representing reality, this chapter will extend these aspects towards contemporary cinema and look at the most recent challenges for film theory and philosophy. In this context, I will also discuss how the increasing use of computer generated images (CGI) and other digital technologies not only advance the practical aspects of the medium, but also challenge previous theoretical concepts of image creation, realism and illusion within cinema.

To start with, I will examine Gilles Deleuze's cinema books, which inspired an ongoing debate about cinema and its images. Subsequently, I will discuss Daniel Frampton's *Filmosophy*, a philosophical work that develops Deleuze's ideas further, particularly with regard to contemporary digital cinema. Finally, I will introduce several essays that explore digital cinema and CGI technologies with regard to their power in (re)creating the illusion of reality.

##### 3.1 Cinema as philosophy - Deleuze and beyond

Looking at the key writers of this thesis, Deleuze's cinema books present the most recent philosophical contribution to the art-life-illusion correlation discussed in the previous chapters and will direct us towards the contemporary epics discussed in the second part of this thesis.

Coming from a background of continental philosophy, Gilles Deleuze publishes his two volume writings on cinema in the mid-Eighties. In these books – *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema II: The Time-Image* – he develops his rather unique history and theory of cinema. Loosely inspired by Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, he aims to produce a taxonomy of cinematic signs. However, his writing goes well beyond a simple definition and classification of cinematic images, it is infused with historic, social, cultural and philosophical aspects relating

to cinema. It is thus not surprising that the attempts from academia to discuss and understand his complex theories are as varied as Deleuze's cinematic examples throughout his book.

R. W. Cook, for example, compares in his essay 'Deterritorialisation and the Object: Deleuze across cinema' Deleuze's concepts of signs and images with Roland Barthes and other linguistic approaches; and Donato Totaro discusses Bergson's influence on the cinema books in his essay 'Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian Film Project'. In a review of *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, Dale Jamieson and Barbara James (1988) compare reading Deleuze's book to

"being in a cinematic funhouse, where extravagant prose and orthogonal distinctions dizzy one into a new conception of the image. Although we may have a difficult time finding our feet in this new world, the thrills and spills may well be worthwhile. Yet at some point, we are bound to wonder whether relations with the external world can be regained." (1988, p.436)

This clearly refers to Deleuze's often difficult and confusing description of the increasingly endless number of new terms he coins in relation to the new images. This is particularly true about the second cinema book. However, I want to argue that the more interesting philosophical ideas behind the 'taxonomy' are accessible without an in-depth understanding about the distinctions between octo- and chrono-signs and the like. Deleuze seems to attempt to find a balance between an in-depth analysis of cinematic fragments and an examination of cinema as a whole. As outlined in the previous chapter when discussing Kracauer's notions of fragmentation, this focus on individual pieces, e.g. certain directors, is exactly what we as theorists should aim to overcome and I will therefore try and focus as much as possible on the aspects of the cinema books that deal with the wider perspectives relating to cinema as such.

In his book *Gilles Deleuze's Time-Machine*, David N. Rodowick (1997) demonstrates the value of Deleuze's notions on cinema for contemporary theory and states that it is worth making the effort to fight ones way through the intellectual neologisms and discover the consistency and significance of Deleuze's writing. However, Rodowick also criticises that particularly the concept of the time-image is rather vague.

This might be one reason why few theorists have considered the more ambiguous theories Deleuze develops towards the end of *The Time-Image*, e.g. his notions about cinema's function to reinstate our belief in the world, which will play a crucial role in my reading of his work.

One of the few scholars who attempt to comment on these more spiritual-aesthetic aspects of the cinema books is Barbara Kennedy. In her book *Deleuze and Cinema - The Aesthetics of Sensations* she calls for a new debate across art, sciences and philosophy, which includes a rethinking of aesthetics in a post-millennial culture. Kennedy suggests that the key to a reunification with our modern world, which struggles to find answers to the negative impact of global economy, ecological catastrophes and political depression, might be found in aesthetics. Here, her ideas link Deleuze's writings to Nietzsche's previously discussed concept of the importance of art with regard to our life as well as Kracauer's notion about cinema's power to reunite us with the world around us. Kennedy suggests that if

“we cannot conceive of solutions in a macro-political sense, maybe there is a micro-political way which through a mutation of mentalities might promote a new sense of being in the world, through a neo-aesthetics? From Apollonian law to Dionysian spirit, the line between the two domains of science and art can easily be crossed back and forth. And so it is with Nietzschean resonations that we can begin to work towards an integrational bio-aesthetic which commingles the material world with the aesthetics of film theory.”(Kennedy, 2000, p.85)

So, to better understand Deleuze's ideas about cinema and its connections with belief and reality, I want to briefly introduce his general conception of philosophy. This insight in his philosophical approach will help to clarify Deleuze's understanding of both cinema and philosophy as a means to create concepts.

Philosophy is according to Deleuze not essentially a theory to *explain* or *analyse* processes of thought and concepts of life, but rather an active practice of *creating* ideas. Moreover, concepts and ideas in his sense aren't just concepts *of* something, but in themselves images –thought images. Philosophy is therefore not opposed to art – one being an abstract theoretical framework and the other a creative practice – but both are equally practical and involved in the process of *creation*.

It is useful to read Deleuze's writings on cinema in the context of this notion, as it allows us better to understand how he assigns both philosophy and cinema alike the power to reflect *and* create universal concepts and ideas for our life. In this way, his cinema books can be described as a philosophical journey through cinema, as reading a theory about cinema as philosophical practice. Deleuze does not just *employ* philosophical concepts to speak about cinema, but describes cinema and philosophy as two powers which give rise to ideas that interact and connect with each other. Equally, cinema is not simply an art form that creates images and stories; it also develops wider concepts, concepts of life.

As a consequence, Deleuze describes cinema as being privileged among the arts, a notion we similarly found in Kracauer's writings. Deleuze (1986) argues that unlike the other arts, which make "the world itself something unreal or a tale", in cinema it is "the world which becomes its own image, and not an image which becomes world." (p.59). Here, he goes beyond the realist Kracauer, who saw cinema rather as a tool to *present* the material world to us. Deleuze, however, describes cinema as *creating* our world.

In principle, Deleuze proceeds chronologically through his cinema books, meaning that he starts roughly in the early days of cinema with D. W. Griffith, works his way through the various schools of the 1920s and 1930s up to the Second World War, marking a distinct break, after which the new cinema of Italian Neorealism and then Nouvelle Vague are discussed. Nevertheless Deleuze does not deliver a history of cinema, but takes a variety of detours and diversions. The cinematic examples used to underline his arguments are interesting, although not always essential to the understanding of his philosophical theories. In his article 'On Deleuze's Cinema', Daniel Frampton (1991) proposes that in the cinema books "there are actually two writers, the philosopher realising film in all its intricate workings, and the film lover, puncturing the text with loving synopses of the great and the obscure of film history, each having tentative reference to the argument at hand." (p.15).

Jamieson and James also criticise Deleuze's excessive use of filmic examples, which are often only known to a very small intellectual circle and even they will probably only have seen a small amount of the films he discusses. Nevertheless, they compliment him for being one of the few theorists of that era to take film seriously and not merely analyse it in the shadow of "more serious" studies of literature and theatre. (Jamieson & James, 1988).

Whereas the first cinema book and parts of the second book largely evolve around the historic developments of cinema as well as an analysis of the different kinds of images produced by cinema, the emphasis in the final chapters shifts to more philosophical considerations on life and art. Frampton (1991) observes that it is "in the last four chapters that Deleuze moves on from his classification of images, of cinematic movement, to a general consideration of the relationship between thought and film." (p.13). Towards the end of *The Time-Image* Deleuze even proclaims that cinema is the medium that can – and should – reinstate our belief in the world. This is one of the important aspects that link Deleuze's cinema books to Nietzsche's and Kracauer's ideas about the redemptive power of art and I will thus have a closer look at Deleuze's idea later in this chapter. Firstly, however, I will discuss his preceding theories on cinema to give us a basis for understanding his later – more elusive – concepts.

At the beginning of *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* Deleuze bases his analysis of cinematic images on Bergsonian theories on movement. His main argument in relation to Bergson is that in contrast to the latter's claim, cinema does not simply give us a succession of photographic images to which abstract movement is added, but instead gives us immediately a *movement-image*. Referring to Zeno's paradox,<sup>17</sup> Deleuze (1986) thinks that this way of looking at cinema suggests that

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<sup>17</sup> Zeno's Paradox of the arrow describes the theory that all movement is nothing but an illusion, an argument developed by the Ancient Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea. See: Huggett, N., 'Zeno's Paradoxes', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2010 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta(ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/paradox-zeno/>>. [Accessed 23 January 2011]

Bergson uses this example to criticise cinema, which to him perfectly reflects Zeno's idea as it consist of still images, which are moved by an apparatus to create the illusion of moving images. See: Bergson, H., 1907. *L'Evolution créatrice*. (First published in English in 1910 as *Creative Evolution*).

it is no longer “just the perfected apparatus of the oldest illusion, but, on the contrary, the organ for perfecting the new reality.” (p.8). Unlike Bergson, Deleuze sees cinema as a medium that does not just rely on recreating an abstract combination of images and movements but actively creates an *undivided idea of reality*, a whole to which movement is an essential aspect. In fact, these images could not exist in the same way as still images and it is only the movement that gives them meaning and life.

According to Deleuze, the movement-image, despite having a variety of forms, is always based on three essential criteria. These are “the determination of closed systems, [...] the movement which is established between the parts of a system, and [...] the changing whole which is expressed in movement” (Deleuze, 1986, p.30). In other words, the movement-image defines a system of a whole, by establishing a closed cosmos in which movement takes place that modifies the whole. The crucial instrument to determine this system is montage. However, this determination of the whole through montage can take different routes. When discussing the early stages of cinema, Deleuze describes four initial montage styles, each with a different emphasis and technique, but all operating according to the three criteria mentioned above.

Deleuze further defines four different approaches or schools of montage present in classical cinema, namely the organic-active montage of the Americans, the dialectical montage of the Soviet school, quantitative-psychic montage represented by the French school and the intensive-spiritual montage of German Expressionism. The most relevant form of montage for the context of this thesis is the organic-active montage style of the American school. Not only is it the most universally successful style, it also still informs contemporary mainstream cinema. In the broadest sense Deleuze’s conception of organic montage allows the audience to fully indulge in the cinematic experience without having the attention drawn towards the creative processes of the medium. Developed by D. W. Griffith, the American school is characterised by an organic composition of the images. This means that the images are composed like a big organism, in which all elements are causally linked together and balance each other. By doing so, they form an organic unity – a whole. According to Deleuze, this organism is a *unity in*

*diversity* that is differentiated into binary relationships, such as good/evil, man/woman, rich/poor and so on. This characteristic of the organic montage style is emphasised on the technical level by the parallel montage and on the narrative level by the duel of forces. In the second part of this thesis I will discuss several examples of these binary relationships in contemporary Hollywood films. In addition to the differentiation into binary relationships, every part of this organic system must act and react on each other, join the conflict, which is threatening the organic unity, and then resolve the conflict to restore the whole.

This organic concept of montage is juxtaposed by the other montage styles, e.g. the dialectical montage of the Soviet school, mainly represented by Sergei Eisenstein, who favours a *montage of opposition*. Unlike in the organic concept, the development here is dialectic; the two opposing powers interact until they clash, which does not lead to a restoration of the organic set, but its destruction in order to reach an entirely new, a higher unity. The pre-war French school emphasises the quantitative aspects of movement, montage here takes the form of a mechanical composition. It is characterised by chain reactions and automata that illustrate “a clear mechanical movement [...] which brings together things and living beings, the inanimate and the animate, by making them the same.” (Deleuze, 1986, p.43). Automata also play a role in the intensive-spiritual school of German Expressionism, but here they are no longer “mechanisms which validate or ‘major’ a quantity of movement, but somnambulists, zombies or golems who express the intensity of this non-organic life” (Deleuze, 1986, p.53). Diagonals and cross-diagonals are the symbols of Expressionism in opposition to the horizontal and vertical orientations of the organic montage. Stark contrasts and sharp angles dominate in favour of a stylisation that eliminates every impression of realism aimed at by the American school. The idea of automata will return in the concluding chapters of his cinema books. More importantly, it will also be relevant for my discussion of recent digital cinema in the second part of the thesis, particularly in relation to my analysis of *Avatar* (2009, dir. J. Cameron) in chapter six.

Besides the different montage styles that establish the connections between the images and the whole, the movement-image itself has a variety of forms.

According to Deleuze, the main forms are the perception-image, the affection-image and the action-image. For our study, the latter will be the most relevant and Deleuze tends to use it synonymously with the movement-image in the later parts of his writings. However, I want to briefly introduce the perception- and the affection-image in order to be able clearly to distinguish the action-image.

Deleuze's notion of the perception-image is largely based on concepts by Bergson, who claimed that human perception of a thing is always less than the actual thing, a filtered subjective perspective. In other words, it "is the unicentred subjective perception that is called perception strictly speaking." (Deleuze, 1986, p.66). This aspect is the reason for Deleuze to suggest that we cannot simply compare cinema to human perception as some theorists have done as cinema *per se* does not have a specific centre of perception. In the objective, variable representation of the movement-image the perspective of the audience can shift around and perceive things from all kinds of angles. Particularly in the majority of mainstream Hollywood cinema, the perspective is not normally limited to a subjective view that follows the perception of one individual. An exception to this objective view is the perception-image, which presents the subjective point of view of the character in the film. The affection-image presents an "in between" perception and action. The most noticeable version of this image is the close-up of a face. It marks a break in the action, the moment between perceiving and *re-*acting that re-establishes their relation. Both the perception-image and the affection-image can be found across all genres and types of cinema, but only rarely they are the dominant, defining image of cinema.

The most popular variation of the movement-image is clearly the action-image. For Deleuze it is the movement-image par excellence and the image that is exemplified in classical American cinema. The action-image, though, is not to be confused with *action films*, but can be realised in a variety of genres. The term *action-image* expresses the premise that there is always a direct relation between an action and the situation into which it is introduced. The action-image is characterised by distinct milieus and individuals that act and react in clearly defined relations. Affects and impulses are replaced by behaviour, because – unlike the affect that marks *a break* in the action – behaviour *is* an action, a distinct

pattern, where people proceed from one instance to another and respond to situations in order to modify them.

However, this action-reaction exchange does not take place immediately. There has to be a gap between a situation and the subsequent action, a gap that needs to be filled with drawbacks and progressions during the course of the film in order to justify the action. In summary, Deleuze (1986) describes the action-image as follows:

“derived milieux assert their independence and start to become valid for themselves. Qualities and powers are [...] actualised directly in determinate, geographical, historical and social space-times. Affects and impulses now only appear as embodied in behaviour, in the form of emotions or passions which order and disorder it. This is Realism.” (p. 145).

The last point of this statement in particular is relevant as it suggests not only a specific type of image, but a whole style of cinema, Deleuze’s idea of realism. Yet this is different from the realism other writers have proclaimed with regard to cinema, e.g. Kracauer, especially in relation to post-war tendencies in cinema, such as Italian Neorealism. When Deleuze equals his concept of the action-image with Realism, this also implies an essential connection between Hollywood cinema – as the ultimate action-image – and realism, which is closer to Bazin and his theories about invisible cuts and continuity editing.

Again, realism is nothing that is opposed to fiction, on the contrary. It does not just include fictional narration, but also dream, fantasy and exaggeration, as long as they are consistent with the criteria of milieus that actualise and specific modes of behaviour. Unlike impulses and affections, behaviour for Deleuze refers to clearly defined and causally related patterns. Thus, when Deleuze suggests that this realism includes elements such as fantasy and dream, he implies that similar to behaviour and milieu these aspects have a clear structure and relation to the overall story. This relation with the whole is accessible and easily understandable to the audience. With the action-image on one hand and the organic representation that aims at an objective, natural correlation of the images, the American cinema achieves a form of cinema that Deleuze later calls “truth as totalisation”. It presents stories that we can (and want to) believe in.

After the trauma of the Second World War, however, dramatic changes occur in the development of cinema. Deleuze argues that post-war Europe is suddenly confronted with situations to which people no longer know how to react and find themselves in places and surroundings too confusing to understand or to describe, which is reflected in new movements in cinema. He claims that in “everyday banality, action-image and even the movement-image tend to disappear in favour of pure optical situations, but these reveal connections of a new type, which are no longer sensory-motor<sup>18</sup> and which bring the emancipated senses into direct relation with time and thought.” (Deleuze, 1989, p.17). In other words, situations are no longer translated in actions and the believability of the movement-image collapses into clichés. This calls for new aesthetical models.

Similarly to Kracauer, Deleuze here draws clear connections between a social-cultural and historical development and the aesthetic development of cinema. Jamieson and James describe Deleuze’s deconstruction of the movement-image as a metaphor for our postmodern ideological crisis. They argue that we “can no longer be confident that biology or culture, whether through its effects on our perception or our reason, will manage to keep our world together. It is this anxiety that gives this book its postmodernist spin.” (Jamieson & James, 1988, p.437) What follows from that is the notion that Deleuze’s shift from the movement-image to the time-image takes place not only on the level of visual representation but more importantly on the level of thinking. De Gaetano describes it as a transition from illusion to belief. (Gaetano, 1997)

Even though the Second World War roughly marks the historic split between the two cinema books, one can argue that the distinction becomes not so much one of timelines but rather a distinction between European art cinema and mainstream American cinema. Deleuze (1989) indicates that the time-image might have been a chance of breaking out of the limitations of the action-image and “reaching a mystery of time, of uniting image, thought and camera in a single ‘automatic

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<sup>18</sup> Perception that is then translated into movement – Deleuze adopts this term from Henri Bergson. For a detailed description, see: Bergson, H., 2004. *Matter and Memory*. Mineola (NY): Dover. p.225.

subjectivity', in contrast to the over-objective conception of the Americans." (p.53). Thus the film analyses of the *Time-Image* largely ignore mainstream productions, which, at least occasionally, found their way in Deleuze's *Movement-Image*. This increasingly selective approach makes the analysis particularly of his second cinema book a bit problematic as it is difficult to see how certain theories on the time-image can be applied to a broader scope of cinema. Frampton states that Deleuze reckons the "power of the false to be the new style of cinema, and, watching such films as Resnais and Godard, this would seem to be a viable argument. But we must also keep in mind that Deleuze is only referring to a select number of film-makers, and thus the application of these classifications to other cinemas is limited – though certainly not untenable." (Frampton, 1986, p.12) Despite his criticism, Frampton also suggests that there might be a scope for a wider interpretation of Deleuze's ideas within mainstream Hollywood, and I will attempt to show in how far specific aspects of the time-image have influenced and modified the contemporary movement-image.

It is important to note that Deleuze emphasises that there is no hierarchy between the two types of cinema. He writes in his preface to the English edition of the cinema-books that it is not a "matter of saying that the modern cinema of the time-image is 'more valuable' than the classical cinema of the movement image. [...] The cinema is always as perfect as it can be, taking into account the images and signs which it invents and which it has at its disposal at a given moment." (Deleuze, 1986, p.xii). Despite that, it can be criticised that his analysis of modern post-war cinema largely ignores a significant proportion of cinema. For example, while talking at length about the emergence of Italian Neorealism immediately after the war, he gives no account of the significant output of historical and religious epics that came not only from Hollywood but also from Italy, France and other European countries.<sup>19</sup> Thus one might ask, as this thesis does, if the audience, despite feeling disillusioned and lost, was actually longing for these grand

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<sup>19</sup> For examples on post-war Hollywood epics, refer to footnote at the beginning of chapter five. European epics from that period include the Bible epics *La Regina di Saba* (dir. Pietro Francisci, 1952, IT), *La Spada e la Croce* (dir. Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, 1958, IT), *Giuditta e Oloferne* (dir. Fernando Cerchio, 1959, IT/France), *Erode il Grande* (dir. Viktor Tourjansky, 1958), *Bethsabée* (dir. Léonide Moguy, 1947, France) and *Le chemin de Damas* (dir. Max Glass, 1952, France)

narratives that may reinstate a lost connection with the shattered world around them. As we will see, the movement-image presents this connection and will thus always remain the standard for mainstream cinema as Deleuze acknowledges(1986, p.210)

As the focus of this thesis is on Hollywood cinema, I will largely focus on the movement-image and aim to look at how this image continued to develop after the Second World War. Nevertheless, the emergence of the time-image has also influenced the movement-image, which makes it indispensable to look at some specific aspects of the new images in more detail. Particularly when talking about contemporary digital cinema, a concept of film that involves both images seems most fruitful as I will argue later in this chapter as well as throughout Part Two.

On the most basic level, Deleuze defines the difference between movement-image and time-image in relation to the representation of time. Whereas in the classical cinema time is subordinate to movement, meaning that time only appears as duration in clearly structured units that present the development of the narrative, i.e. the movement of the story, this hierarchy is reversed in modern cinema. According to Deleuze, the time-image succeeds in presenting time in its own terms, by making it visible. Characteristics are breaks in movement, purely optical situations where seeing is not translated in movement, where no action takes place. Even in films where there is an apparent action, this is often in form of aimless meandering, so that the passing time becomes more important than any purpose or destination.

Yet, apart from its representation of time, Deleuze also links the time-image to new concepts of reality. Here, one of the aspects in the relationship between movement-image and time-image is the distinction between actual and virtual. Deleuze argues that rather than challenging the above outlined *realism* of the movement-image, the time-image opposes its *actuality*. As Deleuze (1989) writes, the “time-image [...] is virtual, in opposition to the actuality of the movement-image. But, if virtual is opposed to actual, it is not opposed to real, far from it.” (p.40). This distinction between actual and virtual connects the time-image to new space-time relationships where various layers of reality and thought can co-exist.

This notion will be particularly interesting for my discussion of *Avatar* in chapter six. Yet, it is important to emphasise that both the time-image and the movement-image can be similarly realistic or un-realistic, although they represent their reality in a very different form. Whereas the organic representation of the movement-image is aimed at truthfulness by presenting it as a whole in which everything is ordered, the time-image gives rise to a new form of storytelling, where boundaries are pushed and binary oppositions disappear. Deleuze calls this *falsifying narration* and while he bases his ideas of the movement-image on Bergson's theories of perception and movement, he now refers to Nietzsche's writings on judgement. His analysis thus shifts gradually from aesthetic considerations of the different images to ethical ideas about the truthfulness and believability of the two types of cinema connected to these images. His focus also moves from the images to the narration.

With the departure from the classical organic representation that represents a believable realism the narration of the time-image, the "ceases to be truthful, that is, to claim to be true, and becomes fundamentally falsifying. [...] It is a power of the false which replaces and supersedes the form of the true, because it poses the simultaneity of impossible presents, or the coexistence of not-necessarily true pasts." (Deleuze, 1989, p.127). Unlike in the classical movement-image, causal relations now no longer allow us to draw universal conclusions about the situations and the characters and we are presented with a variety of options that can all be true or false, or both at the same time.

In the classical cinema, the narrative structure of cinema plays an essential role in creating the believability of the film. As discussed in the first chapter, storytelling is an important factor in relation to belief and fundamental to religion and mythology. Deleuze further argues that classical narration is almost inevitably linked to a system of judgement, "even when acquittal takes place due to the benefit of the doubt, or when the guilty is so only because of fate." (Deleuze 1989, p.129) In contrast to this, the falsifying narration of the time-image destroys this system of judgement. This means that whereas in the cinema of the movement-image moral judgements – explicitly or implied – were a crucial part of the story, these values lose their validity in the time-image and are no longer

justified, because the conditions that validated them have become obsolete. As a consequence, it becomes difficult for these stories to provide us with guiding and consoling ideas about our world and our future, which is likely to be one of the reasons why mainstream cinema never went down this route as Deleuze had emphasised.

Nevertheless, there is potential to reconcile our longing for universal ideas with the post-modern scepticism of the time-image. We can achieve this by reminiscing Nietzsche's theories discussed in chapter one. As I have outlined, Nietzsche's notion of myth and illusion has a strong creative component, rather than just being duped the audience actively participates in the creation of the illusion. Deleuze follows this idea to a certain extent, although he does not explicitly refer to the theories developed in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Based on Nietzsche, Deleuze argues that the truthfulness of the old cinema is replaced with the creative power of the artist, as the creator of truth. Only the creative power of the artist can make a real change to cinema by overcoming purely aesthetic changes to the visual representation and transforming the truthfulness of cinema. Deleuze (1989) claims that we then reach the point, where there

“is no longer either truth or appearance. There is no longer either invariable form or variable point of view on to a form. There is a point of view which belongs so much to the thing that the thing is constantly transformed in a becoming identical to point of view. Metamorphosis of the true. What the artist is, is creator of truth, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced, it has to be created.”(p.142).

In my understanding this is not as far away from the original creation of myth related to the organic representation, the difference is that the apparent truthfulness of the former is replaced by the notion of belief in the latter, yet the distinction remains vague. Similarly to Kracauer's approach, Deleuze states in the second part of his work, the crucial problem of our modern society is that we have lost our belief in the world around us. As portrayed at the beginning of *The Time-Image*, the problem for people in the post-war period is that their connection with the world is shattered; they have lost their belief and hope in the future. Deleuze describes modern man as a spiritual automaton, who sees more than he is able to think, incapable of action, because thinking is already a form of action.

The ultimate question is how people can get out of this paralysed state. For Deleuze the answer it seems is simple, we have to “believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love or life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: ‘something possible, otherwise I will suffocate’.”(Deleuze, 1989, p.164). Confronted with a reality impossible to be captured rationally, belief becomes the only possible reaction. It is the leap of faith required for survival. Here, Deleuze again comes close to Nietzsche, who claimed that when rationality finally reaches its boundaries, it can only be belief – illusion – that saves us from drowning in despair. In addition, these ideas also link Deleuze to Kracauer, who argued that only cinema can reinstate our connection with our world and in that sense Deleuze’s concepts brings the two previous theorists together.

The power of cinema to create a link with the world we can believe in is one of the key ideas of this thesis and Deleuze’s theories largely support this claim. The major flaw in Deleuze’s thinking is that he first moves away from the cinema of the movement-image that constituted a convincing system of truthfulness and then asks modern cinema, which has disposed of this system, to reinstate the belief. Although it is valid to note that certain old ideas and ideals presented by the movement image may have lost their legitimacy for an increasingly critical audience, but this does not explain why this classical cinema continues to be successful. I therefore argue that in the same way that the movement-image was inspired by the time-image, the development of the time-image is equally influenced by the organic concept of the movement-image from which it tries to escape. Disappointingly, Deleuze’s theories here become increasingly vague as he struggles to justify how the falsifying narration can create a model of truth that is different from the old one. Deleuze suggests that cinema should no longer create the perfect illusion of a world but simply belief in our own world and be the *creator of truth*. I argue, however, that this is exactly what the old cinema has done. Its truthfulness and realism is by no means a natural given, even though the organic style of its representation *suggests* this. Rather, it created the *illusion of truthfulness* – of being true or real – by creating a world we want to believe in.

I further argue that by having another look at the development of the movement-image particularly in the post-war period, we can see why it is so powerful. One argument here is that it seems that reinstating belief also restores people's ability to think as thinking is a reaction – an action. We can compare this notion to Nietzsche's example of Hamlet (*Birth of Tragedy*, chapter VII), who is so overwhelmed by what he sees that he is unable to react. Nietzsche claims that only artistic illusion can save us from this state – and creating compelling artistic illusions is the domain of the movement-image. In fact Deleuze himself seems to realise that he cannot get away from the movement-image when discussing belief. He writes that it is “as if cinema were telling us: with me, with the movement-image, you can't escape the shock which arouses the thinker in you. A subjective and collective automaton for an automatic movement: the art of the ‘masses’.” (Deleuze, 1989, p.151).

Here, Deleuze refers to the notion of the spiritual automaton, a kind of thinking machine, pure thought. He describes cinema as a big mechanism that forces us to believe and thus enables us to move on. Even though the mechanical, collective automata of the movement-image have been substituted by the spiritual automata of the time-image, the concept itself seems to be essential to cinema, or more precisely essential to the movement-image. Deleuze (1989) states that if “cinema is automatism become spiritual art – that is, initially movement-image – it confronts automata, not accidentally, but fundamentally.” (p.252). Deleuze suggests at the end of *The Time-Image* that automata take increasingly complex forms in contemporary cinema, as computer, networks and cybernetic automata – automata of thought. Whereas the automata of the classical cinema of the movement-image were still ruled by a single, sometimes mysterious, power behind them, this power is now diverted and becomes ever more diffuse. This already points towards a digital future of cinema, as I will further discuss in the final chapter.

In addition, there is another aspect in Deleuze's ideas on spiritual automata that link his theories to the films I will analyse in the second part of the thesis. Deleuze claims that these new automata also bring back the chance of grand mise-en-scenes, which are a characteristic of the movement-image. Connecting his notion

of the spiritual automata to his previous thoughts on belief towards the end of *The Time-Image*, he assigns cinema a *catholic quality*, comparing Catholicism as “a grand mise-en-scène” with cinema, which produces “a cult which takes over the circuit of the cathedrals” (Deleuze, 1989, p.165). This idea is evident in the revival of grand epics that I will discuss later on. Continuing Deleuze’s line of thought from the 1980s towards the new millennium, I will show that the use of computer generated images endorses this classical style of the movement-image, as can be seen in the breathtaking mise-en-scène in *Lord of the Rings* (dir. P. Jackson, 2001-03), the mass movements in *Troy* (dir. W. Petersen, 2004) and the quite literal spiritual and physical automata found in *Avatar* (dir. J. Cameron, 2009).

Deleuze finally acknowledges that with the increasing influence of electronic images, the time-image has reached a point where its criteria are no longer sufficient to explain these new types of images. He suggests that we may need yet another type of image to explain these new forms, yet my claim is that the way to understand these new images is by revisiting the movement-image and examining its intersection with the time-image in contemporary cinema as I will demonstrate in the second part of this thesis.

There are several other theorists that have attempted to develop Deleuze’s ideas further into the twenty-first century. In his book *Filmosophy* Daniel Frampton (2006) he envisions films as a form of thinking, a system of thoughts, ideas and memories. Frampton claims that cinema “believes in its objects just as we have a belief about our past. Film can thus possibly help us understand our own forms of memory and recollection.” (Frampton, 2006, p.19). Yet Frampton insists that he does not simply use film to illustrate thought processes, but that cinema itself *is* a form of thinking.

There are several problems with understanding this theory, especially since he proceeds by saying that the basic and most obvious elements that show us thought processes in film are metaphors and illustrations, whereas he simultaneously criticises theorists that use cinema as illustration for philosophical concepts. The more interesting argument is that Frampton suggests that a simple analogy between film and thinking is far too limiting. Thus he proposes a new

concept of *particularly filmic thinking*, a more poetical, non-linear concept of thinking in, of and about film. Similar to Martin & Ostwalt's notion in chapter one, he objects that theorists don't "seem confident enough to allow 'thinking' into the plainest of films. The reason most writers hold this view is that they are not able to get past the idea of thinking as 'obvious' or 'ostensibly intentional'." (Frampton, 2006, p.32). He argues that it is well worth taking mainstream cinema into account when talking about film and thinking.

Frampton further criticises the idea that film is similar to human perception. Like Kracauer and Deleuze before him, he states that film works quite differently and enables us to see things we could not naturally perceive. He claims that cinema goes beyond our perception and it differs from it, by directly showing us *'film-thinking'*. Each film reproduces cinema via references and homages to other films and by the way it influences the lives of the audience. Referring to Deleuze, Frampton (2006) states that the film image is always different from what it represents, "cinema is beyond the bounds of representation; it is the image that is the real 'thing' present to the filmgoer." (p.61).

Frampton claims that both the movement-image and the time-image present their own kind of thinking, that influence the audience in different ways. Whereas the movement-image presents naturally structured narratives that conceal the actual process of film making and therefore deliver a realistic image, the time-image presents the deconstruction of "representability" and finally only allows the leap to transcendent belief. Frampton (2006) describes the different systems of thinking which these images inspire as follows:

"A basic metaphorical sequence will cause the filmgoer to think, cause them to receive a fairly distinct idea. A somewhat more irrational sequence will cause the filmgoer to think and receive (a less exact) idea, and the shock of this 'new idea' will cause the filmgoer to go back to the images, re-experience them, and see within them a belief or interpretation that caused the idea. In other words, the shock effect of false movement and irrational cuts (forms of the time-image) provokes the filmgoer's 'new' thought, which brings them back to the image, and the interpretation or belief within the image itself." (p.63-64)

Frampton sees the interesting aspect of Deleuze's theory, particularly in *The Time-Image*, as being the inevitable connection between film thinking and believing. He argues that by claiming that cinema reinstates our belief in the world, Deleuze promotes a unique filmic thinking about our world. This thinking interprets and changes our world, creating a film-world to which we relate not only rationally but intuitively and emotionally.

Frampton points out that especially the latest developments in cinema demand new concepts of thinking as new technologies of image creation free narration from traditional concepts of referentiality and authorship. He emphasises that cinema has always created its own world and the audience has always been prepared to accept the world cinema creates. With contemporary digital cinema we are leaving the last connections to physical laws and photo-real references behind, while still creating worlds that are as compelling and realistic as never before. Drawing on Deleuze, Frampton characterises his own concept of 'filmosophical thinking' as an organic concept, where each image also reflects the thinking of the whole. Frampton suggests that what we see is not only an image or a character, but also the film's own 'belief' in and about this image or character.

There are various extents to which the film thinking is present in cinema. It can either aim at a neutral presentation of its images and objects or apply a strong judgement or perspective towards its objects. Nevertheless, Frampton argues that the audience does not want the film to explain itself, but to *illuminate* the story and images, it wants cinema to provide the rhetoric tools that allows it to experience and engage with the film, both consciously and subconsciously. He writes that "Filmosophers want to believe the film, want to be swept into the film, want to engage with the drama as fully as possible. They want the horror to scare us, the comedy to make us laugh, the drama to make us cry." (Frampton, 2006, p.154). This suggests that Frampton claims film theorist should not shy away from engaging with film in the way the rest of the audience does, being moved and amused by cinema instead of taking a simply analytical perspective that loses the aspect of enchantment, which is often crucial for understanding cinema. Frampton points out that our engagement with a film might be a conscious

process when we start watching the film, but as soon the film develops we rather *feel* the film directly.

Especially recent cinema, that seamlessly mixes digital and photo-real images, provides us with a new form of reality, which provokes new experiences and as a consequence new thinking and emotions. In other words, cinema “seems to engender a new kind of belief – we recognise its reality as being like ours, but we do not expect its reality to always act like ours (in fact we like it to differ quite a bit).” (Frampton, 2006, p.155).

Frampton further argues that a good film theory should take this into consideration by looking at cinema as a whole and not destroy a film by taking it to pieces in order to analyse individual theoretical and technical aspects. This approach is not able to capture the essence of a film, the thinking of the film. Here, Frampton is in line with the previously discussed theorists, who favour a more inclusive, universal approach to an in-depth, analytical one. Frampton evokes a development of ideas starting from reflexive, poetic philosophical concepts by Nietzsche and later Derrida via the images of thought in Deleuze, towards a new philosophical film thinking. He asserts that his concept of film-thinking reveals the content beyond dialectics and truth, which is based on an open judgement and creates a unique filmic truth. As the engagement with film thinking is not just a rational one, the audience connects with cinema on a deeper level. Film thus can show us abstract concepts such as space, time and identity not through reason, but through images and sounds.

In the final chapter Frampton discusses digital cinema and the way it influences and alters concepts of filmic thinking in more detail. He argues that purely digital cinema is less interesting as it presents a world that visually differs significantly from our own. Therefore viewers rather connect with it on a rational, aesthetic level. At the beginning of chapter six I will discuss several digital epics that seem to be consistent with this claim. Nevertheless, Frampton also acknowledges that technical developments may likely proceed to a stage where computer generated images really become indistinguishable from photographed ones. “Cinema will

then truly become its own new world – able to show anything, be anything, go anywhere, think anything...” (Frampton, 2006, p.205).

However, currently more relevant for contemporary cinema is what Frampton calls fluid film-thinking, the blending of traditionally photographed and computer generated images. Like purely digital cinema, it gives the filmmaker full creative freedom, which allows him to completely alter images, but these images have the additional advantage of having an apparent photo-real referent. According to Frampton, contemporary digital cinema is not primarily about creating entirely new worlds, but altering the image of our own world by adding fresh perspectives and variables. This still provides the audience with familiar elements, so that we engage with the new images and thoughts on a more immediate, intuitive, emotional level and not just on an abstract, aesthetical level, where we appreciate the art and craft without being moved or drawn in the story.

In conclusion, Frampton (2006) states that “to see films as thinking is to credit them with power and creative intention.” (p.211). He argues that since our world is undoubtedly shaped by the various forms of media we are consuming daily, it is crucial to understand them in order to understand our world. In the second part of this thesis, and particularly in the final chapter, I will discuss these new thoughts and images presented in digital cinema in more detail. To gain a better insight into the debate surrounding recent developments in digital cinema I will review several essays on this topic in the following part of this chapter.

### 3.2 *Brave new worlds* – computer generated images and a new aesthetics

In the 1990s, computer generated images started to gain widespread influence in mainstream Hollywood cinema. Films such as *Jurassic Park* (dir. S. Spielberg, 1993) and its sequels made use of increasingly sophisticated CGI creatures that acted on screen convincingly with real-life actors. This new development also posed new questions for film theorists and in the concluding part of this chapter I will discuss several articles that illustrate the various debates.

The general problem the following theorists are fighting with is the idea that cinematic realism is based on the fact that the camera image has a referent in reality, similar to the photographic image. As I have shown in the previous chapters, shifting the focus to storytelling and myth allows us to move away from discussing the images as such and focussing on the overall illusion cinema creates. Nevertheless, by looking at alternative ways to interpret these new cinematic images, the following articles will contribute towards the discussion of contemporary Hollywood films in the second part of this thesis

One of the earliest articles discussing the aesthetic consequences of computer generated images is 'Film theory in the Digital World' (1990). In this paper, John Andrew Berton, Jr. revisits classical texts from the early stages of film theory, such as Kuleshov, Bazin and Arnheim. This interesting approach is grounded in his argument that the arrival of digital technologies can be compared to the arrival of cinema as a new medium, when theorists were searching for new concepts to explain a significantly different type of medium.

Berton claims that similar to the invention of the film camera, the computer was not intentionally created as an artistic tool. As a consequence, technological aspects often supersede the aesthetic and artistic aspects of the medium, in early cinema as well as in early *digital* cinema. The process of image creation seems to be more important than the content and meaning carried by those images. Thus, Berton suggests that both theorists and practitioners should put more emphasis on how digital technology can be used in a creative way.

He further suggests that the way digital artists and film makers approach the new technology is comparable to the works of Méliès in the early days of cinema. Méliès tried to explore the extent to which time and space can be manipulated by cinema and then used it creatively.

Discussing Russian filmmaker and early film theorist Lev Kuleshov, who was the first to develop aesthetic concepts of montage, Berton points out that according to Kuleshov, a filmmaker must pay close attention to the *organisation* of images in order to give the audience an image that is easily and efficiently understood. This

is exactly the aspect where Kuleshov seem to be perfectly applicable to modern digital cinema. Berton (1990) states that in all his ideas “Kuleshov seems to call for exactly what digital cinema offers: complete control over every structural element in both the world space and screen space of the shot.” (p.8).

Kuleshov had bemoaned that there are often elements of reality in filmic images that are beyond the control of the filmmaker which might distract and confuse the spectator. These elements, however, do not naturally exist in digital cinema, because a digital image only entails those elements that are specifically and individually *created* to be in this image. Strangely enough, as Berton points out, digital artists in practice often include these ‘meaningless’ elements, often simply because they are technologically available and can thus show off the technology. This notion supports his claim that the current emphasis lies on technological aspects rather than aesthetical ones. This aspect is rather important for digital cinema, especially films such as *Avatar* (2009, dir. by J. Cameron), where images often appear as too neat and controlled. The cyber jungle of the film may be beautiful, but is a far cry from the complexity of an existing rain forest. I will return to this aspect in chapter six.

Berton then moves on to discuss André Bazin’s concept of cinematic realism, whose theories seem to have a revival in the digital age. In contrast to the artistic approach of Méliès, who highlighted the ability of cinema to extend and reinterpret reality, Bazin emphasises cinema’s ability to recreate reality accurately with a minimum of reinterpretation, although there are modifications to this view as I have shown in the last chapter.

Berton notes that although the current state of technological development still only produces incomplete substitutes of photo-real reality, it is very possible that future technology will be able to produce digital images that cannot easily be divided from photographic images. For Berton, the present lack of realism in digital cinema is mainly due to the lack of complexity *within* the images. The point of complexity relates on one hand to the richness of the image as mentioned above when discussing Kuleshov and on the other to the links between the objects of an image. Bazin had argued that realism is largely based on complex

connections between the objects and the world within an image, as well as the other images. This is comparable to Deleuze's organic concept, where the whole is actualised in the individual and the individual in turn influences the whole.

Berton argues that when following Bazin's notion of realism, a digital filmmaker has to build a film world that recreates the visual as well as the contextual complexity of reality by "embracing the highest possible technology in image generation without allowing the technology itself to rule the work", in other words, the "computer makes the viewer believe that an object exists, but the artist must make the viewer believe that the object's existence has meaning." (Berton, 1990, p.9). Berton concludes that Bazin's concepts of realism based on a complex reality provides digital cinema with an aesthetic concept that encourages filmmakers and theorists to discuss images based on the complexity of their reality, irrespective of the way these images were produced.

Finally, Berton reviews Rudolf Arnheim, who described the cinematic space as a primarily artificial space. He claimed in contrast to Bazin that while filming, the camera already fundamentally changes the elements of reality that it captures. By choosing a camera angle or a specific point of view the filmmaker excludes elements of reality that would otherwise be visible to the spectator. Following on Arnheim's concepts, Berton (1990) argues that if "photographic cinema has great artistic potential in part because its representations of reality are filtered, then digital cinema has the same potential because its filtering process is much more complex, and much more controllable." (p.10). With digital technology then, the filmmaker has more facilities to create exactly the cinematic worlds he or she intends and has full control over the selection.

Based on his examination of these three theorists, Berton suggests that the improvement in technologies might reduce the artist's concern with basic aspects of filmmaking by allowing him to fully focus on the *content* and *aesthetic concepts* used to realise his cinematic vision and thus liberates him creatively. This last aspect of Berton's paper suggests that the use of CGI and other forms of digital cinema, such as correcting and modifying images in post-production, might make

filmmaking not only more efficient but also sets it free from previous technical restrictions.

Berton shows new ways of interpreting realism based on traditional film theoretical concepts. Stephen Prince suggests another approach to deal with the difficulty in describing the new cinematic images. In his article 'True Lies: Perceptual Realism, Digital Images, and Film Theory', he proposes a concept of cinematic realism that is no longer based on its reference to physical reality but rather on our perception. At the beginning of his essay he poses the question of which influences new technologies will have on film theory, in particular those based on photographic realism. He sees this concept challenged by the fact that "viewers of Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* watched photographic images of moving, breathing, and chomping dinosaurs, images which have no basis in any photographable reality but which nevertheless seemed realistic." (Prince, 1996, p.28). Prince claims that film theory still has problems analysing these phenomena, whereas the audience seems much more willing to accept these images as 'real'. He claims that viewers make general judgements about the perceived realism of certain images or characters in a film, even if these images are obviously fictional.

Based on this notion, we can easily accept the various creatures living in the jungle in *Avatar*. Despite being tall and blue, the local population acts and speaks and reacts quite similar to the humans and interacts with them naturally. Similarly, the Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-03, dir. P. Jackson) still has human features and a human actor behind his making, and the Oliphants in the third part are only slightly different from the elephants we know.

Prince initially looks at classical film theorists such as Bazin and Kracauer to explain the traditional concept of realism based on indexical references. Unlike paintings, photographic images are connected to a referent existing in physical reality. Because of the paradoxical nature of having credible 'photographic' images of things impossible to photograph, Prince (1996) suggests a new model of realism "based on perceptual and social correspondences, of how the cinema

communicates and is intelligible to viewers.” (p.28). He calls this new approach ‘perceptual realism’.

Nevertheless, Prince acknowledges that despite the fact that computer generated images, such as the aforementioned dinosaurs, do not have a (living) reference in reality, they can still have *certain references* to physical reality. This means that the individual elements of the image, namely lighting, surface texture, movements etc. provide the audiences with clues that are familiar to them, so that they are easily able to refer the ‘unreal’ images to their own physical world space. Prince admits that these referentially based conceptions of cinematographic realism have always been just one tendency in film theory and that there have been alternative models, such as the formalist school. These alternative models emphasised the ability of cinema to recognise, falsify and creatively alter physical reality. Yet Prince sees in these two concepts a bipolar tradition of film theory that only defines the two ends of the spectrum. This duality has been further nurtured by modern film theory.

According to Prince (1996) “classical film theory was organized by a dichotomy between realism and formalism, contemporary theory has preserved the dichotomy even while recasting one set of its terms. Today indexically based notions of cinema realism exist in tension with a semiotic view of the cinema as discourse and of realism as one discourse among others.” (p.31).

Prince suggests that this constant tension in film theory can be overcome by employing his new correspondence based model for describing cinematic images. He writes that instead “of asking whether a film is realistic or formalistic, we can ask about the kinds of linkages that connect the represented fictionalized reality of a given film to the visual and social coordinates of our own three-dimensional world, and this can be done for both ‘realist’ and ‘fantasy’ films alike.” (Prince, 1996, p.32).

This correspondence based model draws on the viewer’s experiences of his own world. In this way, an image might be referentially fictional but still perceptually realistic, because it does structurally correspond with the viewer’s audiovisual

experience. Moreover, those perceptually realistic images “correspond to this experience because film-makers build them to do so. Such images display a nested hierarchy of cues which organize the display of light, colour, texture, movement, and sound in ways that correspond with the viewer’s own understanding of these phenomena in daily life.” (Prince, 1996, p.32). Thus, Prince’s perceptual realism is based on the relationship between the cinematic images and the viewer, and this relationship includes entirely artificial and fictional images as well as those based on reality. Prince (1996) even goes as far as to suggest that because “computer-generated images have been rendered with such attention to 3D spatial information, they acquire a very powerful perceptual realism, despite the obvious ontological problems in calling them ‘realistic’.” (p.34).

As a result, Prince concludes that the emphasis in contemporary film theory is shifting towards a cinematic discourse, which acknowledges the fact that the cinematographic image is not just either indexical recording of reality or artistic transfiguration, but (nearly) always both. This notion may help us in discussing films such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Troy* (2004, W. Petersen) as realistic in the way they are perceived by the audience, which I will attempt in the following chapters.

In a more recent article, published in 2004, Prince updates his ideas and argues that the major impact of digital technology is in areas where they are not often noticed as such by the audience, e.g. by enhancing lighting and colours in postproduction, editing out flaws and so on. Therefore, one has to ask whether new technologies alter cinema on a much deeper structural level than the obvious use of computer generated images suggests. Whereas special-effects might advertise CGI to the audience, they have always been part of cinema and created exciting and outstanding images throughout film history.

Prince, however, wants to discuss how the more subtle use of digital imaging technology changes the audience’s perception of cinema. Like other writers discussed here, Prince stresses the significant increase in artistic freedom through the use of digital filmmaking and compares this with the creative flexibility of painters. These new images nevertheless look ‘natural’, maybe even more natural

in the way they help us to ‘understand’ the images as related to the narrative. He also points out that from an aesthetic perspective “the wide-angle look of digital video arguably fulfils the ideal for cinema that Bazin explicated, that of replicating the viewer’s ontological experience of a rich, multi-plane visual world.” (Prince, 2004, p.31). However, Prince notes that the ethical perspective of this conception of realism is yet to be discussed, but leaves that open for others to attempt.

Prince finally proposes that cinema will continue to tell stories irrespective of the type of recording used. However, he claims that “the quality and the character of light itself, and the perceptual experiences it induces in viewers, provides perhaps the most integral conception of the medium, and it is here – in the nature of the light-induced perceptual experience – that the medium is transforming most radically.”(Prince, 2004, p.32). Yet, this might be simply a generational problem. Prince admits that it might simply be the old-fashioned perception of our generation who still notices the distinct qualities of celluloid film, whereas the new generation, influenced by digital TV and computer games may not actually perceive the sharpness, brightness and flawlessness of digital images as ‘unnatural’. This is an aspect I will further review in relation to *Avatar* and contemporary 3D cinema in chapter six.

Towards the end of the millennium, *Screen* dedicated a special edition to the impact of computer generated images on cinema. The three following essays derive from this edition and present different aspects of contemporary film theory in relation to digital cinema.

In its short introduction, ‘Le réel, c’est l’impossible: The sublime time of special effects’, Sean Cubitt discusses the use of special effects in connection with philosophical notions of the sublime and the spectacle. Like the aforementioned film scholars, he also compares digital technology to tendencies in early cinema, especially Méliès and his cinema of attractions. According to Cubitt (1999) the sublime “points towards a time beyond the mundane, a post-mortem time, or a time of the gods. The different temporality which the special effect occupies vis-à-vis the time of narrative indicates its extra-historical, extra-temporal status.” (p.128). In that sense, the sublime effect of CGI in cinema is an effect outside or

beyond the 'ordinary' narration, it is no longer representational but illusionistic, thus it requires a unique temporality that differs from the rest of the film. I will discuss this aspect further in the second part of the thesis, when looking at the most recent digital epics. Particularly when looking at the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy, the notion of the sublime is important in understanding the distinction between the film version and their literary predecessor.

In the article 'CGI effects in Hollywood science-fiction cinema 1989-95: the wonder years', Michele Pierson argues along a similar line when she proposes that science-fiction cinema in the early nineties presented the computer generated images as an event in itself rather than as an integral element of the story. The focus was on the technological novelty of digital images. Pierson claims that particularly in action focused science-fiction films, the presentation of a crucial CGI marks a distinct break in the action of the film. The eagerness of the audience to be carried along by the film is suspended for a short time in order to allow them to gaze at the digitally created object. She writes that the "sequences featuring CGI commonly exhibit a mode of spectatorial address that – with its tableau-style framing, longer takes, and strategic intercutting between shots of the computer-generated object and reaction shots of characters – solicits a contemplative viewing of the computer-generated image." (Pierson, 1999, p.169). However, not every appearance of a computer generated image is exposed in this way. Usually, there are various modes of presentation of digital special effects in one film as otherwise the event of first appearance would lose its uniqueness.

Another interesting aspect Pierson points out is that the majority of CGI enhanced films that were successful with the audience, do not present an 'as real as possible' cinematographic image, but rather a new "hyperreal electronic aesthetic" that goes beyond. As Pierson (1999) writes, on one hand pulled "towards photographic realism and, on the other hand, towards a synthetic hyperrealism, the computer-generated imagery in this cinema exhibits an aesthetic that plays across these two poles." (p.172). This is especially true of most recent digital spectacles such as *Avatar*, as we will see in chapter six.

Yet, Pierson notes that by the end of the millennium this tendency had already come to an end and the presentation of CGI is no longer a central aspect in the genre. Digital special effects are no longer mere objects of contemplation and become more integrated in the narrative and action of a film. She finally suggests that every now and then “a CGI effect will pop up and again turn the imaging of a technological artefact into an occasion for contemplation and wonder. But for the moment, at least, the future has once more dropped out of sight in Hollywood science-fiction cinema.” (Pierson, 1999, p.176)

In a second article, published in *Wide Angle* in the same year, called *No longer State-of-the-Art: Crafting a Future for CGI*, Pierson further emphasises that the period of CGI described in her previous article was only temporary and that the implication of digital images shifted quickly from exposed presentation and contemplative viewing to a more integrated, subtle and indirect approach. Now focussing more on editing and the way it is influenced by digital technologies, Pierson (1999b) argues that today the “editing of Hollywood films is much less obviously motivated by the desire to maintain visual and narrative continuity than it was even a decade ago” (p.34), an argument that remains to be proved. She also suggests that digital technologies in post-production allow and demand for new concepts of montage that create new modes of enchantment. Despite that, Pierson concludes that special-effects in general always favour a novelty effect over realism and they will lead the way in the development of digital images. The most recent 3-D-effects spectacles clearly support that claim.

Warren Buckland’s essay ‘Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg’s dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism’, examines computer generated images from the perspective of analytic philosophy, more specifically modal logic. In contrast to the ideas presented in the previous paragraphs, Buckland argues that digital special effects have a function in a film, which goes well beyond the creation of spectacle. To analyse CGI and special effects independently from the narrative ignores the films capability of creating and presenting possible worlds. According to him, a “possible world is a modal extension of the ‘actual world’, whereas fiction on the other hand can be described “as purely imaginary world that runs parallel to, but is autonomous

from, the actual world.” (Buckland, 1999, p.177). In this sense, the dinosaurs in Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* were so convincing, because they were not entirely fictional, but the product of an – however unlikely – scientific experiment, a ‘what if’ scenario.

Digital cinema has according to Buckland a unique capacity to present us with *possible worlds* and not just purely fictional ones, by seamlessly combining actual with virtual images through computer generated images. This does not only include visible special effects but more importantly invisible special effects, which are mainly used when a simulation of an event would be too expensive or complicated to produce in reality.

This notion of possibility can also be found in the films discussed in part two of this thesis. The *Lord of the Rings* aims at presenting its universe as pre-prehistoric, but nevertheless part of human history, *Troy* has obvious historic links and *Avatar* presents the unique world of Pandora as simply another planet, which humans colonise just a few years from now. All three examples link actual and virtual images in the way described above to create a more convincing fictional world.

In general, digital images are a combination of both visible and invisible effects and so they “have the potential to replicate the realism and illusionism of the photographic image by conferring a perfect photographic credibility upon objects that do not exist in the actual world.” (Buckland, 1999, p.185). According to Buckland, the fusion of various types of images and effects is one of the key elements in establishing realism in contemporary digital cinema. In his analysis of *Jurassic Park* he argues that the composition of images as well as the choice of shots and perspectives is fully within the concept of realism developed by Bazin. Hollywood mainstream cinema thus creates its unique ‘illusionist realism’ even more so within modern CGI films. More precisely, Buckland (1999) writes that the digital compositing used in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* creates

“all three types of realism identified by Bazin: ontological realism, in that the digital dinosaurs appear to have equal weight and density as the photographic background and live-action characters; dramatic realism, in that they are seamlessly blended into, and interact with, the photographic background and

live-action characters; and psychological realism, in that they are seen to occupy the same space as the photographic background and live-action characters.” (p.189).

Even though these images may not be realistic in a strict ontological sense, Buckland argues that the audience does not usually make a high ontological commitment to the reality of cinematic objects. But nor does it simply regard them as purely imaginary during the film experience. In that way, the “digital image can, by means of special effects, make the possible believable.” (Buckland, 1999, p.191). Buckland describes the audience’s ‘belief’ in films, which present possible worlds, as a combination of modal propositions in the philosophical sense. He therefore sees the value of modal concepts for film theory in its ability to describe connections between film and social reality without falling into naïve traditional theories of mimeticism.

So far, most articles on digital cinema emphasised the creative possibilities of the new medium. Yet, there are also more critical views on the new possibilities provided by digital imaging technologies. In his essay ‘Digital Cinema: A false revolution’, John Belton argues that the so called digital revolution is by no means comparable with the significant impact of sound film or colour film, as it lacks the profound change in the user experience these previous ‘revolutions’ in cinema had. First of all, the transition to digital cinema only takes place very gradually, starting with the use of CGI in special-effects production, followed by digital sound and finally the gradual arrival of digital projection. Although Belton may have a valid point in asserting that the most dramatic impact of digital technology takes place on the production level and is thus unnoticed by the spectator, this does not mean that new forms of image creation do not also influence the audience’s perception of these new creations.

In addition, Belton assumes that the development of digital cinema is more or less purely economically driven and rather directed towards the video and DVD market than towards a true revolution in cinema itself. He writes that “the digital revolution is part of a new corporate synergy within Hollywood, driven by the lucrative home entertainment market.” (Belton, 2002, p.100). It could be similarly argued that the development of sound and colour was driven by commercial

interests, yet this argument does not *per se* negate the fact that these developments have a significant impact on our experience of cinema.

Lastly, Belton sees a further negative impact of digital cinema by suggesting that its influence could lead to a dominance of certain genres specifically equipped to use CGI, such as fantasy and science-fiction. He suggests that an “all-digital cinema might become an all-fantasy cinema.” (Berton, 2002, p.106). Although it can clearly be said that fantasy is a popular genre in contemporary cinema, the revival of historic epics in the last decade already contradicts Berton’s theory.

Despite his overall criticism, Berton acknowledges that the new technologies and their relatively cheap and easy availability can also open doors for independent filmmakers to fulfil their visions, and thus diversify and democratise filmmaking. This final statement would then outweigh his previous claims on the commercialist, fantasy-focussed nature of modern digital cinema.

Finally, I will look at Daniel Rodowick’s essay ‘Dr. Strange Media; Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Film Theory’ (2001). Here, he examines the possible future of film theory based on the assumption that the future of cinema itself is unclear in the digital era.

Firstly, Rodowick notes that when digital technologies first entered modern cinema, the problem between classic (analogue) and modern (digital) technologies even became part of the narratives. Films such as *Matrix*, *13<sup>th</sup> Floor* and *eXistenZ* discussed the – mostly frightening – impact of worlds created by a computer and showed how digital illusions could seamlessly replace our previous perception of reality.

Moreover, Rodowick argues that when the discourse between digital and analogue takes place within the narrative, analogue images obtain an aesthetic function as being more real than the ‘other reality’, thus the photograph “becomes the sign of the vanishing referent, which is a way of camouflaging its own imaginary status” (Rodowick, 2001, p.1398). He further adds as an example that “in the canny conclusion of *The Matrix*, we enjoy both the apotheosis of Nero, the digital

superhero, and the preservation of the last human city, Zion, which functions as the site of the 'real,' hidden away at the earth's core as a distant utopia.” (Rodowick, 2001, p.1398). What we see here is also the classic conflict in film theory, between art and technology, between cinema as a recording medium and a creative configuration of images, which was previously mentioned by Prince.

The paper emphasises that 'photorealism' is still the non-plus-ultra in evaluating the quality of digital images. Yet, Rodowick also notes that film theory has since its beginnings struggled to find a clear definition of what cinema actually *is* and with digital cinema this question is renewed. Nevertheless, despite the problems of theorists in keeping up with the rapid changes in digital media, he has a positive view on the future of cinema and its theory. Unlike in the early days of cinema, when film history and theory only developed several decades later, “digital culture is not emerging in a similar theoretical vacuum. For the same history positions us to better comprehend the complex genealogy defining the technological and aesthetic possibilities of computer-generated imagery as well as its commercial and popular exploitation.” (Rodowick, 2001, p.1404).

The fact that the majority of theorists mentioned in this part review the ideas of the pioneers of film theory seems to support this point. In a similar way I will link the historic philosophical and cinematic concepts developed in the last three chapters to the new possibilities of digital cinema. This framework will allow us to gain new insights about old questions regarding our life and its illusions.

### Summary

As we have seen throughout this chapter, new developments in cinema have always posed a challenge for theorists. When Deleuze classified cinema, he defined two distinct types of images, the movement-image and the time-image. These descriptions not simply referred to the individual images, but also how these images relate to each other and create a system of meaning. For Deleuze, the shift from movement-image to the time-image took place after the Second

World War, when the particular circumstances of post-war society inspired new aesthetic approaches towards film.

Like Nietzsche and Kracauer before him, Deleuze clearly links aesthetic movements to social and cultural developments and thus emphasises the reciprocal influence between cinema and society. However, he also suggests that this shift does not take place in all areas of cinema and admits that although some new styles of cinema take on new images and structures, the majority of mainstream cinema remains within the concept of the movement-image.

As outlined in this chapter, one of the reasons for this tendency is the way of representing its images as an organic whole that creates a very specific and powerful type of realism within mainstream (Hollywood) cinema. When talking about belief later in his books, Deleuze thus returns to these images and links them to the return of grand *mise-en-scène* and other factors that define the arrival of electronic images in cinema.

The writers discussed in the second part of this chapter continue this line of thought towards contemporary cinema and suggest a variety of approaches to capture and explain these new images in aesthetic terms. The second part of this thesis will take on these ideas and apply them to the analysis of the most recent tendencies in Hollywood cinema.

## Part II:

*May we really believe in Hollywood? –*  
Towards a *modern* movement-image

## **Chapter Four:** ***Redemption through illusion? – Cinematic myths***

In the first part of this thesis I have explored several questions regarding the relationship between film and illusion, such as its connection with myth and religion, aspects of realism and the influence of modern digital technology. More specifically, I divided the field into three key aspects, which I regard as crucial for my main hypothesis regarding the importance of illusions for our life and the role of cinema in their creation. These aspects are: cinema's influence on and similarities with religious and mythic discourse; the importance of realism in the representation of these themes and finally the possibilities of contemporary digital cinema in combining these mythic and religious elements with a level of realism necessary in the creation of illusions that are influential and believable.

Notwithstanding the different approaches of these theorists, there is a connecting line which links these initial chapters with each other. Common to all writers is the acknowledgement of art's importance for our social life, and the recognition of concepts such as redemption and creative power as well as the contrast between cinematic realism and reality, between believability and truth.

Having discussed the theoretical framework of belief and illusion in the first chapter of the thesis, this fourth chapter analyses these ideas more specifically in relation to cinema. In this context, the notion of redemption is particularly relevant and I will explore it in relation to cinematic narratives.

The term redemption is also the connecting thread between the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Siegfried Kracauer and Gilles Deleuze, which have been discussed in the first part of this thesis. Nietzsche (*Birth of Tragedy*, section 4) first spoke about "redemption through illusion" pointing out the importance of art in saving us from the despondency of everyday reality. Kracauer (1961) later speaks about the "redemption of physical reality" (p.300), a role that he assigns to film and which illustrates the cinematic power of creating a unified view of the world that would otherwise be impossible. Deleuze (1989) finally speaks about redemption as "art beyond knowledge" (p.259) in the later chapters of his second cinema book, in which he discusses the connection between cinema and religion. This statement

suggests that art itself is the redemption that propels us beyond rational, scientific knowledge and information by providing a higher set of ideas and inspiration. Deleuze also assigns modern cinema the leading role in reinstating our belief in the world, an idea I will evaluate in this second part of the thesis. As a consequence, the questions that will be analysed in this chapter are: How does the notion of redemption relate to cinema? What is redeemed and by what means is this achieved? Moreover, how is cinema as a medium able to deal with redemption and what is the role of the narrative in representing a concept of redemption? And finally, how is this connected with a notion of belief, illusion and reality?

The first part of this chapter will analyse the redemptive qualities of cinema in relation to other forms of storytelling, such as myth, epics and fairy-tales, that all carry a motif of redemption. They also encompass a very distinct set of elements, e.g. the quest, the hero etc., that are equally relevant for cinema and I aim to explore their importance in the creation of a redemptive illusion. As a basis for this analysis I will draw on myth theories by Joseph Campbell and others. The second part of this chapter applies these aspects to Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003, USA/NZ), which is not only extraordinary in terms of its cinematic achievement, but also with regard to its impact on a considerable number of people.<sup>20</sup> In this context I will discuss how the subject of redemption is represented within the narrative of the films, but moreover how these films redeem traditional philosophical concepts for popular culture. Accordingly, I look firstly at the way the mythic story is constructed in the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy and compare this to traditional elements of storytelling. Secondly, I will ask how this is visualised to emphasise the illusion for the audience. In this context I will explore aspects of set-design in close relation to the narrative and demonstrate their importance in enhancing the believability of the story. Especially with regard to the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy, which is often discussed in close relation with its

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<sup>20</sup> In total, the trilogy won 17 Oscars, plus another 249 prestigious international film awards (including 10 Baftas) and grossed over 1 Billion USD. The individual films are ranked on place 19, 31 and 12 in the 'TOP 250 best films of all times' voted by the fans of IMDB. Source: [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). [Accessed 16 February 2011]. In addition, the seemingly endless amount of fanpages on the internet as well as the wealth of academic literature already dedicated to the films are prove of their impact.

literary source, this latter aspect provides an argument for the unique potential and value of the cinematic version beyond Tolkien's original myth.

Finally, I will examine the impact of cinematic epics on popular culture in general and discuss how the mythic narratives and the illusive power of the films as a whole work together to create not only a most convincing cinematic illusion, but also transcend the limits of the cinema screen and influence our view of the world as such.

#### 4.1 *Never ending stories* – Redemption, storytelling and artistic creation

As outlined in the introduction, I use the term illusion to describe a system of stories and values that inspire a culture. In this sense it is similar to myth and I will use the two terms synonymously in this chapter. One of the reasons for this is that Friedrich Nietzsche, whose theories inform much of this chapter, also used both terms more or less interchangeably and as I am frequently referring to his ideas it would be artificial to distinguish between the two terms.

To begin with, I will have a closer look at the concept of redemption. The term itself is full of religious connotations; hence notions of belief will also be discussed in this paragraph. As mentioned at the beginning, Nietzsche talks about redemption in various contexts throughout his work, but especially when he talks about art and artistic creation. In his *Zarathustra* he describes the process of artistic creation as the “great redemption from suffering and the life's easement” (Nietzsche, 2003, p.111). This quote points towards the key aspects of this concept: redemption as the process that frees us from a state of suffering and thereby makes our life easier and more enjoyable. Crucially, however, Nietzsche's statement also emphasises artistic creation as the act that brings about the redemption. As a consequence, we can assume that the illusion created by an artist is fundamental in redeeming us from suffering and therefore making our life more joyful. This can, of course, be interpreted as mere escapism, but I argue that the notion and acknowledgement of suffering as well as the importance of the

creative process suggests a more profound concept of redemption that, unlike escapism, reaches beyond the cinema reality in our daily life.

As I discussed in the first chapter, the overcoming of suffering and the creation of a world of beauty is not simply a naïve process, but a conscious choice out of an instinctive creative drive. The idea that this drive is particularly strong in times of crisis also highlights the importance of suffering – not physically but rather from a lack of meaning – as inspiration for producing particularly strong illusions. The aspect of creativity as a proactive process, which Nietzsche describes when discussing ancient Greek culture, is relevant for our examination of cinema insofar as it moves the cinematic illusion beyond the simple suspension of disbelief towards a *creation* of belief.

Nietzsche notes in his *Birth of Tragedy* (1999) that “human beings themselves have an unconquerable urge to let themselves be deceived, and they are as if enchanted with happiness when the bard recites epic fairy-tales as if they were true, or when the actor in a play acts the king more regally than reality shows him to be.” (p.151). Even though the cinema audience is usually fully aware of the artificiality of the illusion, there is the *will* not only to be deceived, but also to *actively participate* in the creation of the illusion by transferring the story from screen into one’s own consciousness. In addition, two terms can be drawn from this quote, which are also closely connected to the cinematic illusion: fairy-tales and enchantment. As these terms are also frequently brought up in the scholarly debate on *The Lord of the Rings* film versions, I would like to examine them in more detail now.

Linking the narrative structure of *The Lord of the Rings* with Nietzsche’s ideas of redemption and suffering, John J. Davenport’s essay ‘Happy Endings and Religious Hope: *The Lord of the Rings* as an Epic Fairy Tale’ discusses its mythic narrative from the perspective of the fairy-tale. Similar to Nietzsche’s theories about artistic creation outlined in the previous paragraph, Davenport (2003) acknowledges that each good fairy-tale equally requires a “tragic recognition of the evil and imperfection of our world, or even a Norse-like resignation” (p.209), before the story eventually leads to a happy ending.

Moreover, he also argues that the redemption from this state of resignation and despair cannot exclusively derive from the humans themselves but requires some divine assistance. It can be added that like fairy-tales, most Greek myths incorporate an element of divine interference or at least encouragement despite the heroic efforts of the humans. Hence, most Greek heroes are assumed to be half-gods, e.g. Achilles, Perseus, Heracles, which is a way of justifying their supernatural powers.

In the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy we have a variety of magical beings that help the quest, e.g. the wizard Gandalf, the Elves, magic trees and so on. Despite the paramount efforts from humans and Hobbits alike it seems obvious that they would not stand a chance without this supernatural help. Thanks to this support, fairy-tales usually have happy endings, which Davenport calls 'eucatastrophe', a term he takes from Tolkien, who coined it to describe the positive opposite of the catastrophe.

Davenport (2003) further suggests that the "synthesis of the epic mode, which tends towards tragedy and sorrow, with the eucatastrophic consolation of the fairy tale, helps explain what several commentators have recognized as the paradoxical 'joy-in-sorrow atmosphere [that] pervades the Rings' trilogy." (p.215, Davenport quoting C. S. Kilby, 'Meaning in *The Lord of the Rings*'). This statement underlines the unique appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* narrative, which reaches its full impact by combining various modes of storytelling, such as historic epics, classic myths and fairy-tales. I argue, however, that this combination of joy and sorrow described by Davenport is not simply a result that comes out of a combination of two different modes of storytelling, but essential to most stories. Drawing on Nietzsche's notions on happiness and redemption as a result of a creative process inspired by suffering, this combination of 'joy-in-sorrow' can be assumed as the essential aspect of myth in general. In the second part of this chapter, I will illustrate how the epic/tragic and the fairy-tale/eucatastrophic can be found along two different axes of narration throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, which culminate only at the end of the films.

The notion of enchantment is closely related to fairy-tales and mythic stories. In her essay "My Precious": Tolkien's Fetishized ring' (2003), Alison Milbank reveals an interesting aspect of Tolkien's literary concept. She notes that he draws a clear distinction between magic as something that is manipulative and aimed at domination and enchantment, which is seen as a shared creative experience that produces delight and enrichment. (Milbank, 2003). This aspect refers to the difference between the often negative connotations of illusion as being deluded and the positive aspect of *actively participating in the creation* of an illusion. Illusion as enchantment thus obtains a much more positive connotation, which corresponds with my initial definition of illusion at the beginning of this thesis. If we interpret enchantment or illusion as a shared creative experience of a community or society, it is also much easier to understand how it can reach beyond the borders of the screen. More than just momentarily enchanting us, fairy-tales, myths and epic stories are the very foundation of our culture, not simply something that has been added to it or is purely providing entertainment.

Nietzsche (1999) had argued that without that mythic constitution of epics and fairy-tales, all cultures lose "their healthy, creative, natural energy" and claims that "only a horizon surrounded by myths encloses and unifies a cultural movement." (p.108). In this way myth forms a kind of overarching system that informs fantasy and artistic creation and is in turn influenced by it. Yet as described in the first chapter, we have now lost this essential connection with myth, which prompts us to be constantly searching for new founding myths.

This concept of myth is equally relevant for popular culture in general, and more specifically cinema, where popular stories become part of a common consciousness even though we are often not aware of how much we are influenced by it. Nietzsche (1999) emphasises this unconscious aspect of myth when he argues that these mythic images "must be unnoticed but omnipresent, daemonic guardians under whose tutelage the young soul grows up and by whose signs the grown man interprets his life and his struggles". (p.108).

It is important for our analysis of cinematic myths that these mythic narratives are not necessarily ancient. Deleuze had pointed out that "The American Dream" is

probably the most influential modern myth, an ideological concept created by a society in its beginnings. Not only is it still a powerful mythic ideal of modern American society, it is also closely related to and hugely influential on classic Hollywood cinema.

Apart from the enchantment and resulting happiness we can draw from mythic stories, they also have an important function in explaining and structuring our world and the provision of unifying concepts that guide us. This is the aspect Kracauer focuses on when talking about cinema and redemption. The unique power of cinema lies for him in providing these unifying concepts, general ideas and visions of the world that create the illusion of a whole.

In his book, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema*, Robert B. Ray (1985) claims that Hollywood's narrative structure functions in the same way as myth, by magically reconciling society's irreconcilable contradictions. He further argues that Hollywood's illusionist style with its emphasis on continuity editing and individual perspectives operates to conceal the sources of its creation, and in that way succeeds in making a conservative mythology seem natural, real, and true. The aspects of realism and believability, truthfulness in the visual representation is therefore crucial in fully understanding modern cinematic myths and I will further explore this throughout this second part of the thesis.

To start with, however, I would like to focus on the narrative elements that unite most myths, epics, fairy-tales and fantasy stories. As noted in chapter one, *Star Wars* creator George Lucas used the theories on myth by anthropologist Joseph Campbell as a basis for developing his fantasy epic and since Campbell has subsequently had a significant influence on several major Hollywood filmmakers, I will briefly examine his key claims.

Campbell had studied mythic narratives from all over the world and derived from them the common underlining threads, which he understood to be essential to all myths.<sup>21</sup> Through Lucas' support and the subsequent script writing manual *The*

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<sup>21</sup> See: Campbell, 1968, *The Masks of God* as well as R. S. Segal, 1990, *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction*.

*Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler (1992), which was based on Campbell's work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (first published 1949), Campbell's theories became popular in Hollywood. Mainstream production companies suddenly saw it as a shortcut towards creating stories (See: *Hollywood's Master of Myth*, BBC, 1999).

On a very basic level, Campbell described myth as the set of stories that can unite people, a description that can equally be applied to cinema. More specifically, Campbell later argued that the universal language of cinema allowed myths to be presented in a visually compelling manner that transcends linguistic boundaries. In cinema, the visual components of cinema aid the storytelling function and can therefore make a myth even more universally comprehensible. (Campbell, 1999, *Hollywood's Master of Myth*)

However, some elements described by Campbell were not completely new; such as his notion of archetypes, which had been previously analysed by the psychologist C. G. Jung. The concept of the archetype has particularly attracted filmmakers as well as film scholars. An interesting example is Terrie Waddell's (2006) book *Mis/takes – Archetype, myth and identity in screen fiction*. Going beyond the traditional psychological or psychoanalytical concepts, Waddell's essay argues for a broader understanding of mythic narratives. Waddell (2006) argues that film studies often choose a limited approach in the form of a "spot the archetype' concentration"(p.27), which is problematic for an in-depth analysis. She further describes that for Jung archetypes were merely a starting point, a seed, from which images evolve.<sup>22</sup>

Another important claim Waddell makes is that since myths are a deep-rooted subconscious phenomenon, they can pervade artistic creation, even if the artist attempts to use mythic elements consciously. This is crucial for my analysis insofar as it provides a convincing argument for discussing the mythic aspects of films such as *Star Wars* (dir. G. Lucas and others, 1977-2005) or *The Lord of the*

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<sup>22</sup> Jung described archetype as representations of collective, universal ideas, which enable us to interpret our world. See: Jung, C. G., 1969. *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

*Rings* independently from their intended construction as myth by the filmmaker. In addition, we may argue that for the audience who is not aware of the reasoning behind the making of a film, it is of no importance if the story is consciously or unconsciously constructed like a myth, as long as it *functions* similar to myth.

Waddell (2006) also acknowledges the importance of cinema for our everyday reality. She describes that films “seduce us into a world of illusion” in which the audience is not a passive receiver but “invited to juggle mixed ethical, moral, philosophical and political messages. Keeping all these balls in the air, while being pleased, allows us to come to our own conclusions about the viability of the positions we are watching and how they might apply to our lives beyond the screen.” (p.27). This statement confirms the relevance for cinematic myths beyond primitive escapism without dismissing their entertainment factor. As with classical storytelling, the presentation of philosophical and moral concepts in modern myths can provide guidance for our life even when presented in an entertaining cinematic illusion.

In the above mentioned *Star Wars* series (dir. G. Lucas, R. Marquand & I. Kershner, 1977-2005, USA), the filmmakers consciously play with classical and well-known elements of myth, while simultaneously creating an epic myth of their own. Therefore these films appear closer to classic mythic fantasy epics than other science fiction films despite the interstellar background of *Star Wars*. The theme at the heart of the story is the archaic battle between good and evil and the film portrays not a quest to discover new galaxies but the (internal and external) journey of a young Jedi to discover his past and his future.

In his book, *On Religion*, John D. Caputo argues that “*Star Wars* reproduces classic mythic, ethical, and religious figures, both Western and non-Western, in a compellingly contemporary form that has the effect of a vast high-tech *Odyssey*” (Caputo, 2001, p.79). He also describes that rather than demystifying transcendent religious motifs, the films manage to unite science and faith. Even though the plots and settings of *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings* are very different, both epic series have many common threats, especially in the way they deal with aspects of belief, religious symbolism and the basic mythic elements as described by Joseph

Campbell. For example, the quest, the hero's journey, is not only the central element to the *Star Wars* films, it is according to Campbell also the crucial element of *all* mythic stories. It is also the dominant motif in the structure of the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy.

Although my subsequent analysis will focus on the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy, I will compare and contrast these films with the previous *Star Wars* series in order to highlight crucial aspects. This will allow me not only to understand the particular film, but also to get a more rounded picture on cinematic myths in general.

#### 4.2 The myth to rule them all – The Lord of the Rings film trilogy

Peter Jackson's film version of Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings* is widely regarded as one of the greatest achievements of 21st century cinema so far. Equally impressive is also the amount of academic literature that has already been written about it. It seems that the style, narrative and symbolism of the films can be linked to a sheer endless chain of political, sociological and cultural interpretations.<sup>23</sup> For this chapter I will also have a closer look at the narrative of the films with regard to mythic structures and the concept of redemption as well as discussing the relevance of mise-en-scène and set design in the creation of the believability of the myth.

The first film of the trilogy starts with a recounting of the ancient "history" that caused the problems which will later be dealt with in the actual plot of the trilogy. It describes the magic rings that are given to the creatures of Middle-earth. Magic

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<sup>23</sup> For example Kristin Thompson's book *The Frodo Franchise*, which explores the workings of the Hollywood industry. In addition, *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context* by Ernest Mathijs investigates the impact of the trilogy on different global cultures; whereas the collection *From Hobbits to Hollywood: Essays on Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings* presents a variety of topics from technological aspects and political implication to questions on architecture, merchandising and body image. The edition *Lord of the Rings and Philosophy*, essays from which will be discussed later in this chapter, also provides discourses on environmental and spiritual themes.

rings themselves are a common theme in fairy-tales and myths.<sup>24</sup> In this case, an evil power forges another ring that is superior to the others and able to control them. Whereas Elves and dwarfs seem to use their magic rings in a responsible way, humans are easily corrupted by the power and thus the first to fall.

This example in the introduction suggests that from the very beginning of the film, the narrative outlines the weakness of mankind towards the seductions of power. This aspect later becomes crucial at various points throughout the story. It also implies that in the subsequent fight against evil, mankind not only has to overcome its enemies, but also its own flaws. When we see how the first human king refuses to destroy the ring and so allows the evil Lord Sauron to persist, we can read this as the original sin of the story. This act, consequently, affects the whole line of ancestors down to Aragorn, who becomes one of the heroes of this story. Aragorn is so anxious about this inherited sin that he initially decides to hide his identity and stray through the forests as a ranger instead of claiming his right as the heir to the throne of Gondor and reign as king. The weakness of his predecessors is the curse from which he has to break free.

We further learn that for centuries the evil power of the ring seemed to have vanished until by chance a Hobbit – Bilbo Baggins – got hold of the most powerful ring on Middle-earth. This, however, happened unnoticed, even for his people. Despite the fact that the narrator describes the Hobbits as the most unlikely heroes, the voice over also proclaims that “time will come when Hobbits soon shape the fortune of us all.” (LOTR I, 0:06:50) This introduction is comparable to the prologue in classic epic narratives and sets the background for the actual story, recounting the prevailing myth on which the story is based.

In contrast to this gloomy introduction, the actual story starts with a cosy fairy-tale setting, when the film moves on to Hobbiton, a pastoral, idyllic place, which will be the ultimate contrast to all future places. The Hobbits so far seem to be

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<sup>24</sup> Examples for magic rings in mythology would be the Ring of the Niebelungens that features in the Germanic myth of the *Nibelungenlied*, as well as the ring of Gyges in Greek mythology, which is mentioned by Plato in the second book of his *Republic* and also by Herodot (I, 8).

unaware of the events that occur in the world around them. The set design here has already an enormous impact on the credibility of the story, only for the cinema audience but also for the actors.<sup>25</sup> The realism and believability of the environment is important for the perception of the myth and the aim of the production design was to make every place as real and historical as possible.<sup>26</sup> The general notion of the historicity of the story is important insofar as it transcends the fictional story and moves it in the realms of myth, which can also be seen as fictional stories that are assumed to have a historic foundation, at least for the people who believe in it. Here, cinematic realism is the crucial precondition for the believability of the story, which then creates a convincing mythic illusion. As Buckland had pointed out with regard to cinematic realism in digital cinema, which I have discussed in chapter three, believing the world in which characters act also gives these characters more realism, not matter how fantastic they are.

As we have discussed in chapter three in relation to digital cinema, even if an object or scenery is entirely fictional, it is important that the elements that constitute this object, e.g. texture, movement, landscape etc., relate to some aspect of our reality and so become understandable. The argument made here with regard to the settings of *The Lord of the Rings*, however, goes beyond simply grounding the fictional narration in a realistic setting. By giving the films a cultural history of some sort, it creates a complete universe and a sense of time and duration that extends the story before and after the actual plot. This is an aspect that is important in the creation of truthfulness, as Deleuze noted in his cinema books. One of the reasons for Deleuze (1989) to assign cinema the power to

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<sup>25</sup> The realism in the production design prompted actor Ian McKellen, who plays the wizard Gandalf, to remark about his first encounter with the set: “Lord of the Rings is a fairy-tale, it’s an adventure story, it never happened, except somewhere in our hearts. And yet, there was Hobbiton, in three dimensions and smoke coming out of the holes where they lived underground, and .... I believed.” (‘Welcome to Middle-earth’. In: *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings*, Special Edition, Disc 2, DVD. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema).

<sup>26</sup> This aspect is supported by Richard Taylor, a member of the art department, who states that they “had to create an expansive world, something that would spread beyond the four corners of the movie screen. The feeling that there are cultures that are strained with thousands of years of involvement, creativity and integrity from people and the species of Middle-earth” (‘Featurette’, In: *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings*, Special Edition, Disc 2, DVD. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema).

reinstate belief is because “cinema does not just represent images, it surrounds them with a world. This is why, very early on, it looked for bigger and bigger circuits which would unite an actual image with recollection-images, dream-images and world-images.” (p.66). As a result, it is able to provide us with the illusion of a whole, a complete universe that can then easily move beyond the cinematic experience.

From the very first encounter at Hobbiton with Frodo, the subsequent hero of the story, it is implied to the audience that he stands out among his people. When Frodo meets Gandalf, the first thing he asks him is to tell Frodo about outside world. To which the wizard replies “you are far too eager and curious for a Hobbit. Most unnatural.” (LOTR I, 0:08:25) In this small encounter already lies the cue for all his future adventures. The notion of “the outside world” is interesting as it highlights the Shire as a secluded and protected place where people do not usually interact with any of the other inhabitants of Middle-earth. In addition, Frodo’s curiosity makes his character stand out and his interest in the world beyond his immediate boundaries suggests a certain seriousness, which we do not find, or at least not initially, in the other Hobbits that will participate in his journey.

Another indication that emphasises this aspect is that the wise wizard is not necessarily seen as a welcome guest from the world outside the Shire, but described as a “disturber of the peace” (LOTR I, 0:09:47) by the older Shire folk. Being curious and searching for knowledge is here perceived as something potentially threatening and Frodo’s search for knowledge puts him in danger. At this point the Hobbits are characterised as the naïve side of “not wanting to know” which is the basis for their happiness. This is in contrast to the deeper happiness and contentment we later encounter in the Elves, which reach their inner peace and balance out of an ideal of ancient wisdom, an understanding of the natural order of things that can be compared to what Nietzsche calls *metaphysical solace* and what can be described as a general quest for the transcendent. (See: *Birth of Tragedy*, 1999, 17-18).

The reason for Gandalf's visit in the Shire is the birthday party of Bilbo, the Hobbit that secretly owns the One Ring. At this point, even the wizard is not aware of its existence in the Shire. Yet when Bilbo decides to disappear in the middle of his own party Gandalf becomes suspicious. As Bilbo has decided to leave the Shire, Gandalf persuades him, indeed forces him, to leave the ring behind. However, even now he is not sure that it is The One Ring, although he seems to have an awkward feeling when Bilbo calls it "his precious" (LOTR I, 0:21:10). As a consequence, Gandalf does not even dare to touch it and leaves it on the floor for Frodo to find and so he lets destiny decide Frodo's future. Gandalf, however, is not just afraid of the way the ring may control him but also the power the ring will gain through him. He assumes, as he explains much later, that a magical being like him with super-natural powers under the control of the ring would cause much more harm than a Hobbit.

As we have already briefly glimpsed in the introduction, the ring and the evil power of Lord Sauron, which is bound to it, are on the rise, despite having been slumbering for almost thousand years. It is not explicitly clear in the films, if there was a certain event that caused awakening of evil power or a constant development over the centuries, but it soon becomes evident that the danger is immediate. Frodo has to leave the Shire, not to protect himself – on the contrary – but to protect his people and the place that is precious to him. At this point he has no choice anymore as the choice was made when he picked up the ring, even if it was an unconscious one. In just one instance, he is rid of everything that has just been so important to him.

This is an element that occurs in many myths and fairy-tales, where a hero first has to lose all he has in order to inspire his paramount wish to overcome the obstacles and fulfil the quest as this is the only way for him to redeem what is lost. Frodo is accompanied by his best friend Sam and two other Hobbits who slip into this adventure more or less by accident. Their choice is more deliberate and unlike Frodo, they seem unaware of the scale and potential danger of this adventure.

In the meantime, Gandalf visits Saruman, the head of the wizards, for advice. The setting of this first encounter is in stark contrast to the later scenes surrounding

Saruman's tower. In this initial scene, the tower is set in a very beautiful, green, natural environment. Soon afterwards this will be turned into a mine for breeding Uruk-Kai, a gruesome type of warriors. This change visually reflects Saruman's fall and highlights his lost connection with nature. Despite having described Saruman to Frodo as a wise and considerate man, Gandalf soon has to realise that his old friend has been deceived by power and teamed up with Lord Sauron to gain control over Middle-earth. Saruman tries to convince Gandalf to join his cause, but Gandalf challenges him and calls his longing for control madness. Saruman's argument is a pragmatic one – we cannot defeat evil therefore it is better to join it – but Gandalf contrasts this with a higher, ethical reasoning. The fall of Saruman, who is considered to be the wisest of the wizards, demonstrates the way in which traditional intuitive wisdom is replaced by cool, abstract logic. His modernist view of a changing world is reflected by his turning of the surrounding forest into a type of giant mine with thousands of workers, creating a quasi-industrial area.

The conflict between rational knowledge and intuitive wisdom that Nietzsche had discussed in connection with ancient myth, also pervades the narrative of the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy, particularly in the conflict between Saruman and Gandalf. Nietzsche (1999) describes the advantages of wisdom in contrast to rational or scientific knowledge as follows: "wisdom is not deceived by the seductive distractions of the sciences; instead it turns its unmoved gaze on the total image of the world, and in this image it seeks to embrace eternal suffering with sympathetic feelings of love, acknowledging that suffering to be its own." (p.87). On this view, science causes us to look at things as abstract entities, thus we lose the perspective for the larger connections and unities. Unlike rational knowledge, wisdom as characterised by Nietzsche puts the emphasis on an intuitive knowledge and experience of the world as a whole, which also includes mythic concepts.

This idea of wisdom as including suffering, but also seeing the world as a whole and not in abstract terms is crucial for the story of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the trilogy, the modernist, scientific elements usually represent the forces of evil, mainly in the person of Saruman. Once deceived by the Dark Lord Sauron,

Saruman destroys the ancient forest around him to mass-produce genetically created clone warriors. In a later scene, it is a technical device, a bomb, which nearly brings down the city walls of the Rohan fortress Helm's Deep.

In opposition to Saruman, Gandalf represents the intuitive, spiritual site of knowledge. His spiritual wisdom is further emphasised in this film by his close connection with nature that is portrayed in his rescue from Saruman's tower by giant eagles as well as his connection with the mythical horse Shadowfax. In addition to Gandalf, the spiritual wisdom is also represented by the Elves, whose close connection with nature is apparent in all their scenes and it is clear that their ancient wisdom and skill far outweighs those of humans or Hobbits. The Elves are also a good example for the second aspect of wisdom, which regards the solace that results from it.

Besides its deeper view on the world as a whole, the benefit of wisdom as opposed to rational knowledge also lies in the satisfaction and happiness that people can draw from it. Nietzsche (1999) had argued that whereas the rational human is only able to use its knowledge to avoid negative experiences, "the man of intuition ... reaps directly from his intuitions not just protection from harm but also a constant stream of brightness, a lightning of the spirit, redemption" (p.153). This statement supports the idea that redemption cannot be achieved rationally, but only through intuitive, creative power. This intuition or wisdom inspires us to live, even in the most desperate situations, when rational deduction would lead us only to despair. Throughout the *Lord of the Rings*-trilogy, several protagonists are helped by their belief: such as Frodo, who is constantly inspired to go on by Sam's light-hearted spirit. Gandalf's intuition tells him throughout the narrative that Frodo is still alive and it is therefore worth continuing the fight. Finally, Sam's intuition tells him to mistrust Gollum and to protect Frodo despite the latter's increasing aggression against him.

Gandalf's character is also interesting insofar as he represents mystical pagan ideas of wizardry and connection with nature with Christian symbolism. This is particularly strong in the first film, when the fellowship passes the mines of Moria. To begin with, the whole setting of the mines bears distinct religious connotations

and *The Great Hall* of the dwarfs reminds us of a gothic cathedral with its seemingly endless heights and scale. More significantly, when Gandalf fights the Balrog, an ancient fire monster, on the bridge of Khazad-Dum, his raised arms and wooden staff together with his plea “You cannot not pass”(LOTR I, 2:02:36) is strongly reminiscent of the representation of Moses in scenes from the classic biblical epics *The Bible* (dir. J. Huston, 1965, USA) and *The Ten Commandments* (dir. C.B. deMills, 1923 & 1956, USA).

Finally, Gandalf sacrifices himself for the sake of the group, but only to return as a reincarnated, better and more powerful version in the next film. His reappearance in Fangorn forest is another strong symbol as his arrival is accompanied by extreme backlight, which initially makes it even impossible to recognise him. Together with some spiritual background music, his figure now reminds us more of a powerful angelic spirit or even a god than of an old wizard.

I use the term reincarnated rather than resurrected as he seems to have undergone a significant transformation more like a Buddhist concept of moving from one state of existence to a higher one than the Christian idea of Christ’s resurrection. Gandalf has gained significant power, but it is not clear that he has become immortal. Initially, he also does not seem to remember who he is or was and seems irritated when Aragorn calls him Gandalf. In this way, his character becomes a strange mixture of various religious ideas, which may support the idea that *The Lord of the Rings* presents a universal myth rather than a distinctively Christian or Nordic one.

In addition to this, whereas in the first film Gandalf *the Grey* with his wisdom and magic skills functions primarily as a mentor and guide for Frodo and his companions, his reincarnation Gandalf *the White*, is not only a more powerful wizard, but also a ferocious warrior. Gandalf states that he has been sent back “at the turn of the tide” (LOTR II, 0:43:44) to support Aragorn and his allies in their battle. Throughout the next two films he becomes a leading figure in the battle of Middle-earth, not simply an advisor. Gandalf’s change from a man of reflection into a man of action, from a wise man into a warrior, is very significant. It is the essence of the classic cinema of the movement-image, where reflection finally has

to turn into action and even the wise wizard finally has to stand up and fight. Yet it also indicates biblical themes, especially from the Old Testament, where signs and angels are sent to inspire and guide humankind.<sup>27</sup> As we will see at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf leaves after their victory and we realise that he really was sent back for one specific purpose only.

Whilst Gandalf confronts Saruman at the beginning of the first film, the four Hobbits are also facing a major transformation, namely in their environment. After leaving the Shire they arrive at Bree. From the outset, the set design of this village establishes it as the ultimate counterpart to the bright, sunny and colourful village they just left in the Shire. Not only is the complete set in dark, black and grey colours, it is also heavily raining. Here again, the use of *mise-en-scène* and meticulous production design supports the narrative structure of the films, and so adds another dimension to the understanding of the anxieties of Frodo and his friends. They are further away from home as ever before and everything around them is alien and threatening. In addition, the inhabitants are humans; this means that they are approximately double the size of the Hobbits, which makes the whole situation even more intimidating.

This scene presents a common stage in myths, what Campbell called the 'Threshold of Adventure' (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949). The potential heroes have to leave their well-known surroundings and enter a place that is somehow outside the law or part of the underworld. As in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is often a pub or tavern (e.g. Mos Eisley in *Star Wars*, Episode IV; and the saloon in classic Westerns). From now on, Frodo and the other Hobbits are inevitably bound to the adventure.

It is also at the pub at Bree, where Frodo first puts on the ring and for the first time experiences its power. Interestingly, this happens by accident. Nevertheless, he soon encounters the magnitude of this step as the ring draws him into a parallel world, in which Lord Sauron communicates with him directly. Sauron tells Frodo that he is watching him and then warns him "there is no life in the void,

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<sup>27</sup> The most memorable example in the Old Testament would be the divine support in the battle of Jericho, In: Joshua 2, 1-24

only death” (LOTR I, 0:51:52). This is an interesting account concerning the characteristics of evil in the *Lord of the Rings* mythology. Here, the evil is portrayed as non-existence, as nothingness, it is just a void.

Scott A. Davison (2003) discusses this aspect of Sauron’s power in his essay ‘Tolkien and the Nature of Evil’, in which he compares philosophical concepts of good and evil in the narratives of *Star Wars* and *The Lord of the Rings*. He argues that in the *Star Wars* films the good and the evil powers are described as two more or less equally strong powers that are in an eternal conflict with each other, as it is laid out especially in the Ying-Yang concept and other features of Eastern philosophy and religion. In *The Lord of the Rings*, however, the evil power is rather characterised as a negation of the good – bodiless and all-consuming. In this way it is more comparable with the Christian concept of good and evil, in which the evil is usually described as an absence of the good rather than as a clear and distinct power of its own. This aspect is further emphasised visually by the fact that Lord Sauron as the ultimate evil is reduced to an eye without an actual body and resembles a black hole.

Nevertheless, Caputo contradicts Davison’s characterisation of evil and describes the concept of evil in *Star Wars* quite similar to the way it is portrayed in *The Lord of the Rings*. Similar to the Gollum, Darth Vader, the ultimate evil character of *Star Wars*, is a normal, nice person that is eventually corrupted by evil. The actual evil power – the dark side – is never really manifested and it is a loss in faith, emotional imbalance, which leads people towards evil. Caputo (2001) writes that in *Star Wars*, “the messianic age, or the rule of peace and justice, depends upon the smooth and harmonious flow of the Force, while war rages when the Force is disturbed” (p.82). Thus, both epics portray evil in a rather abstract way, as an absence of the good.

Following the instance at the Pub, Frodo is brought back to reality and makes the acquaintance of Aragorn, who despite appearing as dubious as the other guests in the Bree pub turns out to be their saviour at this point. We also find another indicator for the Christian concept of evil, when Aragorn recounts the story of the Nazgul, the Dark Riders that chase Frodo from the moment he received the ring.

In this story, Aragorn calls Sauron “the deceiver” (LOTR I, 0:54:20), a term often used in Christian narratives to describe the devil. We learn that the Nazgul were the nine kings of men that have fallen to the power of the ring.

Analogous to their bodiless master they appear as black, faceless non-beings that only receive their form through the cape and armour they wear. Only when Frodo puts on the ring and enters the parallel world of Lord Sauron, he sees the crowned mummified bodies of the former kings in bright white underneath the Nazgul cloth. The motif of a disembodied evil, abstract and inhuman only intensifies the thread as it becomes all the more difficult to overcome.

Later in the story we learn more about the Orcs, evil creatures that hunt the fellowship. It is told that they have been Elves, which were seduced by the evil. It is not difficult to draw parallels to the Christian concept of the devil as a fallen angel. Here, the story makes a clear distinction between the ultimate evil as an abstract, bodiless entity, and the majority of evil characters that are not fully evil, but seduced by power. In the films the Orcs are often portrayed with a touch of humour, as a bunch of lads doing cruel things simply because they are told to do so.

We also find this concept of good people being corrupted by power in the role of Darth Vader, the central evil character of the *Star Wars* Films. In this instance the film’s portrayal of evil is closer to the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* than its general concept of evil. In the beginning, Anakin Skywalker is a hopeful, positive character with quasi supernatural powers that seem to destine him to fight for the good, but his own fear and hate eventually draw him towards the “dark side”. In this way he is similar to Saruman, but both Saruman and Darth Vader have to realise that their longing for power eventually turns them into slaves of the higher evil to which they are eternally bound. However, whereas Darth Vader eventually redeems himself from evil by scarifying himself to save his son, Saruman does not reach this point of redemption and is finally left defeated and powerless.

Shortly after leaving Bree, the Hobbits and Aragorn have their first direct encounter with the Dark Riders, in which the leader of the Nazgul delivers a near-

fatal wound to Frodo. Despite his survival we will realise at the end of the story that this wound stays with him forever. This incident can therefore be described as not just a physical but also a moral injury that indicates Frodo's lost innocence. It is only due to supernatural powers that Frodo survives the injury. He is saved by Arwen, daughter of the King of the Elves. Her first appearance is in strong backlight, giving her an angelic look that emphasises the mythical powers and godlike status of the Elves. Her magical powers are further underlined by her subsequent escape with Frodo to Rivendell, when Arwen raises the waters of the river to bring down the Riders that pursue them. This not only shows her powers as such, but also demonstrates the close connection of the Elves with nature as the source of their power.

This connection with nature is further intensified by the set design of the film. Rivendell, the city of the Elves, appears to be grown into the forest, set in a soft, warm light and even the rooms always appear very airy and open, with open windows and the wind blowing leaves through the rooms. Later in the trilogy, the departure of the Elves from Middle-earth is visualised by a change of seasons and the falling of the leaves in an autumn setting. It is also interesting to note that throughout the films, we find very few indoor scenes and if so they are often associated with danger and evil.

When the peoples of Middle-earth gather at Rivendell to discuss what they should do with the One Ring, Frodo hopes that his adventure is over and that he is no longer bound to the ring. It is, however, clear to the audience, that he is the one destined to carry it. Once he had stepped into this adventure he was part of it. Despite this apparently clear providential setting, it is interesting to look at the role that Frodo's active choice of this task plays here. Already in the first scene, Gandalf had left the ring for Frodo to pick up, so leaving an element of uncertainty. In this scene at Rivendell, we can assume that Gandalf has a certain awareness of Frodo's future, as he is not surprised, but shows a rather fatalistic expression when Frodo finally declares that he will carry the ring to Mordor. Gandalf seems to know intuitively that Frodo is the only chance for Middle-earth, but equally realises that this most definitely means the destruction of his innocent friend. Nevertheless, Frodo must make a conscious and independent decision to

accept this fate. Frodo's innocence and naivety here makes him the strongest candidate to carry the ring. As soon as all the great warriors and heroes of Middle-earth argue about the future of the ring, its power over them becomes evident. This is when Frodo realises that he cannot walk away as there will not be any hope otherwise.

What follows is the actual start of the journey, as described in classical mythic narratives, such as the *Iliad*, where the quest is explicitly stated and allies are gathered. Here, a team of talented and experienced warriors is gathered to *protect* Frodo and the ring. This is important insofar as it is underlined that although they can assist in protecting him from the enemy attacks, they will not be able to help Frodo with his actual task of destroying the ring.

In addition, from the outset a traitor is implied. Boromir, the representative of Gondor, only follows reluctantly and makes clear that he would rather keep and use the ring thinking that this would enable them to defeat the evil. Further tension arises when he discovers that Aragorn is his long absent king. As with all true mythic quests, the fellowship soon faces the first challenges in the form of monsters and strange places, while being watched by Gollum, a unique creature obsessed with the ring.

We have already briefly mentioned the role of choice and fate in the mythic structure of *The Lord of the Rings*. This theme reoccurs when Gandalf tells Frodo about the Gollum, the creature from which Bilbo acquired the One Ring. Frodo argues that it may have been better if Bilbo had killed the Gollum when he had the chance. The wizard challenges that and asserts that even "the very wise cannot see all ends. My heart tells me that Gollum has some part to play yet, for good or ill before this is over. The pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many." (LOTR I, 1:46:04) The full scale of this statement only becomes evident at the end of the film when the ring is only destroyed due to Gollum's interference. In this sense, providence is related to the notion that all actions and decisions influence the system of the world as a whole in various ways, maybe not instantly, but in the larger scheme of things.

Thomas Hibbs (2003) discusses the importance of providence in relation to *The Lord of the Rings* and myth in general in his essay 'Providence and the Dramatic Unity of *The Lord of the Rings*.' He argues that our "fascination with stories [...], with finding one's bearing in the cosmic history, is perfectly compatible with, indeed seems necessitated by, belief in a providentially structured universe." (Hibbs, 2003, p.178). This means that the reason for us to listen to stories is that they give us a sense of structure on the one hand, and suggest on the other that there is some higher purpose behind all of it that gives life meaning. In this way, a providentially structured universe gives people the faith that there is a certain order to everything, which they can follow.

In addition, for Hibbs the providential worldview as expressed in religion and mythology is largely structured like a story, with a specific plot and a dramatic unity and development. This is a significant point with regard to the connection between religion, myth and cinema insofar as it emphasises the links between the storytelling function of cinema and the presentation of epic stories within religious and mythic narratives. We can therefore argue that similarly to religion, cinematic narratives not merely entertain, but suggest the *general idea* of a universe that follows a clear structure guided by fate or providence.

Gandalf's prophetic statement in his conversation with Frodo points towards this providential concept. We finally realise in the third film that despite all his efforts it is not Frodo's determination but Gollum's obsession, which in fact leads to the destruction of the ring, and so fulfils Gandalf's foresight that Gollum still has a role to play in this story. Consequently, this apparently accidental event appears less as a matter of chance, but a piece in a complex story that reaches back to the moment when Bilbo shows pity towards Gollum. This further implies the moral concept that all our actions have consequences and although there is an element of choice in the first instance, all subsequent events inevitably follow from it.

Another question arises from this final moment. When Frodo eventually submits to the power of the ring, what does that say about the role of the hero in *The Lord of the Rings*? According to Campbell, the hero is the crucial centre of each myth, the character that goes on the journey. *The Lord of the Rings*, however, seems to

have two heroes that undergo significant transformations throughout the story and I argue that they reflect different modes of storytelling that are joined together in the overall narrative. Both Frodo and Aragorn can be characterised as the hero of the trilogy, each in a different type of narrative, such as the epic and the fairy-tale. As suggested in the first part of this chapter both forms are presented as individual strands in large parts of the cinematic narrative, which also signifies that each of this strand has its own hero as I will discuss in the next paragraphs.

At the end of the first film, Frodo realises that he can no longer rely on the help of the others but has to carry on alone. This realisation is caused by Boromir's betrayal and attempt to take the ring from Frodo. It's the breach of trust that pushes Frodo over the next threshold in the story and splits the narrative in two axes. Whereas the warriors led by Aragorn set out to summon their armies and allies for the paramount battle of Middle-earth, Frodo with the aid of his friend and protector Sam proceeds on his increasingly desperate journey to Mordor. On the one hand we observe the external conflict of the epic battle against Sauron's armies; on the other we follow Frodo's struggle and increasingly internal conflict with the rising power the ring. I argue that eventually, his personal struggle to resist the power of the evil even overshadows their struggle with the increasingly volatile landscape they pass through. This duality of events and journeys persists until the very end of the third film when the ring is finally destroyed.

As Deleuze (1985) has outlined in *The Movement-Image*, the concept of duality is a classic feature of Hollywood narratives, representing the organic concept of binary relationships that is so important for the success of Hollywood cinema. It can therefore be argued that here the narrative structure of *The Lord of the Rings* is particularly well equipped for its adaptation to the cinema screen.

The parallel narratives of *The Lord of the Rings* are also reflected in the two very different heroes of the film. Frodo is the tragic hero, who is pushed into his adventure largely if not exclusively by external forces and is finally saved only by a eucatastrophic moment of divine interference. He is the least likely hero and is helped by a variety of magic tools during his journey, such as the Mithril shirt that

protects him from attacks, his sword Sting that glows when Orcs are approaching and the flacon filled with light given to him by the Elven queen Galadriel that helps Frodo and Sam in their fight against Shelop. His journey becomes the journey through the fairy-tale, as described by John J. Davenport (2003) in his aforementioned essay. Frodo's final salvation can only come to him by fate.

J. Lenore Wright takes a different approach in her essay 'Sam and Frodo's Excellent Adventure: Tolkien's Journey Motif in *The Lord of the Rings*.' She acknowledges that despite our postmodern technological advances and scepticism we still long for extraordinary beings and events. Yet, unlike in ancient times, when these heroes were often half-gods or other "special beings", we are now "realizing that we need ordinary people to be extraordinary. [...] We need people to be all too human and frail." (Wright, 2003, p.203). For her, the Hobbits Sam and Frodo are a prime example of this idea, as they are not just inexperienced and naïve, but also physically much more fragile than their human or Elvish counterparts.

As I argued, however, it is exactly this apparent incapability that makes them particularly suitable for their role in this story as it is their positive and profoundly good nature which allows them to succeed. In this sense one could claim that despite their frail and inexperienced nature, we could classify them as "special beings", as their lack of particularly human traits, such as pride, greed and longing for power, makes them if not fully confined from the evil, then at least less weak towards it.

Yet, *The Lord of the Rings* also has a classic epic hero, who transports the second strand of narrative. While Frodo and Sam are on their lonely journey, Aragorn, heir to the throne of Gondor, rides across Middle-earth to save its people from the immediate approach of Sauron's armies. Unlike his predecessors, he resists the seductions of power and is driven by the pure-hearted desire to save his world. However, being aware of the weakness of his ancestry, he is initially reluctant to accept his destiny, but then makes a conscious decision to stand up and take responsibility. Here, Aragorn is the classic epic action hero; his decision is

deliberate and bold. Unlike Frodo, he is also a well-trained and experienced warrior, hence a prototype hero.

As suggested above, Aragorn's part of the story portrays the epic mode of *The Lord of the Rings*. Once the fellowship (and hence the narrative) is split in two axes, Aragorn is involved in various battles: the battle of Helm's Deep at the end of the second film and several smaller battles that culminate in the final war over Middle-earth at the end of the third film. Its title *The Return of the King* also alludes to Aragorn's importance in the story.

Apart from his role in representing the epic line of the narrative, Aragorn also symbolises the arrival of the age of man while the mythic creatures, such as Elves and wizards, are disappearing from Middle-earth. Here, the story of *The Lord of the Rings* does not end with a reinstatement of the peace, but brings upon a major change in the set-up of the world. Its happy-ending is incomplete as some aspects of the world have been lost forever and the power of evil has left a stain on the magical world and so carrying in it the element of the tragic. The only hope now is mankind and the enchanted world is finally replaced with a human world that unites the epic and the tragic.

This is also the major element of redemption in *The Lord of the Rings*-trilogy. Aragorn redeems not only the honour of his family by resisting evil, but more importantly he redeems mankind at large from its original sin. The weakness of men has first allowed the evil to take control, both in Isildur's refusal to destroy the ring and the corruption of the Nine King of Men that turn into the Nazgul. Moreover, as well as redeeming mankind by defying evil and giving Middle-earth a humble and good-hearted king, Aragorn also performs an act of redemption when he summons the ghosts of *The Men in the Mountains*. By fighting for Aragorn they can free themselves from the curse that binds their shadows to this world, unable to die. When Aragorn releases them, they vanish and death becomes their final redemption.

The duality in the narrative is also reflected in the visual components of the film. Following Aragorn's journey, both the second and third film largely portrays the

epic grandeur of the landscape and the grand *mise-en-scène* emphasises the scale of their task. The scenes in the endless mountain chains and plains of Rohan in the second film are highlighted by an infinite amount of pan-shoots over the endless wilderness that enhances the epic battle in front of them. The film concludes with a final sequence in form of a parallel montage between the battle of Helm's Deep and the destruction of Isengard, thus further highlighting the binary structures of the narrative.

The battle of Helm's Deep also replicates a classic mythic battle – the battle of Troy. Similar to Troy, Helm's Deep is considered unconquerable and only a trick – in this case a bomb – allows the evil forces to enter the walls. Unlike the Trojans, however, the armies of Rohan have a saviour in the person of Gandalf, who finally comes to their aid like a shiny angelic warrior, at a moment when all hope seems lost.

The majestic landscapes and sceneries in the epic part of the story are contrasted by the increasingly threatening and claustrophobic settings that Frodo and Sam are passing through. Even though they are similarly outdoors, the mountain gorges, rock formations and marshes they cross, limit their room for navigation to a small path and appear not majestic but deadly and inhibiting.

The camera here also focuses more on close-ups of the characters in an attempt to capture their psychological development: the increasing mistrust of Sam towards Gollum, the growing despair of Frodo and Gollum's/Smeagol's conflict between the good that is left in him and which appreciates Frodo's kindness and his overriding obsession with The Ring. The lack of establishing and pan-shots also increases the sense of being lost that is present in the narrative where Frodo and Sam seem to have lost orientation and are going in circles. As a consequence they have no choice but to rely on Gollum as their guide.

Another set of binary relationships can be found in the Elves, both in terms of set design and character. At the beginning of the first film, we discover the beautiful world of Rivendell, the Elvish city grown in the forest diffused with light. Towards the end of this film, we encounter another Elvish forest that is a stark

contrast to the first. This is emphasised by the fact that several members of the fellowship issue their concerns about entering it in the first place. The set of Galadriel's forest appears much darker, wilder and older than the forest of Rivendell. In addition, we do not actually see any buildings such as the tree houses and palaces in Rivendell. As a result, the Elves here appear much more like nymphs and other natural spirits. As outlined in chapter three with regard to Deleuze's notion of mainstream cinema, these binary relationships are a crucial element in the action-image and I will further elaborate on this point in the following chapter when discussing modern Hollywood epics.

The contrast is even stronger in the two rulers. Whereas Elrond, king of Rivendell, is a friendly and welcoming man they all like to meet, Galadriel initially appears as a much more mysterious and threatening figure. She is described as a powerful witch queen, an expression that implies a certain ambivalence in her character. The whole setting of the forest is also much more sinister, bearing more resemblance with the dark side of Nietzsche's idea of the Dionysian. In Rivendell, the wild, Dionysian element of nature is balanced by the Apollonian ideal of beauty and harmony, whereas the dark and menacing atmosphere of Galadriel and her forest reminds us of a darker, wilder side nature that is closer connected to the wisdom of Silenus than that of Apollo. (See: Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, section 3).

The frightening aspect of her character becomes evident when Frodo offers Galadriel the Ring. For a short moment we experience her fantasy, in which she sees herself as an all-mighty witch-queen. In this scene the cinematography particularly intensifies the narrative. In comparison, in the animated film version of *The Lord of the Rings* from 1978 (dir. R. Bakshi, USA) we also find this scene with nearly exactly the same text and structure, but in this film Galadriel simply recounts her fantasy in a straightforward way, so that the scene is more or less insignificant. Peter Jackson, however, presents Galadriel during her monologue as a negative, giant queen with a distorted, menacing voice, which makes her character appear even more threatening. Only as she refuses to take the ring, hence "passing the test", does she turn back into a more friendly, accessible personality, who subsequently supports Frodo on his journey.

The dual narratives of Frodo and Aragorn only culminate at the end of the third film, after the final battle is won. Even though it is eventually down to Frodo to destroy the Ring and save the world, the focus of the film is more on the battle of the humans and their allies against the armies of evil. It can be said that the third film is the most epic of the three parts, and its focus is on Aragorn's return to the throne.

As a result, the emphasis also shifts from the fairy-tale creatures of Middle-earth – Hobbits, Elves and wizards – towards the human race, which will finally take over Middle-earth. The Elves are leaving this world, which is reinforced by the images of falling leaves and increasingly wintry look of Rivendell in demise. Only Arwen remains at Rivendell with her father Elrond and she stays because of Aragorn for whom she had given up eternal life. Yet her power is waning and only the defeat of Sauron and his evil power will assure her survival. Therefore, Aragorn not only fights to save the world but also to save his beloved one.

I have already outlined the aspects of redemption underpinning the epic line of the story. As far as Frodo is concerned, it can of course be claimed that he redeems the world as a whole, but it is not he who destroys the ring. Nevertheless, he himself is also redeemed as the destruction of the ring finally frees him from his burden. Sam is the first one to notice the passing of evil. Although their situation seems hopeless once the ring has fallen in the fire of Mount Doom and the whole mountain explodes, there is a sense of relief in Sam and Frodo.

Nevertheless they survive their ordeal, saved again by magic and so suggesting a classic fairy-tale happy-ending. Yet, we eventually see that Frodo will never fully recover and his wounds – physically and psychologically – will never fully heal. Even though the end of the story is happy in general, it also proves that this is not true for all those involved, and so incorporating the element of the tragic into the story without fully submitting to it. Frodo's physical scar, the result of the first Nazgul attack, becomes a symbol for the evil he has experienced. This experience will forever exclude Frodo from returning to his old life and only by moving towards a transcendent, eternal life, which is gifted to him by the Elves, can he finally gain comfort.

The final question is then how far does this film version redeem traditional mythic concepts for popular culture? As outlined in this chapter, throughout the films we find various examples where the visual aspect significantly supports the narrative of the myth by enhancing crucial aspects such as the epic scale and the profound changes between places and characters. In this way it can be claimed that the cinematic version of *The Lord of the Rings* adds a new layer to the storytelling.<sup>28</sup>

The most explicit example for this continuous development in the mythmaking process is one scene that is unique to Peter Jackson's film version and does not exist in the books. This scene is also remarkable as it reflects on the meaning of storytelling in general and its importance for our life. In this way it can also be read as a reflection on the power of cinema as this scene is distinctly cinematic. The scene occurs towards the end of the second film as Frodo and Sam continue their journey towards Mordor, finally being caught by Gondor's soldiers. The Nazgul are closing in and Frodo nearly gives in to the power of the Ring and is only by a fraction saved by Sam. In his obsession, Frodo attacks Sam. When he awakes from his trance and seems to have lost all hope, Sam delivers the following motivational speech. It is a narrative device that may sound rather vulgar in a book, but is often found in epic films, especially before or after the crucial battle.

*Frodo*

I can't do that, Sam.

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<sup>28</sup> This point can be supported by a statement by Brian Sibley, author of the *Lord of the Rings official movie guide*. He remarks that "J.R.R. Tolkien was very aware that he created a world that existed within the books. But he also said it was a world that could be enhanced by other people. ... Tolkien created a myth. A modern myth. And what has happened is that by turning this into a film, a filmmaker has given it a new dimension, has taken this myth one stage further. Which is how myths are born, how they are carried through generation after generation. So in the way I see Peter Jackson as part of the mythic process, which was begun by Tolkien" ('Featurette', *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings*, Special Edition, Disc 2, DVD. Los Angeles: New Line Cinema).

*Sam*

I know. It's all wrong. By rights, we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? ...

But in the end, it's only a shadow. Even the darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something. Even if you were too small to understand why. But I think Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going, because they were holding on to something.

*Frodo*

What are we holding on to, Sam?

*Sam (picks Frodo up – literally)*

That there is some good in this world Mr. Frodo. And it's worth fighting for.

(LOTR II, 2:37:52)

This dialogue seems to make explicit the importance we assigned mythic creations in the first part of this thesis, namely to provide a meaning and perspective in a general situation of lacking belief. In this sense it is not so relevant how original the stories are. On the contrary, the basic plot – good defeats evil etc. – is usually simple and easily accessible, a characteristic Nietzsche had already described in relation to the ancient Greek tragedy. Seeing this battle played out on screen, however, gives this ethical idea a convincing visual believability that imprints this idea in our conscious and subconscious collective memory.

This scene, intercut with images from the ongoing battle at Isengard, reinforces the overall theme of the trilogy in true Hollywood style. Rather than letting the audience discover the overall implicit meaning by themselves, the theme is stated explicitly. As the narrative of the films was split in three parts, all screened with a year's break in between them, this scene at the end of the second film summarises the quest and points towards the future.

Overall, this dialogue may not be so crucial in developing the story, although in the film it seems to be the point that gives everybody hope and allows them to continue their journey. What it presents, however, is a reflection of the hopes and attitudes of the audience and so it redeems the importance of storytelling and mythmaking for modern cinema.

### Summary

In conclusion, it can be said that the aspect of redemption plays a significant role throughout the narrative. The concept of belief and trust in a providentially structured universe presented by the main characters reflects universal themes of myth and religion and has the capacity to inspire. As a consequence, for many people *The Lord of the Rings* is “not simply a fictional realm; it’s a safe haven of sorts that they visit over and over again to find re-enchantment and renewal.” (Light, 2003, p.150). Moreover, the cinematic realism of the films, the grand-scale dimensions of the scenery and the attention to detail that helps create a complete universe, are able to enhance the literary basis of the myth, by creating the illusion of our world as it could have been.

Gregory Bassham (2003) stated in his essay ‘Tolkien’s Six Keys to Happiness’ that by “juxtaposing the enchanted with the familiar, the magical with the mundane, such works allow us to see the world with fresh eyes. Having encountered ents and towering mallorns, we forever see elms and beeches differently.” (p.59). The influence of cinematic fantasies on our perception of everyday reality, which he describes here, is very significant and illustrates the validity of mythic experiences in spite of the ‘un-realistic’ fantasy elements. Hence, the reality of the film does influence our view of reality. I will discuss in the next chapter, how the reality of our social reality in turn influences cinematic narratives.

## Chapter Five:

### *Healthy illusions?* – Hollywood's Realism and the return of the epics

The previous chapter discussed the subjective historicity of *The Lord of the Rings* and its importance for the believability of the myth. In this chapter I will look at the genre of historic epics and its revival in the first decade of this century. Just in the first half of the decade, our screens were full of mythic and historical plots, starting with *Gladiator* (dir. R. Scott, 2000, USA), followed by *Master and Commander* (dir. P. Weir, 2003, USA), *The Last Samurai* (dir. E. Zwick, 2003), *Alexander* (dir. O. Stone), *King Arthur* (dir. A. Fuqua, 2004), *Troy* (dir. W. Petersen, 2004, USA) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (dir. R. Scott, 2005, USA).

The theories that will be of particular interest for this part are Kracauer's notions on cinematic content in general and historic films in particular, as well as Deleuze's theses on the movement-image, the conceptions of history related to the movement-image and Deleuze's views on the connection between cinema and thought. In this context I will initially analyse the characteristics of the movement-image, or more precisely the action-image as one type of movement-image in further detail before moving on to the analysis of two film versions of the Trojan wars as a specific filmic example.

I will refer to the epics of the last decade as neo-classical in order to emphasise their connection with what Deleuze defined as classical cinema. By this he meant the classical American mainstream cinema of the pre-war period, i.e. the cinema of the movement-image, which he contrasted with the modern, post-war cinema of the time-image. As I will argue that the above mentioned epics are rooted in the movement-image even though they incorporate elements of the time-image, I find the term neo-classical more appropriate as it also implies the revival of a certain style.

For Deleuze (1986), the action-image presents the movement-image *par excellence* and later in his cinema books he often uses the two terms synonymously. As the action-image is according to Deleuze also the default form for the majority of commercially successful films, I want to evaluate its distinct aspects as presented

in the Hollywood epics of the last decade. Unlike Deleuze, who proclaimed the decline of the movement-image after the Second World War, I argue that there was not only a significant output of biblical and historic epics in the 1950s<sup>29</sup>, which is only comparable to the amount of historic-mythical epics produced in the last decade. Moreover, this parallelism suggests a comparison with the movement-image of the 1950s, which still seems to portray the classic pre-war concept Deleuze describes. How similar are these films in narrative and visual representation and how did the action-image develop since then, particularly with the use of digital technology?

Secondly, both Kracauer and Deleuze described in their main works on cinema developments in film history that are not only linked to technical and aesthetic developments, but which are also a reflection of changes in society. I want to examine how these historic epics reflect certain ideologies. Following Deleuze's notions of history, which he borrows from Nietzsche, I will compare the situation in the 1950s with the recent revival of historic and mythic epics. In this context, I will also critically discuss Kracauer's theories regarding historical films and elaborate on the similarities and differences in story and representation of these films. Here, Kracauer's theories on film are particularly relevant insofar as he was one of the first thinkers who described aesthetic concepts presented in film as symptoms of social developments, first in his book *From Caligary to Hitler* (1947) and then in his *Theory of Film* (1961).

In the second part of this chapter I will relate these aspects to two specific examples of historical Hollywood epics and analyse how they have developed with respect to the elements of the action-image, the social-political background and the relation between historicity and actuality. I will compare Wolfgang

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<sup>29</sup> Based on the German online film dictionary [www.filmlexikon.de](http://www.filmlexikon.de), I established that 1950s Hollywood produced no less than 12 epics with biblical and religious motifs, (compared to an average of 3-4 in the following decades), with a variety of other monumental epics portraying ancient historic or mythic plots. Famous Biblical examples from the 1950s are *Quo Vadis* (dir. M. LeRoy, 1951, USA), *The Robe* (dir. H. Koster, 1953, USA), *The Ten Commandments* (dir. C.B. DeMille, 1957, USA) and *Ben Hur* (dir. W. Wyler, 1959, USA) as well as those films that feature ancient historic plots, such as *Helen of Troy* (dir. R. Wise, 1956, USA/IT), *Alexander, the Great* (dir. R. Rossen, 1956, USA) and *Spartacus* (dir. S. Kubrick, 1959/60, USA).

Petersen's 2004 version of the mythic epic *Troy* with the classic epic film version *Helen of Troy*, made in 1956 by Robert Wise. More specifically, this part of the chapter investigates the mythic story of the battle of Troy and examines the correspondences and crucial differences between the two films. Here, I will also pay attention to the role digital technologies play in creating a modern version of the ancient world on screen. I will further discuss these elements in relation to Deleuze's interpretation of the importance of cinematic illusions and the particular capabilities of Hollywood's narrative style in the creation of convincing mythic narratives.

Consequently, I aim to support my hypothesis that the need for grand epic narratives is particularly strong in our time and that the great classic genre of historic film has not lost its power. Nevertheless I want to demonstrate that it has undergone a significant development and that his continuous success is at least in parts owed to the fact that the neo-classical cinema of the movement-image has to some degree incorporated aspects of Deleuze's time-image.

### 5.1 Truth as Totalisation– Movement-images, action-thought and history

This paragraph follows Deleuze's notion that the organic representation of the action-image implies a concept of truthfulness that defines the believability of Hollywood narratives. It then looks at the close connection Deleuze (1989) draws between the movement-image and a concept of thought. Here I will follow the development from the 'harmonious knowledge' of the classic cinema to the 'belief' of the modern cinema and examines if and how we find both these aspects represented in the neo-classical Hollywood cinema. This new movement-image also presents a new level of realism in historical films, which is particularly interesting when linking it to Kracauer's views on historic subjects in film. Both theories can be connected to the representations of history as monumental, antiquarian and ethical history, which Deleuze borrows from Nietzsche.

In his essay *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life*, Nietzsche argues that there are three species of history, monumental, antiquarian and critical, which

describe the three different ways in which history is relevant to mankind.<sup>30</sup> These aspects are as follows: the portrayal of man as a being who acts and strives (*monumental history*), as a being that preserves and reveres (*antiquarian history*) and as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance (*critical history*). From this description it becomes clear why the first aspect of monumental history, which focuses on actions and efforts, especially appeals to cinema with its narrative of man's struggles.

Firstly, let us briefly recall Deleuze's notions on the action-image and the organic representation of classic American cinema. As outlined in chapter three, he calls Hollywood's traditional style 'organic'. This refers to the way in which filmmakers create meaningful images by implying natural connections and using familiar structures and archetypes, in order to direct the audience's attention away from the medium itself towards the complex illusion it creates. However, Deleuze's organic concept of representation goes beyond merely technical aspects of film editing and *mise-en-scène* to analyse the elements of the narrative in relation to the cinematographic aspects. The constitution of a whole, the definition of specific milieus as well as the duality of forces are not purely aesthetic aspects, but reflect on a specific mode of thinking.

When Deleuze discusses 'Cinema and Thought' in his second cinema book dedicated to the time-image, he eventually returns to the movement-image. He argues that the movement-image and thought are necessarily linked as the "Whole can only be thought, because it is the indirect representation of time which follows from movement. It does not follow like a logical effect, analytically, but synthetically as the dynamic effect of images" (Deleuze, 1989, p.153). This dynamic effect, this synthetically created concept of the Whole, is essential in the understanding of the realism of classic American cinema. This type of "illusionist realism" accounts for an immediate impact on the audience, it *moves* people – emotionally. For Deleuze this is a functional realism, strictly determined by the requirements of the situation and the action. Thus the action-image is the

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<sup>30</sup> In: Nietzsche, F., 1983. *Untimely Meditations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

perfected form of the movement-image and remains the standard for Hollywood cinema until today.

Nevertheless, when discussing the movement-image and its relationship with thought, Deleuze moves beyond the organic representation of classic American cinema. He cannot, however, dispose of the action. As Deleuze argues, the line of thought can move from the image to the concept (organic), from the concept to the image (pathetic)<sup>31</sup>, but it also has a third form, which is the identity of image and concept. He calls this form action-thought and claims that this “action-thought indicates *the relation between man and the world*, between man and nature, the sensory-motor unit, but by raising it to a supreme power” (Deleuze, 1989, p.156, emphasis in original). This relationship between man and the world is represented in the relationship between the individual and the society, but also suggests a more profound reflection not only on individual actions, but on the general relationship with the world that surrounds us. I will show later in this chapter that this reflective aspect is particularly strong in the neo-classical epics.

The second aspect Deleuze describes in relation to the action-image is the emphasis of the individual. He argues that in the action-image where the milieu and characters constantly influence each other, everything “is individuated: the milieu as a particular space-time, the situation as determining and determinate, the collective as well as the individual character.”(Deleuze, 1986, p.146). Nevertheless the individual needs the support of a specific people or community. For Deleuze, this idea is closely linked to the most profound American myth: “The American Dream”. For Deleuze (1986), the action-image “embraces the two poles of the American Dream: on the one hand the idea of unanimist community or of a nation-milieu, melting pot and fusion of all minorities” (p.148) and on the other the model of a great leader, who raises from this nation to counteract the challenges of the milieu as well as the problems of the situation.

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<sup>31</sup> According to Deleuze, the pathetic representation has been developed in the works of Sergei Eisenstein and unlike in the organic representation, it includes a qualitative jump in the final stages that lift it to a higher level of meaning. For a more detailed description, please see chapter three of this work and refer to: Deleuze, 1986. *The Movement-Image*. Chapter 3.2.

This aspect can be found in a variety of recent epics, such as *Gladiator* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2000, USA), in which the former army leader first loses his army, royal support and finally his family, but then gathers a new group of allies, first the other gladiators, and eventually the whole people of Rome. The hero is first reluctant to oppose and only after losing everything does his longing for revenge motivate him. A similar idea can be found in another historical epic from the last decade: *Kingdom of Heaven* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2004, USA). Here, the hero starts as a blacksmith, who has just lost his wife and all hope and only by chance or fate arrives in Jerusalem, where he eventually becomes the hero that leads the people of Jerusalem to defend their city.

Finally, the classic action-image is defined in terms of binary relationships, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and as a consequence its most significant image is the duel. The duel, however, is not reduced to its purest form between hero and villain (as in the Western), but it can also take place in various other parts of the story as well as in the images themselves. As Deleuze (1986) notes, the “action in itself is a duel of forces, a series of duels: duel with the milieu, with the others, with itself.” (p.146). Hence, the duel in its connection with the action-image is not simply one particular moment within the action-image, often shown as parallel montages, but elementary to the whole film. Deleuze claims that the duel may even be external to the film, although internal to cinema itself.

This is further shown when he describes this binary relationship in more philosophical terms, saying that the action-image always develops along two axes, which are defined by integration and differentiation on one hand and contiguity and similarity on the other. Deleuze (1986) notes that the “axes cut across each other, according to a principle of attraction, in order to achieve the identity of image and concept: indeed, the concept as a whole does not become differentiated without externalizing itself in a sequence of associated images, and the images do not associate without being internalized in a concept as the whole which integrates them.” (p.202). Deleuze (1989) later adds that for him this duality of the internalisation in the whole and the externalisation in the image, represent in cinema as well as in philosophy the “model of the True as totalisation” (p.265). In other words, it is a constantly changing universe of moving images, portraying

the individual and the world in which he acts, a universe that extends beyond the cinema screen.

According to Deleuze, the realism or believability of the American cinema is so strong because the audience always has clear points of connection and identification, even in historical narratives. He writes that the “movement remains perfectly consistent with the true while it presents invariants, points of gravity of the moving body, privileged points through which it passes and point of fixity in relation to which it moves. This is why the movement-image, in its very essence, is answerable to the effect of truth which it invokes while movement preserves its centres” (Deleuze, 1989, p.138). When Deleuze argues that the classic action-image is no longer relevant, this is largely explained by the fact that the images and stories have become clichés and as a result the audience can no longer believe in them. Deleuze tries to find new images that can reinstate this belief, but I argue that by attempting a higher degree of realism and incorporating the more reflective elements of the time-image, the neo-classical Hollywood epics can achieve the truthfulness and believability of the classical cinema and thus provide us with a system of belief to which the modern audience can relate.

The last two aspects of the action-image both refer to Deleuze’s notions on the close connection between ‘The American Dream’ as the big American illusion and the American cinema on one hand and his emphasis on the importance of illusion in general on the other. Deleuze (1986) argues that “a community is healthy in so far as a kind of consensus reigns, a consensus which allows it to develop illusions about itself, about its motives, about its desires and its cupidity, about its values and its ideals: ‘vital’ illusions which are more true than pure truth.” (p.152). The idea of having a truth that is *truer*, or more *vital* - hence *useful*, than the actual reality resembles Nietzsche’s conception of ancient Greek culture, which created the healthy illusions of Olympic deities in order to deal with the cruelty of everyday life. It is the concept of a universal idea, dream or illusion that survives through all the changes and exists throughout the different levels of society, no matter if this idea has a religious, mythological or political background. It also suggests the necessity of such illusions and their importance in maintaining social structures. Furthermore, it is obsolete to criticise illusions for being illusions and

one cannot, as Deleuze (1986) points out, “criticise the American dream for being only a dream: this is what it wants to be, drawing all its power from the fact that it is a dream.”(p.152). In our constantly changing society this dream, Deleuze argues, functions as the unifying concept and provides the illusion that ensures the continuity of the nation.

Even though the phrase ‘American Dream’ is a 1930s invention,<sup>32</sup> we already find a reference to this concept in Nietzsche, who describes the assumption that everybody can reach everything if you only try hard enough as a playful, artistic instinct and compares it to the spirit of early Greek culture. In Nietzsche’s (2001) words, it is “the American faith [...] where the individual is convinced he can do just about anything *and is up to playing any role*; and everyone experiments with himself, improvises experiments again, enjoys experimenting, where all nature ends and becomes art” (p.216, emphasis in original). It is the radical optimism despite all obstacles that we recover here, and despite its different origins to ancient Greek culture, it mirrors the pleasure in creating and experimenting of the former, which makes us all artists. Apart from the creative aspect, the role of the individual, which is crucial for the action-image, is also highlighted in this notion of the American Dream. This emphasis on the individual can also be found in the contemporary epics mentioned here.

Unlike ancient myths, which often focussed on the unifying aspects of the Dionysian that define an individual as part of a group, as part of the human race that is being guided by the gods, the myths in contemporary cinema now shift the focus towards the Apollonian aspect of the individual, his decisions, actions and inner conflicts. Accordingly, we find various examples of criticism about the unifying concepts of myth and the influence of a divine power in some of the recent epics, as I will show in the second part of this chapter based on *Troy* (dir. W. Petersen, 2004, USA).

As Kracauer has explicitly examined the genre of historic epics in its relation to the redemptive power of cinema, his notions provide another layer to the topic of

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<sup>32</sup> The phrase was coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*, first published in 1931.

neo-classical epics. Hence I will analyse his theories in combination with Deleuze's ideas of the action-image.

When Kracauer describes history as a problematic subject from a cinematic point of view, this can mainly be attributed to two aspects. The first problem for Kracauer is the artificiality of the settings and people in costumes, through which the audience is constantly reminded of the staginess of the representation. This point can instantly be challenged by claiming that this can be said about most fiction and Kracauer may here underestimate the ability of the audience to suspend disbelief. More importantly, the look and costumes in contemporary epics generally aim at a greater degree of realism and avoid all too distinctive and colourful historical styles. In addition, with a stronger emphasis on the action, the attention is distracted from the staginess and stiff setting of a historic representation, which is further aided by digital technologies.

This attempt at realism is also reflected in the narrative structure. Despite still showing glorious heroes and epic battles, the neo-classical characters those are far less distant from the audience. They are not standing out as 'supernatural' individuals, but are characters with flaws and doubts, with whom the audience can identify. A good example for this tendency is the latest version of the Arthurian legend – *King Arthur* (dir. A. Fuqua, 2004, USA), in which Arthur starts as a soldier from a remote country who does not truly appear destined to rule England. He is even about to retire and probably go back to his home country, when duty calls for one last time. Throughout the film there are hardly any references to a higher purpose – such as becoming the future king – but he is merely doing his duty as a good soldier and a good man, helping some people along the way. This is a stark contrast to many previous adaptations of the legend, where the mystic powers behind the scenes are usually introduced from the outset (e.g. *Excalibur*, 1981, dir. J. Boorman, USA/UK).

The second and more interesting problem for Kracauer in relation to historic epics is what he calls the closed universe of historic narratives. For him, an essential aspect of cinema is its ability always to point at a wider framework, an open cosmos, a before and after – in short, a whole. This is in contrast to the

closed cosmos of the theatrical experience. As historic subjects in films are per se finite, Kracauer argues that as a result the audience only gets a limited view on a closed section of the world without references beyond it. This is particularly obvious in studio scenes and even in certain outdoor scenes, where you always have the feeling – as Kracauer describes it – that you would see an entirely different reality as soon as the camera moves out of frame by only a fraction. (See: Kracauer, p.78).

There are two major arguments against this view, especially in the light of neo-classical historic epics. Firstly, modern technologies have allowed for a much more flexible use of cinematic space and we notice that the modern epics have a much more frequent use of pan-shots, moving cameras and totals. This gives a strong impression of the surrounding world, even if it is not in the frame. Meticulous set-design and mise-en-scène, as described in chapter four with regard to *The Lord of the Rings*, also helps to suggest a wider perspective beyond the immediate frame. Moreover, the amount of outdoor scenes has increased significantly, which gives the landscape and scenery a much more natural touch than the staged pompous indoor settings of some classical epics. This can also be seen in *King Arthur* or *Troy*, where the vast majority of the film takes place outdoors.

Apart from these cinematographic aspects, Kracauer's argument can be challenged when looking at the perceptions of history Deleuze describes in relation to the classic American cinema. This is based on Nietzsche's aforementioned classifications of interpreting history as monumental, antiquarian and critical/ethical history. Based on this theory, Deleuze claims that the classical American cinema focuses mainly on monumental history. This concept refers on one hand to the sublime and grand imagery and heroes it portrays and on the other to a concept of history as parallel events, the reoccurrence of great episodes during time. A perfect example for Deleuze is D.W. Griffith's film *Intolerance* (1916, USA), where the separate episodes are not shown in chronological order, but interwoven so as to demonstrate the parallel occurrences of events throughout history, but without any causal or dialectical development from one historic period to the other. This view on history suggests to us that "the

greatness that once existed was in any event once possible and may thus be possible again” (Nietzsche, 1983, p.69). It simply implies that humankind does not learn from the past, but keeps acting in similar ways irrespective of the times and developments.

As a consequence, this historic conception also tends to focus on the effects and actions but ignores the causes. The conflicts between the dual forces, such as rich/poor or settler/Indian, are seen as a given and even though the immediate conflict might be solved, this does not necessarily lead to a dramatic change in society. Despite this valid criticism, I argue that this model of history can also be interpreted in such a way that certain historic events are not simply parallel yet unrelated. On the contrary, by mirroring the situations and actions of individuals in different times, this concept can help us to think about recent events by looking at them from a new perspective. In that way we can argue that there is much more actuality in historic epics than Kracauer acknowledges for classic Hollywood cinema, particularly in examples from the last decade.

If we focus on the essential plot of the movement image – man’s struggle with his environment – and perceive the historic events as a mirror of the events in our time, as monumental history, then the historic subject becomes a contemporary subject. It is no longer something we look back at in amazement or bewilderment, but it has a direct relevance for our modern situation. Cinema can thus show us, what Kracauer (1961) calls “the flow of life” (p.273), the most cinematic of all content. This idea suggests that life goes on no matter what and the eternally moving cinema is the ideal medium to portray this. It is also a philosophical concept, which is close to Nietzsche’s idea on the eternal recurrence for which he argues in his later works.

There is also a tendency for more openness in the recent historic epics mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, which bring them closer to Kracauer’s ideas. Despite his criticism, Kracauer had already acknowledged that cinema may aim at this openness even in historic films. He writes that there is this possibility in cinema:

“one might think of a film which suggests the infinite chain of causes and effects interlinking the historical events as we know them. Such an effort towards establishing a causal continuum – an effort in keeping with the cinematic approach, for reasons indicated in the preceding chapter – would bring to the fore numerous incidents instrumental in the “unfolding of destinies” and thus lure the spectator out of the closed cosmos of poster-like tableaux vivants into an open universe.” (Kracauer, 1961, p.80)

Unlike in classical epics whose final scene often marks a distinct end to the whole narrative, neo-classical epics often, although not always, show a certain openness that points at the ongoing development of the world and new things to come. For example, *Kingdom of Heaven* does end with the hero returning home and starting a new life, but it also shows us the English king riding out with his knights on his way to Jerusalem, starting a new crusade and thus continuing the battle. There is a final conversation between the king and the hero of the film, which is an exact repetition of a dialogue the hero had with his mentor/father at the beginning of the film. In this way the film suggests that the conflict and battle about Jerusalem is not over but perpetual.

Another example can be found in *King Arthur*. The theatrical version ends with a rather conservative wedding scene between Arthur and Guinevere. However, included in the DVD version we find an alternative ending that was originally intended by the filmmaker. In this version, a lot is left open, it ends on the graveyard and although that may seem like a very final place, the narration leaves future developments – such as becoming king or marrying Guinevere – open to the audience’s speculations. (*King Arthur*, DVD, 2004, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, USA).

We also find this shift towards more open endings in the key examples of this chapter. Whereas the classic 1950s version *Helen of Troy* concludes with Helen returning home to her husband leaving a destroyed and dead city behind, and so closing the narrative, the 2004 epic *Troy* ends with Achilles’ burial in the ruins of the city, but leaves open the destiny of most of the other characters involved in the conflict and seems to mark only one intercession in a continuous conflict.

In the next section I will more closely examine this neo-classical epic and its 1950s predecessor. I call the 1956 version classical as it is still very much true to the style of the classical pre-war American style Deleuze describes in the movement-image. The neo-classical movement-images, however, were influenced by the arise of new images after the Second World War and have since, as I aim to prove, developed significantly without losing the essential characteristics of the movement-image. Particular attention will be paid to the key features of the duel and the hero. Apart from that, I will show that both films clearly reflect a distinct historical situation and can be read as illustrations of a specific line of thought at a specific time.

## 5.2 *Heroes in Action* – Ancient Troy in modern epics

*Helen of Troy*, the 1956 interpretation of the classic myth surrounding the Trojan War, is largely focussed on the romantic love story between Helen of Sparta and Paris of Troy. From the very beginning of the film, we are aware of the theatrical character of this film, fully in line with Kracauer's notion of the staginess of historic films. The movie starts with an overture (lasting a whole five minutes), in which we see nothing but a still image of a large temple door while we hear classical music. This is very similar to a production in an opera house. Then, two people appear and open the door as if they were to raise a curtain and our view proceeds inside the temple. Here again, the closed *mise-en-scène* with large columns on each side of the frame strongly recalls the look of a theatre stage. Finally, an off-screen narrator gives a large amount of background information on the story that is to follow, which is similar to the prologue common in ancient tragedy and classic theatre.

In contrast, most neo-classical epics only give very brief information if at all and then start with a battle scene that throws the audience directly into the action. Thus the actual sensation of the events overpowers the distant historic perspective. (See: Kracauer, 1961, p.81) In other words, the audience is drawn into the action of the film before it can reflect on the staginess of the historic scenery. Moreover, throughout the classical film version we frequently have an

off-screen narrator filling the gaps in the on-screen story, which constantly points at the historicity of the film instead of allowing the audience to immerse in the actuality of the plot played out on screen.

From the outset, the neo-classical version *Troy* by director Wolfgang Petersen is significantly different from the earlier version *Helen of Troy*. Instead of a lengthy overture and the theatrical set-up, it only provides a short on-screen text that gives the essential information on the time, location and principal political constellation of the narrative, but this is not read out by an off-screen narrator. Nevertheless, the film then follows with off-screen narration, which is, however, not there to explain the historical background, but to provide a philosophical statement that sets the tone and introduces the theme of the film. As the voice-over says: “men are haunted by the vastness of eternity, though we ask ourselves will our actions echo across the centuries...” (0:01:31). This already implies the more reflective mood of this action epic, which rather than portraying a legendary historic event can be seen as a reflection of war that translates well into our modern times. As a consequence, from the very beginning it feels much more contemporary and topical than the previous version.

There are various other scenes throughout the classical film version that emphasise the degree of staginess. When later in the film the Greek ships arrive on the Trojan shore, this is shown by night, and so the filmmakers do not actually have to show the ships but merely a sea full of signal fires that *symbolise* the ships. In some later day scenes we can clearly recognise that only the first few ships are ‘real’, meaning they are solid built props, whereas the others are clearly painted on a canvas in the background, which underlines the theatrical setting.

This is in strong contrast to the modern version, in which the possibilities of digital technology allow the filmmakers to produce a breathtaking visual representation of the Greek ships and armies. This is not only more visually compelling and highlights the epic character of the film, it also creates a more realistic impression of the large-scale war that is taking place. Due to the technological restrictions in the earlier production, the battle scenes are kept rather short and often use close-ups and medium length shots, which do not give

us a full impression of the actual fight, let alone allow for a philosophical perception of this epic war.

The technical and aesthetic aspects outlined support the more significant difference between the two versions of the film. There is a general shift in the narrative of the films. This difference also reflects the change in the historical and social context of both works and can be made clear by looking at the two main characters of both films. The first one is Helen, who is particularly important for the first film; the second one is Achilles, the main character of the modern film version. Both characters emphasise the variation in the general theme of the films. Here I argue that apart from individual creative decisions this is a clear reflection of the time and situation in which the films were made.

Bearing in mind the social circumstances of American middle class society in the 1950s, the idea that Helen, wife of Menelaus, runs away with her young lover, poses a significant moral problem that would have been alien to the ancient Greeks. In the ancient myth this infidelity is explained with a decision made by the gods, in this case by Aphrodite, who decides that Paris should get Helen. This divine decision is not questioned. A god that would encourage such infidelity is inconsistent with the Christian morality which was dominant in 1950s North America. Therefore, the narrative is significantly altered and subsequently much closer to the biblical epics of that time than to the original Greek mythology.

At the beginning of the film, in stark contrast to the classic myth, Paris sails for Sparta to convince Menelaus to make peace, but the latter betrays and arrests him and finally even plans to murder him. In this way, Paris is already glorified as the lonely hero who would sacrifice himself for the greater good. The original myth, however, tells us that Menelaus wanted peace and invited Paris and his brother Hector to Sparta, where he treated them with much hospitality and generosity. In return, Paris not only stole Helena, but also a significant part of Menelaus' treasure.<sup>33</sup> Whereas to the ancient Greeks, this behaviour may have found

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<sup>33</sup> For a detailed description see: Bulfinch, T., 1979. *Myths of Greece and Rome*. New York & London: Penguin.

approval for the cunning and cleverness, it cannot be justified under the moral conditions of the Fifties.

More significantly, the film is not only determined to present Paris as the flawless hero, but it must also justify Helen's infidelity towards her husband. The first step here is to portray Menelaus as a cruel, drunken brute, who celebrates orgies with other women and treats his wife badly. Helen's initial support for Paris on the other hand, is portrayed as if it derives not from a romantic interest, but out of a humanitarian interest to save him and because she does "despise oppression" (0:44:17). However, that still not seems to be enough to justify running away from her country and her husband. So finally, her escape with Paris occurs rather as a co-incidence and forced upon them by Menelaus' soldiers. When she helps Paris to escape the soldiers of Sparta, which Menelaus has sent after him simply because he is Trojan; she does not intend to go with him. As they are caught, however, her conspiracy is discovered and Paris has no choice but to take her with him to save her life. This is a somewhat extreme explanation of the moral implications of Helen's escape. In this narrative, Paris is not the one who destroys hope of peace between Sparta and Troy by betraying Menelaus, but it is Menelaus who - fully unjustified - refuses Paris' peace offer and threatens to kill him.

Despite all that, as Paris and Helen get back to Troy, they face the anger and disapproval both of the Trojan people and the royal family. This is repeatedly discussed throughout the film and only towards the end, when she wants to give herself back to the Greeks, and so sacrificing herself for the sake of Troy, she is fully accepted. Again, it is the Greeks who betray them and do not actually want her back but claim power over Troy.

This general interpretation of the theme illustrates my claim that films always reflect their times and social circumstances and – as I said – certain films flourish particularly well in times of crisis. With regard to *Helen of Troy* it can be argued that the social circumstances in the 1950s were a time when people were desperate to overcome the trauma of the Second World War and so the film emphasised the harmony of family and domestic life within the Trojan court, which was contrasted with a brutal war culture of the Greeks. The neo-classical adaptation is

much more ambivalent into this point, reflecting the more complex anxieties of post-modern culture.

In the few scenes involving Helen in the modern epic, it is clear that she is very conscious of her 'sins' and does not attempt to find any moral justification for it. Also, unlike in the 1950s version, there is no absolution for her from the family and the people. This, however, does not seem relevant as unlike in the first story she is not constantly blamed for what happens to Troy. Everybody seems to be aware that she is mainly one individual figure involved in a larger conflict. The new role of Helen in the 2004 version also suggests a new perspective on the relationship between humans and gods. This involves the aspect of providence, which we have already mentioned in the previous chapter. In *Helen of Troy*, this providential element is shown explicitly in the figure of Cassandra, Paris' sister, who foresees the fall of Troy, and she is one of the first encounters in the film. Accordingly, the importance of destiny is emphasised very early on. Throughout this film, the will of the gods is an important subject.

We have to acknowledge that for the ancient Greeks the idea of divine interference was part of their everyday lives, which is reflected in their myths. It is nevertheless interesting to see how both films interpret this aspect. As Kracauer had pointed out, divine interference is one of the elements of classic tragic narratives that are distinctly un-cinematic in so far as they contradict the 'natural aspect' of the cinematic and the natural flow of life. This is rather obvious in the first film, where the scenes involving references to the gods always seem strangely out of place and do indeed remind us of the historicity and artificiality of the plot. The role of the gods is never questioned in this film – unlike in the more recent version – and it is portrayed in such a way that the people are at their mercy and have no power to decide against it. The main problem in relation to the gods in *Helen of Troy* is rather between worshipping the 'wrong' goddess, Aphrodite instead of Athena, not questioning the role of gods in general as it happens in the modern version. Towards the end of the classical film, when Helen is released from her 'sin', Cassandra redeems her by shifting the blame for Troy's destiny from Helen to the goddess Athena.

Instead of Cassandra, who does not appear in the modern version, the moral voice of this film is now Briseis, who – in the classic myth as well as in the film – has a crucial role in Achilles' split with Agamemnon. Her part in this story is, however, largely extended in the modern film epic, as it fulfils a very significant cinematic role. The interactions with Briseis allow the filmmaker not only to show Achilles' emotions and reflections as she is the main figure in questioning his actions; she also presents the noble and ethical conscience of the film. Although she is a priestess like Cassandra, their discussions on the influence of the gods are more in-depth and challenging. For example, when Achilles is questioned by Briseis about his motifs, he replies: "I chose nothing, I was born and that is what I am" (1:26:00), underlining the concept of providence. The shift from Cassandra to Briseis, from Paris' sister to Achilles' companion, also highlights the focus on Achilles in the contemporary narrative, an aspect I will discuss in more detail further on.

This shows that the subject of belief and fate is still very present in this neo-classical epic. Yet, unlike the heroes in *Lord of the Rings* and *Avatar*, who emphasise the importance of spirituality and faith in contrast to the brutal, materialistic nature of their opponents, the hero of Troy is more controversial and critical towards these aspects.

It is not only Briseis who challenges Achilles' moral consciousness. Achilles in return also challenges Briseis' perception of the gods when she criticises him about being a soldier. He tells her as a priestess she is bound to serve all the gods, this including Ares, the god of war. This brings her into a personal conflict between religious worship and her own moral perceptions, which in turn challenges the audience's idea about religious belief and individual morality. Achilles further tells her: "The gods envy us. They envy us because we are mortal. Because any moment might be our last. Everything's more beautiful because we are doomed." (1:26:59). This is an important statement, as it summarises the metaphysical concept of mortality as a necessary criterion for our appreciation of life. As in Nietzsche's notions on redemption and suffering, which I discussed previously, death and tragedy are necessary in the creation of beauty and appearance that allows us to enjoy life.

Another interesting point is that Briseis replies to this statement saying “I thought you were a dumb brute. I could have forgiven a dumb brute.” (1:27:32). Thus she signals that because of his obvious insight and conscious reflection on what he is doing, there is no justification for his actions by saying he did not know better. What Briseis cannot forgive is that an intelligent man with a critical attitude carries out the actions he is doing. For Nietzsche (1994), however, Achilles’ view underlines a powerful Greek concept of life that also always involves an element of cruelty, it is “a hard position, but an ancient, powerful, human-all-too-human proposition” and he further summarises, “No cruelty, no feast: that is what the oldest and longest period in human history teaches us” (p.46).

On the other hand, Nietzsche also makes clear that this is a naïve, amoral disposition that is an essential part of culture and therefore cannot be challenged from the perspective of our modern understanding of moral and ethical behaviour. It refers to what he describes as the morality of the master, which also includes distancing himself from his people, which is obvious in the case of Achilles. Unlike Hector, who portrays the classic hero of the action-image and has the support and encouragement of his family and the people of Troy, Achilles is not a classic hero in that sense. His intentions and motivations are very individual and personal and he rarely seems to be influenced by the opinions of other people, neither enemies nor friends.

In general we find a stronger focus on the individual in modern action epics and the new perspective on divine influence is another expression of this. With the shift from a belief in a higher power and purpose towards a more individualised morality and decision making. In the original myth and its classic literary portraits, e.g. the *Iliad*, the gods have a significant role in this war and it seems at times as if the humans are merely figures in the great game of chess the gods play with each other. There does not seem to be much evidence of free will and conscious decision making. This, however, would be completely alien to us today and make a cinematic portrait simply ridiculous.

Even in the 1956 version this aspect is already toned down, although the influence of the goddesses Athena and Aphrodite are more clearly emphasised in this film. Here, the filmmaker also uses a rather blatant *Deus ex machina*, when Paris tries to kill Achilles who is leaving with his chariot dragging Hector along. While he keeps missing him with his arrows he prays to Zeus to help him find Achilles' weak spot and instantly an arrow lands in Achilles heel. Apart from the fact that it is inconsistent with the myth as Achilles is not killed in this event, the whole scene just seems ridiculous. While to the ancient Greeks it may have been perfectly common to have a god or goddess guiding the hand of Paris, such obvious divine intervention feels completely out of place in contemporary cinema and thus destroys the illusion rather than supports it.

In the modern version *Troy* the only divine focus point is Apollo, but this is often used to challenge the ancient belief with modern ideas, for instance when it is shown that Achilles has no respect for the gods any more. When for example Achilles raids Apollo's temple, Hector questions the priests as to why Apollo has not struck Achilles down when he desecrated his temple. The priests here generally appear as the superstitious elders who not only give bad advice, but who also distract people from making rational decisions.

There is another fact to support this modern view on the divine aspects of the ancient myth. According to legend, Achilles' mother is a sea nymph, which makes him a half-god, an aspect that is only implied discreetly and merely recognisable for those familiar with the details of the myth. At the beginning of the film, Achilles speaks to his mother while she stands in a river bank collecting sea shells. To the average cinema viewer she appears like an ordinary mature woman in a Mediterranean setting. We only get a glimpse of her mystic powers when she foretells her son his future. She says that he can stay home, have many children and grow old and happy or go to this war, die and gain immortality. Importantly, immortality here is not meant in the literal sense of him becoming a god, but about his eternal fame and glory.

This will become the driving force for Achilles' participation in the Trojan War, which is again an individual decision. Shortly after this scene, a young boy asks

Achilles if it is true that his mother is a goddess and if he is really invulnerable as the legend goes, to which the latter only ironically replies, if that were the case he would not bother with his armour. (0:06:05).<sup>34</sup> This notion emphasises the aforementioned more ambivalent treatment of myth and belief in the contemporary version of the story.

These aspects also support my initial claim that besides Helen, Achilles is the crucial character in our comparison between the two epics. He appears merely as a supporting figure in the 1950s version, where he is portrayed as an arrogant and vain, selfish character who has nothing to do but occasionally show up and fight. Even so, he is not very often shown and his only significant fight in this film is against Hector. Whereas Helen's role is reduced to a backdrop in the modern version, Achilles now becomes the central figure. Not only is he now the driving character of the epic, his role is also much more complex and multi-layered, despite still having most of the character traits mentioned above.

The first sequence of the contemporary version is a mass scene of a horse army. Similar to most of the neo-classical epics I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, this film starts with an action scene. Here we meet Agamemnon for the first time: he is instantly characterised as an arrogant, merciless and power-obsessed king. In this scene we also first encounter Achilles, who is called to decide the war in a one-to-one fight and with one stroke kills a man twice his size. Right from the beginning, we not only anticipate the conflict between Agamemnon and Achilles, but also realise that Achilles is not simply refusing to fight for him out of arrogance, but because he does not approve of Agamemnon's actions. The only argument that convinces him to fight is that by doing so he would spare the army of soldiers another bloody fight and end this war for them. When walking past Agamemnon towards his opponent, he remarks cynically, "Now imagine a king who fights his own battles, wouldn't that be a sight!" (0:07:18). Unlike in the first film, Achilles here is more of a boyish, unorthodox 'wild child' who is sceptical of

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, the filmmakers here also seems to refer to a frequently named contradiction in Greek literature between Homer's extensive description about Achilles' armour as well as his mothers concern about this and the legend that she has dunked him into the river Styx as a baby to make him invulnerable. See: Bulfinch, 1979.

Agamemnon not from pure vanity but for plausible reasons. He reminds us more of a hero from a classic Western, the outsider who rides into the village to fight for what he is asked for but without taking clear sides and obeying the rules.

When the Greeks set out for war against Troy, Agamemnon has no choice but to ask Achilles for his support. However, Agamemnon remains very critical of Achilles. For him “Achilles is the past, a man who fights for no flag. A man loyal to no country.” (0:20:01). Again, there are parallels to a certain type of Western hero that focuses on the individual and independent element of his character. Frequently in the Western, once the fight is over, the lonely hero is left behind or leaves town. This is because society has overcome the evil and reinstalled a new power structure, but the hero does not belong to any side and being a warrior through and through he is not capable of adapting to the changes in the world. We will see later that similarly to this, Achilles is too much a warrior to be able to settle down and find peace in a conventional sense.

Agamemnon and Achilles also show two different approaches towards fame. Whereas Agamemnon is primarily interested in gaining power and fame in the here and now, Achilles does not care much about worldly fame and riches, but wants to achieve eternal glory that reaches far beyond his grave. This intention is alien to many other characters in the film, which again puts him in a unique position. When Hector questions Achilles at their first encounter about his reasons to come to Troy, the latter replies: “They’ll be talking about that war for 1000 years.” (0:45:17). Hector seems to be confused by this statement, thus replies “In a thousand years the dusk from our bones will be gone.” (0:45:20). Achilles again emphasises his intentions introduced at the beginning by insisting: “but our names will remain.” (0:45:25).

Whereas Agamemnon and Achilles form the first of a series of binary oppositions – the distinctive element of the classic action-image – Achilles and Hector present another crucial pair. The excessive use of these oppositions shows how much this neo-classical epic is rooted in the classical movement-image, where binary relationships were the basic element of the organic montage of classical American cinema.

There are also several other important dualities, which not only appear between the Greeks on one side and the Trojans on the other, but also within the Greek camp between Achilles and Agamemnon, Agamemnon and Odysseus, as well as on Trojan side between Hector and his brother Paris. In addition, there is also a strong opposition between Agamemnon and the Trojan king Priam, who symbolise two aspects of leadership. In a crucial scene that is missing from the earlier film version, Priam goes to Achilles to beg for the dead body of his son Hector. This scene truly has the dimensions of an ancient tragedy and Priam's plea even moves Achilles to tears. This scene feels very modern through its representation of deeply human emotions, yet is very close to the actual classic myth. Achilles here also acknowledges that Priam is a much better king than his own king Agamemnon as he cares for his people and not for his own power interests.

After having presented Achilles as the main character of the neo-classical epic, we eventually move on to the story of Paris and Helen, although this is rather brief in comparison to the 1950s film. Unlike in the first version and more faithful to the original myth, Menelaus has invited the Trojan princes Hector and Paris to his court to make peace with them. This is the complete opposite to the first film. Also, Paris and Helen are portrayed as young and somewhat naïve lovers who sneak away from the party to give in to their passion. It seems purely a romantic interest that brings him there, not the glorified opposition against an oppressive Menelaus as it is characterised in the first film. Helen here makes a conscious choice of going with Paris, being fully aware of the trouble that will cause. There is no pressure on her to go with him.

In general, the female roles in the modern version are much stronger and interestingly often represent the more rational and considerate element, in contrast to the men in their rage about honour and glory. They seem like the conscience of the warriors and often question their decisions, such as the aforementioned Briseis, Hector's wife Andromache as well as Helen, who seems much more mature than the young Paris. It will later be Briseis, not a warrior,

who finally kills Agamemnon, another departure from the original myth that underlines the stronger female power in this film.

In a reversal of the first film, where Helen tries to persuade Paris to flee to a small island and live there a simple life as farmers, whereas Paris feels the responsibility to return home, it is now Paris who suggests this lifestyle and Helen who is reasonable and convinces him that this is not an option. Paris on the other hand is frequently and in stark contrast to his brother represented as a coward, although not necessarily in a negative sense. He is simply young and naïve and does not seem to have a sense for honour and pride. When he despairs about his own weakness, Helen encourages him by saying, “I don’t want a hero, my love, I want a man to grow old with.” (1:22:19). When looking at this statement, it becomes clear that he is not simply a coward, but rather symbolises an alternative lifestyle that contradicts the warrior culture of pride and honour, which is represented by his brother Hector.

We first encounter Hector in the scene at Menelaus’ court. In contrast to his younger brother, he is not only known as a fierce warrior, but also seems very reflective and thoughtful. In the course of the film he will become the antipode of Achilles as he shows a very different attitude towards war. They both form a very strong binary relationship, crucial for the presentation of the central theme of *Troy*.

With the story shifting from the relationship between Helen and Paris towards the conflict between Achilles and Hector, the general theme of the film also shifts from a romantic love story that caused an epic war to a depiction of war in general, to which the romantic element is merely a small reason. In a personal scene between the desperate Paris and his father King Priam the latter explains: “I fought many wars in my time. Some were fought for land, some for power, some for glory. I suppose fighting for love makes more sense than all the rest.” (0:57:08). This also shows that the Trojans with King Priam and also Hector have a strong sense of family and community, which is in contrast to the Greeks who attack them.

This narrative shift is already emphasised by the set-up of the film and the extent of the battle scenes. For example, even though the earlier version is significantly shorter than the later film, the Greek armies in the first film arrive in Troy much later in the story, around the 53rd minute, which is nearly half-way through the film. The 2004 version not only starts with a battle scene, the Greek armies also go ashore in Troy just half an hour into the film. As a result, the vast majority of the conflict is played out directly on the Trojan shore and around the battle field rather than in the royal palaces.

In both films a significant aspect of the battle of Troy is not the abduction of Helen, but more importantly that this is delivering a welcome reason for the Greeks to attack Troy. The Greek king Agamemnon is in both films the driving power behind the conflict and all too happy to help his brother Menelaus to regain his wife Helena while attacking his archenemy. In the classical film epic, the few critical, reflective moments largely come from Ulysses (Odysseus), who – as in the classic myth – represents the element of the wise, cunning and cynical commentator. As an example, when Agamemnon calls the Greeks for their *War of honour* – he remarks, “Yes, That’s what the future will call it” (0:49:54), suggesting that it will be only in the interpretation of the historians to justify and glorify the war. Although Odysseus plays a similar role in the contemporary film version, the majority of the reflection on war and its purpose here comes directly from Achilles, and occasionally Hector. Thus it is no longer the cynical commentator, but the warrior himself who is reflecting on his actions.

Hector and Achilles here represent two opposing attitudes of warfare – defence and attack. True to the basic elements of the movement-image, this binary opposition is often shown via a parallel montage. The first significant parallel montage in this context occurs when both armies prepare for their first battle and Hector as well as Achilles delivers a short motivational speech to encourage their soldiers for the fight. We first see Hector who says to his men that there is a simple code, “honour the gods, love your women and defend your country” (0:36:55), a statement that underlines the defensive character of his fight.

This is contrasted by Achilles, who simply points at the Trojan shore and shouts to his men: “Do you know what’s there, waiting, beyond that beach? Immortality! Take it! It’s yours!” (0:37:42). We can see from this initial fight that Hector on the one hand is the protector of house and home, who simply wants to defend country and people, whereas Achilles on the other hand is in Troy for his own eternal glory. He does not care much about defending Greece, regaining Helen or reinstating Menelaus’ honour. His motifs at this stage are entirely about the war itself and they are individual and personal. Achilles motivates his soldiers not to fight for the glory of Greece or his own state, not even for the glory of their army, but for their personal, individual immortal glory.

Despite that, Achilles does not seem to have any illusions about the immorality and reality of war. On the contrary, he tries several times to confront the overeager young Patroclus with what it means to fight. In one scene he tells Patroclus that he is constantly haunted by the ghosts of the people he has killed and makes clear that there is nothing glamorous about fighting as he will have to kill people. However, as a man of action this does not lead to remorse or despair, but an acceptance that this is what he is.

This is again a presentation of Nietzsche’s idea of the noble man, which does not serve anyone else or fight for a so called higher purpose. This aspect is further underlined when Achilles tells Patroclus: “I taught you how to fight, but I never taught you why to fight. ... soldiers they fight for kings they never even met ... they die when they’re told to die ... Don’t waste your life following some fool’s orders.” (1:02:07). This is not simply an advice to his friend not to obey the rules, but to challenge him to find out for himself what he is fighting for and to be critical about what is worth fighting for. It is clear that Achilles sees himself as a soldier as well as a leader, but an independent one – a classic warlord, as Agamemnon calls him.

Despite his criticism towards foolish, obedient soldiers, Achilles has more respect for them than for the power-obsessed Agamemnon, who tries to claim his victory irrespective of who was fighting. When Achilles provokes him by arguing “the

soldiers won the battle”, Agamemnon simply replies “history remembers kings, not soldiers.” (0:52:40).

Apart from the fact that this is a historic epic it also includes a variety of reflections on history in general. Agamemnon’s statement points at Nietzsche’s model of monumental history, which Deleuze picked up in relation to classic American cinema as mentioned above. This film is a good example insofar as it not only describes the longing for immortality and the “Olympian laughter” towards death on the side of Achilles as the great hero of history, it also shows the negative side represented by Agamemnon. He is living in the present, exclusively focussed on immediate action, ignoring cause and effect in the historical process. For Achilles, fame is beyond this life, in fact he seems to be aware that he will only gain the glory after his death, but in this sense fame becomes “the belief in the solidarity and continuity of the greatness of all ages and a protest against the passing away of generations and the transitoriness of things.” (Nietzsche, 1983, p.69).

Agamemnon on the other hand shows a very pragmatic attitude towards glory, power and even towards the gods. His character easily translates to contemporary modern leaders that use every excuse from religion to security to justify the extension of their power. It has already been suggested in the classical film version that Agamemnon is in this war purely for personal reasons, but this is extended largely in the modern version. When reading this film as a general reflection on war, then this also implies the driving force behind most wars, not only in ancient times.

This more contemporary and realistic take on an ancient topic can also be found on the visual level of the film. Throughout the film we find several burial scenes, showing not only the people dying in the fight, but also the aftermath of the battle. In one remarkable sequence following the first major battle between the Trojans and the Greeks, the film shows a long scene, in which we see the Greek soldiers collecting the dead and burning them on pylons at the beach. We then see the beach brightly illuminated by the fires. In the first film, the pylons are only mentioned once when Helen complains about the Trojan people putting them so

close to her window in order to demonstrate that these dead are her fault. However, this is never shown on screen and you rarely see dead soldiers after the battle.

Eventually, even Achilles no longer fights for eternal glory, but out of a more basic human emotion. When Patroclus is killed wearing Achilles' armour, Achilles is full of rage and his intention to fight alters completely. He is no longer concerned with eternal glory, but simply thinking of revenge. When he challenges Hector he does not care about Troy or Greece, or about a fair fight, he only wants to destroy him. Here, killing Hector is only the start as he even wants to destroy his body for the underworld so that he will be punished in this life and the next. When Hector and Achilles are preparing for their fight, we find another interesting parallel montage that emphasises the binary relationship between the two. We see both Achilles and Hector putting on their armour in exactly the same manner. This juxtaposes them as the two prototype warriors who may have different purposes and ideals to fight, but also share a common thread that sets them apart from the other characters of the film.

As several other aspects outlined before, the final fight between Hector and Achilles also bears strong reminiscence of Western style confrontations. We see Hector and Achilles in an empty desert landscape outside the Trojan walls. They are both old style heroes who risk their lives for what they believe in and who are not afraid of direct confrontation. This is very different from the previous scene when Paris challenges Menelaus for Helen, but flees when he realises that Menelaus is about to kill him and seeks the protection of his brother. Here, Hector eventually kills Menelaus to protect his brother although it is obvious that he disapproves of Paris' behaviour. Hector is reluctant to kill Menelaus, who he respects as a warrior, whereas the whinging Paris is in stark contrast to Hector's sense of pride and honour.

With Hector being killed by Achilles, the good man who protects his people is overcome by the ultimate warrior, which also has a devastating effect on his community. We already see in the first film that the Greeks and the Trojans form two different types of societies. The Greeks are presented as a loose alliance, used

to fighting each other and only uniting if it is in their own interest. This motif is continued in the contemporary film version, although Agamemnon here appears as a stronger leader who seems to have forged not only alliances, but effectively an empire consisting of the different states of Greece. The Greek society is thus the antithesis to the strongly unified community of the Trojans lead by King Priam, who appears more like a father figure to his people. In one scene, Paris points out to his father Priam that he is such a great king because he loves his country and his people so much, which is in stark contrast to Agamemnon and his rule of oppression.

Also, family values are emphasised within the Trojan royal court and it is made clear that all prefer peace to warfare. Here, the Trojan society is much closer to the idea of a nation-community, which Deleuze describes as an essential part of the classic American cinema. This time, however, the healthy community is defeated by the Greeks. With Hector dead and King Priam broken by despair and grief, the city and the community have lost his leader. Paris is not powerful enough to prevent the Trojans from bringing Odysseus' horse in the city. Again, the priests are giving bad advice based on superstitious assumptions and so the blind belief in the will of the gods eventually leads to the destruction of Troy.

After the Greeks have entered Troy they burn down the city. Unlike previous battle scenes in the modern version, this scene is initially very meditative as the soundtrack only allows the battle noises to appear in the background while the dominant music is a kind of spiritual singing, which gives the whole final battle a philosophical dimension. During the fight of Troy, Achilles is eventually killed by Paris. As in the earlier film version, the first arrow hits Achilles' legendary heel. Unlike in the classic film, however, this does not actually kill him and Paris needs a few more arrows shot into Achilles' heart to bring him down, which makes this instantly more believable and realistic.

Whereas Homer's *Iliad*, which only describes a fraction of the Trojan War, ends with the funeral of Hector in all his glory, the modern version of Troy mirrors this by ending on Achilles' funeral in the ruins of Troy. This also emphasises Achilles'

role as the central character of this epic and forms another parallel to his antipode Hector.

### Summary

In conclusion, we can say that the neo-classical epic remains consistent with Deleuze's concept of the movement-image in all its important elements, such as the use of dual relationships throughout the film, often emphasised by parallel montage in crucial scenes. With the focus on action instead of the historic background, it not only further underlines the ambitions of neo-classical American cinema, but also challenges Kracauer's criticism about the outdated artificiality of historic epics.

In general, neo-classical epics also have a strong focus on the individual; in fact this focus is even stronger than in the classical epics, which reflects an increased individualisation in society. This contemporary background is also apparent in other aspects, such as the questioning of divine powers and a critical attitude towards the reasons behind warfare.

Apart from these elements, the modern action-image, however, has also significantly developed. It has indeed moved beyond the organic whole of the classic action-image, which is illustrated by more ambivalent and complex binary oppositions, inconsistent and disillusioned societies and people as well as more open narratives. With its focus on action, it has overcome the organic representation in favour of an identity of image and concept. In this way it shows the struggle between man and his world, which Deleuze called action-thought. This is largely helped by modern digital technologies that enable the filmmaker to create the images in such a way that it reflects the narrative and allows the audience to be drawn in the story. As a result, they become part of the reflective journey of the film.

Despite the critical treatment of aspects of belief, the revival of mythic epics shows that these grand mythic illusions still have a power to help us understand

our world and that we need them to be reflective and critical of our times while simultaneously implying a certain order and structure by comparing our world with a historical/mythical world.

This contrast between our world and a mythical one can also be found in the latest examples of digital Hollywood cinema, which seem to have pushed the use of technology to such an extent that it no longer seems to support the narrative, but get in the way of a full engagement with the film. I will explore this aspect in the final chapter of this thesis, in which I discuss the future of the movement-image.

**Chapter Six:**  
***Possible Worlds, Impossible Narratives?*– The potentials and limits of  
digital storytelling**

In the previous chapters I have discussed various film epics of the last decade, starting with the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and its mythical themes, such as the eternal fight against an ultimate evil, the hero's journey, the redemption of the world and the belief in the good. Then I looked at recent historical epics and demonstrated how they approach myth from a more realistic point of view, both in the narrative and in the visual components of the film, while also incorporating some of the classic mythical aspects mentioned above. Especially with regard to realism, digital technologies played an important role in the impact of these epics.

The films I will examine in this final chapter continue these ideas. More precisely, I will look at the most recent developments in digital cinema, such as fully digital feature films and 3D technology and explore how technology further moves beyond the boundaries of realism as well as its impact on the aesthetic and narrative elements of the films. One hypothesis I aim to investigate in this context is that despite their hypermodern imagery, the storytelling seems to be rather regressive in the sense that it incorporates clichés of classic Hollywood cinema to a much greater level than the epics discussed in the previous chapters. I will examine in which way this influences aspects such as redemption and illusion and how these themes can be addressed in postmodern narratives.

The latest trend in the development of digital cinema seems to be 3D technology. The general idea behind it may not be entirely new, but the three-dimensional images created by digital technology are significantly different from the first 3D attempts in the 1960s. As a consequence, this technology has a potential to reach beyond a mere cinema of effects, even though recent works in this area have not yet used its full creative potential to go truly beyond the visual spectacle.

Similar to the first wave of CGI in the early 1990s, this new visual dimension often seems to have a pure novelty effect and I want to analyse what impact this can have on the stories told. An example is the recent remake of *Clash of the Titans* (dir. Louis Leterrier, 2010, USA), which was not originally planned as a 3D film. Only after the success of other 3D films, the effect was added in post-production

and so becomes arguably disposable and disconnected with the actual story. This is in contrast to the films analysed later in the chapter, where the technology is a crucial factor from the outset.

In the context of the new images, I shall also resume my review of Deleuze's theories on the decline of the movement-image. I shall question whether Deleuze is right to assume that we need yet another type of images or whether the categories of movement-image and time-image are sufficient to capture the advances in visual aesthetics. Therefore, this chapter will continue the line of thought of the previous chapters and see how most recent works of digital cinema push the boundaries of cinema itself. I will further ask if and how the most recent films continue to incorporate concepts of the time-image or if their conservative narratives link them closer to the movement-image, despite their technological advances.

In the first part of this chapter, I shall summarise Deleuze's notions on the influence of new technologies and discuss the contributions of more recent writers on digital cinema. Linking digital cinema to new impulses in philosophical thinking, I further want to explore the possibilities of these new technologies in terms of narration. For this, I will briefly look at recent attempts to present mythical narratives in a fully digital way, such as *Beowulf* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 2007, USA) or *300* (dir. Zack Snyder, 2006, USA). Like the films discussed in previous chapters, they directly draw on mythical and historical narratives. Although *300* is the adaptation of a graphic novel by Frank Miller, it can be compared to the early historic epic *300 Spartans* (dir. Rudolf Maté, 1962, USA), which was Miller's inspiration.<sup>35</sup> My hypothesis is that these fully digital epics fail to create an illusion for the audience that transfers beyond the screen experience and so are unsuccessful in engaging the audience on an emotional level. Especially

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<sup>35</sup> In an interview with the online magazine UGO, Frank Miller states: "I was a little boy of seven when I saw this clunky old movie from 20th Century Fox called *The 300 Spartans* [released in 1962]. [...] I went and sat down and watched the end of the movie and the course of my creative life changed because all of a sudden the heroes weren't the guys who get the medal at the end of *Star Wars*." Epstein, D. R. Undated. *Frank Miller, 300 Interview*. Under Ground Online. Available from: <<http://www.ugo.com/ugo/html/article/?id=16424&sectionId=106>> [Accessed 28 August 2010].

in *300*, which uses the digital technology to design a new visual aesthetics for historical epics by adapting the style of graphic novels, it can be argued that the effect on the audience is purely aesthetic, which makes it difficult to immerse in the story. *Beowulf* equally seems to fail to connect with the audience properly. Despite the fact that the visual representation is very realistic, it is difficult to empathise with the characters, as they are simply lacking 'human touch'. As discussed in chapter two, Kracauer had criticised *Metropolis* for using human beings simply as ornaments, the visual aesthetic thus eliminating any ethical or emotional aspects. A similar statement can be made with regard to the two films mentioned here. In *Avatar* this relationship may be more complex as the digital images appear to be more complex and engaging. This point is also highlighted in a recent article by scholar Kimberly N. Rosenfeld (2010), who claims that "Cameron pulls the viewer into Pandora's world much like people are pulled into gaming's virtual reality." I will explore throughout this chapter what impact this has on the storytelling of the film and if this can help to use digital technologies beyond the mere spectacle, which was already a problem in the early CGI-cinema of the Nineties as I have discussed in chapter three.

For this reason, I will examine *Avatar* in more detail in the second part of this chapter and analyse whether this film primarily engages the audience on a visual level or whether it has the capacity to create an illusionary world that can provide meaning beyond the screen experience. Since its release, the film has not only divided critics, but also poses some interesting challenges to our perception of the role of cinema and the link between images and storytelling. A further question is whether Hollywood cinema has so far missed out on the possibilities of the new technology to create not only new aesthetical but also new philosophical illusions.

Finally, this chapter will discuss the future role and structure of narratives in general and argue that the new imagery may be at its best as a fusion between the action-driven heroes and stories of the classical cinema of the movement-image and the visual-contemplative aspects of the time-image. We will further explore how far philosophy and film studies can contribute to a debate on digital aesthetics that is currently dominated by discourses on the technological aspects.

Michael Heim (1993) has argued in his book on virtual realities that perhaps “the essence of VR ultimately lies not in technology but in art, perhaps art of the highest order. Rather than control or escape or entertain or communicate, the ultimate promise of VR may be to transform, to redeem our awareness of reality – something that the highest art has attempted to do and something hinted at in the very label virtual reality” (p.124). In this sense, contemporary digital cinema may be able to fulfil Nietzsche’s demand for ‘redemption through illusion’ as well as Kracauer’s claim of cinema as the redemption of material reality and Deleuze’s call for the reinstatement of our belief in the world. This idea of redemption links this theory to the overall hypothesis of this study and asks how a new digital cinema might be able to create illusions that provide us with myths that are not simply manipulative and uncritically ideological, but inspire us to actively participate in creating a sense of stability and wholeness in our modern life. The question is then, how should modern cinema use the technologies and how can films interact with philosophy to make the most of these new possibilities.

#### 6.1 Postmodern heroes in classic myths – Storytelling in the digital age

The increasing impact of digital technologies, especially feature films that are entirely digitally created, poses a challenge for theorists. Deleuze had already suggested that new electronic technologies will affect the very survival of cinema itself. Even before the break-through of digital technologies on a widespread level, he had argued in his cinema books that the “life or the afterlife of cinema depends on its internal struggle with informatics” (Deleuze, 1989, p.259).

The problem already starts with the debate on how to classify digitally generated films such as *Beowulf* and *300*. The Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror classified *Beowulf* under animation as nominee for their 2008 Saturn Awards, whereas *300* was classified as a traditional action/adventure film and won this category in the same year.<sup>36</sup> However, I argue that in terms of storytelling as well as visual representation *Beowulf* and in parts also *300* are much closer to other

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<sup>36</sup> See: Internet Movie Database. Saturn Awards 2008. [online] Available via: <<http://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000004/2008>> [Accessed 28 February 2011].

historical epics of recent years than they are to other animated films. This is particularly strong when motion capture technology is used, as it records the performance of real-life actors that is later applied to digital characters, but the faces of the actors usually remain recognisable. Consequently, it provides a close link with our perception of reality that is distinct from classic animation, which rather aims at creating characters very different from ordinary humans. As the focus of this work is on mythical storytelling and the way it creates illusions and meaning I will not further elaborate on the medium specific differences between animation and real-life feature films, particularly since the boundaries between the two become increasingly blurred. Instead, I treat these films as being similar to the historical epics reviewed in the previous chapter.

Deleuze questioned at the end of his cinema books whether his concepts of the movement-image and the time-image would be sufficient to describe the new electronic images. His mistake here is to assign time-image and movement-image to two different 'wills to art' and then claims that we may need yet another will to art for the electronic age. Yet, I argue that there is only one artistic drive and both movement-image and time-image are the two sides of the coin, even though they use different tools. Thus, the future may be the synthesis of both images rather than an entirely new type of image, which disposes of both the concept of the time-image and the movement-image.

This brings us back to the original illusion created by the movement-image, which allows us to believe in a link between man and the world. I therefore suggest that the characteristics of the new digital images cannot be found in yet another image, but in a combination of both time-image and action/movement-image. As the majority of digital cinema currently consists of composites between digital and photo-real images, it seems only appropriate to define the theoretical concept behind contemporary cinema equally as a composite of both time-image and action-image.

In the following paragraph, I would like to revise the elements of both the classical action-image and the modern time-image, together with several contemporary theories on digital cinema. First of all, digital technologies challenge

the concept of the classic action-image by shifting the emphasis from the narration to the visual components of the film. On the other hand, digital filmmaking allows for a level of continuity that could never be reached before in editing; and as discussed in chapter three, continuity is an essential feature of the classical cinema.

In an essay on the recent film adaptation of *Beowulf*, William Brown discusses the aspect of montage in digital films and draws connections to Deleuze's time-image. Contrary to Brown's theory, which links this temporal-spatial continuity to the concept of the time-image, I argue that the implied continuity is a crucial element in maintaining the model of the movement-image. Brown supports his argument by focussing on the fact that Deleuze links continuity to montage, whereas the time-image is for him defined by "montrage", a showing or presentation of the image (from French '*montrer*': presenting). As a result, the fact that digital cinema does not use traditional editing techniques seem to imply a form of representation that is closer to the long takes used in the modern cinema of the time-image.

Despite this being right in essence, Deleuze's primary concern is not so much the technical process of editing, but rather the connections cinema creates when moving from one frame to the next. In the movement-image, the continuity of images maintains the organic flow of the film that allows the audience to focus on stories and characters. In this way, a virtually created sequence that presents us with a fluent and continuous movement-image is more coherent with his theory of the movement-image, even if it is not actually cut.

In contrast, the time-image is largely defined by a break in this continuity; the images are not organically linked with each other, which is why the focus is on the individual frame or image and not on the flow of the film. As a result, it inspires contemplation but not movement or action. This shift towards the visual component directs the audience's engagement with the film from the story and the emotional conflicts of the characters towards a purely aesthetic pleasure. As Daniel Frampton (2006) had pointed out, "here the filmgoer has an aesthetic connection over and above any natural connection." (p.205). For him, this type of cinema is the less interesting option as he suggests that the natural involvement

with the film, as found in films that engage the viewer on various levels, is the way to inspire new ways of thinking that are particularly cinematic instead of just abstract reflections, poetic rather than rational. This point also encourages an idea of intuitive wisdom instead of abstract thinking, which informs much of contemporary cinema, particularly when dealing with myth. Cinema here aims to reconnect us with the world, not necessarily by showing us a realistic image of the world as Kracauer had claimed, but by providing a general idea that there is something to connect with and so recreating the belief in this world that Deleuze demanded.

As with all classic myths, we need strong characters with whose suffering we can empathise, so that we can find redemption for ourselves in the destiny of the hero. If we do not believe in the existence of the characters then we cannot believe in the myth. Hence, a major point of criticism in relation to fully digital characters is that the emotional component does not translate properly into the computer graphics. Stephen Hunter (2007), reviewer for the *Washington Post*, writes that in “*Beowulf*”, director Robert Zemeckis uses a technique called ‘motion capture’ to conjure fantastical things, angles into action and sweeping vistas to stun your eyes and take your breath away. But what he hasn't mastered and what the technique can't do is this: emotion capture.” We said earlier that cinema not only moves, it moves us, which is a point that seems to be lost in some of the recent digital examples.

Yet this aspect can also be interpreted as an aesthetic tool that in fact reflects a certain attitude towards the superficial in postmodern thinking. In his essay, Brown (2009) claims, that “if the film can be seen only as enacting the falseness of its own construction through MoCap, it is fitting because the film also works hard to highlight how humanity’s own claims to control the flesh are subverted by the flesh itself (the monstrous within us).” (p.164). Accordingly, it may not actually be necessary to achieve a maximum level of photorealism in the digital images, which seems to be the current trend. Frampton (2006) had already argued that we “must resist the desire to always ‘reference’ film to real-world physical laws and properties, exactly because contemporary film is leaving those laws and properties behind.” (p.77).

Heim (1993) also expresses this view and describes that especially a “virtual world needs to be not-quite-real or it will lessen the pull on imagination. Something-less-than-real evokes our power of imaging and visualization.” (p.133). This point is interesting insofar as it emphasises the creative aspect of digital illusions as well as the active participation of the audience in its creation. While provided with a story, such as a classic myth, we always interpret it in such a way that it is relevant to us and so extend it in our own fantasy.

As the example of *Beowulf* shows, the modern video game aesthetic and superficiality of stories and characters could be a new way of introducing a classic myth to a postmodern audience and challenges not only their visual perception but may in turn inspire new ways of looking at our own world. As Brown (2009) has pointed out: “What is true formally of motion capture synthesespians (an uncanny valley between real actor and virtual avatar) is reflected in Beowulf’s narrative: there is a disparity between the image humans have of themselves (mighty) and that which the film presents to us (mere flesh) – and only those that do change their ways (Unferth, the ever-shifting Grendel’s mother) survive.” (p.165-166). This is a message that may appeal to an audience confronted with a world of constant change, but it also hints at a concept of hybridisation, which I will explore in my subsequent analysis of *Avatar*.

Why is it, then that so many of the new digital adventures draw on ancient mythology? As Tom Gunning (2006) has pointed out in his essay on *The Lord of the Rings*, the confluence

“of technology and magic, of the animated character interacting with ‘live’ actors provokes us to confront a number of paradoxes about new cinema: the fascination of mythic representation in an age of super rationalization; the role of special effects in mythic narratives; and the questions about the borders between the human and the artificial.” (p.323).

The cinematic examples discussed in this second part of the thesis are representatives of this tendency. I have already briefly discussed the influence of digital technologies on the narrative of the film and I will look more closely at the interaction between human and the artificial when discussing *Avatar* in the next

part of this chapter. I will now focus on the question of why it is myth in particular that seems so relevant for contemporary cinema.

Heim had argued that even when we interact with virtual realities and immerse ourselves in the illusion, we always need an anchoring in the real world. As our own world becomes increasingly complex and uncontrollable, it is difficult to find some anchoring, simply by linking it to photorealistic perceptions of truth. For this reason, “we need some sense of metaphysical anchoring. I think, to enhance virtual worlds. A virtual world can be virtual only as long as we can contrast it with the real (anchored) world. Virtual worlds can then maintain an aura of imaginary reality, a multiplicity that is playful rather than maddening.” (Heim, 1993, p.133). My argument is that universal myths may help us by providing us with this sense of metaphysical anchoring, something that is familiar to the audience even when the new images push the boundaries of our perception of reality. However, more than just drawing on myth, filmmakers as well as philosophers should use the opportunity of the new images to go beyond the well known and inspire new thoughts and concepts.

As Frampton has argued, by introducing us to new realities, contemporary cinema also inspires a whole range of new experiences and emotions, and causes new thinking as a result. He writes that “With the image now entirely mappable by computer, any section of a recorded image can be changed or eliminated. In the new digital image everything is manipulable, everything is re-thinkable.” (Frampton, p.205). We can then propose that the digital cinema of the future will eventually move beyond the modern interpretation of traditional myths and create new powerful myths adequate to create healthy illusions for a postmodern generation rather than simply producing escapist fantasies based on computer games as recent films have done. Finally, Heim (1993) states that the

“ultimate VR is a philosophical experience, probably an experience of the sublime or awesome. [...] The final point of a virtual world is to dissolve the constraints of the anchored world so that we can lift anchor – not to drift aimlessly without point, but to explore anchorage in ever-new places and, perhaps, find our way back to experience the most primitive and powerful alternative embedded in the question posed by Leibniz: Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?” (p.139).

This statement points at our very fundamental need to believe in something, which we have discussed throughout this work. It now remains to be seen, if contemporary cinema finally creates alternative worlds that have the “capacity to evoke in us alternative thoughts and alternative feelings.” (Heim, 1993, p.139). In the next part, I will examine the most recent digital epic, which goes a step further in creating its own alternative world while still drawing on very familiar classic concepts.

## 6.2 When virtual realities become actual – *Avatar* and the future of cinema

James Cameron’s *Avatar* creates its own, hypermodern myth. Despite its futuristic premise, it also draws on previous cinematic examples of historical narratives, such as *Pocahontas* (dir. Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg, 1995, USA) and *Dances with Wolves* (dir. Kevin Costner, 1990, USA), and other classic stories. Therefore, it can easily be compared to the mythical narratives we have discussed earlier. The film has already caused an intense debate and not only divided fans and critics, but it has also started a discussion among film scholars and philosophers on the relevance and meaning of this film. Some hailed it as a milestone in the development of cinema, some criticised it for its excessive use of clichés and its recycled narrative. But whether or not this film is a masterpiece or an old-fashioned Hollywood story in a new look, it clearly challenges the concepts of realism and illusion discussed in this thesis and raises several important questions on the future of cinema.

In her aforementioned article, Rosenfeld compares the film *Avatar* to another of James Cameron’s futurist tales, namely the *Terminator* series (1984-2009). Here she argues that beyond “their mass-market appeal, impressive visuals, predictable characters, and surface-level storytelling, these films capture aspects of the public’s current experiences and ideological states.” (Rosenfeld, 2010). This statement supports the argument I have been developing throughout this work, namely that cinema in general can be seen as a reflection of developments in a society and its mental state. As Kracauer had pointed out this is particularly true for a mass entertainment industry such as Hollywood. It is therefore worth

examining these epics with regard to the way they create meaning as it may enable us to gain a valuable insight into ideological developments. This crucial aspect of my research can be confirmed by Rosenfeld's claim that by comparing the two narratives of *Avatar* and *Terminator*, we can see an "ideological shift" in these stories that can help us "to understand how they represent the turn from a modern Terminator mindset to a postmodern Avatar mindset." (Rosenfeld, 2010).

The *Terminator* films – even though its latest instalment only launched in 2009 – largely present the Cold War dystopian view of the future, which informed the first film of the series. The same theme also featured in similar works of that time, such as the *Mad Max* trilogy (dir. George Miller, 1979-1985, AUS) and *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982, USA). In contrast *Avatar* not only presents a more optimistic view of the future, it also suggests new relationships with and attitudes towards artificial life-forms and technological advances. Accordingly, Rosenfeld (2010) writes that *Terminator's* cinematic "representations of a society in shambles brought about by humankind's losing control to its machines were popular with audiences in a period when the socio-political context fostered anxiety and technological mistrust. However, such angst is becoming an increasingly passé attitude."

It seems that our post-millennial society sees technological advances no longer as a threat, but as an essential part of modern life and largely focuses on the possibilities it provides in extending our perceptions and experiences. In other words, the dark stories of the 1980s have "been replaced by a new narrative where humans, machines, and technology are more similar than different and their relations more complex" and according to her, *Avatar's* narrative "embraces human-technology-machine relations and extends them into a post-human society." (Rosenfeld, 2010).

A similar claim is made by John D. Caputo in his book *On Religion*, which I mentioned in previous chapters. He notes with regard to a new cyber-spirituality that the "old-fashioned opposition of technology and religion was forged in the dusty mines and grimy factories of the industrial revolution, not the virtual world of post-industrial cyberspace, where the main menace to our health is not black

lung disease but carpal tunnel syndrome, caused by sitting on the computer all day.” (Caputo, 2001, p.72) His point is that we no longer perceive scientific advances as threatening, but embrace the resulting technology not only for reasons of work efficiency but also for spiritual enlightenment. It is thus not surprising that so many viewers are drawn towards the basic mythic and spiritual concepts presented in the cyber world of *Avatar*.

Nevertheless, several distinct problems of this postmodern thinking are also present in *Avatar*. These problems appear clearly in Rosenfeld’s (2010) article, when she suggests that “*Avatar*’s themes of hybridization, fragmentation and hyper-reality are not social liabilities rather, to a large extent, they can be read as transformative assets.” To structure my analysis of *Avatar*, I will have a closer look at these three aspects, starting with hybridisation or the relationship between human and machine/artificial bodies, ‘we’ and ‘the other’.

One might argue that in *Avatar* we do not actually have machines in the classic sense, which are opposed to the human body. However, the avatars, despite being real organic bodies, are artificially created by mixing human and Na’vi<sup>37</sup> DNA. More importantly, they are mere tools and do not have a life of their own unless they are ‘entered’ by a human mind, which directs them. In some sense, they are much less ‘alive’ than the machines in the *Terminator* films and other science fiction epics, which often develop a mind of their own, that often is even superior to the human mind.

In this context we find another interesting aspect in the comparison between *Avatar* and *Terminator*. Unlike in the *Terminator* films, where the machines were a threat to humankind, now the humans and their machines become a threat to the planet, a point Rosenfeld discusses in detail. In addition, the human soldiers also “merge” with machines resembling those of the *Terminator* series, for example the MK-6 ampsuits<sup>38</sup>. The whole look of the army base and their giant machines

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<sup>37</sup> The indigenous population of the planet Pandora, on which the film is set

<sup>38</sup> Giant metal robot soldiers that are driven by a human soldier sitting in their ‘head’

indeed resemble the visuals of the *Terminator* machines in their muted and rusty tones and so form a clear counterpart to the bright colours of the Na'vi world.

Another crucial point with regard to the fusion of bodies and the new form of body-mind relationship is made by Rosenfeld (2010), when she describes that the human “minds reside in Na'vi bodies with both human and *other* physical characteristics. For instance, *Avatar*'s main character, Jake Sully, has an Avatar that is blue, seven feet tall, with feline ears and nose. Yet, the avatar's appearance is still that of Jake Sully, exemplifying postmodernity's embodiment of blurred boundaries”. This characteristic can also be applied to digital cinema in general. As noted above, even in the digitally generated universes, filmmakers tend to use well-known actors whose faces remain recognisable. It seems that even in virtual worlds, the audience better engages with characters, where a ‘real human’ can be identified. In addition, the long developed star cult of Hollywood helps create a cinematic myth that reaches far beyond individual films and so far, the hypermodern digital cinema has not yet managed to escape this tradition.

In relation to *Avatar*, the idea of an avatar body controlled by a ‘human driver’ can also be compared to Deleuze's concept of the spiritual automaton, which is outlined in his second cinema book. Here, Deleuze talks about the puppets or zombies that are populating modern cinema. According to Deleuze (1989), the “puppet and the reciter, the body and the voice constitute neither a whole nor an individual, but the automaton” (p.257). These automata are no longer the active individuals of the action-image but rather wandering around, driven by forces unknown and incomprehensible to them. Thus, they bear closer resemblance to the characters typical for the time-image, which indicates a further step towards an increasingly blurred line between the two types of images.

Significantly, in *Avatar*, the Na'vi call the avatars very tellingly ‘dreamwalkers’ (0:43:19) and it is not difficult to see the similarities with the somnambulists that Deleuze mentions. The important aspect in *Avatar* is that it merges this modern concept with the classic concept of the action hero. Jake Sully is the puppeteer that navigates his avatar, but importantly, he mainly is the classic action hero in the role of his avatar, when he seems more alive and driven than when shown as

his human self. When he is himself in his human body, he becomes more like a zombie or somnambulist, a paralysed outsider who sees no real meaning in his life.

During the course of the film the puppet and the puppet player increasingly merge into each other and eventually become one. Unlike the rather negative way in which Deleuze interprets the spiritual automaton of modern cinema, the avatars can also be seen as extending the possibilities of human perception and allowing the drivers to act independently from the physical restraints of their own life, as Rosenfeld had pointed out. The avatar then becomes an outlet, “where a paraplegic war-torn veteran can experience once again the sensations of his limbs and the joy of living.” (Rosenfeld, 2010). This might be the reason why Jake Sully is particularly equipped to take control of the avatar. Being wheelchair-bound, he is already dependant on some mechanical device to assist him and his avatar is a more sophisticated next step.

Talking about advances in the relationship between human and technology, I further argue that the apparently ‘primitive indigenous’ of Pandora are in fact the next step in a line of technological developments, from the massive machines controlled by a central power, towards a more liberated, organic, global information network that has no longer need for heavy machinery. The nature surrounding the Na’vi is an electronic network where each plant is connected with the next. When Sully and the scientists first enter the jungle, the head scientist Dr Augustine (played by Sigourney Weaver) plugs a device into a tree root and shows her assistant the electro-chemical processes taking place within. She calls it “signal transduction from this root to the root of the tree next to it” and so on. (0:25:26)

This is a very significant aspect when talking about the Na’vi, whose visual representation – with bows and arrows and naturalist spirituality – limits them on first sight to the ‘back to nature’-element of the film. Upon a closer look, however, we become aware of a rather postmodernist concept of nature, which is in essence a complex network of data to which the Na’vi can plug in to communicate and gain information. Hence the apparently divine or spiritual background of the Na’vi society does not necessarily conform with our perception

of a natural spirituality, as here nature itself becomes an electronic network similar to a computer network. In the same way, the Na'vi form connections with the animals they ride by physically connecting their 'data cable' with the animal. On this basis one can argue that in contrast to the impression the film wants to give, these animals are merely electronic tools, which are activated by the mental processes of the Na'vi.

When John Caputo discusses the *Star Wars* films, he points out that 'The Force' in *Star Wars* also has a biological origin; the spiritual aspect and the material aspect of life are no longer separated. (Caputo, 2001, p.86-87). This can also be said about the spiritual network in *Avatar*, which is mysterious and naturalistic, but can also be measured and proven with scientific methods, similar to the midi-chlorians that carry the Force in *Star Wars* and can be tested by a simple blood screening as is shown in *Star Wars I – The Phantom Menace* (dir. J. Lucas, 1999, USA). What we see here is an expanding synthesis of spiritual and material aspects and as a consequence the idea of redemption also becomes progressively linked to material as well as spiritual aspects as we will see later in this chapter. This also allows us to draw further connections between Nietzsche's ideas of spiritual redemption discussed in the first chapter and Kracauer's materialist concept of redemption outlined in chapter two. Deleuze finally shifts the tension between mind and body – spiritual and material – towards a postmodern opposition between actual and virtual which overcomes the previous conflict but raises new problems.

The second aspect of contemporary society which can be found in *Avatar* is fragmentation. Kracauer had described fragmentation – or abstractness as he mostly calls it – as one of the major problems in our modern society, brought upon by an increasingly complex world on the one hand and the shift from a more holistic sense of the world to abstract thinking.

Similarly, Heim points out in relation to our obsession with modern technology, that we are losing our sense for what is really important. He writes that "Infomania erodes our capacity for significance. With a mind-set fixed on information, our attention span shortens. We collect fragments. We become

mentally poorer in overall meaning. We get into the habit of clinging to knowledge bits and lose our wisdom behind knowledge.” (Heim, 1993, p.10).

Our relationship *with* and use *of* machines only emphasises this sense of fragmentation. Let me recall that for Kracauer cinema plays a crucial role in overcoming this fragmentation and gives us a sense of wholeness. This was probably right in connection with the classic movement-image, which presents us with a conception of a whole that integrates the individual. So, when Rosenfeld (2010) writes that with “each machine expansion, humanity struggles to understand its sense of place within a world fragmented in its identity and its relationship with machines”, how does this affect cinema? As Deleuze had shown, not only modern society has lost its sense of wholeness, of unifying images. The modern cinema of the time-image also broke with this organic concept. I will discuss in the following paragraphs, how *Avatar* attempts to combine the classical idea of the whole with the fragmented concept of time-image and postmodern thought.

The notion of fragmentation is advanced further by the growing influence of video games on the aesthetic of cinema. Here, games do not only influence the look of films, they also bring upon new concepts in thinking and dealing with the world, as Rosenfeld had noted. She writes that similar “to today’s identity change via multiplayer video games where players create an individual avatar to represent their identity in the gameworld [...], *Avatar* advances this concept to imagine the future of ‘avatars’ and visually helps the viewer experience fragmentation and virtualization.” (Rosenfeld, 2010).

As I have shown in the last chapter, contemporary Hollywood cinema has in principle preserved this idea of an organic unity, but the influence of the time-image has led to a less absolute system of wholeness and unity, e.g. by more open endings and ambivalent characters. *Avatar* here seems to go back to a more traditional concept within the storytelling, up to the point of using rather obvious clichés, such as a clear division between ‘the good guys’ and ‘the bad guys’, the representation of the army colonel as a live-size G.I. Joe-type figure and a conclusion in which the intruders are sent home for good.

Conversely, the imagery of *Avatar* challenges the conservative aspects of the story and shifts the focus of the film away from the narrative towards the fantastic world of its images. As a consequence, the action is frequently suspended to allow for a more contemplative approach to the film, e.g. when Jake Sully first encounters the jungle of the Na'vi or later the magic tree. This point is also noted by Rosenfeld (2010), who writes that, before “any significant action takes place, the viewer is invited to explore this new world: it’s analogous to the visual discovery within a new videogame.”

When I discussed the arrival of digital technologies in Hollywood cinema in the third chapter, we mentioned that early CGI images often presented a rupture in the narrative, to allow the audience to admire the digital dinosaurs or other creatures. This effect can also be found in the new 3D worlds of Pandora (the planet on which *Avatar*’s plot takes place), but to a much greater extent. Now, these moments have become a defining element throughout the film and not limited to one or two outstanding scenes, as it has been the case in earlier digital works from the 1990s. This new type of awe-inspiring images is much closer to Deleuze’s model of the time-image, where a situation is not directly translated into action because the visual impact is too intense, too overwhelming. Therefore, the situation cannot be quickly captured and processed neither by the mind of the character nor by the audience.

In his essay ‘Making Space’, Sean Cubitt describes the cinematic space of *Avatar* as a series of layers, “intended to stack up as a believable world”, which “introduce schisms between foregrounds and backgrounds.” In order to overcome this break, the film introduces visual focal points that train the “viewers to watch ‘correctly’” (Cubitt, 2010). Yet he also notes that these breaks introduce a new quality in the organisation of cinematic space and the gaps “are no longer merely spatial but extensively temporal” (Cubitt, 2010). This reflects the suggested influence of the time-image with its emphasis on time rather than space and movement. Yet, unlike in the ‘proper’ time-image, contemplation eventually has to turn into action, owing its origin to the traditional action-image.

The final theme to explore in *Avatar* is hyper-reality, in contrast to the realism of the classical image. First of all, it can be said that in terms of set design, the digital Na'vi jungle appears to be more hyper-real than real and the colours are so much brighter and sharper than the soft tones we tend to associate with our experience of nature. In this way, the 'natural' surroundings turn into an artificial, alien world full of strange creatures and our gaze proceeds from one element to the next to analyse its data. When Deleuze (1989) described the shift from natural representation to the electronic image in relation to modern cinema, he claimed that now the "screen itself [...] rather constitutes a table of information, an opaque surface on which are inscribed 'data', information replacing nature" (p.254).

At the end of the film, when Jake Sully finally decides to dispose of his human body and to merge permanently with his avatar, this process is shown as if the 'data' of his human life are 'downloaded' from his human body and then 'uploaded' in the new, enhanced Na'vi body. This process appears more like an upgrade to a new computer, where you simply transfer your files to a better machine, which also raises a variety of philosophical questions, to which I shall return at the end of the chapter.

New cameras developed by James Cameron specifically for this film also enabled him to create a new sense of reality. Unlike previous digital technologies, where the alteration of images takes place in post-production, these new cameras allow the director to film directly *in* the digital world by placing the actors in the digital surroundings *while* shooting a scene. As a result, much less abstraction is needed during the process of filming and the director has an immediate composite image, an organic unity between the characters and their on-screen reality. The technology here reduces the sense of fragmentation and abstractness at least from the perspective of director and cinematographer, which can enable the creation of a whole much closer to traditional filmmaking. In other words, without "having to combine the live-action shots with this elaborate environment in post-production", James Cameron "achieved a more organic feel to the film." (Rosenfeld, 2010).

In the previous chapter, I discussed Deleuze's concept of action-thought presented in the movement-image in contrast to the purely optical situations that imply an inability to act, which was presented in the time-image. I have proposed that the thinking-in-action may be a concept more suitable for our rapidly developing modern environment. *Avatar* seems to mix these two concepts by integrating moments of purely visual contemplation with fast-paced action sequences. On the one hand, the beautiful 3D images of the Na'vi world inspire contemplation and awe, but this is juxtaposed with the action of and interaction with the human world on the other hand.

Furthermore, the traditional demarcation of the two-dimensional space defined by the layout of the screen becomes obsolete. Deleuze had already argued that the use of depth-of-field by auteurs such as Orson Welles challenges this classic model. The three-dimensional imagery of contemporary cinema pushes this approach beyond the boundaries of camera reality. Deleuze (1989) claims that the "organization of space here loses its privileged directions, and first of all the privilege of the vertical which the position of the screen still displays, in favour of an omni-directional space which constantly varies its angles and coordinates, to exchange the vertical and the horizontal." (p. 254). Rather than jumping out of the screen as the 3D effects of the 1970s the new 3D technology opens the depth and draws the audience's gaze *into* the image. At this point, the new technology is close to the time-image as the organisation and development of image elements takes place in the frame itself, but we still have the action of the movement-image that connects these images from one frame to the next.

Rosenfeld (2010) suggests that "Cameron's use of stereoscopic 3D not only helps the audience experience full immersion but also seems to be a direct pushback by Hollywood studios to recapture an audience increasingly lost to video games." This frequent comparison to video games not only challenges our spatial orientation and influences a certain aesthetic. By imitating the hyper-reality of computer games, it also poses questions about the distinction between virtual and actual. The relationship between the two is not only relevant for *Avatar* as a digital composition; it is also discussed *within* the story of the film.

In contrast to a film like *The Matrix* (dir. A.& L. Wachowski, 1999, USA), where the alternative world really ‘just’ exists in the mind of the human characters and therefore can only be accessed virtually, the world of the Na’vi *actually* exists right outside the doors of the human base camp. Technically, the soldiers and scientists do not need the avatars to enter this other world as will be clear later in the film when the human armies attack the Na’vi. They primarily use the avatar bodies to *facilitate* the communication with the indigenous and to engage more immediately with the alien world, although primarily to gain an economic advantage. On the other hand, though, the ‘human drivers’ enter *virtually* into the body of the avatars, while remaining immobile in their boxes in a dreamlike state, which is more similar to *The Matrix*. In this aspect we can find another link with the concept of time-image, which according to Deleuze no longer opposes actual and virtual. In *Avatar*, it seems, this distinction is no longer possible or even relevant. Here, photo-real images merge with digital images, and mix these clearly distinct worlds into one virtual fantasy, a hyper-reality. Deleuze (1989) claims that for

“the time-image to be born, [...] the actual image must enter into relation with its own virtual image as such [...]. An image which is double-sided, [...] both actual and virtual, must be constituted. We are no longer in the situation of a relationship between the actual image and other virtual images, recollections, or dreams, which thus become actual in turn [...]. We are in the situation of an actual image and its own virtual image, to the extent that there is no longer any linkage of the real and the imaginary, but indiscernibility of the two, a perpetual exchange.” (p.262).

In that sense, the time-image could be claimed to be dominant in *Avatar* with its actual and virtual world existing parallel. Yet they are not entirely indiscernible and one can argue that both worlds reflect the clichés of classical Hollywood cinema, e.g. the stereotypes used to characterise the brutal human soldiers as well as the ‘noble savages’ of Na’vi. This duality of worlds also causes problems in defining the organic whole, which is essential for the classical action-image. In *Avatar*, everything consists of fragments of both worlds – virtual and actual, digital and analogue – and it becomes increasingly difficult for the audience to distinguish the two aspects. However, this increasing amalgamation of both worlds challenges not only the audience, but it also becomes a theme for the narrative line of the main character in the film.

The main hero of *Avatar* is Jake Sully and as in most classic Hollywood narratives he stands out from the beginning. First of all, he only becomes involved in the adventure by chance, in this case the death of his twin brother. He neither has the qualification nor the training for this mission (his brother was a scientist and trained for several years before his trip to Pandora). Finally, he is wheelchair-bound. This makes him an outsider in three different worlds: as a human he is an obvious outsider with the Na'vi, but neither does he have the intellectual capacity or training to fit in with the other scientists or the physical capacity to properly fit in with the soldiers. He feels closest to the soldiers as he has been a Marine and this group seems to be most familiar for him. This is why he initially promises the Colonel to use his 'scientific mission' in the avatar body to spy on the Na'vi. Despite the fact that the Colonel promises him in return that he will receive the expensive surgery that would enable him to walk again, Sully's main reason for helping him is his felt loyalty to the soldiers. This loyalty only ceases when he becomes a Na'vi warrior. This indicates that although he may change sides, he cannot change his profession and his inner affinity towards a war culture. In a sense, Jake Sully incorporates all three elements of postmodern society described before, as a man/machine hybrid in his connection with his avatar, the fragmentation of his environment and his mental state by being constantly torn between different groups and ideologies and finally the hyper-real Na'vi environment he operates in, which for him becomes more real than his actual reality as a human.

We can find another element from the previous chapter in the narrative of *Avatar*, namely the moral dilemmas of a war-torn postmodern American society. This also relates to the aforementioned fragmentation of society, where war becomes an increasingly abstract, confusing and ambivalent enterprise that leaves soldiers behind that are no longer heroes but sufferers.

Similar to the historic epic *Troy*, the background of international conflicts driven by commercial and/or political interests is also very present in *Avatar*. We see throughout the film that "financing is still provided by a profit-driven corporation that hires an ex-military warmonger contractor, whose crew resembles a Blackwater operation rather than a peacekeeping enterprise like the United

Nations. Elements of the war economy play out in *Avatar* with the more humane and ethical biologists controlled through and trying to push back from the grip of corporate funding.”(Rosenfeld, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that *Avatar*’s hero is a disabled war veteran in search for a purpose in his life. As a result, he is particularly keen to immerse in the alternative world of the Na’vi as it not only provides him with his lost physical abilities but also gives him a new sense of purpose and meaning.

The fact that Sully is partially immobile even before he enters the sleep state that allows him to drive his avatar, increases the aspect of freedom and liberation that the artificial body provides. This explains that “when Jake Sully is pulled back to homebase, we feel his sense of loss, and the profound struggle between his obligations to his earthly body and his desire to be in his avatar body. His ‘real’ life and *Avatar* life become two incommensurable realities.” (Rosenfeld, 2010). During the length of the film, these two lives not only become incommensurable. Moreover, the avatar life gains more reality for him than his ‘human’ world. In the film, this inner conflict is shown through a video diary, in which Sully describes his increasing confusion between the two realities.

The internal monologue as presented in Sully’s video diaries, is according to Deleuze another feature of the classic cinema of the movement-image that gives the audience an insight into Sully’s personal dilemma and his growing confusion of identities – is he Na’vi or Human? What is more, “Sully’s character is also increasingly burdened by the fact that he must return to sustain his ‘real’ body, as his virtual life is easier to maintain as well as more liberating, exciting and powerful.” (Rosenfeld, 2010). His problem is that as long as his human body exists, he has to return to it to eat, sleep and drink as with the decease of his human body in the actual world, his virtual life would cease as well.

The relationship between Sully and his avatar body can also be read as a strong metaphor for the power of artistic illusion and escapism. It is the ultimate illusion of the audience, immersing into the role of the fictional character and becoming part of the alternative reality. In this sense, “the relationships Sully forms and the freedom he has to walk again and even more to fly and be at one with nature and

the indigenous world demonstrate the ease within the fiction by which one can find a more evolved existence.” (Rosenfeld, 2010). This surely appeals to a generation that is increasingly used to recreating themselves virtually, e.g. in online games such as *Second Life* or *World of Warcraft* as well as on social networking sites. *Avatar* takes their illusion beyond the current limits of reality by showing a fictional world in which people truly can *become* their own avatar. In the way, the film adds a new dimension to our discourse on the relation between illusion, reality and creative power.

As briefly mentioned above, the immersion in the exotic world of Pandora is not just virtual as in *The Matrix*, where the virtual world is only a product created by the neurons in the brain. Sully enters this world via an actual body, while his mind *virtually* moves from his actual human body into the actual Na’vi body. This poses interesting questions for the concept of a body-mind relationship, especially in comparison with *The Matrix*. In the latter film, people can be killed in the virtual world even though this happens only in their minds. Accordingly, when their mind dies this means that in turn their actual body dies. Even though they enter a purely virtual world, this can have a direct impact on the actual one. In *Avatar*, on the other hand, the death of an avatar would not affect the life of the human driver. Consequently, one could argue that even though the avatar body is actual, it is also artificial and therefore more similar to a fictional computer game, in contrast to the virtual world of *The Matrix*, which is real insofar as it poses a direct threat for our life. The two worlds of *Avatar* only merge at the end of the film, when the Colonel no longer attacks Sully’s avatar but instead destroys the sleeping box in which Sully’s human body (and mind) rests and so deprives him of oxygen. While smashing the sleeping boxes, he challenges Sully’s avatar by saying “You think you’re one of them? Time to wake up” (2:22:48). There the Colonel tries to make Sully realise that his Na’vi life is a mere illusion and that his actual human self is sleeping. The Colonel wants him to wake up and face reality, but for Sully his human life is no longer his reality. As a consequence, the final step for the hero is to fully immerse in the new world by freeing himself from the restrictions of his human body and dispose of it. The human body is no longer part of his identity, but has become inadequate and hampering, whereas his artificial Na’vi body liberates him – physically as well as mentally.

This idea puts forward very profound philosophical questions. For example, how far should we go to improve and modify our body and to what extent should we use biomechanics, genetics and the like to do so? When do we stop being human and become machines? As Adam I. Bostic (1998) has described in an article on cyborgs in film, “the cyborg is both real and fictional – through it we anticipate the implications of emergent technology in which we foresee the final blurring of distinction between reality and virtuality.” (p.358). This can clearly be said of the avatars, which are real insofar as they have actual, physical bodies that interact with other beings and can suffer and die. On the other hand, though, they are artificial beings, driven by humans. The problem arises when Sully’s mind/soul is finally transferred into his avatar. Does this mean that the artificial Na’vi body becomes real or alive when inhabited by Sully and is he still human even though his soul now lives in a Na’vi body?

These are difficult questions that ask for philosophical answers, not only to understand this film, but more importantly to understand the mind/body relationship of postmodern society. *Avatar* shows that there is a way of seeing our personality independently from our physical reality. The question of how we define our mind in relation to our body, however, informs a whole line of philosophical thought starting from ancient Greek philosophy and its analysis would go far beyond the scope of this thesis.

As far as this film is concerned, it is interesting to note that *Avatar* portrays Sully’s artificial Na’vi life as being the more naturalistic element of the story, but also the more advanced. His synthetically created life provides him with a stronger feeling of identity, belonging and wholeness than does his fragmented, confused and meaningless human life. Should we therefore be encouraged to simply dispose of our old body and move into a new one? In digital terms, should we aim to transfer our collection of mental data, memories, experiences, character traits, into a more adequate body once the old one fails to serve its purpose?

When Edward O’Neill poses the question if the time-image can be postmodern and transferred into mainstream cinema he uses *The Matrix* as one example.

According to him, “The Matrix takes the seer of the time-image and makes him into the doer of the action-image but only virtually” (O’Neill, 2000). In *Avatar*, this idea is pushed further. On the one hand, the character of Jake Sully bears clear parallels to the seer of the time-image, mainly through his immobile state when entering the avatar, which is similar to *The Matrix* films. However, Sully resembles the seer not primarily in his dreamlike virtual state, but also when awake as a human. As mentioned before, he is (at least partially) immobile and incapable, disillusioned and aimless. Only when entering his avatar, he becomes a man of action. This action-hero, however, is not only virtual, but also actual, especially when he finally fights against the human oppressors.

Based on the conventions of the classical action-image, something has to have changed at the end of the film. In the case of *Avatar*, this transformation is absolute, physical and spiritual. Like *The Matrix*, *Avatar* finally cannot avoid drawing on basic mythical and religious elements. In consequence, the final redemption of the hero comes in form of a ‘reincarnation’ as a better being – morally and physically. As in most modern epics, however, the focus is on the individual, and despite the victory of the Na’vi’s at the end of the film, it is not clear if something profound has changed in the world itself.

Here, *Avatar* also reflects the general attitude of a society that is permanently striving for perfection and keen on tuning its body to catch up with its demanding lifestyles. Is the next step that we are no longer satisfied with escaping in our minds into a fantasy world, but want to escape physically as well? One of the points Rosenfeld had described was that *Avatar*, more than any other film before, had caused some extreme reactions from the audience, such as post-viewing depression. She argues that maybe “the public is especially sensitive to the contrast between the film’s hyperreality and the current reality of our depressed economy. When these viewers walk out of the theatre, they are let down at returning to live in the actual world they must inhabit” (Rosenfeld, 2010).

What influence does this have on the role of illusions modern cinema creates? *Avatar* deals with the aspects of illusion and reality on two levels: firstly as a film itself and secondly within the narrative of the film. Is it better to live in the fantasy

world than in your own world? The film clearly answers this question in the affirmative by allowing its hero to fully immerse in the fantastic new world of Pandora, but for us, the audience, the philosophical problem remains. Here, the film loses out on its chance to truly inspire new ideas as its simplistic narrative and black-and-white ideology does not succeed in exposing the superficiality of our postmodern world, but rather presents us with a ready-made ideology that does not allow for much interpretation and inspiration. In this sense, the film might be closer to Kracauer's critical notes on myth and illusion by presenting us with what he had called confirmative images, images that persuade us to accept them uncritically. Nevertheless, there is scope for critical reflection for both film scholars and philosophers, particularly with regard to the popularity of these images.

Regardless of its hypermodern framework, the story of *Avatar* is directly serving the clichés of the movement-image, such as the duel and the binary oppositions. Unlike *Troy*, which at least partially challenges these relations by multiplying them and making them more ambivalent, *Avatar* returns to a simple good versus evil – noble indigenous versus evil intruder – duality. One cannot help but notice that the contrast with the hypermodern imagery only emphasises the old-fashioned elements in the narrative. The film thus seems to lose out on the opportunity to create new modern narratives. The question is then, if the new visual environment is sufficient to inspire new thinking.

As shown throughout this chapter, there are several points in the narrative that suggests a rethinking of ideas and concepts, but the more subtle critical aspects of the film are overpowered by the visual component and so the impressions remaining from the narrative are only its most obvious clichés. What we may see here, is the start of a general shift away from the focus on the classic storytelling towards the visual aspects of cinema. The question, how much the narrative is bound to clichés, may then become obsolete. Maybe *Avatar*'s narrative is in essence just a rather old fashioned story full of clichés, but it remains to be seen if future productions will continue along this line or manage to combine convincing storytelling with an impressive visual component without one aspect distracting from the other.

Rosenfeld (2010) concludes her essay by claiming that the “perceptual habits of our millennial generation, those born after 1982, are being formed in an early postmodern era. We can expect to see additional shifts in attitudes toward and relations with technology, machines, and each other.” This suggests that a new generation may already have adapted to these new forms of storytelling. What remains despite all the changes in the mode of storytelling is the longing for stories being told.

Even with this shift in our relation with technology and the effortless blending of virtual and actual worlds, we still feel this underlying need for spiritual meaning, even if this eventually turns out to be an illusion. This is why *Avatar*, similar to the epics discussed previously, heavily draws on religious symbolism. Right from his first encounter with Neytiri (the Na’vi princess), Jake Sully is introduced as the ‘chosen one’. Only the divine intervention of a floating seed from the sacred tree, worshipped by the Na’vi as pure spirits, prevents her from killing him. Shortly afterwards this motif is emphasised again when the seeds from the sacred tree all set down on Sully and surround him with an aura. Yet, the final, spiritual redemption of the hero is closely connected to a material redemption in a new, perfected body. Nietzsche’s idea of a spiritual redemption through illusion from a state of despair is thus united with Kracauer’s idea that cinema can provide us with a new, physical connection to our world, or in Sully’s case an entirely new hyper-real world.

In his essay “Fiction, ET, and the Theological Cosmology of ‘Avatar’”, published in *Theology and Science*, Joshua M. Moritz (2010) compares the film’s narrative to a similar story by C.S. Lewis and suggests that perhaps

“it would be best, then, if we understood the story of Avatar as Lewis considered the mythical tales of the classical world and the concept of myth in general: as a ‘real though unfocused gleam of the divine truth falling on human imagination.’<sup>39</sup> In this capacity, such myths awaken us to hidden realities, cleanse our imaginations, transform our hearts, and expand our

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<sup>39</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), p.218

understanding so that through them we may ultimately transcend ourselves and become receptive to even deeper mysteries and greater truths.” (p.131).

This is not only true of *Avatar* but it can also be applied to Hollywood cinema in general. As I have been arguing throughout this thesis, when looking more closely at the apparently superficial and entertainment driven mainstream cinema, we may find that it not only provides us with a valuable insight into our culture, but also in turn provides meaning for a major audience and allows them to gain at least a glimpse of a thinking that goes beyond mere escapism.

### Summary

As we have seen throughout this chapter, traditional concepts of storytelling and cinematic representation in mainstream cinema are increasingly challenged by changes in the media world, such as the impact of computer games, as well as a younger audience that seems more familiar with hyper-real electronic imagery and fragmented narratives than with the classic organic conception of the old cinema. As Frampton (2006) remarks, the audience is “ready (conceptually) to accept whatever ‘kind’ of image-reality the film decides to give us.” (p.77). It is now the work of theorists to provide a profound framework to discuss these new images and uncover their creative potential beyond the mere spectacle.

Even so, we can still identify many elements of the classic organic concept of the action-image, such as binary relationships and spatial-temporal continuity. It can be said that the latter is even intensified through the digital medium. In addition, aspects of the time-image have an increasing impact on mainstream cinema, as the new technologies seem to shift the focus from the story towards the visual component of a film. This creates moments of contemplation and awe that interrupt the action. Moreover, 3D technologies create a new level of visual depth that draws the audience into the image and enables the viewer to explore the various axes of the image.

Nevertheless, the recent developments have also shown that regardless of the hypermodern representation, there is still a significant demand for traditional

mythical concepts that give us a grounding and connection with the world. The possibilities of contemporary cinema to create new possible worlds with convincing realism only emphasises the need for anchoring. Here, universal concepts are needed more than ever to explore the dimensions of virtual realities. This, however, provides a variety of opportunities for philosophers as well as film scholars to discuss modern ideas in both the field of aesthetics and ethics. The possibilities to create an endless amount of possible worlds brings us back to the essentials of philosophy and may help us explain the need for enchantment and illusion in our hyper-real, complex and confusing postmodern world.

## **Epilogue:** **Further reflections and future directions**

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis started with the vague notion that there is a revival of cinematic epics and that philosophy and cinema need to work more closely together to create concepts for our understanding of this confusing post-modern, and increasingly digitalised, world. I set out on a quest for answers, based on aesthetic theories by Nietzsche, Kracauer's ideas on film and society and Deleuze's attempt at bringing together film and philosophy. Linking these theorists via the redemptive power of artistic creation gave this journey a unique and exciting perspective on the quest to uncover the importance of illusions.

It also provided me with the opportunity to link traditional philosophical concepts with the contemporary world of digital Hollywood cinema. Throughout this thesis I have aimed to show how cinema can be compared to myth and religion in the way that it tells stories we want to believe in. It became evident that cinema has an exceptional role in contributing to the creation of these necessary illusions, as its unique capacity for realistic representation allows film to present us with universal ideas that unify our culture. Hollywood cinema with its specific narrative and representational style seems particularly equipped to present grand epic narratives in a visually compelling manner. Deleuze (1989) had argued that because "the cinematographic image itself 'makes' movement, because it makes what the other arts are restricted to demanding (or saying), it brings together what is essential in the other arts; it inherits it, it is as it were the directions for use of the other images, it converts into potential what is only possibility." (p.151).

Thus, Deleuze's concept of the movement-image became a central part of this thesis. As the second part of this thesis has shown, the developments in contemporary cinema were on the one hand reflections of a changing society that required a shift in topics and style and on the other the influence of new aesthetic movements in cinema such as the rise of the time-image. Whereas Deleuze had mainly discussed this later image in relation to avant-garde or experimental cinema, it has also influenced the representation of mainstream cinema, which took on some of its characteristics while simultaneously remaining true to the concept of the movement-image.

The key theme that derived from these observations was that these new myths, although largely drawing on classic plots, often develop very contemporary ideas and present reflections of a post-modern society full of anxieties and insecurities. Interestingly, it was particularly the most recent, most technologically advanced films that seemed to be the most conservative in creating cinematic myths. Here, digital cinema still has a way to go to create truly convincing mythic illusions that can provide post-modern society with the same hope and inspiration that classic myths provided for ancient societies.

As pointed out towards the end of the final chapter, philosophers and film theorists are now challenged to explore these new myths and develop new concepts beyond the boundaries of individual disciplines. The field seems fruitful and exciting and while aiming to provide answers to the initial questions, this project also inspired a variety of subjects for further investigation.

For example, the focus on the movement-image in Hollywood cinema meant leaving out some interesting films that deal with the topic of illusion on an individual level rather than as a grand scale epic. Independent films such as *Amélie* (dir. J.-P. Jeunet, 2001, France/D) as well as Tim Burton's *Big Fish* (2003, USA) playfully interpret Nietzsche's question "Why could the world which is of any concern to us not be a fiction?" (Nietzsche, 1990, p.65). In addition, these examples also show that the longing for illusion and myth is not simply a Hollywood phenomenon. Looking at the developments of world cinema in the last decade, we find a clear indication that the trend for big epic narratives is not limited to the American mainstream. Other nations have also attempted to review classical themes. In Europe, the Danish film *Valhalla Rising* (dir. Nicolas Winding Refn, 2009, DK/UK) plays with ancient Nordic myths and the Spanish epic *Agora* (dir. Alejandro Amenábar, 2009, Spain) portrays not only the life of legendary female philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria, but also the conflict between a declining Roman empire and the rising influence of Christianity. On the other side of the Ural, Russian filmmaker Sergey Bodrov produced with *Nomad* (dir. Sergey Bodrov 2005, France/KAZ) and *Mongol* (dir. Sergey Bodrov, 2007, RUS/GER/KAZ) two monumental epics that mix myth with history. Similarly, Chinese productions, such as *The Warlords* (dir. P. Chan, 2007, China) and *Red*

*Cliff* (dir. John Woo, 2008, China) portray epic battles in times of powerful ancient Dynasties.

Another interesting topic for further research is the role of music in the creation of cinematic illusions. This crucial element in the representation and staging of myths had already played an important role for Nietzsche, when he talked about the power of ancient tragedy and points out that it is impossible fully to understand the effect of the tragedy on the audience by simply looking at the stories. The interesting aspect about music is that this extra-diegetic and non-narrative element strongly supports the illusion without itself being illusionary. It affects us emotionally and subconsciously and thus distinguishes cinema from literature, photography and drama by adding another, very powerful component.

One of the philosophical questions that arise from the ideas developed in this thesis is the role narrative structures in general play in the creation of illusions and the way we make sense of our life. Here, a closer look at cinematic narratives could contribute new insights to an ongoing debate in literary studies, psychology and philosophy. In addition, the concluding chapter on James Cameron's *Avatar* brought up interesting questions on the relationship between virtual and actual worlds and the way modern cinema pushes the boundaries here. Firstly, this raises aesthetic questions on the link between cinema's virtual worlds and the interactive virtual realities of computer games, whose distinct style increasingly influences mainstream cinema, not only in terms of visual representation, but also in terms of narrative. In turn video games seem to become increasingly cinematic in their mise-en-scène and character development. The other aspect inspired by the discussion of *Avatar* relates to philosophical concepts of the relationship between mind and body and raises once again the age old question of the nature of personal identity.

From a cinematic point of view it remains to be seen if Hollywood 3D-cinema manages to move beyond the presentation of pure spectacle and manages to produce epics that use the new technologies in order to develop compelling stories that allow the audience to engage with the visual world as well as with the

characters. In this way, contemporary cinema could truly achieve the creation of new, post-modern myths.

Finally, despite some rapid developments in the domain of film and philosophy, the area of philosophy and television has not yet been explored. Nevertheless, this field is potentially very fruitful for our quest, especially since TV drama over the last few years has replicated some of the developments in cinema. There have been several attempts to create grand historic epics for television, e.g. the remake of *Ben Hur* (TV, dir. S. Shill, 2010, UK/Canada/Spain/Germany) and *The Ten Commandments* (TV, dir. R. Dornhelm, 2006, USA) as mini-series for the small screen as well as the BBC's successful epic drama series *Rome* (TV, various directors, 2005–2007, UK/USA). The question is, however, do we get the same quality and influence from these TV dramas? If they are formally and aesthetically similar to their cinematic counterparts, what is it that makes cinema special? Is this question simply bringing us back to traditional Apparatus theory or are there new aspects to explore? Maybe it is time to have a closer look at how television drama can influence people beyond the viewing experience.

In conclusion it can be said that exploring the importance of illusion in cinema has taken me on a journey that reflects our very human longing for something transcendental, for something that goes beyond mundane entertainment and short term escapism. It seems that examples such as *The Lord of the Rings* and other works discussed show how much cinema influences our culture and vice versa.

This also leads to a rethinking of the way we do philosophy. Lenore Wright argued in her article on *The Lord of the Rings*, that by “confronting both the historical and existential facets of human experience, we begin to understand something new about our task as contemporary philosophers – the task to gaze into the fragmented abyss of postmodern culture and find meaning and value therein.” (Wright, 2003, p.200) Looking towards cinema and finding meaning and value that may inspire us beyond the pure creation of new academic theories will then become the new task of film-philosophers. Thus, distinguishing between philosophy *of* film, philosophy *in* film or *film-philosophy* – hyphen or no hyphen – will become obsolete and we will again look at the old question of how we can

make sense of our life. As a philosopher, I feel this thesis has brought me closer to the answer, although many new questions were raised.

The scriptwriter in me is eager to create mythic illusions of her own, but this is yet another story.

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## Filmography

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- 300 Spartans**, USA 1962, directed by Rudolf Maté, Twentieth Century Fox.
- Agora**, Spain 2009, directed by Alejandro Amenábar, Mod Producciones.
- Alexander**, USA 2004, directed by Oliver Stone, Warner Bros.
- Alexander the Great**, USA 1956, directed by Robert Rossen, C.B. Films S.A.
- Amelie**, France/D 2001, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Claudie Ossard Productions.
- Australia**, AUS/USA/UK 2008, directed by Baz Luhrmann, Twentieth Century Fox.
- Avatar**, USA/UK 2009, directed by James Cameron, Twentieth Century Fox.
- Ben Hur**, USA 1959, directed by William Wyler, MGM.
- Beowulf**, USA 2007, directed by Robert Zemeckis, ImageMovers.
- Bible, The**, USA/IT 1966, directed by John Huston, Dino de Laurentiis Cinematografica & Seven Arts Productions.
- Big Fish**, USA 2003, directed by Tim Burton, Columbia Pictures.
- Blade Runner**, USA/Hong Kong 1982, directed by Ridley Scott, Warner Bros.
- Braveheart**, USA 1995, directed by Mel Gibson, Icon Entertainment International.
- Brothers Grimm, The**, Czech Republic/USA 2005, directed by Terry Gilliam, Dimension Films.
- Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, USA 2005, directed by Andrew Adamson, Walt Disney Pictures.
- Clash of the Titans**, USA 2010, directed by Louis Leterrier, Warner Bros.
- Dances with Wolves**, USA 1990, directed by Kevin Costner, Tig Productions.
- Excalibur**, USA/UK 1981, directed by John Boorman, Orion Pictures.
- Gladiator**, USA 2000, directed by Ridley Scott, DreamWorks.
- Golden Compass, The**, USA 2007, directed by Chris Weitz, New Line Cinema.
- Helen of Troy**, USA/IT 1956, directed by Robert Wise, Warner Bros.
- Hidalgo**, USA 2004, directed by Joe Johnston, Touchstone Pictures.

**Inception**, USA/UK 2010, directed by Christopher Nolan, Warner Bros.

**Intolerance**, USA 1916, directed by D.W. Griffith, Triangle Film Corporation.

**Jurassic Park**, USA 1993, directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures.

**King Arthur**, USA 2004, directed by Antoine Fuqua, Touchstone Pictures.

**Kingdom of Heaven**, USA 2005, directed by Ridley Scott, Twentieth Century-Fox.

**Last Samurai, The**, USA 2003, directed by Edward Zwick, Warner Bros.

**Lord of the Rings**, USA 1978, dir. R. Bakshi, Fantasy Films.

**Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings**, New Zealand/USA 2001, directed by Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema.

**Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers**, New Zealand/USA 2002, directed by Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema.

**Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King**, New Zealand/USA 2003, directed by Peter Jackson, New Line Cinema.

**Lost World: Jurassic Park, The**, USA, 1997, directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Pictures.

**Mad Max, AUS 1979**, directed by George Miller, Kennedy Miller Productions.

**Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World**, USA 2003, directed by Peter Weir, Twentieth Century-Fox.

**Matrix, The**, USA/AUS 1999, directed by Andy and Lana Wachowski, Warner Bros.

**Metropolis**, GER, 1927, directed by Fritz Lang, UFA.

**Mongol**, RUS/GER/KAZ 2007, directed by Sergey Bodrov, Kinokompaniya CTB.

**Nibelungen**, GER, 1924, directed by Fritz Lang, Berliner Union Film.

**Nomad**, France/KAZ 2005, directed by Sergey Bodrov, Ibrus&Kazakhfilm Studios.

**Pocahontas**, USA 1995, directed by Mike Gabriel, Walt Disney Pictures.

**Quo Vadis**, USA 1951, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, MGM.

**Red Cliff**, China 2008, directed by John Woo, Beijing Film Studio.

**Robe, The**, USA 1953, directed by Henry Koster, Twentieth Century-Fox.

**Spartacus**, USA 1959/60, directed by Stanley Kubrick, Bryna Productions.

**Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace**, USA 1999, directed by George Lucas, Lucasfilm.

**Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones**, USA 2002, directed by George Lucas, Lucasfilm.

**Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith**, USA 2005, directed by George Lucas, Lucasfilm.

**Star Wars [aka Episode VI: A New Hope (*reissue title*)]**, USA 1977, directed by George Lucas, Lucasfilm.

**Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back**, USA 1980, directed by Irvin Kershner, Lucasfilm.

**Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi**, USA 1983, directed by Richard Marquand, Lucasfilm.

**Ten Commandments, The**, USA 1956, directed by Cecil B. DeMille, Motion Picture Associates.

**Terminator**, USA/UK 1984, directed by James Cameron, Hemdale Film.

**Thirteenth Floor, The**, D/USA 1999, directed by Josef Rusnak, Columbia Pictures.

**Troy**, USA 2004, directed by Wolfgang Petersen, Warner Bros.

**Valhalla Rising**, DK/UK 2009, directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, BBC Films & La Belle Allée Productions.

**Warlords, The**, China, 2007 directed by P. Chan, Media Asia Films.

### **Television**

**Ben Hur**, (2 part TV epic), UK/Canada/Spain/Germany 2010, Series directed by Steve Shill, Akkord Film Produktion GmbH, Drimtim Entertainment et al.

**Rome**, (TV Series), UK/USA 2005–2007, Series directed by Michael Apted, Allen Coulter et al., BBC & HBO.

**Ten Commandments, The**, (Mini Series), USA 2006, directed by Robert Dornhelm, Actuality Productions, Hallmark Entertainment, History Channel.