# "Blinking and Thinking: The Embodied Perceptions of Presence and Remembrance in Gaspar Noe's *Enter the Void*"

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## Abstract

*This article examines significant innovations in the visual communication of subjectivity as found in Gaspar Noe's* Enter the Void *(2009). Through its mimesis of natural perception, Noe's first person point of view camera is truly subjectivized, and this embodiment passes into the active remembrance of the film's subsequent flashback sequence.*

## 1. Introduction

This article proposes that Gaspar Noe's *Enter the Void* (2009) demonstrates significant innovations in the visual communication of subjectivity, such that the cinematic image is equated with the protagonist itself. Noe's first person point of view (POV) camera is truly subjectivized through its mimesis of natural perception and physical embodiment, and this presentation collaborates and resonates with the flashback sequence of the film, such that the latter communicates an active remembrance on the part of the protagonist; mental activity that aligns with scientific accounts of spatial construction from memory.

To put these cinematic modes of perception into context: *Enter the Void* opens with an extended first person POV sequence that places us within the body of Oscar, an ex-pat American in Tokyo. This sequence ends when Oscar is killed during a drug deal gone wrong. From therein we are given an aerial view which presents the viewer with Oscar's disembodied consciousness as it floats across Tokyo, watching the apparent aftermath of his death on his loved ones and his enemies. With its narrative based on the account of life after death given in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Oscar is occasionally sucked into colorful portals through which he receives fantasies determined by his previously lived experiences. The first such portal takes Oscar into a forty minute flashback, by which we are given an account of his childhood in New York and the more recent events in Tokyo that preceded his death. As will be explicated, this flashback is an active construction on the part of the protagonist, and is given to us as a continuation of Oscar's first person POV, albeit one which is now situated in the imagination rather than the body.

## 2. The Physical Embodiment of Cinematic Perception: Oscar's First Person Point of View
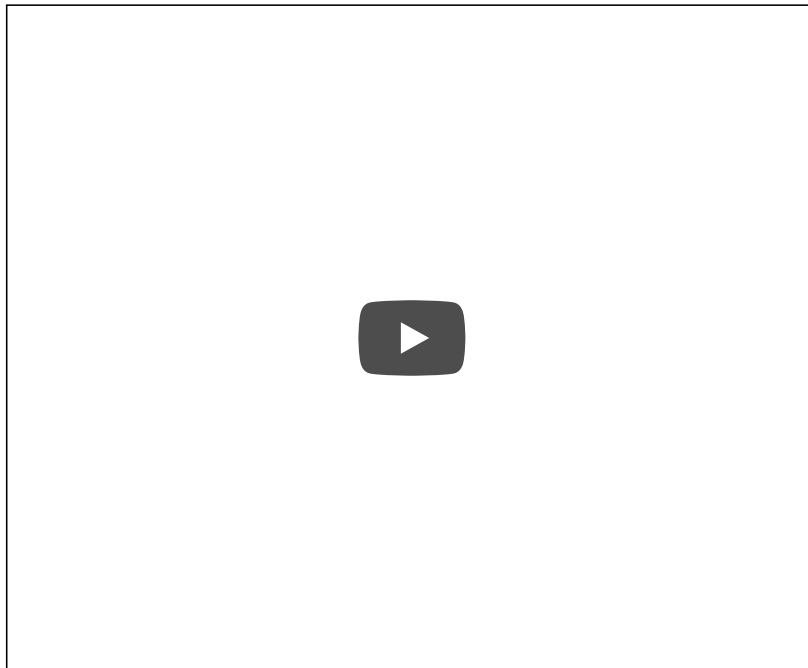
Figure 1. Short excerpt from the extended POV sequence of *Enter the Void*.

Oscar is only alive – in the most physical, secular, sense—in the opening twenty-six minutes of the two and a half hour movie. And this opening segment is communicated from a first person point of view, i.e. through Oscar's eyes. This has been done elsewhere of course, perhaps most notably in Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1947)—the first film to employ a first person point of view in an extended fashion—and Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995)—which depicts memories as recordable via a device that films through one's eyes, and re-playable as thoughts upon the screen of the mind. What makes the first person perspective of remark in *Enter the Void* is the attempt to achieve the highest level of verisimilitude in its depiction.

For example, where *Lady in the Lake* would be criticized for its camera technique being "unwieldy" and "ineffective," "irritating rather than involving," here Noe employs a camera-rigged helmet in order to allow for a wider range of movement, and an emphasis on real-time experience as the character journeys from his flat to the bar in which he will die. [1][#N1] (The duration of Oscar's perceptual experience is broken only by a DMT induced hallucination, which may or may not distort the temporality of Oscar's experiences, and which provides the first out-of-body experience of the film, allowing for a short break from this first person point of view.) Further, unlike *Strange Days*, there is also an admirable attention to camera focus in this segment, such that the film counters the notion that "regarding a specific object, the camera alone will not discard extraneous detail as the eye does." [2][#N2] Take for instance the shot of the pipe through which Oscar smokes the DMT, it shines with clarity whilst everything else before it is mildly blurred, and the shot of his hands that are held out before him and soaked in bright blood, the centre of his attention, whilst the rest of his surroundings, the decrepit toilet stall in which he dies, is somewhat smudged and out of focus (Fig. 2).



[/f/fc/images/13761232.0041.101.00000001.jpg]

Figure 2. Mimesis of natural perception through camera focus in *Enter the Void*

Most significant, however, is Noe's employment of blinking eyes. The blinks are a clever tool that allows the filmmaker to make cuts between takes whilst retaining the implied duration of the natural perception depicted. Further, given that there is mild light persistence when the black hits the screen for its half second or so, the blinks are also another example of how Noe achieves verisimilitude of natural perception.

Examining the significance of blinking in cinema, David Bordwell points out that though eyes do have "locally significant features" – such as the distinctiveness of the color of the iris, the size of the pupil, and the direction of a person's gaze – for the most part, "eyes alone are rather uncommunicative." [3] [#N3] While some would disagree with this assessment, [4][#N4] Bordwell's point is that, as "social signals," the eyes often "function as part of the face. Features, particularly the eyebrows and the mouth, work together with the eyes to create what Paul Ekman has called a 'facial action' system." [5] [#N5] For instance, "[a]nger is prototypically signaled less by the eyes than by the knitted brows, the tense mouth, and the set of the jaw." [6] [#N6]

These points are useful for understanding just how mimetic *Void*'s depiction of a first person point of view really is. For the "blinks" imply the existence of eyelids, and the "eyelids" of these digital blinks imply the existence of a face. In other words, by featuring such blinking, the cinematic image evokes faciality in its out-of-field. Deleuze writes that the out-of-field "refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless present." [7][#N7] This is because the out-of-field is what is determined by the frame whilst being beyond it, "designat[ing] that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around." [8][#N8] The out-of-field, in the case of *Void*'s POV shots, includes the face of the protagonist which cannot be directly seen but which we know exists due to the blinks, reflecting, for the most part, the situation of our own bodies if the visual sense were to be taken alone. [9][#N9] As such, we find that this first person POV is "physically" embodied by virtue of the blinking, which is to say that here "the camera does not simply represent a character, but becomes in itself a character." [10][#N10]

An extended first person point of view does not allow for the usual method for characterizing a cinematic image as subjective – a cut between an external shot of a character's glance, and the POV image that follows, and so, in this respect, we see how innovative Noe's POV shot really is. *Lady in the Lake*, lacking such blinking, ends up failing to characterize the camera as its protagonist – the actors are only ever speaking directly to a camera, not to the character of Philip Marlowe. The mirror shots [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zzdl-js_mQ4] only work to emphasize this lack of embodiment due to bad camera placement that doesn't align with the height of the actor made visible in the glass; the cinematic perception ends up being further distanced, both conceptually and literally, from the physical body that it is supposed to be peering out from. The emulation of reality in *Strange Days* is also limited by its lack of embodiment. Without the intricacies of focus or blinking, the protagonist's recordings of his time with his ex-girlfriend fail to evoke natural perception and instead remind us of the tenuous first person images of POV pornography, whereby the equation of the cinematic perception with the fe/male protagonist tends to be traded for the situation of the subject being explicitly filmed by the protagonist's handheld camera. Elsewhere, the famous POV action sequence [http://www.steadishots.org/shots_detail.cfm?shotID=53] opening of Bigelow's film resembles a First-Person Shooter, as would be echoed in the extended POV sequence of Andrzej Bartkowiak's *Doom* (2005). In both cases, this isn't necessarily a bad thing: for Bigelow the sequence helps amp up the cyber-punk aesthetic of her film, a future so imbued with technology that it resembles a violent videogame, while Bartkowiak has fully emulated his source material: an actual violent videogame [https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/may/13/doom-video-gaming-ramones] . Noe and his cinematographer, Benoît Debie, are aiming to recreate natural perception, however, and it is by way of the physical embodiment of the cinematic perception that they succeed.

Figure 3. The POV sequence from Bartkowiak's *Doom* adaptation.

The film that could be said to have best anticipated *Void*'s mimetic representation of the first person perspective on film is Julian Schnabel's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (2007). Schnabel's film features many POV shots punctuated by its stroke victim protagonist's struggle to lift his heavy eyelids [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlfxQIf2srQ] and to focus, the trails of sunlight and TV light blurring into wonderful watercolor streaks. However, as Steve Vineberg writes, we see the protagonist's surroundings "as he discovers them; the camera leaps from one detail to another in the hospital room, readjusting itself in close-up as he focuses on whoever is speaking to him or in medium or long shot as he views his environment in a wider perspective." [11][#N11] As suggested, then, the physical embodiment of the cinematic view here is somewhat disrupted by the unrealistic range of this character's sight, which is especially evident in the scene in which his doctor informs him that he has "locked-in syndrome." His eye somehow manages to flitter between wide angle views to close-ups of certain faces, a cinematic technique praised by Kracauer specifically for its being something that our natural perception cannot do. [12][#N12] Further, despite his condition, Schnabel's character manages to give us a view from one side of the room all the way to the other, apparently from his left eye and without any movement of the head.

On this point, the benefit of bodily movement helps to further emphasize *Void*'s mimetic presentation of perception. For while in most films "gaze avoidance, far from being a normal part of the rhythm of conversational interaction, is rare and highly informative about the character's psychological state," [13][#N13] Oscar's behavior very much reflects the patterns of looking in actual conversation, by which "shared looks alternate constantly with 'gaze avoidance' or other eye movements, such as looking upward to recall something or glancing to the side to monitor the environment." [14][#N14] However, it is this commitment to realism that results in the criticisms most commonly aimed at Noe's films: that they are "terribly acted" and "dramatically inert," which is really to say that they lack dramatic tension traditionally defined. [15][#N15] With the last three of Noe's feature length films – *Irreversible* (2002), *Enter the Void*, and *Love* (2015) – the director has encouraged his actors (mostly non-professional in the last two movies) to improvise their scenes on the basis of minimal text and set parameters, resulting in performances that look like real-life yet fail to adhere to the behavior we expect from the figures of cinematic "reality." This is the case with the gaze avoidance described above, as it is with blinking also. Whereas in cinema blinking is employed for "clarity and expressive effect," [16][#N16] the characters Oscar views – particularly his friend Alex, played by a non-actor who had only originally attended the film's casting sessions in an observational capacity – reflect our actual behavior in regards to blinking, where "in conversation, playing the role of the speaker tends to raise the blink

rate, whereas playing the role of listener lowers it." [17] [#N17] The digital blinks also tend to become rapid when they accompany Oscar's speech, though his drug-taking early on in the sequence gives cause to reserve judgment on this correspondence.

Examining the use of subjective camera a few months after the release of *Lady in the Lake*, Joseph P. Brinton, III, highlights this conflict between mimesis and drama when he writes: "realistic utilization of a movie camera, whether 'subjective' or 'objective,' does not rely on the physical science of photography, but on the psychological science of human perception." [18] [#N18] His point is that cinematic realism is less about "naturalism" than it is "its capacity to convince an audience," for whom "the dramatic perceptions of everyday life lie beyond the optical scope of the eye." [19] [#N19]

However, I suggest that it is on the basis of *Void*'s technical emulation of natural perception that the film achieves various, alternative, dramatic effects. For instance, the aerial views [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjOy4WIunuc] of Oscar's post-mortem existence are striking not just on a technical or aesthetic level, but because we are given a radical *disembodiment* made impactful by our first experiencing a physical embodiment of camera perception. And it is the transference of first person embodiment to mental processes that shapes the drama of the narrative whole. *Void*'s flashback sequence demonstrates how memories are active constructions, and Oscar's imaginative reconstruction of his factual past reflects his emotional attitudes, which contextualize the rest of the film that follows. Reflecting a further "naturalism" in its technique, Oscar's active choosing and exploring of memory is communicated through the film's attempt at the mimetic presentation of the process of recollection.

# 3. The Mental Embodiment of Cinematic Perception: the Flashback Sequence as Active Remembrance

Following Oscar's death, his consciousness exits his body and floats across Tokyo for several minutes before being sucked into the first of the aforementioned portals. Following entry into this portal, we are given an extended flashback sequence. These memories are presented in a non-linear fashion that provides a new cinematic standard in the mimetic presentation of memory recall, for this flashback is not only subjective, but embodied. This mental embodiment of the cinematic images of this sequence is significant as it demonstrates how memories are spaces of imagination and fiction – whether they are recalled in real-life or as fantasies within the fantasy world of film.

Noe communicates the role of imagination in memory through several unique aesthetic devices that are employed throughout the extended flashback and which work together to give us an embodied recollection of memory. These devices are what I term "blackout jump cuts," variations on memory, and the role of the third person figure in establishing spatiality.

## Blackout Jump Cuts

During the flashback there are many blackout jump cuts (Fig. 4), meaning a cut to black for a brief amount of time that acts as a jump cut to the subsequent image. Traditionally, the jump cut signifies a time lapse within a singular scene, or a much broader time lapse or time jump that also takes us to another scene, both temporally and spatially distinct from the shot that precedes the cut. The most famous example of the first is probably that of the sequence in which Michel and Patricia [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KUVwKp6MDI] are talking in a moving car, or the latter's subsequent discussion with her sleazy editor at the restaurant she is dropped off at, in Jean-Luc Godard's *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (1960). The most famous example of a jump cut that transitions between two distinct spatio-temporal environments is Stanley Kubrick's match-edited jump cut between an ape thrown bone [https://youtu.be/qtbOmpTnyOc?t=1m22s] and a spaceship in his *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). In both cases, the "jump cut" term is used to signify an instantaneity in the transition between shots – first we are at point A in space-time, now we are at point B. While Noe employs jump cuts that conform to the descriptions above throughout the flashback sequence of *Void*, most of the jump cuts occur by way of a quick blackout between shots. Watching the film, these

blackouts are not always noticeable, given the number of shots and the sometimes extremely short shot lengths employed in the sequence. But contextualizing the flashback within the wider film shows us that this employment of blackout jump cuts here is not merely a filmic device, but rather a continuation of the first person perspective that opens the film.
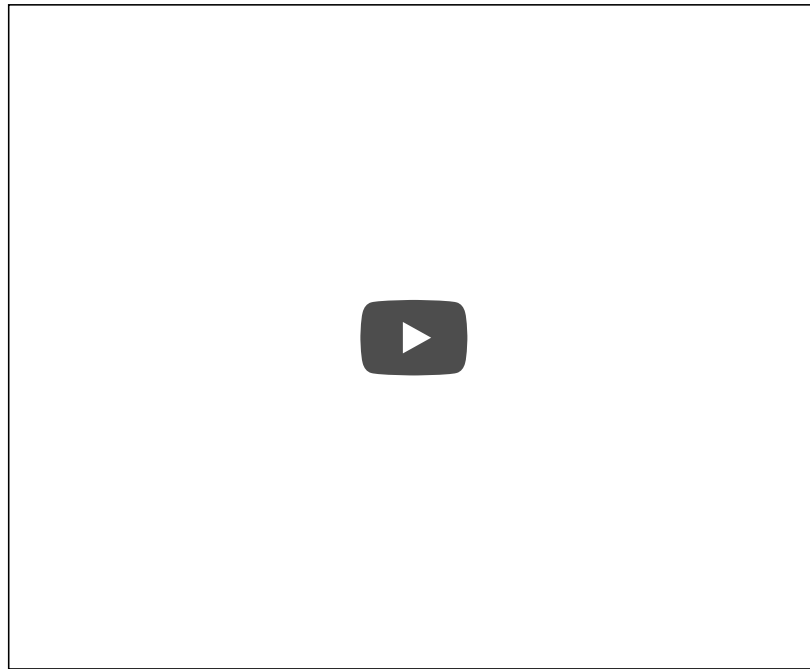


Figure 4. Short excerpt from the extended flashback sequence of *Enter the Void*.

These blackout jump cuts evoke the blinking of earlier and thus provide the unique focalization of the sequence: the flashback here is not only subjectivized, but fully embodied. This flashback is not merely a narrative device employed by the filmmaker for the benefit of the story or the viewer, a subjective account of the past interjected into the flow of narrative time. Instead, the flashback is presented as a continuation of the first person perspective of the protagonist, albeit in a new mode of perception: here the "subjective camera presents not external but internal 'sights' (such as dreams or memory images)," and, demonstrating the functions of the subjective camera thought possible by Timothy L. Johnson, here "another phenomenological plane [is] presented to audiences." [20] [#N20]

In the first sequence, in which Oscar is physically alive, the blinks imply faciality, which, in turn, fully embodies the camera as a character within the physical space of the scenes. In this flashback sequence, however, the blackout jump cuts provide an embodiment of the cinematic view that trades not on physicality but on mental exercise. Drawing on the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein and P. M. S. Hacker, Malcolm Turvey points out that "seeing is something that a whole living creature does as manifested in its behavior, not one of its parts such as its eyes. [...] For us to say that a machine such as a camera can see, at the very least it would have to *behave* as if it could see." [21] [#N21] In this article, the "cinematic perception" referred to is not just the camera image, but the cinematographical image in its three aspects of frame, shot, and montage, as defined by Deleuze. And Turvey's observation is of use here as I am suggesting that the montage sequence of the flashback in *Enter the Void* mobilizes the three aspects of the cinematographical image to give us a cinematic perception that *behaves* in a manner of "seeing."

This is because the flashback of *Void* is an *active* remembering by the protagonist, Oscar, as the cinematic perception itself. Oscar is giving us a "telling" of the past, albeit one that breaks with the convention of most flashback films since the sound era to guide the sequence through verbal commentary, or a verbal introduction. Whilst dialogue between characters is featured in the flashback sequence – working to contextualize the film as a whole by way of discussion of the contents of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and other expository information concerning the impact on Oscar and Linda's lives of the car-crash that killed their parents – the actual communication of the non-linear

flashback is closer to that of the silent era whose "comparatively restricted verbal narration necessitated visual means of compensation for the eloquent narrative alternatives offered by the word in the novel and verbal theatrical forms." [22][#N22] This is to say that the designation of this flashback as subjective rather than objective is communicated to us through visual cues, such as the blackout jump cuts which resonate with the earlier blinks of the embodied POV and thus subjectivize these memory images, demonstrating the way in which the different modes of cinematic perception in this film collaborate with one another. The memories are further focalized as being actively recounted, or engaged with, by Oscar, through the following visual cues.

## The Repetition and Variation of Memories

The flashback sequence of *Void* is non-linear, offering three time-frames in the life of Oscar: one of Oscar as a toddler when his sister Linda is newly born; one of Oscar and Linda as older, still pre-pubescent, children; and one of Oscar and Linda as adults, both before and after the latter's arrival in Tokyo. As stated above, the blackouts between shots give us a jump cut in the form of either a time lapse within the same scene, or a radical shift from one point in space-time to another. What is interesting here is that the shots that constitute the flashback sequence are often reiterations of earlier ones, i.e. different versions of the same scenes.

This is demonstrated in the first bracketed sequence within the flashback, which follows Linda's discovery of Oscar's death. This scene is given to us via a view from the latter's disembodied consciousness, whose subjectivity is felt via its manipulation of the lighting of the mise-en-scène, which begins to violently strobe as if in distress. [23][#N23] As Linda curls into herself on the couch before us, the camera enters a portal which takes the form of a field of alternating colours. Exiting the portal, via another lamp, the camera tilts up and rises to show us a child-aged Linda, similarly distraught, crying on a bed. The camera then descends behind a silhouette of Oscar as a child and subsequently moves into his head, both literally with the camera movement and figuratively in that we are given a first person point of view shot of the child Linda as she continues to cry – helping to further contextualize the aforementioned blackout jump cuts as metaphorical blinks, given that they continue after the camera exits Oscar's head again and the flashback continues. Within the first thirty seconds of the flashback there are twenty-eight different shots, as demarcated by the blackout jump cuts, and within this series we can identify at least four clearly bracketed sequences (Fig. 5). These sequences are "bracketed" in that their various shots constitute variations of the same scene.

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Figure 5. The pre-flashback shot of the adult Linda and then the twenty-eight shots of the first thirty seconds of *Enter the Void*'s flashback.



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Figure 6. The first bracketed sequence of *Enter the Void*'s extended flashback.

For purposes of brevity, I will examine here just the first bracketed sequence – that which opens the flashback, wherein we find the child Linda crying on the bed (Fig. 6). The first shot implies that an associative memory is at work due to its compositional similarity to the shot of the adult Linda that precedes the flashback; the child Linda is crying on an amber bed that, helped by the positioning of pillows along the wall behind her, resembles the amber couch on which the adult Linda wailed. After the camera descends into Oscar's head, providing a first person POV shot, the subsequent four shots provide variations on this scene. The first is a tighter framed image of Linda crying. The second features Linda crying on that bed, but with her parents at either side, watching her, the red lighting beginning to fade, signifying a calming down of emotion through a reduction of the color's intensity. The third shot finds the parents caressing and consoling the crying Linda, and, with the wider angle, it becomes clearer that this is in fact a bed and not a couch, due to the backboard of the furniture appearing on the left side of the frame. The fourth shot finds the parents gone, and Linda now simpering rather than wailing, holding a different toy and with the pillows that earlier lined the wall now gone, transforming the furniture so that it has now lost any trace of the dressing room couch that brought the memory forth. The final image of this bracketed sequence finds the silhouette of the child Oscar returned to the screen; Linda holds up that second toy and smiles at Oscar, the angle of the shot has changed and we can now see more of the room and the place of the bed within it.

This variation on the one scene – that of Linda crying as a child on that bed – exemplifies that what we are seeing is a fully embodied flashback. This is because it shows us that Oscar is *thinking*, that he is attempting to properly pin down the memory he is engaging with. Such repetitions and variations show us that, in this life after death narrative, Oscar is still "present," and in the present, in so far as he is actively remembering – but he can't quite recall his memory with exactitude. Did his parents simply watch his sister cry? Did they console her, or were they even there at all? These explorations of memory reflect to us his emotional state of mind – what and who, in this moment of death, is important to him, and how he came to be in this position. For instance, the vanishing of the parents in this bracketed sequence reflects a recognition of their deaths and the siblings having had to look after themselves. The dramatic resonances that echo throughout the film are thus communicated through the process of memory recall presented. Oscar is "telling" us the story of his past, except he is not sure of either where to begin, what really happened, or whether he is constructing a past that never was. And this tension between memory recall and imagination is encapsulated by the employment of the silhouette figure within the memories, which in turn point us towards how this film presents the process of recollection with a certain verisimilitude.

## Establishing Spatiality with a Third Person Figure

The metaphorical blinks imply a first person perspective on the action that occurs in the flashback, yet Oscar himself also appears in the majority of images that constitute the sequence – whether as a toddler, a child, or an adult. Oscar appears in these images with his back to the camera, which is often situated either behind his shoulder or his neck. (Aside from one brief sequence in which the child Oscar looks at himself in the mirror, we never see his face.) At first glance, this may seem a contradiction – we do not appear physically before ourselves in the present and so ought not to appear in such a way in our memories. I would suggest, however, that what we are seeing is a subjectivity actively employing imagination in order to fully grasp a memory.

It is useful to make a comparison here with Carlos Saura's *La Prima Angélica* (1973), which includes a flashback sequence in which "the main character, Luis (José López Vázquez) remains exactly the same in appearance across this cut to the past." [24] [#N24] The adult actor features as himself in his childhood memory, resulting in what Maureen Turim describes as:

> the sense of irony and the uncanny produced by the incongruity of seeing an adult actant in the world of his childhood. He enters there not as an outside observer to a scene in which his younger self is present (as in the film versions of *The Christmas Carol*), but as the displaced representation of his younger self. The sign system itself has been altered

away from the semblance of the narrative-real towards an impossible subjectivity. [25] [#N25]

By an "impossible subjectivity," we can infer that what we are viewing from a third person perspective is a character fully embracing his memory. He is actively reliving his past and thus appears as an adult within that scene. The employment of the silhouette figure within Oscar's memories works to achieve the same ends as Saura's presentation – an accurate grasp of memory. However, it is because the camera consciousness of *Void*'s flashback is of the first person perspective that Noe's presentation of memory recall better resembles the actual process we engage in when we attempt to reconstruct spaces of the past within our minds.

There are two orders of representation in Noe's flashback sequence. Trading the explicit notion of an adult watching his child self, as in *The Christmas Carol*, for the implicit visual cues of the metaphorical blinks and the memory variations cited above, in *Void*'s flashback sequence there is the Oscar who is telling us of the past, and there is the figure of Oscar that the first has placed within the images he is presenting, in order to fully reconstruct the past. This is demonstrated by the final image of the earlier cited bracketed sequence, where it is by way of Oscar reappearing as a silhouette that we can fully situate Linda as being upon a bed in their childhood home, as opposed to on the couch in the dressing room, the couch in the bedroom, or the bed in the dressing room, in the manner of similar confusions of space and memory in, for example, Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). The method of memory recall depicted in *Void* shows us that by placing ourselves within a scene as a physical marker, by extending ourselves from the first person to the third person in our memories, we are able to properly estimate spatial distances, to understand exactly where we were in relation to the action that occurred in that moment of time. This suggests that accurate memory recall requires imagination; in order to grasp the factual past we need to enter a space of fiction.

These points are supported by the research of David J. Bryant, who conducted an experiment examining the conceptualization of space by humans from the perspective of memory. Bryant and his colleagues studied "the self in an array of objects," meaning "one person (the subject) looking at another person who was surrounded by objects to their six body sides" (the front/back axis, head/feet axis, left/right axis). [26] [#N26] It is notable that in the subject's recollection "[t]he scene can be considered from an internal perspective of the person," and, "[a]lternatively, one could take the perspective of someone outside the scene." These two modes of remembering the scene, which align with the first and third person perception respectively, correspond with two forms of spatial analysis: Spatial Framework Analysis (SFA) and Intrinsic Computation Analysis (ICA). And the bracketed sequence of memory recall in *Enter the Void* corresponds to both.

The organization of spatial concepts via ICA relates to the function within memory recall of the third person marker described above, and it is notable that this method reflects the spatial recognition that occurs in our natural perception of the present, thus further emphasizing the point that the flashback sequence of *Void* is an embodied recollection analogous to a first person perception.

> According to the intrinsic computational analysis, observers view a person in a scene *intrinsically* [...]. That is, they identify the intrinsic sides of the person by using the same general perceptual mechanisms used in object recognition. Object recognition involves extracting the axes of the object because identification depends on how features are spatially related to one another. [...] To locate an object, subjects extract directions by analyzing the person's intrinsic axes, then visually scanning in the appropriate direction.
> [27] [#N27]

This method of estimating distances between objects via an "object-centred frame of reference," then, reflects the process that occurs "when actually perceiving environments." [28] [#N28] And we note that Oscar is using his imagination in his recollections by inserting himself into the scene as the object that

provides his frame of reference. However, in regards to memory recall, this is a somewhat slower process of spatial construction than the approach of SFA, as ICA requires the subject to keep track of two perspectives simultaneously (that of the rememberer and of the subject/object that is remembered). [29][#N29] The method of Spatial Framework Analysis resolves this issue as here the subject "adopt[s] the perspective of the character and construct[s] spatial frameworks to represent scenes." This is to say that "the subject 'mentally' occupies the position of the person in the scene," as Oscar does when he enters the head of his remembered child self. This is the second function of imagination in the memory recall presented in *Void*, and it is notable that it is within this first person perspective that we are given various consecutive images that re-imagine the scene before him (his sister crying upon the couch/bed, with and without the presence of their parents), for

> [s]patial frameworks are mental models that serve as a mental scaffolding on which information can be arranged and rearranged. The scaffolding is based on spatial concepts that define directions in terms of the body axes and enduring physical and perceptual regularities to which the mind has adapted. [30][#N30]

Confirming the interpretation of an active remembrance in *Void* that has been argued in this article, Bryant concludes that "the internal worlds we create do not form maps of external space per se, but of perceptual and behavioral affordances within space." [31][#N31] In other words, both techniques of spatial reconstruction reflect how our remembrances of spaces is not merely about the mapping of physical environments but attempts to grasp how we fit within that space. "[S]patial cognition is based not only on the geometry of space, but also on the functional design of our body and its relation to the world." [32][#N32] Spatial Framework Analysis already requires an imaginative immersion, but Noe's presentation of Oscar placing himself as the marker object within the remembered scene shows how imagination can also play a role in remembrance via Intrinsic Computation Analysis. [33][#N33]

Turim points out that most flashback films depict eidetic memory. Eidetic memory refers to the ability to "retain analogues of visual displays in short-term memory," "geometric figures and pictures that can be so reconstituted by some subjects as to be measured or described in detail purely from the subjects' memory images of them." [34][#N34] Other "eidetikers" can retrieve material from long-term memory and are able to "project their recalled images as three-dimensional images that have more cues of spatial reality than the original stimulus, while others have the ability to make their recalled images move and change in time, like the cinematic image." [35][#N35] However, this ability is said to be "found in only certain individuals," and the filmic depiction of memories as fully formed, three-dimensional, moving images is, for the most part, or for most people, unrealistic. [36][#N36] Hence, Noe's depiction of the silhouette method of memory recall offers a more realistic cinematic portrayal of a subject attempting to grasp past images. [37][#N37]

## 4. Conclusion

This analysis has shown how Gaspar Noe's *Enter the Void* achieves new levels of mimesis in regards to perception – both in the present moment and in regards to remembrance. The duration, mobility, and focus of Noe and Debie's camera avoids the issues that have plagued earlier attempts at extended POV shots in cinema, while the employment of blinks provides a fuller embodiment of the subjective camera as character.

In regards to memory recall, the silhouetted Oscar is a third person marker employed to better establish the spatiality of the scene for the subjective Oscar who is viewing these memories from the first person perspective. Both viewing and telling, for as Gaston Bachelard puts it: "Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor." [38][#N38] Echoing research concerning spatial construction from memory, Oscar is switching between perspectives analogous to the two differing spatial frameworks. In doing

so, Oscar is shaping the scenes by invoking his imagination, causing variations in his memories informed by his attempt to grasp the past whilst in a turbulent emotional state. As such, Noe has also achieved a major innovation in the mimetic representation of memory recall in film.

## Author Biography

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## Notes

1. Timothy W. Johnson, "Some Psychological Aspects of Cinematic Point of View," *Journal of the University Film Association*, Vol. 32, No. 1/2, CINEVIDEO AND PSYCHOLOGY (Winter-Spring 1980), 60. [#N1-ptr1]

2. Joseph P. Brinton, III, "Subjective Camera of Subjective Audience?" *Hollywood Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Jul., 1947), 361. Of course, these cinematic images of *Enter the Void* rely not just on the camera alone, but digital post-production effects. [#N2-ptr1]

3. David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2007), 328. [#N3-ptr1]

4. "The empathy directed at the symbolized eye plays a critical role within the culture of Japanese comics and animation, both commercially and textually." Hiroki Azuma, "Super Flat Speculation," in Takashi Murakami, *Superflat* (Japan: MADRA Publishing Co., Ltd, 2000), 149. [#N4-ptr1]

5. Bordwell, *Poetics*, 327. [#N5-ptr1]

6. Ibid. [#N6-ptr1]

7. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* [1983], trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), 17. [#N7-ptr1]

8. Ibid., 18. [#N8-ptr1]

9. I believe a cognitivist stance as espoused by Bordwell is perfectly compatible with Deleuzian film philosophy. Joe Anderson states of the cognitivist stance that: "We develop perceptual systems to perceive the world, and movies simply exploit them." Alissa Quart, "The Insider: David Bordwell Blows the Whistle on Film Studies," *Lingua Franca* vol. 10, no. 2 (March 2000), 40. My reading of Deleuze is that the philosopher shares this sentiment, albeit from the position that Bergsonian metaphysics provide an account of our perceptual systems. Cinematic images are of fascination – and Bergson was *wrong* about the cinematographical illusion – because they reflect the processes of perception; this is what Deleuze outlines as the dynamic "movement-image." Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 7-8. The difference between a cognitivist and a Deleuzian is that the latter gives a metaphysical account of perception, whereby the (any) image *is* consciousness (and therefore viewed cinematic images also *become* consciousness, as with everything else that is perceived). Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* [1896], trans. Nancy Margaret Paul, and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Urzone, Inc., 2005), 43. For Deleuze (and Félix Guattari) such metaphysics, of immanence rather than transcendence, operate on the "molecular" level. The cognitive science employed in this article, and favored by Bordwell, works on what they name the "molar" level, via alternative procedures. These two approaches focus on reality from different levels of perspective, but they are not incompatible; the molecular underpins the molar. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], trans. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Continuum, 1987), 36 and 534. [#N9-ptr1]

10. Brinton, III, "Subjective Camera," 366. [#N10-ptr1]

11. Steve Vineberg, "Point of View," *The Threepenny Review*, No. 114 (Summer 2008), 33. [#N11-ptr1]

12. Of the close-up Kracauer writes: "Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality, opening up

expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before." Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* [1960] (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 48. [#N12-ptr1]

13. Bordwell, *Poetics*, 329. [#N13-ptr1]

14. Ibid., 328. Bordwell is drawing here on studies of interpersonal communication such as Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (London: Methuen, 1975) and Janet Beavis Bavelas, Linda Coates, and Trudy Johnson, "Listener Responses as a Collaborative Process: The Role of Gaze," *Journal of Communication* 52, no.3 (September 2002). [#N14-ptr1]

15. Sukhdev Sandhu, "Enter the Void, review," The Telegraph, 23 Sep 2010, accessed July 14 2016, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8020425/Enter-the-Void-review.html [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8020425/Enter-the-Void-review.html] . [#N15-ptr1]

16. Bordwell, *Poetics*, 335. [#N16-ptr1]

17. Ibid., 332. Bordwell is drawing here on the research of Daniel McNeil, *The Face: A Natural History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998). [#N17-ptr1]

18. Brinton, III, "Subjective Camera," 362. [#N18-ptr1]

19. Ibid., 361. [#N19-ptr1]

20. Johnson, "Psychological Aspects," 60. [#N20-ptr1]

21. Malcolm Turvey, "Can the Camera See? Mimesis in 'Man with a Movie Camera'," *October*, Vol. 89 (Summer 1999), 28-29. Italics my own. [#N21-ptr1]

22. Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 22. [#N22-ptr1]

23. *Void*'s cinematographer, Benoît Debie, points out that Noe's "script called for color changes in the middle of some scenes to reflect the ghost's mental state." Benjamin B, "Contemplating a Colorful Afterlife," *American Cinematographer: International Journal of Motion Imaging*, Vol. 91. No. 10 (Oct, 2010), 20. [#N23-ptr1]

24. Turim, *Flashbacks*, 228. [#N24-ptr1]

25. Ibid., 229. [#N25-ptr1]

26. David J. Bryant, "Human Spatial Concepts Reflect Regularities of the Physical World and Human Body," in P. Olivier and K.-P. Gapp, ed. *Representation and Processing of Spatial Expressions* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2008), 216. [#N26-ptr1]

27. Ibid., 219. [#N27-ptr1]

28. Ibid., 228. [#N28-ptr1]

29. Ibid., 218. [#N29-ptr1]

30. Ibid., 228. [#N30-ptr1]

31. Ibid., 229. [#N31-ptr1]

32. Ibid., 215. [#N32-ptr1]

33. Peer Mylov describes the "two sorts of mental spatial concepts" as "the ego-centred and the object-centred framework," arguing that the former, Spatial Framework Analysis, involves being "immersed to some degree in a space." Peer Mylov, "On Space, Its Time, and Spatiotemporal Expressions," in Lars Qvortrup, ed. *Virtual Space: Spatiality in Virtual Inhabited 3D Worlds* (London: Springer-Verlag London, 2002), 55. [#N33-ptr1]

34. Turim, *Flashbacks*, 207. [#N34-ptr1]

35. It is not clear from this account whether Turim is suggesting that eidetikers are remembering these moving-images in the first person or third person, given that most cinematic images are shot from the latter perspective. [#N35-ptr1]

36. Cyrus Martin writes more recently of how "there have been very few studies to measure the abilities of persons claiming photographic, also known as eidetic, memory." Cyrus Martin,

"Memorable Outliers," *Current Biology*, Vol. 23, No. 17 (2013), 731. He further notes that in the areas of cognitive psychology where such capabilities have been studied, such research only worked to highlight "the distinction between innate and artificial memory." (732) For instance, researchers found that their case study sample of master chess players had developed an artificial eidetic memory on the basis of memorization specific to the game, such that "if the [chess] pieces are re-arranged in a nonsensical fashion, their memory abilities suddenly become pedestrian." However, there are cases of subjects exhibiting an innate eidetic memory, a condition that has been termed Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory (HSAM), as first identified by neuroscientists James McGaugh and Larry Cahill. Such subjects – twelve in total have been studied – possess "the ability to recall relevant personal events from nearly every day of their life from a certain age onward," yet "despite their prodigious memory of personal life events, the HSAM individuals did not score better than average on rote memory exams." (733) [#N36-ptr1]

37. Given the role of Deleuze in this article, it is worth addressing the implications of these points for Deleuzian film philosophy, particularly his concept of the time-image, which is infused with Bergson's take on memory. Bergson acknowledges that imagination plays a role in the act of memory recall, but states that a pure memory image requires no imagination at all: "To *picture* is not to *remember*. No doubt a recollection, as it becomes actual, tends to live in an image: however, the converse is not true, the image, pure and simple, will not be referred to the past unless, indeed, it was in the past that I sought it." Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 135. For Bergson, when he writes that "we shall never reach the past unless we frankly place ourselves within it," he is being literal: the memory image replaces our perception-image as the present image that constitutes our consciousness at that moment of time. "This is what psychologists too often forget when they conclude, from the fact that a remembered sensation becomes more actual the more we dwell upon it," Bergson adds, "that the memory of the sensation is the sensation itself beginning to be." (136) Can we ever truly recall memory in the way Bergson describes? The research here might suggest that Bergson was an eidetiker himself, able to recall memory images as they were initially perceived, and so expressing his philosophy under such terms. In any case, Deleuze's concept of the time-image continues to work regardless of these points because, as Turim points out, most cinematic images of memory are of the eidetic kind in any case. It is instead the case that *Enter the Void* is not a time-image film and needs a new conceptualization by Deleuzian philosophers. [#N37-ptr1]

38. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* [1958], trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xxxvi. [#N38-ptr1]